RELATIONAL LEARNING: A STUDY OF PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE TEACHER EDUCATION MAJORS

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Peer mentoring is a topic that has been prevalent in the literature for the past several decades and plays a significant role in the learning experiences of many students. This study investigated the experiences of peer mentors in one specific mentoring project, in order to learn how the mentors describe and understand those experiences.

Eighteen mentors participated in this qualitative study, which examined mentoring-influenced-by-relational-learning in pre-service teachers through in-depth, phenomenological interviews. These interviews were supplemented by photo elicitation and reflecting processes. These mentors defined mentoring as a multifaceted endeavor, which exhibits, among others, traits of teaching, friendship, learning, building relationships, and communication. They defined relational learning both in terms of the course they took, and as a construct which revolves around working together, talking through experiences, being open to new possibilities and ideas, and, through these, being in relationship with one another. Four themes were identified: (a) Mentors experienced relational learning; (b) Mentors experienced investment; (c) Mentors experienced challenges; and (d) Mentors identified ways mentoring can be different. An overarching theme was, mentors and the mentoring project experienced a process of becoming. Mentors also described their overall experiences, explained the ways in which they feel
they benefitted from the project, and discussed why they believe this project has been successful. Implications of these findings are also discussed, as they relate to both research and practice.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

As student enrollment in universities grows to the largest numbers that have ever been seen, visible outcomes, value-added experience, retention, and accountability become increasingly important. While colleges and universities do not guarantee specific results or outcomes, the responsibility of the university is to provide students with quality education, opportunities for growth and development, and the potential to excel in their lives and careers. With growing class sizes and shrinking budgets and human resources, instructors must find ways to engage students and scaffold their learning. Mentoring, which has been written about extensively over the past few decades, is one method of working toward these goals. Most research on mentoring indicates that it leads to primarily positive outcomes (see Ehrich, Tennent, & Hansford, 2002, for an overview). In fact, Jacobi (1991) stated that “the professional literature, the popular press, and students themselves seem to agree that mentoring is a critical component of effective undergraduate education” (p. 505). However, as Healy and Welchert (1990) pointed out, literature on mentoring tends to fall into two categories: good mentoring practices and poor mentoring practices.

This “polarized view” (Healy & Welchert, 1990, p. 18) of mentoring seems to divide the practice into mentoring experiences that work and result in positive experiences, and those which do not work, and tend to end without much positive impact. Of this second type of mentoring situations, Healy and Welchert noted that they are typically short-term, are cost-effective, and have only limited significance. Therefore, it
is important to focus on creating mentoring experiences that provide the opportunity for participants to have experiences that make a positive impact and lead to educational outcomes that they believe are valuable and significant. This dissertation investigates and analyzes the experiences of mentors who participated in one, specific mentoring project at a large, public, Midwest university, which has been described as sustainable and valuable by former participants.

**Research Goals**

The goal of this study is to learn about the experiences of peer mentors in one mentoring project, as well as to learn how the mentors describe and understand those experiences. Specifically, this qualitative study examines *mentoring-influenced-by-relational-learning* among pre-service teachers through in-depth, phenomenological interviews, supplemented by photo elicitation, which added additional perspective to the mentors’ portrayals of their experiences.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand why this peer mentoring project seems to “work” for the students involved, by examining *mentoring-influenced-by-relational-learning*. While mentoring has been written about extensively throughout the literature and across disciplines, it is still a subject that garners much interest. As there is not, yet, a commonly-accepted definition of mentoring and many mentoring programs, themselves, vary widely (see Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Jacobi, 1991), this study contributes to the existing body of literature in describing the experiences of mentors in one, specific example of a mentoring project. This study
investigates and analyzes the personal experiences and beliefs about mentoring of undergraduate student mentors, the activities in which they participate via this role, and the factors they believe are most important in a successful mentoring project.

This study also investigated relational learning opportunities in the context of a larger peer mentoring project and explored the ways in which this mentoring opportunity benefits the mentors, how they perceive their experiences with mentoring in this context, and how they describe their roles and relationships within this project. This information may help to advance the definition and understanding of relational learning.

Additionally, this study defines relational learning from the perspective of students who have mentored or are currently mentoring one or more individuals, across a variety of academic situations. Experiences discussed include peer mentoring in an undergraduate Educational Psychology class, a conversation partners program for international students, and interactions with students in a local, inner-city elementary school.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and outcomes of the mentors who participate in this relational learning program. Learning more about this mentoring project and the experiences the students are having may be a valuable contribution to the extant literature related to mentoring and relational learning. In addition, this study may further help to explain why this project has been reported to be sustainable and valuable to the mentors. Finally, approaching an investigation of mentoring outcomes and experiences from a constructionist perspective and using reflecting processes as an approach to research allows for additional conversations to
develop about how students experience mentoring. In this manner, another goal of this investigation was to continue to open dialogue about, and consider the possibilities of, mentoring for the participants in this investigation, the readers, and myself.

Relevance

This study is relevant to the current landscape of education, as there has been continued interest in the topic for the past few decades. Evidence for this can be found in academic and professional journals, in books, on websites, and at conferences, where the topic of mentoring is not uncommon.

Despite the volume of research that has already been conducted relating to mentoring, Crisp and Cruz (2009) note that there is “a lack of clarity and precision of the concept of mentoring within the context of college students” (p. 540) and state that it is “critical that researchers continue to add to our theoretical understandings by continuing to unpack the ways in which mentoring is personally experienced as constructed by students” (p. 540). This study contributes accounts of these mentors’ experiences, as well as insight into how they understand what mentoring is and is not, to the existing body of literature.

Context of the Study

The mentoring project that is the focus of this study was created to support students in the undergraduate teacher education program, taking the Educational Psychology course. The goal of this mentoring project was to engage students in their own learning, as well as increase understanding of the course material and assist with retention within the course and education program. Mentors enroll in Relational
Learning in Education, an elective course, and participate in two of three mentoring opportunities: mentoring students in the Educational Psychology course; working with or observing students at a local, inner-city elementary school; and working with international students in an English-language conversation partners program. This mentoring project began informally, as a teaching initiative, with previous students from the project director’s Educational Psychology classes stopping by to say hello to the professor, sometimes sitting in on the current class and participating or answering questions for the current students. Over time, a more structured approach was incorporated, where former students began to be introduced as mentors for the current students. The Relational Learning course was then offered as a special topics course in the College; mentors had the option of taking a structured course for three credit hours, or simply volunteering their time to support the students in the class. It was at this point that I began interviewing these students, both the mentors and the mentees, to learn what their experiences were like. The approach that was taken in interviewing these students came from the reflecting processes (Andersen, 1991, 1995), where they were asked to respond, in interviews, to the following questions: What is the peer mentoring project? What is it as a mentor/mentee? What do you think it is to the mentees/mentors? How could it be different? and Who should we be talking to? From these interviews, one thing that became clear was that the mentors wanted more structure in the project. Specifically, they wanted more class/meeting time, more guidance on mentoring, and more opportunities to interact with their mentees and build relationships early in the semester.
Of the reflecting processes, Andersen (1995) wrote, “The less planned the process the greater the possibility of letting the situation determine its form. It is important that those who take part in the process can say and do what feels natural and comfortable” (p. 19). This ground-up, reflective approach is consistent with the approach taken in interviewing participants, the evolution of the mentoring project, and the reasons for (and from) which much of the structure of this mentoring project is now in place. Over severalsemesters, with interviews conducted with the mentors each semester, the project began to change and evolve in response to many of these suggestions, as well as from an increased focus in the project and class on relational learning and the reflecting processes.

As of the Spring 2011 semester, the peer mentoring project is housed within the Relational Learning in Education course, a newly-formed elective in the undergraduate teacher education program. In this evolution of the course, students meet weekly, with structured readings and projects, including participation in the mentoring project. As mentors, students attend one of the Educational Psychology courses approximately six times throughout the course of the semester, to work with the current students on their term projects. They also organize and hold a review session for the final exam. Additionally, mentors must engage in a second relational learning project outlined by the instructor.

**Impetus for the Study**

I was not always interested in mentoring as an area of research. Instead, I began my work with the mentors and mentees conducting interviews on the project as a requirement of my graduate assistantship. My interest evolved over time, as a lengthy
process that included a great deal of inquiry and evidence and many formal and informal conversations held both inside and outside of the classroom. I had previously been involved with and/or had witnessed a number of inadequate “mentoring” programs, throughout my undergraduate and Master’s years. These programs seemed, to me, to be superficial and shallow, often appearing to be simply a pairing of a “mentee” to a “mentor,” with the responsibility falling somewhere between the two individuals to provide obligatory reports and updates to the mentor. In return, the “mentor” would offer impersonal advice or generic guidance to the “mentee.” These experiences reflect Healy and Welchert’s (1990) description of unsuccessful mentoring practices portraying the extrinsically motivated nature of this type of “relationship.” Essentially, it was not a relationship, but a meeting of two individuals to fulfill some obligation (i.e., an agreement, a class or program requirement, or the infamous undergraduate opportunity to earn extra credit). Those mentors and mentees were not intrinsically motivated to participate in this type of relationship and take advantage of the benefits possible for both parties. As a consequence of my experiences, this is what I expected when I reluctantly began to work with this peer mentoring project as a graduate assistant assigned to conduct interviews for the project director.

For these initial interviews, a particular qualitative approach, called reflecting processes, was suggested by the project director. Reflecting processes “involve multiple perspectives, listening and talking positions, a nonjudgmental curious stance, respectfulness, collaboration, and mutual exploration” (Kleist, 1999, p. 274). Andersen (1996) described the reflecting processes in this way:
The reflecting processes can be described as shifts between talking with others about various issues and sitting back and listening to others talking about the same issues. The talk with others is *outer talk*, and that which one has with oneself (when listening to others’ talk) is an *inner talk*. These two kinds of talking seem to deal differently with the same issue. What happens in the outer talk will be a perspective for the inner talk and vice versa. (p. 120)

Working on this project was my first introduction to the reflecting processes (Andersen, 1991). The reflecting processes were created as a way to work with clients in a counseling relationship, where the therapist(s) and the participant(s) assumed a more-egalitarian relationship, focusing on thinking about the issue and really hearing ideas, rather than prescribing a solution or coming up with rigid answers. Although this approach is typically applied to counseling, the project director’s experiences with the reflecting processes and her background in counseling encouraged her to use a similar approach in developing her mentoring project, incorporating the principles of reflection, multiple perspectives, and the creation of space and opportunities to both talk and listen in both her Relational Learning class and her research. The application of reflecting processes to other contexts is consistent with Andersen’s conceptualization of the reflecting processes. He wrote,

> The reflecting processes appears to be a useful practice that is relatively easy to apply and can be used in many different circumstances. It is also a practice that studies itself. Clients and therapists are not only collaborators but also coresearchers. (Andersen, 1995, p. 28)
This acknowledgment of the versatility of the reflecting processes not only substantiates its application to a mentoring program, but also connects it to research practices. In a like fashion, Andersen’s invitation can be applied to using reflecting practices to research what is happening in the peer mentoring project and, specifically, the experiences of the mentors, by allowing them to act, as cited above, not only as “collaborators but also coresearchers” (Andersen, 1995, p. 28).

While the reflecting processes have been widely used and described in counseling settings (see Kleist, 1999; Morrison, 2001, for a review), this practice has also been discussed and used as an approach to research (Andersen, 1995; Morrison, 2001). A reflecting processes approach provides a foundation for understanding the experiences of these mentors, through the use of three main questions: “What is it?” “How could it be different?” and “Who else should I be talking to?” (Andersen, 1991). The theoretical foundation of the reflecting processes is discussed in Chapter 2.

Over time, I began to understand that this mentoring project was different from those I had previously witnessed. Both the mentors and the mentees seemed to find value in their interactions; both parties seemed to be learning. I was still not “sold” on the project, but decided to further investigate it during my doctoral course work, since I was becoming curious as to why the participants seemed to see so much value in it.

**Summary and Influence of the Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study during the Spring 2009 semester focusing solely on the mentors to learn more about what their experiences were like, as they participated in this mentoring opportunity. The research questions for the pilot study were: 1. What kinds of
experiences are these mentors having? and 2. What are the learning outcomes that these mentors are experiencing, throughout the semester and through their interactions with each other and with their mentees? Again, these interviews were guided by the reflecting processes and were informed by what had been learned though early, informal interviews, which formed the basis for this pilot study. The findings of both the pilot study and the initial interviews I had conducted as a graduate assistant helped me to begin to understand the evolution of the peer mentoring project, its grounding in social construction and relational learning, and the use of reflecting processes in research, setting the groundwork for the current investigation.

The findings of the pilot study indicated that the mentors realized numerous benefits from participating in the mentoring opportunity. Through this pilot study, I learned that the mentors did, in fact, acknowledge the existence of a space to engage in conversations with other mentors, as well as their mentees, which allowed them to help others, learn for themselves, and practice becoming a professional. In gaining this understanding, and being able to link it with much of the extant literature on the benefits of mentoring, I was able to focus less on the outcomes specifically, and more on the mentors’ actual experiences, learning, and development as future teachers. With this basic understanding of their beliefs about the benefits of participating in this mentoring project, I was able to consider research questions that would allow for a deeper understanding of the mentors’ experiences with this project, to explore how they understood the term “mentor” and why they believe that this mentoring project was a useful experience.
The pilot study also helped to shape the methodology of the current investigation. In interviewing the 12 mentors who participated in the pilot study, I learned that they typically demonstrated ease in talking to me about their experiences and their beliefs—both positive and negative—about this mentoring project. I also realized that they had much to say on this topic; many provided detailed stories and rich descriptions of their involvement. Because of this, interviews that allowed for back-and-forth conversation, as well as expression in the form of photographs, were a natural fit.

**The Research Questions**

The research questions for the present study emerged over the course of three years, from numerous conversations with individuals both involved in and separate from this mentoring project. Specifically, the questions for this study were formed from foundational interviews done with this mentoring project; from knowledge gained from the pilot study discussed above; and have been informed by literature on mentoring and relational learning. The research questions for this investigation are as follow:

1. How do mentors describe their experiences in this mentoring project?
   - How do mentors describe what it is to be a mentor?
   - How do mentors describe relational learning?

2. What are the reported outcomes of this project?
   - What benefits do mentors report, resulting from this mentoring project?
   - How do mentors believe their participation has influenced their learning and other outcomes (i.e., professional development)?

3. What characteristics do mentors believe make this project successful?
4. What do participants think could be different?

**Clarification of Terms**

This investigation examined one specific peer mentoring project. Therefore, it is important for the reader to have a clear understanding of how mentoring and other concepts used in this manuscript are understood in relation to this project. Following are several terms and definitions integral to the present investigation.

**Peer Mentoring**

Harmon (2006) defined peer mentoring as “a form of peer education where students serve as role models to fellow students and provide them with personal support and guidance” (p. 53-54), based on the work of Ender and Newton (2000) and Gould and Lomax (1993). Similarly, Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, and Ballou (2002) described mentoring as

A process whereby two people are engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship. A mentor provides emotional support, information, and advice; shares values; facilitates access to key networks; motivates; is a role model; protects; and provides the type of interactions that allow for transfer of knowledge and skills.

(p. 90)

In this investigation, the term peer mentoring is used in multiple environments. The following three examples are addressed in this investigation: (a) mentoring in an undergraduate educational psychology course; (b) mentoring in a university-based conversation partners program, which provides support for international students; and (c) mentoring to support students in a local, inner-city elementary school.
As it relates to mentoring in the Educational Psychology course, I adopt a definition of mentoring similar to the one provided by both Harmon (2006) and Beyene et al. (2002), as an educational process by which students serve as role models to their fellow students and provide them with different types of support. I would distinguish these as affective support, educational support, and practical support. Affective support includes motivation, ethical considerations, and support on a personal level. Educational support addresses support and guidance with educational content, tasks, transfer, values, and programmatic concerns. Practical support takes into consideration the “intangibles” of the mentor-mentee relationship, and may include support related to networking, careers, time management, and similar issues.

Mentoring in a university-based conversation partners program is defined by me, again, similarly to the way in which it is described by Harmon (2006) and Beyene et al. (2002), but with a much more limited expectation of the relationship. Specifically, this type of mentoring allows students to serve as role models for international students; provides the international students help with networking; helps with understanding, knowledge transfer, guidance, and shared values; and supports the other student. My definition stresses the reciprocal nature of “mentoring” in this program: not only is the domestic student/mentor “mentoring” the international student but, in many ways, the international student is mentoring the domestic student. Therefore, this definition has been constructed to allow for a view of mentoring as a two-way street, focusing on reciprocity and reciprocal learning: the domestic student knows much more about American culture and has a greater command of the English language; however, the
international student knows far more about his or her native culture and country and can mentor the domestic student in at least that way, as well as, possibly, others.

Finally, I define mentoring in a local, inner-city elementary school the most broadly of these three, encompassing the adoption of a stance as a role model, the providing of information and advice, and an allowance for interactions that promote learning and transfer of knowledge. This definition of mentoring was constructed because of the nature of the relationships that are built with the students in these elementary-level classes. While the mentors are typically much older than the students with whom they observe and interact, and have much to offer in terms of support, education, and guidance, they also have the opportunity to learn a great deal from these young students. They are, in a sense, being mentored by these inner-city elementary students regarding everyday inner-city life and academic environments.

Within these variations of mentoring described above, two consistent themes distinguish the mentoring relationship. The first comes from the definition provided by Beyene et al. (2002), which requires that the relationship be mutually beneficial. In all of these mentoring contexts, reciprocity is at the center of the relationship. The mentors benefit as well as the Educational Psychology mentees. The international student and the domestic student both have the potential to benefit from the relationship. It is possible for the inner-city elementary student and the undergraduate college student to each benefit greatly from their classroom interactions. The second key component that unites these definitions together is derived from Harmon’s definition, describing mentoring as a form of peer education, which offers support and guidance. For this investigation, these
characteristics of a mentoring relationship are expanded to include an approach to a relationship that is more-heterarchical in nature, or peer-based. According to Andersen (1995), a heterarchical relationship might also be described as “a ‘democratic relationship,’ an ‘even relationship,’ or a relationship with equally important contributors” (p. 18; emphasis mine). While elementary students would not, typically, be referred to as “peers” of college students, the larger point, in this study, is that the relationships are approached as a way to learn from another; not to go in and “direct” a younger student or “impart” one’s years of college-level knowledge on elementary school students. The meaning of peer, in this sense, is simply a person who enters into a relationship in a way that will be mutually beneficial and afford mutual opportunities for learning and growth.

**Social Construction**

Social construction is a term introduced by Berger and Luckmann (1967) and describes a way of being in the world in which language, dialogue, relationship, and context play a vital role in what is understood. In social construction, “what we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part” (Gergen, 2009, p. 2). Said differently, constructionism is concerned with relationships and how, through those relationships, language is used to construct meaning.

**Relational Learning**

Relational learning is a social constructionist approach to education that places value on the relationships built between and among learners and the impact that those
relationships have on how meaning is constructed. Related to relational learning is Bruffee’s (1993) conception of collaborative learning, which he described as “a process in which the ongoing exchange among students serves as a primary educational function. One learns through engaging, incorporating, and critically exploring the views of others, and new possibilities of interpretation are opened through the interactions” (as cited in Gergen, 1995, p. 34). This concept can be expanded to include relationships to “tools and materials encountered in the educational process” (i.e., as through Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism and the use of cultural tools; see Vygotsky, 1986), relationships with the school, and relationships with “community and national agendas” (Gergen, n.d., p. 21), as well as those that occur between individuals.

Reflecting Processes

Reflecting processes are approaches to conversations and research that center around an open, focused dialogue among the participants and are derived from the work of the Norwegian psychiatrist Tom Andersen (1991). They require space for exploration and thoughtful consideration of ideas and approaches, with a heterarchical relationship between all participants. Reflecting processes are comprised of “shifts between talking and listening” (Andersen, 1995, p. 18), and create space for multiple voices to be heard within a conversation.

Photo Elicitation

According to Harper (2002), photo elicitation is “a postmodern dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher” (p. 15) and revolves around the use of a photograph in an interview. In this study, I follow Harper’s definition, which
includes an approach that encourages the participant to be a coresearcher throughout the interview, and describe photo elicitation as a method by which photographs are used in a face to face interview to elicit thoughts, feelings, and descriptions with the goal of expanding and deepening the narrative shared in the interview. I also include Ketelle’s (2010) work in this definition, which requests that the participant write captions of his or her photograph to answer a specific question about mentoring.

**Conversation Partners**

Conversation Partners is a program at this university, which pairs international and domestic students for the purpose of engaging in casual conversation. Through this dialogue, the international student has the opportunity to practice conversational English and learn American culture, whereas the domestic student has the opportunity to learn more about the international student’s culture and experiences.

**Mentors**

In this study, mentors are primarily undergraduate teacher education majors who have successfully completed the Educational Psychology course in a previous semester, but may be from other majors, as this opportunity is open to students campus-wide. Mentors are enrolled in a Relational Learning course for elective university credit.

**Mentees**

In this study, mentees are primarily undergraduate teacher education majors who are currently enrolled in the Educational Psychology course. This course is required in the teacher education track at this university. Mentees may also be from other majors, as some of the mentors come from outside the education program and work with students
from their own discipline. Choosing to be paired with a mentor for the semester is optional for the mentees. In addition, mentees may be international students (i.e., from the Conversation Partners program) or elementary school students (i.e., from a local, inner-city elementary school).

**Peer Mentoring Project**

This study investigated a peer mentoring project at a large, public, Midwest university. This project was begun as a teaching initiative in an undergraduate Educational Psychology course to increase program retention, enhance understanding of course material, and engage students in their own learning. Students who participate in the mentoring project as mentors must take Relational Learning in Education, an elective course, and participate in two of three engaged experience options: mentoring Educational Psychology students; observing students at a local, inner-city elementary school; and participating in the Conversation Partners program. In addition, there is also an option to design an alternate experience.

**Organization of This Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. This chapter (Chapter I: Introduction) outlined the research goals, the research questions, and clarification of terms that were used in this manuscript. The remaining chapters adhere to the following structure: Review of the Literature (Chapter 2), Method (Chapter 3), Analysis (Chapter 4), and Discussion (Chapter 5). The Review of the Literature summarizes relevant literature relating to definitions of mentoring, mentoring in education, and the reflecting processes as an approach to research. Next, Method (Chapter 3) describes the evolution
and design of the study, as well as details about the sample selection, data collection, the role of the participants, data analysis, trustworthiness and triangulation, and ethics.

Analysis (Chapter 4) describes mentoring and relational learning within this project, as well as the findings that I identified. This chapter also describes the overall mentoring experience, benefits of participating in this mentoring project (as described by the mentors), and the reasons for which this mentoring project has been successful, as the mentors have described them. Discussion (Chapter 5) provides a summary of the findings in Chapter 4 as well as a discussion of the findings as they relate to the extant literature. The chapter concludes with an overview of the limitations of the study, implications for research, and implications for practice.

Summary

This chapter described the context and purpose for the current study, along with introducing a pilot study, which has already been conducted. In addition, Chapter 1 outlined the research questions for this study and defined critical terms and concepts and that are discussed throughout. In Chapter 2: Review of the Literature, I present relevant literature related to the following topics: defining peer mentoring, mentoring as it relates to education, and reflecting processes as an approach to research.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This study examines the experiences of mentors in a peer mentoring project. Mentoring is a familiar topic across disciplines, and can be seen across a number of different contexts, including within the field of education. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the relevant literature on definitions of peer mentoring, the use of peer mentoring in education, and reflecting processes as an approach to research.

Defining Peer Mentoring

While mentoring has received much attention over the past few decades, several issues surrounding mentoring still exist. One especially relevant issue is the lack of a generally accepted definition of mentoring, across studies and disciplines (Chan, 2008; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Jacobi, 1991). The goal of this review of mentoring literature is not meant to be comprehensive. For a comprehensive review of the literature on mentoring and mentoring definitions, please see Jacobi (1991) and Crisp and Cruz (2009). Presented here are definitions of mentoring which support the interpretation of mentoring presented in this study, as defined in Chapter I, and add to the overall understanding of the mentoring relationship.

According to Chan (2008),

The word “mentoring” is frequently used to describe different types of supportive relationships involving varying configurations of individuals: dyads of dissimilar power status (e.g., a more senior individual with a less experienced individual),
dyads of equal power status (e.g., peer mentoring), and groups of individuals of mixed power status (e.g. mentoring groups). (p. 14)

As a general overview of mentoring relationships, this seems to be the most basic, highlighting the helping and supportive aspects of the relationship and outlining a range of interpretations of these supporting relationships. Chan’s statement specifically addresses differing approaches to power issues within the mentoring relationship, as she makes a distinction between relationships that are heterarchical and those which are hierarchical. Similarly, Kram and Isabella (1985) addressed differences between “traditional” mentoring experiences (i.e., “significant differences in age and in hierarchical levels”; p. 129) and experiences in which there was a “significant” peer relationship among coworkers. Their findings described both similarities and differences between more-traditional mentoring (i.e., hierarchical) and peer relationships, which were viewed as a type of informal mentoring. Specifically, Kram and Isabella described these relationships as a “two-way exchange” (p. 129) which provided “mental opportunities that should not be over-looked or underestimated [and which] provide a forum for mutual exchange in which an individual can achieve a sense of expertise, equality, and empathy” not typically found in more-traditional mentoring relationships. They also noted that longevity was more characteristic of peer relationships, and that peer relationships could also offer support for individuals not interested in having a “mentor.”

Other authors have focused on different aspects of mentoring relationships. For example, Yamamoto (1988) noted that
Mentoring has come to mean in many quarters little more than remedial tutors for academic deficiency, provisions for therapeutic catharsis, assistance in social networking, coaching for professional skills, or apprenticeship for career advancement. \( \text{(p. 188)} \)

This view of mentoring, which characterizes it as a self-serving relationship based on individual outcomes and a concern only with personal gain, is not uncommon and is, perhaps, the result of loosely-structured “mentoring” initiatives, aimed at reaping the benefits that have been described in the literature as outcomes of successful mentoring relationships. To foreshadow, this is one conversation in which I engaged with some of the mentors during my interviews: the question of whether or not the term mentoring provokes a positive or negative image, and what experiences may have created that image. As is discussed in Chapter 4 and can easily be seen in the literature, the value and outcomes of mentoring programs can vary greatly, depending on individual experiences and understandings of the goals, structure, and approach to mentoring. Healy and Welchert (1990) described this issue in this way:

What emerges from the literature is a polarized view of mentoring. On one hand, there is “classical” mentoring worthy of the name—it is dynamic, occurs spontaneously between two people of goodwill and commitment, is long term, multifaceted, and potentially profound in impact. On the other hand are assigned, short-term, cost-effective arrangements of limited significance that have, in the minds of some, sullied and usurped the title \textit{mentoring}. (p. 18)
These two sides of mentoring are easily found in a variety of settings. The issue to consider, then, seems to be in the structure of the mentoring program itself; not, necessarily, the individuals involved or even the goals of the program. As Crisp and Cruz (2009) described, mentoring has been recognized as being a valuable tool for a number of years; indeed, many examples of mentoring can be seen in schools, businesses, and programs.

Possibly because of the lack of a generally accepted definition of mentoring and possibly because of the multifaceted and complex nature that mentoring projects seem to entail (based on specific goals, rationale, resources, and pragmatics), some researchers have borrowed from multiple definitions to create their own. Harmon (2006), borrowing from Ender and Newton (2000) and Gould and Lomax (1993), wrote that “peer mentoring is a form of peer education where students serve as role models to fellow students and provide them with personal support and guidance” (p. 53-54). As described in Chapter I, the definition of a mentoring relationship in this study revolves around reciprocity and the offering of support and guidance within the context of a relationship, as described by Harmon (2006) and Beyene et al. (2002).

**Peer Mentoring in Education**

Recent research has focused on exploring mentoring as a way to increase academic achievement (see Jacobi, 1991, for a review; also, Bernier, Larose, & Soucy, 2005; Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Rodger & Tremblay, 2003), retention (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003), self-efficacy (Wang & Wu, 2008), social exchanges (Ugrin, Odom, & Pearson, 2008), and enhanced learning (T. Smith, 2008). Mentors, as well as mentees,
can also benefit from these types of relationships. One important outcome of mentoring programs is the interactivity between the two students and the support structure that each offers the other, which allows students to benefit regardless of their role in the relationship. In one investigation, Good, Halpin, and Halpin (2000), upper-class, undergraduate mentors were paired with freshman-level mentees. The mentors provided academic support as well as supporting their mentees more generally, discussing challenges and successes they faced during their own freshman year. The mentors kept journals and responded to prompts related to their mentoring experiences. Findings of this study indicate that the mentors who participated in the mentoring program benefitted in ways that included academic growth, increased retention, enhanced social skills, and higher levels of self-satisfaction. In another study, which examined the experiences and perceived learning outcomes of undergraduate students who served as peer mentors to freshmen, Harmon (2006) reported that mentors described benefits across a number of dimensions. Areas in which the mentors were impacted included their own professional development, organization and planning skills, and self-reflective learning. They also learned how to interact with “diverse groups of people” (p. 65), and identified ways in which they could change their approach to instruction, based on the individual they were mentoring. Additionally, Harmon reported that the mentors identified a “collaborative learning process” (p. 65), in which they discussed ways to “manage challenging situations in the classroom” (p. 65). To summarize, Harmon’s findings indicate that mentors “learn through self-reflective and collaborative processes by reflecting on their own personal experiences and integrating learning from those experiences into their
mentoring style” (p. 53). These collaborative and social processes of experience and reflection are central to both reflecting process and social construction. In the present study, these collaborative and social—relational—practices play an important role in the mentoring experience. Relational practices are an important influence not only in a university setting, but in an increasingly global society, as well. A study by Devereux (2004) used peer mentoring as a way to increase intercultural skills and enhance social opportunities for new international students. Findings from this study indicate that their participation in the project led to increased confidence in interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds and in intercultural knowledge. In their profession of teaching, these students will be especially involved in such processes and practices, as they interact with school boards, colleagues, parents, students, and myriad other stakeholders, increasingly focused on outcomes and value-added education.

One application of mentoring in education is to support students new to a particular environment. As previously described, Harmon (2006) and Good et al. (2000) investigated mentoring programs that supported first-year undergraduates. Another study of a peer mentoring program which supported freshmen (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003) found that the experience of having a peer mentor alleviated anxiety for new freshmen. They speculated that these results could occur from the sharing of experiences of initial failure which led to better habits and, eventually, success where the new students learned that effort and persistence, and not simply the possession of raw intelligence or ability, may pay off. This indicates that peer mentors may be able to change the perceptions of these new students: instead of coming to believe that initial failures are due to
circumstances beyond their control or a lack of ability, they may adopt the belief that working hard, learning and practicing better study skills (self-regulated learning), and increasing effort will lead to success. McKeachie (2003) suggested that “a large part of our job as teachers is to teach our students how to learn and think and to be motivated to continue learning” (p. 42). This perspective can also be applied to peers; in mentoring situations, peers can motivate the students they are mentoring in a number of ways. Peer mentors can relate to their mentees; they can give them a “student” perspective on the course and the content, as opposed to the “teacher” perspective; they can find similarities and differences within each other, and learn from each other. Additionally, “peer assessment involves students directly in the learning process and may promote a sense of ownership, personal responsibility, and motivation [as well as] increase variety and interest, activity and interactivity, identification and bonding, self-confidence, and empathy for others” (Topping, 1998, p. 256).

Campbell and Campbell (2007) also examined mentoring and its effects on academic achievement. This study matched experimental and control mentees in the areas of gender, ethnicity, class level, and entering grade point average, in order to accurately compare the academic success and retention of students who have mentors and students who do not. Their findings indicated that the mentored students do have “better academic outcomes at the end of the first year [but those outcomes were] not sustained over time” as the mentor/mentee relationship ended (Campbell & Campbell, 2007, p. 143). This may be due to motivational factors associated with having a mentor. For example, these students may be seeing a mentor as a type of extrinsic motive for
maintaining a high level of academic achievement; while the mentor is around, the student wants to show the mentor he or she can do well. Once the mentor leaves, however—in effect, the source of the extrinsic motivation has been removed—the student returns to a lower state of achievement. In this situation, once the relationship between the mentor and the mentee ended, so did the motivation: no internal motive for continuing success had been developed. The motivational benefits of the presence of a mentor can also be seen in Karcher’s (2008) research on School-Based Mentoring (SBM). Karcher speculated that improved academic performance may be an indirect outcome of the effects of mentoring, but that a more direct effect may be an increase in self-esteem. His research confirmed his speculations: “small but positive main effects on two measures of self-reported self-esteem, on connectedness to peers, and on perceived social support from friends” were found (p. 107). Increasing self-esteem has a positive effect on motivation and one’s self-efficacy in these areas, possibly leading to better academic self-efficacy as well, if the student feels he is able to interact with his peers in class and engage in knowledge construction.

Mentoring can also be used as an approach to support students in a specific course. T. Smith (2008) investigated the outcomes of mentors in a newly-implemented mentoring program, which utilized peer mentors who had already successfully completed the course in which they were mentoring. Data were collected in the form of surveys, peer mentors’ assignments, and interviews. These data suggest that students are influenced by the presence of peer mentors who attend and assist with their classes, even if they are not formally paired with a mentor. Specifically, the advantage of having the
mentor in class, offering his or her perspectives and expertise on both the class and the class content, was believed to enhance the students’ overall class experience, as well as facilitate the building of relationships, trust, and credibility by the mentors (T. Smith, 2008). This is important, because it indicates that the results of mentoring relationships can be secondary and residual, as well as being a primary goal. Additionally, it suggests that even students who are too busy or would not normally choose a mentor for personal reasons can benefit from the presence of a mentor in the classroom. This is important because it shows a strategy that can be used by a faculty member both to help students who are aware that they want help, and to assist those who many not know that they need help, or who initially do not want any assistance. A possible threat to the building of these relationships, as shown in a study by Allen and Eby (2008), is the level of commitment of the mentors to the mentoring relationship. This study investigated both mentors’ and mentees’ perceptions of how committed the mentor was to the mentoring relationship. Findings indicated that the perceived level of commitment by the mentees determined the success of the mentoring relationship; those mentors who were seen as less committed, but believed they spent more time with the relationship (as opposed to the amount of time they were perceived to have invested) were weaker than the mentoring relationships wherein the mentees viewed their mentors as dedicating more time, and the mentors evaluated themselves as spending less time (Allen & Eby, 2008). The amount of time that mentors and mentees interact has been positively correlated to improvements in GPA (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). This is also an important finding, as a cautionary statement: mentors must ensure that they are both willing and able to put
in the amount of time necessary to make the mentoring relationship work. Mentors who do not commit to helping their mentees, or who do not have time for this type of relationship should be discouraged from participating in mentoring relationships, so as not to negatively impact the mentee’s success. Additionally, it is important to have mentors and mentees involved in these types of mentoring relationships because they want to be, and who do not hold the belief that they are being forced into an unwanted relationship. The results of T. Smith’s (2008) study indicated that planning and methodical integration of mentors into a classroom is an essential component to the success of the relationship; if the mentors were not adequately integrated into the classrooms, there was a noticeable disconnect between the mentees and mentors. In his study, Smith was unable to remedy this disconnect, once it occurred. Parker-Katz and Bay (2008) interviewed mentor teachers who had mentored pre-service teachers in an urban area. They found that mentoring takes commitment, determination, and optimism on the part of the mentor, and the ability for mentees to be able to critically evaluate themselves and focus on their goals. They also noted that mentoring can shape the professional identities of the mentees. Finally, academic benefits were noted in the outcomes of T. Smith’s (2008) study; specifically, the results indicated that students, such as the ones in this study, who are available for both in class and out of class help and support “are most effective in supporting student learning” (p. 62).

**Reflecting Processes as an Approach to Research**

The present investigation uses the reflecting processes, an approach which emerged from the psychiatry and psychology professions, as a framework for research
and as a way to engage in the process of teaching and learning, by asking the question “what is the peer mentoring project?” This question, derived from Norwegian psychiatrist, Tom Andersen’s (1991) therapeutic work, encourages meaning-making through dialogue and exploration. While this approach has been used frequently in therapeutic settings and in qualitative study (see Andersen, 1991, 1995; Kleist, 1999; Morrison, 2001, for a review), it has not, to my knowledge, been employed as an approach to qualitatively evaluate the mentoring relationship.

In one article, Gehrke (1988) wrote that “we need a relational kind of research” (p. 193). The reflecting processes are an approach to research grounded in social construction (see Gergen, 1999; Gergen & Gergen, 2004, for an overview). Social construction focuses on the ways in which knowledge and understanding are affected by and dependent upon an individual’s interactions with others. In approaching this research from a “social constructionist epistemology” (Kleist, 1999, p. 274), emphasis is placed on how the individual’s identity evolves through the experiences and relationships he has been or is a part of. Identity is also created through language. Andersen (1995) wrote:

Besides being informing, language is also forming. Many have been inspired by what Wittgenstein said, namely, that the language we are in gives the possibilities, on the one hand, and the limitations, on the other, for what we come to understand (Grayling, 1988). Language will be part of forming what we come to think and understand. John Shotter, inspired by Bakhtin and Volosvinov, takes this even further and says that the utterances we perform not only form what we come to
think but actually form the person as a whole, including the psychological makeup. (p. 30)

Interpreted meanings form and informed individuals, as they bring pieces of experience and understanding along with them and into their relationships and lives.

Reflecting processes approach conversations from a curious and open stance, as a way to elicit a number of perspectives from participants. Research that places value on a process of hearing multiple opinions, as reflecting processes do, allows individuals to puzzle over issues related to a topic and generate a variety of opinions and perspectives about a certain topic or topics. It is a way to include a more diverse group of people into the construction of knowledge and, by incorporating their varied perspectives and ideas, create meaning that may be useful to a larger population. Using this type of process allows new possibilities to unfold and encourages new way of “seeing” oneself and thinking about one’s thinking. This is true for both the participant and the researcher. As Andersen (1995) described,

In qualitative research the researcher might talk with another, for example, about his “data” and his attempts to search for something in his data, either a specific category or something unknown or not yet “discovered.” Others who listen to that talk can then talk about what they were thinking when they heard about the researcher’s search and about the not yet known, before the researcher gives his/her comment on what he heard. (p. 19).

In this approach, multiple views and ideas are valued, as is the dialogue that is generative and occurs between participants as a way to explore different perspectives and
interpretations. This type of organic, evolving approach is consistent with a qualitative approach to research.

Reflecting processes (see Andersen, 1991) were originally born from a desire to approach therapeutic relationships in a more egalitarian way; however, educational research can benefit from these principles, as well. As Morrison (2001) considered in her reflection on the possibilities of the process, “using the reflecting processes in research has the potential to continue the deconstruction of oppressive roles in research and therapy by hearing all voices” (p. 138). The open, focused dialogue among the participants creates an environment for exploration and thoughtful consideration of ideas and approaches. Andersen (1994, as cited in Morrison, 2001) described the structure of reflecting processes by noting that it is “an open . . . process that highlights the shifts between so-called open and inner talks” (p. 29) where people talk with each other for a while, in a back-and-forth sharing of ideas. Reflecting processes “do not merely represent a technique or method . . . but reflect a broader view about the construction of knowledge within conversations” (Morrison, 2001, p. 109).

In defining the reflecting processes, it is important to understand that it is not a technique, with a structured set of rules, as much as it is a philosophy or an approach (Jenkins, 1996; Kleist, 1999). Indeed, Morrison (2001) explored various ways in which reflecting processes can be used, but also reminded us that there are key points to this approach that “cannot be different” (p. 113), including entering into the conversation with preconceived ideas or searching for a particular storyline, finite solution, or conclusion.
In reflecting processes, participants are encouraged to think deeply about topics and consider them in ways that they may never have before. As Kleist (1999) explained, “reality is negotiable; knowledge, meaning, and perception are mediated, formed, and altered through language and dialogue; and [individuals] bring narratives . . . for exploration rather than problem solving” (p. 274). While participating in this process, whether it is in a therapeutic setting or in a research and/or learning context, each participant takes on the role of a co-participant in the conversation, rather than in a “subject”/“researcher” relationship, with all of the hierarchical connotations that go along with such definite roles. In this context, the conversations take on an exploratory role, and allow the participants to work together to create meaning and describe their experiences and “[construct] knowledge within conversations” (Morrison, 2001, p. 109). It also prevents the researcher from imposing what could be interpreted as the “correct” or “preferred” answer or structure onto the participant, giving value to the participant’s own interpretations of the topic. This open exploration of different interpretations is one way in which the reflecting processes can benefit qualitative research.

The perspective of viewing the participant as a co-constructor of knowledge is consistent not only with reflecting processes, but also with the theory behind the semi-structured life world interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As Kvale and Brinkmann noted, “the process of knowing through conversations is intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge” (p. 18). The emphasis on the researcher and subject, client, and participant as coresearchers highlights an ethic that is common to qualitative research and, specifically, the
interviewing process: the power differential that potentially develops within the relationship. According to the reflecting processes approach, conversational interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and the semi-structured life world interview, the researcher should try to deconstruct this power differential, with the goal of creating a more egalitarian approach to knowledge construction. In this way, the entire process is made more “transparent” (Friedman, 1995), allowing the participants insight into the thoughts of the researcher and vice versa, enabling a more complete and accurate description of the participant’s experiences. This is an important view in considering participants as coresearchers; not only do they inform *me* about their experiences, but they continue to form *themselves* into the person they have become as a result of these experiences. The reflecting processes allow for periods of both talking and listening, and encourage the participant to step back from the conversation and reflect on what was said and felt by others, and by him/herself. Andersen (1995) also reminded us that

The reflecting team process comprises shifts between talking and listening.

Talking to other(s) can be described as ‘outer talk,’ and while we listen to others talk we talk with ourselves in ‘inner talk.’ If we let a particular issue be passed from outer talks to inner talks back to outer talks, and so on, we might say that the issues is passed through the perspectives of various inner and outer talks. (p. 18) These shifts between thought and language and the active construction of understanding reflect the influence of Vygotsky (1986), who theorized that an individual’s development occurs through the process of inner and outer speech, including dialogue. This process is important, as it allows the participants to deliberately engage in both talking and listening
positions, giving everyone both a chance to hear and be heard, as well as listen and reflect, creating space for new ideas and insights. Additionally, as Kleist (1999) pointed out, “[the] therapist and team relate to clients in a more collegial relationship, with the team focusing more on positive connotations when reflecting on client experiences” (p. 274). This can be adapted to qualitative research practices by applying the general principal of a collegial relationship to interviews and data collection. In giving participants a stake in the research, in creating value within the learning experience and opportunity to further understanding, the outcome can be of benefit to the participants and researcher.

**Summary**

This chapter provided definitions of mentoring in the extant literature. In addition, this chapter outlined the presence of literature on peer mentoring in education. Recent research on mentoring programs has found that there are numerous benefits to the mentors who participate, as well as for the mentees. This chapter also outlined reflecting processes. Reflecting processes are a way of approaching a conversation in which multiple voices can be heard and different possibilities may be explored. Reflecting processes are also valuable as an approach to research. In the next chapter (Chapter 3: Method), I discuss the evolution and design of the study, the selection of the sample, and the role of the participants and the researcher. I also describe the process I used to analyze the conversations I had with the participants, trustworthiness and triangulation, and issues related to ethics.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Overview

The primary objective of this investigation was to explore the experiences of mentors in one peer mentoring project. Specifically, this study explored the experience of being a mentor—what being a mentor is and is not, as they have come to understand it—as well as investigated how mentors describe relational learning and peer mentoring. This chapter includes a discussion of the design of this study, including a description of interviewing and photo elicitation as methods of data collection. I also provide an overview of the sample selection and characteristics, introductions to the mentors who participated in this study, and a description of the roles of the participants and the researcher. Following that, I describe the process I used to analyze these data, and address issues related to trustworthiness and triangulation. Finally, I discuss ethical issues related to this study, including the benefits of participation in this study, the role of relationships to this study, and participant confidentiality.

Design of the Study

For this study, I chose to take a qualitative approach in learning about the experiences of the mentors. As Kvale and Brinkman (2009) explained, this approach focuses “on the cultural, everyday, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons” (p. 12). This fits well with the goals of my study: learning about the experiences of mentors in this project. Qualitative methodology, in the form of interviews, reflecting processes, and photo
elicitations, was used to provide thick description of the mentors’ experiences and their understanding of mentoring and relational learning. According to Denzin (1989),

A thick description does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83)

In using the words of the mentors along with the photo elicitations, detail, context, emotion, and relationships can be conveyed and are useful in achieving an understanding of how mentors describe their experiences.

As I have been working closely with this project since 2008, with many of the mentors, mentees, and the project director, I have formed relationships with and have learned from many people. These relationships have allowed me to be, simultaneously, an insider and an outsider in these events (Spradley, 1980). Because of this, I have been able to learn more from these participants than if I were simply an “outsider,” and my research has been influenced by what I have seen, heard, and taken an interest in. These influences have affected the questions I have asked, what information has been provided to me, and how I have understood, interpreted, and reported the data in this study.

The groundwork for my study was based on the methodology of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; see Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; J. Smith, 2008; J.
Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In IPA, the goal of the researcher is to “capture particular experiences as experienced for particular people” (J. Smith et al., 2009, p. 16). This approach employs the use of purposeful sampling, semi-structured interviews, small to moderate sample sizes, and in-depth analysis, as well as the establishment of rapport with the participants. For these reasons, this approach made sense and aligned with the goals and purposes for my study. In addition, IPA recognizes that the researcher is “engaged in a double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (J. Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). This process of sense-making between both the participant and the researcher is consistent with the goals of the reflecting processes (Andersen, 1991). Data were collected using phenomenological interviewing, reflecting processes, and photo elicitation.

**Sample Selection, Participants, and Characteristics**

For the interviews and photo elicitations, I used purposeful sampling. I sent an email to all previous and current mentors, inviting them to participate. I also asked, in person, current members of the Relational Learning course for volunteers. See Appendix A for a sample consent form. From this point, the project director reminded mentors with whom she was still in contact to get in touch with me, if they were interested in participating in the interviews. Through this process, I was able to interview a substantial number of mentors, with a wide range of experiences, views, and backgrounds.

Seventeen mentors participated in interviews for this study. Thirteen participants were female; four were male. In addition, one mentor sat in on five interviews, with
various participants. While his role was partially that of an informal co-researcher, he also contributed his voice and his thoughts to the interviews in which he took part. Ten of these mentors also participated in the photo elicitation portion of this study.

Participants’ ages ranged from 20–37. Two participants, due to time constraints, were unable to complete three separate interviews. Instead, one completed one interview, spanning all topics; the second covered all topics over the course of two interviews. See Table 1 at the end of the participant section for additional details about the participants and their involvement with this mentoring project.

The Participants

Elizabeth. I met Elizabeth as a sophomore, Integrated Language Arts major in an Educational Psychology course I taught. Following that semester and at the time of this interview, she had taken the Relational Learning course and had been a mentor for one semester. She was planning to participate in the mentoring project for a second semester. Elizabeth was a mentor in the Educational Psychology class and a conversation partner for an international student program.

Brandon. Brandon was an Integrated Social Studies major who was a senior when he took an Educational Psychology course I taught. As a nontraditional student, with previous college and military experience, Brandon had a lot of life experience to share. He also provided a unique perspective, with his African American and Asian heritage, as well as the perspective as the founder and President of a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and making available books in their paper form, for
future generations. Brandon was a mentor in the project director’s Educational Psychology class and a conversation partner for one semester.

Jay. Jay was a mentor for five semesters, including one in Italy. He was an Integrated Social Studies major and, at the time of these interviews, was teaching in a local K-12 school. Jay also attended and co-presented as a mentor at two conferences with the project director and me: one was a roundtable discussion, where he shared his experiences with other presenters and participants. For the other conference presentation, Jay and I worked together to create and present a poster based on relational learning in this mentoring project. Jay was a mentor during a time when the class was not offered for credit, and mentors only worked with the Educational Psychology course.

Kallie. Kallie was a mentor for three semesters and had a mentor before that, in her Educational Psychology class. At the time of this interview, she was a senior in the Intervention Specialist program. Kallie attended and co-presented at a regional conference with another mentor, the project director, and me. They worked to create a poster session about their part in the mentoring experience.

Ashley. Ashley was a mentor for four semesters, and had a mentor in her Educational Psychology class. Ashley attended and co-presented at a regional conference as a mentor, and was a senior in Early Childhood Education at the time of her interview, and was planning to continue on to a master’s program upon graduation. Ashley was also in the Educational Psychology course in Italy, was a conversation partner, and mentored at the local inner-city elementary school.
Karie. Karie was a mentor for four semesters and had a mentor when she took Educational Psychology. She was a Deaf Education major and, at the time of her interview, she was teaching in a local K-12 school. Karie mentored in Italy and also attended a regional conference as a co-presenter. Karie participated in the mentoring project before it was a course and there was the option to go to a local school, or participate in the Conversation Partners program.

Erin. Erin was a mentor for five semesters, and had a mentor for her Educational Psychology course, which she took in Italy. Her undergraduate major was Middle Childhood Education with several concentrations, including English as a Second Language/Teaching English as a Second Language. At the time of her interview, she was a graduate student in a master’s program. Erin co-presented at one conference. Erin was a mentor before the mentoring project was extended to include mentoring in a local elementary school or participating in the Conversation Partners program. Erin was a mentor before it was offered as a course.

Matt. Matt was a mentor for six semesters and had a mentor when he took the Educational Psychology course. At the time of this interview, he was a senior in the teacher education program and student teaching in an urban environment.

Kelly. Kelly mentored for three semesters. She had a mentor when she was a student in the Educational Psychology course. At the time of her interview, she was a senior in the teacher education program. She was a mentor for the Educational Psychology course, was a conversation partner, and mentored at the local, inner-city elementary school.
Michael. Michael was a mentor for five semesters and had a mentor when he took the Educational Psychology course. One semester as a mentor was as study abroad, in Italy. He attended and co-presented at two conferences when he was a mentor. At the time of his interview, he was a senior Biology major, having recently transferred out of the teacher education program.

Heather. Heather did not take Educational Psychology from the program director or me. Instead, she heard about the mentoring project from her roommate and mentored for the first time in Italy. She also mentored the following semester, on-campus. She was an Early Childhood Education major. At the time of her interview, Heather was substitute teaching in a K-12 school and also taking classes in mater’s program. Being a conversation partner and mentoring at a local elementary school were not options when Heather was a mentor, as this was before there was a Relational Learning course.

Sarah. Sarah was a student in an Educational Psychology course I taught, who expressed an interest in mentoring when she attended one of the roundtable sessions that the program director, some mentors, and I led. She was an American Sign Language major and mentored for one semester. She also had a conversation partner.

Emma. Emma was a student in my Educational Psychology class. She was a mentor for one semester and a senior in the teacher education program at the time of her interviews. She chose to tutor children of a refugee family as her second project.

Jessica. Jessica mentored for three semesters and had a mentor when she took Educational Psychology. She served as a mentor in the study abroad course in Italy. At the time of her interviews, she was a senior in the teacher education program. She was a
mentor in the Educational Psychology class and mentored students at a local elementary school.

**Amber.** Amber had a mentor in her Educational Psychology class, and then went to Italy for her first semester as a mentor to support students studying abroad. She was also a mentor the following semester, on-campus. Her undergraduate major was Early Childhood Education and, at the time of her interview, she was teaching at a local K-12 school. Amber participated in the mentoring project before there were options to mentor at a local elementary school or participate in the Conversation Partners program.

**Christy.** Christy had a mentor when she took Educational Psychology and then mentored for two semesters, one of which was a study abroad course in Italy. She also mentored at a local elementary school. She was a senior in the teacher education program at the time of her interview.

**Eric.** Cody took an Educational Psychology course I taught, so he did not have a mentor. He then decided to become a part of the mentoring project for one semester, until he graduated. At the time of his interview, Eric was not currently teaching, but was exploring options including teaching English as a Second Language abroad.

**Jane.** Jane was a nontraditional student, with previous college experience, and a mother of two. At the time of her interview, Jane was working part time on a degree in American Sign Language and Interpreting with minor in Education. She was a mentor for two semesters, and enrolled in the Relational Learning course for one.
### Table 1

**Participant Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
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<td>F = 13</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Sign Language: 2</td>
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<td>6: 1</td>
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<td>Mentors Participating in each Mentoring Option</td>
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<td>Conversation Partners Program: 6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Italy: 7 (+1 mentee in Italy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors Presenting at Conferences</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>
Mentoring Contexts

Mentors enrolled in the Relational Learning course participated in two engaged learning/mentoring situations. First, they all mentored current students in the on-campus Educational Psychology course. As a second mentoring opportunity, each mentor was able to choose one of the following: to mentor students at a local, inner-city elementary school; participate as a conversation partner in a program supporting international students; or propose an alternate experience in which they could participate in a mentoring capacity. In addition to these options, some mentors chose to enroll in the Educational Psychology/Relational Learning study abroad option in Italy, and participated as mentors in that way.

Role of the Participants

According to Seidman (2006), “in-depth interviewing encourages people to reconstruct their experience actively within the context of their lives” (p. 14). In his research, he has noted that the word participants “capture[s] both the sense of active involvement that occurs in an in-depth interview and the sense of equity that we try to build in our interviewing relationships” (p. 14). I have regarded those who have been involved with this research as not only participants in this study, but also as coresearchers. This stance has been supported in a range of qualitative literature, including Andersen (1995); Kvale and Brinkmann (2009); Rubin and Rubin (2005); and Janesick (2011). While I am, largely, the one who is focused on their words and their interpretations as they pertain to my research questions, I have invited others, especially the mentors, to participate in the process of writing, editing, interpreting, and revising all
of the information contained in this document. Just as I am, they are seekers of knowledge and understanding. They are also creators of knowledge and understanding and have been “active participants in the planning and implementation” (Seikkula et al., 1995, p. 62) of this mentoring project and related research. Additionally, I have included the voice of a former peer mentor, as noted earlier, who returned to the project to be a part of the interviewing process. His input in this process and in the interviews in which he participated was invaluable, and added to the richness of the conversation and to the outcomes of the study. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) reminded us, “the process of knowing through conversations is intersubjective and social, involving interviewer and interviewee as co-constructors of knowledge” (p. 18). While my example above is very literal in outlining how the interviewer’s and the interviewee’s roles may connect and overlap, a reliance on multiple perspectives is evident throughout this project and in the research on the peer mentoring project, as a whole. On the value of multiple perspectives, Gergen (2009) asserted, “the capacity to subject assumptions to critical reflection demands that one participates in more than one tradition. If there is only one account of reality, one cannot step outside to assess its limitations” (p. 260-261). This lends support to the use of multiple methods of data collection, as well as the consideration of others as coresearchers. The use of multiple perspectives also contributes to triangulation, which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

If not for the words and thoughts of the mentors, attained through interviews and co-created personal conversations, the Relational Learning course and peer mentoring project would not be the same. So, while in this document I refer to the students who
participated in the Relational Learning course and/or peer mentors as participants in this study, I do recognize the contributions that each has made in the process and progress of this project, its success, and its evolution over the past several semesters (and, indeed, in future semesters). By definition, research means to search again (Seidman, personal communication, St. Louis, March 5, 2011). I believe that, in each of these mentors’ decisions to participate in this research, each mentor decided to search again for meaning in this project; for meaning inside of herself or himself; and for meaning in my research, making this a project grounded in the co-construction of reality and the co-construction of meaning through experiences with others (i.e., relational learning).

**Role of the Researcher**

In the beginning, I became involved in this project as primarily an outsider, as a graduate student fulfilling her work requirements by helping with interviewing for the mentoring project, a teaching initiative in undergraduate Educational Psychology courses. As I worked with the students who were participating in this project and learned from them and about them, I began to get closer to the project and to look at it from multiple and more intimate perspectives. My first formal investigation into mentoring was writing a literature review for an unrelated quantitative research class. For this class project, I read and compiled a brief summary of the literature relating to the benefits of mentoring. The following semester, I conducted what would become my pilot study for this dissertation research project, looking at the experiences of the mentors, for an introductory qualitative research course. Following that, I explored the reflecting processes—a back-and-forth approach to dialogue, which creates space for the
exploration of ideas and possibilities—more deeply and, for an assignment in my advanced qualitative research class, engaged a group of mentors, instructors, and graduate students in a series of reflecting processes about topics related to mentoring. Even at this point, I was not certain that I wanted to write about the mentoring project for my dissertation. Along with the project director, I began presenting pieces of the research on the mentoring project at educational and research conferences, continuing to interview the mentors and learn more about mentoring, relational learning, qualitative research, and social construction. Throughout this process, I began to realize the importance of this project for those involved in it and, especially, for the mentors as they learned, built relationships, and discussed teaching and the education profession.

Some of the mentors I interviewed for the current study had met with me in previous semesters for interviews. Many of them were students with whom I had an academic relationship; I had seen them in their classes, worked with them on projects and activities, or had them in classes I taught as a teaching assistant or adjunct faculty from semester to semester. At a minimum, all of the mentors who were interviewed had an awareness of me, as someone who worked with this mentoring project and as a participant observer (Spradley, 1980) who was engaged in research related to the project. For these reasons, there was not as much distance between us, as an outside researcher might experience. Instead, our conversations were often comfortable and easy. Throughout this process, I have considered myself a tool to help explore the mentors’ experiences and describe them for the reader.
Data Collection

A total of 18 mentors participated in this study. Data were collected using phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006), photo elicitation (Ketelle, 2010), and reflecting processes (Andersen, 1991).

Interviewing

As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) pointed out, “the knowledge produced in a research interview is constituted by the interaction itself, in the specific situation created between an interviewer and an interviewee. With another interviewer, a different interaction may be created and a different knowledge produced” (p. 32). For this reason, it is important to describe my involvement with the peer mentoring project, as it has changed and evolved over the semesters in which I have worked with it.

The interviews were structured around phenomenological interviewing, as described by Seidman (2006). In this style of interviewing, in-depth interviews are conducted as a series of three. According to Seidman, “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). In interviewing the mentors, I was interested in understanding their lived experiences in this project, with mentoring and relational learning.

In phenomenological interviewing, the first interview focuses on the participant’s background, with the goal of establishing a context for the following interviews. For the purposes of this research, the context focused on educational and mentoring experience and what events related to those two dimensions influenced the mentor’s decision to
originally enter the teacher education program and subsequently enroll in the Relational Learning course. If the mentor was currently a teacher (i.e., had already graduated from the teacher education program and now held a job at a school as a part time or full time teacher), teaching experiences were also explored. This is consistent with IPA, as it “facilitates the discussion of relevant topics” (J. Smith et al., 2009, p. 58) that will lead to the answering of the research questions during the analysis phase. As mentoring is something that may be encountered in a teaching job, following this line of discussion could provide data that would help to answer my research questions. The second interview focused on the actions of the mentors, both as a mentor and in the Relational Learning class. The goal of this interview was to find out as much about the lived experience of the mentor as possible, in concrete terms. The third and final interview focused on the meaning derived from these experiences, and how the mentor interprets the experiences. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) agreed, noting that the goal of qualitative interviewing is to uncover both fact and meaning. In the final interview, in addition to meaning, the question of how the Relational Learning course or the peer mentoring experience could be different. That is, how has the experience of these things varied or changed over time. Finally, I asked the mentors to tell me what mentoring and relational learning mean to them. Seidman (2006) reminded us that “reconstruction is based partially on memory and partially on what the participant now sees as important about the past event” (p. 88). From the mentors’ responses, we can begin to understand what some of the most relevant and most important pieces of the mentoring project are/were.
This interview structure fits well with this research for a number of reasons. First, this in-depth interviewing approach allowed for a holistic picture of each participant to be created. The focus on different aspects of their experiences allowed me to look for consistency across the three interviews for each participant. Additionally, as these interviews were spaced out over the span of approximately one week (some were more, some were less, based on the availability of the participant), allowing the participants time to reflect on the interviews and to formulate additional ideas that could be started in subsequent meetings. Specifically, this approach “reduces the possibility of idiosyncratic interviews” (Seidman, 2006, p. 21), as it gives the participant space to have an “off” day, and still be able to be thoughtful about the other interviews. Said differently, participants have time in-between interviews to consider them, as well as their experiences, but there is not so much time between them that they lose track of what has been discussed or the focus of the previous interview.

Another approach I took in these interviews was to provide a frame for the next conversation, so the participants would have time to consider what they might share. For example, at the close of interview one, I told the participant that, in interview two, I would be interested in specifically what they did as a mentor: what their day consisted of, what happened when they went to class, how many times they met with their mentees over the course of the semester. While this approach is not always used, I made the decision to prepare the participants in this way, and to give them more time to recall their experiences, especially as some of them had been mentors semesters or years prior to their interviews, and many were mentors across several semesters. According to
Maxwell (personal communication, April 11, 2011), there are mixed feelings on prepping participants in this way, by giving them insight into the questions in advance. On one hand, allowing insight into the questions could, in certain circumstances, cause the participant to fabricate additional information, intentionally leave information out, or discuss their answers with other participants before the interview, possibly mixing stories or incorporating events that were not important to that participant, but were important to another. On the other hand, preparing the participant in this way gives them additional time to think about their answer, reconstruct their experiences, and allow them time to recall different aspects of their experiences over the course of a few days. This was the approach I took, because I felt that the benefits of added time and insight would outweigh any possible risks. Additionally, I felt that, by giving them the general focus of the interview ahead of time, they would be better ready to discuss that specific aspect (i.e., concrete details, meaning) during our meeting time, for a more-focused interview.

The phenomenological approach to interviewing is also consistent with conversational interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and the reflecting processes (Andersen, 1991). The idea that an interview is literally an “inter view” or an “active process where interviewer and interviewee through their relationship produce knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 18) about a topic that is interesting to both parties fits well with the ideas of relational learning and reflecting processes. This approach is also consistent with IPA. In IPA, the participant controls what is shared and how his experiences are described; from there, it is up to the researcher to find meaning in those experiences in order to understand them (J. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).
The interviewing protocol. To begin each interview, I gave the mentor a brief description of my research and, generally, what we would discuss during the interview. In general, I described how I was interested in learning more about the experience of being a mentor in this mentoring project. I explained that it would be audio-recorded, and that they would have the opportunity to read and reflect on their transcript. I then explained that our first interview would focus primarily on their previous experiences with education and with mentoring. Once I had discussed this and allowed time for any questions they may have had, the interview began. At the end of each interview, I introduced the topic that we would be discussing during the next interview. I felt this was important, as some had participated as mentors over a number of semesters and had several experiences to sort through. Additionally, some had been mentors for a semester or more, but were not presently participating in the mentoring project. For some, several semesters had gone by since the last time they were involved with the project. I allowed the conversation to flow as naturally as possible, letting my questions come from what the mentors had said, which is a key piece of the in-depth interview (Seidman, 2006). For this reason, the interviews were semi-structured in that each one had the same focus for each of the three sessions (i.e., background, actions and activities as a mentor, and meaning) and some of the questions overlapped (i.e., I asked each mentor I interviewed to define both mentoring and relational learning), but were shaped largely by the direction of the conversation.

All interviews lasted approximately an hour and were audio-recorded. I also made notes while the mentor was talking, which allowed me to go back to points that had
been made at a later time and follow up, without causing a distraction in the dialogue or interrupting the mentor. Interviews were conducted at a location convenient for both the mentor and myself. Most interviews took place on campus, but there were several that took place at a local coffee shop or restaurant, and one that took place at the mentor’s home.

**Transcription.** All interviews were audio-recorded. All interviews were transcribed by a University transcription resource. Once interviews were transcribed, I made adjustments as necessary for accuracy.

**Reflecting Processes**

Using the reflecting processes (Andersen, 1991, 1995) as an approach to collecting data and conducting interviews made sense in the context of this study. Reflecting processes were defined in Chapter 2: Review of the Literature. As previously described, the reflecting processes are an approach to egalitarian, back and forth conversation, centered around the exploration of ideas and the creation of space for possibilities. Mentors became familiar with reflecting processes throughout the Relational Learning course, as a way to discuss topics and issues that came up during the semester. Specifically related to the methodology of this study, reflecting processes can also be seen in the back and forth, conversational nature of the interviews I conducted. I also used this approach for data analysis, which is described in detail later in this chapter. In analyzing the conversations, I used a “conversational” approach, which allowed me to engage with the text and with many of the participants for a second time.
**Photo Elicitation**

I decided to use photo captioning, inspired by photo elicitation (Ketelle, 2010), in this study for a number of reasons. While I had been using photographs to document certain occasions throughout the mentoring program (i.e., an ice-breaker activity with mentors and mentees, mentor attendance at conferences, etc.), I had not considered using them formally in my research. When I was first introduced to the concept of photo elicitation (Ketelle, 2010), I felt that it would be a valuable addition to my interview data. Harper (2002) explained that “photo elicitation evokes information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph’s particular form of representation” (p. 13). As I learned more about using photography in social science research (see Collier & Collier, 1986; Goldberg, 1995), it seemed like a natural fit, which could contribute valuable information and perspective to my study. The process of taking or selecting a photo for the mentors to use allowed certain experiential highlights to emerge. This process allowed mentors to provide a visual representation of what they found to be key aspects of the mentoring relationship or their mentoring experience. Asking them to caption their photographs encouraged them to draw out the essence of their photograph and their experience into a brief response. Harper addressed the collaboration that is inspired by photo elicitation, noting that “when two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs, they try to figure out something together. This, I believe, is an ideal model for research” (2002, p. 23). Additionally, photo elicitation added another layer to the interpretation of relationships, experiences, and outcomes of mentoring, and provided both the mentors and myself with a visual reference to explain a moment in time.
I was inspired by Ketelle’s (2010) framework, which asks the participant to select or create a photograph, describe what is going on in it, and then write a caption. I asked each of the mentors to select the context in which he or she would like to be photographed or select an existing photograph for use. I then asked the mentor to view the photo and write a caption for the picture, which answered either of the two following questions: “What does it mean to be a mentor?” or “What is being a mentor?” I considered these images and what I saw in them, as well as the mentor’s caption, as part of my data analysis, specifically considering what these photos added to the data obtained during the interviews. This is similar to Ketelle’s work, and also consistent with the reflecting processes, in the back-and-forth sharing of thoughts and ideas that may be very different or provide another perspective. In line with reflecting processes, this step allows time for both talking and listening, through the two explanations of each photograph, providing additional perspectives.

**Analysis**

To analyze the data, I again drew heavily from IPA, in which the analytic focus “directs our . . . attention towards our participants’ attempts to make sense of their experiences” (J. Smith et al., 2009). My goals in analyzing these data were to be true to the participants’ words and stories, and to interpret and report them to the best of my ability, as well as to incorporate reflecting processes and engage with their words. I felt that IPA was a good fit, as it is “a reflective engagement with the participant’s account,” creating “a joint product of the participant and the analyst” (p. 80). In addition, the focus of IPA is on “attempting to capture particular experiences as experienced for particular
people” (p. 16). In this study, my goal was to understand the experiences of mentors (specific people, from a specific group) in this peer mentoring project (a specific experience). These characteristics, in addition to others, made IPA a good fit for data analysis.

The following steps were used to analyze the data:

- First Sweep: Using the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose (http://wiki.dedoose.com/index.php/User_Guide:_Documents), I read through the transcripts to determine interesting, important, and compelling passages, as well as passages relating to my research questions and the individual’s profile. I also looked for negative examples that were contrary to what I had already learned from my pilot study. I separated the meaning units I identified for each participant into another document and created an initial list of codes from this sweep. This initial list of codes served as a way for me to begin to organize my thoughts, as well as the data, and as a way to check back through my coding, to ensure that I was including as many relevant ideas as possible. Beginning in this sweep, I used memos to keep track of my thoughts and ideas as I read through the transcripts.

- Second Sweep: Putting aside my initial list so I could think for a second time about the ideas and themes I saw emerging, I used Microsoft Word to code and annotate all meaning units that had been extracted from the transcripts during the first sweep of the data. These annotated meaning units allowed me to keep track of my thinking as it related to the data in more detail, as I moved
through the process of coding. They also served as in-context reminders of critical notes and salient points. The goal of this sweep was to identify why these meaning units were important, and how they fit into the goals of this project. I created these notes directly within the text of each participant’s transcript, using varying font colors to differentiate my thoughts from the main text (See Appendix B for an example). I decided to start from the beginning with my coding of these meaning units, as a way of intentionally remaining open to what I was reading, instead of working from a pre-set list. This also allowed me to compare lists, once I finished coding and annotating the meaning units. After my coding and annotations were complete, I began to identify categories and themes, sorting the codes from the first and second sweeps, as well as some of my memos and notes. For this step, in order to better differentiate between and among categories and themes, I printed out and then mapped strips of paper containing words, phrases, and ideas from my two lists of codes, as well as from several of my notes and memos, relating to some of the more salient points that I felt were the most important to understanding and describing the experiences of these mentors.

- Member Checking: Once I had completed my annotations of the meaning units, I sent that document to the mentor or mentors who had participated in the interview. Here, I invited them to make any changes that they felt were necessary or important, including edits, deletions, additions, or other reflections. These were done by the mentors in Microsoft Word, using a
specific font color, as well as the *track changes* feature. Deletions were indicated by the mentor using strikethrough, so I would have a record of both the original and modified text. I received reflections back from 11 of the 18 participants. Most of these were received within approximately two weeks of my request (See Appendix C for an example).

- Third Sweep: Once I had received reflections back from the mentors, or was certain that they would not be returning reflections to me, I again used Dedoose to code these new, annotated documents, taking care to also code (or annotate, if needed) any additional reflections (See Appendix D for an example). The coding in this sweep was based on annotations made and codes identified through the previous sweeps. This process allowed me to sort and export meaning units and my notes into documents based on themes.

- Final Sweep: After I drafted all of the themes, photo elicitations were used to further explain and triangulate the data from my interviews. As describe earlier, these photo elicitations were completed by mentors who selected a photograph that represented mentoring for them, which they then captioned. These captions addressed the questions “what is a mentor?” or “what is mentoring?”

**Trustworthiness and Triangulation**

A number of factors influenced trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in this investigation. I discuss trustworthiness in general, followed by triangulation, and then ethical considerations. First, the nature of this project itself, as an ongoing study with
prolonged engagement by the researcher is an important consideration. I have been a part of this study since the Fall semester of 2008. This prolonged engagement has enabled me to see the evolution of this mentoring project, and has allowed me to interact with a number of mentors and mentees over time. This has given me access to a range of perspectives, circumstances, and ideas, which I have heard, formally and informally, in conversations and interviews. Additionally, the reflecting processes approach has enabled me, as well as the participants and the project director, to engage in ongoing conversations about the project and what kinds of experiences the mentors were having. This reflection helped us all to better understand what was going on, and encouraged even more conversations, reflection, and investigation.

Member checking was used to ensure accuracy in the meaning of the mentors’ statements and increase trustworthiness. Also, thick description has been used in describing the mentors and their experiences with this project. All participants were emailed the meaning units identified during the second sweep of data analysis, which also included my comments and notes regarding emergent themes and early parts of my analysis. At this point, they were invited to continue our initial conversation via reflections on their transcript and to make notes, additions, changes, or clarifications to their words or to my annotations. Eleven mentors chose to comment on their transcripts in some form. One additional mentor responded to my email to decline the invitation to review hers, due to time constraints. Mentors’ comments and reflections were included in the data analysis. Mentors were also given the option to review their complete transcripts at any time. This is a process that is also consistent with reflecting processes
and the deliberate engagement in back and forth conversations about topics, ideas, and situations. This engagement in back and forth conversation, for the purposes of this study, began with the interview; I then engaged with the transcript by annotating and commenting on pieces of that transcript. The conversation continued when mentors engaged with their own thoughts, as well as mine via my comments and annotations. This back and forth process continued, as I read the mentors’ reflections and wrote about those reflections, my annotations, and our original conversations in the upcoming pages of this manuscript. This back and forth process of reflecting and continued conversation has increased the likelihood that I have captured mentors’ words and descriptions accurately in the interviews, as well as in my final analysis.

Triangulation is the use of more than one method, perspective, or source to examine a particular research question (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Triangulation is “more than being careful; it is being skeptical that [the participant] was seen and heard right and checking further” (Stake, 2010, p. 123). This, said Stake, can be accomplished in several ways, including “look[ing] again and again, several times,” by “looking from more than one vantage point,” and by member checking (p. 123). Stake also noted that the use of multiple methods is a way to increase confidence in the outcomes of a study.

In this study, I used three primary methods of triangulation to learn about the experiences of the mentors and relational learning in this mentoring project. The primary forms of triangulation I used in this investigation were multiple views/reviews of the data, reflecting processes, and member checking. In addition, as noted previously, I conducted a pilot study, specifically asking about the mentoring experiences and it was to
engage in that experience. This provided me with a frame of reference and additional insight on how mentors perceived their experiences with this mentoring project.

**Ethics**

In any study, part of trustworthiness involves a consideration of the ethical issues and principles relevant to the investigation. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) explained that An interview inquiry is a moral enterprise. Moral issues concern the means as well as the ends of an interview inquiry. The human interaction in the interview affects the interviewees, and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition. Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues. (p. 62)

In this section, I address ethical issues in this study related to the benefits of participation; my relationship with the participants; and the decision to maintain the confidentiality (or not) of those who have participated in this investigation.

**Benefits**

One ethical consideration related to this study is the advancement of knowledge. Specifically, this issue revolves around the purposes for the research, and the impact of the research, including who may benefit from it. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) reminded us that “Social science research should serve scientific and human interests” (p. 62). A primary focus for this mentoring project, since its beginning as a teaching initiative, was to help students be successful in their Educational Psychology course, through peer relationships and collaboration. In researching this mentoring project, both informally and formally (including for the present investigation), the intent of the project director
and the researcher has been to learn about the experiences of the mentors to both benefit the mentors, mentees, and to improve the project as a whole, as well as to share the outcomes of this project with others to whom it may be of interest. In order to benefit those who have been involved, the findings of this project have been, and will continue to be, used to make improvements in the mentoring opportunities and experiences as a whole. In addition, individual mentors may benefit from the conversations had with the project director and/or the researcher. These benefits may manifest as professional insights, including insight into teaching, research, and graduate school, or may have become opportunities for the mentors to discuss and process the experiences they have had in this project, allowing them to think further and continue a dialogue about personal and professional growth, such as attendance at conference, and other outcomes. Additionally, the larger academic community may find benefit in this research, as the details and outcomes of this project are shared with others who are interested in creating or modifying an existing mentoring project in a school or other organization.

**Relationships**

Because of my prolonged engagement with this project as a research assistant, a researcher, and a participant observer, I have gotten to know several of the mentors, many of whom have contributed substantially to this investigation. These relationships have formed organically, over time, through numerous interactions within the context of the Educational Psychology and Relational Learning courses, and within the context of the mentoring project as a research study. While professional in nature, it is important to consider, in a discussion of ethics, the nature of the information relayed to the researcher
as a result of these relationships. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) noted that “the researcher should be aware that the openness and intimacy of much qualitative research may be seductive and can lead participants to disclose information they may later regret having shared” (p. 73). As has been noted previously in this manuscript, many of the mentors seemed comfortable sharing their experiences and stories with me, even when being audio or video recorded. This level of comfort with me, along with my interest in what they had to say about their experiences and ideas, may have encouraged them to be more open with me than they would have been with another researcher, or may have shared had the circumstances been different. While this research does not, at its core, look at especially personal or controversial issues, the common act of sharing stories in conversation with another always carries the slight risk that something will be said that, in another situation, may have been kept confidential. It is for this reason, along with the others already described, that I used member checking and the layering approach of the reflecting processes throughout my study. In this manner, participants have been given the opportunity to review their words and make any changes, additions, or deletions necessary to convey their points and/or to feel comfortable with the conversations that have been used as data in this study.

The participants in this study are also in the subjugative position of being students in the project director’s class on at least one occasion (i.e., the undergraduate Educational Psychology and/or Relational Learning classes), and are participating in research conducted by a doctoral student. While many of the participants have reported that they feel comfortable enough with the project director to discuss concerns with or criticisms of
the mentoring project directly with her, this is an issue that I have had to address with several participants in this investigation and in previous interviews I conducted, related to this mentoring project. Most notably, I have always assured students that these interviews, while not “confidential,” will always be understood as a tool for learning and growth, and not as a direct attack on the project director. In essence, I encouraged them to be truthful, and assured them that there would be no negative consequences for doing so. One of the ways this was addressed was through the timing of the interviews. As they occur toward the middle or end of the semester, the project director did not have access to them, or the transcripts, before final grades had been submitted and released. This prevented any potential influence a student’s criticism of the project or outcomes, positive or negative, would have on a grade. In this manner, I also do not discuss specific participants’ concerns or suggestions with the project director until after the end of the semester. On occasions where I have made suggestions for the improvement of the project structure, or discussed concerns, I have done so anonymously. In acknowledgment of the intricacies of the relationships I have built with both the mentors and the project director, I have tried and will continue to work at being careful to use the participants’ voices in the reporting of this data, and not giving them words that I believe fit with my own, or anyone else’s, goals and purposes for this project.

Confidentiality of Participants

In order to protect the rights of the participants, I asked each of them how they would like to be identified in this study. As much of this data is low-risk (i.e., no more harmful to them than in day-to-day conversations they may have), they were given the
opportunity to have their real first name used; to select a pseudonym; or to have me choose a pseudonym for them. This choice, along with an overview of any potential “risks” to them (i.e., that this will be published and accessible to the public) was described when their transcripts were sent to them during member checking. This provided the mentors with the opportunity to read what they had said and make an informed choice, based on their transcripts and my annotations. This method was especially appropriate for this investigation, as it relates to the use of a reflecting processes approach, and to a specific population of students. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) wrote, “anonymity can protect the participants, but it can also deny them ‘the very voice in the research that might originally have been claimed as its aim’” (p. 73). In the reflecting processes approach, the inclusion of participants’ voices is essential; taking this away from the participants in this study may detract from the impact of their words. Additionally, retaining the names of the participants helps to preserve the voices of the participants and ensures that the reader “hears” their voices throughout the manuscript—not simply a fitting of words into categories by an “expert.”

The decision to provide the opportunity for participants to choose how they would like to be represented in this investigation and the reporting thereof also came about as a way to respect their individual contributions and efforts, as integral pieces of this work. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) explained that “in some cases interviewees, who have spent their time and provided valuable information to the researcher, might wish . . . to be credited with their full name” (p. 73). This was something that the project director and I discussed at length, to ensure that we felt we were respecting the participants’ rights to
not be identified, as well as their right to be identified, if they so preferred. In this investigation, and in the formal and informal conversations held throughout the course of the mentoring project, the participants have been both gracious and generous in giving us (and, especially, me as a researcher) their time and commitment in describing their stories and experiences with mentoring. As such, it was critical that they were able to decide how they wished to be represented in this manuscript. Providing the opportunity to choose how they would like to be represented, along with having the option to read, edit, or verify their annotated transcripts supported my effort in this.

Finally, since this study deals with photographs, I informed each mentor whose identifiable image appears in the final version of this manuscript that this was the case, and provided them an additional opportunity to opt out. While all participants have signed IRB-approved consent forms for the use of their photographs, I believe that it is important to ensure that they are aware of how and where their image was used and that they support that usage.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology that was used throughout this investigation. Specifically, this chapter addressed the evolution and design of the study. This is a qualitative study, drawing heavily from IPA. Phenomenological interviewing, reflecting processes, and photo elicitation were the methods by which data were collected. The sample selection, role of the participants, and the role of the researcher were also described. Data analysis as well as issues relating to trustworthiness, triangulation, and ethics were outlined. Chapter 4: Analysis describes mentoring and relational learning in
this project, and discusses the emergent themes in detail. It also provides a description of the overall mentoring experience, the benefits of being in this mentoring project, and the characteristics that have made this project successful, all as reported by the participants. Research Questions 1-4 are addressed in this chapter.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of peer mentors in one undergraduate mentoring project. This study examined mentoring-influenced-by-relational-learning and explored a group of peer mentors’ experiences as mentors. Specifically, this study focused on the ways in which mentors described those experiences; how they defined what a mentor is and is not; how these mentors described relational learning; and their beliefs surrounding what makes this project successful. This qualitative investigation approached these issues using interpretive phenomenological methodology and reflecting processes. Data were analyzed in three sweeps, and included member checking.

This chapter addresses the Research Questions, as follows:

1. How do mentors describe their experiences in this mentoring project?
   - How do mentors describe what it is to be a mentor?
   - How do mentors describe relational learning?

2. What are the reported outcomes of this project?
   - What benefits do mentors report, resulting from this mentoring project?
   - How do mentors believe their participation has influenced their learning and other outcomes (i.e., professional development)?

3. What characteristics do mentors believe make this project successful?

4. What do participants think could be different?
To answer these questions, this chapter discusses, in detail, what the participants believe mentoring is and is not; what relational learning is; and the emergent themes that were derived from the data and my interpretation of that data. The experiences these mentors reported can be described with four main themes, plus one overarching theme, which can be seen across each of the four themes. The emergent main themes were: *Mentors experienced relational learning; mentors experienced investment; mentors experienced challenges;* and *mentors identified ways that mentoring can be different.* An overarching theme was *mentors and the mentoring project experienced a process of becoming.* The following sections describing the themes address Research Questions 1 and 4. This chapter also describes how mentors talked about their overall experiences in this project, addressing Research Questions 1 and 2; what mentors identified as the benefits of participating in this project, which addresses Research Question 2; and the characteristics of this project that the mentors believe have made it successful, which answers Research Question 3.

**Mentoring and Relational Learning Within This Project**

In order to provide context and focus, I first provide examples of how the mentors I interviewed understood what it was to be a mentor. Specifically, these examples describe what, according to them, a mentor *is* and *is not.* These descriptions address Research Question 1: How do mentors describe what it is to be a mentor? For the purposes of this chapter, I have included the examples that I feel are the most salient and the most representative of what was said during the interviews; however, there were many more compelling and insightful descriptions, which I hope you will explore. These
examples are being provided to set the context for understanding and interpreting the mentoring experience, as this study investigated.¹

**A Mentor Is . . . (or, Mentoring Is . . .)**

According to the mentors who participated in this study, mentoring is a multifaceted endeavor, which exhibits, among others, traits of teaching, friendship, learning, building relationships, and communication. The following is a list of some of the characteristics of mentors. Mentors believed that mentoring/being a mentor is:

- An on-going cycle
- Open communication, sharing experiences, sharing your struggles, just being there to offer support in all kinds of ways
- About building relationships
- Trying to develop that person into what they want to be
- Everywhere in education
- [Being] on the same level. We sort of have similar life experiences that we are going through; not only do I give them advice about what they may be struggling with as far as course work or anything, it’s more *we* are learning, I am learning, myself, as well
- Being able to listen
- Being equal to students, not above them
- Less of a gap between lifestyles

¹ Note: A complete list of what mentors described as is and is not mentoring is available in Appendix E. Additionally, I have provided examples of how mentors describe relational learning, as a construct and as a class.
• A strong relationship between two people and one person happens to have more experience and knowledge about a particular interest

• Help[ing] them realize that it’s not that hard and help[ing] answer any questions and help[ing] them get to the point where they feel they need to be

In the following image, Brandon’s caption describes what he believes a mentor is.

In this image, he is working with a group of new Educational Psychology students during the ice-breaker/group building Plane Wreck activity, which serves to help the mentors and mentees become acquainted and to begin to introduce the mentoring relationship.

The goal of this activity is to build a water-tight container out of only cardboard and tape. This activity asked the group to imagine that they had been stranded after a plane crash, and needed to be able to transport water to survive. However, some people are to imagine that they have lost the use of their hands (in this activity, the mentors), while others imaging losing their sight (in this activity, the mentees). This activity was used as a way to describe the mentoring situation: the mentor, who can see but cannot actively help (i.e., without hands), must give direction to the others, as their “sight.” The mentees, who cannot see, must listen to guidance of their mentor, but actually do all of the work: the mentor cannot do it for them. Brandon’s caption reads: “To be a mentor is to help students find the answers to the questions that they might not be able to see on their own.” This describes how, in the process of mentoring, the mentee may be unable to visualize the bigger picture, or the end goals of the project, similarly to how they cannot see what they are putting together in the Plane Wreck. The role of a mentor, who can see
the bigger picture, as they have been through the entire process, guides and helps direct the activities of the mentees, but cannot give direct assistance, as his hands are “tied.”

Figure 1. Brandon

To be a mentor is to help students find the answers to the questions that they might not be able to see on their own.
A Mentor is Not . . . (or, Mentoring is Not . . .)

Mentors also described what mentoring is not. In these statements, we see that mentors do not believe that mentoring is a hierarchically-based relationship. Nor do they believe that it is a rigidly-structured relationship, controlled by one party. Mentors said that mentoring/being a mentor is not:

- A power struggle
- Directly feeding them the answers
- Not everybody’s even going to be accepting of your mentoring. I had mentees that weren’t really accepting of me, took my knowledge or my support for granted.
- Imposing your own agenda on them Just a one year . . . contract term
- Just a professional relationship or just being friends

Relational Learning (as a Construct) is . . .

One way that mentors described relational learning was as a construct. Here, they provided descriptions of what they have found relational learning to be, through their experiences. To them, this construct revolves around working together, talking through experiences, being open to new possibilities and ideas, and, through these, being in relationship with one another. Mentors reported that relational learning involved the following:

- Being a partner in the learning process, growing, helping someone along in their skills, not just from the surface level, but on a deeper level of all there is in life—whatever it is that they need.
- A really good way to expand your perspective.
- All of your interactions with other people can teach you a lesson in some way or teach you about yourself, teach you about the world, or things like that. So always just be aware that you’re forming these relationships, like, all of the time and they’re important, even if you don’t realize it at the time. When you look back on it, every contact that you have can teach you something.
- Learning through the relationships that you build with others and helping facilitate your learning through having relationships with others and learning by doing but also learning by having support from other people around you.
- Talking about our experiences and what we learn—what you can learn from your experiences, growing.
- Talking to people who have been where you’ve been is the most helpful way to understand something that’s new or different.
- Sometimes students have personal experience or an interest more relatable to each other than something that I have to offer. I believe that conversation is an important part of mentoring and the learning process as a whole.
- Everyone getting together and just hanging out. But yet, through that hanging out, we’re still, like, talking and learning and reflecting. . . . And we don’t exploit it, but we use it to learn and help each other out . . . From each other’s pain and our problems and stuff, we definitely think about how we can help future students and future people, which is awesome.
- Figuring out how, through conversation, we can help each other and what we were doing.

**Relational Learning (as a Class) Is . . .**

Mentors also described relational learning in terms of the course they took, as part of the mentoring project, which was called *Relational Learning*. Here, they identified attributes of the class that made it unique from their other classroom experiences, and described ways in which their participation in it influenced how they perceived mentoring. About the Relational Learning course, they made statements such as:

- Somebody will start a conversation and everyone will just reply to it and then we just constantly build until we get the one idea that we can all agree upon and what “this” is. We talk through all of our problems. Not our own personal problems. We talk through all the problems in class and the theories and [this process] helps you get an idea of how to understand it better.

- Everybody kind of just helps people to talk and you didn’t feel uncomfortable saying what you experienced or what happened or trying to figure [things out].

- What you actually did was a smaller experience than getting together as a group and talking about everybody’s experience.

- It helped me realize the importance of talking through things with other people that are experiencing the same thing.
Emergent Themes: Describing the Experience of Mentoring

The following is a discussion of the findings of this study, which include four emergent themes, as well as one overarching theme. The four themes I identified in this study were: *Mentors experienced relational learning; mentors experienced investment; mentors experienced challenges; and mentors identified ways that mentoring can be different.* *Mentors and the mentoring project experienced a process of becoming* was an overarching theme. These themes address Research Question 1, and explain how mentors describe their experiences in this mentoring project, as well as what these mentors perceive a mentor is and is not, and what relational learning is. In addition, Research Question 4 (What do participants think could be different?) is addressed in the theme, *mentors identified ways in which the project could be different.* Connections to the literature are made, to support the findings of this study.

Experience as Relational Learning

In this mentoring project, mentors experienced *relational learning* through their shared experiences with other mentors and with their mentees. I was struck during the interviews and then again during data analysis by how frequently the mentors discussed the prevalence and importance of relationships, in varying forms. One way mentors discussed relationships was by describing some of the relational processes, such as how the mentors keep each other involved and that the relationships are deep and long-lasting. These shared experiences form the backbone of the mentoring experience; while mentees are learning from their mentors, the mentors are learning from their mentees and from other mentors. They are learning with and teaching each other through these
relationships. As Gergen wrote, “teaching cannot be separated from learning; without one, the other fails to exist” (2009, p. 145). A story that Elizabeth told, about how she was learning while teaching her conversation partner about language, exemplifies this:

That’s where learning happened for me; was where I kind of thought, “well, you know, we learned this socially and we learned from observation and all of that sort of thing,” so it’s really helpful to me to understand that, as well. [Sometimes] she would have troubles pronouncing a word and I would break it down for her—“reg-is-ter,”—like sounds and stuff like that. Learning how to break it down for somebody, learning how to teach them, specifically, that is something that I really didn’t know much about . . . I knew about language but didn’t know how to teach it and that was something I had to continuously learn—how to get better at teaching her a word or that sort of thing. That, to me, was relational learning.

Elizabeth’s experience helps to describe how learning and teaching are inseparable and occur alongside of each other. Therefore, even though there are reasons and benefits for the students in this program to become (and stay) mentors that are highly personal and very individual in nature, it became evident that it is impossible for mentors to engage in this mentoring experience as a disconnected individual: the process of learning and teaching occurs within the space of these relationships.

**Becoming connected.** One of the more foundational ideas that the mentors discussed throughout their interviews was how and why they became connected to one another. Within this idea, they discussed the space that was created or formed in which
they were able to do this, in addition to why it was important to build relationships as mentors. The idea of becoming connected to others is important to learning: Vygotsky believed that “all higher psychological processes [are] acquired only through interaction with others and participation in the life of one’s cultural community. . . . [Their] origins are always social” (Goodenow, 1992, p. 178). Similarly, Bakhtin (1986) explained,

Our speech, that is, all our utterances . . . is filled with others’ words varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of “our-own-ness,” varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate. (p. 89)

The foundation of who we are comes in relation to who we know. Getting connected to others creates who we are. The mentors also discussed connecting as having common ground with others: specifically, they described being able to find common ground with other mentors and with their mentees. In having common ground, there was also a sense of community and camaraderie, as well as the sentiment of really being “in this together,” whether that meant with other mentors or with one’s mentees. Finally, as it relates to becoming connected, mentors described a process of building relationships with others (mentors and mentees) that they felt they would not, normally, have gotten to know under different circumstances.

The following photo elicitation (Figure 2) depicts an example of mentors connecting. Jane and her children attended a field trip to a local historical site, with the project leader and several other mentors and mentees. Jane, her children, and Brandon
connected through this experience, when they went geocaching. Geocaching is a popular activity which uses a navigational device (such as downloaded onto a smartphone) to help the participants locate containers or objects hidden by others. Jane described what is going on in the picture this way:

We were at the cemetery in Cleveland and at the top of Pres. Grant's tomb. We were on a field trip with the Education Psychology class. We had just finished walking through the building and climbed the stairs to the top. We had a blast walking all over the property searching for Geocaches that were hidden. We saw so many different things that day. Even though it was raining we really enjoyed the whole day. We joined another student and taught him about how to do Geocachings.

Jane’s caption reads, “Even through the rainy day, we were able to bond & have fun together.”
Even through the rainy day, we were able to bond & have fun together.

*Figure 2. Jane*
Opening space—A difference that makes a difference. An important idea that emerged within the theme of Relational Learning was the idea of a difference that makes a difference, as Bateson (1972) described. According to Bateson, a difference that makes a difference can be described as information; specifically, information that affects—“makes a difference in”—some later event (p. 381). This information, or difference, must be significant enough to cause a change, but also not too different as to be unrelatable. Andersen (1995) described this by saying that “what is too usual does not make a difference. What is too unusual also does not make a difference” (p. 15). The critical factor within this idea is that this project created space for these mentors to have a different kind of educational experience; they were able to experience a new (for many of them) kind of role (i.e., as a mentor); they were able to create relationships with their classmates, their mentees, their conversation partners, and those with whom they interacted at the elementary school; and they had the space to speak freely about their engaged learning experiences and process them in purposeful dialogue with others sharing similar experiences. This difference—the information mentors had, based on their circumstances—affected how they perceived situations; how they interacted with their peers, colleagues, and professor; and shaped how they discussed their experiences.

In one of his interviews, Michael described a difference that made a difference for him: being challenged to think deeply about issues, and to embrace that challenge. During the semester he was interviewed, he was not enrolled in the Relational Learning course, and was not actively participating in the mentoring project, due to the time constraints of his other courses. He reflected, “I haven’t had a class this semester where I
actually left feeling like my thinking has been challenged.” For him, feeling challenged is clearly an important piece of his experience: it was one of the reasons for which he participated in the project and one of the things he got out of it, personally. This is also a sentiment that connected him with other mentors, who valued the same type of challenge.

Kallie described a difference that made a difference for her in the mentor/mentee relationship, by recalling how it feels when students in the Educational Psychology course first see the term project (lesson plan) they will work on throughout the semester:

[You and your partner think,] “Oh my gosh, are we doing this right?” You know, . . . most teachers will lay out a syllabus and say, “this is how it should be.” Anne didn’t do that. I mean, she gave us [some guidance on] “this is what you have to have,” but she never really said, “I want 5 pages. I want it to be this many words.” So, I think that scares [students] a lot because it’s not all laid out perfectly.

Her account addresses the disequilibrium felt by students as they encounter a type of project that they have not experienced previously and highlights the valuable role that mentors play in this situation. In this scenario, mentors act as a bridge between one point and another; or, said differently, mentors are able to help shed light on what a finished project looks like, while also providing evidence that the project is doable and supporting the mentees as they work toward successful completion of their own project. This difference—information—helped to shape both how Kallie proceeded in helping her mentees, as well as how her mentees may have approached their lesson plan.
These open spaces were not, however, limited to inside the classroom. Eric described a difference that made a difference for him, as he remembered a turning point in his relationship with his conversation partner:

I’d like to say it was kind of a different environment from what we had been in. We’d normally gone to the student center or Starbucks or here [a local café], and we just sat and talked. And [going to the art museum] was something kind of different, kind of getting out, kind of experiencing something new. She had never been to the art museum. I’d never been there. I’d never really seen any of the art work there. She had never really seen any of it either. And it was . . . kind of being in a new environment, but both of us being at the same new environment kind of leveled it out, even though we were still relatively new friends, but it was still like . . . I don’t know. We kind of both experienced something new, and it kind of made us not feel like our friendship was so new.

For Eric and his conversation partner, this new and different experience helped to move their relationship forward, and gave them a new way to connect. Being able to share an experience such as this, in a new place, with someone from the other side of the world, is an experience that not all students have. However, it addresses the notion that “no longer are students limited to learning about others, but can begin to learn with them” (Gergen, 2009, p. 267). Differences such as this one, which can open space between two individuals and create opportunities for relationships and experiences which students may not typically encounter—the differences that make a difference—are an important piece
in beginning to understand why and how some of these relationships form and what can be done to create these types of educational experiences.

Finding common ground. Being able to find common ground with another seemed to be a major factor in developing relationships. Eric’s account, above, of how he and his conversation partner experienced the art museum together, is one example of the importance of mentors and mentees finding common ground, and how it can affect their relationship. Additionally, mentors frequently described ways in which they were similar to both their mentees and, at times, surprisingly, to other mentors. This connection often led to a sense that they were working together for a better outcome and, in some cases, that they were part of a community. Jessica described one important part of a mentoring relationship as being “able to relate to each other.” In this, she was describing the Plane Wreck activity the mentors and mentees participate in together during one of the first Educational Psychology classes, to get acquainted and to begin to think about the mentoring relationship. Jessica’s statement was referring to how both the mentors and the mentees were at a disadvantage—the mentors could see, but not use their hands to help, and the mentees could not see but did have the use of their hands to build the container. Her observation that they could relate to each other was based on the fact that each was at some kind of disadvantage and faced a struggle; in that struggle, they were able to find common ground.

Emma described this same concept, as she considered the first day she was a mentor. It was also her mentees’ first days in the Educational Psychology class: “They were probably still pretty nervous about their classes and stuff and so was I.” Here,
Emma is able to relate to them on two levels: as someone new to the mentoring project, and as a fellow student, who was just starting her own classes for the semester, as well as being a new mentor for the first time.

Mentors were also able to relate to each other. Eric described this, saying,

I got to really understand other people because we were all in the same boat almost and it felt like we were all experiencing the same thing, to a certain degree. It was kind of different for everyone, but we were all experiencing different mentoring and conversations or whatever. I didn’t feel like I ever really got that from another course. I felt like everybody was coming from somewhere different, and [here] nobody was.

The feeling that they were in the “same boat” as a group of mentors working together through situations and experiences was important, because it helped build a sense of community and camaraderie. In addition, Eric also noted that he “didn’t feel like [he] ever really got that from another course.” This is similar to the discussion earlier, where Michael said he had not felt challenged in his other courses. Again, the creation of space to have different types of interactions and have different types of experiences is integral in the development of these relationships and these feelings of being on common ground with others.

One tool that some mentors used to connect with their mentees was social media. Brandon, who discussed using social media the most out of all of the participants in this study, described his use of social media as an approach to mentoring and teaching:
I do believe that social networking can help mentors and teachers learn a lot about their students. For example, I follow you (Kristen) on Pinterest (www.pinterest.com). I have learned more about the foods, fashion, crafts and [other things] . . . that you like, way more than any conversation that we have had in person. Now just imagine, as a teacher, if I could figure out how to use that knowledge to make my class better for you. Maybe if I learn from Pinterest that you are really into photography, for example, I can make sure that I incorporate an activity in the class [in] which you have to analyze historical photos or take photos.

In this description, one thing that Brandon is addressing is a way to connect, both in more-concrete sense (i.e., the intentional act of “following” someone on a social media site) and a more-experiential/relational sense (i.e., learning what commonalities and varying interests exist, including relationships and interests). He connects finding these commonalities with being a better teacher and mentor, and defines that as having the ability to make the experience more personal and individually-based, through relationship. He also mentioned the use of Twitter (www.twitter.com) with his mentees, saying, “I follow one of ’em on Twitter, and we interacted. I interacted with them a lot more on social networking sites than I did in person.” This is interesting because it shows how Brandon’s in-person mentoring relationship was supported through his use of social media as a means of communicating. Other mentors reported using email, phone calls, text messages (texting), and in-person meetings to connect with their mentees.
Common ground was also important to these mentors as they described their interactions with their conversation partners. Earlier, I gave an example from Eric about finding common ground in a new experience, at the art museum. Emma also described finding common ground with her conversation partner. She said, “Even though he’s older than me—so I don’t know if we are considered peers—we’re both in college, doing kind of the same thing, so we’re in similar situations.” In this, Emma described both a difference and a similarity, which clarified one way in which they are able to connect, as conversation partners. Being in a “similar situation,” they are able to relate to each other on that level, even if age would, initially, be a hurdle. Through this, they were able to break perceived barriers in connecting, and find these commonalities. Brandon also discussed common ground in terms of the Relational Learning course, and the people he was able to connect with that way. He reflected,

It gave me the opportunity to be with like like-minded individuals who felt the same way about helping people, and because of that, . . . I was able to realize that we have a lot of other stuff in common, too, that I would never have [realized], even if we [were] just in a regular class.

Here, he is comparing the “regular” classes he has taken to the Relational Learning course. Having something in common—that is, wanting to help people and be a mentor—was an initial point of common ground where, from there, mentors were able to learn about each other and begin to see additional commonalities in interests, activities, and ideas.
Brandon also discussed the importance of creating space to relate to each other in person, as a way to learn, connect, and find common ground with others. In talking about his experiences with his conversation partner, he said,

I cannot stress enough how important it is for people who come from different cultures and backgrounds to come together and speak face to face. When we do that, we realize that we are not that different from each other. It also helps to get rid of stereotypes that both people might have about each other.

This is similar to the point made earlier, in discussing Eric’s interactions with his conversation partner, as they relate to the importance of opportunities to learn with—not just about—others. These comments by Brandon, while initially made in the context of his experiences with his conversation partner, easily translate to other situations, as well. Finding common ground and ways to connect are important in peer mentoring relationships. This process also helps individuals to realize that they have more in common than they may have suspected.

*Getting to know people you typically would not.* Brandon’s previous statements also led into another piece that the mentors discussed frequently: through this project, mentors built relationships with people who they did not believe they would have “typically” gotten to know. Matt described this, saying,

There’s a lot of people that I’ve learned to appreciate in other terms than I would have, because I know, for example, Ashley and I, we wouldn’t have gotten along if it wasn’t for that class, because [of our different personalities;] if it wasn’t for that class, we would never speak. We’d hate each other, we’d make fun of each
other, but, like, we interact and we actually get along. So, it broke a lot of, not stereotypes, but it just broke a lot of, like, misconceptions.

Brandon’s and Matt’s accounts of making connections with others based on the common experience of a class that created space for students to get to know each other, and a project which encouraged the same, exemplifies this process of getting to know people that you would not, otherwise. Kelly gave another example of this difference that made a difference:

It was just cool to have that outside experience as well as, you know, and I think that it made . . . I think it made a lot of us closer. You know, a lot of people that I probably would never have had a relationship with if it hadn’t been for this class—I mean, people who were older. [For example], with Brian. He’s awesome, but I probably wouldn’t have known him if it wasn’t for Relational Learning. I probably wouldn’t have even thought to be his friend, I mean as crazy as that sounds, but like he’s just . . . he’s like the non-typical student. He’s an older guy that came back and he wears pajamas every day, but he’s so awesome. So, like, if it weren’t for our connection and our little clique that we have together, I probably would have never gotten to know him. So, I just think that it’s even, I don’t know, it connects people that wouldn’t typically connect.

Kelly’s account specifically acknowledges relationships that wouldn’t have happened based on surface differences, such as being a non-traditional (older) student. In this example, Kelly did not describe very different lifestyles or personality conflicts; instead, she described a situation where there may not have been enough outward similarities
between them to seem as though they would connect. However, with both of them being mentors and getting to know each other as a group of mentors, a relationship was built.

Brandon, who reflected on his student teaching experiences, described a similar scenario:

> When I student taught, I had my students work in groups a lot. I would put them in groups with people that were not their friends, or people who they would not normally work with. At first, the students hated it, but I explained how in life they will have to work with people that they do not know or that they do not like and they will still have to find a way to make it work. Over time, students started to like when I picked the groups because they realized that they have stuff in common with people they did not consider their friends.

This experience was similar to what Kelly described: Brandon’s students didn’t realize their commonalities through the barriers of their differences. However, through some thoughtful planning, these students were able to see how their peers, who initially seemed very different, shared common interests, which served as the foundation of new relationships and connections, and expanded knowledge through these different perspectives.

Finally, Erin described a less-individualized way in which this process seemed to work: that of connecting between cohorts, teaching specializations, and (teaching) grade levels:

> I got to know people just through mentoring who I wouldn’t have met otherwise, and we can talk about education and we talked about our programs and our field experience. Like, it was just a good community of all education majors that
you’re not . . . I wasn’t exposed to [in my specialized classes, or intro level classes, where the focus was more on getting through the work]. So, I couldn’t, I didn’t have a lot of exposure to early childhood, high school, deaf ed, special ed, you know, because they would just be in the classes and that’s it. But this was more of, like, a community of educators.

Her emphasis on having access to these students, in a forum that created space for them to all get to know and learn from each other, is important in understanding why the relationships built in this project are valuable. Being able to make these connections and build these relationships can deepen and broaden these individuals’ understanding of complex issues, offer different types of insight, and can provide connections to future colleagues, in addition to building friendships and support systems while still in college.

**Community: Being a part of something.** A number of mentors also discussed how, through the mentoring project and the Relational Learning course, they became a community. Michael said, “I feel like the program is just like a community.” This sense of being a part of some kind of group was important to these participants. A sense of community is a valuable asset to education. According to McCaslin and Hickey (2001), “learning, motivation, and identity are closely bound to context, specifically to participation in the activities of a community where learning is practiced and valued” (p. 137). To this end, it is valuable for mentors to identify as part of a community of mentors, colleagues, and, in this instance, future teachers. Kelly described this sense of community in the following way:
When we go to Anne’s house, it’s not like a class getting together and going to Anne’s house. It’s like a family get together. We all come and see each other, and, I don’t know. It just kind of has that feel about it, that it’s not . . . like, this isn’t class. This is my family.

In this description, she stated both what the community is and is not like, for her. Specifically, she differentiated between a “family” and “class,” emphasizing that this community is not just a class; rather, it has become like a family for her. Matt and Elizabeth, as well as other mentors in other semesters’ interviews, also echoed the sentiment that this community of mentors is like a family.

Elizabeth described her experience by saying, “I went into it not sure what was going to happen and we just became family, that’s how we wanted it to be.” In this account, there are a few important points. First, there is the association of this community with a family. Second, she stated that she went in “not sure what was going to happen”—so she did not have a preconceived notion of how things were going to turn out, or what was “supposed” to happen, when she first became a part of this group. She entered into the situation in a position of “not knowing.” Additionally, Elizabeth was another mentor who did not have Anne for her Educational Psychology course and, therefore, had no prior experience with this mentoring project or Anne when she first decided to participate. Finally, she noted that it turned out “how we wanted it to be,” which gives the sense that becoming a “family” was how others in the group felt about the relational dynamics, as well. Matt’s statement was very similar: “I just feel like we made ourselves like a little family.” Their emphasis that this type of “family”
relationships was what the group wanted, and not how they were told to act, indicates that
the relationships were both voluntary and important in the eyes of those who were a part
of them—that is, the mentors.

**Helping mentality.** Mentors also described an interest in helping others to
succeed. Jane said, “I think there is true value in making sure that others are doing well
too and not [just] focusing on ourselves.” However, it was clear that, while they were
helping others, they were also helping themselves, in terms of gaining experience, as well
as other positive outcomes—whether they realized it at the time, or not. As Ashley
reflected, “I wanted to influence people and at the time I didn’t realize this, but I know
now, I wanted to help others and with helping others you learn too.” Helping others
while learning from those interactions was also described by Karie:

I’m there to help them, and I’m going to help them as much as I can and talking
with other mentors helped me get some ideas on how to handle certain situations,
how much help to give them, and I think I . . . as I went through it, it was a lot
easier.

Each of these mentors described a process of relational learning, where they learn
through their interactions with others, with benefits to both themselves as mentors and to
the mentees, as well. In these accounts, the mentors are also describing scaffolding
(Bruner, 1990). Scaffolding provides support for the learner (i.e., mentee), based on his
or her skill and ability level. To begin, more support is given by someone who has more
experience with the task (i.e., a mentor); as the learner is able to do more on his own, the
scaffolding is slowly removed so that the learner is, eventually, achieving at a level higher than he could with no assistance.

Brandon also described wanting to help others, as a reason for making the decision to be a peer mentor:

It gives me the opportunity to help people. That’s what I like to do. I like to help people, not necessarily just with academic stuff [but] anything about life . . . and just give advice and stuff, and that’s where I have opportunity for it, even with the girl, [who] wasn’t the person I was mentoring, but she was in the class and she had to take her Praxis test, and she was nervous. And I explained to her that I was nervous, too, when I took my test, you know. And that didn’t really have anything to do with academics, what was going to be on the test. We didn’t talk about that, but I just told her things that I did to help me relax and just stay positive and just think positive thoughts, and she passed. So, maybe, do I know if she was going to pass without my help? I don’t know. But maybe something I said helped her relax a little bit because she was really worried if she could pass. So . . . peer mentoring . . . gives me the opportunity to do that, to give my advice and to tell people about my experiences, and hopefully they can learn something from that. That’s why I do the whole program, because I messed up. So, anything I can do to help somebody not go down the same path that I went down and make their life easier, I’m all for it. I’d jump all over it and that’s why I signed up for it.
For Brandon, and for other mentors, “helping” encompasses many aspects other than simply working with mentees or each other on course work. For Brandon, part of this desire to help comes from a time where he feels that he fell short of his own expectations for himself at another university. He explained that, partially because of that experience, he wants to help others to succeed. In Brandon’s reflection, helping was described primarily in terms of relating to another person, meeting them where they were (i.e., nervous about the prospect of taking the Praxis exam), and talking through it. By sharing his experience, Brandon hopes to have helped her “relax a little bit” and have made a small but positive impact on her preparation. Ashley also wanted to address helping in her photograph and caption (see Figure 3). Her caption both describes how she defined mentoring, and describes what is going on in this image. Ashley wrote,

Being a mentor means to help people when they need it. It is also about forming relationships. In this picture I was sitting with a group of future mentees. Throughout my Relational Learning experiences I have helped these mentees with different projects. I have also been able to form friendships from interacting with the mentees.
Being a mentor means to help people when they need it. It is also about forming relationships. In this picture I was sitting with a group of future mentees. Throughout my Relational Learning experiences I have helped these mentees with different projects. I have also been able to form friendships with the mentees.

Figure 3. Ashley (a)
**Guiding and being guided.** Another way in which the mentors helped their mentees was through guidance on their projects and in other aspects of their courses and/or program. Michael said, “I think there’s a lot of guidance in mentoring, or the potential for a lot of guidance.” This potential, however, was contingent upon the mentor both offering the guidance, and feeling as though he or she had something worthwhile to say, as well as on the mentee being receptive to that guidance. In most cases, mentors were able to draw on their own experiences in Anne’s class, and in the education program, as a way to help their mentees and scaffold their learning, even if their situations were not quite the same. Often, like Brandon, mentors described how their guidance was based on their own experiences, and simply wanting to share those experiences with their mentees, with the hope that some part of their story would have an impact. Kallie said that she “felt like [she] could help other students in [Anne’s] class, guide them, you know, like through my experiences [and say,] ‘well, this is what I did. This helped me with . . . ’ you know, whatever topic.” Here, Kallie is describing how she used scaffolding to help her mentees think through ways to approach various topics and scenarios in their class.

Eric used the following technique to help his mentees with their lesson plan project:

I suggested that they use an example just to kind of think more like a teacher. And that was . . . I mean, I don’t think they had thought of that. That was one big thing—that I felt that a lot of students in the class also weren’t necessarily . . .
they weren’t quite thinking as teachers, [but] more so as students who had to complete a project.

In this example, Eric helped to guide them toward a different way to approach their project, and to begin thinking more like “teachers,” as opposed to thinking like “students.” This different way of thinking helped these future teachers gain perspective on the content of the project, as well as helping them to continue to prepare for their future careers. While this perspective is something that is discussed throughout the Educational Psychology course by Anne, hearing this from a peer (mentor) can help it to make more sense in practice. Another approach to guiding mentees can be seen in Sarah’s description. She said,

I talked with them and I helped them out if they needed any guidance and, you know, mentors don’t know everything, right? So, I would either ask [another mentor] or Anne if I didn’t know something, and then she would tell me, and I would make sure that I told them what [what was said].

In this situation, Sarah is not only offering guidance for working on a project in the form of direction to complete the project, but also guiding them in thinking about the mentoring relationship, as well as how and when to seek help. In essence, she is modeling behaviors that will be valuable in future situations, both in school and in the professional world, since the first person you ask may not always know the answer or have the language to effectively explain it. In this way, the sharing of knowledge and information between Sarah and her mentees “enables students to absorb characteristics of each other, to model their ways of acting and relating” (Gergen, 2009, p. 257). As a peer,
Sarah’s behaviors and approaches to problem solving may be easier for her mentee to relate to than those of a professor, since Sarah and her mentee share common ground as undergraduate students.

Erin is another mentor who described her approach to mentoring, and emphasized that guiding is a process of helping students discover that they can succeed on their own, with a bit of direction from someone who has had a similar experience. Erin said,

If you have a mentor, it’s someone who helps you realize that you can do it on your own and just is your little push when you feel like “how am supposed to even do this?” It’s like your lifeline . . . I think that talking to people who have been where you’ve been is the most helpful way to understand something that’s new or different.

Erin’s statement that a mentor “helps you realize that you can do it on your own” reminds us of Bandura’s (1997) social-cognitive theory and, specifically, self-efficacy: a belief that one can successfully accomplish a specific task or type of activity. One way in which students’ self-efficacy can be created is through building relationships and connecting with peers (Guay, LaRose, & Boivin, 2004, p. 54). Peer mentors are a valuable resource for this.

Karie expanded on Erin’s account of providing guidance, highlighting the importance of not only sharing successes, but struggles, as well:

When I was a mentor, I was sharing experiences from the past and . . . in that way giving them guidance, because I showed them the way I struggled with it or the way that I was successful with it. And now I’m working through it for my first
time, kind of like, you know, I’m the mentee. And I’ve got other people there to help me that haven’t done the exact same thing that I have, but are there to offer that same kind of feedback or support.

In this part of her interview, Karie described how she is currently going through a similar situation as a beginning teacher, and has a mentor teacher that she can go to for advice, who will share her stories with her. She also noted that it is not important that the experiences all be exactly the same: there are lessons, ideas, and approaches that can be taken from similar situations and adapted to whatever situation she is currently facing. This is consistent with the Rodger and Tremblay’s (2003) finding that, for new students, having a mentor alleviated anxiety by showing students that initial failures could lead to the adoption of better habits and, with effort, success. The photograph (see Figure 4) that Karie chose to caption as her representation of what mentoring is was a picture of her working with students when she studied abroad in Italy (she was a mentee, taking the Educational Psychology course). She described the picture this way:

This picture was taken when I was a mentee in the peer mentoring project. I took the class in Italy. In this photo I was visiting an international school, and we had some time to observe and spend time with some of the students. This little girl spoke both Italian and English. She was working diligently on a puzzle and telling me the words in English and Italian. It's funny to think that such a young person was "mentoring" me in learning some Italian.

Her caption reads, “Mentoring is sharing experiences and struggles in order to guide others.”
Mentoring is sharing experiences and struggles in order to guide others.

Figure 4. Karie
A similar thought was shared by Matt, who believes that “[mentees] really look for advice on professionalism and how to be a teacher and maybe how to introduce you to people that can help you get a job and stuff like that,” indicating, again, that mentoring is not only project-based, but can relate to all aspects of a mentee’s experiences.

Karie’s earlier example relates to the next point, made again by Matt, regarding getting guidance from other (peer) mentors, as well as offering advice for fellow mentors:

We’re there to guide each other because, I would say within our Relational Learning class, within that itself, we’re all mentors to each other because we take things from each other that can help us for, one, our professional development. Then, in the Ed Psych course, we’ve been around, so we can help [new mentors] get through the stumbling blocks and what not.

These reflections demonstrate how the helping mentality of mentors can be of benefit in a variety of situations, and in a variety of ways. While it may initially seem as though mentors are “just” sharing their experiences, it is these experiences that can be very beneficial to both their mentees and their fellow mentors, in working through new and/or difficult experiences. The process of sharing experiences—talking through them—with others is an example of Vygotsky’s (1986) notions of inner and outer speech, and the process of becoming as you hear your own voice (outer speech), while talking to others, and through your thoughts (inner speech). This process is also an example of how mentors scaffolded their own and each other’s learning.

**Being there for your mentees.** Finally, mentors discussed helping their mentees in terms of simply “being there” for them. This is another example of a difference that
can make a difference. Emma thought that, “mostly, what I got out of it was that we provided them like a familiar face and someone that looked like an ally for them, because when you start freshman year, that’s scary, I remember how scary it was.” She described being there for her mentees as being an “ally” and as a “familiar face,” making the newness of the situation (i.e., a new class; the first days of a new semester) less “scary.”

Ashley had a similar view, noting that a mentor is “someone to look up to in different times of need.” This indicates that a mentor is not, necessarily, someone who is always around; moreover, a mentor is someone who is around when they are needed.

*Being there for your mentees* is exemplified by the photograph that Elizabeth selected to describe what a mentor is (see Figure 5). Her caption addresses a number of components that are encompassed within *relational learning*, but which can be summarized as “being there.” Her caption reads,

Part of being a mentor involves supporting the students I am mentoring in what they are learning as well as personal goals and achievements. This photo is a visual representation of how I wanted to have a presence at Fiona’s graduate recital to show my support for her talent and passion for opera and vocal performance. Going above and beyond to show that I wanted to be a part of Fiona’s experiences at Kent State University was something she appreciated and it allowed us to grow closer in our continued interactions.
Part of being a mentor involves supporting the students I am mentoring in what they are learning as well as personal goals and achievements. This photo is a visual representation of how I wanted to have a presence at Fionna’s graduate recital to show my support for her talent and passion for opera and voice performance. Going above and beyond to show that I wanted to be a part of Fionna’s experiences at Kent State University was something she appreciated and it allowed us to grow closer in our continued interactions.

Figure 5. Elizabeth
**Authentic relationship.** Mentors also viewed their relationships, both with their mentees and with other mentors, as authentic. Authentic relationships were described through a number of dimensions. Specifically, they described their relationships as genuine and caring, and noted that they were able to be open and honest with each other and about the situations they faced, without a fear of being judged. Elizabeth said that she “felt like you could be honest about what was going on.” Matt described how he missed having meeting weekly with the other mentors, during a semester in which he was not enrolled in the Relational Learning course: “they helped me grow a lot, and it was a safe environment for me to grow up in.” He also pointed out that it “was a place where we could come together and be honest and vulnerable and allow ourselves to be criticized knowing it was from a good place.” This is in-line with Rawlins’ (2000) ideas regarding educational friendships—a concept describing, in Rawlins’ case, teacher-student relationships, but which could easily be adapted to the relationship between a mentor and his mentee. Rawlins maintained that there are “clear differences between feeling comfortable about feeling vulnerable and feeling vulnerable about feeling vulnerable” (p. 13). This ability to feel “comfortable feeling vulnerable” would not have manifested if Matt had not felt that his relationship with his fellow mentors, as well as the project director, was authentic in these ways.

The mentors also viewed their relationships—both with their mentees and with other mentors—as equal. Elizabeth considers an egalitarian relationship as one important aspect of mentoring, and said that part of the role of a mentor is to “make [your mentees] feel comfortable where you can sort of help them without having them feel judged.”
Sarah felt the same, describing it in the following way: “mentors should be equal to students, not above them, because, if you’re above the student that you’re mentoring and you act it and you show it, the students are gonna feed off that and they’re gonna think you’re no good.” Sarah used her opportunity to illustrate what mentoring is by selecting a photograph of her during the Plane Wreck activity (see Figure 6). About what was happening in this photograph, Sarah said,

I am trying to give the students advice on how they should put together a container out of cardboard in which to hold water, while my hands were tied behind my back. They were blindfolded which meant they had to trust me on how they should create the container.

She captioned her photograph in the following way: Mentoring is “To be a friend, to help students better understand the material. Guide them so they could complete their assignments successfully. Be equal to the students, not above them.”
To be a friend, to help students better understand the material. Guide them so they could complete their assignment successfully. Be equal to the students not above them.

Figure 6. Sarah
Emma also discussed mentoring as having an equal relationship with her mentees. She described it in this way:

One of the important parts of mentoring is that there isn’t, like, you are equal. You know what I mean? A lot the other relationships that we had, like, with our [students’] parents or with our teachers, one kind of always has a little more power than the other one. So teachers have a certain power over you. I think with mentors it’s neat, because there isn’t that, like, power struggle going on. I don’t think, I never—that’s kind of what it became to me. Forming new relationships that you learn from each other, you taught each other things but you . . . were, like, equal.

In Emma’s account of the importance of egalitarian relationships, it is clear that she is still forming her thoughts about the nature of mentoring, even as she is describing them. This act of forming while informing (Bateson, 1981) is helping Emma to solidify her understanding of mentoring (forming), while she is talking about it (informing).

The heterarchical nature of mentoring relationships was important to many of the mentors. This is important, as it brings to the surface the idea that learning can happen in these relationships where there is equality; one person doesn’t have to be “up” the hierarchy from the other, in order for both parties to take something away from the relationship. This dynamic allows both the mentors and the mentees to see themselves as equal and able to contribute to a relationship: it is not, simply, a one-way avenue, where a more-knowing entity gives one-sided directives and instructions. Instead, it is a conversation where both parties contribute to a successful outcome. Andersen (1995)
called heterarchical relationships “democratic” and “even,” as well as describing them as relationships “with equally important contributors” (p. 18).

In addition, the mentors talked about being able to trust one another, in the relationships that they built. This extended to relationships with both their mentees and with the other mentors. Emma said she “could get a feel for how [my mentees] were and they were being, like, really honest with me, which is good. They already had a level of trust in me that they could be honest,” which was important to their successful relationship as mentor/mentees. Other mentors described the trust they had among each other. Karie, in thinking about the relationship and trust that she has built with some of the mentors that mentored with her, said: “it’s nice to really know them because I think I would . . . I was more likely to talk about it with Erin or with Kate or Jay than somebody that I haven’t, I hadn’t really known as well.” Having a level of established trust with a group of peers makes it easier to discuss problems and situations that might occur.

Finally, Matt described how he was able to discuss very personal issues with some of his fellow mentors, as people that he had built authentic relationships with, and had come to trust. He said,

If I need to talk about my [personal situations], I can do that. And we don’t exploit it, but we use it to learn and help each other out . . . From each other’s pain and our problems and stuff, we definitely think about how we can help future students and future people.

The trust that is built within these relationships makes them authentic and useful, in a variety of accountability ways. While this trust is important to have between a mentor
and a mentee, is it also valuable to trust your fellow mentors, who can be there to offer guidance and support. Kelly described a relationship that was compromised when she was unable to make a strong connection with her mentees:

I couldn’t come to any of their classes, so I met them once and then was their mentor and, other than that one time that I met them, I never saw them again. So, I think that was kind of, they knew that I was there to help, but they didn’t know me. So I think that had a lot to do with why they didn’t use me a lot, even though I would email them every now and then and just see, like, you know, “do you need help?” . . . and I remember talking to Anne about it, that I had made a suggestion that they needed to change and they didn’t and they lost points and it was just, I don’t think that they really knew me or trusted me as somebody to be their mentor, just because I couldn’t physically be there.

This sheds light on the importance of making connections: even though Kelly was willing to help her mentees and approached them via email to ask if they needed help, they did respond to her offer. She and her mentees did not have a strong relationship and, she believes, trust had not been established. This may have impacted their willingness to allow her to help.

The last dimension of an authentic relationship that the mentors discussed was longevity: relationships were not bound by a specific time frame, such as a class or a semester. Jane discussed how she sees her mentees “around the hall now, a semester later, and we still say ‘hi, how are you doing?’ We stop to talk; I ask how classes are going. I can tell in their face that it makes them feel good.” In this context, longevity
refers to the ability of the mentor-mentee relationship to persist, longer than just for the
time it takes to complete a project. Ashley stressed that, in approaching mentoring, “it
really needs to be peer mentor. It’s not just for the class, it’s for life.” Her emphasis on
the word peer stresses the need, as stated earlier, to be an equal, but also places
importance on the idea that the mentor and the mentee are growing together, learning
together, and progressing together, and that their involvement continues in that way;
again, the mentoring relationship is not for a specified time period and then dissolved. It
also indicates that credibility, in this sense, is established by being a peer. However, it is
not always the case that these types of relationships are formed between mentors and
mentees. In her interviews, Jane also described her experience with a “mentor” with
whom she did not form this type of relationship: “the [mentor] I had just got me through
an assignment, we were done and I never saw her again.” Jane was clear, in her
interviews, that this individual was only a “mentor” in title, and not in what she considers
to be the truer sense of the word. This quality also extends to the mentor-mentor
relationship. Matt described this type of ongoing relationship:

I think I’m going to take these relationships with me for the rest of my life, ‘cause
they’re the kind of, like, they’re the people that I’ll still be in contact with, I
would say, long after it’s said and done. And if I happen to be in a classroom or if
they happen [to need] advice, I know that they’ll call me or I’ll call them. And
then we can all get together, and I think through this continuity that we have, I
think we can do a lot of good things for education, and I think we will. And I
think it’s very unique.
The longevity of these relationships, the networks that these mentors are building, and the authentic nature of these relationships are important to them, for a variety of reasons, including in preparing to be a colleague in a teaching situation.

**Collaborative learning: Learning with each other.** Mentors also discussed how learning together—from and with each other—was a common experience within the mentoring project. Collaborative learning (see Bruffee, 1993;Goodsell, Maher, Tinto, Smith, & MacGregor, 1992, for an overview) “assumes learning occurs among persons rather than between a person and things” (Bruffee, 1986, p. 787). Collaborative learning grants authority not only to the teacher but, more importantly, to one’s peers, while also requiring that students accept the authority that their peers give to them. This interdependence fosters conversation among students, where they can engage in “constructive conversation with others whose background and needs are similar . . . but also different” (Bruffee, 1993, p. 24). Eric was one mentor whose story described this. While speaking about the discussions the group had in the Relational Learning class, Eric said that, “everybody [had] something to say about their experience that could basically be applied to yours.” This idea that one mentor’s experiences could relate to the experiences of other mentors was also mentioned earlier, when mentors discussed how they offered guidance to their mentees and their fellow mentors, through the sharing of their own experiences. Andersen (1995) said,

Bateson was very concerned with the significance of multiple perspectives: One might understand the same issue differently in the various perspectives, and when these different ways to understand are put together (as in the reflecting process),
they might create new ideas about the issue in focus” (Bateson, 1980, as cited in Andersen, 1995, p. 18)

Being able to learn in this manner proved to be a valuable experience for these mentors.

Ashley recalled that:

Anne’s class taught me a lot about myself, and my relationships with these mentees and other mentors have lasted for years now. In our community of mentors it was all about learning from each other, whether it was about classes or other projects we were doing. We would always have something to talk about and to relate to.

Here, Ashley described how her experience was “all about learning from each other,” and pointed out that this type of experience and the multiple perspectives it provided helped her to learn about herself, as well. She also called the group a “community,” another concept that was discussed earlier in this chapter. Being able to learn from and with this community, and building lasting relationships, was also something that Elizabeth spoke about. About her interactions with her mentees, she said,

We are on the same level; we sort of have similar life experiences that we are going through. Not only do I give them advice about what they may be struggling with as far as course work or anything, it’s more we are learning. I am learning myself, as well. I may be learning how to teach someone some things better or how to communicate better—which is what I learned with my conversation partner—and just how to build better relationships.
In this description, we can again see common elements of collaborative and relational learning and how, in these interactions, not only is the mentee learning, but the mentor is learning, as well, on a number of levels.

The previous examples, from Ashley and Elizabeth, specifically discuss learning from one’s peers, as either fellow mentors or in a peer mentoring situation. Erin, however, extended this idea to her classroom experience, as a teacher, saying, “as a teacher, that’s how I teach best is when my students learn from me, but I also learn from my students.” She went on to also relate this to what she learned by attending a professional conference, and being able to learn from and with colleagues: “you’re not always gonna know everything about your topic . . . and, if you could learn from other people, you know, if you can converse back and forth [it will expand what you know].”

These examples also describe a hidden curriculum: learning as part of mentoring that students do not even, necessarily, realize is occurring (see Margolis, 2001 for more on hidden curriculum). However, these mentors are learning about themselves, as well as about the construct of mentoring, about professionalism and professional and academic values, about others, and about teaching and learning, throughout the entire process.

Emma’s photo elicitation (see Figure 7) describes the idea of reciprocal learning, in the greater context of relational learning. Her caption reads, “Peer mentoring is how we build and learn from our relationships with others. It is about using our relationships to learn and teach. It’s informal and fun but still very meaningful.”
Peer mentoring is how we build and learn from our relationships with others. It is about using our relationships to learn and teach. It’s informal and fun but still very meaningful.

Figure 7. Emma
**Sharing experiences / Having shared experiences.** Similarly, mentors also described how their experiences in the mentoring project overlapped and connected. Karie said that the mentoring project “helped [her] realize the importance of talking through things with other people that are experiencing the same thing.” Being able to share experiences and find common ground with others is important in building a connection with other mentors, as was discussed previously.

Another perspective on having shared experiences was from Eric, who said that “what you actually did was a smaller experience than getting together as a group and talking about everybody’s experience.” For Eric, the Relational Learning class was the biggest part of the mentoring experience. From his perspective, it didn’t matter which projects the mentors chose to participate in—how they chose to experience mentoring. What really made it a “mentoring experience” (or relational learning) was bigger than each of the pieces: it was the act of getting together and discussing the process and the ideas and the struggles, and finding commonalities and ways in which the mentors could relate their classmates’ situations to their own and then find ways to think about them differently that was the most important.

**Hearing others’ perspectives.** Mentors also valued the opportunity and space that the Relational Learning class, as well as the mentoring experience, provided to hear different perspectives about similar topics and situations. Emma said, “It’s always so interesting to hear different perspectives on things. And it’s interesting to hear Anne’s perspective on things, because she has so much more experience than the rest of us.” Being able to hear others’ perspectives and experiences and compare them to their own
was an opportunity for learning for these mentors. It also allowed them to consider different possibilities and outcomes, both individually and as a group, and helped them expand their thinking around these situations. According to Jessica, being able to reflect with the class helped her to “see [that she] would have changed something about” how she acted and reacted in certain situations. Other mentors also described these conversations as enjoyable. Sarah said, “I enjoy being able to, you know, get feedback off my experiences to better understand a different way of thinking about my experiences—about my observations.” This is important, as group discussions are not always favored by students; however, Sarah described being engaged in the conversations, and comparing and contrasting others’ experiences to her own.

Another benefit to these discussions was the effect they had on students’ individual work. Eric said,

Thinking about [these experiences] in a different way is what it helps you do [your own project], because you look at your [participant] observations and what you’re recording- you look at them and then you write about them again in the paper and kind of, like, start to see what this means to your life, what it meant for [those involved], possibly what it could mean for somebody else.

Being able to see things in different ways and being able to consider how situations could be constructed or experienced differently, based on who is involved, is a valuable perspective for teachers to develop. Additionally, Eric’s reflection highlights the influence that these group discussions, and this way of being with others—reflecting and considering possibilities—had on his own writing. He described working through the
notes he took during a participant observation activity, as well as the final paper he wrote, based on those observations, as a process of considering what else could have been, or might have happened.

**Reflecting processes.** A key component to these discussions was the reflecting processes format that was used in the Relational Learning class. Using both the guiding principles behind the reflecting processes (discussed in Chapter 1), as well as, at times, forming actual reflecting teams and using them as reflecting processes, the mentors had space to discuss and think critically about a variety of topics. Again, reflecting processes “[are characterized by techniques] that involve multiple perspectives, listening and talking positions, a nonjudgmental curious stance, respectfulness, collaboration, and mutual exploration” (Kleist, 1999, p. 274). Eric described his experiences with reflecting processes in the following way:

We had four of us sit in a group and speak to each other only for about ten minutes. Then the rest of the group watched and they kind of just listened to us while we talked to each other and we weren’t talking to them at all; it was just us four, so it’s kind of like a very small group. We just talked about our experience of what we normally do with the whole group. Us four talked about it. When we were done talking about it the whole group commented on it and we weren’t allowed to talk. Then we talked to each other [again] and put in our own thoughts. It’s almost like they were watching us and observing what we were talking about in our-. They discussed, they observed us on observations on observing us. So it’s kind of like they got to look at what we were doing so much...
differently than what we were used to. We got to hear feedback on our discussion in a much different way than what we had previously done and kind of change things up.

This description gives an overview of the back-and-forth process of listening, thinking, and discussing a specific situation. Some of the mentors who were interviewed discussed the benefits of this way of exploring topics, including Matt, who said that participating in the reflecting processes “has helped me a lot in my life. It has allowed me to become an actual listener.” He also described it as a “practice of actual communication.” The structure of the reflecting processes, as previously described, creates space for reflection and thoughtful communication. Jessica described it as a way to “just think, without constantly trying to think of what you are going to say next.” Jessica’s comment addressed how participation in this type of a conversation is reflective and provides the time to be reflective, as opposed to feeling the need to keep up with the dialogue/conversation as it happens. Kallie also noted that this process helped her “focus more on listening to what people were saying and kind of understanding where they are coming from.” This focus on listening, and on concentrating specifically on what was at the heart of the issue, was also mentioned by Michael, who said that the process enabled the participants to find out “what really stood out to us and then, through that, we would work through the problems.” This is similar to Andersen’s (1995) explanation of the process, which says,
If we let a particular issue be passed from outer talks to inner talks back to outer talks, and so on, we might say that the issue is passed through the perspectives of various inner [listening] and outer [out loud] talks. (p. 18)

All of these descriptions of the reflecting processes point to the ways in which they create and invite meaningful, thoughtful, open, reflective conversations, where participants can explore ideas through this inner and outer talk.

Although this process was described by many mentors as valuable and thought-provoking, it was not always an easy activity for them. Kallie, who earlier noted that the reflecting processes helped her to really listen to what was being said, also pointed out that “it was really hard to do at a certain point, because you wanted to, like, say something—but you can’t.” This exercise in stepping back and giving others space to talk was, at times, very challenging. Erin described it as “a little bit frustrating,” but was also quick to say that “it was a very good activity, I think.” These contrasting feelings toward the reflecting processes, both that it was difficult and caused them to struggle a little bit, but that it was also a valuable way to learn more about conversations and stopping more-typical conversation dynamics to actually listen to what people are saying, again connects with the idea of a difference that makes a difference. It also supports the idea of creating space for students to have the opportunity to be challenged and learn in ways that, from their accounts, are not typically available in their other classes.

Engaging in the reflecting processes was also a way that students were able to learn more about themselves and about how they could translate these types of conversations to their everyday lives, as well as to teaching. Erin recalled her experience:
It really made you think about listening because a lot of times, and this is something I noticed myself and with other people, we listen and, as soon as someone says something that makes us think of something, we just want to interrupt them and, “oh okay, well I’m just worried about me and what I want to say and what I want to gain from this conversation.” And with that activity, it was a lot of, “I have to wait until they’re finished. I have to listen to all of what they’re saying, instead of just asking immediately.” And a lot of times, what I’ve learned, I—so I do that now. And the way you think a conversation is going to go with someone, they can make a totally different point by the end of their conversation if you just let them talk and say full circle what, exactly, they were going to say instead of, just, they bring up a point, but maybe they’re going to counterpoint that one second later.

Above, Erin described how she learned to identify when she was actively listening and thinking about what the speaker was saying, versus when she was focused more on trying to make her own point or jumping to a conclusion about where the conversation was headed. The ability for a teacher to actively listen to her students, not jump to conclusions, and hear the real point that is being made is a valuable skill. This example also describes Bakhtin’s (1981) definition of an utterance, which is a phrase or sentence that has been given meaning by the speaker, and invites some sort of response from another. Part of what makes an utterance such is that it has a defined beginning and end, which is signified by a change in speakers. This is demonstrated in Erin’s description of
the reflecting process, as she recalled the value in letting the speaker finish an utterance, before she began her own.

**Layers of mentoring: Mentors mentoring mentors.** Mentors also frequently discussed the layers that were present within the structure and dynamics of the mentoring project. While mentors described a heterarchical relationship with one another and with their mentees, it was also clear that mentors helped and supported each other in the mentoring process, based on their level of prior experience. Emma pointed out that the mentors “mentor each other, actually.” As new mentors come in to the Relational Learning class, the mentors who have already been in the class—sometimes for a semester, sometimes for two or three—work with them and help them work through some of the challenges of being a mentor. Erin described this process during her interview:

> If [the new mentor] had questions, then they could talk to other mentors about how to be a better mentor. So, layers of mentoring were going on. Even though we were all supposed to be mentoring about ed psych, but the mentors of [the Educational Psychology course] needed a mentor about how to be a mentor.

This layering process, with more-senior mentors working with newer mentors, happened often, and organically. Jessica described it as a “circling process,” saying, “when I was mentee, I was being mentored and then I went on to be a mentor, so I was mentoring the mentees. I feel like it’s just kind of a circling process.” The idea of a circling process is important, because it describes the mentors as both learners and teachers. This ongoing—circling—process implies that these mentors are always learning and evolving,
and helping others to do the same: there is no beginning of learning (i.e., mentors always have some kind of experience that they can share, depending on the situation), and there is also no end (i.e., there is always something else that the mentors can learn, or someone else that they can learn from). This learning is not just limited to course content or being a mentor. In Matt’s interview, he discussed how mentors “take things from each other,” and mentioned specifically that this could be in terms of professional development or in learning how to deal with “stumbling blocks” as they relate to their role within the Educational Psychology course. Michael also discussed the importance of this overlapping of new and old mentors. He said, “That’s why I think it’s so important to have [multigenerational] mentors, because it sort of gives us a direction and . . . anything that was worked on the previous semester can sort of be continued upon and built upon.”

The opportunity for continuity and stability enables the building of relationships and the evolution of ideas and initiatives. Without this type of layering, there would be less of an opportunity for this evolution of projects, ideas, and relationships.

The idea of this circling process as something that happens organically is something that Emma described in her reflection, after reading through her transcript excerpts I had sent her. She wrote,

Reading your reflection here makes me see how much of a cycle this mentoring process becomes. Mentor becomes the mentee who then becomes the mentor to others. It’s really cool how it’s sort of in our human nature to mentor others and use this collaborative process. We do it without even realizing we are doing it.
In her description, Emma said that this process of mentoring—helping, collaborating—is “in our human nature” and so ingrained that many do not realize that it is even happening, until reflecting on it at a later time. Mentoring as something that happens without even realizing that it is occurring is something that was also pointed out by Erin, during her interview:

No one ever said the sentence “mentors are mentoring the other mentors,” but I think Anne, obviously, probably encouraged us to all be best friends with each other, like she always does, and she said, “if you have any questions, new mentors, ask the old mentors.” And so, I’m sure there was a level of it—understanding what was going on—but I don’t think we recognized the irony, I guess, that we were mentoring each other, until right now when I’m talking about it again, for me anyway.

Erin’s comments address both the idea that the process of mentors mentoring mentors, and the layering of levels and types of experiences, is an organic process as well as one that is circular. Even though Erin was a mentor for multiple semesters, she was still able to be in a position of knowing as well as one of not knowing and continuing to learn. Specifically, in this situation, she described how she had not realized some of the underpinnings of the experience until she discussed them with me, demonstrating this organic process of engaging and reflecting, and how it can lead to new insights. It also, again, described the idea of forming while informing, as Erin stated that she hadn’t even considered these ideas until she began describing them to me.
Support system. While the act of being there for their mentees is an important aspect of mentoring, as described earlier, it is also important that mentors are there for their fellow mentors. Through the process of mentoring and participating in the mentoring project, students were able to develop a support system for each other. Emma talked about how she felt supported by her fellow mentors, saying that it was beneficial to know that, when she got to the Relational Learning class, “‘she’ll be there, I get to see her.’ Even if we don’t hang outside of class, you know that if you’re struggling with something you have someone you can be like, ‘did you get this?’ and [they] can explain it [to you].” Here, Emma described having a support system as different from having a friendship or a relationship that extends outside of class. More importantly, she described a form of security or source of comfort, where she knows that someone will be available for her to ask questions and discuss ideas or problems with. Kelly described a similar experience, where mentors worked to support and look out for each other, especially when times were difficult:

I think that the fact that mentors want to be involved with the mentoring project and Relational Learning course, not that they have to be for course credit matters. And we’re together all the time. We’ve been, all of us have been together and kind of “done” mentoring, because you know, even if somebody’s like, “I don’t think I can [be in the Relational Learning class],” like, “I’m too busy next semester,” we are like, “no, you are. You don’t have a choice.” So then we kind of pull each other back into it.
Here, Kelly was describing how the mentors are there for each other, to support and encourage each other. She also described how the mentors hold each other accountable, in terms of what they find important or valuable, and keep each other motivated. This is in line with Johnson and Johnson (1985) have said, describing the social component of motivation:

> Motivation to learn is inherently interpersonal, created by internalized past relationships and by current interpersonal influences. Other people provide the purpose, meaning, and support for learning by providing approval and respect for one’s academic accomplishments . . . Humans, not machines, materials, personality characteristics, or external appeals, motivate humans. (p. 250)

This resonates with several relevant theoretical perspectives, including the social constructivist work of Vygotsky (1986) and social construction (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Gergen, 1999; Gergen & Gergen, 2004). When Kelly stated that she feels it is important that the mentors want to be involved with the class and the mentoring project, and are not involved because they have to be, she was describing the reasons for which she and other mentors are motivated to participate in this project. She is also describing how they find motivation in each other, and work to maintain each other’s motivation to learn and grow. By holding each other accountable, mentors are ensuring that they all stay connected, stay supported, and remain active in an experience that has proven to be a source of learning, growth, and educational value.

The importance of having a support system was also described in terms of having *future* support. Elizabeth noted that one of her motivations for becoming a mentor, when
she initially made the decision, was for the support and the connections that would come with it. She said, “I know that, once I get into the bulk of my programs, that I’m going to need a lot of support from people from before, or [who] are going through it at a different time than I am.” For her, the relationships she has built with her fellow mentors will still be valuable, once the Relational Learning class is over. The relationships she has built will enable her to continue to seek support and advice from this group. Her comments also relate to the cyclical nature of mentoring, as seeking advice from other mentors puts her in a not-knowing position, looking to others who have been through that situation to provide guidance.

Finally, some mentors noted that experiencing this type of collegial relationship will be beneficial to their futures as teachers. Emma considered the possibility of a work setting that was similar to her Relational Learning class. She talked about being able to treat all of my co-workers . . . like they’re like people from my Relational Learning class. So, like, form relationships with them and use them to—like, we can all help each other. So if someone has a problem, or someone is having a bad day, make sure that we have these relationships, so that we will be support systems for each other.

It is clear that Emma values having—and being able to create—a support system. From her experiences, she concluded that “we all just need to be there for each other kind of and you can’t get through the world without having a support system.” Being able to reference how interactions occurred in the Relational Learning class will be one way that
she will be able to begin to create this type of support with colleagues, once she begins teaching.

**Motivation and inspiration.** Mentors also acted as sources of motivation and inspiration for each other. For some, this motivation comes in the form of a combination between what the Relational Learning course and the mentoring experience, as well as the relationships that have been formed, have to offer. Matt described how these impacted his motivation:

I’ve had the ability to re-take the same class and re-learn—not *re*-learn the same information, but do continuing work on my own education on mentoring and relational learning and constructivism with the same group of people that we’ve become like a big family, like, you know? So, it’s a reason to stay motivated and it’s a reason to stay, like, keep your head in the game, even though sometimes you don’t want to.

In his description, he discussed how the more in-depth learning that he gets to do, coupled with the relational dynamics that he has experienced, create the motivation for him to continue to engage in these activities and relationships, as well as to continue to learn.

Mentors also were inspired by those that they mentored. Recalling some of her talks with her conversation partner, Emma described how she was inspired by his choice to study abroad:

I remember he told me that he came here because he got bored with his life. He had been teaching for eight years and really wanted to do something else, so he
just came to the United States. I remember reflecting, later, that I was so inspired by him; he’s so brave for something that—I could never do that. I thought about transferring schools and I couldn’t even do it.

The opportunity for Emma’s conversation partner to share that story with her gave her a different perspective on choices that she has made, and the factors that have influenced her decisions. For some, being a mentor has created space for them to be motivated and inspired by their fellow mentors and/or their mentees.

**Anne as a mentor.** Relational learning is also present within the relationships that the mentors built with Anne, the project director, and how they spoke of these relationships. Throughout their interviews most mentors spoke of Anne either explicitly or implicitly as a mentor, describing qualities that they attribute to her, which are also consistent with what they have expressed as a “mentor.” One of the mentors that spoke to this point was Kelly, who said,

> I think Anne is like a mentor to all of us . . . I think that goes without saying. You know, she helps us with anything that we need and she helps, you know, guide us . . . if we have a problem, you know, we can always call Anne. I just think of her in that way, too, that, like, we’re mentoring for her, but she’s mentoring us, and there’s just, like, this whole chain.

Kelly’s words describe many of the characteristics that these mentors have outlined as being a part of what makes a mentor, a mentor. Specifically, she points to Anne’s helping orientation, her ability to guide students through problems and situations, and her presence when she is needed. Kelly also described layers of mentoring, which were
discussed earlier, and how there is mentoring occurring at all levels, between Anne, the mentors, and the mentees. This sentiment was also shared by Erin, who described Anne as a mentor not only in relation to her experiences with the mentoring project, but also in a professional sense:

I would consider Anne a mentor in my professional life, completely outside of Ed Psych and I know I could call her about anything and she would help me . . . because she’s obviously, she has her Ph.D., she’s been through all these programs and I think it’s understanding, also, that you get the most feedback and you do the best when you talk to someone who has actually done what you’re about to do, like Anne.

In this account, Erin described Anne as someone who has more experience in specific situations for which she might need guidance; as someone who is willing to help; and as someone with whom she can discuss options and ideas.

Christy also stated that she would consider Anne “very much a mentor” to herself, saying,

I felt comfortable and I felt like I grew almost as an educator in her class, more than I did in other classes. She pushed us and wanted us to excel. She wanted to know you personally and on an academic level, and not every teacher wants to do that.

Here, Christy emphasized the relational aspect of Anne as a mentor, as well as how Anne was there to both support and challenge her. Christy also described how she felt “comfortable” in Anne’s classes, and was able to grow as an educator from that
experience. Again, this is an example of experiencing a difference that makes a
difference, where Christy was comfortable enough in these situations—to a point where it
was okay for her to be uncomfortable—to work hard and let herself be “pushed,” and
have the opportunity to grow.

Matt also described Anne as a mentor, as well as a “personal inspiration.” About
his experiences as a mentor and his relationship with Anne, he said,

She challenged me on a daily basis and showed me so much love that it really
motivated me to search within myself to become a good teacher, and a role model,
[and] to be involved in the process of learning any time I can.

Again, the idea of being challenged and having the space to learn and grow can be seen in
these statements. Being inspired in this way has helped Matt to learn and continue to
want to learn, as well as affecting his understanding of what a “good” teacher and role
model are, and how he wants to be seen in those roles.

**Experience as Being Invested**

Mentors in this mentoring project felt a sense of *investment*. This theme
exemplifies the finding that part of being a mentor is being invested in the mentoring
relationship. Being invested, in this case, means to be intentionally and actively
participating as a mentor. It also means to be participating fully and not just in incidental
relationships and acting passively or reactively but, instead, being invested in another
person’s life, success, and challenges. This point is emphasized by Kelly: “You have to,
if you’re going to take the [Relational Learning] class and you’re going to do it, I mean,
*you have to do it*. . . . and kind of put yourself into everything that you’re doing.”
Another example, by Matt, described a negative case of investment by the mentor to whom he was originally assigned when he took the Educational Psychology course, and then the investment that a different mentor showed him:

My [original] mentor did not help me out much. But there was another girl who was mentoring, who we ran into in the library one day, that helped me out a ton.

So, I don’t think it’s so much about who’s assigned to you as just, like . . . it shows you who’s willing to help.

In this example, Matt did not, originally, have a mentor who seemed to be invested in this mentoring experience. However, he was able, through his own initiative, to connect with a mentor who was willing to spend time working with him, answering his questions, and helping him to be successful with his assignment.

Finally, being invested addresses the investment in themselves that the mentors are making. While they are investing in others, they are also investing their time and energy into a process that creates space for learning and affects them, as mentors and teachers, as well. This investment does not always result in an immediate payoff or tangible benefit; however, many of these benefits may be realized at a later time.

**Being a partner in the learning process.** Being invested requires that mentors are not just assistants for the lesson plan project that the Educational Psychology students complete, but that they take an active role in helping their mentees with questions about the program, or being a student, or any other topic that they feel they can speak to or relate with, including offering support as others go through personal situations. Jane described a mentor’s investment by explaining that being a mentor means “being a
partner in the learning process, growing, helping someone along in their skills not just from the surface level, but on a deeper level of all there is in life—whatever it is.” This sentiment seems especially relevant to the mentor-mentor relationship, which Michael articulates in the following way: “We all, one, can depend on each other and, two, rely on each other for certain things. So once you get into this program and you build the relationships, you don’t want to let anybody down.” Saying that the mentors “depend” and “rely on” each other suggests that they really feel that they are “in this” together; that part of the crux of these relationships is that they know that they are not alone in the experiences and struggles they encounter. In these examples, it is clear that mentoring requires a level of investment in the lives of others; it is not something that starts and ends with only a task-based focus. Investment includes the qualities of dedication and commitment—mentors are bound by this relationship and serious about being there for their mentees and their other mentors—but goes beyond those terms. Investment also carries the sense that these mentors are both getting and giving something; that there is value in the relationships, whether that relationship is that of mentor-mentee or mentor-mentor.

Sarah pointed out that investment is important on the mentee’s end, as well. She summed this up by saying,

The harder you [as mentees] work, the better bang for your buck, the better your project will be, whatever. The students that got a good grade—that me and Jane [another mentor] worked with—got betted grades than the other students who were doing mediocre work, didn’t get much help or didn’t care what their mentors
were talking to them about . . . if you get help from mentors and you actually
listen to them, you will increase your productivity—your grade—more than not.

In Sarah’s statements, it is clear that mentoring is a two-way relationship, where both
parties need to be invested. If the mentor is not invested in her mentee, the mentee will
struggle. Conversely, if the mentee is not invested in her relationship with the mentor,
her outcomes may suffer. Having both parties invested in the relationship and in working
together will create the most successful results. Eric’s photo elicitation (see Figure 8)
described this idea of being a partner in the process of learning. He discussed why he
wanted his photograph taken in this specific situation, saying,

The picture of Brandon and me is meant to portray the importance of teamwork
during the peer mentoring program. We worked together quite a bit during the
semester and, because we were both part of the same mentor group, we worked
together in our everyday studies quite a bit. In this particular photo, I had met
with Brandon in one of the computer labs on campus to look over some of the
material for our final exam. Teamwork is an essential part of any profession and
that's basically what this photo says.

He chose to caption his photograph, simply, “TEAMWORK.”
"TEAM WORK"

Figure 8. Eric
**Longevity.** Investment also suggests longevity, sometimes in the sense of building more-permanent relationships (both with mentees and with other mentors). Matt recalled his experiences as a mentor, and how the relationships he formed with other mentors, as well as the help that they can provide, spans over time, and is not limited by the course they are currently taking:

> When any of us have problems going on whether . . . at home, whether it’s just like a break-up or anything like that, we have someone we can talk to. We have someone we can talk to about the Praxis. We have someone we are able to study with and who’s actually going to take an invested interest in our life, not just because we’re in the same class together. So, those relationships last beyond just a semester.

In her interview, Kelly also described how longevity and investment are important:

> I don’t think that [mentoring] would work when people [say], “oh, well, I just, I won’t do it all the time” or, “I’ll only do it sometimes” or, “I can’t go,” you know, “for two weeks and I just don’t care.” I think that you have to really care about what you’re doing.

Longevity can also be seen, in this mentoring experience, as time invested now for future benefit, as opposed to immediate gain. Often, mentors report that they participate for reasons that include gaining experience for future jobs, building relationships, and influencing others. These reasons do not have an immediate payoff for the mentors. Instead, mentors invest their time now and hope that they will benefit in the future from having had these experiences. Ashley discussed investment, saying,
In mentoring, first of all, you have to have motivation, and you have to have that “oomph” to really be focused and really be on the ball with what you’re getting into because I think a lot of people just come in thinking, “Oh, I’ll probably meet with them once. I’ll just go into the class a few times and be done,” which, that’s not what you should get out of it. It should be an experience that you should really look at to grow on. So, you should look at your peer mentees as friends, and you should hang out with them and really be a mentor, not only for the class, but for whatever road they’re going down.

In Ashley’s description, it is clear that she believes that there is an investment that goes into a mentoring relationship with the expectation of some kind of future outcome, whether that is a relationship with your mentees, professional or personal growth, or experience. Additionally, some mentors also engage in “outside” experiences, such as attending and presenting at local and national education conferences. For these, they get no course-related or tangible benefits (no money, no course credit), and often have to pay out of pocket for some or all of the expenses incurred through travel, registration, and other, related costs, as well as take time out of work or personal lives, in order to attend the conference. Even so, many mentors believe that this is a worthwhile undertaking. An example of this, shared by Erin, described how she was able to make connections between the experiences she had at a conference, as a mentor, and from inside the classroom. She recalled this experience, saying,

[It] was definitely helpful for me. It was the first time I’ve ever presented at a conference. So, I mean, it was like the first time you do any major professional
[activity]. I remember the first day I went into my first classroom, my third semester at Kent. I was like, “oh my God, I’m so scared,” and that’s how I felt at this conference thing, because I’ve never presented at a conference before. I’ve been to them, but I didn’t really know what to expect on the other end of things and so it was definitely helpful, especially, [because] I’m going to graduate school in the fall, where I’ll obviously, hopefully, be doing things like that and so it was just a good way to have that experience . . . and then it also helps you think about, “okay, well, these are things I saw at a conference, so what are things I’m working on now that maybe I could potentially bring to a conference in the future?” And it just makes you more aware of, I think, the more perspectives you have on something, the more you can be aware of what you’re doing and the impact it will have [and how, as] a presenter, what I can do to make someone like a conference more, or [thinking about] “what did I do that people disliked, and how can I change that to make my presentations better in the future?”

From these experiences, she was also able to reverse her thinking and consider how her classroom experience could shape future experiences, either attending or presenting at a conference. Michael and Matt, who also discussed their attendance at and participation in conferences as mentors used these opportunities to begin to distinguish themselves, among graduate students and professionals/academics who already have graduate degrees. One of the mentors who chose to represent his experience through a photograph (see Figure 9) taken at a conference wrote the following for his caption:
Being a mentor means to help others grow in their education while allowing yourself to grow from those that you are interacting with. It is also an opportunity for professional development. In this picture I am at an educational conference with other mentors speaking on relational learning and the mentoring process.

*Figure 9. Matt*
Michael related one of his conference experiences to mentoring in the following way, saying that “it was just another aspect of what it was to be a mentor: To take what we’ve learned in the mentoring program [and share it with] the region.” To him, investing his time was a process of giving back, as well as something that would help him develop a professional identity. For Matt, his investment and conference attendance also meant access to conversations with individuals he was inspired by, as well as some who could offer support or guidance for his goals. He said,

You can sit there and have a conversation with [the other attendees, even though] you’re there at these conferences as an undergrad who doesn’t even have their degree yet and they already have their doctorate and they’re giving you the time of day and they’re seeing value in your words, it’s, it gives you a boost of confidence and it allows you to see that you can, like, do it, you can be there. And I’ve gotten so many business cards from people that have [said], “when you need help with grad school or when you need a recommend-, letter of recommendation for grad school, give me a call,” or, you know, “if you’re thinking about grad school here, or if you’re thinking about law . . . if you come here, I can help you and introduce you.”

This investment in beginning to carve out a place as a professional and scholar, as well as having the opportunity to network with other schools, is a valuable opportunity for the mentors who chose to attend conferences. As a mentor, Jay attended two conferences with the project director and me. He selected a photograph (see Figure 10) taken at one of the conferences he co-presented at to caption. It reads,
The mentoring project allowed me to attend and present at professional conferences around the area. Meeting new people and learning from them is what makes me a “professional” in my field . . . something that is invaluable to college students. Good times!

Figure 10. Jay
Commitment of time. Investment is also about a commitment of time. Even with the time constraints that many of these mentors faced, including with their own classes and school work, internships and student teaching, volunteering, jobs, families, and personal lives, mentors still found time to be invested in the project and in their mentees. Jane, for example, pointed out that she was “taking 21-24 credit hours and [didn’t need another class].” While this time commitment varies (sometimes smaller, sometimes larger, depending on the needs and number of mentees in a class), mentors still show up to Educational Psychology classes, Relational Learning classes, answer emails and phone calls, and stay after class time to help their mentees. This investment of time is not supplemented by pay and does not result in course credit required for the mentors’ specific programs of study (the course can only be taken as an elective). Kelly addressed the issue of credit, saying, “for a lot of us, too, this class isn’t even really counting for anything. I have all my electives.” Ashley described the investment of mentors’ time, by recalling informal conversations that she has had with mentors and other students in the teacher education program (i.e., outside of the mentoring project):

We [mentors] all come in [to other classes] and talk about Anne, like all this stuff that we’re doing with [mentoring in] Italy and everything like that. And everyone’s like, ‘What are you talking about?’ It’s like, “Oh, we take an extra class.” They’re like, “You’re joking. Like, you’d take an extra class on top of your other 18 credit hours?”

These mentors invest their time to help the Educational Psychology students; to help Anne and continue to work with and learn from her; to participate as conversation
partners; to mentor elementary school students; and to work on other projects to which they feel a connection. They do these things as a way to help others and invest in their futures, as opposed to doing so to fulfill program requirements or earn some kind of immediate reward (i.e., pay).

Michael also described being weighed down with a heavy class load, but finding enough value in the experience that he would join the group whenever he could:

I came whenever I could, and I would stop in in between [my classes]. We had a three hour class, and then we’d have a break. So, I would come in during the break and try to gain or grab whatever I could grab from what they were talking about right then, just to try and stay in the loop a little bit because I wanted to be there. But taking 21 hours, there was no possible way I could’ve taken it even. So, I did what I could.

Again, this account and the effort he put into making it to these classes to “grab whatever I could from what they were talking about right then” during his class breaks, illustrates the value he found the content, discussions, and relationships that were part of the class. Their statements demonstrate an investment in this process of relational learning, helping, connecting, and being present.

*Being invested in.* The idea of investment also includes mentors’ appreciation for teachers (or other mentors) who are invested in them, and their success. Matt talked about how it was Anne’s investment in him that made him stay in the class and, later, become a mentor. The previously-addressed sub-category Anne as a mentor is a piece that also fits well under this theme of investment: the mentors have seen her investment
in each of them and in the success of the mentoring project, and appreciate and recognize that this project would not be the same without that investment. Michael described how he is invested, in the following way:

   It’s to the point now, if I told Anne I was going to do something, the world could be ending and I would still be doing it because she has that much value in my life now, that I won’t let her down. With any other professor I’ve met in my life, if they ask me to do something and it wasn’t in my best interest, I would tell them, “go away.”

Michael also discussed, during his interview, becoming a mentor because of the positive experience he had in Anne’s class and wanting to extend that to others.

   Ownership. Finally, there is the idea of being invested in the program itself.

Several mentors, including Michael, have discussed wanting to further the project and find ways to expand or extend it.

   Now that I’m not in the education program anymore, I want to start, sort of bring another dynamic into it from a botany perspective and so I signed up for the summer in Italy, which, you know, I don’t know what we’ll be able to do in Italy . . . because we’ll be overseas and we won’t really be in our comfort area, but next semester, I signed up for the fall and I want to see what, you know, Anne already has; [she] is bringing ideas to the table and wants to talk about them soon. So, I really want to just, you know, bring another perspective into it.

This theme reflects mentors taking ownership of the mentoring project and the Relational Learning course, and bothering to do something with and for it, to make it better both for
themselves and for future generations of mentors. Karie and Jay also discussed this, during one of their interviews. Karie made the point that

Anne started it, but she . . . has your help. She’s got our help. She’s got people that have been doing it for how long, and now I mean, people like Jay and [me] coming back after a year. We’re trying to offer even more help.

The accessibility of these mentors—the fact that they are willing to help and make themselves available to come back and help, even after they have graduated and moved on in their careers—demonstrates that they feel a sense of ownership of the program, as well as the feeling that they have something that they can still give for its benefit. This is reinforced by the fact that five of the mentors I interviewed reflected this situation: They had all graduated and begun teaching careers, but returned in order to share their stories with me. Additionally, at the time I completed the annotations of the transcripts and sent them to the mentors for reflection, six more of the mentors who responded to me with comments and reflections had either already graduated or were graduating within the next few weeks and were no longer actively taking the Relational Learning class, but still chose to continue their engagement with and support of this study.

“Real Life” Experience. Mentors also appreciated the “real-life” experiences that they had, as part of the mentoring project and the Relational Learning course. Many of the mentors were able to articulate ways in which they were able to relate what they were learning or discussing as mentors to their lives outside of the classroom. Eric gave one example, as he was discussing the research project and the participant observation that the mentors conducted as part of the Relational Learning course. He said,
“researching skills are a big thing; the participant observation—I mean, that’s almost, like, you [can] take that into your life any time.” For him, learning how to observe and reflect and draw conclusions, as well as being able to look at a situation and think about different possibilities was something that was transferrable to and valuable for his personal life.

Emma had a similar experience, where she was able to relate what she had learned throughout her participation in the mentoring project to her life outside of the Relational Learning class and mentoring project, as well. As part of her reflection on her transcript, she wrote:

Reading back through [this transcript] makes me think of my experiences that I’ve had student teaching. I’m in a self-contained classroom in an elementary school. I have two grade levels in my classroom, so I do a lot of collaborating with other special education teachers, our paraprofessional, the support services, and general education teachers. I’ve seen how important it is to develop relationships with all of these people. When there are eight little sets of eyes staring at you, expecting you to know what you are talking about, know all the answers, and be able to explain it in way they can understand . . . it’s scary! You have to have people you can go to. I’ve seen the relationships my cooperating teacher has with her colleagues and it’s clear that she really needs them, just as they really need her. Relational learning is way bigger than just a class at Kent State, it’s how we learn and teach and grow. These relationships we form, whether we realize it or not,
are those layers of mentoring you talked about. We teach others while we learn from others. We support others and they support us. We really can’t do it alone.

Emma’s reflection touches on a number of points, but especially emphasizes the real-world value and implications of what she saw and learned through her experiences as a mentor. By engaging in these experiences, she was able to recognize similar situations and dynamics during her student teaching, and articulate the connections between the two. Ashley chose to focus on real life experience in one of her photo elicitations (see Figure 11). Her caption reads,

Being a mentor means to take different experiences you have and being able to use them through your learning experiences. In this picture I am conversing with my mentor teacher about my teacher action research project that I had been working on throughout the semester. I was able to use the knowledge of what I learned in the Relational Learning class and use it to help me with my research as a teacher.
Being a mentor means to take different experiences you have and use them throughout your career learning experiences. In this picture I am conversing with my mentor teacher about my teacher action research project that I had been working on throughout the semester. I was able to use the knowledge of what I learned in the Relational Learning class and use it to help me with my research as a teacher.

Figure 11. Ashley (b)
Experience as Challenge

Mentors experienced *challenges and challenging situations* in their mentoring roles. This theme describes how mentors faced obstacles and hurdles throughout their participation in this project. Some of these challenges had a negative feel, including frustration, disconnect, and the feeling that their help was not wanted. The challenges that the mentors faced, however, were not all negative. Many of these struggles had to do with learning how to handle new situations and pushing themselves to think critically and from multiple perspectives, and grow as both a person and a professional. *Experience as Challenge* addresses the reality of that situation: the complex personal, interpersonal, and logistic variables that affect each mentoring relationship. It also describes the relational nature of mentoring, it’s messy, individualized nature, and the complex dynamics involved in navigating being a mentor through new and different situations and experiences.

**Feeling disconnected.** One of the challenges that mentors faced was the feeling of being disconnected from the project, once they were no longer able to participate regularly. Michael, who chose to change his major to one outside of the education program, became too busy to participate in the mentoring project and enroll in the Relational Learning class, even though he would try to occasionally stop by and help, if he could. He reflected:

I have been really loosely tied [to the mentoring project] this semester, because of my prior commitments to the program I’m in and it’s sad, because I don’t feel that connection and I, the people who are in [the Relational Learning course] now
almost seem content with what we have and I want to keep driving it further and further.

In this statement, Michael described how he wished he was still able to participate and maintain the closeness of the program, as well as alluded to the fact that he was still invested in it and its outcomes. Specifically, he mentioned that he still participated as much as he could, and was still interested in the direction of the program and how he could “keep driving it further and further.”

The feeling of disconnect, however, does not only happen when mentors are too busy to participate with the project formally; some seem to simply want more interaction and more time to spend being mentors in this capacity. Brandon discussed this, saying,

I wish we met at least twice [a week] because . . . sometimes I [feel like] it’s been so long since we’ve had this class. And sometimes it just doesn’t . . . seem like a real class, not that, but it just, I don’t know, it doesn’t keep me connected with that class as it would if we met twice a week.

For him, only meeting once a week makes it seem less “real” and less-connected than it would if he was able to meet more often. This is a statement that I have heard mentors make previously, as well. When I conducted my pilot study, this was a common concern for the mentors. Matt also discussed feeling disconnected, as it relates to the relationships he has built within the group of mentors. He said:

I wish there was a way to find more time outside of the structure of Anne’s class, because I know that it’s not- while you’re in there, it’s good and the relationship
is there, but it seems like you walk out the door [and] a lot of it’s stopped. That’s been my experience.

This contrast between what he has said about the relationships that he has built—specifically, how important they have been to him—and about the disconnect he feels once he “walk[s] out the door” demonstrates that, while these relationships are real, and deep, they also are challenging to maintain, just as any other relationship might be.

**Frustration.** Another challenging situation that the mentors described was that, sometimes, they were paired with mentees who either did not seem to need or simply did not want the help of a mentor. Since many of the mentors have said that one of the reasons they participate in this project is because they want to help others, this is often a difficult experience for them. Talking about her relationship with her mentees as compared with some of the other mentor-mentee experiences she observed, Elizabeth said,

I guess I have a pretty good relationship with them, then, if they are willing to get in contact with me, and they want to see me. So yeah, I think it was pretty frustrating for those who really wanted to help and the mentees wouldn’t really respond—just didn’t care or anything.

She described having a relationship with her mentees, and noted their willingness to get in touch with her, contrasting it with the experience of mentors whose mentees were not responsive. The following is an experience described by Christy:

I got paired [with my mentees]. I don’t know if they picked me or not, but I got two students in [the] class. I gave them my email. They never emailed me, and
I’d email them to say, “Hey, how’s everything going?” And then nothing, so I
gave them my cell number, too. I was like, “If you guys aren’t emailers, you can
text me—anything.” Nothing. Nothing. I got one email from them, one time.
This was one example of a frustrating experience, where the mentor wanted to be helpful,
but her mentees did not seem to want any help.

Some mentors considered the reasons behind why this may have been happening.
These mentors recounted their experiences as students and compared them with their own
mentoring experiences, like Erin, who was an honors student as an undergraduate when
she took the Educational Psychology course. In her interview, she described the desire to
feel independent, especially as an “honors student” and the mindset that, as a “college
student,” students often feel that they should be able to do things on their own and that
seeking help is looked at in a negative light. Brandon also made this point, with regard to
the honors section in which he was a mentor. However, he also made it a point to say
that he thought that, even though they did not seem to want much academic help, they
were happy to have mentors in the class and still engaged in discussions with the
mentors. Christy brought up a similar point:

I found a connection between the Ed Psych students not wanting my help and [my
experience as a student:] I didn’t really want any tutoring or help when I was in
my Concepts class. So, I thought that was kind of an interesting connection. I
mean, I was going to them. They didn’t have to come to me. I was literally
putting myself right there in front of them, and saying, “here, come here” [but
they still did not come].
Some mentors also wondered if it was the “peer” part of peer mentoring that some of the mentees questioned. Considering her experiences as a new mentor and how her mentees might feel, Christy recalled,

I really didn’t know what to expect. I don’t know how I would handle having a peer mentor. I’ve never really experienced that, so, someone who is the same age as me, maybe even younger than me [also may not have]. I’m one of the younger [ones]—there aren’t a lot of peer mentors that are sophomores—I was like “oh my god these people think I’m going to try to come in here and boss ’em around!”

Being unsure of how they would be perceived by the mentees—their peers—was a sentiment shared by other mentors, as well. In their interviews, Erin and Michael both described similar situations, where they were concerned about how they would come across, and tried to be intentional in how they were interacting with and coming across to their to-be mentees. Kelly also rembered feeling this way:

I don’t think they really view us as mentors, if that makes any sense. I think that they view us as students who are there to help them, but in a way I think it could be good because maybe viewing us as, you know, a mentor would be more intimidating. Maybe it’s good that they only view us as students so they can actually come to us and ask us things that they feel more comfortable talking to us [about] than talking to a “mentor,” you know, somebody that is higher up.

What Kelly is saying here, that mentors could be viewed as “intimidating,” is the opposite of how this group of mentors generally seems to view themselves. Instead, they describe themselves as their mentees’ equals or, possibly, as a “half-step” up. This is a
comparison that I have heard from many of them, throughout our interactions, and is something that was addressed earlier, when I described the finding that mentors believe that a heterarchical relationship is important to mentoring. The “half-step” comes simply because they have had this experience in the Educational Psychology course, so they are more knowledgeable about this specific experience and can see the bigger picture in this specific situation. This difference in perspectives—how mentors view mentoring versus how they believe that their mentees perceive “a mentor”—may stem from other understandings of mentors or mentoring. Some of these are described later in this chapter, under Connotation: Experiencing the Word “Mentor.” Whether or not this is how the mentees—or Educational Psychology students who chose not to have mentors—actually perceived the mentors is unclear, and is beyond the scope of the present study. However, this is an issue with which a number of mentors were struggling, at least at times, throughout their mentoring experiences.

Another reason that was brought up by some mentors regarding unformed mentor-mentee connections was even more general: perhaps some people just do not want a “mentor.” This idea can be summed up by Elizabeth, who observed that “it’s hard to try to help somebody who doesn’t want to be helped.” This was a point that was discussed in some detail during Karie and Jay’s interview, as well. They considered the point that you cannot force someone to want a mentor—and, likewise, that you cannot force someone to want to be a mentor.

**Guilt.** Another challenge that some of these mentors faced was wondering whether or not they were helping their mentees enough. Jane struggled with this issue, as
she considered how much she did or did not help a fellow mentor, who was new to the project: “I didn’t spend as much time on her as I probably should have. . . . I was a horrible mentor to her. I guess I shouldn’t have even mentored her, now that I think about it.” Jane’s account described a struggle that some of the mentors faced, in thinking about how much “help” their help actually was. This leads to the question of whether it is “worth it” or not to be a mentor, if it does not feel as though one’s efforts are “enough.” In other words, is some mentoring still better than no mentoring? While these were not questions addressed in this study, it is important to include a response to Jane’s uncertainty and feeling as though she “probably shouldn’t have even mentored her.” The new mentor that Jane worked with, Sarah, felt that Jane “helped me out a lot. She had been a mentor before. So, she helped me to become pretty decent at mentoring [the mentees we worked with].” This difference in perspective, with one mentor thinking that she was a “horrible” mentor, and the other feeling as though she was “helped a lot” may be related to the expectations a mentor puts on herself, based on past experiences, and may not take into account the amount of benefit that was actually recognized, or the work that was actually accomplished. Kelly described a similar feeling:

I just felt like I was cheating them. Like, if I wasn’t able to be at every meeting and do everything personally, that they weren’t really getting that mentor experience that I had with [my mentor], when she came to every single thing. This feeling, that she was “cheating” her mentees by not being with them for “every single thing” that they did that related to their project, also exemplifies the difference between a mentor’s expectations for herself, based on her experience, and what is
required of her as a mentor for the class component and likely still seen as helpful or “enough” by her mentees.

Another way that guilt was described throughout these interviews was in terms of feeling “selfish.” During Matt’s interview, as he was discussing the reasons behind his decision to participate in the mentoring project initially, he said: “I think it’s going to help me get into a really, really good grad or law school. . . . And that’s me, purely being selfish.” Matt’s account illustrates a common sentiment among the mentors I interviewed: they felt guilty for participating in the mentoring project when the reasons for which they initially chose to do so included a benefit to them. In fact, during these interviews, there was only one mentor who gave reasons for becoming a mentor that included self-benefit, who did not qualify those reasons as being “selfish” or superficial. Instead, Ashley felt as though participating in the mentoring project was a “really good opportunity” and wanted to keep learning from and with a faculty member with whom she’d built a relationship and continue to have similar opportunities for growth.

Perceptions. Mentors also seemed to worry about how they would be perceived by their mentees. Specifically, they worried about issues that were hierarchical in nature, including age, class standing (i.e., sophomore, junior, etc.), and amount of experience. Karie said that her experience, initially, was “intimidating, because I was the person . . . with the least, I mean, I was the youngest [mentor].” Her statement is particularly interesting, because she begins to describe a hierarchy based on a limited amount of experience, but then changes the focus to her age. Although these two issues are not always related, some mentors worried that their age—either as younger than their
mentees or as the same age as their mentees—might be perceived as a lack of “enough” experience to “really” be able to help. Elizabeth had a similar experience, and was worried about how others would perceive her. This concern over perception was one reason that Elizabeth chose to work with mentees who she already knew, from outside of the Educational Psychology course. She was concerned that other students in the class “might not listen to me so much because a lot of them are my age, or maybe a little older, in my case.” In this example, it is important to point out that this was not the only reason that Elizabeth chose to work with mentees she had met prior to the start of this semester and her participation in the mentoring project; she also discussed how having an existing relationship, as well as a certain level of trust already established, was beneficial in this situation. However, it is important to note that these feelings do exist for these mentors, and may need to be explored further.

Another way that some mentors perceived hierarchy was at conferences in which they presented. Karie discussed how “presenting to adults is completely a different story, especially adults that are obviously older and more experienced.” While her experience ended up being positive, and Karie reported that she gained confidence in this type of situation, there was still, initially, the perception of a hierarchy, based on age and experience. Matt, also, had a similar experience, but discussed it more in terms of it being a “really cool” experience, where attendees “would come talk to us” and were interested in what the mentors had to say, even though he and Kallie, with whom he presented (along with the project director and myself), “were always the youngest ones there.” Through these accounts, mentors have described how they have experienced
uncertainly about how others perceive them, based on factors including their age and level of experience. While most of their experiences turned out to be very positive, this is an area that may need further consideration.

**Experience as Difference**

There are many ways in which mentoring—either the experience or the project itself—could be different. This theme reflects Andersen’s (1991) and Morrison’s (2001) work with the reflecting processes and, specifically, the question: *How could it (i.e., the mentoring project or mentoring experience) be different?* Mentors discussed how their experiences and outcomes varied, how the mentoring project was different across semesters and iterations, and what changes could be made that might benefit the project. This section can be summarized by Eric’s comment that “we all shared kinda different experiences.” While each of the mentors had a unique experience, these were created through many shared experiences and, as such, his use of “kinda” in describing variations within those experiences and within outcomes is very accurate.

**Types and meanings of “mentor.”** While an explanation of what a mentor “is” and “is not,” according to these mentors, has already been discussed, this section explores some additional dimensions and perceptions of what the word *mentor* describes, in the context of this project. Specifically, this section addresses differences in terminology; the connotations of mentoring; how mentoring varies in understandings, experiences, and context; and how mentoring or this mentoring project could be different.

**Connotation: Experiencing the word “mentor.”** In thinking about the meaning of the word “mentor,” it is important to also think about how individuals experience the
word itself. For many, peer mentoring is a term that most have likely heard, either through direct experience or through the experiences of others. However, the term mentor may elicit different meanings for different individuals. The connotation of the word mentor, as it can be either positive or negative, likely has a lot to do with how a mentoring opportunity is experienced, at least at first. Additionally, the term mentor may be unfamiliar to some, and/or some may not have intentionally considered how mentoring has (or has not) played a role in their past experiences. These factors could affect participation by either the mentor or the mentee and, therefore, is an important consideration in thinking about what a mentor is.

When asked what kind of connotation the word “mentor” had, Erin and Jay had the following exchange:

Erin: I think mostly negative, but I think if people have had a positive mentoring experience in their life prior to this and it’s been called mentoring [it might have a positive connotation], ‘cause when we did our one interview, I didn’t realize how many mentoring experiences I had until we thought about what mentoring is and compared them. But I think, especially since Ed Psych is a class you take maybe your second or third semester at Kent, I think people are, they just want to be like, “I’m at university now and I do all the work by myself and I’m, I don’t get babied anymore” and then all of a sudden, when there’s a mentor in their face who says “do you need help? I’ll help you, here I am, here’s my email, da-da-da” and they just get frustrated and they say . . .

Jay: “I’m an adult; I can do it by myself.”
Erin: . . . I also think a lot of people think maybe mentoring is a new, like, a nice term for tutor, which it’s not at all and I think, ‘cause a lot of people, again, I don’t think they know what mentoring actually is and so they just think it’s twenty tutors in the room to help you do your work and Anne’s worried they’re all gonna fail and here’s the mentors which isn’t true at all. I think it depends on the person, but I think a lot of the times, people haven’t had a lot of formal mentoring in their lives before they get to this class and it’s, it’s a lot of, “what is this? I don’t trust this. I can do it by myself.” I think people get offended, also.

This dialogue illustrates how the perception of the word, *mentor*, may affect how—or whether—students choose to be a part of the mentoring project and, specifically, whether they choose to have and then work with a mentor in the Educational Psychology course. Erin also described part of a conversation she had with her mentees, toward the end of one semester:

I remember having one talk with a set of my mentees . . . and they said, “thank you for being so helpful, but we wish we would have utilized you more, but it was, it was a weird thing for us. We never really, you know, like, we, we would have liked to work with you more, but we felt kind of weird about the whole situation” and they were like, “you were so nice, but we still didn’t know how to go about approaching it the right way or how to, how much we could ask of you or what, what exactly this relationship is.”

These perceptions of what a mentor is or is not clearly affect the actions of the mentees. Eric, also, shared a similar sentiment to what Erin described. He also used the term
“weird” to describe how he might feel, if he would have first encountered the Educational Psychology class and had the opportunity to have a mentor (Note: Eric did not have Anne as an instructor for the Educational Psychology class; mentors were not available in the section in which he was enrolled), explaining that having a mentor in high school, or in other classes in college is not something that everyone has experienced.

Another connotation of mentoring, as described by Kelly, was “almost like, I don’t want to say an idol, but, almost somebody that they look up to and want to be more like.” For her, the idea that a mentor was something of an enigma seemed strange and unnatural. However, “when it turned out like mentoring—the traditional mentoring—‘I have taken this class I can help you do it,’ that makes sense to me.” Her connotation of mentoring, initially, had been one that made her think of a relationship in which she would have been uncomfortable, or which seemed unrealistic. This may also be one reason that mentors seem unsure of themselves and how much they will be able to help their mentees, as discussed previously. Instead, in learning more about what a mentor was, in this specific situation, it helped her understand that mentoring can be less-formal and more spontaneous than it seemed in her initial understanding.

**How mentoring varies: Understandings, experiences, and context.** One way that the dynamics of mentoring can change are simply between and among participants, based on personalities and situational dynamics. To illustrate this, Karie described it in this way: “A mentoring relationship will be defined and will be different for each person or for each mentor-mentee partnership.” In addition to her focus on differences, it is also important to note that she uses the word *partnership*—which implies a multi-directional,
egalitarian exchange, as opposed to a one-way stream of ideas or directives. As previously discussed, mentoring is a collaborative and participatory relationship, where both the mentor and the mentee have input and, ultimately, where the mentee makes his or her own decisions, based on guidance from the mentor. Another way that the mentoring situation can be different is based on the mentors’ previous experience and/or participation in this mentoring project. Many of the mentors participate over the course of several semesters and, as such, they bring their prior experiences with them and make adjustments in their approach and style, based on what was more or less useful. Jane described this type of experience and how she approached a new semester of mentoring: “What I did this year that was different from last year is that I sent an email to my mentees in full detail. . . . Because I know when I was a mentee it was awful and we had no idea what was going on.” In this example, she uses her previous experiences as a mentor, as well as her experience taking this class and as a mentee to inform her approach to a new semester, to be as helpful as she could for her mentees and meet their needs. These examples demonstrate that, while this organic approach to mentoring—trial and error and making adjustments from one semester to the next, based on what works or does not—can lead to uncertainty and problems when it is unsuccessful, it can be very beneficial when mentors do find what works for them.

Mentor vs. . . . Also important in describing mentoring and what can be different is parsing out the nuances between mentoring and other, similar activities. The two most-commonly discussed were the differences between mentoring and tutoring and mentoring
and teaching. Erin described some of these differences, in addition to touching on the importance of having some kind of framework for what a mentor is:

I think with tutoring, because tutoring’s also something I did while I was at Kent, it’s like, “hold your hand and I’m going to make sure you do this correctly;” you know, because most people pay for tutoring, or if you’re at university, it’s usually drop in, which is nice because it’s free. But people who do tutoring outside of the university pay a lot of money for tutoring. So, it’s . . . you’re really supposed to see results, I think. And then I think that’s . . . because I had never really heard the term mentoring used before. I mean, I had, but I don’t think I really had a, when you hear a vocab word, you have associations with it and you know of examples of what it’s supposed to . . . Like when I say tutoring, people think of a tutoring setting. When you say mentoring, you don’t really think of, for me anyway when I first started mentoring, I couldn’t think of what exactly mentoring was. What it would look like, how it was structured out, what it was, what exactly would entail . . . I wonder how many other students feel this way? Most have likely heard the term, but how many could give an example or articulate a distinction between mentor/tutor, mentor/teacher, etc.? So, I think it was finding the right balance. I think it’s being available, but not . . . I would check in on my mentees probably every two to three weeks. I would email them and be like, “Hey, I’m still here if you have any questions, or I’ll be in class if you want to ask me, too.” But it wasn’t like I called them every single day and said, “Are you
doing your lesson plan? Are you doing your homework? Did you get your quiz back? How’d you do?” It’s not as much hand-holding as tutoring is, I think.

In her thoughts, it is clear that Erin makes a distinction between the amount and type of help that occurs in a tutoring relationship versus a mentoring relationship. She explained that tutoring entails much more accountability than a mentoring relationship. In a tutoring relationship, she noted that there may be a financial investment and, with it, the expectation of a certain set of outcomes—possibly increased performance or skills, or the completion of a specific task. The tutor has the responsibility to work with the tutee to arrive at this point; the tutee has the responsibility to work with the tutor to reach that specified level. In many ways it is a more-structured, tutor-led situation, with specific goals, and, likely, a specific time frame in which the tutoring is completed. Contrasting this with mentoring, Erin described how, with her mentees, she checked in on them for support, but did not play a role where she monitored their activity or was responsible for specific outcomes. She also articulated that her role was to be available and to offer support if it was needed. These mentors frequently discussed this less-structured, mentee-led approach as a primary difference between the tutoring and mentoring relationship.

Jay also described an important aspect of the mentoring relationship that is typically not present in a tutoring relationship: “we’re learning just as much as, if not more than, the students themselves are, you know, we’re not there to teach them as teaching assistants, we’re there to mentor them and, you know, help them through the experience.” In this description, Jay made two important points: that mentors are
learning and active participants in the mentoring experience and that they are there to
guide them, as he said, “through the experience.” Karie illustrated this point in more
detail, by making the distinction between focusing on small-scale skills and knowledge
versus larger-scale, big-picture ways of understanding: “A tutor would sit there and help
you and practice it and teach it, and a mentor’s going to try and enhance that a little bit
more with support and experiences and suggestions and a little bit more.” In all of these
distinctions, the major differentiator is the focus of help: in tutoring, the focus is
task-based, specific, and tutor-led. In mentoring, the focus is on larger-scale advice,
embraces a more-general sharing of experiences, and is driven by contributions by
both the mentor and the mentee.

There are also differences between mentoring and teaching, which some mentors
noted. Erin also described the similarities between mentoring and teaching, by saying,
I think mentoring is teaching but, I think, that’s my definition of teaching. I think
a lot of people have a different perspective of what teaching is. . . . I think my
perspective of teaching is very child/learner centered, as much as it can be in the
systems that exist already with testing and, you know, as much as you can do
child/learner centered and as much scaffolding and guidance you can do without
directly feeding them the answers. So, I think mentoring is like teaching . . . to
me. But that’s just how I describe teaching.

In this description, Erin acknowledged that this is the way she understands the definition
of teaching and that not everyone might share the same understanding. She also
discussed how mentoring and teaching are “just a different kind of relationship [and]
mentoring helped me separate that relationship.” Having the experience of being both a mentor and a student teacher has helped her parse out the differences between mentoring and teaching, and has helped her to understand where they are similar and where they diverge. Mentors also acknowledged differences in power (i.e., the teacher as being the person to assign grades, where the mentor is not); differences in “acceptable” dress (i.e., as a mentor, dressing as a student is completely appropriate when working with your mentees; however, as a teacher, there is a professional image to maintain, and business or business-casual dress is typically preferred); and differences in the ways they communicate (i.e., mentors sometimes gave out their cell phone numbers as a way to communicate, via talk or text. In a teacher-student relationship, this is something that teachers may be less likely to do, again, in keeping with maintaining a more-professional, less personal persona).

These roles, and how the mentors understand and describe them, is important not only in helping to define what a mentor is and what a mentor is not in this project, but also in putting these mentors’ experiences into context. Specifically, it helps in beginning to understand how these mentors differentiate various roles helps to understand their thinking and how they have made sense of their experiences.

Within the current experiences (as a mentor in the Educational Psychology course; as a conversation partner; or in the elementary school). The mentors’ experiences also varied based on the types of mentoring experiences in which they chose to participate. As previously discussed, mentors had the opportunity to choose from various mentoring experiences, including mentoring the Educational Psychology class;
mentoring at a local, inner-city elementary school; and participating in the Conversation Partners program. Based on these situations and on how the relationships took shape within them, mentors described and experienced them in various ways, including as more or less of a mentoring type of relationship.

In Kelly’s experience, being a conversation partner did not feel like a mentoring relationship. She said, “I didn’t feel like I was their mentor . . . I didn’t see it that way; it was more [focused on forming a] relationship and communication and less of ‘mentor’ communication.” This can be contrasted with Ashley’s experiences in the same program. Of her experience, she said,

I definitely think I was a mentor to my conversation partner, [because] telling him about my experiences being an RA he kind of got that motivation to really have the drive to become an RA, too [and I] helped him see the bigger picture.

Finally, Eric’s experience seemed to fall somewhere in-between these two. According to him,

Conversation Partners is like the peer mentoring. It’s a little different than the relation that you had with your actual mentees, mine at least was. I felt like it wasn’t so much focused on learning necessarily, not directly. I guess it was more a friendship thing.

Eric noted that the relationship with his conversation partner is “like” the relationships between the mentors and the mentees in the Educational Psychology class, but also “a little different.” This is a good contrast, as a way to see how these different types of
relationships and situations can, often, share characteristics of mentoring but may or may not take on additional nuances.

The mentoring experience at the inner-city elementary school was also complex and viewed differently by different mentors. Christy described her experience in the following way:

Going to [this elementary school], I felt like that’s learning for us, but also [it was] to adjust to being put in the teaching role, and how to work with that. But then with Anne’s [Educational Psychology] class, it’s to help them succeed the way that you were able to succeed, but not give them everything on a platter—that they need to work for it, but you are there if they need help.

In Christy’s experience, she described being both a mentor and also a mentee, simultaneously in a position to help the students, but also to allow the students and the classroom teacher to help her learn how to be a teacher. Jessica’s take on the situation, however, was a bit different. She noted that the “Ed Psych students are more, like, at your level; whereas the [elementary] students are, obviously, you’re the authority person; whereas the Ed Psych students, you’re just kind of making suggestions. They can choose to go with them or not.” Her description and differentiation hinges on authority and how, in the elementary school classroom, as a college student and adult, she was more of an authority figure, although she did not have the authority of the teacher. Conversely, in the Educational Psychology class, where her mentees were about the same age as she was, she felt it was a truer peer relationship and, as such, her role was more-closely
aligned with that of someone who was there to only offer suggestions and share experience.

While any of these experiences could be (and were, by many of the mentors) considered a type of mentoring, as they involved a type of active engagement, investment, mutual learning, and valuable experiences, not all mentors considered all of their relationships to be mentoring relationships: to some, certain experiences seemed more like friendships, some seemed more like student-teacher relationships, and others seemed less-defined. However, it is clear that, while not all mentors would, necessarily, have defined all of these relationships as mentoring relationships, aspects of mentoring were present in each.

*Mentoring in Italy.* Another way that mentors experienced mentoring relationships was studying abroad in Italy in the Educational Psychology course. Four of the mentors I interviewed had either been mentees or mentors in Italy, as well as being mentors on campus. This experience differed from the more-typical peer mentoring experience in a number of ways, which Erin described:

I think the main difference [between on-campus and in-Italy mentoring] . . . is availability and, like, trying to figure out how to make that initial contact [on campus], because I lived with my mentors [in Italy]. I was with them pretty much the whole day, every single day. We would go to sleep in the same place, wake up in the same place. And so, it was so much easier for me because when you live with someone, that’s kind of way more intimate than [coming to] classes once a week, obviously. I mean, so just the initial—and when you’re overseas, anyone
you can cling to and remind you of home, you do. And so, since we all got to
know each other, we were all in this unknown place together, we kind of had to
build our relationship together and trust each other from the beginning because we
were in an unknown country instead of in the safe, okay, everyone, you’ve been
here your whole life. You have your comforts of home, you have your friends,
you have this, and so they don’t need to cling to me because they have other
forms of support. And so, trying to figure out how do I get in there and just be
like trust me, I want to help you. Versus in Italy, it was just . . . I mean, I live
with you and you’re one of the only ten people I know in this whole country. So,
I want to . . . I’m going to be drawn to you naturally, and we both speak English
and we both are here for the same thing. We have the same kind of background.
And so I think that’s the main reason I can think . . . the main thing I can think of.
And it’s also . . . in Italy it was also I was with them every single day, and it was
so . . . for so long, too. I was with them, just class time, not socializing time
outside of class, but in class, we were together five hours a day, every single day.
And so, we really got to know each other and know the material. And I got to
know them as students instead of just I see my mentees for 50 minutes or an hour
and a half, two times a week. And so, it’s easier to, you know, [they didn’t have
to ask] “well, are you my mentor?” It wasn’t as in-your-face as it was in Italy.

There are a number of salient points in Erin’s account, contrasting her experiences in
Italy and on campus. First, it is important to note that Erin was a mentee in Italy, and a
mentor on campus; so she is drawing on experiences from different perspectives. One of
the most important points that she brought up, and a point also discussed by Heather and Amber, is that of the proximity of the mentors and the mentees, and the resulting relationships. In Italy, mentors and mentees typically lived together, sharing an apartment for the duration of their stay. So, as Erin pointed out, there was not a lot of “reaching out” that had to be done, on either the mentees’ or the mentors’ part. Instead, they would see each other passing in the hallways, or making dinner in the evening, and were able to casually bring up questions or discuss concepts that they had questions about. In addition, it is important to note Erin’s point about being in a foreign country and knowing no one else, and how that impacted the relationships that were formed. This is key, and a difference that made a difference, in that sharing this experience together—being strangers in a completely foreign situation—built, as Erin said, trust in one another and, particularly, in the mentor, as someone who at least knew the content and was familiar with Anne and the assignments of the class—but who could also relate to being in a completely unfamiliar place. Erin also described how different it was on campus to build relationships and earn trust between mentees and mentors. Because of the structure of the class, as it was a “typical” college class, and everyone’s lives and individual schedules played a much more prominent role, it felt far more difficult to connect, requiring both the mentor and the mentee to put effort into reaching out to one another.

Erin’s account of her experiences in Italy versus her experiences on campus illustrate, even further, the ways in which mentoring can be different, on several levels. Mentoring can vary based on location; specifically, the proximity and availability of the mentor and how much access the mentee has to him or her. Mentoring can also be
different based on the *way in which* and the *rate at which* the relationship forms. When studying abroad in Italy, relationships formed quickly and grew strong, both because they lived together and were in class together for the majority of the days they were there, and because of the bond that was created based on their shared experience in a foreign country, where nothing was familiar. These differences continue to illustrate the many forms that mentoring can take, and how these variations are all fundamentally the same, yet can be very different, based on specific events, personalities, and situations that shape them. These differences that make a difference influenced and shaped the understanding, experiences, and outcomes of those who are involved.

*Outside of these experiences.* While not all mentors felt they had previously been a part of mentoring experiences (i.e., before becoming involved with this mentoring project), some mentors did. In fact, to some, mentoring was a very familiar concept, which influenced their expectations of themselves and others, as mentors. Of the different levels of experience and understandings of the role of a mentor, Jane brought up the fact that it could be “kind of frustrating.” She added, “I know what I expect; I mean, I know what’s expected of me in my position.” Because of her experiences mentoring outside of the mentoring project, part of the relational process for Jane was acting as a mentor to other mentors and helping them to find their footing and refine their own understanding of mentoring and how that translates into their own actions and action.

Unlike Jane, some mentors did not feel that they had had many previous mentoring experiences and, instead, chose to describe a family member or teacher they felt had made an impact on them. Other mentors specifically juxtaposed their
experiences in this mentoring project to other, similar situations that they had experienced. Emma made sense of her role as a mentor by comparing it to her high school experience, and how she remembers feeling about being a mentor. She said, “we provided them [the new Educational Psychology students] a familiar face and someone that looked like an ally for them because, when you start freshman year, that’s scary. I remember how scary it was.” Comparing the overwhelming feeling she had beginning high school with the experience of first beginning this class (which has been described as challenging in this study, and also in the pilot study), and then mediating that feeling with “an ally” gives the mentors in this situation a person to lean on, and a way to feel more comfortable moving into a challenging situation.

Prior situations also shaped the mentors’ understanding of what mentoring is. In an example from Matt, he reflected on previous experiences with a former coach:

[He] would be there doing school work. So we’d just sit and talk and he really became . . . like he just became a mentor. He gave me life advice. He helped me out through everything, helped me through my parents’ divorce, through when I broke my neck. And to me, what it meant, it’s just someone there that, you know, like . . . a professional friend, I guess . . . And someone who guides you in the direction that you need to go, that suits your potential, but at the same time is very empathic.

For Matt, these experiences with his coach shaped his perceptions of what a mentor does, and the ways in which a mentoring relationship may work. In this example, he talked
about both personal and professional situations, and how his coach listened and offered guidance, but, specifically, guidance that was in his (Matt’s) best interest.

**How this mentoring project could be different.** This section focuses on how the mentoring project *could be* different, and not only considers what is possible in this project but also uses a reflecting processes approach (i.e., in the use of the question, “How could the mentoring project be different?”), giving mentors the opportunity to be invested in the future of the project, imagine its possibilities, and improve its effectiveness. Many mentors believe that the project works well. While some mentors did not really know how it could change, or what might need to change, Jane made it a point to say, “I don’t think she should change it at all.” This section addresses Research Question 4: What do participants think could be different?

Some mentors, however, offered suggestions on how the project could evolve to be of even more benefit to those who participate. Some mentors suggested small, but meaningful, changes that could be implemented somewhat easily. Other mentors made suggestions that were larger and more abstract. All of these suggestions are valuable, as they create space to consider the possibilities of the mentoring project, and shed light on the ways in which mentors feel that they could be better served—and serve better—through their participation. Brandon, for example, in his reflection on his transcript, expressed the following:

Now that I have finished over 100 hours observing my cooperating teacher and have completed my 12 weeks of student teaching, I believe that there are many things that I could teach the students I mentored in Anne’s class. The problem is
That I did not know what those things were until after I finished student teaching. During my time mentoring, I did not have the real world classroom experience. Yes, the students in Anne’s class wrote really good lesson plans, but that is such a small part of teaching. If I mentor those same students now I would be able to provide them with so many tips, hints and suggestions that I only learned about from student teaching. I believe that I would have been a much better mentor if I would have done it during my practicum class.

The idea that this mentoring project should, in some way, be connected with student teaching is not new; it was mentioned during other interviews in this study, as well as in the pilot study. Brandon also expressed that he wished that, “instead of just being with Anne’s class, I wish we had the opportunity to go to any Ed Psych [class] that the teacher feels like her [students] could use some extra help.” This was an interesting comment from Brandon, as he was another mentor who did not take one of Anne’s sections of Educational Psychology. From this, his perspective seems to be that it is valuable and should not have to be limited to just Anne’s classes, if there are others needing help, as well.

Jay suggested that it would be great experience for the mentors if they were able to also play a slightly different role in the Educational Psychology classes. He feels that it would be helpful to “get the mentors more involved in actually teaching some of the lessons in class.” In his experience, he presented Bloom’s Taxonomy a few times to the Educational Psychology classes, as a mentor. As previously noted, he also participated in some of the conferences attended by the project director and myself. For him, these
experiences were valuable and could be beneficial to others, as well. Similarly, Karie suggested that having first-year teachers in the workforce come in and talk to the mentors would be helpful. She said:

If it were at all possible to get first year teachers in the classroom, in the Ed Psych classroom and just talk about it would be immensely helpful. . . . just getting communication with somebody that’s in my and Jay’s shoes now. We know, you know, we’re doing this. And we know what it’s like, and just hearing stories, like we are now, I mean, I think that would be really beneficial for the [students] that are sitting in that class now, like, this is real. This is what happened.

She continued, saying,

Even if it’s just once a year, having someone come in and sit and talk to these students. Like, “I know you’re scared. I was scared when I was in your shoes. What do you need? What are you curious about?” . . . I still think this could be a very powerful experience. Even now, finishing my third year of teaching, I find myself going to the veteran teachers just to talk—to have conversation about what’s going on in my classroom, or even just in my life. Those people have been in my shoes, and I have been in the shoes of the college students in the classrooms.

This would add another layer to these mentoring relationships, as the first-year teachers would, in some ways, be mentoring the mentors. This type of mentoring would, as has been discussed previously, provide a way for the mentors and the first year teachers to connect, as Karie described it, because of the first-year teachers’ ability to relate to how
the mentors, as pre-service teachers, are feeling: unsure, “scared,” and “curious” about how things might be during their first year of teaching, or in finding a job. This would also enhance the experience of both the mentors and mentees, as a way to both develop as professionals and reflect on experiences.

Another suggestion, which was also discussed in the pilot study, was the frequency with which the mentors meet. This issue has already been mentioned earlier, in discussing how the mentors sometimes feel a sense of disconnect. Matt described it this way:

It’s like you punch your time card and you, you go in and help them out and you know you’re a peer mentor and then you walk out the door and it’s—it’s because everyone is so busy. It would just be nice if there was a way—if it was at all possible to get people together outside of class.

The relationships that they build, the connections they make, and the experiences they share are very important to many of these mentors. With regard to shared experiences, Eric suggested the possibility of research teams in the Relational Learning class, as a way to increase the collegiality within the course and also allow for space to discuss ideas with classmates working on similar topics for their research paper assignment.

The connections that the mentors make with their mentees are also important. Eric discussed how he wished that they had more time that they could spend getting to know their mentees and building a relationship with them, before they had to really jump in and help with assignments. He said,
When I first met my mentees... we didn’t really talk about their lessons plans too much. I kind of asked them what their major was, what year they were. I tried to talk to them a little bit. After that, I—because I had two weeks after that—I emailed them and asked them the same thing and I said, what’s your hobbies, this is what I like to do, and my major, and what I want to do what I graduate, and all that stuff. One of them responded and the other one didn’t, but I feel like, if there was maybe some way to have more of an orientation... I think if you could take one or two class periods just to talk with them and just to learn a little bit more about them, I think that would help.

This illustrates how important it is to build relationships in a mentoring situation and alludes to the ways in which mentoring relationships vary from other types of “helping” relationships, such as tutoring. For Eric, “getting to know them on a personal level” was an important component of defining the experience as a mentoring relationship.

Finally, some mentors discussed ways the project could be different that were based more on logistics. One suggested that the course be made an elective for the teacher education program, so it could be taken for course credit that would count toward requirements for that degree. Another suggested that, perhaps, the honors classes do not need mentors, based on his experience as a mentor in the honors section. Other suggestions included widening our research efforts, and making it a point to talk to the mentees about their experiences and what could be different, as well as to others who have been participating in or overseeing their own mentoring projects.
Experience as a Process of Becoming

Across all of these themes, I noticed the presence of one, overarching theme: the mentors, as well as the mentoring project, were involved in *a process of becoming*. Initially, I thought that *a process of becoming* would be its own theme. However, as I continued to analyze the data, it became clear that it was far more pervasive and descriptive of the overall experience in this mentoring project than as a specific theme. These individuals are in the process of becoming mentors, they are becoming teachers, they are becoming scholars, they are becoming colleagues, they are becoming friends, they are becoming invested in others’ success, they are becoming better thinkers, they are becoming better listeners, they are becoming professionals, and they are becoming who they are. Examining all of these processes, as well as the four themes described above, it is clear that they all speak to change and transformation, in various forms. Beginning with the theme of *Relational Learning*, a process of becoming is present in the building of relationships. It can be seen in the ways in which mentors become a part of a community or a “family” of mentors; it can be seen in how their interactions and shared experiences advance their thinking, understanding, and relationships; and it can be seen in how they begin to define themselves within and between these relationships, as mentors and learners. A process of becoming can also be seen throughout the theme addressing *Being Invested*. Their dedication to the project, their mentees, and to each other is constantly evolving and *becoming*. In being invested, mentors are also shaping who they are, how they understand their commitments, and understanding how their actions are shaped by their investments. A process of becoming is also clear in the theme
describing *Experience as Challenge*. These challenges and struggles, as well as the mentors’ involvement in discussing them and considering their alternatives and implications, and then growing and adapting to meet—and succeed at—these challenges are what makes this a valuable and impactful learning opportunity. Finally, a process of becoming can be seen clearly in the theme addressing *Experience as Difference*. A process of becoming highlights the growing and changing components of this mentoring project, itself, as well as how mentors’ input can shape the future of the project. It also addresses the varying ways in which the specific experiences and interactions that the mentors may have had have shaped their understanding of mentoring and who they have become as mentors.

In speaking of this process of becoming, Matt described how the project has made an overall impact on who he is as an individual. He reflected on how being a part of the mentoring project altered his outlook on himself: “It gives me a different perspective of myself as someone who I want to be and someone that I need to be in order to be successful.” The ability to change your perception of yourself, and being able to see yourself in a different way, is an example of this process of becoming, almost literally, a different kind of person. He continued, saying:

It’s amazing how, the last year I spent in the fraternity, I really transitioned from a “frat boy” to a mentor and role model to these [other students]. They look up to me and they need a good role model. I took that responsibility upon myself and it helped me a lot last year. It was my way of kind of earning my redemption and saying thank you at the same time. That place has helped me grow up a lot, too,
however I wouldn’t have been able to grow up without Anne’s class, either. It’s really the culmination of everything.

In this reflection, it is clear that this mentoring experience has helped to shape and help him become what he considers to be a better person, and someone that others can look up to and rely on. Kelly shared a similar sentiment:

On a personal level, I think that those are experiences that I needed to have. Like, as a person, you know, no matter what I do with my life, those were things that I needed to have as an experience.

To her, this experience has been a process of becoming someone who is better-prepared for her future, “no matter what” she decides to do. These examples, as well as the theme-specific ones that follow, exemplify this process of becoming and how, through their interactions and experiences in this project, the mentors have seen themselves change.

*A process of becoming in Relational Learning.* Relationships served as a pivotal element in the process of becoming. Previously, I described a process of becoming through language for both Erin and Emma: they formed their ideas while informing me of their experiences. These also describe Vygotsky’s (1986) ideas surrounding the process of becoming, through language and interaction: out loud talk, informing inner thoughts. Specifically, it is interesting to see how their processes of becoming are still in progress, during their reflections, as they gain—and recognize—additional insights into their mentoring experiences. This process of *becoming through language and relationships* was also articulated by Anderson. He wrote:
The person who expresses herself, by expressing herself as she does forms her life and her self(selves). Because every person is constantly in some kind of activity (i.e., constantly expressing oneself), every person constantly is in the process of being formed—transforming, reforming, or conforming oneself. Shotter (1993) says that an essential part of forming oneself is “positioning oneself” in relation to those who are in the surrounding (i.e., those who see and hear the person’s utterances). (Andersen, 1995, p. 31)

Relational learning facilitated this process by creating space for conversations and dialogues within a community of like-minded individuals. In this space, mentors had the opportunity to express themselves to individuals who were similar enough to themselves (i.e., undergraduates; teacher education majors) to feel as though the interaction was supportive and that they could be understood, but also different enough to be able to contribute varying perspectives to the conversation.

Relationships were also important in this respect for Matt. He described his experience in the following way:

Many people in the class I still stay in contact with and we relate to each other.

It’s almost as if we have seen each other grow up and are now ready to support each other in the pursuit of our professional endeavors.

Through this project, he has built relationships that have supported and will continue to support him, through a range of situations. It is especially important to note how he said that he and these mentors “relate to each other.” In this, he is emphasizing the importance of having some kind of common ground, from which to relate. Additionally,
he is describing how these relationships are lasting and ongoing. In this case, the process of becoming is not only in developing these relationships, but in becoming long-term support for each other and in the process of “growing up.”

Matt also described this process of becoming, as it relates to how he approached guiding his mentees. He said:

I don’t force anything or tell them how they have to do it because obviously it’s not my assignment. But it just gives them another perspective and then it’s up to them if they want to change it and improve their grade. So, ultimately, I leave it up to them. I don’t force anything on them.

In this reflection, he described how he gives them options and choices, and then allows them to choose the path that best suits them. In this way, he is helping them along, in a process of becoming thinkers and students. Being able to witness growth in this way often has an impact on these teachers in the making.

Finally, it is important to discuss the reflecting processes’ connection to a process of becoming. Specifically, it is critical to understand that viewing participants as cocreators of knowledge is an important stance in a mentoring relationship and is what allows them to be involved in this process of becoming. This allows each person to take an active role in the consideration and description of the “issues” being discussed, as well as in thinking about possibilities and ways in which the issue could be approached. While the goal of the reflecting processes is not to find a solution, it is the act of engaging in dialogue with others, in ways that help the participant become who they are, that is important. As Andersen (1996) wrote,
Talking has an informing part as both the person him- or herself and others hear what he or she is thinking. Talking also has a forming aspect, as the person, by searching through language, reaches a meaning. When a person does this search, he or she forms not only a meaning, but a being-in-the-world in that moment. (p. 122)

These ideas are also congruent with Bakhtinian thought, which emphasizes the importance of language on one’s becoming who they are. Bakhtin wrote, “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another” (Bakhtin, 1961, as translated in Emerson, 1996, p. 135). Through the process of engaging in generative language with another, one realizes himself.

*A process of becoming in Being Invested.* A process of becoming can also be seen within the finding that mentors are *invested.* Here, it is the ways in which their priorities and identities change through the relationships and commitments that they make that help to define who they are and who they are becoming. Ashley reflected on her participation as a mentor, saying:

I am taking away different experiences that I’ve had and what I’ve learned from those and that’s made me more . . . that’s made me more of a better person just because of how I’ve been able to really reflect on myself more and have that . . . that ability to look back and say, “Hey, I did this” and it was something extra that I really wouldn’t have even had to do. But I did this and I learned from it, and I’ve learned probably more from this class than probably most of my structured
classes that I’ve had. And it’s really beneficial to me because now, as I said before, like, I see myself getting that Master’s and Ph.D. level of education now, when, before, I really didn’t have that. It was more, “Hey, let’s get through school. Let’s become a teacher, and then we’ll go from there.” But more . . . now it’s more like, “Oh, I want to do research in my classroom now. I want to find out more about how children learn,” and, like, that sort of thing. So, I think it’s really helped me expand on my learning and how I want to become a teacher.

In this reflection, Ashley described her investment in not only the project, but in terms of how this mentoring experience has affected her investment in herself and her future. She discussed how her involvement in this project and the time and effort she has dedicated to it have made her a better student and scholar; it has been an experience where she has learned about many things, including about herself and where she wants to be in the future. For her, this program has helped to solidify an interest in pursuing graduate-level education and making that a reality, as opposed to seeing it as an abstract possibility or something that she had not considered at all. In fact, at the time of publication, Ashley has already completed her first year as a master’s student and is approaching her second year. She also noted that being a mentor made her reflect on herself, and be invested in that piece of learning and growing or, as she said, “becoming a better person.” Finally, she addressed the fact that participating in this project was “something extra” that she did, and not as a specific requirement for any program. From it, she gained experience and knowledge that, otherwise, she likely would not have. The initial investment she put into participating in this mentoring project, which included her time and energy, paid off
and will continue to pay off, in terms of learning, accomplishments she can add to her resume, and experiences from which she can draw in the future.

*A process of becoming in Experience as Challenge.* That these students are involved in a process of becoming is also clear in discussing *Experience as Challenge.* As previously discussed, mentors faced issues including guilt and frustration, as well as other challenging situations as a part of their mentoring experiences. The finding that mentors experienced challenges in their roles also encompassed learning and how, at times, that was a challenge—whether that learning was in the form of a challenge to navigate certain situations, or the challenge being put into a position where critical thought and reflection were paramount to creating success. Karie described one of these situations, as she reflected on being a brand-new mentor:

> At first, it was really intimidating just because I wasn’t really sure how to handle [helping my mentees]. I wasn’t really sure where to draw that line between too much help and not enough help. At first, it was kind of hard, because I wasn’t confident in the material. I didn’t know if I really knew what I was talking about. But then, as the semesters went along, it got a lot easier because I really, I felt comfortable. I felt more comfortable with Anne. I felt more comfortable with the students. You know, I realized that I’m really . . . I’m there to help them, and I’m going to help them as much as I can and talking with other mentors helped me get some ideas on how to handle certain situations, how much help to give them, and I think I . . . as I went through it, it was a lot easier.
This description of some of the challenges she faced as a new mentor gives insight into the process of becoming that Karie experienced, over the course of a couple of semesters. She began, as she said, being unsure of “where to draw that line” between helping too much and not enough. She was also unsure of herself as a mentor; she wondered how much help she could be, and doubted whether or not she knew the material well enough to give them the right guidance—whether she could make a difference that would make a difference. Once she started working with her mentees and with Anne, however, she became more and more comfortable in her role as a mentor. This process of becoming, from being unsure in so many ways to being confident in what she was doing and in her ability to help them, is a valuable learning experience to recognize within an educational environment, as well as one that easily translates to other situations.

Erin had a similar experience. She described how she was uncertain as a new mentor, but learned to adapt and adjust, as she grew into her role as a mentor: “I think it’s, your trial and error is how you put the twist on ment-, is how you become the type of mentor you’re gonna be. I think the same thing with teaching.” In this statement, Erin talked about how, through this process of becoming, through “trial and error,” she was really able to find how mentoring worked for her—in what specific ways she was able to interact with and relate to her mentees, and how her unique approach to mentoring helped her to feel successful in that role. From this, we can also see that she feels the same way about teaching: another challenging role.

Most importantly, Erin’s statements, as well as Karie’s, emphasize the process of becoming through engaged learning, facing challenges and challenging roles. The
feeling of uncertainty is a major challenge in any situation; however, being able to
overcome that uncertainty and being able to look back at it and see it as a success—
viewing the challenges as a process of becoming a better mentor, as Karie did—
demonstrates value in the experience. Similarly, Erin views “trial and error” as a process
of becoming “the type of mentor you’re gonna be,” suggesting that these types of
challenges—trying something, risking it not working, and then trying something else, as
many times as needed—are essential.

A process of becoming in Experience as Differences. The process of becoming
is also important when considering how mentors’ experiences and the mentoring project
itself could be different. Specifically, mentors discussed ways in which their experiences
and a process of becoming shaped their outcomes. Ashley considers her mentoring
experience as a whole, saying:

You get an experience and then you also gain a friendship with her, and hopefully
that friendship turns into being like a mentor and like really getting into this
program because I couldn’t imagine my life without this program. I wouldn’t be
going to Italy. . . . I wouldn’t have had the experience of [going to the inner-city
school], of the Conversation Partners [program], like, all these different
experiences I’ve had come from this peer mentoring project. And it’s really
interesting for me to look back and say, “Well, where would I be without this?”
Like, where . . . I don’t even know where I’d be without this program.

In this reflection, Ashley considers the process of becoming who she is today and who
she may have been, had she not had these experiences. In this case, it is important to
recognize how many facets of this theme come into play. First, there is a connection to Ashley’s wondering how she could be different, had it not been for these experiences, and had she not met Anne and built a relationship with her. Second, her experiences as a mentor had been shaped by generations of mentors before her, as well as directions in which Anne wanted to take the project; specifically, her involvement the Conversation Partners program, the inner-city school, and her study abroad experience in Italy would not have taken place without the conversations and interactions that created these opportunities. Finally, as discussed previously, all mentors participate in different experiences, and take different things from those experiences, which shape who they are as mentors. These specific experiences, as well as the relationships Ashley built, and the interactions that she had all came together as a process of becoming, to shape who she is as a mentor and how she has come to understand, make sense of, and talk about mentoring.

The Experience of Mentoring

Throughout this investigation, mentors described what they had come to understand as mentoring and its dimensions in a variety of ways. Their participation was described as it relates to Relational Learning, Being Invested, Experience as Challenge; and Experience as Difference, as well as describing it as a Process of Becoming. These descriptions, as a whole, created a picture of what the experience of mentoring was really like, as well as what it really meant, to these participants. The mentors also offered reflections on their overall experience, and what that meant to them. This section addresses Research Questions 1 (How do mentors describe what it is to be a mentor?) and
2 (What are the reported outcomes of this project?). During Michael’s interview, he explained how, in his participation in the mentoring project, “everything has boiled down to relationships and experience.” These two key pieces can be seen in most other mentors’ reflections, as well.

Sarah specifically described what it was like to be a part of the Relational Learning course, and to discuss various topics and issues with the mentors, as a group. She shared:

It, I guess, was an experience. I liked it like that. I like how the people in the class look like they listen to you. You know how you’re scared of talking or saying something? You were able to, you know, say what you thought, as long as it didn’t hurt anybody else, but you were able to say what you thought and you know, get feedback and nothing was bad, so speak your mind. I thought that was interesting, nice. . . . Sometimes I would worry about what other students thought about me but while I was in the [Relational Learning] class, I felt comfortable.

In this, Sarah described the Relational Learning class, and her mentoring community, as a sort of “safe space,” where she was among people who would listen and not judge, as well as offer support and guidance for challenges or issues she may have faced. She continued, specifically contrasting the environment of this course to some others she had experienced, saying, “there are some classes that I have taken in the past, that I felt like not attending because I did not like the teacher or the atmosphere or environment. But for the Relational Learning class, I always enjoyed going to class.” For her, this was an environment in which she could speak her mind, and a place in which she was
comfortable, to explore learning without too much risk (i.e., of judgment from her peers or the instructor). This is another example of a difference that makes a difference: being able to feel comfortable enough to create space for learning with others. It is also reminiscent of Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs and, specifically, having base-level needs met. When students feel safe and secure in their environment, and feel as though they belong, they are better-able to engage in learning.

Karie also described her overall experience and what it really meant to her, as well as how it affected her thinking. She said:

It’s taught me that talking about this stuff, communication, experiences, again that word [mentoring]. It’s going to help everybody in the end. I mean, I don’t know. I use it in my classroom in- within my students, with my students. I use it in my teaching, among other teachers. I use it in talking to people that are—like [another former mentor], who’s still in the program, you know. She’s coming to me, asking me stuff because I’m a little bit, you know, more out there [farther along] than she is because I’m doing it [teaching] and she’s doing the field experience [and is still a student]. So, in a way, I’m mentoring her. In a way, other teachers that I work with are mentoring me. I’m mentoring my students. My students are mentoring each other. I mean, it happens everywhere in education, and I don’t think I would’ve realized that had I not- had I not been in this program, and—yeah. I think it’s made me realize that it happens everywhere, and it’s a really good learning experience for everybody involved.
In her account, Karie described how being involved in the mentoring project has affected her relationships, her teaching, and how she thinks about the world. She reflected that mentoring “happens everywhere in education” (and, in another part of her interview, that “these kinds of [mentoring] relationships are happening all around us, even outside the world of teaching”), and provides examples of how she sees—and uses—mentoring in her classroom, throughout her school, and within the connections she still has to her undergraduate institution. This idea of mentoring as ubiquitous and pervasive, yet something that goes mostly unnoticed in day-to-day life, is interesting in itself. Thinking of mentoring in this way, it is particularly important that teacher candidates have an awareness of mentoring and what it is, in order to be better able to consciously create successful situations in their classrooms and within their own environments: between teachers and teachers; teachers and students; students and students; and any other relational dynamics present. Similarly, Erin recalled that she “didn’t realize how many mentoring experiences [she] had until [the mentors] thought about what mentoring is and compared them.” As with Karie’s points about how mentoring is “everywhere,” Erin’s statement provides another example of how frequently mentoring interactions occur, even if they are not immediately recognized as such.

Finally, Jay explained how his experiences have affected what he believes a mentor is and what it is not, and how pieces of mentoring become a whole experience. He said,

I don’t think you can answer “what is mentoring?” without saying something about building relationships, because, ultimately, that’s what you’re doing.
Mentoring is a social science. So, you’re not going to be a successful mentor if you’re not social with the people around you. So, building relationships is huge. In order to build those relationships, however, you need to be open to suggestions, open to criticism. You know, to be the best mentor that you can be, you have to be very, very open-minded. And you can’t be set, in order to be a mentor, you can’t be set in your agenda because you’re not trying to pass on your agenda to your mentees.

In his reflection, Jay described both individual and interpersonal qualities and characteristics that describe what mentoring is. His account, as with the others in this section, described relationships and experience as two key factors in mentoring.

**The Reported Benefits of Participating in This Peer Mentoring Project**

Through their interviews, mentors described a number of benefits and outcomes, which they directly related to their experiences in this mentoring project and which addresses Research Question 2 (What are the reported outcomes of this project?). Ashley described the value of participating in this project in terms of actually learning through the process of engaging in the project. She said, “they weren’t just experiences that I did just to do, like, they had meaning behind them. And I feel like, because I’ve done these experiences, I’ve learned so much from them.” This meaning, and the learning that resulted from them, was something that other mentors, such as Sarah, mentioned frequently, as well. She said,

I think you become a better learner, a better communicator, because you’re actually sitting there talking about your observations, your experiences and
someone who doesn’t really talk much, will learn to, you know, get out of their shell and start talking.

Here, Sarah is describing her experience becoming a better communicator as she was able to talk through her experiences and the experiences of others. She is also describing a process of coming out of one’s “shell,” becoming braver and transitioning to feeling like a part of the community—an insider—as opposed to someone participating as an outsider. This connection and growth demonstrates a transition from an individual to a member of a community of learners.

Erin described one benefit in terms of being able to “understand.” In this instance, her reference point came from being both a mentee and a mentor in this program and being able to see both sides of the process. About being involved in both roles, Erin said,

Then you understand. You can understand what your mentors need to do and [as a] mentor what your mentees need to be like, because you’ve been in both positions and so, I think, one of the best things you can walk away from [with] doing both things is to be able to take that knowledge and apply it to your classroom if you want to teach university or if you do middle school or you do high school or you teach babies, whatever you want to teach.

For her, one important outcome of participating in this project was to be able to see—understand—both sides of mentoring, and what the experience is like for both a mentor and a mentee: she was able to gain perspective on multiple points of view. Additionally, she relates being able to see both sides of a mentoring situation to how it can affect her
teaching, and how the experiences on each side of a mentoring can be translated into ways to relate to her classroom experiences, as a teacher.

In addition to its applicability to teaching situations, mentors also found what they learned in the mentoring project to be valuable to other areas of their lives, as well. In Eric’s interview, he summarized what he believed to be beneficial about his participation in the following way:

I’m going to be a much more open person in receiving help, open to giving help, open to trying new things, open to talking just in general. I don’t know, I feel like, it’s kind of impacted every little bit of my life, especially in school but, beyond, I could see applying those skills to a career or work of any other situation, basically. . . . [Including] hobbies, family life. You know? I mean, everything. I felt like [the other mentors] made it—not shameful, but it took away any uneasy feelings in my head about asking for help or giving help or if you don’t want to feel like you’re not taking control of the situation and you don’t want to feel like you have no idea what’s going on. I feel like the peer mentoring really helped with that because we got the experience with both helping with mentees because we kind of had some knowledge about what they were learning so we could help them and at the same time we really didn’t know too much. If the new mentors didn’t really know what we were doing, we could always reach out to the older mentors to help them.

In his reflection, Eric echoed Erin’s points about being on both sides of the learning process, and being able to see multiple perspectives, but in a slightly different way. This
is also reminiscent of Bateson’s ideas: his perspective differed, but in a way that was not too much and not too little. It was a difference that, for him, made a difference. While Eric was never a mentee in the Educational Psychology course, he was still in a not-knowing position as a mentor, at times, since he was not familiar with the structure of this course or the projects. In this way, he was a mentor to other students, but also got to experience being mentored by those who had mentored in previous semesters, again exemplifying the layers of experience that are present in this mentoring project. Also critical is his description of how “it has kind of impacted every little bit of my life.” This is a powerful statement, which connects this one piece of his educational experience to a broad range of real-life possibilities; or, in his words, being able to take this experience and apply it to “any other situation,” even hobbies and family life. This is also descriptive of the process of mentoring. Eric’s account of being able to take what he has learned in this mentoring project and apply it to such a wide range of activities, both professional and personal, shows that the benefits of participating in this mentoring project are not simply limited to the academic environment; instead, they are applicable across many life experiences.

Mentors also described some more-specific benefits, resulting from their participation in this project. Matt said,

I get better, I get to look at more lesson plans so, as a result, I have a better understanding what to do or better ideas how to do it. Or [how to] do it in a timelier manner. I get more practice of contact with students in a professional setting. They get the benefit of having someone there who can help them if need
be with their lesson plan or make sure they’re not going to fail it and make sure they’re on the track to pass.

Here, he described a direct benefit to his teaching career: specifically, being able to better-learn how to create lesson plans and to become more familiar and comfortable with them. In addition, he described the benefit of having a mentor, from the perspective of the mentees. However, this benefit is also the reason behind why he gets this practice, and why he is able to work on developing lesson planning skills as well as being able to practice ways of communicating and working with students in an educational setting.

Jay described similar dynamics and benefits. He said:

Eventually we’re all gonna be teachers anyhow, but the mentors are usually a little closer to that graduation step and a little closer to teaching. So, for me, mentoring was actually practicing what I’m gonna be doing for a lifetime, anyhow. So, not only is it education, but its good practice. That’s why, that’s why I said that we take away just as much from it as the students do. The students probably take away a little more content knowledge than we do, because we’ve already learned that before, not that we’re not refreshing ourselves every day when we go into the class, but you know, we learn—we learn different things than the students do and it’s a different, it’s a different experience for us than it is for the students. The students are obviously trying to learn the material and, you know, pass the class and you learn how to write lesson plans and those type of things and we’re doing a different type of learning or, you know, we’re learning
different things, you know, different ways to work with people, different ways to teach people, different ways to mentor people.

Here, Jay is describing how being a mentor not only allows him to learn more about the content and concepts of educational psychology, but it also teaches him about relating to and working with others, as well as how to be a mentor. In addition, it also helps him learn to think more like a teacher and practice being in variations of that role. His statement about “[taking] away just as much from it as the students do” is important, because it demonstrates that he is open to the idea of relational learning and how learning can happen across all levels, through all forms of interaction.

Ashley also described some specific benefits and outcomes of her participation as a mentor. In this instance, she is discussing how her participation in a research conference she attended as a mentor, with the program director and me, influenced her interest in research:

It gave me the motivation to really focus on research as a teacher. Like, I’m just not going to go into a classroom now and just look at things in one perspective. Thinking critically about things and also getting excited about the opportunities to be a presenter at a conference and doing research—I want to look at things from different perspectives and . . . [figure] it out throughout the year . . . It gave me motivation to do research.

Here, Ashley is describing, among other things, metacognition (see Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009, for an overview), or thinking about thinking. Being able to take this perspective and be mindful and reflective about what she is thinking is an important
process in critical thinking. In addition, being able to think critically about these experiences is an important outcome for Ashley because it created the groundwork for her to engage in future inquiry in her classrooms and, perhaps, at other conferences. This experience may have also influenced her decision to attend graduate school after she completed her undergraduate degree.

Finally, Michael reflected on his learning and growth as a result of participating in this mentoring project. He wrote the following reflection as a response after reading the transcripts from his interviews for this study, and my annotations. Michael wrote:

It’s fascinating to look back on all of the conversations we had about the mentoring program and how my involvement in the program has helped to shape me as a person. Looking back on the transcripts, I am amazed of how much I was able to take away from my involvement in the program and although I didn’t graduate with a degree in Education, it was still a valuable experience that I am honored to be a part of. I sometimes wonder if the outcome of my college career would have been different if I would [not] have been surrounded by an embracing group of students and a professor who cared as much as my group of colleagues and Dr. Morrison did. Now that I have been out of college for a year, I have been able to think back on what we truly learned during our time as mentors. At the time, I thought I would only be able to take away knowledge that would help me become a better teacher and when I left the program I wasn’t sure I was going to be able to find any value. The camaraderie and active listening skills I took from the mentoring program have been of great value for me in my work setting and
my workmates have been impressed with my “compassion and ability to listen to what people are saying.” Overall the program was of great value to me and I honestly wish I could have one more semester with everyone.

This reflection described a number of benefits that Michael saw, resulting from his participation in the mentoring project. Of note is his “then” and “now” account of how he felt, upon completion of his degree (Note: During his undergraduate career, Michael made the choice to switch from the education program he was enrolled in to a different major, from which he graduated). While he still believed, at the time, that there would be some specific benefits to his participation—namely, those directly related to teaching—he found, over time, that his experiences resulted in much farther-reaching outcomes, which help him currently, in a job that is very different from the world of teaching where he planned to end up when he first became involved with the mentoring project.

Overall, the mentors described a number of outcomes, ranging from the ability to be able to hone specific skills and refine their educational psychology content knowledge, to gaining skills that can help them across all areas of life. These outcomes, for many, have proven to be versatile and useful across a variety of life situations.

**What Has Made This Project Successful?**

This study has focused on a mentoring project that, largely, has been described as sustainable (i.e., students continue to enroll and participate, and participants mostly describe positive experiences and outcomes) across the semesters during which it has been available. Therefore, one important question that arises relates to why this program has been successful and, specifically, the characteristics of this program that the mentors
believe have made it successful. To continue to clarify these points, I asked some of the mentors whether they believed that a program such as this one could be successful under different circumstances, or if this mentoring project was only successful because of its specific context. Their responses, in addition to those from other mentors who described important characteristics of the project without being asked to directly, address Research Question 3 (What characteristics do mentors believe make this project successful?).

The mentors who were asked whether a mentoring project such as this could be successful elsewhere, or if it was based on some specific aspect of this mentoring project, all agreed that it could, under the right circumstances, be implemented elsewhere. Karie said,

Absolutely other people could do it, but I think that they are also going to need people like us, people who are doing it and people that are . . . nobody could do it on their own. Everyone’s going to need to try it out and get suggestions from other people to build it, just the same way that it’s happened here.

Karie’s belief that this project could be successful in a different context was echoed by Kelly, who said, “I don’t think that it’s impossible for other departments to kind of . . . take on . . . but I think that they would need somebody who has that same mentality and dedication as Anne.” Here, she pointed out that dedication and a certain type of mentality seem to be the important factors, in building a successful mentoring project.

Michael also brought up similar points, noting that:
It could be done; I just think it takes a professor who wants to go above and beyond. I think there is a little bit of luck involved, too, and you just have to find the right people at the right time.

While he also mentioned that luck was “the most minor” part of the equation, he said that it provides a “spark” that can set in motion the momentum to create a solid foundation.

Two more components that mentors felt were crucial to the success of this project and to having success in the creation of a mentoring project were collaboration and joined effort. Karie noted that, “obviously it was a hard thing to get going and it’s still going to keep growing, and it’s not something that’s just going to happen.” She pointed out that this project has not been the work of any one person; instead, Karie said, “we as a whole have helped her build what this is.” The mentoring project, as it is now, has been a collective effort, based on feedback and input from a variety of people, over a number of semesters. Kelly’s comments indicate a similar belief. She said that she does not think “that just anybody could say ‘oh, I’m going to start this and it’s just going to work,’ you know? . . . I think it takes a special person to put things in order and actually make things work.” Through these statements, it is clear that, while mentors believe that this type of project could be successful in different contexts, there are key foundational pieces that are essential for success, including collaboration and support from students and others.

In general, mentors identified the following qualities and characteristics necessary in order to develop a successful mentoring project:

- Leadership
• Organization (on the part of both the project leader and the mentors who participate)
• Patience
• Passion
• Dedication (again, on the part of the project director and the mentors)
• Commitment
• Willingness to help others
• Willingness to change things that are not working
• Willingness to listen to others’ ideas
• Communication
• Willingness to delegate responsibilities to others
• A catalyst - one small core of people or one person who is going to take this upon themselves to spread it in their department
• An open outlook
• The ability to “walk that tight line” between being a friend and a professional

In addition to these points, mentors also described a few other important characteristics. Kelly described how taking the Relational Learning class and being a mentor is not required and I think that makes a big difference because, if you want to be there, then you’re going to put more into it or get more out of it, or be more open to talking with other people and discussing things, than ‘oh, I have to be at this class, great,’ and it’s just, you sit there [and don’t do anything].
For her, the fact that the Relational Learning course and participation in the mentoring project is optional and voluntary is very important. For Kelly, having the choice to participate or not makes it a project that attracts individuals who already have an interest in the project or want to be a part of the project and, as such, are more interested and invested than someone who might be required to participate but does not want to. Ashley shared a similar sentiment, saying that the Relational Learning course is “a fun class to go to instead of just another class,” because of the way that the project director has approached the content and structure. Eric also mentioned how the class is enjoyable and interesting:

I loved it, I thought it was fun. It was really different; I never got to really experience anything like that [previously], where everybody works together [and we have] very different learning experiences. It didn’t even feel like a class almost; it was almost professional, and it was almost like a job. There was almost, like, volunteer work but at the same time, I mean, you’ve got to get a grade. You have a goal. You are helping people, but you’re learning. It’s very beneficial.

For these mentors, being able to participate voluntarily in a project that they found to be enjoyable and valuable was important. This is something that connects back to my own experience, as well as the cautions by Healy and Welchert (1990) regarding mentoring programs that are required or done out of obligation and how, in these programs, the outcomes and benefits may be limited. Creating a space for students to participate in the project who are intrinsically motivated to do so is an important factor in
the success of this project and can keep them participating, from one semester to the next. This is a critical component of sustaining the benefits of a mentoring project. Campbell and Campbell (2007) described a similar point: if mentoring relationships dissolve, the positive outcomes the mentee experienced during the mentoring relationship will not persist.

Finally, Jay described the relational aspect of why he feels the project has been successful. He said,

I think that it was really important that the mentor not only has good relationships with the other mentors, but also with the professor; between mentors and students, and mentors and instructor—kind of a like a connector, you know? Because that’s how it’s going to build. The professor has to be approachable like Anne is, in order to get ideas.

To him, being able to create and maintain strong relationships is an important part of a successful, lasting mentoring project. Additionally, it is important that the project leader is open to hearing the generative suggestions of others and works to keep building the project. Michael, who noted the importance of layers of mentors, also addressed the importance of relationships. He said,

That’s why I think it’s so important to have multigenerational mentors being in there, because it sort of keeps a direction and it’s sort of—anything that was worked on the previous semester can sort of be continued upon and built upon . . . Without that sort of multigenerational [aspect] in there, I feel like it would just be sort of sporadic because it would never have any continuity.
Having this type of continuity is important not only for building on existing ideas and projects, but also, as discussed in Chapter 4, because of the circular nature of mentoring that Karie and Jessica described. The idea of mentors mentoring mentors, and new people coming in and integrating with the mentors who were already there maintains a sense of camaraderie and community and allows the process of learning from and with one another to continue.

Mentors described a number of characteristics and qualities that make this mentoring project successful. While they believe that there are a number of factors that must be present in order to create a successful mentoring project, they do not believe that the success of this mentoring project is limited to this, specific context or situation, and believe that other departments or institutions could implement a similar, successful project, as long as it had similar characteristics.

**Summary of Data Analysis and Emergent Themes**

This chapter has discussed the analysis of the data and the emergent themes that were identified in this study in detail. Mentors described their perceptions of what mentoring is and is not, and also described what relational learning is, as both a construct and a course. The mentors I interviewed explained that, to them, mentoring encompasses relationships that are egalitarian in nature; are based on communication and sharing one’s challenges and successes; learning from and with each other; and being able to listen. They described how, for them, mentoring is not a process by which the mentor tries to impose values or beliefs on the mentee; is not a power struggle; is not providing the answers or solutions to problems; and is not a superficial relationship. Mentors also
shared their beliefs about relational learning, saying they understand it as a process by which learning can happen through relationships that are formed with others; sharing perspectives; and helping others to learn and grow, as they help you to learn and grow. Mentors also described relational learning in terms of the course—Relational Learning—that they took, while participating in the mentoring project. About the course, they said that it was a place where they could engage in dialogue with like-minded others, who were interested in talking through stories, ideas, and experiences and learning together.

This chapter also discussed the findings as they related to Relational Learning, Being Invested, Experience as Challenge, and Experience as Differences. These findings embodied the experiences of the mentors who participated in this study and describe how they understood their experiences as mentors. Mentors believed their shared experiences resulted in relational learning. They also felt a sense of investment. Often, mentors experienced challenges and challenging situations. Finally, mentors described many ways that both mentoring and the project itself could be different. Through all of these themes, Experience as a Process of Becoming was clear. This overarching idea described how mentors who participate in this project change and grow, in many ways, as they form relationships, become invested, face challenges, and experience the project in different ways, in terms of outcomes and experiences. Through all of these experiences, the mentors are in the process of becoming many things, including better mentors, better teachers, and better learners.

Finally, this chapter highlighted how these mentors described their overall experiences, as well as the benefits they felt they experienced as a result of their
participation in this project. The characteristics that these mentors believed made this project successful were also outlined and explained.

Summary

This chapter discussed the results of the research questions. First, I outlined the ways in which mentors described what mentoring is and is not. I then outlined how the mentors described relational learning, both as a construct and in terms of the actual class they took. I then discussed, in detail, the four themes I identified from my interviews: mentors experienced relational learning; mentors experienced investment; mentors experienced challenges; and mentors identified ways the mentoring project and mentoring experience could be different. I described the overarching theme, mentors and the mentoring project experienced a process of becoming, and tied it to each of the four themes. These sections addressed Research Questions 1 and 4. Mentors’ accounts of their overall experiences, the benefits of participation in the mentoring project, and the reasons for its success, according to the mentors, were also outlined, addressing Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. Chapter 5 (Discussion) provides a detailed summary of the findings presented in this chapter, as well as a discussion of those findings grounded in the extant literature. Conclusions are presented, as well as the limitations of this study and implications for both future research and practice.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the experience of mentoring for mentors participating in a specific mentoring project. In Chapter 4, mentoring and relational learning, as they were described by the mentors, were defined. Four themes were also discussed in detail: Mentors experienced relational learning; mentors experienced investment; mentors experienced challenges; and mentors identified ways mentoring and the mentoring project could be different. An overarching theme, mentors and the mentoring project experienced a process of becoming, was also described. Following these, I described the overall experience of mentoring, as reported by the participants. These descriptions and themes answered Research Question 1: How do mentors describe their experiences in this mentoring project? Chapter 4 also answered Research Question 4: What do participants think could be different? The benefits of participating in this mentoring project were also addressed, answering Research Question 2: What are the reported outcomes of this project? Finally, I summarized the characteristics of this mentoring project, as described by the mentors, answering Research Question 3: What characteristics do mentors believe make this project successful? Chapter 5 discusses the findings of this study as they relate to the extant literature. The implications of this study are also discussed in this chapter, as well as directions for further research.
Findings Revisited: A Brief Summary

The four emergent themes discussed in detail in Chapter 4 were: Mentors experienced relational learning; mentors experienced investment; mentors experienced challenges; and mentors identified ways the mentoring project and mentoring experience could be different. The experience of relational learning outlined the belief that mentors held, that a primary component of the mentoring experience was in relationship: they discussed how relationships were built, how they were maintained, and what they provided. I discussed the ideas of opening space for possibilities and the difference that makes a difference. Opening space has to do with a process of intentionally creating a place where mentors are free to explore ideas, engage in dialogue and relationships, and try out ways of being (i.e., how they act as “a mentor” or as a “presenter” at a conference). A difference that makes a difference (Bateson, 1972) is information that affects or influences a later event. This open space—this difference—allowed mentors to engage in a kind of educational experience that many of them had not had previously.

Part of the discussion regarding Relational Learning described becoming connected: how the mentors came to be involved in relationships. This section discussed how they found common ground with their mentees and with other mentors; how, through this project, they got to know others that they would not have gotten to know under other circumstances; and how they became a community.

Another sub-category within Relational Learning is the finding that many mentors have a helping mentality. This sub-category described how many of the mentors who were interviewed expressed the desire to actively help others—both their mentees
and their fellow mentors—through their participation as a mentor. In the process of helping others, mentors also were helping themselves, as they learned and grew alongside their mentees and fellow mentors. This sub-category also included guiding others, as well as being guided by others, and being there for your mentees.

The idea of engaging in an authentic relationship was also discussed. Mentors described their relationships as open, honest, egalitarian, and caring, noting that the relationships they formed allowed them to feel comfortable being themselves, and trust others to listen to, support, and—perhaps—offer advice or suggestions, which came from a place of caring, and not judgment. Mentors also described authentic relationships as being ongoing and lasting, as opposed to situationally-bound and finite.

Collaborative learning (see Bruffee, 1993) was another important component of Relational Learning. Collaborative learning, or learning from and with one another, described how mentors’ shared experiences were valuable; how they were able to listen to others’ perspectives and share their own; and how they participated in reflecting processes, as a group. Reflecting processes are an approach to conversations that are hierarchical in nature and which explore possibilities, through back and forth conversation (Andersen, 1991). These experiences reinforced the value of collaboration, hearing—and listening to—multiple perspectives, and being open to new and different ideas and possibilities.

Finally, Relational Learning was discussed as something that occurs through multiple layers of mentoring. These layers were created by the presence of mentors who had been around for multiple semesters, as well as those who were brand new to the
mentoring project. Additionally, mentors described these layers in terms of a support system; as a way to be motivated and inspired in their own mentoring; and through their understanding of Anne (the project director) as a mentor to them.

Mentors also described the experience of investment. Being Invested outlined how mentors actually participated in this mentoring project. Their investment was demonstrated by active participation and engagement, as well as commitment and dedication to processes and activities that did not, always, have an immediate payoff or benefit. One way mentors demonstrated their investment was by being a partner in the learning process. In being a partner in learning, mentors described how it is important to be committed to helping their mentees through the process of learning, not just with specific tasks. It also described a successful mentoring relationship as a two-way commitment: a mentor’s investment in the mentee, as well as the mentee’s investment in the mentor.

Longevity and a commitment of time are also discussed as they relate to Being Invested. Longevity described the process of building more-permanent relationships with other mentors and with mentees, but also described work being done in the present, with the goal of a payoff in the future. These kinds of situations were exemplified by, among other things, mentors’ participation in professional conferences. Mentoring as a time commitment described the extra time that mentors dedicated to the mentoring project and the Relational Learning course, as an elective, but a class that was not required for their program. Yet, they enrolled in the course anyway, sometimes needing to seek approval for “overload” hours, in order to participate.
Mentors also described how they felt invested in. Specifically, some mentors acknowledged that other mentors and/or the project director were investing in them, as student, mentors, colleagues, and learners. Being invested in was communicated as feeling valued. The category of Being Invested also included a description of how mentors felt a sense of ownership in the project and how they felt invested in making it better for both themselves, as current participants, and for those who will participate in coming semesters.

Finally, Being Invested addressed how mentors found value in their experiences in this mentoring project and also felt that they were engaging in “real life” experiences. Mentors were invested in their experiences and in this mentoring project because they believed that it provided value to them. They also believed that the experiences they were having would help them in their futures, and were applicable to their “real” lives, as opposed to being based on hypothetical textbook cases, or in theory that did not have a strong connection to practice.

Both negative and positive affect was described, in accounts of how mentors experienced challenges. In this theme, participants described how they encountered many difficult situations as mentors, but learned from all of them. For example, some mentors felt disconnected if they were not able to participate in the class as regularly as they wanted, due to schedules or life circumstances. Some mentors felt frustrated if their mentees did not seem to want—or need—their help. Others felt guilty based on how they judged their own ability to mentor, questioning whether or not they had helped “enough.” Some mentors also worried about how they would be perceived by their mentees, in
terms of power dynamics, age, class standing, or ability level. Taken together, these issues created challenging—yet educational—situations for many of the mentors.

Mentoring—the experience as well as the project itself—was also described by considering the question, *How Could it be Different?* In this section, mentors identified ways in which the mentoring project or mentoring experience could be different. This theme addressed various ways in which the mentors felt the actual word “mentoring” was understood—its *connotation*; how mentors *understood*, and *experienced* mentoring in this project, as well as through the different *contexts* that were described; and explored how a “mentor” might be different from a “tutor” or a “teacher.”

Another sub-category in the discussion of *identifying differences* was how mentoring was experienced through that semester’s experiential options, such as the main-campus’ *Educational Psychology course*, the *Conversation Partners program*, and at the *local elementary school*; abroad *in Italy*; and in experiences that the mentors had had, *outside* of this experience in the mentoring project. Ways in which the mentoring project might be different were also addressed. This section outlined ideas from mentors on how the project itself might change, to create an even better experience for those who participate.

Finally, mentors described how they and the mentoring project experienced a process of becoming. This *process of becoming* is a thread that connects all of the previously-described components of the mentors’ experiences. *A Process of Becoming* described not only what is occurring with the mentors, as they become colleagues, better thinkers, better scholars, better professionals, and better teachers, but also represents what
is going on within the mentoring project, itself, as it grows and changes. This process of becoming is seen as fluid and evolving, as well as ever-present in the experiences of the mentors and the evolution of the project.

Mentors’ overall experiences, as they understood them, were also discussed, as well as how they feel that they have benefited from being a part of the mentoring project. Some reported benefits included learning and being able to transfer skills and knowledge from one situation to another; experience as a means to understanding, and providing a foundation for future work and/or study. Mentors also explained why they believe that this mentoring project has been successful. For them, dedication, openness, communication, and a catalyst were some of the primary components necessary for creating a successful mentoring project.

**Discussion of Findings**

The current study explored mentoring-influenced-by-relational-learning and why it seems to work for the students involved. The goal of this study was to learn about the experiences of peer mentors in one peer mentoring project, as well as learn how these mentors describe and understand those experiences. The results of this study largely support the findings of the extant literature.

**Motivation**

Peer mentoring influences motivation. In this study, mentors described how they were motivated by (and motivated) their mentees, their fellow mentors, and the project director. Intrinsic motivation is the desire to satisfy psychological needs, such as fulfillment and interest (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, extrinsic motivation describes
the motivation to accomplish a task for external rewards, such as praise or a grade. Intrinsic motivation is fostered by tasks that that students find interesting, in which they have some choice, and which are optimally challenging (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). Intrinsic motivation is typically more stable than extrinsic motivation, as it is fostered by the student’s own drive and accomplishment and is fulfilling in itself. Extrinsic motivation may have limited benefits and could act as a detriment to continued motivation, as it is tied to some kind of external reward (Deci et al., 2001). The mentors’ relationships, as described by the mentors who participated in this study, primarily provide intrinsic motivation. This is evidenced by the fact that mentors sign up for this class and to be a part of the project without the benefit of credit hours toward completion of their specific, professional program. Instead, as described previously, mentors participate in this project to increase their own understanding of the Educational Psychology course material; to practice being in “teaching” kinds of relationships; to challenge their thinking; because they enjoy helping others; and because they want to engage in and build relationships with like-minded colleagues.

One way this mentoring project can support student motivation is through peer assessment. In this mentoring project, a major role of the mentors is to assist with the peer critiques of the lesson plan assignment, in addition to offering support and advice for the project on a more individual basis. They also reflect on each other’s research work, in the Relational Learning course. The benefits of peer assessment, including increased student motivation, were demonstrated by Topping (1998) in a review of the literature.
Another way motivation can be discussed in this study is through the concept of mindset (Dweck, 2007). Mindset describes how individuals perceive their abilities and intelligence. A growth mindset describes intelligence that is fluid and unlimited. Said differently, an individual with a growth mindset focuses on effort and perseverance as a vehicle to learning and intelligence: higher effort leads to higher achievement. Conversely, a fixed mindset describes a limited amount of intelligence, which is typically inherent: either one has it, or one does not. With a fixed mindset, a student may believe that minimal effort with high success is the only way to be seen as intelligent. Hard work, in a fixed mindset, is an indication of a deficit. Peer mentoring may be a way to work to instill a growth mindset in students. In the stories of the mentors interviewed, there are a number of accounts of how mentors shared their experiences, both good and bad, with their mentees. In sharing their struggles with their mentees, as well as their stories of hard-earned successes, mentees may begin to internalize a growth mindset. Additionally, as they face the initially-challenging and unfamiliar task of completing a large lesson plan project, having someone to work with them through the process can provide support and direction for the mentee, modeling the idea that effort, practice, and staying with a task can lead to success.

**Self-Efficacy**

Mentoring can also increase self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual’s beliefs about his ability to be successful at various tasks (Bandura, 1997). One way to create self-efficacy is through vicarious experiences. According to Bandura (1995), “seeing people similar to oneself succeed by sustained effort raises observers’ beliefs that
they too possess the capabilities to master comparable activities required to succeed” (p. 2). This is important to the designation of these mentors as peers. Both in the intended structure of this mentoring project, and through the descriptions of the mentors who were interviewed, relating to their mentees as peers was a critical component. As these mentors were all students who had been successful in an Educational Psychology course previously, they acted as models that were able to achieve success with a difficult task. In this way, the mentors provided a model for success, as noted previously, sharing both ways in which they were successful and in which they were not successful, and offering suggestions and guidance from their experiences. Mentors also modeled success for each other. More-experienced mentors acted as mentor models for the beginning mentors, and modeled successful mentoring relationships and strategies.

Self-efficacy can also be increased through the reinforcement of others’ abilities and efforts (Bandura, 1995). In this persuasion of ability, people are likely to mobilize greater effort and sustain it that if they harbor self-doubts and dwell on personal deficiencies when problems arrive. To the extent that persuasive boosts in perceived self-efficacy lead people to try hard enough to succeed, they promote development of skills and a sense of personal efficacy. (p. 4)

Having peer mentors to support, encourage, and push their mentees to produce high-quality work is another way to increase students’ (mentees’) self-efficacy. Similarly, mentors encouraged each other in this way, through support and guidance, to become better mentors.
Self-efficacy is also important to motivation. Self-efficacy may influence the goals that students set, their perseverance, and how much effort they expend in working to achieve a particular goal (Bandura, 1995). In these ways, self-efficacy also plays a role in mindset.

**Metacognition**

Metacognition describes an individual’s thoughts about his own thoughts or “one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products” (Flavell, 1979, p. 232). Metacognition describes the ways in which individuals understand, assess, and regulate their knowledge, and is comprised of three facets: metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive monitoring, and metacognitive control (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009).

Mentoring programs can support metacognition by scaffolding how students think about tasks and how they evaluate what they know or do not know. Mentors encourage this process, partially, by helping students think through their lesson plan assignment and, as many mentors noted, **guiding them in thinking about the solution**—or guiding them in thinking about their thinking about the problem—as opposed to providing an answer. Metacognition was also evident in this study as the mentors described how they thought about their own learning. Some mentors described a benefit of participating in this mentoring project as being able to learn concepts more deeply than they had been able to before; here, they were thinking about their thinking at two different points in their experience. They were able to assess their own understanding of the course material and realize that, while they understood it at one level, being exposed to the content and using it in practice provided an opportunity to enhance their understanding. Other mentors
described how, during our interview, they were having realizations about their learning and their experiences that they had not previously considered. This is another example of metacognition. Metacognition was also evident as mentors addressed their desire for additional meeting times for the Relational Learning course: they wanted to spend additional time discussing, in order to learn about, mentoring and related experiences.

**Scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development**

Scaffolding is a process that allows a learner to accomplish, with a more-experienced other, a task or activity that is too difficult to complete on his or her own (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding is related to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky, 1986). The ZPD describes a range of tasks, with the upper-limit of the ZPD being a point that is too difficult for the learner to achieve on his or her own, but which can be accomplished with the help of a more-experienced other. Intelligence, or capacity, in this understanding, encompasses the ways in which one seeks help, utilizes the environment, and asks questions to solve those problems (Morson, 1986). This is where the idea of scaffolding becomes important, as it is at this upper-limit where learning occurs.

In this project, as individuals who had successfully completed the lesson plan and/or Educational Psychology course, the mentors were qualified to be more-experienced others, and offer support and guidance as students worked through their projects and the course. In using scaffolding to enhance learning and achievement, more support is offered in the beginning, as the learner is new to the task. In time, as the learner begins to master the task, some of the structure or scaffolding is removed, leaving more onus on the
learner—who, now, is more-capable of completing the task without assistance.

Scaffolding is exemplified a number of times and in a number of ways in the accounts of the mentors who participated in this study. The mentors employed scaffolding as they worked with their mentees to successfully complete their lesson plans. Scaffolding was also accomplished through the mentors’ discussion and interactions with each other. Through these interactions and discussions, mentors supported and extended each other’s learning. Additionally, interactions with the project director helped to scaffold the mentors’ learning.

**Transitioning to a New Experience**

The findings of this study also support Harmon’s (2006) assertions that mentors can help ease the transition of students to a new environment. While Harmon’s study focused on new freshmen, the mentors in this study provided examples that show how the mentees new to the Educational Psychology class—in addition to some of the mentors new to the mentoring project—experienced anxiety and uncertainty that was mediated by the presence of mentors. In the case of this study, mentors offered support for their mentees, and were able to find common ground with them, as they recalled their experiences on their first days of the course.

Rodger and Tremblay (2003) also found that mentors could offer support and comfort to new students, in their sharing of their initial successes and failures. Again, while their research focused on new freshmen, this concept can be extended to experiences in a new semester and a new course, with an unfamiliar instructor and a
challenging project to complete. The sharing of successes and failures, and how that supports students, has been discussed previously.

**Professional Development**

Harmon (2006) also found that mentoring projects helped students learn to better-interact with a diverse group of people, as well as providing professional development. This is a topic that a number of mentors in this study discussed, as well. Several mentors, including Jay, Karie, and Brandon, described the importance of being able to work well with diverse people and having to be able to get along with varied personalities in the work environment. Emma and Michael, among others, described the process of getting to know people from diverse cultures—in this instance, through the Conversation Partners program—and how that was a valuable skill, as well as an educational and personally gratifying experience.

Professional development was also discussed by Matt and Erin, among others. They described how their participation in the mentoring project affected their professional outcomes and efficacy, through their participation at conferences and in having the ability to “practice” being in a role similar to that of a teacher, where they helped to scaffold their mentees’ learning.

**Conclusions**

McKeachie (1999) reminds us that “a large part of our jobs as teachers is to teach our students how to learn and think and be motivated to continue learning” (p. 42). One way we might accomplish this is through the use of a peer mentoring project, such as the one that has been described in this study. This study described mentoring-influenced-by-
relational-learning among pre-service teachers and why it “works” for the mentors who participate in this mentoring project. It also discussed how these mentors describe their roles and relationships as they have evolved in this mentoring project. These findings of this study, as well as other studies on mentoring, suggest that mentoring projects may be useful in addressing a variety of issues in educational institutions. These issues include, but are not limited to, supporting students as class enrollment grows; adding value to students’ experiences; increasing retention; making student learning visible and addressing accountability; and creating and fostering positive and engaging learning environments for students.

The findings of this study also make evident a process of mentoring as practicing educational psychology, or experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). This can be seen in the mentors’ accounts of how they actively engaged with the project and in their use of educational psychology terms and principles, both in their actual words and in the concepts and processes they described. Part of the reason they used some of these terms and ideas is because they have heard them before: mentors in this project had previously taken an Educational Psychology course. This is also an example of the power of language, in Vygotskian thought: “One makes a self through the words one has learned, fashions one’s own voice and inner speech by the selective appropriation of the voices of others” (Emerson, 1996, p. 133). These students are becoming who they are through their use of language, and the integration of others’ language with their own. From this foundational knowledge of educational psychology, they were able to engage in and re-experience many of the ideas from that course, including the Zone of Proximal
Development, scaffolding, motivation, metacognition, equilibration, and participant observation/qualitative research methodology. As they applied the concepts and principles they had learned or were re-experiencing in their mentoring relationships, they were actually practicing educational psychology and deepening their learning.

Mentoring-as-influenced-by-relational-learning also had a significant effect on the experiences of these mentors. One of the primary reasons that these participants reported this mentoring project as having so much value was because of the relationships they created. These relationships affected almost every aspect of their experiences. In most cases, the participants identified that it was because of the relationship they had with the project leader, or another mentor, or me, that they initially became involved with this project. They also said that the relationships they built with those involved in the mentoring project were a reason why they returned, sometimes for multiple semesters. Relationships created a sense of investment for them, with their mentees, their fellow mentors, the project director, and the project itself. They also showed investment in me, as a researcher, and my work with this project: they exhibited dedication to this research and, specifically, to my work, in agreeing to three, one-hour interviews, in addition to reading through parts of their transcripts, and being available for any follow-up questions I had, over the span of a couple of years. The forming of relationships also allowed for challenges and challenging situations both to occur and to be explored: forming relationships with others can be difficult, in the initial stages (i.e., with a mentee). However, relationships created connections among the mentors, who were able to discuss those challenges and experiences with each other, as a way to hear others’ perspectives
and learn from one another. These relationships also gave them a sense of accountability for and to each other. This bond helped them to motivate and encourage each other, both inside and outside of the classroom.

This study also contributes to the larger body of research on peer mentoring, by offering perspectives from those involved to explain how they describe mentoring, based on their experiences—what it is, as well as what it is not. In addition, the participants’ understanding of relational learning was provided.

Limitations

This study investigated one particular mentoring project at one particular institution. As described previously, the focus of this study was undergraduate teacher education majors at a large, Midwest university. The sample population was almost entirely White and mostly female. While the demographics of this sample are not unlike the makeup of the teacher education program at this institution, they may affect how mentoring was experienced or perceived for these individuals. Because of these factors, it is unlikely that all of the findings would transfer to other populations. However, it is likely that at least some of the findings could provide valuable information for other institutions or programs with mentoring projects. Another limitation was due to time constraints. As these interviews were conducted toward the end of a spring semester, as a way to give mentors as complete of a semester-long experience as possible, there simply was not enough time for me to coordinate and to conduct in-depth interviews with all of the mentors who were willing to participate, before the semester ended. Additionally, since the mentors who participated in this study did so as volunteers, the results may not
represent all experiences equally. While I believe that the experiences described here do represent the general experience, additional insight may be available with a more complete group of participants.

The other main limitation to this study was my own inexperience as a researcher. While I prepared as well as I could, conducted a pilot study, and continued to refine my practice throughout my data collection, analysis, and interpretation, I am certain that there were some areas in which I could have improved. As pointed out by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), “the knowledge produced in a research interview is constituted by the interaction itself, in the specific situation carried out between an interviewer and an interviewee. With another interviewer, a different interaction may be created and a different knowledge produced” (p. 32). In the same manner, it is likely that, if I were able to conduct my first interviews over after having had this entire experience, some of the “produced knowledge” might be different. This applies, as well, to the mentors; if they would come back and interview now, their answers, understandings, and chosen words may differ, based on the experiences they have had since our interviews.

**Implications for Research**

This study only described a partial view of the complete experience of these mentors. Also important to understanding these experiences is taking into account the backgrounds of the mentors and how those influence their experiences; why they chose to become mentors; what types of mentoring relationships they had in previous, unrelated experiences; and how they perceive mentoring to have impacted their lived experiences after graduation and into their teaching careers. While some of these aspects are
addressed in a cursory manner in this manuscript, they were not the main focus of the study and deserve more attention. Therefore, the following questions may be valuable for future study:

- What prior experiences were important in the decision to participate in this mentoring project? How did these experiences influence how he/she approached the mentoring relationship?
- How has mentors’ participation in this mentoring project influenced or made an impact on their current careers? Do they use anything that they learned in the mentoring project in their current position (teaching or otherwise)?
- What was it like to participate in this research study, and discuss the mentoring experience with the researcher? Were additional insights gained?

Another valuable approach to learning about the mentoring experience would be to conduct a series of interviews, at multiple points in the “becoming” of a mentor. Specifically, interviews could be conducted with students before they decided to have a mentor in the Educational Psychology course; after that experience, but before they became a mentor; and then after their mentoring experience, to see how their attitudes, values, and understanding of mentoring had—or had not—changed. It may also be valuable to examine the similarities and differences between the experiences that these mentors (or other mentors who have taken or are currently taking the Relational Learning course) had across the various contexts that were discussed in this study (i.e., on-campus in the Educational Psychology course; in Italy; working with elementary students at the inner-city school; as conversation partners, in a project supporting international students).
Another line of research is one that extends from the current study. As there were mentors who agreed to be interviewed for this study, but with whom I was not able to complete the interview process, I could follow up with these mentors for their insights. Efforts could also be made to re-connect with mentors with whom contact has not been maintained. Additionally, a survey was created, related to the findings of the pilot study, but was never tested. This survey could be revisited to gather additional data relating to the mentoring experience. This would also provide a way to reconnect with those previously mentioned, who have been out of touch. A survey would also provide a way for mentors to offer input without the time dedication that was required for the present study.

Finally, this study can provide an avenue for further study of relational learning. Specifically, additional research may focus on ways to further define relational learning, how students understand and experience it (with a scope beyond that of this study), and the effects it may have across areas such as participation in various learning experiences and in the process of learning, itself.

There is much more that can be learned about the experiences of mentors in this project. This study may provide a foundation for future research and may serve as a starting point for additional conversation surrounding mentoring experiences.

**Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for this peer mentoring project. The findings from this study can be used to continue to refine the project, further opening more space for conversation and collaboration, and enriching the project’s impact for both mentors and,
by proxy, mentees. As previously discussed, several mentors provided specific suggestions for improving the mentoring experience. Those suggestions provide a valuable starting point for continuing to explore how the needs of the mentors and mentees may be better addressed. This study also provides an in-depth look into this project, based on the input of a number of mentors with varying experiences. Compiled in this way, it provides an overview of this project not previously available. Additionally, information about the mentors’ experiences, as described in this study, can be an impetus to better-prepare mentors for participation in this program. Said differently, knowing what the experience is like for this group of mentors may help to inform subsequent groups of mentors about both the challenges and rewards of participating in this project.

In addition, this study may be beneficial for those who wish to implement their own mentoring project. Implications for structure and insight on the experiences of the participants may influence the foundations of these future projects. Specifically, the results of this study indicate that relationships and valuable learning experiences are key outcomes—and priorities—for mentors. The mentors who participated in this study believe that mentoring relationships should be egalitarian in nature, and provide opportunities to learn from and with others.

Specific recommendations, based on the experiences and perceptions of the mentors who participated in this study, for creating the foundation for, or enhancing, an existing mentoring project are as follow:
• The project leader should demonstrate characteristics that include a high level of commitment to the project and organization, a willingness to embrace others’ perspectives and change aspects of the project as needed, and who is able to communicate effectively with others.

• Engage students as mentors who find helping and supporting others’ learning rewarding, who have a sense of commitment and investment, who want to further their learning, and who embrace challenge and challenging situations.

• Establish regular meeting times for the mentors, to discuss various aspects of mentoring: situations, issues, and problems that may arise; the various understandings of what a “mentor” is and is not, and how those might change and evolve over time; and to consider how mentoring is—or is not—impacting them as students, learners, teachers, or professionals.

• Create space for discussions about the project. Specifically, allow mentors to participate in conversations that shape the direction of the project, how “mentoring” is carried out, and with whom they engage (i.e., are there different populations they might act as mentors for, outside of their primary mentoring role?)

• Create space for discussions about the experience of the project. Allow mentors to act as mentors not only to their mentees, but to their fellow mentors, as well, to scaffold their learning.

• Make both being a mentor and being a mentee an option, if possible: give individuals a choice regarding whether they want to participate or not.
- Encourage the mentors to build relationships with each other, as well as with their mentees. These relationships will, in turn, drive their learning, investment, experiences, and how they come to understand mentoring.

**Summary of the Study**

This study explored the experiences of peer mentors, using the following questions:

1. How do mentors describe their experiences in this mentoring project?
2. What are the reported outcomes of this project?
3. What characteristics do mentors believe make this project successful?
4. What do participants think could be different?

A reflecting processes approach was used as a qualitative framework for learning about the mentors’ experiences. To answer these questions, mentors drew from their experiences across three, distinct opportunities: mentoring in an Educational Psychology course; mentoring in a conversation partners program; and mentoring at a local, inner-city elementary school.

Mentoring has been a pervasive topic in many fields, as well as topic of research, for a number of years. The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn more about the experiences of mentors in a specific mentoring project, in order to describe those experiences and understand some of the benefits mentors experienced as a result of their participation. In addition, this study described how mentors understood what it is to be a mentor and discussed how they understand relational learning.
The Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (J. Smith et al., 2009) was used as a framework, along with a reflecting processes approach to the conversations and research (Andersen, 1991, 1995; Kleist, 1999; Morrison, 2001). Phenomenological interviewing (Seidman, 2006) was used as the primary method of data collection. A total of 18 mentors participated in a series of interviews. These interviews were analyzed in three sweeps. Member checking, which provided the opportunity for mentors to edit, expand, or write reflections on their interviews, was also utilized.

Chapter 4 provided an overview of what the participants believe mentoring is and is not in this project, as well as what relational learning is, as a construct and as a class. Additionally, four emergent themes were identified and described: Mentors experienced relational learning; mentors experienced investment; mentors experienced challenges; and mentors identified ways in which the mentoring project could be different. An overarching theme, mentors experience a process of becoming, emerged, as well. Chapter 4 answered Research Questions 1-4. Chapter 5 summarized the findings of Chapter 4, and provided a discussion and conclusions, grounded in the extant literature. Limitations, as well as implications for future research and practice, were also discussed.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

Relational Learning: Peer Mentoring Among Undergraduate Teacher Candidates

We want to do research on the mentoring opportunity in the Educational Psychology and/or Relational Learning class(es) at Kent State University. We want to do this because we would like to understand the outcome of teacher candidate participation in this mentoring opportunity. We would like you to take part in this project. If you decide to do this, you will be asked to discuss your experience with the mentoring project, and/or complete a survey related to the project. If you would like, we will discuss your reflections on our discussion with you at a later time.

If you take part in this project, you will be contributing to a body of knowledge about the mentoring experience. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. If you take part, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call one of us at (330) 672-0580. The project has been approved by Kent State University. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call the Division of Research and Graduate Studies (Tel. 330.672.2704). You can get a copy of this consent form by requesting one from either of us.

Sincerely,
Anne B. Morrison, Associate Professor and Kristen Chorba, Doctoral Candidate
405 White Hall
Kent State University
Kent, Ohio 44242-0001

CONSENT STATEMENT(S)

I agree to take part in this project and give Anne Morrison, Kristen Chorba, and/or other approved researchers permission to use my audio/video/still photos/e-mail communication/survey data/writing as part of this project and for the purposes of data analysis related to this project. I know what I have to do and that I can stop at any time. This material can be used for the purposes of this project on the Web or in editorial or educational material produced, published, and/or displayed, and in conference presentations and/or manuscripts relating to this project. I have been told that I have the right to see or hear the audio or video tapes.

______________________________  ______________________________
Signature                   Date

______________________________
Please print name

______________________________
Address

______________________________
Phone number

______________________________
E-mail

School of Lifespan Development and Educational Sciences
Counseling and Human Development Services • Educational Psychology • Gerontology •
Human Development and Family Studies • Instructional Technology •
Rehabilitation Counseling • School Psychology • Special Education
P.O. Box 5190 • Kent, Ohio 44242-0001
330-672-2294 • Fax 330-672-2512 • www.ehhs.kent.edu/ldes/
APPENDIX B

SECOND SWEEP: ANNOTATIONS
Appendix B

Second Sweep: Annotations

what Emma said earlier, about meeting people and being able to work together and how that makes for so much better of a college experience. um but both of them are really nice and started telling me what they were going to do over the weekend, the one ways like she was talking about her partner, I might call you this weekend. So I could get a feel for how they were and they were being like really honest with me which is good. They already had a level of trust in me that they could be honest. mentor IS someone you can #trust Um, yeah, and then my conversation partner and I met for the first time in there also. It took a while for us to meet because I emailed him because he wasn’t at our orientation so I just had to email him and say I’m your conversation partner and he couldn’t meet until March because of his ESL, so yeah, so after March 1st I’ll be able to meet with you but I can’t until ten. So this was like, I think it was around like Valentine’s Day or something so I had to wait until March to even meet with this guy. Then we met and that was good. Um, in the meantime people were doing their lesson plans so we had to go the gd psych classes a lot. Where was I?

#trust is a really interesting idea, because it plays into #investment and also being an #advocate for your mentees. A mentor mentor IS has their mentees’ backs — and the mentees know that.

Title: Emma All.doc
Excerpt Range: 62991-63815

As a peer mentor I worked with two gd psych students helping them do their big lesson plan project, helping them with concepts and proofreading and stuff like that. I also was a conversation partner, so I was friends with an international student and we met a couple times and just talked about our lives and what was going on. I also tutor a family of refugees from Burma, who live in Lakewood. We just do homework and just talk about other things like having English and stuff like that to help them improve their English help them improve their American like social skills and stuff like that. In the relational learning class we usually like reflect on all the peer mentoring stuff that we do and [help each other kind of make sense of it all] mentor IS: [we also just talk about our lives] the “personal” side — she said “lives” and not, for example, “classes.” So they talk about things that are personal as well as those that relate to their school and professional lives and [help each other through any problems that we’re having]. Mikey also talked about the idea of helping others through struggles/problems and having that kind of #connection #1 — characteristics of a mentor.

Title: Emma All.doc
Excerpt Range: 64557-65260

Um, [inaudible]. I studied really hard and I felt like I wasn’t as good of a peer mentor as the other people were just because I would always kind of ask people questions and it was like never like “oh we could go to her and she’ll know for sure” kind of feel like people were like “oh ask her last, she’s like a last resort.” It was a good, you know thing to learn that you’re [not always going to know everything] mentor IS it’s nice to learn that that you don’t always, it’s okay to ask other people for help] use this quote to so, definitely not doing the project to help me see that. I guess that’s one of the important things of peer mentoring that [you’re going to need to rely on the people around you to help you out] mentoring is (being able to rely on the people around you….) PL IS so.

This is a different experience than a lot of the other mentors had, because Emma didn’t write a lesson plan in her gd psych class, gc she wasn’t in Anna’s section. So she didn’t have quite the same knowledge that other mentors did about the specifics of the project (though she could help

Note. My annotations are in pink; additional notes are in green and orange.
Note. My annotations are in pink; additional notes are in green and orange.
APPENDIX C

MEMBER CHECKING:

MENTOR REFLECTIONS ON ANNOTATED TRANSCRIPT
Appendix C

Member Checking: Mentor Reflections on Annotated Transcripts

Yeah, our program can’t take over the world, but it’s going to have to... our ideas, our experiences, our mentoring could help it grow into something else that it needed to be, you know, in the architecture school, or whatever it is. They can take our feedback, but they’re going to have to change it, too! Use this quote, because... Mentoring helps mentoring become a more wide-spread program! Mentoring is everywhere even if you don’t realize it. #guiding – offering #suggestions and then they can take them or leave them and figure out what works for them.

Note. Mentor reflections are in red. My annotations are in pink; additional notes are in green and orange.

Title: KarieALL.doc
Excerpt Range: 81067-81798

*Jay
So, I guess my definition of mentoring kind of meshes with what Karie said about the relationship. I don’t think, personally, I don’t think you can answer what is mentoring without having something about building relationships. Because ultimately, that’s what you’re doing. Mentoring is a social science. So, you’re not going to be a successful mentor if you’re not social with the people around you. So, building relationships mentor is huge. So, building in order to build those relationships, however, you need to be open to suggestions open to criticism mentor is. You know, to be the best mentor that you can be, you have to be very, very open-minded mentor is. And you can’t be set in your agenda mentor is NOT because you’re not trying to pass on your agenda to your mentees. Use this quote.

Title: KarieALL.doc
Excerpt Range: 82982-84604

*Jay
But as far as different aspects of mentoring, you have to be open-minded mentor is. You can’t pass on your agenda from person to person mentor is NOT because not everybody’s the same person. You’re not trying to build a person mentor is NOT, you’re trying to develop that person into what they want to be mentor is. Use this quote. A mentoring relationship will be defined and will be different for person or for each mentor-mentee partnership.

Title: KarieALL.doc
Excerpt Range: 84671-91152

*Karie
I think mentoring is a type of relational learning. Another example of relational learning would probably be co-teaching. You know, working in a classroom with another teacher. You have the same goals for your classroom, but your kids are going to learn from each different co-teacher differently. So, I think relational learning is kind of a big umbrella, and mentoring and co-teaching and possibly even tutoring falls underneath of it.

*Jay
To add to the co-teaching thing, the kids are getting it from another, two different perspectives, but the teachers are, too. You know, I could see Jay teaching it one way and I’m thinking, “Oh, that’s really good,” you know. It’s going to teach the two teachers as well. RL is. Mentors are also learning from other mentors. Again, these kinds of relationships are happening all around us, even outside the world of teaching.
*Jay

Yeah, yeah, yeah absolutely. I think it’s one of those things where I [you take what you did as a mentor and you’re applying it to a classroom instead of applying it to help with somebody else’s classroom - now you are applying it to your own classroom] benefit. But as far as coming back and knowing what you guys are doing and talking to Kristen, and um, I was actually kind of shocked like I came in here a little nervous because I was like I don’t know what is going on, you know, I had no idea what these guys were doing but now that you have talked about it, it sounds like the mentoring experience, like I said, is pretty much the same. Um, but I guess in hindsight, um, I don’t know it’s…I am only a year out so it’s not like I am looking back very far. Um, I think if I were to maybe be out of college another five or ten years and then look back on it I think there would be a drastic change. I don’t know necessarily what that change would be but, obviously, the more time goes by the more changes you are going to see. Um, so I’d say just being out a year I can see and I can, you know, remember some exact days that I had back as a student and mentoring but you know come ten years asking me the same questions it’s probably going to be way different I’m going to be like okay well kind of remember doing that I remember what the mentoring experience was but I don’t necessarily remember any of my individual details - like not details but not necessarily days no experiences, like I just kind of remember like a broad theme but like you ask me now I can tell you, you know how I helped them prepare for final exams and those types of things. I can’t remember here and I never actually answered the question! So, moving forward I see myself using this mentoring experience all the time in the classroom. I certainly agree with the idea of “mentoring” and believe it benefits both parties. The interesting aspect of it moving forward, however, is that I am getting older and the kids I teach are staying the same age. As a mentor, I was only 1 or 2 years older from my mentees but now I’m to the point as a teacher where I am a decade older than these kids I teach. So, my interest is how mentoring will change now that I’m that much older and separated from my students. Will it be more beneficial because of the “older but wiser” cliché or will it be less beneficial? Can I longer relate? Right now, my mentoring of students is strong because I CAN relate to these youth. As a teacher, you don’t want to “lose touch”

How about in terms of use. Do you see yourself using anything now that you are a year out, do you see yourself using anything that you have thought about during the mentoring project or you learned or you have realized?

*Jay

In theory, yes, in practice no. Even if students want to use what they have learned, or create a similar experience for their students, it will be limited by circumstances. In another interview (Katie?), Jay and Katie talked about how part of what makes this class/project “work” is the people involved - and how that depends a little bit on luck (who is around interested, who takes Anne’s class or finds out about the KL course, who has the right number of credit hours to sign up, etc.). So, I think the same holds true in practice. While these basic ideas may be applicable to a huge variety of situations, you won’t always have the support you need; or a class that will cooperate; or colleagues or a boss (or parents) that will be supportive of your efforts - so maybe you have to rethink or revise what you take into that situation and how you implement these ideas. I couldn’t have said this better myself!

Note. Mentor reflections are in red. My annotations are in pink; additional notes are in green and orange.
APPENDIX D

THIRD SWEEP: EXAMPLE OF CODING IN DEDOOSE SOFTWARE
Appendix D

Third Sweep: Example of Coding in Dedoose Software

Note: Coding in Dedoose from a mentor who did not provide reflections
Note: Coding in Dedoose from a mentor who did provide reflections
APPENDIX E

MENTORING IS AND MENTORING IS NOT
APPENDIX E

Mentoring Is and Mentoring is Not

Mentoring Is, or A Mentor Is:

- Going above and beyond
- Wanting to make them feel welcomed and encouraged
- On a deeper level
- Bring them along; you help them in all aspects of your learning
- Feeling like I’m there for them in anything that they need.
- Being a partner in the learning process, growing, helping someone along in their skills not just from the surface level but on a deeper level of all there is in life whatever it is that they need to bring home
- They already had a level of trust in me that they could be honest.
- Help each other kind of make sense of it all
- Not always going to know everything
- A really good way to expand your perspective
- You are equal
- Like forming new relationships that you learn from each other, you taught each other things but you never were like, equal
- I just look at it as a way to help other students achieve their full potential in a class that they might think is too difficult or might have or might be struggling in. So, that’s where I come in and I just help them realize that it’s not that
hard and help answer any questions and help them get to the point where they feel they need to be.

- I just think that I want to influence as many people as I can
- A choice
- Someone to look up to in different times of need
- Guidance
- An on-going cycle
- Being available
- To be a resource
- Easier to reach out to than your professor
- Saying, “I know about this and so I want to help you know about it so you can go on with your life and be better and I think that’s what mentoring was, but mentoring also was, I sat in your shoes and I’ve been in this classroom and I know about that.”
- Like teaching
- Scaffolding and guidance
- You learn and you grow by relating common experiences together
- Someone who is passionate about working with other people
- Learning just as much as, if not more than the students themselves are
- Extra help
- Asking students to think about the question, “how does this apply to your life?”
- Not only is it education, but it’s good practice
- Someone who helps you realize that you can do it on your own and just is your little push when you feel like how am supposed to even do this.
- Different for everybody.
- Learning through interacting with peers
- Learning through forming relationships with other people and helping them
- Being a good example
- Relationships that you form with people in the class and always be able to go back and say, hey, this is happening in my classroom. What do you think?
- Helping the students in a class I’ve already taken excel
- Someone who made us think
- Involved in the process
- There for your support
- Can say it in a different way
- Share stories about what I did or what I saw happen to other groups or what I had heard from other mentors
- Gives you complete responsibility . . . and basically allows you to fail (in order to learn, then encourage you to think through better ways for the next time)
- About sharing your experiences and your struggles and your positive and negative experiences
- Hearing the other stories and hearing the experiences of other people
- Sharing what you’ve been through to help someone else
- Open communication, sharing experiences, sharing your struggles, just being there to offer support in all kinds of ways
- Being able to listen to it and make changes to it and not think, you know, “I’m the master of this,” be able to change-form-change it as it needs to be changed
- Patience
- Passion
- Willingness to really, really, really help people
- Someone that, she, can put theirself on our [the mentee’s] level
- Easy to communicate with
- Someone who can look at things through our [the mentees’] eyes
- I don’t think you can answer what is mentoring without having, without saying something about building relationships. Because ultimately, that’s what you’re doing. Mentoring is a social science. So, you’re not going to be a successful mentor if you’re not social with the people around you.
- You have to be open-minded. You can’t pass on your agenda from person to person because not everybody’s the same person. You’re not trying to build a person, you’re trying to develop that person into what they want to be.
- A mentoring relationship will be defined and will be different for person or for each mentor/mentee partnership.
- Compatibility
- Finding ways to connect with or get along with all types of people.
Everywhere in education

Just trying to help them, our individual mentees, and the others in the class.

Helping out someone to learn something you’ve learned already and at the same time receiving help from them in refining what you’ve learned.

Learning new things also with the help of your fellow peer mentors.

Really, really helpful

A leader

Helping [mentees] along when they need

Being honest about what is going on

We are on the same level, we sort of have similar life experiences that we are going through, not only do I give them advice about what they may be struggling with as far as course work or anything it’s more we are learning, I am learning myself as well, I may be learning how to teach someone something better or how to like communicate better which is what I learned with my conversation partner and just how to build better relationships

Simultaneously teaching and building relationships.

You take what you did as a mentor and now you are applying it to a classroom instead of applying it to—helping with somebody else’s classroom—now you are applying it to your own classroom

Learning [that is] extended beyond the classroom

Someone whom you care about and who cares about you
- Personal inspiration
- Someone we are able to study with and who’s actually going to take an invested interest in our life, not just because we’re in the same class together.
- Those relationships last beyond just a semester
- Taking an invested interest in someone’s life
- Held me accountable
- I don’t think it’s so much about who’s assigned to you as just like . . . it shows you who’s willing to help
- In it just to help people and help me learn
- Just being able to listen is a big part of being a mentor
- A professional friend
- It’s a life-long thing
- People that I can talk about my problem to.
- [Someone who can give] advice on professionalism and how to be a teacher and maybe like how to introduce you to people that can help you get a job
- Someone that’s there to help you get through the structure of class or the structure of your own research and just kind of there to guide you
- We’re all mentors to each other because we take things from each other that can help us for one our professional development. Then in the Ed Psych course we’ve been around so we can help them get through the stumbling blocks and what not
- Role model
• Someone who has knowledge that the other students don’t
• [Someone who] understands that other students want to learn
• You need [to guide them], not to tell them it’s my way or the highway.
• Equal to students, not above them
• Helps us with anything that we need
• Guide us when, you know, if we have a problem
• Available whenever we needed her
• Checked up on us
• It’s working with other people in whatever aspect it is. It’s helping each other out
• I just left that class everyday feeling inspired and like my thinking had really been challenged
• Inspired and enlightened and keeping them driven to want to do something like this
• The ability to be professional and “friends”
• Doesn’t overstep the boundary
• Being serious and passionate
• Less of a gap between the lifestyles
• Can relate to you in ways [even the best instructors can’t]
• Guide them in the right direction
• Someone who was there for a class that we had never previously experienced before
• Never to a point where I don’t know what’s going on right now.

Mentoring is Not, or A Mentor is Not:

• Just got me through an assignment,
• Didn’t have any connection
• Seemed too busy
• Power struggle
• Not helpful
• Tutoring
• A huge time constraint
• Hand-holding
• Directly feeding them answers
• A teaching assistant
• Someone who lays everything out on the table and make it easy for us
• For people who are only in a profession for themselves
• Just cooperation
• Someone who is never there
• Lecture and drill
• A contract term
• Someone who gives false information
• Not just a professional relationship or just being friends
REFERENCES


