

# Pennsylvania Teacher Educator

Volume 25, No. 1, Spring 2026

A Publication of PAC-TE

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# **Pennsylvania Teacher Educator**

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A Journal of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators

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Volume 25, No. 1.

# Pennsylvania Teacher Educator

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# Pennsylvania Teacher Educator

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# Pennsylvania Teacher Educator

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A Journal of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators

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## Call for Manuscripts

The Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators publishes a peer-reviewed journal — the *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator*. Our journal is intended to provide PAC-TE members and other writers with a venue to capture current research that makes use of quantitative, qualitative, and/or mixed-methods approaches, as well as rigorous theoretical works that present current research, advances, and changes in the emerging directions of teacher education. Publication decisions are made following a blind-review process.

In 2021, the *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator* moved to publishing two issues per year where a sufficient number of high quality submissions were received, allowing more flexibility for writers to conduct and to report their research throughout the academic year.

Beginning with Volume 25 (2026), authors do not have to belong to PAC-TE, nor must they be employed in Pennsylvania-based institutions of higher education in order for their work to be considered for publication in *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator*. While preference is given to teacher educators from Pennsylvania, submissions are invited and welcomed from authors in other jurisdictions.

### Submission Guidelines

1. Manuscripts should be no more than 12 pages of narrative (exclusive of references, tables, and appendices), and typed using Calibri 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Manuscripts must conform to the latest APA style manual.
2. A cover page should include the title of the article, a brief (no more than 50-word) abstract, the name, position, place of employment, mailing address, phone number, e-mail address, and a 2-3 sentence description of background and experience of each author.
3. The title of the article should also appear on page 1 of the manuscript, but do not include the name(s) of the author(s) on page 1.
4. Pages should be numbered consecutively, including the bibliography, but the author's name should not appear on the manuscript itself.
5. Charts or illustrative material will be accepted if space permits. Such materials must be clear, camera ready, and submitted as separate files of the type pdf, jpeg or tif. Photographs will usually not be used, unless they are black and white and of high quality.
6. Reference list entries must include doi numbers where available, formatted as hyperlinks. Journal article and book titles should be formatted according to sentence case. In sentence case, most major and minor words are lowercase (proper nouns are an exception in that they are always capitalized). In contrast, titles of academic journals should be formatted according to title case. In title case, the first word and all words of 4 letters or more in length are capitalized. Refer to section 6.17 of the latest edition of the APA style manual for details.

7. Manuscripts should be submitted as email attachments, sent to PA Teacher Educator at [journal@pac-te.org](mailto:journal@pac-te.org).
8. Authors are expected to take full responsibility for the accuracy of the content in their articles, including references, quotations, tables, and figures. The editorial board reserves the right to edit articles accepted for publication.
9. Authors of manuscripts accepted for publication are asked to sign a copyright release to PAC-TE. This allows PAC-TE to publish the information in the *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator*, to publish the information in future PAC-TE publications, and to grant permission to persons or organizations that formally request the right to reprint the material in whole or in part.
10. Authors of manuscripts accepted for publication are also expected to make a presentation about their article at the PAC-TE Teacher Education Assembly in the fall or spring. There is no remuneration for articles accepted for publication. There is no fee for the review of the manuscript.

### **Call for Manuscript Reviewers**

The *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator* is seeking Pennsylvania-based teacher educators who are interested in becoming reviewers for the journal. Each manuscript that is submitted to the journal undergoes a blind-review process from three peer reviewers. Consequently, we are always in need of good reviewers who return manuscripts to the editors in a timely fashion. Members who are interested in becoming a reviewer should contact [journal@pac-te.org](mailto:journal@pac-te.org).

# Pennsylvania Teacher Educator

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## A Journal of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators

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Dear colleagues:

I am pleased to bring you Volume 25, No. 1 of the *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator*, on behalf of the journal's editorial team. We are grateful for the diligence and care of the Associate Editors and the many reviewers whose generous contributions of time and expertise make this journal possible.

This issue presents four pieces of scholarship, each of which reflects the vital and varied work our teacher education community continues to pursue on behalf of the preservice teachers we serve and, ultimately, the K–12 students whose lives our graduates will touch.

*There is more than paperwork! Preparing pre-service Special Education teachers for the daily tasks of case management*, by Colleen Commisso and Brittany Severino, addresses the daily demands of special education practice that teacher preparation programs often miss. Four specific areas, including daily paperwork, organization, unexpected requests, and parent concerns were examined in this pilot study, which provides a timely and practical contribution to the literature on special education teacher preparation.

*Podcasts as pedagogy: A framework for utilizing podcast-based learning in the education classroom*, by Jenna Copper, Amy Orville, and Samantha Fecich makes a practical case for harnessing the educational potential of podcasts with preservice teachers. The authors offer a framework that gives teacher educators a concrete pathway for integrating podcast-based learning into our classrooms.

The third article, *Mentor experiences in the community and representation (CoRe) program: A layered and holistic approach to mentoring*, by Kalani Palmer, Emily Wender, Nicole Rice, and Leslie Coates, investigates the mentoring relationship from the perspective of the mentor. Through interviews with mentors in a year-long initiative, the authors examined the meaningful connections, reciprocal learning, and reflective growth that characterize effective mentoring.

The issue closes with *Mentorship matters: Co-thinking and emotional anchoring for preservice teachers in urban contexts* by Sara Podvasnik, Jennifer Tepe, Susan Parker, Erica Slobodnik, and Sue Mariani. This article examines the increasingly complex reality of mentoring new teachers in today's urban classrooms. The trauma-informed, culturally sustaining mentorship model the authors describe offers genuine promise for teacher preparation programs committed to equity and excellence.

What these four articles make clear, taken as a whole, is that preparing teachers goes far beyond technical skill. It is work that is relational, adaptive, and deeply rooted in the human experience.

We remain grateful for your continued contributions to the *Pennsylvania Teacher Educator* and to the broader aims of PAC-TE. It is the scholarship and dedication of this community that makes this journal possible, and we are honored to serve as its stewards.

Respectfully,

Philip M. Kanfush, Ed.D., B.C.B.A.-D., I.B.A., L.B.A., L.B.S.  
Managing Editor

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# PAC-TE

**Pride • Advocacy • Commitment • Teacher • Excellence**

*Pennsylvania Teacher Educator* is an official publication of the Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators. The journal is published as a service to the members of the organization and others concerned with teacher education.

*Pennsylvania Teacher Educator* serves as a forum for the open exchange of ideas and information related to the improvement of teacher education at all levels. Points of view and opinions are those of the authors of the articles and do not necessarily represent the views of the organization.

*Pennsylvania Teacher Educator* is a peer-reviewed journal that depends on both potential authors and reviewers to produce a high-quality publication each year. We are always in need of reviewers with a wide variety of perspectives and expertise to help us with the biannual review process. Becoming a reviewer is a helpful way to give back to the profession of teacher education and to PAC-TE as an organization. If you would like to be a reviewer, email [journal@pac-te.org](mailto:journal@pac-te.org). Reviewers must be PAC-TE members.

PAC-TE is dedicated to providing strong advocacy for teacher education within the Commonwealth by promoting quality programs of teacher education and providing a variety of forums for discussion of issues that are of concern to all who are engaged in teacher education.

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**Joel Geary**

PAC-TE Executive Director

Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators

(717) 516-8893 | [joel@pac-te.org](mailto:joel@pac-te.org)

# There is more than paperwork!

## Preparing pre-service Special Education teachers for the daily tasks of case management

Colleen E. Commisso

Brittany Severino

### **Abstract**

This pilot study integrated various case management activities within two special education courses to better prepare pre-service teachers for the complex requirements of their soon-to-be career. Analysis of 27 pre-and post-tests revealed a significant increase in preparedness, particularly in paperwork, organization, handling unexpected daily requests, and responding to parent concerns.

### **About the Authors**

Dr. Colleen Commisso is an associate professor of special education at West Chester University and previously worked as a high school special education teacher in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Brittany Severino is an assistant professor of special education at West Chester University and previously worked as a high school special education teacher in Pennsylvania.

Direct correspondence by email to [ccommisso@wcupa.edu](mailto:ccommisso@wcupa.edu).

Teacher attrition is a significant issue plaguing the country, with more casualties in special education than in any other certification (US Department of Education, 2025). Younger, less experienced Special Education Teachers (SETs) exhibit higher rates of burnout compared to veteran teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014; Bettini et al., 2017). Almost a third of newly hired SETs leave the field within three years of employment, never obtaining tenure status (Cancio et al., 2018). For decades, researchers have explored the root causes of this extreme shortage and teacher turnover. This research has found that among SETs, responsibilities of caseload management have caused elevated levels of burnout (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Caballero, 2024; Hagaman & Casey, 2018).

Research has investigated the components related to caseload management that impacted feelings of burnout, which can lead to attrition. Hagaman and Casey (2018) found that new SETs noted that the high number of students on their caseload made it nearly impossible to provide special education services to each student and took away time from their teaching. In addition to high caseload numbers and the complex tasks associated with caseload management are stressors for new and experienced SETs. Similarly, Billingsley and Bettini (2019) conducted a review of 25 research articles published between 2002 and 2017 on SET attrition, and found that completing paperwork, unmanageable workload, and coordination and support from additional IEP team members were key working conditions or demands increasing attrition. Furthermore, a meta-analysis conducted by Park & Shin (2020) found that self-efficacy and stress were significantly related to burnout dimensions (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). Given this research, changes need to occur at all levels to help ensure certified SETs are fulfilling positions and remaining in those positions (Billingsley, 1993).

One change proposed by researchers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Caballero, 2024; Hagaman & Casey, 2018) is focusing on how pre-service SETs can be better equipped to handle the complexities of caseload management before entering the classroom. Incorporating this training in teacher preparation programs is important given that less experienced teachers are more likely to leave a position compared to experi-

enced teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). One of the largest protective factors for burnout is self-efficacy or belief in one's own ability to succeed (Kim & Seo, 2018). Usher and Pajares (2008) found that the most powerful source of teacher self-efficacy is mastery experiences, which are successful encounters with a task that enhance a teacher's belief in their ability to succeed (Bandura, 1986). Teacher preparation programs can provide pre-service SETs with mastery experiences before being hired in a full-time position, thus increasing their self-efficacy and reducing the risk of burnout.

Although all teacher preparation programs require a student teaching experience to help soon-to-be certified SETs demonstrate their ability to teach and manage a caseload, this experience is often too short and is unable to fully replicate natural demands, as the student teacher typically shadows their mentor teacher without managing an entire caseload. Instead, teacher preparation programs should consider how pre-service SETs can practice and demonstrate the difficult skills of caseload management alongside their required coursework before student teaching. These accompanying skills include, but are not limited to, responding to parent concerns, addressing student issues, collecting progress monitoring data, collaborating with fellow IEP team members, conducting and attending various types of meetings.

### Literature Review

Few studies have explored specific components of caseload management in isolation. IDEA (2004) requires parent participation throughout the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process as a case manager's responsibility. Mandell and Murray (2005) found that most pre-service special education programs rely on fieldwork rather than coursework for students to experience parent communication, which limits their preparedness. Scholars have emphasized the importance of further developing standalone courses by adding assignments specific to parent communication, such as generating parent interview questions, engaging in class discussions, and providing reflection opportunities (Mulholland & Blecker, 2008; Strassfeld, 2018).

IDEA (2004) also requires students to be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which is the general education classroom, to the greatest extent

possible. For students with diverse disabilities to be successful in the LRE, collaboration with general education teachers is another case manager's responsibility. Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) identify several recommendations for preparing pre-service SETs for this responsibility within coursework, including discussion of time management strategies, creating fact sheets to summarize a student's IEP or disability, and practicing effective communication strategies.

Additionally, caseload management requires completing the necessary special education paperwork for students. Mehrenberg (2013) interviewed 18 novice SETs from around the United States to discover that most participants felt their pre-service training did not adequately prepare them for the paperwork requirements of being a caseload manager or the multitasking involved in completing this paperwork alongside other responsibilities. Furthermore, pre-service SETs must be prepared to discuss paperwork, progress monitoring data, and concerns at IEP meetings. Several studies have engaged pre-service SETs in simulated IEP meetings to identify increased awareness of understanding the IEP process, team member roles, and collaboration required (Mason, 2011; Toledo, 2023; Werts et al., 2002). However, no studies have required pre-service SETs to engage in all the tasks necessary to come to an IEP meeting prepared or how to handle unexpected situations that arise during the school day as a SET (e.g., emails, student concerns).

Being able to effectively navigate all requirements of case load management is essential for success as a SET; however, the expectations of case management are often discussed and explained in isolation without teaching preservice teachers how to organize and prioritize the tasks required. This is evident in the current research, as no known studies have been found on the teachings and impacts of case management skills on pre-service SETs, emphasizing the critical need for research in this area.

### Research Questions

1. Do pre-service SETs perceive higher levels of preparedness for the various roles of case management (e.g., paperwork, data collection, parent communication, IEP team collaboration, meetings, unexpected events, and prioritizing time) after completing a case management activity in-

tervention when comparing pre-test to post-test results?

- b. Which case management activities warrant the most significant growth in pre-service SETs' level of preparedness?
- c. Which case management activities warrant the least growth in pre-service SETs' level of preparedness?

## Method

### Research Design

The researchers implemented a pretest-posttest design with IRB approval during a 15-week semester for this pilot study. The pre-test and post-test included 13 Likert-scale items regarding specific tasks or requirements of case management that the researchers embedded within two required courses in the Department of Special Education at a mid-sized public university in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The first course, a methods course for supporting secondary-aged students, reviewed co-teaching and adaptation of instruction for standalone Special Education PreK-12th-grade majors. The second course was an assessment course that reviewed the law and requirements for creating essential documents such as the Reevaluation Report (RR) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) for double majors pursuing certification in Special Education PreK-12th grade, and Early Grades PreK-4th grade, or Middle Grades 4th-8th grade. Both courses met in person weekly for approximately two and a half hours of in-person instruction.

Pre-service SETs received a caseload with approximately 18 students receiving learning support services. They also received a copy of their daily schedule including their contractual start and dismissal time, push-in or pull-out classes, lunch, and prep. Pre-service SETs were required to prepare and complete the case manager activities within their school day, versus trying to use time outside of school. The instructors purposely required this to help pre-service SETs engage in time management, but also to help create a manageable workload and work-life balance. The following case management skills and activities were integrated within both courses, and aligned with items on the pre-and post-tests.

## **Paperwork Requirements**

Each Pre-service SET's caseload included students' names, special education service(s), last RR date, and last IEP date. Pre-service SETs created a spreadsheet to identify when each student's new IEP was due, new RR was due, as well as 60 and 90 days before the RR due date to begin collecting data and determine if new testing is required. Pre-service SETs then used this information to create a monthly calendar (Figure 1) to organize their daily prep time and meetings. Next, students used backward planning to map when they would request or collect data, write each document, send reminder emails to the IEP team for the upcoming meetings, and conduct the meetings. Two items were on the pre-and post-test regarding the skills practiced related to paperwork requirements, including how prepared the pre-service SETs felt to organize a school year of compliance due dates for a caseload of students (e.g., RR, IEP) and how to manage their daily prep time to accomplish the required paperwork.

## **Data Collection**

For one student on their caseload, the pre-service SETs analyzed data collection sheets to create progress monitoring reports for five annual IEP goals, including academic and functional needs. Pre-service SETs created a progress report for the marking period and drafted an email home to the students' parents explaining the progress report. Additionally, pre-service SETs created monthly calendars to keep track of who, when, and what tools would be used to collect data on each IEP goal for each student on their caseload. Aside from data collection, the pre-service SETs also learned that there could be additional requirements that need time allocated on their monthly calendars. For example, some students have an IEP accommodation that requires their case manager to send weekly updates to their parents regarding grades, academic performance, and behavior. Lastly, students practiced identifying accommodations needed in the students' classes by creating a spreadsheet of accommodations required for students with an IEP in their classes. Three items were on the pre-and post-test regarding the skills practiced related to data collection, including how prepared the pre-service SETs felt to analyze data and create progress reports, communicate with parents about academic and behavioral updates connected to data,

and manage students' accommodations and their effectiveness.

## **Parent Communication**

Pre-service SETs practiced drafting an email to parents regarding progress monitoring data (described above) and had the opportunity to practice additional forms of electronic communication with parents. Pre-service SETs received an email from a parent on their caseload with a concern and responded by submitting a recorded phone call that addressed the concern and outlined next steps. Conversely, pre-service SETs received a concern about a student on their caseload and drafted an email to parents explaining the issue and requesting additional information. Lastly, pre-service SETs created and maintained a parent communication log to document all email and phone call communication. Three items were on the pre-and post-test regarding the skills practiced related to parent communication, including how prepared the pre-service SETs felt to respond to parent concerns or requests electronically, initiate contact with parents regarding a student concern, and document parent communication.

## **IEP Team Member Collaboration**

Pre-service SETs completed several activities to practice communicating with fellow teachers and related service providers. The pre-service SETs drafted an introductory email to their fellow general education colleagues. Additionally, pre-service SETs practiced drafting emails to general education teachers or related service providers requesting data for a student's IEP goal, general input for the upcoming IEP, or specific input to address parent concerns. Two items were on the pre-and post-test regarding the skills practiced related to collaboration, including how prepared the pre-service SETs felt to request data and discuss student concerns with fellow teachers and related service providers.

## **Meetings**

Pre-service teachers engaged in a mock IEP meeting reviewing a student's new RR and IEP in a small-group setting or engaged in a one-on-one back-to-school meeting with a parent. In both scenarios, the parents brought up concerns or specific questions for the special education teacher to address on the spot and in

a face-to-face meeting. One item was on the pre-and post-test regarding the skills practiced related to meetings, including how prepared pre-service SETs felt to address parent concerns during in-person meetings.

### ***Unexpected Events***

Pre-service SETs received several unexpected “events” during the middle of class sessions. The goal of these events was to simulate situations in which the pre-service SETs had to respond in the moment without being able to consider, think, discuss, and make a decision. Each event posed a problem that a case manager could face during the school day, such as a student on their caseload coming to their classroom upset in the middle of a lesson, or they receive a call while teaching that a student on their caseload was just involved in a fight in the cafeteria. After the event was read aloud to the students, the pre-service SETs had two minutes to type how they would approach it or resolve it. One item was on the pre-and post-test regarding the skills practiced related to unexpected events, including how prepared pre-service SETs felt to handle unexpected situations that arise during the school day.

### ***Prioritizing Time***

In addition to spur-of-the-moment events, the pre-service SETs were given a variety of different tasks required of them at the start of their school day (Figure 2) that were associated with their responsibilities of being a case manager. Examples included providing read-aloud for a test due to staff absences, responding to a principal’s email requesting information, or completing behavior rating scales for the school psychologist. Pre-service SETs prioritized the order in which they would respond or complete each task, identify how and when they would do it, and any other IEP team members they would contact. One item was on the pre-and post-test regarding pre-service SETs’ ability to prioritize the daily tasks of being a case manager, including when and how they would complete those tasks.

### ***Participants***

There were 35 pre-service SETs between the two class sections, including juniors (71%, n=25), seniors (20%, n=7), and sophomores (9%, n=3). The researchers administered the pre-test to all participants during the

first class session, with 32 responses providing consent. The researchers administered the post-test during the last class session, with originally 32 responses providing consent. However, after reviewing the data, the researchers removed five responses because most of the survey responses were incomplete. This removal left 27 pre-service SETs who completed the post-test in its entirety and provided consent.

### ***Data Analysis***

The pre-test and post-test had 13 Likert-scale items specific to the various case management skills practiced throughout the semester. These questions started with, “How prepared do you feel to...”, with the specific skill following, such as “...respond to parents regarding concerns they have about their child?” Pre-service SETs had four answer options, which included 1) not prepared, 2) somewhat prepared, 3) mostly prepared, and 4) very prepared. The researchers initially analyzed these items using descriptive statistics (Table 1). The researchers converted each response to an assigned value (1-4) to compare the pre-test and post-test scores to determine if the pre-service SETs made adequate growth or if the embedded case manager activities positively increased pre-service SETs’ level of preparedness for all aspects of case management (Table 2). The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was used, as an alternative to dependent t-test, to compare each survey item due to the sample size being less than 30 pre-service SETs and the survey using a 4-point Likert scale (Hollander et al., 2014). Additionally, each pre-service SETs pre-test and post-test responses were aggregated to single scores to compare overall differences.

Additionally, the pre-test and post-test included two open-ended questions, one of which was different, and one of which remained the same. On the pre-test, the pre-service SETs described personal or professional experiences they obtained outside of required field courses. This helped the researchers determine the pre-service SETs’ background knowledge before beginning the intervention or case management practice. On the post-test, the pre-service SETs identified which case management assignments they found most beneficial and which skill(s) they would like additional practice with. This question would further clarify the quantitative results and be used by researchers as a reflexive piece in making future course improvements.

**Table 1***Pre-Test and Post-Test Descriptive Statistics*

Survey Items		Response Options				M	SD
		Not Prepared	Somewhat Prepared	Mostly Prepared	Very Prepared		
Organizing compliance due dates (e.g., RRs and IEPs)	Pre-Test	45%	48%	6%	0%	1.5	0.71
	Post-Test	0%	19%	44%	37%	3.0	1.41
Organizing time to complete paperwork requirements	Pre-Test	27%	58%	12%	3%	1.0	0.00
	Post-Test	0%	11%	70%	19%	3.0	0.00
Planning when and how to collect data	Pre-Test	21%	52%	21%	6%	2.5	2.12
	Post-Test	0%	15%	56%	30%	3.0	0.00
Analyzing and reporting data for progress monitoring	Pre-Test	18%	55%	24%	3%	3.0	1.41
	Post-Test	0%	19%	59%	22%	3.5	0.71
Contacting teachers to discuss student concerns	Pre-Test	6%	24%	55%	15%	3.0	1.41
	Post-Test	0%	4%	44%	52%	4.0	0.00
Requesting data from teachers or related services	Pre-Test	9%	42%	45%	3%	2.5	0.71
	Post-Test	0%	4%	44%	52%	4.0	0.00
Documenting parent communication	Pre-Test	21%	42%	30%	6%	3.0	1.41
	Post-Test	0%	0%	37%	63%	4.0	0.00
Responding to parents' concerns (e.g., email, phone)	Pre-Test	18%	39%	42%	0%	2.5	0.71
	Post-Test	0%	7%	56%	37%	3.5	0.71
Contacting parents with concerns	Pre-Test	18%	39%	42%	0%	3.0	0.00
	Post-Test	0%	7%	56%	37%	4.0	0.00
Ensuring accommodations are correctly implemented	Pre-Test	30%	48%	21%	0%	2.0	1.41
	Post-Test	0%	15%	63%	22%	3.0	0.00
Responding to parents' concerns during meetings	Pre-Test	27%	52%	21%	0%	2.0	0.00
	Post-Test	0%	11%	74%	15%	3.0	0.71
Handling unexpected situations	Pre-Test	21%	52%	27%	0%	2.5	0.71
	Post-Test	0%	15%	74%	11%	3.5	0.71
Prioritizing your daily tasks as a case manager	Pre-Test	21%	64%	15%	0%	2.0	0.00
	Post-Test	0%	7%	74%	19%	3.5	0.71
<b>Overall</b>	<b>Pre-Test</b>					1.75	0.35
	<b>Post-Test</b>					3.25	0.35

The pre-test and post-test both asked pre-service SETs to define a case manager and their responsibilities. This was utilized as another measure to document the potential growth of pre-service SETs and the effectiveness of the intervention. The researchers reviewed each open-ended question using pre-determined codes and then analyzed the responses for themes.

**Results**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of instruction on case management skills on SETs' perceptions of preparedness related to case management skills. Table 1 displays the pre-test and post-test results for the 13 Likert-scale items; however, the pre-test re-

**Table 2***Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test (N=27)*

Survey Item	<i>p</i> -value	<i>r</i>	Z	W
Organizing time to complete paperwork requirements	<i>p</i> < .001	.89	4.39	0
Responding to parents' concerns or questions during meetings	<i>p</i> < .001	.90	4.44	0
Organizing compliance due dates (e.g., RRs and IEPs)	<i>p</i> < .001	.88	4.24	0
Prioritizing daily tasks as a case manager	<i>p</i> < .001	.90	4.33	0
Ensuring accommodations are correctly implemented	<i>p</i> < .001	.89	4.09	0
Responding to parents' concerns (e.g., email, phone)	<i>p</i> < .001	.89	4.02	0
Documenting parent communication	<i>p</i> < .001	.88	3.87	0
Requesting data from teachers or related service providers	<i>p</i> < .001	.84	3.98	7.5
Analyzing and reporting student data for progress monitoring	<i>p</i> < .001	.84	3.89	8
Handling unexpected situations	<i>p</i> < .001	.84	3.78	6.5
Contacting parents with concerns	<i>p</i> < .001	.79	3.71	17
Planning when and how to collect data for parent updates	<i>p</i> < .001	.72	3.61	32
Contacting teachers to discuss student concerns	<i>p</i> < .002	.75	3.02	11
<b>Overall</b>	<b><i>p</i> &lt; .001</b>	<b>.87</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>0</b>

sponses are from 32 pre-service SETs, and the post-test responses are from 27 pre-service SETs who completed the survey in its entirety. Based on this snapshot of descriptive statistics, all elements of caseload management indicate a decrease in pre-service SETs identifying feeling not prepared or somewhat prepared, and an increase in feeling most prepared or very prepared for every item. On the pre-test, pre-service SETs identified seven skills they did not feel very prepared for, specifically contacting or responding to parent concerns in an electronic or face-to-face environment. Additionally, pre-service SETs identified the highest ratings of feeling not prepared on the pre-test with their ability to organize compliance due dates (45%), ensuring accommodations are correctly implemented (30%), organizing time to complete paperwork requirements (27%), and responding to parent concerns during meetings (27%).

On the contrary, no pre-service SETs felt "not prepared" for any of the 13 case manager skills on the post-test. Items with the highest level of self-reported "very prepared" include documenting parent communication (63%), contacting teachers to discuss student concerns

(52%), and requesting data from teachers or related service providers (52%). The mean and the standard deviation for the 27 participants' responses on the pre-test and post-tests that could be paired are reported in Table 2. Each item exhibits an increase in the overall mean and a low standard deviation, signaling that the responses are close to the mean to help reduce variability and increase reliability.

### Comparing Pre-Test vs. Post-Test Quantitative Results

The researchers used the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test to determine if the null hypothesis could be rejected for each Likert-scale item to determine if the pre-service SETs reported a higher level of preparedness on the post-test compared to the pre-test results. The researchers selected the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test to analyze the difference between the two related groups. However, the researchers completed undersizing of the majority group (pre-test data) due to the unequal sample sizes, with more completed responses in the pre-test versus the post-test data. The researchers implemented randomization to compare 27 pre-test responses (out of the 32 collected) to the 27 post-test

responses obtained. The data was aggregated to provide each pre-service SET with a single average pre-test and post-test score. Overall, there was a significant large difference between the pre-test (Mdn = 2.1, n = 27) to post-test (Mdn = 3.2, n = 27),  $Z = 4.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = 0.9$ . This finding indicates the case manager project had a substantial impact on pre-service SETs' perceived preparedness.

Furthermore, Table 2 displays the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test results for each individual item. The researchers found all 13 items, specific to elements of case management, significant at the  $p < .05$  level. Seven items indicated a significant large difference with all pre-service SETs post-test results larger than pre-test results ( $W=0$ ), including organizing time to complete paperwork, responding to parent concerns in-person, organizing compliance due dates, prioritizing daily tasks, implementing accommodations, responding to parent concerns digitally, and documenting parent communication. The item with the highest standard deviation above the average included responding to parents' questions or concerns in-person from pre-test (Mdn = 2, n = 27) to post-test (Mdn = 3, n = 27),  $Z = 4.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = 0.9$ . This was followed by the ability to organize time to complete paperwork requirements from pre-test (Mdn = 2, n = 27) to post-test (Mdn = 3, n = 27),  $Z = 4.4$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = 0.9$ . On the contrary, contacting teachers to discuss student concerns, while still significant, resulted in the lowest difference from pre-test (Mdn = 3, n = 27) to post-test (Mdn = 4, n = 27),  $Z = 3$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $r = 0.8$ . This was followed by the pre-service SETs' level of preparedness to collect data for parent updates from pre-test (Mdn = 2, n = 27) to post-test (Mdn = 3, n = 27),  $Z = 3.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = 0.7$ .

### **Qualitative Items**

While the pre-test and post-test mainly relied on quantitative data collection with 13 Likert-scale items aligned with each element of case management that was reviewed and practiced in the courses, participants also responded to several open-ended questions to help gather additional information to support the quantitative findings. These items were brief in nature, but helped provide some further explanation to the pre-service SETs' Likert-scale responses, as their level of preparedness was self-reported.

### ***Evolution of Case Management Definition***

The pre-test and post-test asked pre-service SETs, "How would you define caseload management and what tasks would you include in managing a special education caseload?" The researchers purposely added this qualitative question to determine the participants' growth in their knowledge of caseload management, not just preparedness for each skill. Out of the 32 pre-test responses, four participants responded, "I don't know." Most of the remaining responses (93%) identified caseload management as being responsible for "overseeing", "handling", or "helping" an assigned set of students receiving special education services. However, more than half of the pre-service SETs (55%) were only able to identify one example or task that is involved in caseload management. Most (n=20) identified paperwork requirements (e.g., IEP) as the main or only responsibility. This responsibility was followed by progress monitoring (n=8), collaboration with colleagues (n=6), meetings (n=6), communication with parents (n=5), and advocating for students (n=1). Overall, the pre-service SETs seemed to have a broad idea of what caseload management was, but little insight into specific responsibilities.

All 27 pre-service SETs who completed the post-test were able to define caseload management in their own words, with no response indicating "I don't know". Participants commonly defined being a case manager as "supervising", "keeping track of", "organizing", and "balancing" the needs of an assigned group of students receiving special education services. Most participants (63%) identified three or more tasks or responsibilities included in caseload management. Similar to the pre-test, paperwork was noted most often (n=20) as a main responsibility. Additionally, similar but slightly higher mentions of progress monitoring (n=10), meetings (n=7), communication with parents (n=7), and collaboration with colleagues (n=6). However, several new themes were identified in the post-test definitions. Pre-service SETs identified the importance of time management and organization to prioritize the various tasks (n=7) described as "the way you delegate your time" and "considering where and when you, as an educator, have time to efficiently get all your work done." This theme was followed by supporting daily unexpected needs of students (n=7), mentoring or ad-

vising fellow faculty to implement IEPs (n=2), and one comment on figuring out how to have a proper work-life balance. The increase in the number and type of codes for this item supports the overall quantitative findings that the case manager project had a significant impact on the pre-service SETs' ability to identify and complete the various aspects of case management from pre-test to post-test results.

**Most Effective Assignments and Areas for Improvement**

The last item on the post-test asked pre-service SETs which assignment(s) they felt best prepared them for the responsibilities of caseload management. More than half (52%, n=14) identified all of the case manager activities to be beneficial as they helped students understand “the real life of special education teachers.” Four students identified creating a calendar (Figure 1) to organize compliance due dates for a school year (e.g., RRs, IEPs) as most helpful in being “realistic” and “realizing how important time management and

organization is.” This supported the quantitative findings of organizing prep time to complete paperwork requirements and organizing compliance due dates for a school year being in the top three most significant increases in preparedness from pre-test to post-test results (Table 2). Three students identified that they most benefited from additional practice learning how to write RRs and IEPs. Two students enjoyed getting to create their daily schedule to “become familiar with the responsibilities,” and two students benefited from the unexpected events (Figure 2), addressing IEP team member concerns. One student preferred creating a parent communication log, and one student identified practicing how to collect data.

This item also asked pre-service SETs if there were any additional responsibilities or aspects of caseload management that they wished they had the opportunity to learn or practice in either course. Most participants (78%, n=21) were satisfied with the variety of case management activities by stating “no” or identifying “I don’t believe so” or “I felt the activities we

**Figure 1**

*Case Manager Paperwork Calendar: Pre-Service SET Example*

March					2025	
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 PREP: Erica’s IEP Task #2	3 PREP: Erica’s IEP Task #3	4 PREP: Erica’s IEP Task #4	5 PREP: Erica’s IEP Task #5	6 PREP: Erica’s IEP Task #6	7
8	9 PREP: Erica’s IEP Task #7	10 PREP: Sam’s RR Task #1	11 PREP: Sam’s RR Task #2	12 PREP: Sam’s RR Task #3	13 PREP: Sam’s RR Day 60 Send to School Psychologist	14
15	16 PREP: Send Erica’s Draft IEP and Meeting Reminder	17 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #1	18 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #2	19 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #3	20 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #4	21
22	23 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #5	24 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #6	25 PREP: Dan’s IEP Task #7	26 PREP: Prepare for Erica’s IEP Meeting (Print)	27 PREP: Erica’s IEP Meeting	28
29	30 <b>NO SCHOOL- Spring Break</b>	31 <b>NO SCHOOL- Spring Break</b>				

**Figure 2**

*Prioritizing Daily or Unexpected Tasks: Pre-Service SET Example*

**Prioritizing Case Manager Tasks**

*Good morning! It is the start of your work day! You enter your classroom and sit down to figure out how you will organize your day. You open your computer and read through the emails you have received since yesterday. You also have a couple of items on your desk that need to be completed. The table below includes five of these tasks. For each task, identify the priority to which you would respond to it, how you would respond, when you would respond (use your daily schedule), and any other considerations in order to accomplish all five tasks today. You can do this!*

<b>Tasks</b>	<b># of Priority 1-5 &amp; Why</b>	<b>How Will You Respond</b>	<b>When Will You Respond/Do the Task</b>	<b>Any Other Considerations</b>
A student on your caseload has a science test to take during 3rd period and is scheduled to take it in the school's testing room for full read-aloud. You receive an email that the person who works in the testing room is absent today, and it will be closed.	Priority #2: This is a problem because the child needs to take the science test today in another room since the testing room is closed. This is a required accommodation in their IEP.	I will see if another faculty or staff member can cover my 3rd period recess duty so I can have the student come to my classroom or office and provide read read-aloud for the science test.	I will call my colleagues in the morning, before advisory, to find coverage for my 3rd-period recess duty.  I will email the science teacher to let them know the location change.  I will let the student know about the change during advisory.	If someone else can provide read aloud (possibly a paraprofessional)  Don't want to reschedule or postpone the student taking the test, as it could cause them to miss course instruction.
You have two behavior checklists to fill out (for students you work with) that are due tomorrow for another case manager. They should each take about 15 minutes to complete.	Priority #4: They are due tomorrow, so I have time today or worst case, tomorrow to get them done if needed.	I will complete both checklists when I have free time today. I will place them in their case manager's mailbox tomorrow.	I will complete one during my lunch period.  I will complete the second one after bus duty and before I'm allowed to leave for the school day.	I could possibly do them tomorrow morning, but not sure what new unexpected tasks could happen.

did were enough.” However, 22% (n=6) did provide recommendations for additional practice. One pre-service SET requested more practice writing and organizing due dates for RRs and IEPs for different students on a caseload. Two students noted additional practice with progress monitoring as “collecting data for IEP goals” and more specifically “more in-depth how to translate data out of jargon into parent-friendly vernacular.” This supported the quantitative finding of collecting data for parent updates displaying the least difference in preparedness from pre-test to post-test results (Table 2). One student requested more practice with formal communication, specifically with meetings or interviews. One student requested more templates that they could save and use for the future, and one student noted they wished there was a field component so they could “see the activities we do being put in place.”

**Discussion**

The embedded case management activities (e.g., paperwork, data collection, parent communication, IEP team collaboration, meetings, unexpected events, and prioritizing time) resulted in significant increases in the pre-service SETs levels of preparedness when comparing pre-test to post-test results (Table 2). However, some activities or skills had a greater effect on the pre-service SETs than others. Paperwork is identified as the top stressor in special education attrition research (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Caballero, 2024; Hagaman & Casey, 2018) and was also identified as the main or only responsibility among pre-service SETs when describing case management responsibilities, identifying that undergraduate students know and understand it is an important and challenging aspect of the career they are entering.

The quantitative and qualitative data show that pre-service SETs benefited the most from activities not

solely on how to write special education documents, but how to manage and organize their time to ensure they are collecting data and completing the required documents by their legal due dates. As part of the paperwork and data collection activities, pre-service SETs made their own calendar (Figure 1) to record caseload due dates and utilize backward planning to maximize their prep periods for data collection and sending out communication updates (e.g., emails). These two skills were ranked as pre-service SETs demonstrating the most significant progress from pre-test to post-test results (Table 2), as well as the most mentioned when asked which assignment was most beneficial in the qualitative post-test item.

Additionally, pre-service SETs exhibited great growth in their perceived level of preparedness when it comes to prioritizing the daily tasks or handling unexpected situations as a case manager (Table 2). This was also identified as a new theme in the post-test qualitative responses, with seven comments specific to it compared to no mentions of it in pre-test responses. This data shows how pre-service SETs have a lack of awareness or difficulty understanding the on-the-spot challenges that arise during the school day when a student on a caseload can be having academic, emotional, or behavioral difficulties. Pre-service SETs had the opportunity to practice prioritizing daily tasks outside of their typical responsibilities, thinking about their available time during the school day or week (Figure 2), and engaged in in-person “events” where they were posed with a realistic scenario and given two minutes to respond. These results support Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) recommendation for teaching activities that help pre-service SETs practice time management skills.

As suggested by previous researchers (e.g., Strassfeld, 2019), the activities that required pre-service SETs to practice sending emails, responding to phone calls, or responding in face-to-face meetings with the opportunity for class discussion and reflection were effective in teaching communication strategies. Pre-service SETs displayed significant growth in their perceived level of preparedness when it comes to responding to parent concerns face-to-face and electronically, as well as documenting all forms of parent communication. However, despite still being significant, pre-service SETs displayed the least amount of growth in initiating contact

with fellow teachers or staff members to discuss student concerns (Table 2). As two pre-service SETs noted in qualitative items, additional activities, such as practicing formal communication techniques and turning special education-specific vocabulary or acronyms into user-friendly terms, would have been beneficial.

### **Limitations**

Although the findings of this pilot study are promising, several limitations should be noted. The study involved a small sample from a single university, limiting generalizability. Future research should examine case management skill development with larger, more diverse samples and across varied instructional contexts (e.g., online or seminar-based courses). While embedding activities in two courses increased participation, the sample remained small, and incomplete post-test responses resulted in unequal pre- and post-test data. Randomly removing pre-test responses to create matched samples led to data loss but was necessary for analysis. Additionally, responses from both courses were analyzed collectively, though separating them may have revealed differences related to program structure (standalone vs. double majors) or instructional approach, as the courses were taught by different instructors. The study also relied on self-reported data, increasing the potential for bias. Finally, the use of open-ended survey questions produced varied responses; future studies could benefit from more in-depth qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, to better understand specific case management skills requiring additional practice.

### **Implications for Future Research and Teacher Preparation Programs**

The severe shortage and turnover of special education teachers has increased the need for condensed and alternative certification pathways, limiting the ability to add required coursework. Instead, teacher preparation programs must strengthen existing courses and pedagogy to better prepare pre-service SETs for the complex responsibilities of case management. Findings from this pilot study (n = 27) suggest that effective preparation requires not only teaching case management tasks, but also providing opportunities to practice how those skills are applied. Although the two courses addressed case management components in isolation,

embedding applied activities allowed pre-service SETs to practice skills in realistic contexts and connect learning across courses.

Teacher preparation programs and future research should further replicate the day-to-day experiences of special education teachers, particularly by standardizing instruction that builds communication skills with parents and colleagues. Communication related to student concerns showed the lowest perceived growth in preparedness, highlighting the need for targeted practice. Research consistently emphasizes the importance of focused training in parent collaboration and interpersonal skills (Kyzar et al., 2019; Luke & Vaughn, 2022), as communication is a strong predictor of parent involvement and positive student outcomes (Gise-white et al., 2021; Berkowitz et al., 2021).

Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustained impact of case management instruction during student teaching and the early years of employment (i.e., years one through three and beyond the third year of teaching), including comparisons between condensed and full-semester models. Future research should also examine burnout and stress among novice teachers, as these findings may inform certification competencies, policy decisions, and efforts to reduce attrition in special education.

## Conclusion

Increasing special education teacher retention requires changes to be made by various stakeholders, including how teacher preparation programs prepare pre-service SETs for their soon-to-be careers. If certified special education teachers are identifying the multitasking and complex responsibilities of case management as the main contributors to attrition, practicing these skills needs to be the focus in courses. All of the pre-service SETs in this pilot study reported significantly higher levels of preparedness in all areas of case management skills (e.g., paperwork, data collection, parent communication, IEP team collaboration, meetings, unexpected events, and prioritizing time) by the researcher's intentionally integrating specific activities to apply and connect course content. Additionally, most pre-service SETs felt the mix of activities and skills practiced was sufficient in preparing them to be a case manager and have a better understanding of what it

takes to be successful at it. Integrating hands-on case management activities within teacher preparation courses could serve as an intervention to increase the mastery experiences, self-efficacy, and preparedness of the next generation of special education teachers. This preparedness and greater feelings of self-efficacy could reduce levels of stress and exhaustion experienced by SETs, decreasing burnout.

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# Podcasts as Pedagogy: A framework for utilizing podcast-based learning in the education classroom

Jenna Copper  
Amy Orville  
Samantha Fecich

## **Abstract**

Podcasts have become a valuable means of professional development, teaching, and learning for practicing educators. This article details a practical approach for using podcast-based learning with K-12 pre-service teachers. The authors detail a framework to bring the educational value of podcasts to the education classroom.

## **About the Authors**

Jenna Copper, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Educational Leadership Department at Slippery Rock University.

Amy Orville, Ed.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Educational Leadership Department at Slippery Rock University.

Samantha Fecich, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Curriculum, Instruction, and Educational Leadership Department at Slippery Rock University

Direct correspondence to [jenna.copper@sru.edu](mailto:jenna.copper@sru.edu)

Podcasting has become a global multi-billion dollar industry, and it is projected to reach over 130 billion USD by 2030 (Grand View Research, 2024). It, therefore, should come as no surprise that over half of U.S. adults (ages 30-64) and two-thirds of young adults (ages 18-29) say they have listened to a podcast in the past 12 months (Pew Research Center, 2025). This statistic is important because it shows that young adults are the typical age group listening to podcasts. So, why not reach students using a platform they are already using, such as podcasting? There are a variety of reasons that podcasting as a medium has become so popular among these demographics, including listening for learning, entertainment, diversion, or having something to listen to while doing another task (Shearer et al., 2023).

While listening to podcasts for professional learning is an emerging trend in education, a 2023 survey study of over 5,000 educators reported that approximately 43% of educators listen to educational podcasts (Edge Foundation, 2024). Consistent with the general population listening habits as reported by Shearer et al. (2023), McNamara and Min (2024) surveyed over 600 educators and identified five motivational factors for listening to podcasts:

1. Information Gathering: Listening to podcasts for education related tasks, such as professional development and learning to gain new ideas for professional practice.
2. Flexibility in Use: Listening to podcasts because they are convenient and easy to use.
3. Social Interaction: Listening to podcasts to relate to others and build relationships.
4. Entertainment: Listening to podcasts for fun, relaxation, and enjoyment.
5. Professional Encouragement: Listening to podcasts due to “word of mouth” or encouragement from colleagues.

Similarly, Engzell et al. (2025) reported that effective educational podcasts should be 20 to 30 minutes in length, involve enthusiastic and entertaining speakers, and contain real world examples, case studies, and narratives of teaching practices. These factors, though often intersecting, showed variability for preference.

Specifically, McNamara and Min (2024) highlight both “information gathering” and “flexibility” with the highest mean scores. These findings are consistent with the broader picture of professional learning for educators.

Professional learning for educators should, first and foremost, be content driven and aligned with the educator’s subject-matter, curriculum scope and sequence, instructional methods, grade level, and content-specific instructional strategies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; DeMonte, 2013). When contextualized to educational podcasts, this recommendation is further supported by the findings from the Edge Foundation (2024) report. Compared to all categories for educational podcasts, educators reported listening to subject-specific educational podcasts above all other categories, which include research and theory, career development and professional development, resources and lesson ideas, teacher well-being and support, news and current affairs, leadership, and educational technology (Edge Foundation, 2024).

Flexibility is another key characteristic of quality professional development in the 21st century (Evers et al., 2021). Considering budget, travel, and time constraints, Jung (2005) suggested the increasing need to utilize information and communication technology (ICT) to facilitate quality professional learning. In the post-pandemic era, this suggestion has become a key component of professional learning for educators (Copper, 2024). Information and communication technology, such as podcasts, webinars, and YouTube videos, provides an accessible means for formal professional development and informal self-directed learning (Plaza del Pino & Cabezón-Fernández, 2025; Seenivasan, 2024). Listeners can tailor their listening to their learning preferences and needs; for example, they can fast-forward, pause, rewind, or speed-up or slow-down listening (Plaza del Pino & Cabezón-Fernández, 2025). This key feature of flexibility as it relates to podcasting, also supports accessible options for listeners. Podcasts are on-demand learning. They can be utilized when needed (Lee et al., 2008) or when the listener is working on a mundane task and wants to have something to listen to at the same time (McNamara & Min, 2024; Shearer et al., 2023).

## Podcast-Based Learning for Pre-Service Teachers

Podcasting has become increasingly common in educational contexts, including podcast-based learning with pre-service teachers who generally have a favorable attitude toward podcasts (Guler & Ozkan, 2018). As a result, podcast-based learning, which refers to using podcasts as a learning tool, can be a valuable pedagogical strategy for college professors to utilize with pre-service teachers (Götzfried et al., 2024). In higher education, professors have used podcasts to “flip classrooms” (Suire et al., 2026), share lectures (Forbes, 2011), and assess learning (Westwood et al., 2025).

There are significant benefits for having pre-service teachers listen to podcasts as a pedagogical learning tool. First, podcasts can fill the gap between the methodology pre-service teachers learn in their college courses and the practice of teaching, which is often limited to observation and beginning practicum work (Malushko, 2015). With video and/or audio podcasts, pre-service teachers can hear narratives from practicing classroom teachers and get a glimpse into real classrooms (Malushko, 2015). From these narratives, they can gain new ideas and strategies to implement into their own classrooms. Also, pre-service teachers hear a different perspective and experience on the topic, other than the instructor. Additionally, podcast-based learning can provide a new means for student engagement. Considering the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which calls for educators to consider multiple means of representation, engagement, and action and expression in their teaching, podcast-based learning provides instructors with an opportunity to engage students with new digital media. It also offers additional opportunities for representing content in an audio-based format, which can improve both learning and engagement (CAST, 2018; Gunderson & Cumming, 2023). Finally, if educators choose to have their pre-service students create their own podcasts, it provides an innovative approach for expression (CAST, 2018; Chen & Ben-Atar, 2025; Gierhart & VanValkenburgh, 2023; Gunderson & Cumming, 2023; Kurniawan, 2022; Smith et al., 2022).

Specifically relating to pre-service teachers, the research indicates that podcast-based learning may offer opportunities for nuanced learning and processing. For example, Götzfried et al. (2024) determined that

requiring pre-service teachers to listen to educational podcasts was a successful strategy for pre-service teachers to challenge educational myths. They concluded that podcast-based learning supports pre-service teachers as they grapple with challenging educational content and research. Additionally, podcasting can also help pre-service teachers develop and improve their listening skills, a vital skill for the profession of teaching (Hasibuan & Male, 2022).

While there is plenty of opportunity for innovation and creativity with podcast-based learning in teacher education (Savall Ceres & Villafán, 2025; Thomas et al., 2025), barriers and challenges do exist (Rodríguez, 2024). In a study on higher-education educators' perceptions of using podcasts as a pedagogical tool, Rodríguez (2024) reported the following barriers: “time constraints (38.7%), technical difficulties (22.6%), student engagement (9.7%), and a lack of suitable content (6.5%)” (p. iii). Savall Ceres and Villafán (2025) concurred with challenges for time constraints and lack of content and added the lack of institutional training and support. These findings indicate that professor training and institutional support is an important consideration.

### Theory Into Practice

Considering the benefits and challenges identified in the current literature on utilizing podcasts with pre-service teachers, the authors developed a theoretical framework to support the implementation of podcast-based learning with pre-service teachers. The Podcast-Based Learning Framework is designed to implement podcasts as a pedagogical strategy in pre-service teacher curriculum. This framework is comprised of three tiers based on a proficiency ladder. Though all three levels are designed to support the faculty member in developing podcast-based learning content, the progression moves from entry level in Level 1 to advanced in Level 3.

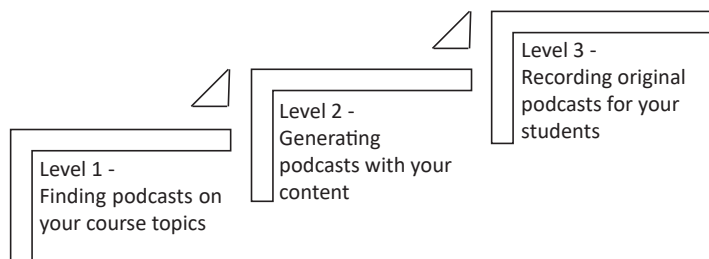
#### Level 1 - Finding Podcasts on Your Course Topics

The first level is finding podcast episodes related to course topics. According to Hennig (2017), professors generally identify content for their pre-service students in two ways: by browsing podcast platforms and through professional recommendations. Hennig (2017) also identified that one of the major challenges

of utilizing podcasts in higher education was improving discovery. Since then, methods to locate podcasts have greatly improved.

**Figure 1**

*Podcast-Based Learning Framework*



Recent improvements include digital media streaming platforms that have expanded significantly. For example, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube are now large searchable digital media databases that use algorithms based on your search history to provide featured podcasts. Additionally, specialized search tools, such as PodSearch, Podchaser, and Listen Notes allow users to search via keywords and filter functions to discover podcasts that meet search criteria. These options allow professors to search categories and keywords to find topics that relate to pre-service teacher learning.

Discovering podcasts through recommendations can support self-directed listening and learning (McNamara & Min, 2024) and assist in discovering course content (Hennig, 2017). Personal recommendations are valuable in this context; though, they often come randomly. Fortunately, there are social media sources designed for sharing podcast recommendations (Hennig, 2017). Reddit, Facebook, and Goodpods are examples of social-driven websites where users can interact with other listeners to discover podcasts for specific topics. Reddit and Facebook specifically have forums and groups that are exclusive to educators. The following resources offer professional recommendations for content: EduMagic, The Cult of Pedagogy, Angela Watson’s Truth for Teachers, Take Note!, Teaching Today, House of EdTech, The 10 Minute Teacher Podcast, and The Shake Up Learning Show.

**Level 2 - Generating Podcasts with Current Course Content**

If a professor cannot find pre-made content that meets the needs of their course curriculum as described in

level 1, level 2 of the framework details generating podcasts with current course content using technology. All professors have acquired their “tried and true” course materials that are meaningful resources for their students. At level 2, professors can utilize this course content to generate podcasts.

There are several tools that have the ability to take course content and create an AI-generated podcast. Although this area continues to evolve, Table 1 highlights three commonly used platforms and their associated costs.

The tools outlined in Table 1 generate podcasts based on the professor’s input; therefore, there are options to help the podcast reflect the desired content. For example, the professor can edit the script to include personal stories, experiences, class references, and real-world applications, which are key components for using podcasts for professional learning (Engzell et al., 2025). This maintains authenticity and connection as the learner listens. Additionally, barring cost restraints, the instructor can adjust the length, pace, and voices to improve engagement, though it should be noted that these podcasts use AI generated voices (Plaza del Pino & Cabezón-Fernández, 2025). Still, students may benefit from the ability to adjust the speed and listen multiple times. This flexibility underscores the importance of presenting material in varied ways, ensuring that all learners have equitable opportunities to understand, engage with, and make meaning from the content based on how they learn best (CAST, 2018; Gunderson & Cumming, 2023).

This level of the framework requires some technological savviness. For example, the user must be able to access the tool, log in, navigate the interface to the chosen podcast tool, generate a podcast using AI prompting and external sources (e.g. YouTube and course documents), and share the podcast via a link. Because this area continues to develop, more tools may become available to increase accessibility, function, and quality. However, there are limitations and previously generated content may be removed or be relocated behind a paywall, making previously stored content inaccessible. Therefore, while this option is more accessible than recording podcasts, it is not as reliable as the topic to be described in level 3.

**Table 1**

*AI Tools for Generating Podcasts*

Tool	Description	Cost
NotebookLM	NotebookLM is an AI-powered research and learning assistant developed by Google Labs. This platform allows educators and users to interact, organize, and curate new outputs of their own documents and materials. Once the sources have been added, the educator then prompts the platform to generate a conversational podcast script that explains the main points and key concepts, while including examples and details surrounding the content.	NotebookLM is currently free with a personal Google account but has limits for how many Notebooks can be created.
BriskTeaching	BriskTeaching is an AI platform that is integrated into Microsoft and Google tools. While BriskTeaching has a variety of educational functions, one of their featured resources is a podcast generator for educators. This function gives professors the option to type in a topic or upload course documents to generate a two-person podcast.	The free version requires a login and will generate podcasts up to 2 minutes in length. The Educator Pro version is \$99 a year and allows for 4–5-minute podcasts.
NoteGPT	NoteGPT is marketed as a learning assistant, not an educator tool; however, it includes a podcast generator option that includes many options for the output. This includes up to six speakers, several length options, and the ability to upload content from YouTube, pdfs, and external links.	The Educator version is listed as free with a subscription, but it is unclear if the subscription will change to charged. There are limits to the number of “quotas” that can be used.

**Level 3 - Recording original podcasts for your students**

The third and final level of the framework is developing, creating, and recording an original podcast for content delivery with pre-service teachers. Recording a podcast does not require expensive equipment or software (King & Gura, 2008); however, there is a significant time commitment and learning curve involved with recording original content and many users will opt for the convenience of paid subscriptions. Although it can be as simple as recording via a smartphone voice memo or a cloud-based recording interface, such as Zoom, most podcasters need significant practice before being able to record quality content. Rime et al. (2022) interviewed 16 professional podcasters and identified a consistent workflow: pre-production, production, and post-production. Pre-production requires

a noteworthy time commitment in preparation for recording. This includes brainstorming topics, researching the topic, and writing scripts and outlines. While some professors will already have the content they need in mind, synthesizing the information in a script that is engaging can be time consuming.

Production relates to the act of recording. Even if the user is reading a script, it takes practice to speak in a natural way when recording while also avoiding speaking errors. Additionally, a quiet space and a quality microphone help facilitate a smoother recording experience. Though free applications are available for recording audio content, subscription-based computer software, such as Audacity, GarageBand, or Camtasia, can save time with options for editing the sound and content. Though Rime et al. (2022) note that in other

industries, such as film, editing happens in post-production, with podcasting, editing generally happens during recording. This process involves adjusting volume levels, removing filler words, shortening long pauses, and deleting spoken errors during production using subscription-based editing software. As a result, recording takes longer than simply reading a script. Finally, these programs can add professional touches including an introduction with music, an outro, or special segments throughout the show. As with any technology, learning how to edit audio files takes time and practice.

In post-production, the user publishes the recording. Professors must decide whether to publish the podcast publicly or keep it private in the learning management system accessible to only the class. If the professor chooses to publish it publicly, meaning it is listed on podcast platforms, such as Apple Podcasts or Spotify, then they will need to use a podcast hosting service, such as Spotify for Podcasters or Podbean, which comes with a cost.

Although getting started with podcasting is not as simple as clicking “record,” it provides an opportunity to provide professors and future teachers with professional audio learning experiences for content that is not available anywhere else (King & Gura, 2008).

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The proposed framework was designed to address the challenges that professors face when utilizing podcast-based learning in their coursework. In the context of teacher preparation, this framework should effectively and efficiently support pre-service teacher learning. Therefore, there are several implications and conclusions.

First, because research suggests that subject-specific content is ideal for professional learning, the Podcast-Based Learning Framework is intended to support professors to find targeted content (Darling-Hammond et al. 2017; DeMonte, 2013; Edge Foundation, 2024). Because of this, the framework should support educators in overcoming barriers to implementation, specifically due to the time commitment of finding podcasts and not being able to find podcasts for the content they need (Rodriguez, 2024; Savall Ceres and Villafán, 2025). Each level intentionally specifies ways to find

subject-content in efficient and effective ways.

Additionally, this framework should provide a flexible means for adapting instruction to student learning preferences. This consideration is in line with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2018; Gunderson & Cumming, 2023). As a result, podcast-based learning should provide a meaningful way for professors to offer new ways for engagement and representation of content (Chen & Ben-Atar, 2025; Gierhart & VanValkenburgh, 2023; Gunderson & Cumming, 2023; Kurniawan, 2022; Smith et al., 2022). In addition to differentiated meaning making and understanding information, professors can perhaps even offer a new way for action and expression if they take the next step and ask students to create their own podcasts (Chen & Ben-Atar, 2025; Gierhart & VanValkenburgh, 2023; Gunderson & Cumming, 2023; Kurniawan, 2022; Smith et al., 2022)

In relation to engagement, this framework follows the research recommendation to use podcasts with dynamic speakers and narratives within a 20–30 minute time limit (Engzell et al., 2025; Malushko, 2015). At Level 1, the instructor has the freedom to search for podcast episodes that meet this recommendation. For Level 2, the instructor can use AI to develop engaging conversation-based narratives with sources, such as Notebook LM and Brisk Teaching, and for Level 3, educators can use these guidelines to record their own podcast episodes using authentic, engaging voices and conversations with first-hand narratives. All of these options provide the instructor with the means to fall within the suggested timeframe (Engzell et al., 2025).

Finally, this framework works to address the technical difficulties that were cited as a barrier to adopting podcast-based learning in higher education classrooms (Rodriguez, 2024; Savall Ceres & Villafán, 2025). To address varying levels of proficiency with podcast-based learning and digital media, the framework seamlessly integrates application recommendations and directions at each level. Additionally, it utilizes a tiered system to begin with less advanced technical applications and moves to more advanced applications with experience and proficiency. This framework supports professors by meeting them where they are comfortable in implementing educational technology in a meaningful way for content delivery and assessment. It goes be-

yond the textbook to provide students with a different lens from which to learn and a unique perspective beyond what is offered by the professor.

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# Mentor Experiences in the Community and Representation (CoRe) Program: A Layered and Holistic Approach to Mentoring

Kalani Palmer

Emily Wender

Nicole Rice

Leslie Coates

## **Abstract**

The Community and Representation (CoRe) program paired underrepresented minority (URM) teacher candidates with URM educators in a yearlong mentoring initiative. Interviews with five mentors revealed benefits including meaningful connections, reciprocal learning, and reflective growth. Findings underscore the value of a layered holistic mentoring approach that affirms and supports mentors.

## **About the Authors**

Dr. Kalani M. Palmer is a Professor and Assistant Department Chair in Professional Studies in Education at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, where she teaches and advises students in teacher preparation programs. .

Dr. Emily Wender is Professor and coordinator of English Education in the Language, Literature, and Writing department at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Ms. Nicole Rice serves as the Assistant Dean of Academic Affairs and Educator Preparation for the College of Education and Human Services at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. She is currently pursuing her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at the same university

Ms. Leslie L. Coates serves as the Director of Multicultural and LGBTQIA+ Student Support at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Direct correspondence by email to [kpalmer@iup.edu](mailto:kpalmer@iup.edu).

A diverse educator workforce has been tied to notable gains for students, particularly Black and Latinx students (Daniels, 2022). In Pennsylvania (PA), around 40% of K-12 students identify as belonging to an underrepresented racial/ethnic minority (URM) group, while only 7% of teachers identify with a URM group (Miller, et al., 2024). Although Shaw-Amoah et al. (2020) documented slight increases in educator racial/ethnic diversity over the past decade, the number of PA's K-12 students who are URMs significantly increased, creating a wider gap between URM educators and students. Furthermore, URM educators leave the profession at higher rates than White educators (Kohli, 2018; Shaw-Amoah et al., 2020). Given this disparity, most PA teacher candidates are not exposed to URM educators during their own K-12 education (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2025). They are also less likely to be mentored by an URM educator during early career internships.

Community and Representation (CoRe) was a pilot mentoring program designed to address the lack of representation in PA's K-12 teacher workforce (i.e., disproportionate racial composition of educators). In this program, URM teacher candidates were paired with URM K-12 educators. At the conclusion of the program, an evaluation was conducted to better understand participant experiences (e.g., perceived benefits of the program). In this article, we focus on the perceived benefits of the program for mentors.

## Literature Review

### Defining Mentoring

Formal mentoring practices are embedded within industries, organizations, and academic institutions worldwide. Kram (1983) named a "developmental relationship" as the primary aspect of mentoring, where an older, more experienced professional teaches a younger individual as well as other forms of mentoring, such as peer mentoring, where the difference in age and experience might be small (Dominguez & Kochan, 2020). Ambrosetti (2014) describes mentoring as an "interpersonal relationship that comprises a series of purposeful, social interactions" (p. 31), while Blake-Beard et al. (2021) emphasize that these interactions "cover the spectrum of career to psychosocial support behaviors," going beyond professional or academic de-

velopment.

### Mentoring Models

Dawson (2014) noted that there are a variety of ways to cluster mentors and mentees beyond the traditional dyadic mentor/mentee relationship. One critique of the traditional model is that it tends to emphasize the knowledge and experiences of the mentor over those of the mentee (Endo, 2020; Gist et al., 2021). In contrast, "group mentoring" can refer to a small group of mentees paired with multiple co-mentors; co-mentoring can help ease time, experience, and knowledge burdens on mentors, as there is more than one mentor sharing their time and perspective (Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024; Mentor, 2020). In addition, "family style mentoring" can complement group mentoring (Mentor, 2020). In the "family style" approach, mentor-mentee pairs or groups come together for occasional communal activities and meals, allowing for "robust peer interactions and collective experiences" (Mentor, 2020, p. 3). The combination of family style mentoring and group mentoring creates a community approach that others have described as holistic mentoring (Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024). Research has found multiple benefits to the community or holistic approach, including professional growth for mentors (Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024; Lee et al., 2025) and positive "cultural spaces" for Black educators (Dingus, 2008, p. 374).

### Mentoring Underrepresented Minorities

Gist et al. (2021) stressed that URM teachers benefit most from culturally responsive and sustaining mentorship frameworks. Culturally sustaining approaches go beyond resource approaches (i.e., culturally relevant and responsive approaches); instead of maintaining that URM students must learn dominant languages and literacies, culturally sustaining approaches acknowledge and affirm URM's knowledge, cultures, and identities (Paris, 2012). With this framework, mentees' funds of knowledge derived from their lived experiences enable them to be valuable contributors to the mentoring relationship. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory reinforces this idea, highlighting how development is shaped through bidirectional relationships and multiple layers of influence (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). When applied to mentoring, mentors

and mentees affect one another within their broader social and cultural context.

Same race mentorship has also been shown to positively impact URM students. Louis et al. (2014) examined the mentoring experiences of Black female undergraduates and found that both Black and non-Black mentors offered meaningful and supportive relationships. However, the nature of these relationships differed significantly. Black mentors provided both professional guidance and familial-like emotional support, which fostered closeness, affirmation, and validation. In contrast, relationships with non-Black mentors were primarily focused on career development. These practices align with the findings of Blake-Beard et al. (2021), which framed mentoring as a dual role, requiring both psychosocial and career support.

Similarly, Strayhorn (2022) found that faculty mentors, particularly Black faculty at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), can play a critical role in affirming Black students' experiences. Strayhorn (2022) observed that same-race mentors have a unique vantage point for helping Black students make sense of microaggressions, process racist events (e.g., interpret events), and develop healthy coping strategies. These interactions went beyond providing social support; when mentoring relationships helped students feel that they belonged and could navigate challenging contexts, the results were impactful.

## **Method**

### **CoRe Program Description**

The Community and Representation (CoRe) program, implemented in 2023, was a structured, voluntary extracurricular, year-long mentorship initiative built around a signed agreement that outlined expectations for both mentors and mentees. Teacher candidates were recruited through an email sent to all URM students enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Mentors were recruited through an email to all teacher preparation program alumni that identified as an URM educator and social media postings. Interested students and educators applied. URM teacher candidates were paired one-on-one with an URM educator. The mentor-mentee pairs were encouraged to communicate regularly and met monthly for whole-group virtual meetings that included breakout rooms for small-

group discussion (e.g., multiple mentee-mentor pairs). The program also had monthly mentee activities, ongoing mentor support, and two in-person events, a midpoint meeting for all mentees and a final hybrid gathering for mentors and mentees. Mentors received a \$250 stipend each semester and mentees received \$25 e-gift cards after each activity.

The program presented a different focus each month that was designed to foster relationship-building, professional growth, and reflective practice. Early sessions emphasized icebreakers, communication preferences, and bidirectional informational interviews, followed by mentee goal setting, strategies for partnering with families, a bias self-assessment shared among all participants and program leadership, goal reflection and follow up, as well as guidance on transitioning to employment and building a professional support network.

### **Program Leadership**

The CoRe program leadership team was composed of four members. It included two faculty members engaged in educator preparation programs, the Director of Multicultural and LGBTQIA+ Student Support, and an assistant dean who supported educator preparation students.

### **University Setting**

CoRe was launched at a predominantly White public institution in southwestern Pennsylvania that awards certificates and degrees at all levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2025). Overall, 20% of the undergraduate students at the institution identify as belonging to an URM group.

### **Evaluation Design**

The program evaluation aimed to explore participant experiences (e.g., perceived benefits of the program). Given these aims, a qualitative research design was employed to allow participants to share their perspectives in their own words and without constraint. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method. The interview consisted of nine key questions, with follow-up probes used to explore responses in greater depth (Appendix A). While the evaluation had a broader scope, this article focuses on the perceived benefits of the program for mentors.

## Participants

The CoRe program began with six mentors and six mentees. Five mentors and five mentees completed the program. All six mentors and mentees were invited to participate in the evaluation; however, only the five mentors who completed the program agreed to participate. The evaluation was conducted in the summer, which may have limited mentee response and participation.

All mentors were employed in urban and suburban public schools located in Maryland and across the state of Pennsylvania. Three mentors identified as Black/African American, and two identified as multiracial (i.e., Asian and White/European American; Black, Native, and White/European American). Two mentors identified as male (he/him), and three as female (she/her). Two served in administrative roles, while three were classroom teachers. Years of experience in education varied: one mentor had one to three years, two had seven to 10 years, and two had 15 to 20 years of experience.

## Procedure

Following program completion, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. All six mentors and six mentees were invited to participate via email during the summer of 2024. The invitation included a link to a consent form. Once informed consent was obtained, participants were contacted via email to schedule their interview.

Two of the program leaders, also authors of this article, conducted the interviews. Due to scheduling conflicts, three interviews were conducted with two interviewers, and two interviews were conducted by a single interviewer. One of us identifies as Black/African American and the other as White American. The race of interviewers could potentially influence participant responses (Kim et al., 2019). Interviews took place over a four-week period via Zoom and were recorded and transcribed using Zoom's transcription feature. Each interview lasted on average 31 minutes. During the interview, each question was shared one at a time on-screen to support participant comprehension and engagement. All participants were assigned pseudonyms for confidentiality, and all data are stored in a restricted password-protected cloud-based service account.

## Positionality and Conflict of Interest

We acknowledge that all four authors were program leaders, organizing and managing mentoring program activities examined in this study, and two of the program leaders/authors also conducted the interviews and analysis. These dual roles represent a potential conflict of interest and may have influenced participants' responses as well as interpretations offered. To help mitigate this limitation, the study did not begin until the program ended. Furthermore, participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and would not affect their future involvement in this program or other university programs.

## Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was used, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) generation of initial codes to capture meaningful features of the data, (3) searching for patterns and grouping codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing themes for coherence and alignment with the dataset, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. A thematic analysis approach allows for an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and perspectives but also acknowledges the role of the researcher in the interpretation and analysis of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The interviewers jointly read the transcripts multiple times and developed an initial code list, including a description for each code. We coded the interviews collaboratively, allowing for real-time discussion and consensus-building. During the coding process, additional codes were added, and some existing codes were refined (Appendix B). Taguette, an open-source software, was used to code the data.

## Results

### Community and Connections

A prominent theme across the interviews was a strong sense of community and connection. All five mentors described valuing the relationships they built with their assigned mentees, with other mentors, and/or with mentees outside of their official pairings.

## **Mentor-Mentee Pairing**

One mentor, Eddie, shared, *“I don't know how the mentor-mentee relationship was with everyone, but I felt like me and [my mentee] had a good rapport.”* Another mentor, Mark, who was paired with more than one mentee during the program shared a similar sentiment,

*I think my first [mentee] was very open to [communicating outside of the monthly meetings] because when she ran into her challenges, she definitely did reach out to me, which ... I felt like, okay, I'm connecting with you because you're reaching beyond.*

Mark saw the contact initiated by his mentee at critical times for her as an indicator of a meaningful relationship or connection.

## **Relationships Beyond the Pairing**

While mentors were motivated to develop meaningful relationships with their assigned mentees, the program's holistic structure also supported the formation of additional connections. This model enabled mentors to connect with other mentors, fostering a diverse network of perspectives and expertise (Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024). As one mentor, Melissa, said, *“You get to connect with people that you wouldn't have maybe otherwise been able to connect with.”* Melissa also seemed to value the monthly synchronous meetings, which brought together mentors and mentees from a variety of teaching backgrounds, subjects, and roles. She noted that *“. . . we were all like focusing on the same topic and then we did get to hear from... multiple perspectives of different mentors and mentees, from various backgrounds of teaching and experience and subjects, etc.”*

Another mentor, Erica, shared a similar perspective:

*We come together as a whole group. So it's not always just your mentor that you're receiving information from, but you can get a range of perspectives... it gives you a wide range of ideas and perspectives to look at while you're building up your own idea of what you're gonna look like as a teacher.*

Both Melissa and Erica described the connections they made and the benefit of coming together as a diverse

group.

## **Emotional Connection and Support**

Coming together as a whole group at the end of the program also seemed to reinforce the community bonds formed. The final meeting used a hybrid format, which had not been used before. Two mentors and one of the program leadership team members were on Zoom. The other meeting attendees were in person. Erica described the meeting as deeply meaningful:

*The last meeting, the in-person meeting, I think that was very impactful to see the people in real life, to see the other mentors. You know, people hugged each other and cried because they were so proud. It was very, very impactful. And it just shows you how important [it is] having someone to support you, who's been there.*

## **Learning Through Connection**

Mentors also valued the opportunity to learn through these relationships. Sasha explained, *“I think it was great to connect with a lot of people.”* Sasha continued:

*. . . I definitely felt like I learned a lot because I got to connect with other mentors, and mentees, and just talk a little bit about their experiences as well. And I felt I personally learned a lot about teaching and a lot of different perspectives.*

Overall, the program's holistic structure created an environment where relationships were not confined to traditional mentor-mentee pairings. This sense of community provided both emotional support and professional growth.

## **Mentor as Learner**

A second theme was that mentors learned from their participation in the program. This was not an initial goal of the program, nor was it included in an interview question, which made this theme particularly significant. Mentors described learning from mentees, mentors, and the activities themselves.

## **Learning from Mentees**

Sasha described learning from her paired mentee whose academic trajectory and personal responsibilities were different from her own when she was a student:

. . . it was definitely eye opening to get the different experiences [of current students], but [see] how they also overlapped [with my prior experiences]. So she was a double major, I believe...and I think she was also a mom of two. She really just blew my mind about like how she was able to do it, and everything that she was going through... because she was a double major. ...I got to learn a little bit about what that looked like.

Erica described how mentees can provide new inspiration to mentors: “Mentors will be able to get new ideas because the kids coming out now who want to be teachers, their ideas are way better than ours. I mean they are, and I think that’s the way it should be.”

### **Learning from Other Mentors**

Mentors also described learning from other mentors. For example, Sasha discussed a learning moment when she participated in a breakout session with another mentor and a mentee:

*I learned something, because that [other] mentor had so much experience. I think he was like a principal at that time, and you know he was saying things that [were] impactful to me. But like I could also chime in and give my own, you know, experiences that [made it] impactful for all of us. I just think the discussion was just so great that, like, I think, all three of us were like actively learning from each other.*

Sasha saw this discussion as a learning experience for all three of them: herself, the more experienced mentor, and the mentee.

### **Professional Growth through Structured Activities**

Melissa described her learning as an overall takeaway from the program. She shared, “The activities made me think about teaching in a way that I don’t think about teaching on a daily basis.” She also named her overall learning as one of the benefits of the program: “I would say it was beneficial to me just to kind of broaden my perspective on teaching.” Melissa named the activities themselves as what spurred her to broaden her perspective, and she went on to add that the activities pushed her to think about teaching more deeply: “. . . [the activities] just made me reflect, I guess, on what I

do and what I value.”

CoRe’s Layered and Holistic Approach (LHA) to mentoring allowed for a wide variety of interactions and contributions. Ultimately, mentor learning was a substantial element of three out of five mentors’ experiences in the LHA, inspired by mentees, other mentors, and the program activities. For the two mentors that did not discuss their own learning, they had the greatest years of experience, and personal learning may not have been a remarkable program benefit for them.

## **Discussion**

The findings from the CoRe evaluation provide insight into potential benefits of an LHA to mentoring (Appendix C). The sense of community and professional growth were prominent benefits of the program. The professional growth aligns with the work of Lee et al. (2025) who found that activities that were intentionally designed for both mentors and mentees to engage in supported mentor agency and professional reflection. Furthermore, the program’s approach allowed participants to connect across roles, backgrounds, and experiences. From a systems theory perspective, the program functioned as more than the sum of its parts, illustrating that the unique characteristics of the whole mentoring system cannot be fully understood by analyzing individual components in isolation (Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Although the CoRe program was designed to address gaps in URM teacher candidates’ experiences at a PWI, these findings suggest that an LHA may also address gaps for URM teachers, creating networks for professional learning and reflection that could help affirm mentors’ professional worth, growth, and knowledge. This is a strategy worth considering in research on teacher retention, especially that of URM teachers.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Although this study was limited by a small sample and restricted to one institution as well as one region, future mentoring programs for teacher candidates and URM teachers may want to consider an LHA. In an LHA, program leaders can create mentor-mentee pairings, but interactions are not limited to pairings. Instead, there are opportunities for small or large group interactions with an emphasis on the holistic community approach (Ben-Amram & Davidovitch, 2024; Mentor, 2020). The

layered approach also values the diverse types of interactions (e.g., mentees only, multiple mentor-mentee pairs), environments (e.g., physical space, virtual), and activities (e.g., shared meal, discussion) that can occur within a mentoring community. The LHA promotes community building as well as bidirectional relationships where mentors can learn and grow alongside mentees and other mentors.

Lastly, research on effective mentorship for URM mentees focuses specifically on mentees' experiences (Blake-Beard et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2021; Louis et al., 2014), but this study raises the question of how mentoring can be culturally responsive, effective, and sustaining for URM mentors. Since URM educators face increased workplace challenges (Dingus, 2008; Shaw-Amoah et al., 2020), it is important to consider how additional leadership roles, such as mentoring, can be designed to support their learning and positive professional identity development. These efforts could lead to systems of support and higher retention of URM educators.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

Appendix A includes the nine interview questions asked in the semi-structured interviews with CoRe mentors.

1. Why were you interested in participating in CoRe?
2. What, if anything, was beneficial about participating in CoRe?
3. What, if anything, was challenging about participating in CoRe?
4. What program activity was the most impactful for you and why?
5. If the program continued, what might support your participation?
6. What advice would you give to a mentor considering the program?
7. What advice would you give to a mentee considering the program?
8. If the program continued, what other activities or topics would you recommend?
9. If the program continued, what would you like to gain from the program?

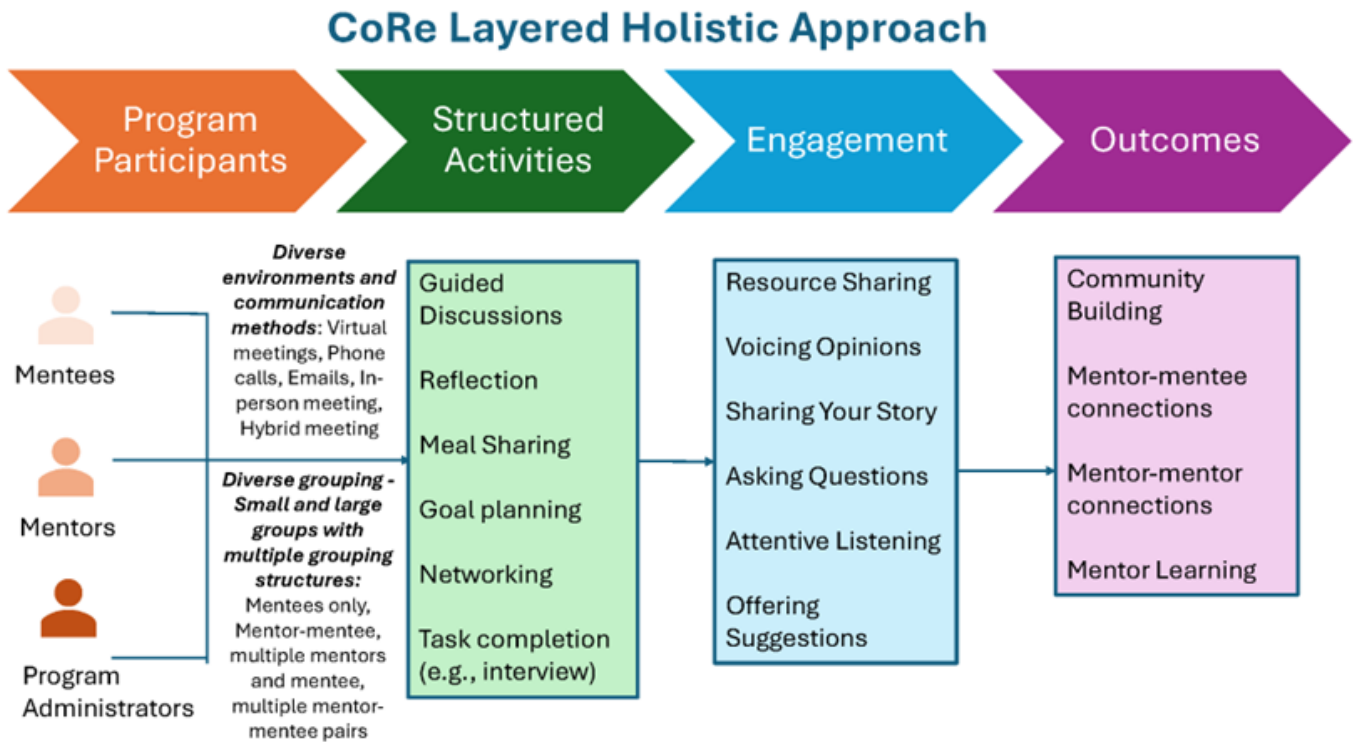
## Appendix B

### Final Code List

<b>Code Name</b>	<b>Code Description</b>
<b>Commitment-Program</b>	Expressing or referencing dedication to the program
<b>Connection</b>	Interaction with other(s) that are viewed as enriching
<b>Connection--Prospective</b>	Describing possibilities for further connections within the program
<b>Connection-Community</b>	Referencing group connections within the program
<b>Curriculum</b>	Educator Preparation Curriculum
<b>Difficulty Responding</b>	Referencing mentor struggle in responding to prompts or questions
<b>Distance</b>	Referencing physical distance
<b>Giving back</b>	Helping others (e.g. in the education field, in an institution, minority students, in the community)
<b>Love for education</b>	Describing education as a profession with affection or “love”
<b>Mentee as Learner</b>	Discussing or describing mentee’s learning or growth within the program
<b>Mentor as Learner</b>	Discussing or describing mentor’s learning or growth within the program
<b>Mentoring Philosophy</b>	Referencing their own beliefs/philosophies of mentoring
<b>Personal Values</b>	Referencing personal code of ethics
<b>Practical Challenges</b>	Referencing experienced challenges in education
<b>Practical Challenges--Diversity</b>	Referencing conflict around diversity or race
<b>Professional identity</b>	Aligning or defining themselves as an educational professional
<b>Professional identity--Perspective on Education</b>	Referencing their own beliefs/philosophies of education
<b>Professional opportunities</b>	An enriching professional experience
<b>Race</b>	Reference to race or ethnicity
<b>Race - Racial identity</b>	Referring to one’s own racial/ethnic identity
<b>Reflection</b>	Referencing deep thinking prompted by the program
<b>Relationship building</b>	the process of building a relationship
<b>Representation</b>	Exposure to non-white educators
<b>Representation-Underrepresentation</b>	Referencing no or limited exposure to non-white educators
<b>Self-doubt</b>	Questioning the quality of their mentorship
<b>Solicited Input</b>	Referencing the program requesting their input
<b>Structure</b>	Referencing program guidance, content, and potential changes
<b>Time Limits</b>	Referencing time and schedules

## Appendix C

### CoRe Mentoring Program Layered Holistic Approach (LHA) Final Code List



# Mentorship Matters: Co-Thinking and Emotional Anchoring for Preservice Teachers in Urban Contexts

Sara Podvasnik

Jennifer H. Tepe

Susan W. Parker

Erica Slobodnik

Sue Mariani

## **Abstract**

Today's classrooms, particularly in urban and underserved communities, are marked by increasingly complex realities, including a rise in behavioral challenges, special education referrals, and mental health needs. The convergence of poverty, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and visceral trauma has reshaped what it means to teach, mentor, and lead in K–12 education. This article examines mentoring strategies used in one urban school district to support a pre-service teacher. The experienced educators serve not just as content and pedagogical guides, but as emotional and professional anchors for pre-service teachers navigating challenging environments. Drawing on both current research and field experience, this piece explores how urban schools and teacher preparation programs can develop responsive, trauma-informed, and culturally sustaining mentorship models to support pre-service teachers during student teaching semester

## **About the Authors**

Ms. Sara Podvasnik is an experienced educator specializing in Early Childhood Education an Instructional Coach at Duquesne City School District

Dr. Jennifer H. Tepe is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education/Special Education at Robert Morris University

Dr. Susan W. Parker is a Professor of Education and the Director of the Women's Leadership and Mentorship Program at Robert Morris University

Ms. Erica Slobodnik is the K-8 Principal, K-8 Cyber Principal, and Federal Programs Coordinator at Duquesne City School District.

Dr. Sue Mariani is the Superintendent of the Duquesne City School District.

Direct correspondence by email to [tepe@rmu.edu](mailto:tepe@rmu.edu).

Urban education today faces a complex set of challenges that significantly affect both student learning and teacher preparation. Many students and families in urban settings experience mental health challenges, behavioral dysregulation, and the enduring impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs], which often manifest as trauma, disrupted learning, and increased emotional support needs (Burke Harris, 2018; Souers & Hall, 2016). These challenges are further intensified by systemic inequities, including disparities in school funding, limited access to high-quality resources, and a lack of representation in the teaching workforce (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Amid these conditions, effective mentorship emerges as a critical support for preservice teachers. Mentors provide not only guidance in pedagogy and classroom management but also emotional support and practical strategies for navigating the layered realities of urban classrooms (Hudson, 2013; Zeichner, 2005). Research supports the need for culturally responsive and trauma-informed mentorship programs specifically designed for urban education settings (Gay, 2018). However, there remains a notable gap in research and training addressing the unique needs of preservice teachers preparing for placements in urban schools (Sleeter, 2008). Mentorship plays a pivotal role in equipping preservice teachers with the tools, confidence, and cultural competence necessary for success in urban and underserved school environments (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006). Beyond content knowledge, effective mentors model empathy, resilience, and reflective practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This support is essential not only for professional development but also for fostering inclusive, equitable, and sustaining school communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017).

This article shares a mentorship story through practitioner reflection methodology that provides a set of guidelines for preservice teachers in urban schools, focusing on the role of the cooperating teacher as an instructional guide and emotional support. Often volunteering their time with minimal compensation, cooperating teachers serve as both pedagogical mentors and emotional anchors, enriching the profession by attracting and retaining the next generation of educa-

tors to the field (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). Drawing on current research and a firsthand student teaching experience in an urban education setting, this article explores how one urban school/cooperating teacher and teacher preparation program support mentorship that is responsive, trauma-informed, and culturally sustaining. Investing in strong and innovative mentorship structures represents a powerful step toward educational equity and long-term teacher retention in urban school districts (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

While existing research highlights the importance of culturally responsive and trauma-informed mentoring, much of it is conceptual (Gay, 2018). Fewer studies center on the experiences of the mentor and mentee relationship in the urban education setting. This article proposes to bridge the gap to provide a lived experience that highlights how trauma-informed practices and culturally sustaining pedagogies are interpreted and used in practice.

Practitioner reflection is grounded in the tradition of reflective practices that emphasize that educators are knowledge creators that systematically reflect on experiences to inform professional learning and ideas (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Larrivee, 2012). This approach aims to create co-construction between mentor and mentee. A co-thinking perspective reflects broader research findings that state effective urban education mentorship is not hierarchical; rather, it is reciprocal and relationship-based (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006).

### **Foundational Concepts in Urban Education Mentorship**

There are three primary types of school cultures within the United States education system: rural, suburban, and urban. While suburban and rural school environments often share similarities in structure and expectations, urban schools tend to differ significantly in both challenges and needs (Milner, 2012). Unfortunately, these distinct norms are frequently overlooked in teacher preparation programs (Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner, 2005). It is essential for preservice teachers in urban settings to have strong mentor teachers to grow and understand the complex needs of students, staff, and

the broader school community. Effective mentorship within the school community enables preservice teachers to navigate cultural dynamics, trauma-informed practices, and institutional inequities more successfully (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Souers & Hall, 2016). The following sections provide insights and individual reflective experiences that identify several guidelines defining and sustaining urban education mentorship.

Miss P. is a second-grade teacher at Duquesne City School District [DCSD], a kindergarten through eighth-grade school located in Western Pennsylvania. Four years ago, DCSD and Robert Morris University [RMU] established a partnership that began with the placement of a preservice teacher. That initial collaboration between the cooperating teacher, Mrs. S. (now the principal at DCSD), and the preservice teacher provided a foundation of support and mentorship that has continued to grow over the years.

By year three of the partnership, Miss P. had developed and refined a mentorship approach around four foundational practices: positioning mentors as co-thinkers, prioritizing relationships over content, shifting from trauma-informed to healing-centered practices, and emphasizing ongoing reflection and processing. Together, these four elements form a cohesive and intentional foundation for supporting preservice teachers in urban settings. Grounded in specific school community contexts, the discussion that follows draws on the four foundational practices to provide a lens for understanding Miss P.'s practitioner reflection through her story and lived experience.

### **Mentors as Co-Thinkers, Emotional Supports, and Instructional Guides**

Casey, an early childhood education major at a private suburban university [RMU], entered her student teaching year eager but inexperienced in urban education. After a field visit to DCSD, she requested a pre-student teaching placement in an urban setting. Through the RMU–DCSD partnership, she was placed in Miss P.'s classroom.

In preparation for the year, Casey reached out to her cooperating teacher, Miss P., to build a relationship before the formal placement began. Miss P. was immediately invested, not only in Casey's development

as a teacher but in supporting her as a whole person. As a veteran educator in an urban school, Miss P. understood that the challenges her students faced were significantly different from those encountered in many other teaching contexts. She also recognized that student teachers and mentors often enter the relationship from very different perspectives, shaped by varying levels of experience, cultural backgrounds, and emotional readiness (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Hudson, 2013). As Miss P. reflected on her mentorship of Casey, she shared:

*I was in my 11th year of teaching at DCSD when I was approached by the principal to see if I would be interested in being a cooperating teacher for a student teacher that would be coming to second grade. Of course, I jumped at the opportunity to shape and mentor a new teacher. In my experience, most teachers in an urban school do not come from an urban upbringing, thus making the transition one filled with anxiety if you do not have a strong mentor.*

Miss P. emphasized that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was not just a theory, but a practical guide for teaching in an urban school. Students must have their basic needs met such as food, sleep, and safety before learning can occur (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2023). In urban schools, students often arrive in the classroom seeking emotional support, nourishment, and security. Preservice teachers must understand and respond to these realities before they can focus on pedagogy and instructional practices (Souers & Hall, 2016).

In addition to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Miss P. also highlights the importance of ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) as a critical lens for Casey to understand the complex realities that many students may face in and out of school spaces. Awareness of both ACEs and Maslow's framework helped Casey to begin to recognize and understand how trauma can impact student learning and preservice teacher development.

A recent comparative study (Mbhiza, Nkambule, & Masinire, 2024) highlights the distinct dynamics of mentorship in urban versus rural schools. Mentor and mentee relationships in urban settings are often emotionally complex due to heightened exposure to student trauma and behavioral challenges. These findings reinforce the importance of differentiated mentor

training that prepares cooperating teachers to support preservice teachers in high-stress, underserved environments. Cooperating teachers also play a critical role in providing psychological safety not only for their students but also for the preservice teachers they mentor. Strong, reflective, and collaborative forms of mentoring are linked to increased confidence, emotional well-being, and long-term professional growth among new educators (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Miss P.'s approach aims to create co-construction between mentor and mentee to highlight how this relationship develops. A co-thinking perspective reflects broader research findings that state effective urban education mentorship is not hierarchical but rather is reciprocal and relationship-based (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006).

When Casey began her full-time student teaching placement, she was paired with Miss P., who didn't just guide her through lesson planning and classroom management; she built a relationship with Casey. Miss P. describes this process as co-thinking, becoming an emotional anchor, and an instructional mentor. Their relationship blossomed into something more than just professional. It was built on trust, vulnerability, and a shared purpose. Miss P. didn't see herself as someone with all the answers, but rather as a partner in growth. She was modeling, listening, and walking alongside Casey every step of the way. In doing so, she helped build Casey's teacher self-efficacy, confidence, and teacher identity. Creating the conditions for preservice teachers to thrive emotionally, relationally, and professionally, while building skills that are practiced throughout the semester. The most impactful mentors focus not only on instructional guidance but also on building authentic, human connections with their mentees (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Paris & Alim, 2017). Urban classrooms need not only more teachers, but better prepared and better supported teachers. Investing in mentorship structures that allow for co-thinking is a powerful lever for equity and teacher retention.

### **Relationships Over Content**

One of the most powerful takeaways in Casey's experience is the value of relationship-building. Miss P. consistently reinforced those relational practices by stating, "When students know you care and when you're real with them, they will show up for you." She recalled

a student once saying, "I have your back, Miss P." She further explained, "You can't change a student teacher's personality, but you can help them understand that being authentic is non-negotiable, and students will not learn from someone they don't like." Effective mentors lead with care, build trust, and maintain high expectations of both their students and preservice teachers (Gay, 2018). They understand that growth happens in spaces that are both psychologically safe and brave. They create learning spaces where preservice teachers can take risks, reflect honestly, and feel supported (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Moreover, Miss P. shared that being a successful teacher isn't just about performance in the classroom but also about sustainability and retention within the field. Preventing burnout, building confidence, and staying culturally responsive all require intentional care for self and others (Jennings, 2015; Santoro, 2018). Preservice teachers need support in developing healthy boundaries, self-care, and routines that allow them to bring their best selves into the classroom each day. Additionally, she emphasized:

*It is important for preservice teachers to understand that students will not learn from a teacher they do not like. Children know if you are sincere or if you are just there for the pay check. I stressed this to Casey. Get to know the students and what drives them, what makes them tick. You can then incorporate their interests into the lessons to make them more interested in learning.*

Another piece of advice she offered was simple yet profound, "meet student teachers and students where they are." Students often arrive with gaps in learning which is referred to as the "opportunity gap." Rather than reinforcing this gap, effective teaching focuses on students' current knowledge and builds from there (Gorski, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006). As Miss P. explained:

*If you don't meet a student's basic, most fundamental needs first, you won't need to worry about lesson planning, curriculum, or content because they won't be learning from you anyway. Understanding this is key to relationship building.*

DCSD prioritizes a "Maslow before Bloom" approach

by intentionally addressing students' social and emotional sense of belonging and overall well-being a foundational prerequisite to rigorous academic instruction and higher-order thinking (Bloom, 1956; Maslow, 1943).

Mentors can coach simple but powerful relational strategies, such as morning check-ins, consistency in classroom routines, and affirming students' cultural identities (Emdin, 2016; Hammond, 2015). These practices build the trust and connection that lay the foundation for rigorous learning. As part of their mentorship, cooperating teachers can model these strategies and co-plan for opportunities for preservice teachers to practice and grow. In fact, many mentoring programs could benefit from developing a simple relationship-building checklist tailored to urban and high-needs settings (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Hudson, 2013). Relationship building is an essential part of teaching, but even more important when considering and understanding the trauma that students may bring to the school community.

Overall, this emphasis on relationships is consistent with culturally responsive teaching frameworks, which position trust, authenticity, and care before academic engagement (Gay, 2018; Noddings, 2005). In urban classrooms, these relational practices are not supplementary but foundational, reinforcing research that suggests student engagement and achievement are deeply tied to relational trust and belonging (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017).

### **Moving from Trauma-Informed Teaching to Healing-Centered Engagement**

When student teachers arrive at an urban district with little or no experience around trauma-informed teaching, it creates a barrier and bias that fails to support the school culture or the students within it. Students experience numerous traumatic events within the community. As Miss P. states:

*There is violence, housing insecurity, and food insecurity to name a few. During one of our training sessions, the presenter spoke about students coming to school with an open amygdala in their brains. Physical, mental, and emotional stressors can often trigger the flight-or-fight response in the amygdala. It is hard for*

*an adult to regulate their amygdala, so imagine how hard it would be for a child to regulate theirs. The adults, no matter what kind of day you are having, must be the calm to their storm. When this happens, it is important to just sit with the child and listen.*

Miss P.'s perspective reflects a shift from trauma-informed teaching toward healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018), which emphasizes identity, resilience that aim to support students who have experienced adversity and high ACEs. Trauma-informed teaching emphasizes understanding the impact of trauma on student behavior and learning, prioritizing safety, trust, and emotional co-regulation within the classroom (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). This approach seeks to avoid re-traumatization and frames students through a lens of what has happened to them. In contrast, healing-centered engagement moves beyond a trauma-centric view, focusing instead on student strengths, cultural identity, and collective well-being (Ginwright, 2018). It views healing as a holistic process involving meaning-making, empowerment, and connection to community, rather than solely addressing individual trauma. While trauma-informed practices are important, healing-centered engagement is proactive and strength-based, aiming to affirm students' identities and foster co-regulation rather than merely coping for the preservice teacher.

The practices modeled by Miss P. illustrate this shift, demonstrating how Casey can move beyond responding to trauma toward identity, teacher self-efficacy and hope.

Teaching Casey to process behaviors from a healing-centered perspective allowed her to focus on student voice, cultural affirmation, and teacher agency, which are crucial to avoid teacher burnout and high levels of visceral trauma. Miss P. prompted Casey to gain a deeper understanding of the urban contexts where students, often Black, Brown, immigrant, or low-income face intersecting inequities rooted in racism, poverty, and displacement which is important for preservice teachers to experience and reflect upon.

This approach also reframes schools as spaces not just of safety, but of possibility and transformation. It recognizes that healing is not merely the absence of trau-

ma, but the presence of hope, joy, and belonging. DCSD and Miss P. strive to emphasize community connection and holistic development. Healing-centered engagement empowers students and educators to co-create a more just and affirming learning environment. For urban education to truly be equitable, it must move beyond managing trauma to fostering healing, identity, and purpose for students, staff, and school leaders. Miss P. shared a story with Casey that illustrates the complex and layered way she provides her students with support:

*On the second to last day of school this year, D. would not come into the building. The adults finally coerced him to come into the school, but he sat outside of the classroom and would not get up. I went out, sat next to him, and asked what happened. He told her something bad happened at home and he was mad. I listened, then told him something funny and he smiled. I then requested his help inside the classroom and asked him to come inside the room. He smiled and agreed. Throughout the day he got better, but every day in our school, in all schools across America, students come in having a bad day with their amygdala open. Before any learning can happen, we need to close it and bring them back to a calm state. Breathing exercises and grounding techniques can help calm them down.*

Once again, this ties back to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, building relationships and preservice teachers as co-thinkers. If basic needs are not met, no real learning will likely occur.

Miss P. continues to recognize the importance of a healing-centered approach and its link to mentorship. She is trained to understand how trauma affects learning and behavior, and she passes that lens on to her mentees. During reflective conversations Casey indicated that Miss P. helped her to process her own emotions and build the resilience needed to stay in the profession long-term.

### **Processing Classroom Management through Reflection**

Cooperating teachers and mentors play a crucial role in guiding student teachers through the emotional com-

plexities of school environment, especially when they encounter secondary trauma stemming from students' externalizing behaviors, such as aggression or defiance. Miss P. recognizes that classroom management is one of the most significant challenges for preservice teachers. Experienced educators, like Miss P., are key in modeling practices and strategies, helping student teachers process challenging incidents, and fostering reflective spaces for emotional co-regulation and professional growth. Through structured mentorship and reflective practice, Casey was able to understand that disruptive and challenging behaviors are often expressions of unmet needs, not simply disciplinary issues. This understanding led to empathy-based, rather than punitive, responses (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2024).

Mentor teachers, such as Miss P., also support preservice educators in recognizing symptoms of secondary trauma and emotional exhaustion. She emphasizes the importance of self-efficacy and resilience-building as foundations for sustainable teaching (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Hydon et al., 2015). These strategies not only promote teacher well-being but also model emotional intelligence and professionalism for future educators.

Reflective teaching practices are essential for professional growth and for coping with the demands of managing a classroom and high-quality teaching. Research underscores the importance of embedding structured reflection in teacher preparation programs to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Larrivee, 2020). However, this process is neither automatic nor easy that requires the guidance of skilled, reflective mentors who can support preservice teachers in critically examining their beliefs, emotions, and instructional choices.

The reflective process is central to preservice teacher growth and development, as it enables educators to critically examine their assumptions, interpret classroom experiences, and adapt their practice in responsive ways (Larrivee, 2020). In this article, reflection functioned not only as a mentoring tool but also as a methodological lens through which meaning, for both Miss P. and Casey, was constructed.

### **The Role of Collaboration Between Higher Education and Urban Education**

It is true that it takes a village to support a preservice teacher; it requires collaborative effort across a school community. As schools around the country struggle with attraction and retention to the field, we must ask ourselves why this is a growing challenge. To support Casey in an urban school placement, it takes a new and different type of mentorship and collaboration. When Casey approached her university instructor, it was immediately fostered and supported as a positive student teaching placement. The University collaborated with the school district to create a system that provided on-going safety in learning and growing within the school community that moved beyond the classroom to community events and activities. When university supervisors and mentors are open to various school placements and understand the need for innovative mentorship, it creates a layered support system that fosters success and growth.

It takes strong administrative leaders to accept and guide preservice teachers within their school communities. Through this partnership, DCSD has hired two teachers directly from the student teaching semester, demonstrating the power of sustained mentorship and leadership.

As the preservice teacher phases into the student teaching placement, it is imperative that the team learn and grow together and provide a space to reflect and process within the school placement as well as with preservice peers away from the school placement. Utilizing the university seminar course to move toward a differentiated mentoring model values preservice teachers' unique experiences within each placement community (urban, suburban, rural). Building strong relationships with district leaders and mentor teachers is essential because partnerships grow and change depending on individual school communities and preservice teacher needs. Three years ago, RMU's first student teacher was placed in a second grade classroom at DCSD with now Principal S. who built a welcoming and open learning space to develop both the teacher heart and skill. The four foundational practices have grown into a multilayered support system for RMU preservice teachers to learn and grow.

In reflecting on Casey's journey, Miss P.'s experience is not just a story, it's a guide. Mentors have the power to shape the future of education by showing up

as co-thinkers, emotional anchors, and instructional guides. When mentors lead with relationships, everything else can follow. As Miss P. expressed,

*I believe that when you mentor someone, you can have the ability to mentor them for life. Casey's student teaching experience ended at the beginning of May. We were hoping she would get hired in the district. She knew the students, and she knew and understood the trauma that came with them. No openings were anticipated for the next school year. It looked like she may not get hired. Then, on August 13th, she received a call offering her a position at the school. The next day, she was at the school, preparing her classroom. As she was driving to school that next morning, she drove past a group of children huddled under a blanket. As she passed, she saw it was one of our students, D, and his younger siblings. She called me and asked what she should do. She was pulling up at the school, so she let the administration know, and I called the police. A few of the administrators went up to check on them and when they arrived, they were gone. Just like I will always mentor Casey, not as a student anymore, but as a colleague, the trauma is still all around us. I will always help Casey navigate the difficult times, situations, and happenings that we come across every day at our school. Raising scores is important, but we have students out on the street, huddled under blankets, trying to raise their siblings. D was one of the brightest students I ever had. He most likely would pass that state test with flying colors. However, that isn't what is important to him; survival is. The trauma is real, and it shows its face every day in our students.*

Before Casey even stepped into the classroom, she was already reflecting and planning to support each student's unique needs. Miss P. was ready and willing to support her based on Casey's mentoring needs. Miss P.'s strong relationship with Casey allowed her to know what Casey needed through reflective discussion and problem solving together. Miss P.'s Mentor Activity Worksheet (Table A) is shown in Appendix A. It provides a powerful way to guide preservice teachers in their efforts based on Miss P. and Casey's experiences.

Using the four foundational practices to support Casey's individual needs and development were crucial to this story. It takes a village to support and mentor a preservice teacher. Although this is one story, it is a powerful tool to build educational mentorship for our future teachers.

Taken together, Miss P's practitioner reflections contribute to the existing body of literature by illustrating how mentorship is layered and enacted within the realities of one urban school community. It highlights the importance of relational trust, emotional support, and reflective co-thinking as mechanisms through which preservice teachers develop self-efficacy, skill, and heart. By situating these findings within existing research, the study demonstrates that effective urban mentorship is not a singular strategy, but a dynamic, context-responsive practice shaped by both theory and lived experience. Miss P's story illustrates that mentorship in urban education is not simply instructional; it is relational, emotional, and deeply human.

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**Appendix**  
**Mentor Activity Worksheet**

<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Why It Matters</b>	<b>Mentor Observations (Check All That Apply)</b>
<b>Recognize the Impact of Trauma</b>	Life experiences affect learning for students and preservice teachers.	<input type="checkbox"/> Responds with empathy <input type="checkbox"/> Avoids punitive reactions <input type="checkbox"/> Uses healing-centered language
<b>Prioritize Maslow Before Bloom</b>	Safety and belonging must come before academic rigor.	<input type="checkbox"/> Checks for basic needs <input type="checkbox"/> Creates emotional safety <input type="checkbox"/> Adjusts expectations when needed
<b>Build Relationships with Families</b>	Family partnerships increase student success.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicates respectfully <input type="checkbox"/> Honors cultural differences <input type="checkbox"/> Builds trust over time
<b>Uncover What Makes Students “Tick”</b>	Interests drive engagement and motivation.	<input type="checkbox"/> Asks about interests <input type="checkbox"/> Connects learning to passions <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages student voice
<b>Set &amp; Sustain High Expectations</b>	High expectations signal belief in every learner.	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicates belief clearly <input type="checkbox"/> Provides scaffolds <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains academic rigor
<b>Reinforce Expectations Consistently</b>	Consistency builds structure and safety.	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviews expectations regularly <input type="checkbox"/> Uses predictable routines <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Resets calmly when needed</i>
<b>Be Authentically Present/Create Co-thinkers</b>	Authenticity builds trust and connection.	<input type="checkbox"/> Shows genuine care <input type="checkbox"/> Is emotionally present <input type="checkbox"/> Maintains professional boundaries
<b>Connect with the Broader Community</b>	Context deepens understanding and empathy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Knows community context <input type="checkbox"/> Attends school events <input type="checkbox"/> Integrates community knowledge
<b>Meet Student Teachers Where They Are</b>	Differentiation supports developing educators.	<input type="checkbox"/> Adjusts support level <input type="checkbox"/> Focuses on growth <input type="checkbox"/> Gives actionable feedback

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Joel Geary

PAC-TE Executive Director

Pennsylvania Association of Colleges and Teacher Educators

(717) 516-8893 | [joel@pac-te.org](mailto:joel@pac-te.org)