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## From Swan to Ugly Duckling? Mentoring Dynamics and Preservice Teachers' Readiness to Teach

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## From Swan to Ugly Duckling? Mentoring Dynamics and Preservice Teachers' Readiness to Teach

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*Abstract: This study focuses on two preservice teachers who experienced significantly different mentoring relationships in their two placements during a one-year teaching degree in a university in Western Australia. Data were collected through three rounds of semi-structured interviews, reflective journals and classroom observations. The findings indicated that mentor teachers' mentoring styles considerably informed the preservice teachers' perceptions of themselves as teachers and facilitated or inhibited their professional development. Implications for practice include teacher education programs invest more time and rigour in selecting and preparing mentors for their crucial role.*

**Keywords:** preservice teachers, mentoring relationships, teacher education, practicum.

### Introduction

Considered as the most highly valued component of teacher education programs (Parkison, 2007; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005), the practicum consists of a period of observation, teaching, reflection and critique (Merriam, 2001). It provides opportunities for preservice teachers to develop professionally in their role as teachers, explore teaching as a career choice, and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; Ralph, Walker, & Wimmer, 2008). However, the practicum is fraught with tensions, challenges, and contradictions that might impact preservice teachers' decision to continue or leave the profession (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Kelly, 2013). Depending on the sort of experiences gained and the emotions felt during this period, preservice teachers start to form a clearer professional mental image of the teacher they are and will be. The more positive their mental images are, the more likely they are to stay in the profession. This begs the question: How can positive practicum experiences be created for preservice teachers to maximize their retention?

A significant amount of practicum experience is created by mentor teachers who work alongside preservice teachers in the classrooms and offer professional knowledge and support. Pitton (2006) defines mentoring as "an intentional pairing of an inexperienced person with an experienced partner to guide and nurture his or her development" (p. 1). The literature on mentoring defines different key roles for mentors including advisor, trainer, and partner, (Jones, 2001), providing psychological or emotional support, and offering academic subject knowledge and support for preservice teachers' goal setting and choice of career path (Nora & Crisp, 2007). Although mentor teachers help preservice teachers grow professionally, the presence of a mentor alone is not enough (Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009). Mentor teachers need to be skilled and

knowledgeable in mentoring, be good communicators and reflective (McCann, 2013), have willingness, commitment, and enthusiasm, be able to collaborate with adults, and enjoy teaching as a job (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, 2008).

When mentor teachers are equipped with the above-mentioned essential characteristics and are professionally prepared for their job, they are more likely to bring about positive outcomes such as mentees' increased confidence, satisfaction, career growth, and greater personal and professional development (Baranik, Roling, & Eby, 2010; Buyukgoze-Kavas, Taylor, Neimeyer, & Güneri, 2010; Magnuson, Black, & Lahman, 2006). There are studies on mentoring which show the impact of effective mentoring on preservice teachers (Boswell, Wilson, Stark, & Onwuegbuzie, 2015; Garza, Duchaine, & Reynosa, 2014; Grima-Farrell, 2015; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). For example, Grima-Farrell (2015), examined the outcomes of an Australian collaborative university-and school-based immersion project, in which mentor teachers were found to play a critical role in reducing preservice teachers' initial anxieties and improving their personal and professional knowledge, confidence and skills. In another study, Garza et al. (2014) examined preservice teachers' perceptions of their teaching experiences in a mentor's classroom during a year-long field-based placement. Garza et al. found that mentor teachers' trust, guidance and support as well as field experiences developed preservice teachers' skills, dispositions and understanding of teaching.

However, not all mentoring relationships are effective or create successful and positive experiences for preservice teachers. For example, when the relationship is forced and the mentor is not a good fit for the mentee (McCann, 2013), the mentoring experience can become painful and emotionally demanding (Izadinia, 2015b; Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009). Some researchers have reported the existence of hierarchical, imitative, inflexible, and demanding mentoring relationships (Abed & Abd-El-Khalick, 2015; Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Chaliès, Ria, Bertone, Trohel, & Durand, 2004; Yuan, 2016). Beck and Kosnik (2000) found that despite mentor teachers' intention to provide freedom and leeway, in practice they were inflexible and required their mentees to follow the curriculum closely. Abed and Abd-El-Khalick (2015), as another example, also suggested the majority of preservice teachers did not have a supportive and reflexive environment to build up confidence and develop their pedagogical knowledge. And Yuan (2016) asserted that negative mentoring dismantled student teachers' ideal identities.

Although the literature abounds with studies on different aspects of mentoring (e.g., roles of mentors; features of optimal mentoring relationships; preservice teachers' and mentor teachers' perceptions of their roles, etc.), little attention has been paid to preservice teachers' negative experiences in their relationships with their mentors and the effects of such undesirable experiences on their professional development. As the quality of mentoring and the presence of a mentor affect retention (Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Ingersoll, 2003), there is a considerable need to closely scrutinize mentoring relationships to maximize their effectiveness and create a more positive experience for preservice teachers. The title of this paper, from swan to ugly duckling, reflects the idea that negative mentoring experiences can change preservice teachers' perceptions of the sort of teacher they are and can be. In this paper, I focus on two secondary preservice teachers who experienced totally different types of mentoring in their two placements and examine differences made in their readiness to teach as a result of their distinctive mentoring. In other words, I seek to highlight the importance of mentoring relationships by examining the direct effects of "this sometimes fraught relationship" (Patrick, 2013, p. 209) on the emotions and professional development of the participants from their own perspective. The results of this study are particularly important for preservice teacher education

programs to consider as they call for quality mentoring to increase retention. The overarching research question addressed in this study is: To what extent did the two preservice teachers feel prepared to teach as the result of the mentoring they received during their practicum experience?

## **Theoretical Framework**

This qualitative case study was framed within social constructivism which foregrounds the centrality of collaboration and social interactions (Powell & Kalina, 2009). As opposed to cognitive constructivism in which ideas are constructed through a personal process, in social constructivism it is assumed that ideas are shaped by experiences and through interactions with the teacher and other students (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Vygotsky (1978), the founding father of social constructivism, believed that learning happens in a social process in which learners gain new skills and knowledge through interactions with other people. Such interactions give social and emotional support to learners and enable them to take risks and acquire ownership of their learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2006).

According to Beck & Kosnik (2006), the three main tenets of social constructivism are (1) knowledge is constructed by learners; (2) learning involves social interaction; and (3) learning is situated. I have used this framework to guide my study and examine the impact of mentoring interactions on preservice teachers' professional development. More specifically, I have assumed that preservice teachers start to develop a professional view towards teaching and construct a teacher-self during their practicum experience as they engage in the learning to teach process. Furthermore, I have assumed their understanding and views are derived from the social and professional patterns of interactions within their learning community such as their day-to-day communications with a significant other like their mentors. By zooming in on such interactions and their unique characteristics as the unit of analysis, I explored the overall impact of mentoring relationships on preservice teachers' understanding of who they are as teachers and what they are capable of.

## **Method**

### **Context of the Study**

The Graduate Diploma of Teaching-Secondary [GDE-S], offered by one of the largest Teacher Education Programs in Western Australia, was the setting for the study. The course was a one-year programme designed to prepare students for the Secondary Education profession. The GDE-S had 120 credit points, accredited by Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia which included four compulsory units: classroom management and instruction, beginning teaching: theory and practice, teaching in diverse Australian schools, and becoming an exemplary teacher. There were also areas of specialization from which preservice teachers could choose and two main professional practice components (a four-week and a seven-week block practicum) across the course. The on-campus mode of this course, which was the focus of this study, included lectures, tutorials and coordinated programme of Professional Practice.

### Research Design and Participants

A case study design was used because it allowed me to understand the participants' experiences from their perspective to "evaluate, summarize, and conclude... [their] potential applicability" (Merriam, 2001, p. 31). Moreover, by studying a single case I "wish[ed] to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many" (Merriam, 1988, p. 208). In other words, by reflecting on participants' experiences and the impact of such experiences on their professional development, I sought to better understand and elucidate the role of mentoring relationships in preservice teachers' readiness to teach. It is worth noting that this study is solely based on the perspectives of the two preservice teachers and mentor teachers' views of the mentoring relationships are absent, which might be a limitation for the study. However, as the aim of the study was to investigate the preservice teachers' feelings and perceptions towards their own professional development, I sought to only focus on their views to provide an in-depth analysis of their mentoring experiences.

This article reports the findings from case studies of two preservice teachers; Anna, 24 and Eden, 35 years old (pseudonyms). The participants were majoring in Drama and Music respectively, and were enrolled in GDE-S in 2014. The recruitment process took place on-campus and during the orientation day. The researcher attended the orientation, explained the research project and its aims and asked for volunteers. Anna and Eden volunteered to take part in the research study, knowing that their names and any identifiable information would be removed from the data, they would be assigned pseudonyms, and they would be able to withdraw from the research at any time.

### Data Collection

Data were collected over the course of GDE-S from February 2014 to December 2014. The main data collection tool was semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted in three phases: at the outset of the program, at the end of the first placement, and at the end of the second placement. The first interview was designed to elicit background information about the participants' goals, purpose of teaching, prior teaching experiences, and their views about mentoring. The questions in the second and third interviews, however, were designed to elicit participants' mentoring experiences, such as: Could you describe the relationship you shared with your mentor teacher? Do you think your mentor gave you the courage and confidence you needed in your role? Can you compare the relationship you shared with your mentors in the first and second placement? Which one did you prefer and why?

The second source of data was participants' reflective journals. Anna produced five journal entries and Eden produced two over the course of the program. It is worth noting that keeping a reflective journal was not a compulsory component of the research and participants had the choice to write a journal or not. However, they were encouraged to write at least one entry in each placement. The participants were asked to reflect on issues such as their experiences of teaching within their schools, their ideas about the mentoring relationships, and their perceptions of their progress. The participants were also given the leeway to write about any issues of interest and significance to them. In addition, each participant was observed twice in each placement and in total four classroom observations were conducted on each participant. The debriefing sessions following participants' solo teaching were observed as well. It was assumed that these sessions would provide rich data on the interactions between mentors and

mentees. For instance, ease of communication and the way verbal and written feedback was offered indicated the extent to which rapport, respect, and support was provided and established. Using a checklist and researcher's field notes helped to pinpoint specific patterns of interactions between the participants during debriefing sessions.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis was conducted in two stages, namely within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). To do a within-case analysis and build a profile of each participant's background and unique mentoring experiences, their data, (i.e. their transcribed interviews, reflective journals, observation checklists and researcher's notes) were analysed independently. Questions asked in analysing each set of data included: What were the significant mentoring experiences of this person? How did these experiences affect their perceptions of themselves as a teacher? How did this person feel in remembering their mentoring experiences? Observation checklists and researcher's notes helped in crosschecking the data. More specifically, the participants' comments on the availability of their mentors or the depth of their feedback were compared to the notes taken in the debriefing sessions for verification. For instance, the researcher took note of the length of sessions and noticed some sessions were as short as three minutes and some mentors were not present in the classroom during the two solo teaching of the preservice teachers that the researcher observed. Such data provided further evidence for the mentors' patterns of interaction with their mentees.

In order to conduct a within-case analysis some codes were developed and then the codes were compared across the two cases. Constant comparison techniques provided the chance to compare each case with the other to determine similarities and differences (Merriam, 1998). However, as Patton (2002) suggests "the analyst's first and foremost responsibility consists of doing justice to each individual case. All else depends on that" (p.449). Thus, an attempt was made to delve deeply into each participant's experiences and provide more detailed within-case analysis. Finally, data were grouped together and the most recurring codes were regarded as themes, with the most telling or representative extracts selected for reporting. It is worth nothing that the two participants of the study read the manuscript for additional verification of conclusions.

### **Findings**

In this section, I will examine Eden's and Anna's experiences of their two placements and spotlight the critical factors that positively or negatively influenced their perceptions of their teacher-selves. First, I will provide an introduction to participants' background, their perceptions of mentoring, and their image of an ideal teacher.

#### **Eden and Anna: At the Outset of the Program**

Eden was born into a family of teachers. Both his parents and his brother were teachers. He completed his Masters' degree in Musical Performance and Musicology and started with music teaching. Two years later he moved to English teaching in Europe. As the industry

changed and job opportunities became difficult, Eden decided to use the skills he had learnt as a teacher and combine them with his passion for music. He chose to become a classroom music teacher to facilitate students' learning and provide opportunities for them to discover for themselves. For Eden, the ideal image of a teacher was someone who would put his students first, provide them with all the resources out there, and inspire them to make their own discoveries. Eden hoped with the help of his mentor teachers he would be able to implement his vision of the teacher he wanted to be into a reality. He hoped to have a mentor who was inspirational and had achieved what Eden hoped to achieve. He also wanted a mentor who would provide continuous feedback and guide him as he went along: "one of the most important things... is the opportunity to have a go, get feedback, have a go, get feedback and just keep going like that". For Eden "personal interactions", and whether he would get along with his mentors, was also key.

Anna had completed a Bachelor of Arts in mass communication and a Masters in professional communication. Anna's decision to be a teacher started as a back-up plan. As the industry she was pursuing was competitive, she considered teaching as a career in which she could teach her passion for film and drama. For Anna, the main purpose behind teaching was to set a good role model for students so they knew how to behave in society. She also aspired to be a "likeable" teacher and not only knowledgeable about her content but also "approachable", "caring" and "involved with school's activities and events". Anna wanted to have an "open relationship" with her mentors so she would feel supported and could bounce ideas off them. She also wanted to develop a sense of authority as teacher. In her reflective journal written at the beginning of the program, she mentioned that it was hard for her to differentiate herself from her students because she felt she "could dress up in the uniform and be one [herself]". Developing confidence and authority were so important for Anna that she thought she might leave teaching if she did not gain that sense of control.

#### **"I Feel Like a Teacher": End of the First Placement**

**Eden.** Eden started the first placement feeling he and his mentor had many things in common, including the teaching style which was based on the same pedagogical model Eden was ascribed to. Although from a different music background, Eden's mentor enjoyed asking Eden's opinions about music and they started team teaching by the end of the first week. The mentor's comment that " 'Look, just chip in with whatever knowledge you have that can supplement what I know' ", reduced the stress Eden was experiencing at the beginning and he felt supported as a result: "I feel like I can try things and that I am in a kind of a safe place". In addition, Eden thought his mentor's feedback, which was gradually reducing in size, helped Eden build up confidence:

*He [the mentor] said from the start, "Look, this is critical reflection... do not get depressed," and I said, "No, that is fine." So the first one [feedback] was a page of things I needed to improve... The next one was like half a page... that I had not done in the past. The next one was like a quarter of a page of things that I needed to improve, and half of a page of things that were working well, and then by the end of it, it was just all things that had worked well... the result of that was that I could not be anything but more confident, watching that progression very clearly on paper.*

Eden was encouraged by his mentor to engage in a systematic approach of teaching, getting feedback, reflecting and acting on feedback to develop a better understanding of himself as a teacher and discover himself more. What also contributed to his professional development was his mentor's appreciation of his ideas, which increased his confidence as well. Eden talked about one particular lesson plan, which he executed pretty well, and for which he received his mentor's tremendous compliment and praise: "he [the mentor] was so chuffed and said 'that is such as a great idea, I am going to use some of those ideas' ". Eden explained that one week later the mentor had all the students in a class with three other teachers and did a spot quiz on what Eden had taught:

*They [students] probably got 90% right, and the 10% of the students would be putting up their hand going, 'I know, I know, I know,' And later he [the mentor] actually said in the class, "That is so great that you have all learned that, but better you all did that with [Eden] and now he can know that what he has done has really helped you." And it was in front of other staff, in front of the students, and it was just giving me that boost.*

The constructive comments of the mentor on Eden's specific teaching techniques helped him not only to learn and broaden his repertoire of skills and tactics but also develop a teacher voice and authority. He described one incident where his class was out of control and he did not know what else he could do. He noted his mentor's comment that "Sometimes you have to pretend like you are really angry, even when you are not" helped him to get on top of the situation:

*So I just put on this really big, angry voice and just said, 'Stop!', and they stopped dead in their tracks. And then I had a little discussion with them about, 'We have discussed what we need to do, we have talked about how if we make that much noise we'll never get through...' and that actually improved for the rest of the class. And then after that... [my mentor] was saying, 'Oh, this is really good, today, for the first time I saw that sternness in you that I had never seen in any of your lessons, and maybe you do not want to use it all time, but now I know that you can do that.'*

Eden thought he and his mentor also connected at a personal level, "we had a very good rapport" and "we got along very well on a lot of levels". Regarding his mentor as a "big brother", Eden felt the first placement "was an overwhelmingly positive experience thanks mainly to the support from the mentor". He finished the first placement thinking he "could turn around and come back and teach there".

**Anna.** Anna's experience of her first placement was also very positive and she mentioned that she was "thankful" and "very lucky" that she "was given a strong mentor [she] could work well with while also having some laughs along the way". Anna felt the constructive feedback and advice from her mentor helped her improve:

*He would always give feedback after a lesson and say, 'Oh, that went well,' or, 'That was not so good,' or, 'That has been the best one so far,' like he'd always start off with a comment about how the lesson went, ... so it was good quick feedback. And talking about content and what I was going to teach, he would always be supportive and give me ideas and say, 'What about you do this,' and then if I had an idea he was like, 'Oh yeah, that is great'...*

Anna also received her mentor's full support to make decisions and have a more confident presence in the classroom, knowing that her mentor was there to support and help:



*He [the mentor] was very supportive of everything I kind of did. I knew that my mentor teacher would support and back me up when managing students. He would interrupt or address a student I was talking to and support my decision or observation on how the student was behaving.*

Effective communication and a strong relationship were other features of her mentoring experience. For instance, for Anna, the practicum was like “you go in, you go out, never really contact them again”. However, the mentor’s willingness to provide continuous support “anytime” surpassed Anna’s expectations. Anna pointed out that her mentor was like a role model for her and the way “he could switch from his happy and enthusiastic person to ‘this is my serious mode’ ” helped her learn how to handle difficult situations and eased her transition into the authoritative role of a teacher:

*From the start I was worried about the whole transition of going as a teacher from a student because I felt so close to their age and everything, switching that mindset to say ‘I am the one that has the power’, seeing him switching into the two different types of categories, I guess, makes me think that, yeah, I can do this and I think I was slowly kind of transforming into that...*

In addition to developing ideas about classroom management from her mentor’s techniques, Anna was impressed by his passion and enthusiasm for teaching, which she also aspired to incorporate into her own teaching: “[his] enthusiasm in the class and always being energetic and bubbly is something I would want to try and gain”. Reflecting on her first placement, Anna asserted that her mentor’s guidance, advice, and support made the process smooth and not so scary because “[Anna] was scared at the beginning”. Anna felt she gained a lot of confidence at the end of the first placement and “was somewhat ready to enter a school environment”.

#### **“I Did not Improve Much”: End of the Second Placement**

**Eden.** The second placement was a “partially negative” experience for Eden because he felt he and his mentor were like “two separate people, with two separate roles, doing this process”. Eden believed he did not have much in common with his second mentor and they did not “gel as a unit as much”. Using “driving examiner” as a way to describe their relationship, Eden pointed out that his second mentor put more emphasis on assessment than teaching. Reflecting on his development, and viewing the practicum as “a real lottery”, Eden lamented that he achieved more and learned more in the four-week practicum (i.e. the first placement) than in the seven-week one (i.e. the second placement). Eden explained that although he continued to reflect on his teaching practices, as he did in the first placement, this time the mentor did not appreciate the importance of reflection:

*This time I did reflect, just as before, and I did get feedback, but those things were disconnected. She was never interested in seeing my reflection, she never asked me. In fact I think, why did I write that stuff, just for myself? She never reflected on herself like, ‘what does this guy [Eden] understand or not understand? Why do I need to give?’.*

Eden stressed that his relationship with his mentor involved some degree of mutual respect and he had no doubts that the mentor was trying her best to do the right thing. However, Eden claimed that the mentor did not value and recognize the skills he had developed over the

last practicum, and she even made Eden believe he should detach himself from his prior experiences:

*I remember I would say, 'I cannot understand why I am not doing so well with this as I was before,' and the teacher said, 'Look, it is a different school, just forget everything that you have done there. This is different, we are different, everything is different here,' and stupidly I kind of did.*

Not being able to draw upon the skills learnt in the first placement, and not receiving any positive reinforcement, Eden felt his teaching skills were “magically” taken away from him and he started to second-guess himself and his ability to work as a teacher:

*If you take your superpowers away from your superman, you are just left as kind of not able to do all the things that you would normally do, and that is what happens to people when you take away their individual strengths, that they are just left as a kind of very diminished teacher.*

Reflecting further on his second placement, Eden also referred to a lack of open communication with his mentor, which he referred to as “a cold war” and “an Anglo-Saxon way of negotiating... where everyone is very polite but probably there is still waters run deep”. He emphasized that he was frustrated a lot during the practicum and especially on the last day when he realized his mentor had given him a poor mark. Eden wondered whether the mark was really a reflection of his teaching performance, which Eden doubted given the high distinction he received in the first placement, or the mentor’s disapproval of his teaching style:

*She [the mentor] seemed so focused on the details but, 'is there something more subtle going on here?' [She] knew that he [the university supervisor] was happy with me... 'Are you afraid of me achieving beyond what you believe? Is there an underlying sort of personal thing that perhaps you do not like the way I tried to manipulate your course, or you do not like the way that I tried to teach, or you do not appreciate my individual skills compared to yours?'*

At the end of the second placement Eden felt his confidence had declined, and “went backward” and “did not exist as a teacher” as he tried to become like his mentor instead of developing his own “identity” as a teacher: “Well, if you are just there to provide material to students within a set period of time, you do not have an identity, you do not exist”.

**Anna.** Anna also did not develop a strong bond with her second mentor. Although she was not really sure why, she guessed it might have been due to the fact that her mentor did not invest enough time into her presence and “she always had other things on her mind”:

*Before a lesson, you know, you would show a lesson plan and my mentor would tick it off and say that is good, good to go, and then afterwards she would suggest that maybe you should not have done that, but then my mentor is the one who should know the students as to whether they would understand or work well with my concept or what I was going to do. So... I feel that maybe my mentor was a little more involved in her own individual thing she was doing rather than accommodating as much.*

Anna also felt that she was not welcomed and left unsupported most of the time: “for example, when I would finish a lesson, she would quickly disappear because she had gone to have lunch, and I would be there packing up”. In her reflection, Anna questioned the purpose of a mentor, whether it was to provide support and guidance to the preservice teacher or to find some free time to catch up with your own work:

*It felt as though she [the mentor] was busy making plans for herself during the time I was teaching, and in a way I felt like she gave me her classes so she could do other things either for herself, or planning for other classes.*

What adds support to Anna's observation were the researcher's notes taken from Anna's solo teaching. Anna was mainly on her own during her teaching time, while the mentor was either deeply involved in her own work or not present in the classroom. The debriefing sessions following Anna's teaching were also very brief, only a few minutes, and the researcher's reflection "how would it be possible to comment on her teaching when you were not present in the classroom?" validated Anna's feelings of being unsupported. Consequently, Anna felt she "did not have a mentor at times because it was just [Anna] there just doing [her] thing". Describing their relationship as "distant," and the mentoring as "incomplete", Anna lamented that she did not improve much and the second practicum was not as fruitful as the first one. She mentioned that she also did not have the chance to observe her mentor teach because the mentor was sick while Anna was there. Not receiving enough response, feedback, and support from her mentor, she believed, her confidence declined and she wished she could have received more guidance from her mentor and felt more at ease during the experience.

## **Discussion**

Practicum is full of opportunities for growth and development, and at the same time full of moments of overwhelming emotions, stress and doubts. The findings of this study draw attention to the powerful role of mentor teachers to facilitate or inhibit the process of learning to teach for preservice teachers. In this section, I compare and contrast the mentoring experiences of Eden and Anna in their two placements to highlight the effects of different mentoring styles on their teacher-selves. In looking at Eden's and Anna's mentors' professional practices and conduct, from the perspective of the participants, I will focus on mentors' differences; I frequently go back to the question: what was absent in this placement and what was different about this mentor? Clandinin (1986) maintained that emotions are the glue that holds the image of self together and influences one's perceptions of events and responses. Therefore, I also look at the participants' emotions as felt by them at the end of each placement to provide a clearer picture of their perceptions of themselves and their readiness to teach.

### **Imitation Vs Scaffolding**

Mentor teachers view the learning process differently and thus their mentoring approaches reflecting their theories and belief systems differ. For example, mentoring might be considered as an "imitative" or "scaffolding" by mentors (Granott, 1993; Lesley, Hamman, Olivarez, Button, & Griffith, 2009). In the imitation model, or what Clark calls "formal mentoring" (2004), mentees are assigned a passive role and viewed as a novice with no expertise, who are mainly there to imitate the more experienced partner (Lesley et al., 2009). However, the scaffolding or co-mentoring (Clarke, 2004) model is characterized by collaborative interactions and dialogue, in which mentees are regarded as having expertise and the capacity to be teaching mutually. The findings suggested that one of the main differences between the mentors was their view of mentoring as imitation or scaffolding. Eden's first mentor, believed in

a scaffolding approach, as evidenced by the way he validated and recognized Eden's prior experiences by encouraging him to "chip in" with his knowledge and contribute to the teaching. Moreover, Eden's ideas and attempts were highly praised by the mentor, contributing to his confidence and feeling more like a teacher. Researchers believe if mentor teachers show openness to preservice teachers' ideas, collaboratively reflect on their practices and analyse them, they will indirectly help them develop a voice and confidence in their ability (Liliane & Colette, 2009). The vignettes provided above, such as the mentor complimenting Eden on his lesson plan in front of other teachers and students and engaging him in an active process of teaching, getting feedback and reflecting on it, showed his attempts to give rise to Eden's confidence and teacher voice.

However, Eden's second mentor, who seemed to have an imitative approach to teaching, did not give enough credit for his prior experiences and even encouraged him to forget them. Subsequently, Eden felt unable to implement the techniques and skills he had developed in the last placement. As the focus of the imitation model is on imitating the expert, new ideas and differences are not appreciated and welcomed. Eden's attempt to become like his mentor while feeling like a diminished teacher suggested his lack of opportunities to implement his ideas, resulting in Eden thinking he did not exist as a teacher. In addition, as Morton (2003) says "The mentor's role is in helping the mentees to come to their own informed conclusions about the issues or ideas they are toying with, through discussion... but it is not the mentor's role to make them change their ways!" (P. 5). However, as indicated by Eden, reflection was absent in the second mentoring and although he continued to write reflections, his mentor did not show any interest in reading them. Moreover, Eden's low mark from his mentor, which to Eden was a sign of the mentor's disapproval and dissatisfaction of his teaching method, suggested he should have adopted his mentor's style rather than developed his own.

### **Personal Connectedness Vs a Distant Relationship**

Another major difference between the mentors was the extent to which they maintained a close and friendly relationship with their mentees so that they feel welcomed and supported. Personal connectedness described as "getting to know each other on a personal level" (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009, p. 792) was mainly absent in the second mentoring Anna and Eden had with their mentors. Whereas both participants mentioned that they got along well with their mentors in the first placement and connected with them personally, they reported that they felt they either did not have a mentor or had nothing in common with them in the second placement as the bonding was not established. The metaphor of a "big brother" used by Eden to describe his first mentoring relationship depicted a close and friendly bond with the first mentor. Researchers have found that preservice teachers desire to work with mentors who care for them personally as well as professionally (Izadinia, 2015a; Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Glenn, 2006). Fullan (1995) asserted that the existence of a collegial relationship enhances preservice teachers' learning. After the first placement in which Eden felt emotionally and academically supported (Gold, 1996) by his mentor to try out his ideas and experiment in a safe place he felt ready to teach in the same school. However, lack of collegiality was noted in the second mentoring with a mentor who was described as a "driving examiner" by Eden. Malderez (2009) recommended that mentor teachers should not consider themselves as a supervisor, teacher trainer, or evaluator as having an evaluative orientation to mentoring impedes the development of trust and open communication between mentor and mentee. This is supported by Eden's comment about not gelling as a unit

and not being able to communicate openly with his second mentor (i.e., the metaphor of being involved in a cold war and having an Anglo-Saxon way of negotiating) as the mentor considered herself an assessor and Eden as someone to pass the test.

Anna also experienced distinct relationships with her two mentors. The first mentor provided ongoing support and was always there, thus Anna felt she had built a strong rapport with him and felt success in the first placement. Making a personal connection with mentees results in positive outcomes, such as perceptions of scholastic competence and feelings of self-worth (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). Anna's feeling more like a teacher at the end of the first placement, developing confidence and a sense of authority suggested a successful mentoring relationship. However, the relationships that are not close have little effect (DuBois & Neville, 1997; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). This was observed in Anna where she felt she did not improve much and her confidence declined as she experienced a "distant" relationship with her second mentor. Categorizing isolation into physical, professional and emotional, Buchanan et al. (2013) argued that real and perceived isolation is debilitating for any teachers, especially for new teachers who need advice, ideas and support. Suffering from both physical isolation (i.e. being alone in the classroom without the support of the mentor) as well as emotional (i.e. feeling of struggling on one's own and not succeeding), Anna felt unwelcomed and unsupported throughout the second placement thinking she did not have a mentor.

#### **Mentor as a Match or a Mismatch**

It has been argued that when mentors and preservice teachers have the same goals and understanding of their roles and share the same values, they have a more successful mentoring relationships (McGee, Ferrier-Kerr, & Miller, 2001; Russell & Russell, 2011). What also made a difference between participants' two mentoring experiences was the extent to which their mentors matched the participants' ideal mentoring images. Eden began the course hoping to have a mentor who would provide continuous feedback, was inspirational and could get along well with him. The first mentor perfectly matched the image of the ideal mentor Eden had in mind; he shared a lot of common ground with him, including a teaching style, and provided ongoing and detailed feedback. Anna, scared and lacking in confidence at the beginning and hoping to develop an open relationship with the mentor and have his support, also received a mentor who held her hands throughout the process so she could exercise her power and authority in the classroom and feel more like a teacher (e.g., the vignette of the mentor's supporting Anna's decisions when she disciplined students). In other words, Anna's and Eden's first mentors were on the same page with their mentees. They suggested, through their actions, that they appreciated the importance of providing their mentees with support and feedback and maintaining close and friendly relationships with them, which is what Anna and Eden had wished for. As a result, the first placement was a very successful and positive experience for the two participants as their expectations of mentoring were fully met.

Hawkey (1997) contended that mentors and preservice teachers bring different concerns and beliefs into the mentoring process leading to complex interactions and complicated dynamics. These different perceptions, as Wang (2001) argued, can affect the relationship and the learning process by influencing how the two parties communicate. Relatedly, other researchers maintained that conflicting role expectations or lack of clarity of such roles might result in unsuccessful mentoring relationships (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Rajuan, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2007). The second mentoring experiences the two participants had were reported

“partially negative” and “incomplete” as they thought their second mentors did not match the image of their ideal mentor and their expectations were not met. In other words, the second mentors’ perceptions of their mentoring role and what was important were apparently different from the two participants’ and this partly resulted in lack of success and satisfaction on the mentees’ part. Eden desired to see his mentor interested in his reflections, however, as Eden observed, the mentor did not invest any time on reading his reflections and paid more attention to the assessment side of her mentoring role which to Eden was not the main focus. Differences between their teaching styles resulting in the mentor’s frustration and poor assessment of Eden, also contributed to the lack of success of Eden’s second placement. Anna also did not receive enough support and attention from her second mentor as she needed and subsequently felt abandoned while for her mentor providing that level of support might have been considered enough.

## Conclusion

The metaphor of a swan turning into an ugly duckling clearly demonstrates the changes in the feelings and perceptions of the participants towards their teacher-selves during two drastically different mentoring experiences, suggesting the powerful role of mentor teachers. The two participants of this study transformed into beautiful swans ready to fly after working with mentors who inspired them with ideas and provided encouragement and support. They gradually grew and gained increasing confidence in their teaching, so much so that they both felt ready to teach even after the short four-week placement. The positive emotions experienced by the two participants in the first placement, such as feeling “more like a teacher”, being “lucky”, “thankful”, and “inspired” by their mentors were indicative of their sense of self-satisfaction and achievement. Conversely, the changes in mentoring practices resulted in participants’ thinking they “did not improve”, “went backward”, “lost confidence” and “did not exist as a teacher”. In other words, the beautiful swan felt ugly and powerless inside as their second mentors did not recognize and value their skills and potentials.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of mentoring and mentor teachers’ mentoring styles for preservice teachers’ professional development and their self-views of the teacher they are and can be. As mentor teachers can play such a powerful role, it is recommended to invest more time and rigour in selecting mentors. Researchers believe assignments of mentors typically are based on convenience, volunteerism and entitlement rather than on choosing the ones who are willing to help preservice teachers in their professional development (Stanulis & Floden, 2009; Wood & Stanulis, 2009). This research calls for careful mentor selections to safeguard against ill-practiced mentoring lacking in motivation and inspiration. Relatedly, thorough mentor training programs to familiarise mentors with key components of ideal mentoring are in urgent need. Despite research on mentoring, researchers believe still less attention has been focused on developing and implementing mentor preparation programs and mentors often do not receive formal training (Gershenfeld, 2014). This point is approved by this research which suggested a few mentor teachers, who participated in other phases of this study, had not received any professional mentoring programs before starting their mentoring role (the data is based on informal conversations with mentors). As a result, it is obvious that the mentoring that preservice teachers encounter might be “hit or miss” (Russell & Russell, 2011). The creation of teachers who have a strong sense of who they are as teachers and

are passionate and excited about their teaching role hinges upon effective mentor teachers who know how to instil a sense of self-confidence in their mentees and help them find a teacher voice. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to effectively prepare mentors for their crucial role through comprehensive mentoring programs. Further research should be undertaken to explore the effectiveness of current mentoring program and develop strategies to better equip mentors for their role.

The findings of this study also suggest personalities and opinions may clash during mentoring. What contributes to this problem is lack of open negotiations of ideas and expectations. Mentor teachers can create more positive mentoring experiences for preservice teachers by initiating open discussions in early stages of mentoring to know about their mentee's wants and needs and also make explicit their own views and expectations. It is recommended that mentors invest enough time with their mentees not only to ascertain their academic and professional needs but also to develop a collegial relationship with them, characterized by constant care and undivided attention to inspire and motivate them to remain true to their aims along the way.

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