Making an Impact Through Collaborative Leadership: Developing Teacher Mentors Through Online Professional Learning

- Proposal Abstract ▮▮▮▮
- Proposal Strand: **Strand II: Resilient Leadership During Unprecedented Times**
- Session Type: **Case Stories**
- Proposal Abstract Status: **Complete / Locked**

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Section II. Abstract Information

Target Audience Level

- Intro

Keywords

- Accreditation
- Assessment
- K-12 Partners
- Post-COVID/Student learning
- Technology

Short Abstract

Effective mentorship between school-based educators and student teachers plays a critical role in supporting the next generation of educators. Establishing successful mentoring relationships requires collaborative efforts from leadership in Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) and school districts to foster a collaborative environment for ongoing professional learning to develop school-based educators, like cooperating teachers, as teacher mentors.

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped collaborations, particularly in large urban districts. Challenges such as limited in-person learning, restricted school access, and supervision limitations disrupted clinical placements. Despite these obstacles, the pandemic prompted a reimagining of collaborative leadership and professional development, utilizing online platforms.

This session highlights a collaborative model between Queens College, CUNY's EPP, and New York City Public School District 24. Online professional learning modules were developed to address state-mandated requirements. The shift to remote learning facilitated flexible online platforms tailored to teacher mentors' schedules.

The data-driven conversations between Queens College and District 24 led to innovative changes, fostering a strong partnership manifested in visits, meetings, and ongoing collaborative initiatives. This session delves into this successful collaboration, born out of the need to adapt post-pandemic, resulting in online modules and a robust model of collaborative leadership to empower teacher mentors and enhance clinical practices.

A. Statement of the issue.

Emerging from the pandemic required EPPs, districts, and schools to rebuild relationships, ensuring high-quality clinical experiences for teacher candidates amid technological shifts. EPPs must navigate evolving state regulations and accreditation standards. In this context, Queens College, CUNY developed online professional learning modules in collaboration with NYC Public Schools to meet new state requirements and enhance teacher mentors' effectiveness. The initiative aimed to create a model of collaborative leadership supporting mentors in guiding student teachers.

B. Literature review.

Mentoring, and more recently, coaching, have taken on a more pronounced role in teacher education, particularly in pre-service teacher education that requires more support and guidance to ensure that future educators feel successful and are retained in the field (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Russell & Russell, 2011). The literature on mentoring has centered on redefining the role of school-based educators, or cooperating teachers, as teacher mentors and coaches, rather than supervisors, which implies a more hierarchical role in teacher preparation. Teacher mentoring, however, reframes the role of teachers, who have critical functions in building relationships, developing pedagogical and content knowledge, and modeling professional knowledge and dispositions, as someone who co-constructs student teaching experiences through a bidirectional, interactive process within the mentor-mentee relationship (Coppola, Rocha & Woodard, 2021). The benefits of high-quality mentorship show that student teachers who have effective teacher mentors develop professional identities with higher levels of confidence and are retained longer in the field (Izadinia, 2015; Leshem, 2014; Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

Researchers, however, have argued that there is not a common definition of mentorship within pre-service education and have explored how teacher mentors have defined their mentorship roles and the roles of the student teachers (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). In addition, researchers (e.g. Greer Richardson et al., 2019; Russell & Russell, 2011) have found that teachers do not always feel prepared to be mentors, although they feel a professional responsibility to support the next generation of educators.

While there was increasing acknowledgement of professional learning for teacher mentors and attention to professional learning programs, the COVID pandemic disrupted or refocused how professional learning should be conducted and the content of professional learning for mentorship (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Shin 2022). Regardless of the impacts of the pandemic, student teaching placements are complex, involving a variety of stakeholders, including university students and supervisors, clinical professors, clinical placement offices, and district principals and teachers. The pandemic exacerbated navigating these complex relationships. Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020), who studied student teaching placements during the pandemic, found that school closures and the transition of teaching placements from face-to-face to remote resulted in a lack of clear communication between student teachers and cooperating teachers. Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison argued that student teachers felt isolated, exhibited lower self-confidence, and were overwhelmed by their focus on self-learning and independence.

The negative broader impact, however, is the strain that the COVID pandemic placed on consistent and clear communication needed to foster sustainable partnerships among districts, schools, and institutions of higher education for student teaching placements. University-school partnerships are not without their challenges. Walsh & Backe (2013) noted that conflicts in cultures, institutional support, competing professional pressures, funding, and external factors and dynamics can challenge partnerships. Yet, researchers argue that collaborative university-school partnerships, which are essential to fostering professional learning for teacher mentors, are needed to strengthen the preparation of prospective teachers as we emerge from the COVID pandemic (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020; Shin 2022).

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C. Contribution

The work described in the proposal aligns closely with the conference strand, which focuses on leadership in the 21st century across the education landscape, particularly in the context of the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The current case study focuses on an existing school district-university partnership between the EPP at Queens College and New York City Public School District 24. During the pandemic, a centerpiece of this partnership became professional learning to highlight the centrality of teacher mentorship on part of the cooperating teacher. The proposed presentation addresses the changing dynamics and demands that educational leaders are facing in this rapidly evolving environment. It is situated within the subcategory of "How can educational leaders effectively use data to inform decision-making and continuously improve the performance of their schools or districts?"

As the extant literature has described, educational leaders at all levels of education have been compelled to navigate uncharted territories, implementing new policies and procedures for online learning, technology integration, and student and educator engagement in the wake of the pandemic. This presentation showcases a practical case study where collaborative leadership was employed to develop and implement online professional learning modules for teacher mentors. These modules were developed in response to new state regulations and aimed at enhancing the quality of mentorship provided to student teachers.

A critical piece of the collaborative leadership models was generating and sharing data between the EPP and the school district. The data sharing led to collaborative decisions to improve informed decision-making processes for how the EPP and school district can support the two-way mentorship of cooperating teachers and student teachers. By doing so, the presentation directly addresses the question of how educational leaders can leverage data and innovative approaches to address the evolving needs of their institutions.

In the context of the subcategory's emphasis on continuous improvement and data-driven decision-making, the presentation underscores the importance of adapting leadership strategies to changing circumstances driven through collaboration and data-driven insights to the needs of school-based educators, like cooperating teachers, and student teachers. These insights could encompass various aspects such as the challenges faced by mentor teachers during the pandemic, the changing expectations of student teachers, and the evolving needs of the education community.

Furthermore, the presentation echoes the conference strand's call for educational leaders to be adaptable, innovative, empathetic, and responsive. The work highlights how the collaborative leadership model was developed in response to the unique challenges posed by the pandemic. It emphasizes the role of leaders in fostering a positive and inclusive learning environment, even in the face of adversity.

Additionally, the presentation is aligned with the broader theme of addressing challenges in educational leadership. It discusses how the pandemic exposed inequities in education, including access to technology and resources. By developing online professional learning modules that accommodate diverse schedules and needs, the collaborative leadership model showcased in the presentation directly addresses the pressing challenge of providing equitable opportunities for professional development.

By sharing insights from the case study, the presentation contributes to the conference's goal of exploring leadership in the 21st century across the education landscape, while offering practical solutions to the most pressing challenges facing educational leaders today.

D. Relevance

The proposal outlined above holds significant implications for policy development and highlights effective practices that adapt to the current professional needs of teacher mentors, particularly within the context of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the proposal demonstrates the utilization of qualitative evidence to inform both policy and practice, showcasing a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to making data-informed improvements that help to advance district, school, and university partnership.

Implications for Policy:
The proposal directly addresses the implications for policy by showcasing how the collaborative leadership model developed between an Educator Preparation Program (EPP) and a large urban school district led to the creation of online professional learning modules for teacher mentors. In response to new state regulations requiring professional learning for teacher mentors, this initiative exemplifies a proactive approach to policy compliance. It underscores the importance of policy adaptation in response to evolving educational landscapes. By focusing on equipping teacher mentors with the necessary skills and tools, this proposal suggests a broader policy shift towards recognizing the critical role of mentorship in addressing teacher attrition. This approach signals that policies should be dynamic and responsive to the changing needs of educators and students, promoting innovation and collaboration.

Successful (Exemplary) Practices:
The proposal highlights exemplary practices by showcasing a successful collaboration between an EPP and a school district. The development of online professional learning modules for teacher mentors illustrates an innovative approach to meeting the challenges posed by the pandemic. This collaborative effort serves as a model for effective partnership and cross-sector collaboration, where educational institutions come together to address a common goal. The proposal's emphasis on fostering a collaborative environment and cultivating meaningful conversations exemplifies best practices in leadership. The success of this endeavor can serve as inspiration for other institutions seeking to enhance mentorship and professional development. It also demonstrates a commitment to excellence by actively addressing challenges and providing tangible solutions that benefit both educators and students.

Using Qualitative or Quantitative Evidence to Inform Policy or Practice:
The proposal incorporates a qualitative evidence-based approach to inform both policy and practice. The case study presented showcases a collaborative leadership model that emerged as a response to the challenges brought about by the pandemic. The proposal provides insights into the qualitative data collected during the process, including the experiences of teacher mentors, student teachers, and other stakeholders. This evidence-based approach demonstrates a thoughtful consideration of the perspectives and needs of those involved, guiding the development of the online professional learning modules. By incorporating qualitative evidence, the proposal underscores the importance of understanding the human aspect of educational leadership and decision-making. This approach can serve as a valuable example for educational leaders seeking to use data-driven insights to create effective policies and practices.

This presentation showcases a collaborative leadership model that addresses the challenges posed by the pandemic, emphasizing policy adaptability,

successful collaboration, and evidence-based decision-making. The proposal's comprehensive approach serves as a valuable contribution to the discussion on educational leadership in the 21st century, offering insights that can guide both policy development and exemplary practices within the education landscape.

E. Implication for Action

The work described in the proposal has the potential to yield a range of concrete changes, activities, policies, research, and outcomes that can significantly impact the field of educational leadership and the overall quality of teacher mentorship. Drawing from the information presented in the proposal, the following outcomes are anticipated:

Policy Reform and Development: The collaborative leadership model between the EPP and the urban school district, as outlined in the proposal, can serve as a blueprint for how to address policy reform in teacher mentorship and professional development. Education policymakers can draw inspiration from this successful collaboration to encourage other institutions to develop similar partnerships and initiatives. EPP and school districts may consider incorporating online professional learning modules for teacher mentors to address how to professionally develop school-based educators as mentors, a needed area of exploration as described by the literature.

Enhanced Mentorship Training: Data gathered from the development and implementation of online professional learning modules, informed by qualitative evidence and insights, will assist fostering learning opportunities that result in more effective mentorship development. This outcome will lead to better-prepared mentors who are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to guide and support student teachers effectively.

Innovative Professional Development Models: The success of the proposed collaborative model highlights the potential for innovative approaches to professional learning. Institutions can explore similar partnerships and leverage data sharing opportunities and online platforms to create flexible, accessible, and tailored learning experiences for educators.

Improved Student Teacher Experiences: Through improved mentorship, student teachers will benefit from higher-quality experiences. This will lead to increased confidence, improved instructional practices, and ultimately, higher retention rates among new educators. The proposal's emphasis on bidirectional, interactive mentor-mentee relationships will create a positive impact on the overall teacher preparation process.

Research Opportunities and Insights:
The collaborative leadership model and its outcomes provide a rich context for further research. Researchers can investigate the long-term impact of the online professional learning modules on mentorship quality, student teacher outcomes, and teacher retention rates. Additionally, studies can explore the scalability and adaptability of the collaborative model across different educational contexts and geographic locations.

Promotion of Equitable Practices:
The proposal's focus on addressing inequities through online professional learning aligns with the broader goal of promoting equitable education. As institutions adopt similar models, it can lead to greater inclusivity by accommodating the diverse needs and schedules of educators. This outcome contributes to narrowing educational gaps and ensuring that all educators have access to high-quality mentorship.

Cultivation of Collaborative Leadership Culture:
The success story of collaborative leadership demonstrated in the proposal can encourage educational leaders to foster a culture of collaboration within their institutions. This outcome extends beyond mentorship to encompass broader initiatives that benefit both educators and students. It encourages leaders to seek innovative solutions and engage in open, meaningful conversations to address challenges.

F. Methods

By designing the session with a combination of presentations, interactive discussions and small group discussions, participants will have the opportunity to engage with the content and collaborate with their peers. This approach ensures that the desired learner/participant outcomes are achieved, allowing participants to leave the session with a comprehensive understanding of collaborative leadership's role in effective teacher mentorship and actionable strategies for implementing online professional learning in their own educational contexts.

The proposed session will address the following objective:
1. Understand the importance of collaborative leadership in providing professional learning experiences that advance teacher mentorship.
2. Explore the development and implementation of online professional learning modules for teacher mentors.
3. Analyze the impact of qualitative evidence on policy and practice improvement.
4. Identify strategies to promote equitable mentorship and professional development.

Session Structure:

Introduction:
Welcome participants and provide an overview of the session's objectives and structure.
Highlight the relevance of collaborative leadership and online professional learning in addressing challenges posed by the pandemic.

Context and Case Study Presentation:
Present the context of the collaboration between the EPP at Queens College, CUNY and New York City Public School District 24.
Showcase the development of online professional learning modules for teacher mentors as a response to new state regulations and changing educational landscapes.
Show part of the online modules that were developed.
Present data collected from the teacher mentors who took the online professional learning modules.
Present how the data was shared with the school district to inform next steps to support the professional learning for cooperating teachers.

Interactive Discussion on Collaborative Leadership and Mentorship:
Discuss some of the challenges and opportunities that came out of the collaborative leadership model between the EPP and school district.
Engage participants in a facilitated discussion about the role of collaborative leadership in effective mentorship.
Share insights from the case study and encourage participants to reflect on their own experiences and challenges related to mentorship.

Broader Impacts:
Discuss the incorporation of qualitative evidence in the development of online professional learning modules.
Explore how data-based decision-making can inform policy development and lead to positive outcomes in educational settings.
Highlight the role of online professional learning in promoting equitable mentorship by accommodating diverse schedules and needs.
Discuss the broader implications of equitable practices in education and the benefits of fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Small Group Discussion on Applying Collaborative Strategies:
Divide participants into small breakout groups.
Provide a hypothetical scenario related to teacher mentorship and ask groups to brainstorm collaborative strategies for developing effective online professional learning experiences.

Sharing and Closing Remarks:
Reconvene as a whole group and invite each breakout group to share their collaborative strategies and insights.
Summarize key takeaways, reiterate the importance of collaborative leadership, and encourage participants to apply the insights gained from the session.
Open the floor for participants to ask questions and seek clarifications.

Section III. Content Learning Objectives

1. Upon completion, participants will be able to articulate the importance of collaborative leadership in providing professional learning experiences that advance teacher mentorship.
2. Upon completion, participants will be able to describe the development and implementation of online professional learning modules for teacher mentors.
3. Upon completion, participants will be able to analyze the impact of qualitative evidence on policy and practice improvement.
4. Upon completion, participants will be able to identify strategies to promote equitable mentorship and professional development.

Section IV. Aligning with AACTE Strategic Priorities and Core Values

1. **Advocate for high-quality educator preparation. Graduates of educator preparation programs will be profession-ready and prepared to meet the needs of PK-12 districts and schools.**
   The proposal advocates for high-quality educator preparation by emphasizing the development of effective teacher mentorship through collaborative leadership and online professional learning. This approach directly aligns with the goal of producing graduates who are profession-ready and well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of PK-12 districts and schools. The proposal underscores the importance of mentorship as a critical component of educator preparation. By promoting the transformation of cooperating teachers into teacher mentors through a collaborative leadership model, the proposal recognizes the need for experienced educators to guide and support novice teachers. The proposal's reliance on qualitative evidence and insights from real-world experiences reinforces the importance of evidence-based practices in educator preparation.
2. **Prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Educator preparation programs and their faculty, students, and communities will provide successful learning environments that demonstrate diversity, equity, and inclusion.**
   The proposal's commitment to equitable mentorship and online professional learning recognizes the diverse needs of both mentors and student teachers. Educator preparation programs must faculty, students and communities with ways to foster inclusive and equitable learning environments by recognizing the everyday context in which teacher mentors teach and learn. The proposal's approach ensures that educators are exposed to diverse perspectives, teaching methods, and strategies, aligning with the broader goal of supporting student teachers who can effectively meet the needs of diverse PK-12 districts and schools.
3. **Advance educator preparation policy, practice, and research. The use of leading-edge research and models of innovative practice will advance the field of educator preparation and strengthen public education for all students.**
   The proposal's reliance on qualitative evidence and insights from real-world experiences reinforces the importance of evidence-based practices in educator preparation and how data-informed decisions can make positive impacts on policy, practice, and research. The proposal's focus on qualitative evidence demonstrates the significance of this skill and encourages future educators to base their practices on research and effective strategies.

   The proposal's adaptation to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic reflects the importance of innovation and adaptability in educator preparation. EPPs must be prepared to navigate various instructional contexts, including remote, hybrid, and in-person learning. The proposal's online professional learning modules exemplify how educator preparation programs address the needs of educators at all levels to equip them with the skills and strategies needed to succeed in rapidly changing educational landscapes.