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It Takes a Village to Raise a Teacher: The Mentorship Experiences of Teachers of Color Cultivating The Next Generation of Teachers at the Community Colleges

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It Takes a Village to Raise a Teacher:

The Mentorship Experiences of Teachers of Color

Cultivating The Next Generation of Teachers at the Community Colleges

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Yvonne Yen Hai Tran

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

It Takes a Village to Raise a Teacher:

The Mentorship Experiences of Teachers of Color

Cultivating The Next Generation of Teachers at the Community Colleges

by

Yvonne Yen Hai Tran

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Lorena I. Guillén, Chair

This study investigated the mentorship experiences of TK-12 teachers of Color (TOCs) with community college students aspiring to be teachers and how it informed their growth and development into Murrell's (2000) definition of a "community teacher." Through analysis of 15 interviews with teachers of Color involved in the Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) program in Los Angeles, CA, the study found that the mentorship experiences with community college mentees provided TOCs the opportunity to grow into community teachers through four key areas: (1) Practice of mentoring community college students; (2) Context of BIPOC cultures, communities, and identities; (3) Communities of practice with pre-service and in-service teachers; (4) Culture of mentorship and reciprocity. With the plethora of literature and research on teacher preparation, mentorship, and GYO programs, this study shines a light on the overlooked role of community colleges within these pieces of the teacher pipeline work. The

intervention takes an asset-based framework and racially centered approach to communities growing and sustaining their own educators who are connected to the students and community they serve. Lastly, uplifting the stories of mentor TOCs highlights factors that affect their recruitment, learning, development, and retention as mentors and teachers in a GYO program. Traditional educator preparation and professional development programs have far too long reproduced deficit views about the communities of Color they serve, but this study can stand out in giving voice to teachers of Color who can effectively cultivate the next generation of diverse education leaders. Ideally, after this study, TOCs and community colleges can be looked upon as valuable and essential players in building out a more equitable and sustainable teacher pipeline. Additionally, teacher education and districts could incorporate learnings from TOCs experiences to reshape mentoring programs, professional development, and teacher retention strategies to be culturally responsive and better meet the needs of diverse teachers, and ultimately, their students and communities.

The dissertation of Yvonne Yen Hai Tran is approved.

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2023

DEDICATION

Bố Mẹ

I dedicate this work to my very first mentors and teachers,

my mother, Christine “Châu” Hải Vũ, and father, Lâm Ngọc Trần. My parents’ incredible life journeys and the sacrifices they have made to give their three daughters a better life has been the foundation on which I stand on. Both of you instilled in me the power of education and a steadfast spirit to always keep going.

Thank you for believing in me and for your unconditional love.

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CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

This qualitative study examines the development of mentor teachers of Color (TOCs) in a "Grow Your Own" (GYO) mentorship program for community college students exploring the teaching profession. The investigation focuses on one segment of a wide-scale teacher pipeline project (Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline) that probes the experiences of TOCs mentoring future teachers at the community college and how it contributes to the TOCs' learning and growth. Furthermore, it demonstrates the value and role of mentor TOCs in a GYO teacher pipeline. With a teacher shortage looming and systemic barriers preventing TOCs from entering and staying in the teaching profession (Partelow, 2019; Carver-Thomas, 2017), mentorship from current TOCs can potentially scale community-based teacher preparation and sustain a diversified educator workforce.

Statement of the Problem

Teacher-Student Mismatch in National and State Statistics

New approaches are needed to increase the number of teachers of Color (TOCs). The current teaching profession in America does not reflect the diversity of its students. In the U.S., approximately 80% of the teaching workforce identify as White, while 52% of the student body in the U.S. identify as students of Color (de Breay, et al., 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) 2011-12 and Follow Up survey 2013-2014, TOCs are an increasing share of the workforce (18%). However, the numbers of TOCs are disproportionately lower compared to the proportion of students of Color (SOCs) they teach.

In California, 77% of the public school student population are students of Color, while only 34% of public school teachers identify as TOCs. The largest ethnic group, Hispanic or Latinx students, make up 55% of California's student population, but just 21% of their teachers identify

as Hispanic or Latinx (CalEdFacts, 2018-19; CalEdFacts 2019-20). This White-centric teaching force, mismatched with the communities they serve, can perpetuate disparities in student outcomes for generations to come. With a student population becoming more diverse, one solution to tackle the mismatch and to be more culturally responsive is to increase the number of TOCs in the teaching profession (Achinstein et al., 2010). The current demographic shifts of the student population demand an educator workforce that reflects the students it serves.

The Opportunity to Increase Educational Equity with Teachers of Color

The racial disparities in education matter, especially when there is overwhelming evidence that TOCs can disrupt opportunity gaps. Research has shown that TOCs bring a wealth of academic, social-emotional, mental, and cultural knowledge to classrooms and can positively affect student outcomes, especially among ethnically and racially diverse students (Achinstein et al., 2010; Carter et al., 2019; Magaldi, et al., 2018; Villegas & Davis, 2008). Therefore, increasing the number of TOCs in the profession has the potential to reduce educational inequities. However, even with the benefits that TOCs bring to classrooms, TOCs continue to be overworked, mistreated, and overlooked in their school community as an asset (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Kohli, 2018; Magaldi, et al., 2018). Kohli and Pizarro (2016) analyzed the hostile racial climates that TOCs face in schools, showing the impact of an education system that still has many barriers to recruit and retain TOCs. As a result of the systemic inequities, too few students of Color choose to go into the teaching profession and too many TOCs continue to leave education altogether.

The Critical Teacher Workforce Shortage

An encroaching teacher shortage exacerbates the lack of diversity in the teaching workforce. Enrollment in teacher education programs has steadily decreased by one-third over the

last ten years (Partelow, 2019). Projections for the next five years indicate 125,000 openings for 20 teaching different occupations in California per year. Teacher shortages in Los Angeles County represent about 26% of all teacher openings in the state, with about 32,600 openings per year (Madrigal & Martinez, 2019). California's teacher shortage has prompted the reliance on emergency-style provisional and short-term educator permits to fill the need, increasing the issuance of substandard credentials sevenfold since 2012 (Carver-Thomas, Leung, et al., 2021). When disaggregated by race/ethnicity, enrollment in teacher preparation programs declined by one quarter for Black and Latinx teachers and more than half for Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders and American Indian/Alaskan Native (Partelow, 2019). The teacher shortage also does not affect every school the same; the most dire shortages are concentrated in high-poverty, urban and rural schools that often experience higher levels of turnover (Achinstein et al., 2010).

Not only are there not enough potential TOCs entering the pipeline, but also too many are leaving the profession altogether, with TOCs leaving the profession at a higher rate than White teachers (19% vs. 15%) (Partelow, 2019; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Ingersoll and May (2011) found that in the 2003 school year, 47,6633 new TOCs entered schools nationally, but 56,244 of TOCs left teaching the following year. The rate of attrition for TOCs is greater than the rate at which new TOCs are entering the profession to replace them. The top reasons teachers reported leaving had more to do with organizational and school conditions rather than natural attrition causes like retirements (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Attrition also tends to occur among newer teachers and the costs of their leaving the profession are tremendous. Estimates are that it costs $7 billion a year for the U.S. to replace teachers who leave (about $20,000/teacher) (Carver-Thomas & Hammond, 2017). Since a higher proportion of TOCs work at already under-resourced schools, this turnover is particularly felt by their students of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2017;

Achinstein, et al., 2010). The lack of diversity among teachers coupled with the teacher shortage is especially concerning for high-demand subject areas (e.g., STEM, Early Childhood, and Special Education), where academic disparities exist for students of Color (Partelow, 2019; Madrigal & Martinez, 2019). With both recruitment and retention showing a downward trend for TOCs, the leaking that is happening at both ends of the teacher pipeline necessitates attention.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, education and workforce trends suggest that the disruptions in education will further profligate the teacher workforce shortage. The California State Teachers' Retirement System (CalSTRS), reported a 26% increase in the number of teacher retirements in the second half of 2020, compared with the same period in 2019, many of whom cite the challenges and disruptions of teaching during the pandemic as reasons for leaving (CalSTRS, 2019). A report by the Learning Policy Institute (Carver-Thomas, et al., 2021) interviewed eight of the largest California school districts on the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce and found that every district hired teachers on substandard credentials and permits in 2021, signaling a shortage of fully certified teachers. The repercussions of the pandemic on TOCs have not been fully understood yet, but the urgency to recruit and retain TOCs now is both an issue of critical economic demand and inequity.

Narrow Manifestation of the Problem

Barriers in the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of Color Remain

Numerous barriers undermine the recruitment and retention of TOCs in education. Institutional racism, lack of mentorship, negative experiences in the education system, fewer leadership opportunities from administration, and a burdensome credentialing process prevent TOCs from entering and staying in the profession (Kohli, 2018; Carver-Thomas, 2017; Carter, et al., 2019). Instead, non-traditional paths to teaching are increasingly seeing traction in recruiting

TOC candidates. TOCs are more likely to enter teaching through alternative pathways; however, there is evidence that teachers graduating from such programs receive less preparation for teaching and are more likely to experience higher attrition rates than TOCs who graduate from a traditional education program (Carver-Thomas, 2017).

Beyond the complicated licensing requirements and structures, when education programs recruit teacher candidates of color, there still is a disconnect between the teacher candidates' identities and the curriculum being taught (Rogers-Ard, et al., 2019; Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). The current U.S. pedagogical curriculum is designed to "maintain a White Supremacist Script" that does not effectively train and support TOCs' needs, denigrates the value that TOCs bring to the field, and prevents a true transformation of the education system (Rogers-Ard, et al., 2019, p. 24). Therefore, a cycle is created where TOCs go into teaching to advance social justice for their students of Color, but go on to face a barrage of barriers along their educational journey. And when they finally become a teacher, they feel so alienated and demoralized at their schools to the point of exiting the education profession altogether, which in turn leaves their students at a loss.

The Need for Teacher Mentorship Models to be Responsive to Teachers of Color

Various interventions have been implemented in the teaching pipeline to help retention rates of TOCs, including induction and mentorship programs. In response to the high attrition rate of teachers, especially among novice teachers, mentorship programs were created and integrated into teacher education programs in the 1980s to help socialize them into the profession (Odell & Wang, 2002). Mentorship and induction support could be a strong lever in the recruitment and retention of TOCs who are both pre-service (mentee) and in-service (mentor). Particularly when mentor teachers share a similar cultural background as their mentee, studies have shown the

positive benefits of same-race mentorship matches on teacher preparation and development (Johnson-Bailey, 2012; Garte & Kronen, 2020).

The benefits of mentoring are not limited to just the mentee; the mentor teacher also receives benefits from the mentoring relationship. The relationship can serve as an opportunity for mentors to gain professional experience in learning how to be a better mentor, teacher, and leader (Odell & Wang, 2002; Huling & Resta, 2001; Clinard & Ariav, 1998). Particularly for mentor TOCs, mentorship can provide a sense of community and belonging that is not often found in the individualistic school systems they work at and predominantly-White credential programs they went through. However, little is known about the wider racial makeup and experiences of mentor teachers who play such an important role in the induction and retention of pre-service teachers. The California Teacher Credentialing body does not track mentor demographics or release mentorship outcomes. Also, many mentoring programs within teacher preparation do not have an explicit focus on equity (Yendol-Hoppey, et al., 2009). Mentoring programs have the potential to reduce barriers in the recruitment, development, and retention of TOCs, but despite the existence of mentorship programs, there has been little movement in the numbers of TOCs. Instead, dominant preparation and mentorship models currently being implemented in formal education programs that have DEI elements continue to gear more towards building the cultural competency of White teacher candidates (Gay & Howard, 2000). Professional development for in-service teachers also continues to serve an audience that does not address explicitly the learning and development needs of TOCs.

Grow Your Own: A Pipeline for Developing and Sustaining Teachers of Color

The presence of mentor TOCs who also come from the communities they teach presents a counternarrative to the notion that students of Color must leave their communities to succeed. In

the field of educator diversity, “Grow Your Own” (GYO) programs are gaining traction as a teacher pipeline design that is based in Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). GYOs provide resources and support, such as mentorship, to recruit and retain students from nontraditional and overlooked pools and put them on pathways to become teachers in their community (Gist, et al., 2019). While promising in theory, homegrown pipeline programs currently are not widespread enough, have fluctuating financial support, and often do not explicitly address racial inequalities at the systemic level (Kohli, 2018). GYOs have typically focused on the beginning of the pipeline (high school) and at the end of the pipeline (paraprofessionals and college graduates), but little has been done to center community colleges in this pipeline work. The exclusion of community colleges from the teacher education throughline means that mentorship for aspiring teachers at the community colleges is also nascent in its development. In addition, few community college teaching preparation programs have an explicit focus on local mentorship and racial equity as part of their implementation, thus missing out on opportunities to engage a cadre of TOCs already in the community and who are eager to train the next generation of educators.

Gaps in the Research

The gap the study is trying to address is how mentorship at the community college level by TOCs is a critical (and understudied) component of a community-based, GYO teacher pipeline. Most of the teacher preparation literature focus has been on the experiences and impact of mentoring on the preservice teachers at credential-granting institutions (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), but less so on the impact on in-service teachers who serve as their mentors (Kwan & Real, 2009). Moreover, teacher preparation at the community colleges has largely been ignored in scholarship, thus overlooking a diversified, qualified pool of candidates earlier in their career development and bring a wealth of assets to the profession (Bautista, 2020). White teacher educators and White pre-

service students have long been the dominant creators and audience of teacher preparation models, so "whiteness" has been normalized in teacher development, while TOC perspectives continue to be ignored (Goodwin, 2004). The experiences of mentor TOCs can provide insight into culturally responsive and humanizing practices that can help to reimagine teacher education, mentorship, and teacher learning that is more likely to meet TOCs' development and retain them in the education field in the long run.

The majority of GYO literature looks at tapping into non-traditional student pools such as paraprofessionals and high school students (Gist, et al., 2019). However, very few studies and GYO programs have tapped into the community colleges for teacher recruitment and preparation. By examining the experiences of mentor TOCs with their community college mentees, the data can inform professional learning and teacher leadership opportunities for TOCs and future sustainability and scaling of mentorship programs at the community college level. Furthermore, few GYO and mentorship programs in teacher education have an intentional critical race theory focus that is explicit about its race-based initiative (Kohli, 2016; Rogers-Ard, et al., 2019; Brown, 2014). A project that centers race as part of its core mission would be a new direction for GYO and mentorship programs (Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

Utilizing the conceptual framework of Murrell's (2000) "Community Teacher," this study will investigate the mentorship experiences of TOCs in a GYO model of teacher preparation and development that aims to increase the number of TOCs coming from the community colleges. Specifically, I want to understand how TK-12 mentor TOCs experiences with community college students aspiring to be teachers informs their own development as mentors, teachers, and social justice advocates.

Research Questions

1) How does the experience of being a mentor to community college students aspiring to be teachers contribute to the learning and development of teachers of Color?
2) How do mentor teachers of Color perceive their role and impact in a Grow Your Own teacher pipeline that seeks to increase the number of teachers of Color?

Design and Methods

This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to understand the phenomenon of TOCs mentoring future teachers at the community colleges, making sense of it in the landscape of teacher development and diversification of the teaching workforce. Additionally, the research aims to target development and retention efforts for teachers of Color, and why some TOCs decide to step into mentorship and leadership positions amongst a landscape of overwhelming turnover of TOCs from the profession overall.

My research questions are rooted in experiences, thus indicating a phenomenological study because it is seeking to acquire the information directly from its participants in understanding their views and experiences related to the aforementioned phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study employs qualitative methods because it is not trying to identify a problem, but rather seeking to answer "why" the phenomenon is occurring and dive deeper into individuals' thoughts and feelings as to why TOCs want to mentor community college students on the teaching pathway when so many leave the profession altogether. Though it would be possible to survey mentor TOCs, a quantitative study would not allow the opportunity to take a more holistic, deeper approach to understand their lived experiences in the program and the effects of mentorship on their professional and personal growth through the process.

Site and Participants

The study sample of 15 interviewees was drawn from a population pool of 150+ mentor teachers who were involved in the Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) program and came from all over the Los Angeles metro region. CPTP was a federally-funded, grant initiative to use a multi-layered level of mentorship with community college students in a Grow-Your-Own teacher pipeline model to increase the number of TOCs. Taking place within this larger research project, this specific study analyzes and reports on one aspect of the data collected from the mentors who identified as teachers of Color. Mentor teachers were recruited for the CPTP program in Spring 2021, Fall 2021, Spring 2022, and Fall 2022 semesters and were matched with up to two students from one of three community colleges involved in the project. The three community colleges were strategically chosen because of their location in federally designated Quality Opportunity Zones (QOZs) that were earmarked because it is recognized as an area of historical underinvestment. All three community colleges were located in Los Angeles County and considered HSIs (Hispanic Serving Institutions). The mentor teachers were expected to follow their mentees for the next two years until the students graduated with an Associate's degree, certificate, or transferred into a credential-granting university. By the time this study was conducted, some mentor teachers participated in the mentoring program for up to two years.

Significance

With the plethora of literature and research on teacher preparation, mentorship, and GYO programs, this study shines a light on the overlooked role of community colleges within these pieces of the teacher pipeline work. The intervention takes an asset-based framework and equity centered approach to communities growing and sustaining their own educators who are connected to the students and community they serve. Lastly, uplifting the stories of mentor TOCs highlights

factors that affect their recruitment, development, and retention as mentors and teachers in a GYO program. Through the learning of the TOCs, there is an opportunity for education leaders to create mentorship spaces that are more culturally responsive, aligned with relational values, and integrated within the community so that TOCs, from pre-service to in-service, can feel a sense of belonging and hope for their chosen profession. Traditional educator preparation and development programs rooted in "hegemonic Whiteness" (Brown, 2014) have far too long reproduced deficit views about the communities of Color they serve, but this study can stand out in giving voice to TOCs who can effectively cultivate the next generation of diverse education leaders. Ideally, after this study, TOCs and community colleges can be looked upon as valuable and essential players in building out a more equitable teacher pipeline. Additionally, teacher education and districts could incorporate learnings from TOCs experiences to reshape mentoring programs, professional development, and teacher retention strategies to better meet the needs of diverse teachers, and ultimately, their students and communities.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers of Color (TOCs) bring a wealth of academic, social, emotional, mental, and cultural wealth to classrooms that translate into positive student outcomes, especially among students of Color. However, the teachers in classrooms currently do not reflect the diverse students they serve. The demographic disparity will be further amplified with a growing critical teacher shortage that shows students of Color are not entering the profession and TOCs are leaving the profession altogether in higher numbers. In this next chapter, I will review the benefits of having a TOC, the challenges in recruitment and retention of TOCs, and promising strategies to recruit and retain TOCs. Next, I will touch upon TOCs experiences in the education system, from pre-service to in-service to mentorship. Additionally, community colleges will be examined in the context of the teacher pipeline and the unique role they can play in diversifying and strengthening the teaching profession. Lastly, the theoretical framework of the "community teacher" (Murrell, 2000) will be used to conceptualize a more community-based model of teacher learning and development for in-service TOCs.

The Benefits of Having a Teacher of Color

TOCs matter for students of Color. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report by the U.S. Department of Education, Black and Hispanic students in urban ("high-density") schools continue to perform lower on math and reading scores compared to White students (NCES, 2009; NCES, 2011). The gap in student academic performance can partly be attributed to the mismatch of the majority White middle class teachers and the diverse backgrounds and needs of the majority students of Color they teach (Gay & Howard, 2000). In the U.S. public school system, TOCs comprise approximately 20% of the teaching workforce, while 52% of students identify as students of Color (Carver-Thomas, 2018). The disparity in the racial

composition of teachers and students has consequences for all students. However, increased representation of TOCs has been shown to transform student learning, especially for racially and ethnically diverse students.

A vast body of research supports increased achievement for students of Color when their teachers share similar racial, cultural, and/or linguistic backgrounds (Gay & Howard, 2000; Villegas & Davis, 2008; Carver-Thomas, 2018). In a seminal report about diversifying the teaching field, Carver-Thomas (2017) reviewed a collection of studies that confirm how TOCs positively benefit *all* students, but particularly students of Color. TOCs are more likely to increase the academic performance of students of Color, be role models for their students, build cultural bridges, have more positive perceptions of students of Color, experience fewer discipline issues, and are more likely to teach in low-income communities where teaching positions are difficult to fill (Carver-Thomas, 2017; Carver-Thomas, 2018; Achinstein et al., 2010).

Kohli's (2018) study demonstrated that TOCs are more likely to have a unique role in education as they act as "cultural brokers" for students and families. They see their students as capable learners, understand racialized experiences, help support navigation of structural barriers, and demonstrate a commitment and passion to teach within urban schools (Achinstein et al., 2010; Kohli, 2016). In addition, TOCs are more likely to go into teaching with the objective of returning to their communities to provide opportunities they lacked in their own schooling (Irizarry & Donaldson, 2012) and with a disposition towards equity (Dingus, 2008). TOCs matter, not only for the students they serve, but also for the profession and education system.

The social justice mindset and community orientation of many TOCs ties them to their students and community in a deeper way that helps with retention. With a "revolving door" of teachers at "hard-to-staff" schools that serve many students of Color, TOCs are more likely to stay

than their White counterparts (Achinstein et al., 2010). In addition, the presence of TOCs in schools improves the job satisfaction and retention of other TOCs, thus benefiting the students indirectly (Sutcher, et al., 2016). So not only are TOCs more likely to bring their identities, community orientation, and culturally relevant skills into the classrooms, but they are more likely to be committed to and more effective in teaching students of Color. TOCs have a role to play in achieving educational equity for students of Color, but there are still too few of them represented in the profession to truly transform the system.

Challenges in Recruiting and Retaining Teachers of Color

Despite overwhelming evidence of the benefits of TOCs, the number of TOCs entering and staying in the profession continues to stagnate compared to their White peers (Albert Shanker Institute, 2015). The lack of diverse representation in the profession stems from historical roots that date back to the desegregation of schools after the *Brown v. Board* Supreme Court decision (Carter Andrews et al., 2019). The unintended consequence of school integration was the shuttering of African American schools and mass firings of African American teachers. Since that pivotal decision, the teaching workforce has not seen TOCs en masse and remains a predominantly White profession. The historical exclusion of TOCs in schools reverberates today in the inequitable policies and systems that continue to keep students of Color out of teaching.

Barriers in the Recruitment of Teachers of Color

Challenges in College Attainment

Students of Color are interested in teaching, but as they travel along the teaching pathway, it is riddled with gaps and roadblocks for them to navigate. Therefore, many slip through the cracks along their higher education and teaching journey. One major barrier for students of Color to become teachers is the requirement of the bachelor's degree in order to get a teaching

credential in most states. In 2021, among 25-29- year-olds, 26% of Black students and 23% of Hispanic students graduated college with a Bachelor's compared to 45% of White students (NCES, 2022). As the rate of Black and Latinx students who graduate with a bachelor's degree continues to be half the rate of their White peers, the number of eligible TOCs who can pursue a credential shrinks because a majority would not meet the higher education requirement for teacher licensure. There is a need to focus on college access and success for students of Color, so that they feel prepared and are able to meet the bachelor's requirement of getting into a credential program (Ocasio, 2014; Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Financial Burdens

For those who are able to graduate with a Bachelor's, the dominant narrative of the teaching profession as an undervalued and underpaid position that only privileged students can realistically enter, dissuades many students of Color from seeing teaching as a feasible career (Ocasio, 2014). Students of Color, a majority of whom also identify as first-generation students, are more likely to go into college with a lower socioeconomic status, less parental support, and geographic constraints (Inman & Mayes, 1999). The financial and familial responsibilities of first-generation students often influence their choice of postsecondary education and what they deem as viable career options. Moreover, the heavy financial cost of enrolling and completing a bachelor's and credential can also be a challenge in recruiting potential TOCs. Measured by skyrocketing tuition of higher education institutions and student debt, lost full-time salary during the credential process, and the numerous fees teachers must pay (e.g., licensing, exams, books, etc.), teaching has become a profession that excludes those who cannot afford it (Carver-Thomas, 2018). It is imperative to not only make the profession more financially feasible for students of Color (e.g., scholarships, paid work opportunities, community college credit, etc.), but to also

uplift TOCs narratives that help to demystify the potential income/benefits, push for higher pay, and elevate the intrinsic rewards of teaching.

Standardized Testing

Standardized testing and licensure exams for teachers, particularly the CBEST and CSET in California, have also prevented many students of Color from meeting teaching requirements for licensure. Black and Latinx students disproportionately fail these standardized tests, lack access to test preparation resources, and may need to take it several times (adding to the cost burden). Yet, there is little evidence that performance on these tests leads to good teaching (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Carter Andrews et al., 2019). More recently, the credentialing bodies have shifted slightly in its stance on standardized testing and now offers alternative measures or coursework options to waive these tests. However, few students aspiring to be teachers may not be aware of these changes in testing policy or how to go about utilizing these waivers.

Isolating Conditions in the Education System

As students of Color matriculate into traditional teacher education programs, these preservice teachers regularly feel alone and that their experiential knowledge and cultural backgrounds are bypassed or shunned (Brown, 2014). Instead, the teacher preparation content taught in majority historically White institutions, are more likely to reproduce "colonial" philosophies and replicate the current demographics of the profession (Carter Andrews et al., 2019; Téllez, 1999). Pre-service minority students already feel an "overwhelming silencing power of Whiteness" in their education classes (Amos, 2010, p. 36), and this dominant narrative follows them in-service. In fact, research demonstrates that social justice oriented TOCs often feel isolated, marginalized, and pushed out of the schools that recruit them because the Western culture of individualism at their schools conflicts with their community orientation disposition (Kohli &

Pizarro, 2016). To attract more students of Color into traditional teacher education, shifts towards more culturally relevant pedagogy that is inclusive of the assets that TOCs bring and welcoming of their identities/cultures is needed (Carter-Andrews et al., 2019; Allen et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Barriers in the Retention of Teachers of Color

Dissatisfaction with Working Conditions

Much of the research and reform efforts for TOCs focus on recruitment, but there is a dire need to shift attention to retention of TOCs. Teacher education programs can continually add more candidates to the pool, but 90% of national teacher demand is due to teachers who leave the workforce (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Less than 20% of attrition is due to retirement, so most of the attrition is due to factors like teacher dissatisfaction with working conditions and lack of preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ingersoll & May, 2011). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) analyzed national teaching surveys to find out the reasons behind teacher turnover and they included dissatisfaction due to concerns with school administrators, lack of influence on decision making, challenging school conditions like under-resourced facilities, or lack of financial compensation. Zeroing in on TOCs, they are more likely to experience racism on the job through policies and interactions underscored by color blindness and microaggressions that create a hostile racial climate (Kohli, 2018).

Lack of Support and Preparation

Attrition tends to happen in the first few years of teaching, with approximately 44% of new teachers leaving within the first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). In the past three decades, the annual rate of turnover for TOCs from public schools increased by 45 percent, thus undermining the impact of recruitment work (Ingersoll, et al., 2018). Particularly for novice TOCs, the first few

years of teaching are hard enough as they are learning the trade, but they face an additional burden of isolation and racialization in their school environment (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Furthermore, the assumption that novice TOCs come into teaching intuitively possessing the required knowledge and skills to teach in culturally responsive ways is false and essentializing. Some TOCs even fail to recognize the existence of racism and may not come into the field with a critical consciousness lens, and thus leave because they were not prepared to teach diverse learners (Brown, 2014). Sleeter's (2017) research showed that despite learning about Critically Relevant Pedagogy among predominantly White cohorts of teacher candidates, these teachers still tend to blame students' families, cultures, and communities as primary causes of inequitable academic outcomes. To disrupt the replication of inadequate training and deficit mindsets on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), there is a need for deliberate, targeted training for TOCs to build out the skills, knowledge, and culturally relevant pedagogy that helps them feel confident in their ability to teach diverse learners. In turn, such asset-based training and development that is centered on DEI can help TOCs feel welcomed, valued, connected, and empowered, thus giving them incentive to stay in the profession. To change the tide, there needs to be an intentional pulling in of TOCs and their experiences to "regain their rightful places in the teaching profession" (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Promising Practices to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Colors

Recruitment and retention are not distinct phases but operate in tandem and feed into one another. Various teacher workforce diversification programs utilize strategies that target both ends of the pipeline to increase the number of TOCs who come into and stay in the profession including residencies, minority serving institutions, Grow Your Own (GYO), alternative pathways, and mentorship.

Teacher Residencies

Teacher residencies are based on the medical residency teaching model for doctors, where pre-service teachers with a bachelor's degree train under the supervision of master teachers at a school district while earning their credential and master's degrees at a university. The residencies are often accompanied by tuition assistance, living expense stipend, and in-depth support or mentoring in exchange for service at the school district after they graduate from teacher education. Such programs target diverse candidates and have been shown to improve retention rates of new teachers and TOCs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). However, criticism of residency models is that they are still too small (typically ~30 graduates per program) and too costly to scale to make any progress in addressing the teaching shortage. Additionally, participants usually are unable to work during their residency, are required to squeeze in an overwhelming amount of coursework and fieldwork into a short amount of time, need to already have a bachelor's degree, and have to live on stipends that may not cover skyrocketing living costs (especially in urban areas), thus residencies are still reserved for a privileged few who can fit into that model.

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs)

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) are special higher education institutions that are classified as serving minority populations. MSIs include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), TCUs (Tribal Colleges and Universities), and AANAPISIs (Asian American Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions). MSIs are looked to as sites of recruitment and retention for TOCs because they have unique missions and objectives to primarily serve diverse student bodies and implement culturally relevant pedagogy in their education programs. A majority of community colleges in California are considered HSIs; 95 community colleges in California (which encompasses 54% of the HSIs

in the state) can be classified as enrolling more than 25% of undergraduate Hispanic full-time students compared to 40 public 4-year institutions (encompassing 23% of the HSIs in the state) (Excelencia In Education, 2020). While traditional 4-year universities get more attention and resources for their MSI designation, MSIs at the community colleges actually educate a larger share of diverse students among the secondary education population.

In Ginsberg, Gasman, and Samayoa's (2017) study on MSIs' role in teacher preparation, they found that MSIs produce a disproportionate number of TOCs. For example, 48% of Hispanic teachers at public schools have a bachelor's degree from an MSI, while 34.9% of Black, male teachers received their Bachelor's from an MSI. Through a range of proactive recruitment and retention strategies that are targeted towards low-income and first-generation college students (e.g., early outreach, looking beyond test scores, personal mentoring and intrusive counseling, financial aid, cohort models, flexible schedules, childcare, etc.), MSIs have proven to be effective in producing TOCs who stay in the profession, are engaged with the community in which they are embedded, and use culturally relevant pedagogy (Ginsberg et al., 2017). However, not all MSIs are created equal and teaching programs vary in quality between MSI institutions. Plus, there are far too few MSIs compared to traditional non-MSI institutions, so the question remains if these institutions can make a real dent in the teacher diversity and shortage issue.

Alternative Pathways

A good portion of students of Color who enter the profession do so through non-traditional routes such as programs like Teach for America, alternative certification, or emergency credentialing because it is cheaper and more accessible (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Due to the teacher shortage, the number of teachers going through these alternative pathways is predicted to increase exponentially to meet the demand (Carver-Thomas, Leung, & Burns, 2021). However, the quality

of such programs has come into question as teachers who go through training via alternative pathways are more likely to leave the profession earlier, are less likely to achieve desired student outcomes, and feel less prepared to teach compared to teachers who train via traditional pathways. In Title I schools, teachers certified through a regular pathway have greater career longevity (average of 9 years) versus alternatively certified teachers (average of 6 years) (Carver-Thomas & Hammond, 2017). So although alternative pathways provide more opportunities that attract more TOCs to the profession, traditional pathways to teaching are still essential in providing the foundational education for teachers to feel prepared to enter and stay in their schools.

Grow Your Own (GYO)

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are derived from the theory of Yosso's "community cultural wealth" that views the local people and knowledge as assets in their community and therefore would make the best teachers who can address the local needs (Gist et al., 2019). Recruiting high school students, paraprofessionals, after school staff, parents, or other community members who grew up, live, and work in and around schools in their region is a model that capitalizes on the fact that teachers who come from the community are more likely to stay and continue teaching in their communities.

On top of recruiting, GYOs tend to underwrite the costs of teacher training through high quality preparation or support programs to get TOCs through the pipeline (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Gist et al., 2019). For example, GYO programs have emerged that tap into supporting paraprofessionals (e.g., teacher aides, custodians, etc.), middle/high school students, and parents to become teachers (Lau, et al., 2007; Reed, 2007; Gist, et al., 2019).

There is a critical race theory foundation to GYOs that has potential to dismantle White supremacy. Embedded in GYOs is a form of mentorship that is highly collaborative and taps into

the assets of communities of color (Yosso, 2005; Rogers-Ard, et al., 2019; Madda et al., 2012). Mentorship and teacher preparation programs that use the GYO model have demonstrated some effectiveness in the recruitment and retention of TOCs (Flores, et al., 2007; Lau, et al., 2007; Goodloe, et al., 2020; Monto, 2021; Kohli, 2018). Being intentional about equity and race in GYO programs is important because it not only helps attract students of Color into the profession, but also develops students' critical and social consciousness to be transformational leaders of educational change in the long-run (Valenzuela, 2017; Madda et al., 2012). In GYOs, teachers can learn in environments that foster identity development, cultural relevance, and critical consciousness that disrupt educational hierarchies, dehumanizing discourses and inequitable practices (Valenzuela, 2017).

However, not all GYOs are designed with an equity-based framework and the literature suggests that many do not actually have an equity-centered approach in the way they are implemented (Gist et al., 2019; Bragg, 2007). Less research has also been done in the effective retention pieces of GYOs (like mentorship), often because there is little tracking done across systems and spotty funding to support the sustainability of the work (Gist, 2019 et al.; Kohli, 2018). Nonetheless, the original idea of a GYO, when built on a critical race framework, is one that is worth exploring to increase the number of TOCs in the community.

Mentorship and its Role in Teacher of Color Development and Retention

Benefits of Mentorship for Future Teachers

Eighty percent of new teachers have mentors (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Despite the varying effectiveness of mentorship across different education programs, mentorship overall has been shown to have a positive impact on teacher satisfaction, commitment, and retention (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). More importantly, there is evidence that novice teachers who received some sort

of mentoring and induction were more likely to increase their student scores on academic tests (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring and support networks have been shown to improve retention rates of new teachers along with positive attitudes, feelings of efficacy and instructional skills and high-quality teaching at high-need schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Mentorship also plays a role in reducing attrition among teachers when it is paired with observation and feedback, time for collaborative planning with colleagues, a reduced teaching load, and focus on high leverage activities (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). Odell & Wang (2002) found that mentors tend to not only help future teachers develop a deeper understanding of subject matter and how to teach it, but they also can provide emotional and psychological support to their mentee. Mentoring can be one of the most important pieces for retaining TOCs and reversing the trend of early resignations among novice teachers. Thus, mentor teachers are considered very influential actors in the student teaching experience and potentially have a large role to play in a future teacher's trajectory (Jaspers, et al., 2014). Positive mentorship experiences in urban classrooms early on during teacher preparation have been shown to positively correlate with teacher retention (Gallego, 2001). However, the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship on the new teacher's professional and personal development ranges widely depending on the structure, duration, and content of mentoring that is implemented (Gardiner, 2017; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

Formal Mentorship In Traditional Teacher Education

Regardless of the overall widespread use and popularity of mentoring in teacher preparation, research still is inconclusive about the role mentors should play as well as the mechanisms that constitute effective mentorship. Ambrosetti and Dekkers' (2010) literature review of mentorship roles in preservice teacher education revealed the dearth of research for preservice teacher contexts (most mentorship research is about in-service teachers). In addition,

they noted how in most studies, mentor-mentee roles are not clearly defined in terms of what actions and interactions occur during the mentoring process. Achinstein and Athansases (2005) found that mentorship in teacher induction has a lot of buy-in from the field, but most mentoring programs do not hold robust ideas about teacher knowledge, students, or change, much less about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Current teacher mentorship models, formalized in traditional education programs, typically address the technical and psychological aspects of teaching, like content and pedagogical knowledge. Most of the traditional teacher prep content still focuses on workshops on school policies and classroom management instead of the prevailing social and political issues within the larger educational contexts. As a result of this prescribed and standards-based approach, most mentors then become "local guides" and not "agents of change" in the education system (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Stanulis, et al. (2019) study makes the case that preservice teacher mentoring should emphasize growth-producing experiences, rather than to simply provide a placement to practice and evaluate teaching.

Mentorship is also just one of the many components of pre-service teacher education programs, which include academic coursework, licensure test preparation, and a practicum involving observation of an experienced teacher. In the California teacher credential process, student teachers are required to complete a minimum of 600 hours of clinical practice guided by a master teacher and program supervisor (California CTC, 2017). Student teachers completing their field placements typically are not paid during this yearlong process and are put on a tight timeline to finish all these components, thus mentorship can be an overshadowed and burdening component amongst all the requirements to become a teacher.

In addition, traditional mentorship models are more transactional and follow a "transmission" model of knowledge transfer that is often evaluative in nature. This leaves less

room to focus on the cultural and relational aspects of teaching (Gardiner, 2017; Odell & Wang, 2002). Furthermore, the formalized mentor-mentee relationship is typically conceptualized in hierarchical and asymmetrical terms where transfer of information and learning flows down to the mentee (instead of the other way around). Thus, formalized teacher mentorship, as it currently stands, is typically too narrow in its focus, ignores the development of the mentor, and does little to tap into a potentially empowering relationship.

In trying to disrupt the traditional mentoring models, equity-focused mentoring is gaining traction as a framework for training future teachers. This camp posits that effective mentoring needs to not only link classroom learning with the local community (cultural contexts), but also should know how to work within the constraints of a hierarchical school environment to affirm diversity and uplift equity (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005). This means that mentorship would include regular and critical conversations with an "eye toward inquiry, introspection, and continued improvement" (Stanulis et al., 2019) rather than just reproducing the inequitable structures that exist in the education system. One method of engaging in this equity-focused mentoring involves teachers being exposed to many different types of informal and community-based mentoring that can serve to socialize them to the profession, familiarize them to the school context, and give them the social emotional support that may be lacking in formal mentorship relationships (Guillén & Zeichner, 2018; Desimone et al., 2014; Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007).

Community and Informal Teacher Mentorship

Desimone, et al. (2014) found that informal networks and mentorship can play a complementary role to the formal mentors assigned by teacher education programs. Informal sources of support can meet the personal needs of preservice and novice teachers while formal mentorship can be geared towards professional needs. Even though most teachers have informal

mentors, informal mentoring is not explicitly considered as an induction support offered in traditional teacher education and development. Strengthening informal mentorship networks has the potential to be responsive to preservice teacher's needs and offer other learning and support opportunities not available if the student was only paired with one mentor.

Community mentorship models in teacher education is another promising site of learning for preservice teachers who may want to look beyond just pedagogy and want access to the knowledge that exists in the communities. In Guillén and Zeichner's (2018) study, community mentors (e.g., parents, community leaders, etc.) partnered with a formal teacher education program to authentically engage teacher candidates with the communities they would eventually teach in (e.g., panels, group discussions, mini conferences, community walks, etc.). This type of community-based mentorship involves the community in the "shared creation and ownership of the work" of educating teacher candidates that transcends a skills-based approach they receive in formal teacher education. It was tiring, frustrating, and sometimes "dehumanizing" work for mentors who worked with preservice teachers from more privileged backgrounds. But the pre-service students of Color who went through this type of mentorship felt more supported and affirmed about their relationship with the community and equity-oriented vision of education (Guillén & Zeichner, 2018). In this instance, it is possible for mentorship to expand the walls of the classroom and uphold the community as the teacher, bridge, and beneficiary of culturally-responsive future teachers.

Mentor Teachers: Their Role and Benefits

Mentorship can provide a plethora of benefits for not only the mentee, but also the mentor. Mentor teachers receive professional development, renewal, psychological benefits, reflective practices, and contribution to teacher leadership from their relationship with pre-service teachers

(Huling & Resta, 2001; Ford & Parsons, 2000; Clinard & Ariav, 1998). Mentor teachers tend to perceive the teacher and mentor role to be complementary, potentially reinforcing each other (Jaspers et al., 2014). Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005)'s study found that in a survey of 259 mentor teachers in the University of Hong Kong, 70% noted that they benefited professionally from mentoring by learning from these four areas: (1) self-reflection, (2) student-teachers (3) mutual collaboration (4) university tutors (staff). They also saw evidence of learning from mentors that extended into the communities within their respective schools, thus indicating the benefits of mentorship ripples beyond just the mentee and mentor.

In Lammert et al.'s (2020) case study, the researchers showed that a mentor teacher's identity can be constructed through mentoring practices and how that identity can serve as a site of resistance against existing, dominant practices and pedagogies. "Reflective mentorship" can be a space to be able to articulate tensions of the profession/environment with internal values, where teachers can find learning, support, and validation through community and develop agency and leadership by redesigning a system. Mentor teachers, who experience belonging within a formal or informal learning community that is dedicated to pre-service teacher learning, develop a "teacher educator" identity and professional knowledge that contributes to their commitment as a mentor (Andreasen, 2019).

For equity minded TOCs, who already have a heightened awareness of inequities and racism, serving as a mentor can provide a sense of camaraderie and belongingness amongst an oppressive system. In Dingus' (2002) research, Black women's mentoring networks provided a much-needed cultural space for validation, knowledge generation, and inquiry to navigate racism within education. The multi-generational mentorship of Black female teachers was centered less on the practical knowledge of teaching, and more on the relational and cultural orientation rooted

in lived experiences and love (Dingus, 2002). The networks and "cultural spaces" provided participants affirmation that they typically did not receive within the individualistic and racially harmful environments of the school (Kohli & Pizarro, 2016). Dingus (2002) shared the possibility of a mentorship model built on the "intellectual, spiritual, and cultural strengths of people of color that can bolster them for challenges of multiple oppressions" (p. 362). Therefore, mentorship that is intentional about centering racial equity and valuing the cultural assets that both students and teachers of Color bring can be a powerful force in combating the barriers that plague the profession.

Mentorship also can serve as a site of resistance. The act of dialogue in the mentoring relationship influences identity construction and reorganizes shared experiences, perspectives, goals in the context of an inequitable education system (Danielewicz, 2001). For mentor teachers who have gone through and feel disillusioned by the system, the mentoring relationship creates a space for critical reflection and empowerment, developing them as change agents in their roles. Villegas and Davis (2008) found that most of the research on diversification of the teaching profession continues to focus too much on representation rather than the preparation needed for TOCs to promote equity and alter systemic disparities in student achievement. Therefore, an opportunity lies in recognizing the power of mentoring to disrupt educational disparities.

The Experiences of TOCs in Traditional Teacher Education and Mentorship

The experience of TOCs in literature demonstrates a strong relationship between cultural/racial identities and perspectives in education (Tellez, 1999; Kohli, 2018). Yet, the recruitment of TOCs into teaching programs does not guarantee that their lived experiences and identities are included or supported by the predominantly White teacher institutions that train them. Teacher education is still the most explicit way preservice students get socialized into the

profession. Teacher training that can openly acknowledge race in education can disrupt the status quo and reveal the underlying root causes of inequitable systems (Tellez, 1999). On the other hand, teacher training that is inconsistent and hostile to TOCs' identity and vision of education has potential to oppress and exclude them altogether (Quiocho & Rios, 2000). With formalized mentoring making up such a large component of teacher preparation, the culturally relevant and equitable ways in which that mentorship is conducted (or not conducted) should be considered.

Mentorship in educator spaces reflects the dominant demographics of the teaching profession. Traditional teacher education programs have a shortage of minority faculty and mentors to work with minority students and mentees (Torres, et al., 2004). Because an overwhelming majority of teacher educators identify as White, institutions that prepare teachers "reproduce white supremacy by default" (Garte & Kronen, 2020). Thus, for students of Color who go through traditional teacher preparation programs, having mentor teachers who look like them and can execute culturally relevant pedagogy can be hard to come by. Literature on preservice mentorship has shown that power differentials are a significant factor in mentoring relationships and can have a negative impact on the learning of the preservice teacher, yet the impact of race, ethnicity and culture is rarely studied as part of the power differentials (Johnson-Bailey, 2012). Studies have shown that the identity and positionality of the mentor influences the mentor's perceived role, coaching model, and tendency to be change agents (Lammert et al., 2020).

An Equity-Centered Approach to Mentorship by Teachers of Color

To create a successful mentorship environment for TOCs to thrive, more attention needs to be paid to the culturally relevant matches, identities of mentor and mentee, and their mentoring environment. Results from Garte and Kronen's (2020) study of future early childhood educators at the community colleges, most of whom identified as students of Color, showed that same culture

mentorship matches mattered. Students who were paired with mentors who shared a similar cultural context had the most highly successful relationships, while pairs that did not share the same culture had the least unsuccessful mentor relationship. Success was attributed to an equal power exchange between mentor and mentee that was enhanced even more because of the shared cultural background and "intersubjectivity" that led to transformative results for both the SOC and TOC (Garte & Kronen, 2020). For TOCs, personal and professional identities are tied together and in constant development and revision (Quicho & Rios, 2000). Thus, personal issues of race and culture for TOCs cannot be separated from the teaching profession. For preservice SOCs and their mentor TOCs, the literature confirms that they have shared experiences of microaggressions, lack of support, and alienation due to their minority status. But the literature also mentions how the mentoring relationship can be a resource and buffer to combat these challenges in the teaching field (Magaladi et al., 2018). Similarly, Gist (2017) noted that the culturally responsive teacher educator is one who is critically conscious enough to support preservice teachers to overcome academic and professional barriers to successfully teach. In this sense, the work of the teacher educator is not limited to the basics of classroom management, but also includes envisioning the future challenges for TOCs, and in doing so, actively preparing them to confront possible equity issues along their career trajectory.

While incorporating mentor identity into mentoring relationships is important, the type of mentoring framework that is implemented can also make an impact on current and future TOCs. Kohli (2018) argues for using a "critical mentoring" model that redefines the relationship between students of Color and their mentors; mentors should recognize the future TOCs have relevant knowledge and experiences grounded in their racial, cultural, and social identities that are assets in their work in schools. The leveling of the power differentials between mentor and mentee in

“Critical Mentorship” positions the mentor as a “co-learner” so that knowledge is more relational rather than transactional. Mentorship then becomes less a set of skills to teach, but more so a relationship and identity that is shaped by dialogue between mentor and mentee (Lammert et al., 2020). Such critical and equity orientations by the mentor have shown to improve the future TOC’s experience with racial and cultural climates in schools they serve and can be a factor in overall retention (Gist & Bristol, 2021). But this type of “critical mentorship” not only benefits future TOCs, but it can also help current mentor teachers shape their own identity and practice in a way to disrupt the status quo. Gist (2017) found that TOCs benefit from talking about ethnic/racial identity in classrooms, having opportunities to tailor cultural assignments, participating in spaces to reflect on racialized experiences, and modeling critical teaching. Navarro et al. 's (2019) research bolsters the idea that TOCs benefit from mentorship of SOCs when the mentors can draw from both their mentee’s and their own “funds of knowledge” to disrupt the classroom and transform teacher education. The teacher educators of Color used the relationships with their mentees to inquire, adapt, co-construct, engage in critical self-reflection, and develop solidarity as TOCs. These studies demonstrate how mentorship between SOCs and TOCs provides a space learn about the equitable and culturally responsive practices that better align with their identities and empower them.

Community Colleges: An Overlooked Opportunity

The “Typical” Community College Student

Community colleges have long been considered the “workhorses" in higher education, as they serve 46% of undergraduates in the U.S. compared to the four-year public and private universities that get more of the spotlight and serve just 20% of the population (Bok, 2013; Steven, 2015). The American Association of Community Colleges report that half of the students who

receive a college degree attended a community college during their undergraduate studies. In the state of California, 116 community colleges make up the largest higher education system in the U.S, serving over 2.1 million students annually (Foundation for Community Colleges, 2022). It is also worth noting that community colleges serve a very diverse population with their open-access mission, lower tuition costs, and convenient locations (Torres, et al., 2004; Townsend & Ignash, 2003).

The community colleges are known as a democratizing space to serve those who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. In California, more than 69% of community college students identify as people of Color, while 35% identify as first-generation in their family to attend college (California Community Colleges, 2022). The community colleges are highly diverse, racially and ethnically, but also in terms of age and experience; more than 40% of California community college students are 25 years or older (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2022). These "non-traditional" students reflect the communities they come from, are older, and often come with past job and educational experiences that would be well-served in a profession that could use their assets. Yet, community college students continue to be overlooked in teacher preparation.

Community college students are a prime group to help diversify the teaching force as well as resolve the teacher shortage, but they are often met with multiple systemic barriers and hidden curriculum along the teaching pipeline that prevent them from successfully transferring into credential programs. Community colleges continue to struggle in retaining and graduating its students, especially students of Color. In the California community college system, only 13% of freshmen receive an Associate's degree after two years and 31% receive their degree within three years (Public Policy Institute of California, 2019). Of those students whose goal is to graduate with

an Associate's degree and transfer, only about 48% do so within 6 years (Public Policy Institute of California, 2019). In trying to offer open and accessible education to all, but without large endowments like their university counterparts, community colleges work under austerity conditions that limit their capacity to provide support and resources.

Another challenge for getting community college students through the transfer process is the lack of alignment and clarity across the community college and 4-year institutions in their articulation agreements (Public Policy Institute of California, 2019). Community college students end up losing credits, taking more than is needed or find that they are short and need to take longer to finish their degree because articulation varies from campus to campus. However, students who do eventually transfer to a UC or CSU are likely to earn their degrees at similar or better rates than first time freshmen at the respective 4-year institutions (Public Policy Institute of California, 2019). Thus, more must be done to ensure the students at the community college level who are interested in teaching are able to transfer and complete their credential requirements to become a teacher.

The Guided Pathways (GP) framework is currently being implemented on a large scale in the California Community College system to restructure college offerings so that there is a clear pathway for higher education and career advancement (California Community Colleges, 2022). The hope is that GP will improve persistence and graduation rates for students, but the current model risks a one-size-fits-all model that lacks an equity and racial perspective. In Rose, Neri, and Rios-Aguilar's (2019) critical analysis of the Guided Pathways model, the researchers note that the approach does not consider the "reality of racial privilege and oppression" that shapes community college students' opportunities. They recommend that in implementing GP, institutions should: (1) create career communities that recognize the Funds of Knowledge and community labor histories of students; (2) ensure work-based learning opportunities; (3) use

equity-focused labor market data to improve student persistence and completion. These recommendations for a more equity-centered Guided Pathways would be a natural fit for the teaching pathway that incorporates mentoring at the community colleges.

Community College Pathway to Teaching

50% of current teacher graduates started at a community college and more than 531 community colleges in the U.S. currently offer 2-year programs in education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). In California, about 60% of credentialed teachers coming from the CSU system got their start at a community college (Madrigal & Martinez, 2019). As the teacher shortage continues to grow and teacher education programs struggle to attract students of Color, community colleges are poised to play a larger role in educating a larger share of the teachers of tomorrow and will need the resources and structures in place to do so.

Nonetheless, tension exists between 4-year universities (where traditional teacher education lives) and the community colleges (where education pathways live), because institutional lines are blurred (Townsend & Ignash, 2003). The murkiness of teacher education between the community college and four-years translates into murkiness on the student end as they try to navigate two complex systems that do not often talk or align to each other (Townsend & Ignash, 2003; Floyd & Walker, 2003). In addition, there has been a lack of data tracking and chronic underinvestment in student programming and services in the crucial transition from community college to the 4-year university for pre-service teachers. More research is needed to understand how a teacher candidate of color successfully moves through these systems and through to the other side as a working teacher.

In Townsend and Ignash's (2003) study of the community colleges' role in teacher education, they found that most community college programs still play the traditional role of

preparing students to transfer into teaching credential programs at the university level through articulation agreements. However, education articulation agreements vary in quality and effectiveness at each institution and are not always a clear throughline for teacher candidates. Other community colleges in their analysis take a more direct role in credentialing by offering Associates and Baccalaureate degrees for teaching, particularly in states where there is a dire need for teachers. Nonetheless, few community colleges go down this road because of the mission overlap with credentialing programs at the universities and the fear that this degree would be inferior to a Bachelor's at the 4-year universities (Townsend & Ignash, 2003). But as the 4-year universities continue to hold exclusive territory, decision-making, and resources around teacher preparation, the community colleges continue to be excluded, despite having engaged in teacher preparation work for decades. Meanwhile, teacher shortages and diversity challenges remain, and sub-standard licensed teachers are temporarily filling the gaps until a longer-term solution is devised. Thus, an opportunity exists to invest in future teachers at the community colleges and to recognize the large role community colleges have to play in meeting the demand for qualified, diverse teachers.

The spotlight on community colleges as the center for investment, recruitment, and training future teachers is also ripe for wide-scale replication because of the abundance and accessibility of community colleges nationwide. Through case studies of community college partnerships with TK-12 and universities, Bragg (2007) showed promising data that makes the case for more partnerships and alignment across the community college and public university systems to make a teaching career more accessible to students of Color.

One study by Flores, et al. (2007) specifically highlights the successful collaboration between community colleges and universities to build a pipeline for Latino teachers in Texas using multiple interventions, including a mentorship program. The national gap between Latinx teachers

(8% of the workforce) and Latinx students (more than 21% of students) is relevant in both the Texas and California context. However, there are few studies that build upon the community college collaboration and put focus on teacher mentorship in urban areas such as Los Angeles.

Because the community college's role in teacher preparation is overshadowed by the universities', few programs and resources currently exist on a large enough scale to ensure community college students are able to successfully transfer and finish a credential program. One of the promising interventions that needs further investigation is mentorship of pre-service teacher candidates during their years at community colleges, which has been shown to increase their persistence rates and feelings of readiness for teaching (Monto, 2021; Garte and Kronen, 2020; Woullard and Coats, 2004). The studies that have addressed mentorship at this level highlight the importance of individual, interactive and sociocultural factors for enabling mentorship of community college students.

In Bautista's (2020) study of Latinx students who participated in teacher preparation programs at community colleges found that they were effective at increasing the transfer rates due to the transmission of special capital and "manufacturing of hope" via caring and mentor-like relationships with institutional agents as part of the program (e.g., professors). The validating relationships formed through the program transformed the trajectories of students of Color, but less research has been done on the "institutional agents" who extend into the community and network of teachers of which the future teachers will eventually be part of.

The Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline Program

The Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) program was an innovative teaching exploration and mentorship model that was implemented at three Los Angeles area community colleges in order to build a more humanistic, effective, and diverse GYO teacher

pipeline. The mission of the CPTP was to strengthen the teaching profession by increasing the number of teachers of Color. The model utilized community colleges as a central site of TOC recruitment, training, and community development and ultimately, retention. CPTP collaborated with local school districts, community organizations, and credentialing universities to dismantle barriers that were keeping TOCs from entering and staying in the profession.

CPTP implemented an Enhanced Advisory Mentoring (EAM) for Equity and Retention Model that built upon the concepts of "enhanced advising" or "strategic advising" recommended for community college student success (Karp & Stacey, 2013; Vasquez & Scrivener, 2020). In the case of CPTP, advising was adapted to emphasize equity and social justice while providing students with multi-layered mentorship (mentor teacher, success coach, and Teacher Mentoring Network), comprehensive enhanced advising, career development activities, and stipends for each semester of participation. Over 300 community college students, of all majors, engaged with EAM each semester to explore teaching at all levels, from early childhood to community college, inclusive of all subjects. Because of the open access of the recruitment, the students came from diverse backgrounds and were in different parts of their teaching journey (e.g., some had never thought about teaching and others already knew they wanted to become teachers).

As a participant, the student engaged in a multi-layered model of mentorship that started on the first level with an Early Childhood or a TK-14 teacher mentor in a local school site. At the next level, Success Coaches connected students to resources on-campus and used data to support the 1:1 mentoring relationship. A majority of the Success Coaches were also current teacher education candidates and had successfully transferred from a community college to 4-year university. The third level of mentorship was a Teacher Mentoring Network (TMN) that brought together novice, veteran teachers, and current educators in the community into a communal space

along with the mentees and mentor teachers to explore different education topics and created a sense of community and belonging.

Zeroing in on the 1:1 mentoring relationship, each semester the community college student was matched with a current teacher based on location, pathway preferences, and time availability. Once matched, the mentee and mentor teacher worked together to complete 30 mentorship hours each semester in order for both to receive a stipend. The 30 hours were not evaluative and empowered the mentor-mentee pair to decide how to best use the time together. The flexibility and openness of the mentorship requirements were intentional to allow for exploration, inspiration, and relationship building to meet the students wherever they were at in their teaching journey.

Mentor teachers were recruited primarily through existing relationships the community college partners had with their local school districts, community college faculty, and early childhood centers. Mentor teachers did not need to have any prior mentoring experience in order to participate. The mentors received an orientation and one asynchronous training to guide their mentorship as well as ongoing support by the CPTP staff. However, a unique aspect of the mentorship was that mentor teachers had very little paperwork to fill out (besides approving hours) during the process and only are matched with up to two students at a time to facilitate relationship building. Mentors were allowed to mentor the same student over multiple semesters if they chose to and many did. The program emphasized relationship-building over pedagogical knowledge of traditional mentoring, gave stipends to both mentors and mentees, and created space for professional learning opportunities with a social justice and community focus for mentees and mentors (e.g., professional learning communities, Teacher Mentoring Network, etc.).

Another distinguishing piece about the CPTP mentor teachers was that over 80% of the 150 mentors identified as TOCs, a statistic that surpassed the general LA teaching population and

is in parity with the over 90% of the 300 students of Color in the program. Thus, there is much to learn from this group of TOCs and how they experienced EAM with community college students of Color wanting to explore teaching. The EAM for Equity and Retention model of CPTP elevated students' and teacher mentors' experiences by creating a welcoming and inclusive culture of educators dedicated to mentoring the next generation of teachers.

Conceptual Framework

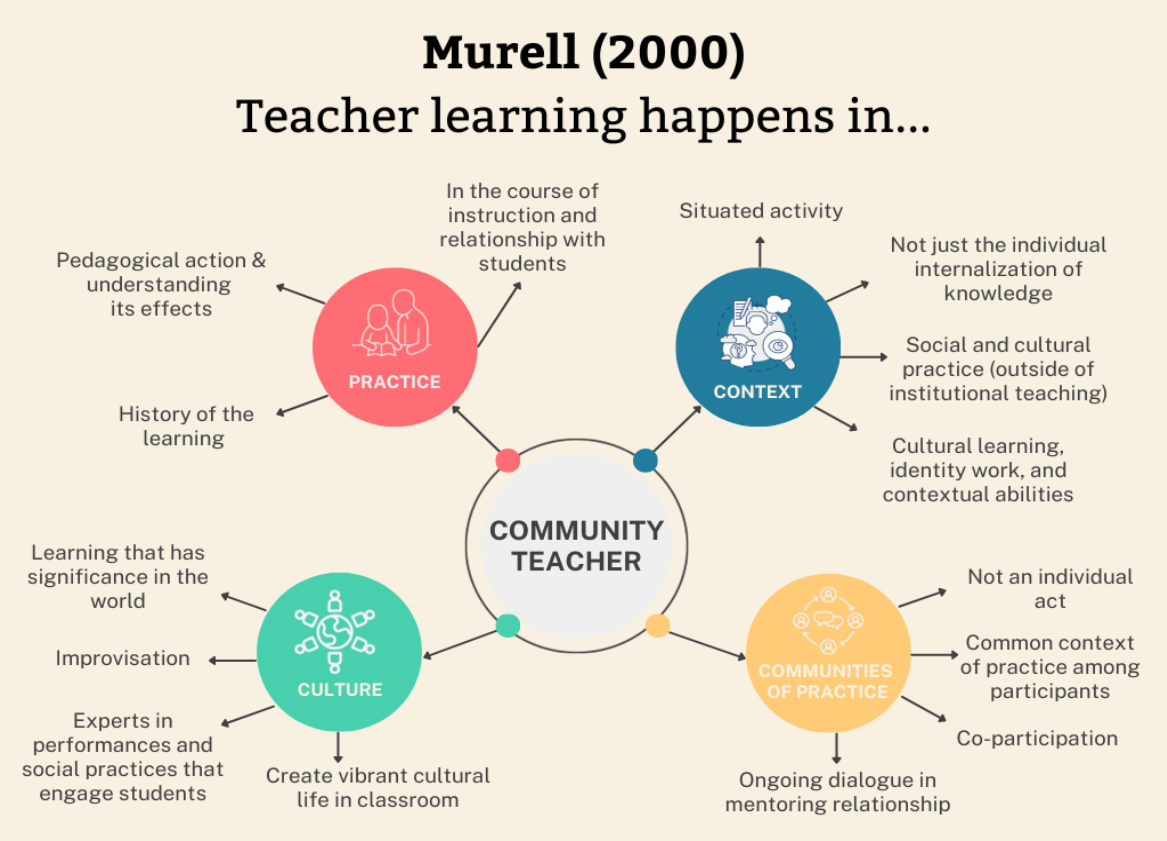
Mentor TOCs experiences will be analyzed through the conceptual framework of Murrell's (2000) "community teacher." A "community teacher" is defined as holding and practicing "contextualized knowledge of culture, community, and identity of the students." This type of special knowledge of their students is mainly due to the teacher's own lived experiences and the cultural, political, and racial identities they possess. These types of teachers are often integrated into the community and have common characteristics such as living/working in the same neighborhoods, growing up in a similar school system as their students, producing high achieving students, seeing themselves as change agents and wanting to give back to the community. This framework has primarily been used in the context of learning and development of preservice teachers with the hope that once they enter the classroom, they have strengthened their ties to the community in which they teach. However, applying this framework to the ongoing learning of in-service teachers and the professional development they engage in, such as with mentorship, could be a different way to think about how "community teachers" can continue to learn and grow in their practice.

The "community teacher"concept posits four key principles: (1) Teacher learning is not isolated to the act of teaching, but happens in the course of practice or teaching activities; (2) Learning is not limited to internalizing knowledge as an individual (such as from a book or course),

but also happens in the context of lived experiences and interactions with others; (3) Learning about culture should be guided by an adaptive practice that is situated within the people, principle, and context of the community; (4) Learning should also happen through participation in a Community of Practice (CoP) where cultural and social knowledge is put to use in common practice. Murrell's (2000) sample intervention, where an introductory education course for preservice teachers was restructured based on these foundational elements (e.g., first field experiences are positioned within the community and not the classroom, community service/projects, and small group reflections in communities of practice), demonstrated an effective model of how to merge theory and practice, all situated within the community.

Figure 1

Murrell (2000) Community Teacher Framework: 4 Key Features for Teacher Learning



These elements are also exhibited through the CPTP program where the mentoring relationships created a unique space for teacher learning and growth that welcomed lived experiences and varying identities to infuse reflective practice. The mentee, and to an even greater extent, the mentor, actually got the chance to live out being a "community teacher" and learn from the contextual interactions that took place with their mentees. The community literally comes into the classroom and this relationship became a crucial piece in opening up the walls of the classroom and restoring the value of marginalized communities.

Jimenez-Silva & Olsen (2012) argued that people construct and develop their identities and understanding through their active participation and engagement with others in cultural practices that are situated in a particular social community. Thus, as members of COPs, mentors can develop their understanding about the practice, who they are, and what they know in relation to the community. The exploratory nature of the mentorship, multiple levels of mentorship (EAM) and inclusion of a Professional Learning Community component all speak to the tenets of Communities of Practices and the lifelong learning and development of a community teacher who is dedicated to being change agents and transforming systems. Thus, mentorship program designs that support teachers, at all stages, to become "community teachers" can have an impact that ripples across schools and communities.

Gap in the Research

Teacher preparation programs at the community college level have long been excluded from the national conversation of teacher shortages and diversity. In addition, TOCs have yet to be called upon, en masse, to mentor community college students to consider a profession and community that needs them. Future teachers at the community college are typically one step removed from the credential process to becoming a teacher and may need more information and

support before committing to the profession when they transfer. It is a rare period in time where mentorship can truly be about inspiration and exploration and be free of the bureaucracy and technical barriers (e.g., standardized tests, loans, etc.) that often accompany formal teacher education. Community college students have a potential to bring a wealth of lived experiences and assets to the profession, but continue to be an overlooked pool in terms of teacher mentorship, development, and support.

There is a plethora of literature that supports the benefits and learning of mentorship from the mentee perspective (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), but little is known about the growth and learning the mentors experience in the process. Even less is known about the impact on mentors who identify as teachers of Color and the unique experience they have with their student of Color mentees. Very few research studies on TOC mentorship focus on issues related to race or ethnicity (Kohli, 2018). By understanding the mentorship structures, practices, context, and content that TOCs say keeps them engaged in the work of mentoring future teachers, new policy considerations for teacher educators could arise (Feiman-Neser, 1996). Acting as a mirror, interviews with current TOCs who are mentoring future TOCs, can yield better understanding of how their experiences can help recruit, train, and retain TOCs in the teaching pathway and profession. More so, they can give insight into the decision-making, preparation, learnings, goals, and development of TOC mentors.

The concept of the "community teacher" is still a relatively new approach to preparing and developing teachers, so few studies actually deal with future teachers being prepared for the classroom by working with the families and communities they will eventually serve. Even less is written about the mentors who work with these future teachers. A community based approach to teacher education and development can help decentralize the power of teacher education so that

authentic experiences within the community becomes the learning space for all teachers (Liu & Ball, 2019). Field experience partnerships between LEAs and universities have long been studied, but very little research has been done concerning the partnerships between community colleges and LEAs in preparing future teachers. The mentorship space provides an opportunity to explore how the development of "community teachers" (current and future) can disrupt traditional teacher education and create a sense of reciprocity that builds the critical consciousness, culturally relevant pedagogy, and leadership of TOCs that leads to a sustainable GYO teacher pipeline.

Summary

There is overwhelming evidence that TOCs bring a wealth of academic, social, emotional, mental, and cultural wealth to classrooms that have potential to positively affect student outcomes, especially among students of Color. However, the assets that TOCs possess remain untapped because of the teacher-student demographic mismatch in classrooms. With a looming teacher shortage, the racial disparity in the teacher workforce is poised to grow, nationally and locally in California.

Barriers remain in the recruitment and retention of TOCs in education, including a burdensome credentialing process, hostile racial climates, institutional racism, lack of mentorship, isolation, lack of preparation, disconnect between identities and curriculum, and fewer leadership opportunities. Certain interventions have been shown to be effective in attracting and keeping TOC in the teaching profession such as culturally relevant pedagogy, minority serving institutions, residency programs, Grow Your Own (GYO) models, and mentorship programs.

In Los Angeles, an urban school environment that serves mostly students of Color and has historically been under-resourced, there is potential to re-invest in the current TOCs who work in these communities and have them play a role in mentoring the next generation of teachers at the

community colleges. Mentorship programs and its effects are often looked at from the mentee perspective, but less so from the mentor perspective, especially mentors of color. Mentor TOCs are more likely to enter mentoring programs that appeal to their cultural and community orientations and make an explicit call for their service. They are also more likely to stay if mentorship programs allow space for their identities and relationships to form and evolve in culturally relevant ways (an aspect often overlooked by dominant teacher education practices) (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Mentors who are TOCs also learn and grow in the process of relationship building and meaning making with their mentees that can be transferred to their school settings and the overall education system. Thus, mentorship has the potential to be effective in recruiting and retaining future TOCs, but also can be effective in retaining current TOCs in the profession and impacting an entire community.

This study will examine the experiences of mentor teachers of Color (TOCs) and their development in a "Grow Your Own" (GYO) mentorship program that seeks to grow community college students into future teachers.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Community-based mentoring programs have an important role in the training and development of teachers of Color (TOCs) in a "Grow Your Own" (GYO) teacher pipeline model. This study examines the experiences of mentor TOCs and how mentorship affects their own learning and growth as they work with community college students in a pre-service program for aspiring teachers. The investigation probes what brings and keeps mentor TOCs in these mentoring programs, how the mentoring relationship with community college students affects their development, and the role current mentor TOCs play in the sustainability of a GYO teacher pipeline. In this chapter, I will explain my research design and rationale, the reason I chose CPTP as the study site, how I selected and recruited my participants, my data collection methods, credibility/trustworthiness issues, my reflection on my role management, and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

1) How does the experience of being a mentor to community college students aspiring to be teachers contribute to the learning and development of teachers of Color?
2) How do mentor teachers of Color perceive their role and impact in a Grow Your Own teacher pipeline that seeks to increase the number of teachers of Color?

Research Design and Rationale

This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to understand the phenomenon of the development of mentor TOCs in a federally funded mentorship program targeting aspiring teachers at the community college. The Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) project design uses a "Grow Your Own" approach to recruit and retain future teachers of Color. As part of a larger research evaluation, my research piece dives deeper around the topic of mentor teachers,

specifically those who identify as TOCs. My research questions are rooted in experiences, thus lending itself to a phenomenological study because it is seeking to acquire information directly from its participants in understanding their view and experiences related to the phenomenon of TOCs in mentoring experiences with future teachers of Color from the community college (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study employs qualitative methods because it is not trying to identify a phenomenon, but rather seeking to answer "why" the phenomenon is occurring and dive deeper into individuals' feelings on mentorship programs and its effects. The research aim is to have a better understanding of the development and retention of TOCs, given the context and presence of overwhelming turnover of TOCs in education.

Though it is possible to survey mentor TOCs, a quantitative study does not allow me the opportunity to take a more holistic approach to understand their experiences and feelings about mentorship in the community college-based GYO program. Because the mentor teachers vary so widely in terms of teaching pathways, race/ethnicity, and school contexts (e.g., grade levels, public school, charters, etc.), quantitative studies would also be limiting in terms of unique responses. Whereas capturing the stories and lived experiences of mentor TOCs who choose to mentor future TOCs at the community colleges is more aligned with a qualitative study because it seeks to explain this phenomenon further.

Site Selection

The Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) project was a three-year federal grant initiative to build a community-based teacher pipeline that strengthens the teaching profession by increasing the number of TOCs. The consortium, consisting of three community colleges and a nonprofit, served over 300 Los Angeles community college students in their exploration of teaching.

The CPTP project was a unique site because it focused particularly on recruiting in regions that served predominantly students of Color and in subject areas where they have historically been underresourced, such as STEM education, special education, and early childhood education. The intervention used a multi-tiered system of engagement, called Enhanced Advisory Mentorship (EAM) for Equity and Retention, that sought to address barriers along the pathway to becoming a teacher for students of Color at the community college. In the model, community college students who were interested in teaching were matched with a mentor who was an Early Childhood or TK-14 teacher in the local community. These mentor teachers formed a relationship with only one to two students per semester and had the ability to continue with the same mentee over multiple semesters. The community college mentees committed to 30 hours of mentoring and engaged in teaching-related activities per semester and both mentors and mentees were paid for their participation in the program.

While the federal grant research focused on the impact of mentorship on students' likelihood to transfer and stay on the teaching pathway, less attention was paid to the project's potential impact of mentoring on the mentor teachers and their development. By investigating mentor experiences, the data can better support recruitment and retention of TOCs in preservice mentoring programs to address the critical shortage of TOCs. It also can point to the role the mentor TOCs play in a robust, diverse, and sustainable GYO teacher pipeline.

Mentor teachers for the CPTP program were recruited primarily through word of mouth and existing relationships the community colleges had with their local school districts. The community colleges created messaging that was shared to district leadership and communications offices that called for teachers to apply to this mentoring program trying to increase the number of teachers of Color. The only requirement to participate was that the mentor needed to be currently

teaching and had access to a classroom. Info sessions were held for those interested and a simple application was required to join. Almost all mentors who applied got in, and once they did, they received a mandatory orientation and one asynchronous training. Mentors are matched with up to two mentees every semester and they are able to continue with the same mentee for subsequent semesters. The mentor teachers were paid a small stipend each semester if their mentee finished the 30 mentoring hours. It must be noted that for a majority of the project duration, including the recruitment and implementation phases, almost all activities were conducted online because of the COVID pandemic. The original intention was to have CPTP be an in-person program, but the increased use and acceptance of digital tools due to the pandemic provided an unexpected medium for relationship building. The effects of the COVID shutdowns on the mentorship experience are described in more detail in the participants' interviews.

Participant Selection

The spotlight on mentor TOCs was possible because CPTP was an outlier for teacher education programs in terms of its diverse population. 95% of the students it served were students of Color and approximately 75% of its mentors identified as teachers of Color. The centering of race, the community colleges, and relative success with recruitment and retention of large numbers of BIPOC participants can serve as an exemplar for other programs looking to diversify their pipeline. The project also focused particularly on recruiting overlooked mentors of Color who taught in high-need fields that have historically been underserved, such as STEM education and special education.

In order to select study participants, I used purposeful sampling with the following criteria: mentor teachers who identified as BIPOC, have participated in CPTP for at least one year (or 2 semesters), and taught in the TK-12 teaching pathways. The spotlight on mentors who participated

for a longer period is intentional because time is a factor in building a strong enough relationship with the mentees to have an impact. Additionally, the TK-12 teachers have significantly different training and work environments than Early Childhood teachers and community college faculty who were mentors, so the decision was made to separate these two pathways for additional study in the future. Initial outreach went out to all CPTP mentors and the 15 interview participants who met the criteria voluntarily responded to be part of the study.

During a critical time of need for teachers, replication of traditional recruitment and retention strategies will no longer suffice, especially if the goal to yield more TOCs is to be met. Better data is needed on TOC experiences as part of mentorship and GYO programs to address the teacher workforce shortage and elevate their voice. The relationship of the mentor TOCs with community college students and the community integration into the classroom is another innovative feature that is highlighted through the study and has potential to disrupt the status quo. Something also unique about the participant pool is that a majority of the mentors and students in the program were recruited and retained during the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when classroom observations ceased, and teachers faced unprecedented challenges of online learning and social-emotional distress among students and families. The creative learning, pivoting of content and activities, and shifting of roles during this unique period added a layer of complexity to the mentoring situation for TOCs and can be used as an opportunity to re-think what mentorship and professional development in this "new normal" could look like for pre-service and in-service teachers.

Recruitment and Site Access

I have worked on the CPTP project since its inception in 2021 and had a project management role in the recruitment and support of the 150+ mentor teachers in the program. As a

result of my position, I managed the database of program participants and communicated with them en masse or answered individual questions using a general email inbox every week. Thus, I had access to the contact information required for interview outreach. The outreach was sent to all mentors in the program and those who self-identified with the three criteria I specified in the outreach, voluntarily responded to me.

All participants in the program were informed about the research nature of this grant at program onset during the info sessions, orientations, and application sessions. To be a CPTP mentor, they had to sign a consent form releasing their contact information to the Center for Collaborative Education and notifying them that they will be called upon to voluntarily participate in various research studies as this program progressed. As an organization, we have conducted several internal studies with the mentors on different topics related to specific program components, but there has yet to be a study on overall experiences of mentor TOCs.

Because the community colleges we work with provide the bulk of direct services to the mentors and students, my relationship with the mentors was still surface level, at best. Therefore, I informed all the three partner community colleges about this study and got their permission to conduct it with their mentor participants. My project director and research director were also aware of my research and supported it because it aligned with our organization's research and dissemination goals. The research findings from this study will be integrated into the organization's program evaluation and blueprint for building out a teacher pipeline. Additionally, I also identify as an educator of color and understand deeply the contexts of the mentor TOCs, thus allowing me another form of access and insight into their experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection was conducted through 15 semi-structured, individual interviews with TK-12 mentor TOCs who participated in the CPTP mentorship program for community college students. Because the study focused on development of mentors over time, I interviewed mentors of color who persisted in the program at least for one year or two semesters (CPTP started in Spring 2021 and ran until the Fall 2023 semester). Each live interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and included a short intake survey given before the interview to collect demographic data from respondents.

Outreach and Informed Consent

In my outreach to potential participants, I was clear to distinguish the purpose of the study, my affiliation with UCLA for this research, and how the data will be used and stored. Initially, I sent out formal email invitations to all mentor teachers who participated in CPTP and indicated that the study was looking to know more about BIPOC mentor experiences in the program. Interested individuals who self-identified as: 1) being BIPOC, 2) participating in the program for at least 1 year, and 3) teaching in TK-12, replied to the recruitment message if they were interested in participating in the study. I had them fill out a consent form that specified their voluntary involvement, the purpose of the study, disclosures of risks/benefit, the ways in which I would ensure anonymity of their information (e.g., pseudonyms, no individually identifying information shared, etc.), and what the results will be used for. Since we successfully implemented this program digitally during and after the pandemic, I conducted the interviews online through Zoom and provided digital consent and intake forms sent via email. Digital methods of data collection was the preferred mode of communication for many of our mentor teachers due to the widespread geographical distributions of their schools and their scheduling limitations. Because of my 10+

years working in education, specifically providing training and support for teachers online, I utilized the rapport-building techniques I have used in the past to establish a connection virtually.

Demographic Intake Form

Before the interviews were conducted, demographic data was collected through a brief digital Google form that asked multiple choice and open ended questions around race, ethnicity, community college attendance, first generation status, credentials, teaching pathway, school site, teaching tenure, mentor experience and context that helped to inform the analysis of the interviews. Several open ended questions at the beginning of the interview also obtained background information in regards to why and how they became teachers and were analyzed for patterns across the mentor teachers. The demographic forms were administered before or on the day of the scheduled interview. The data from the survey were aggregated and no individually identifiable information will be shared publicly (e.g., use of pseudonyms, school sites will be reduced to categories: public/private, small/medium/large, urban/suburban/rural).

The results of the interviewee intake forms are as follows:

Table 1

Demographics of CPTP Mentor Teacher of Color Interviewees

Demographic Characteristics	n	%
Race/Ethnicity		
Hispanic/Latinx	10	67
Asian	2	13
Multiracial	2	13
Black	1	7
Gender		

Female	13	87
Male	2	13
First Generation Student		
Yes	10	67
No	5	33
Attended Community College		
Yes	8	53
No	7	47
University Attended for Credential		
Public University, In-State	10	66
Private, In-state	3	20
Private, Out of state	1	7
International	1	7
Credential Type		
Multiple Subject	8	53
Single Subject	7	47
Number of Years Teaching		
0-9 years	4	27
10-19 years	2	13
20-29 years	8	53
30+ years	1	7
Type of School Teaching At		
Urban	7	47
Suburban	7	47
Declined to state	1	7

Grade Level Taught		
Elementary (TK-5)	8	53
Middle (6-8)	5	33
High School (9-12)	2	13
Past Mentoring Experience		
Mentor for teacher education program	9	60
No formal mentoring experience	6	40
Number of CPTP Students Mentored		
2 students	7	47
3 students	4	27
4 students	2	13
5 students	1	6
6 students	1	6

Note. N=15

Racially, the demographics of the mentor teachers are in parity with the 300 community college student participants in the program, with a majority identifying as Hispanic/Latinx (10), followed by Asian (2), Multiracial (2), and Black (1). The gender breakdown of the mentor teachers also mirrors the student participants and what is typical among the female dominant profession, with 13 females and 2 males. 10 of the 15 mentors were first-generation students who did not have parents who went to college. More than half of the respondents attended a community college for their education and a state university to obtain their teaching credential, indicating the importance of the community college ties for the mentor teachers and the role of public universities in producing teachers of Color.

All 15 interviewees used to or currently work in low-income, diverse schools with majority students of Color. About half work in urban school settings whereas the other half work in suburban schools and a handful chose to teach in high shortage areas such as early childhood, special education, STEM, and bilingual education. The interviewees are also split down the middle in terms of single subject versus multiple subject credentials, and this is reflected in the grade levels taught with about half teaching elementary and the other half teaching middle/high school. The broad representation of TK-12 grade levels among the respondents gives a range of teacher voices and perspectives.

Among the mentor TOC participants, the number of years teaching ranged from 3 to 30 years, with more than half having over 20 years of experience. Four of the mentor TOCs also identified themselves as Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA), a position typically reserved for teacher leaders who have a significant amount of teaching experience to share with their colleagues. However, when it came to mentoring experience coming into the CPTP program, there ended up being two extremes where about half of the mentors had a lot of formal mentoring experience in teacher education programs and the other half had no formal mentoring experience. There was a mentor that had more than 15 years of formal mentorship experience with student teachers in credential programs and others who saw CPTP as an opportunity to mentor for the first time. With a relatively simple application process and minimal requirements to become a mentor, the CPTP project was open to recruiting mentors at all different stages of their teaching career. By not limiting the program recruitment to mentor teachers with a certain number of years of experience or certain skill set, it assumed learning and development can happen at any level and that the novice teacher can share as much as the veteran teacher.

Lastly, these mentor teachers all participated for at least one year in the mentoring program, but several were able to mentor for much longer. Mentors were allowed to continue mentoring the same student(s) for several semesters, so that they can develop the relationship. Thus, some mentors only had 2 students whereas others had 6 students during the program duration due to students graduating or dropping out of the program. About half have stayed all four semesters (or 2 years) and wanted to continue as mentors for as long as the program ran.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured nature of the interviews was meant to leave room for open-ended dialogue and follow up that a straight question and answer format would not allow. I used an interview protocol so that questioning can be consistent across interviews and allow for probing. The interview questions asked of respondents yielded deep and authentic descriptions of their experiences in the CPTP mentorship program. Questions were generated from research on mentors in mentoring programs, teacher preparation and development, and the teaching profession. Interviews were conducted over Zoom in January 2023 and lasted from 40 minutes to one hour. The interviews were recorded using the Zoom recording feature on the computer and an external audio recording device as backup (Otter.ai). Notes and memos were taken during and immediately after the interviews. After the interview ended, I asked the interviewees for permission to contact them regarding further clarification during the analysis process and gave them the opportunity to share additional information, if needed. I also sent out thank you notes and $40 gift cards to respondents via email as a token of my appreciation.

Additional data to supplement and triangulate interview findings were also collected by analyzing programmatic materials such as the mentor application, training materials and feedback, and mentorship logs that track the hours and activities for the students (EAM logs). These

programmatic artifacts contributed further insight into a mentor's thoughts and feelings and provided points of references for their experiences.

Data Analysis Methods

The recorded interviews via Zoom were analyzed audibly, before transcription, in order to gather initial impressions within 24 hours of the interview. I transcribed the recordings through Otter.ai and reviewed the transcriptions for accuracy. When reviewing the transcripts, I took notes of developing categories and relationships and used an "open-coding" strategy to create categories and subcategories based on the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I looked for the similarities and differences across experiences, factors, and events that influenced the participants' learnings in the program and understanding of their role. After finalizing the categories and themes, I created a codebook to review the transcripts again and coded them based on the categories established using Dedoose. The data from the intake forms and programmatic artifacts were used to triangulate and confirm the interview findings. To enhance inter-rater reliability, researchers from my team conducted an additional review and coded the transcripts according to the codebook. I also shared the transcripts and coding with the study participants to validate and provide any clarifying information.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

As someone who preaches the mission of the CPTP project daily and whose job depended on the success of this project, I knew that my own biases and reactivity were the biggest threat to the credibility and data collection of my study. I checked my own biases in my questions to make sure they were not leading to the answer I wanted. I also needed to temper my reactions to interview responses so that they are not skewed positively or negatively. To help mitigate such threats and reactivity, I pre-tested my questions and practiced the interviews with my colleagues before

conducting the actual interview. Another strategy I used was practicing "reflexivity" that was mediated through a dissertation journal where I reflected on my responses during the interviews for any reactivity throughout the process and acknowledged biases/assumptions that I have (Maxwell, 2012).

I also predicted threats at the analysis level if I came into the process with the mindset of advocacy and promoting the project rather than objectively wanting to explore the mentor experiences. To help prevent that bias, I analyzed a substantial number of interviews, did participant checks, and triangulated them with other data like program artifacts to make sure the patterns and themes are consistent and representative of what was actually said.

Role Management

As a result of the project design, the community college partners we work with were the main program contacts for students and mentors, and my organization is the second point of contact. Because of the pandemic and digital nature of the program, I have yet to meet many of the mentors in person and have only talked to a handful through video chat. Since I do not have direct and daily interactions with participants (most of my communication to them is via email), I had enough distance to come into the interview space as an explorer and researcher. When I conducted the interviews, I positioned myself as a UCLA doctoral student and researcher first, and not as the project manager at CCE. I used my UCLA email address and signatures that identified me as part of UCLA throughout the whole communication process. In my introduction and initial outreach to participants, I was transparent about my affiliation and differentiated this study from the one that CCE is conducting.

Ethical Considerations

To anonymize the participants, I blurred and removed any information in the reporting phase that may identify or single out any individuals. For confidentiality purposes, I did the following to protect the participants' information, including removing any individually identifying information, using pseudonyms, password protecting any recordings and transcripts from the interviews, storing all media and transcripts on a secure server, and moving on to the next question/end the interview if they ever felt uncomfortable during the session. I will destroy all transcripts and recordings within three years after the study is completed to further protect the participants' privacy.

I also was aware of student confidentiality since the mentor teachers worked so closely with their community college students and often will delve into very personal topics. I left out any information in the reporting that may individually identify a student. I encouraged participants to be completely candid with me about their interactions and experiences because their feedback would improve the program, but it also helped to temper participant reactivity. In addition, I reassured them of confidentiality and anonymity upfront in the consent forms as well as during the interview. Their real names are never connected to specific quotes in my dissertation or case report. To ensure no conflicts of interest due to my employment, I also had trusted research colleagues critically analyze my emerging findings to make sure that I was not misinterpreting or being biased with what the mentors told me.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of the study that affect the overall generalizability to the population of mentor TOCs include the smaller sample size of 15 interviews and the exclusion of early childhood and community college educators from the sample. In addition, due to the limited time

frame and voluntary participation of the interviewees, the purposeful sample may not be fully representative of the range of responses. The ones who volunteered tended to be the most participatory in the program, thus leading to a possible positivity bias when it comes to program experiences; mentors who experienced negative experiences often dropped out or would be more likely to be unresponsive. But because few studies on mentor TOCs exist nor are there many mentor TOCs in existence, this study can at least serve as initial research for an understudied group and lead to more research in the future.

Conclusion

To best answer the research questions, I utilized semi-structured interviews to understand mentor TOCs experiences in a GYO mentorship program with community college students. The findings from this research will directly inform scholars and practitioners through a budding teacher of Color pipeline in Los Angeles that centers community colleges and equity-focused mentorship as key levers to drive change. It also uplifts the voices and leadership of TOCs in research and allows for a thorough understanding of the perceptions, learnings, and impact of TOCs in a community-based model of preparing teachers.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This study investigated the experiences of mentor teachers of Color (TOCs) in a "Grow Your Own" (GYO) mentorship program for community college students exploring the teaching profession. The investigation focused on one segment of a wide-scale, teacher pipeline project to increase the number of teachers of Color and how it contributed to the learning and development of the mentor teacher. Through uplifting the voices and stories of mentor teachers of Color, the study sought to address the following research questions:

1) How does the experience of being a mentor to community college students aspiring to be teachers contribute to the learning and development of teachers of Color?
2) How do mentor teachers of Color perceive their role and impact in a Grow Your Own teacher pipeline that seeks to increase the number of teachers of Color?

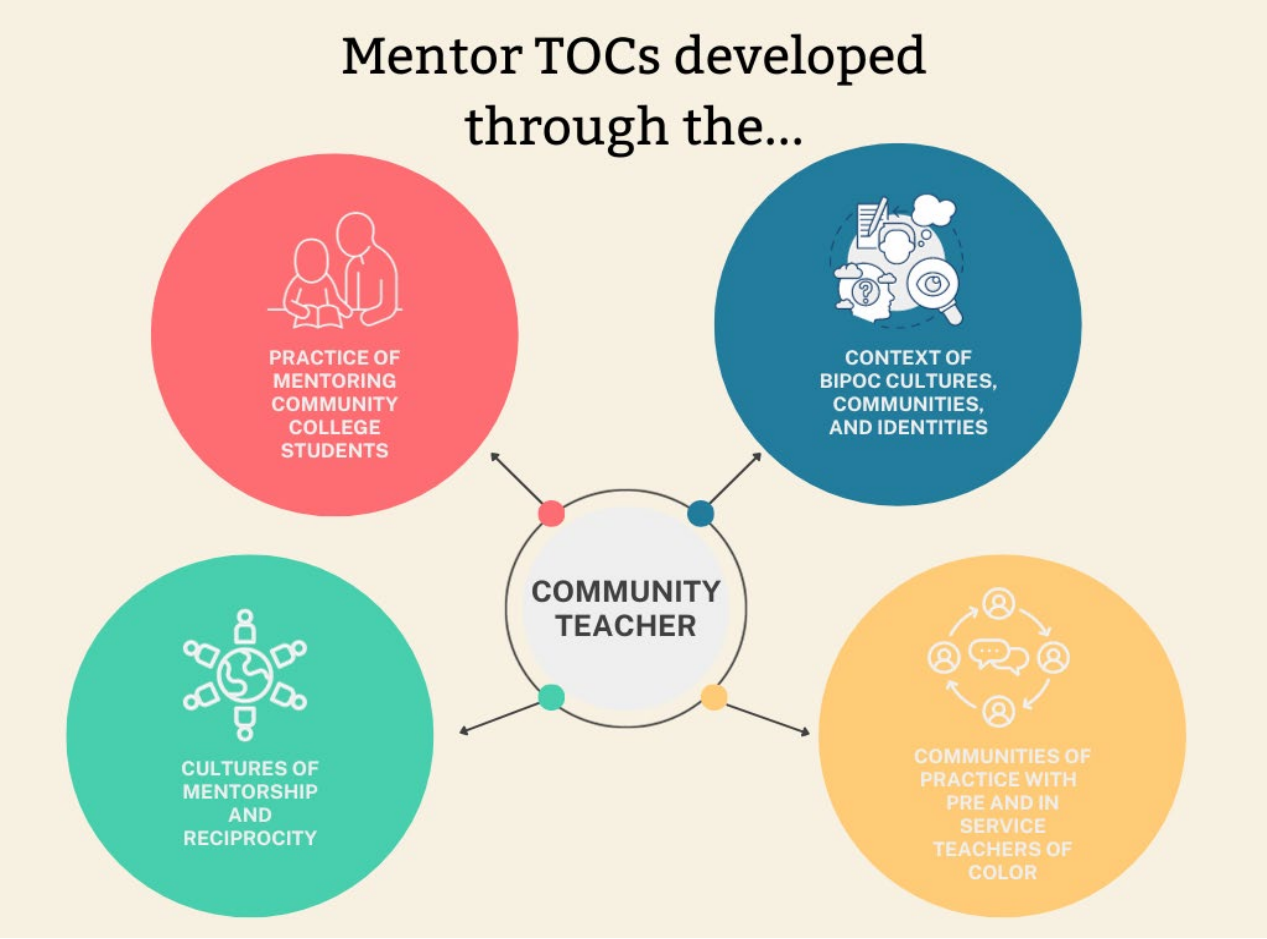
To answer these research questions, I analyzed 15 interviews from mentor teachers of Color, from all over Los Angeles, who mentored aspiring teachers from the local community colleges. The interviewees all met three criteria for the sample: (1) they identified as a teacher of Color (BIPOC); (2) they participated in the CPTP mentorship program for at least 2 semesters (or 1 year); (3) they were teachers working in the TK-12 grade levels. Principle findings are that mentorship of community college students aspiring to become teachers provides a space for continued learning and growth for mentor teachers of Color (TOCs) into Murrell's (2000) definition of "community teachers." As a result of their experiences with their mentees, the mentor TOCs played a valuable role in humanizing teacher preparation, integrating community into professional development, and sustaining a diverse teacher pipeline.

In the next section, I begin with the findings from the mentor teachers' interviews, organized into the four major themes based off of Murell's "community teacher" framework (See

Figure 2). The findings highlight the learning that happens for the mentor TOCs within the: (1) Practice of mentoring community college students; (2) Context of BIPOC cultures, communities, and identities; (3) Communities of practice with pre-service and in-service TOCs; (4) Culture of mentorship and reciprocity. The results demonstrate how mentorship impacts the mentor TOC to develop and deepen their expertise as "community teachers" and solidify their importance in a diverse GYO pipeline.

Figure 2

Study Findings Applied to Murrell's (2000) Community Teacher Framework



Learnings from the Practice of Mentoring Community College Students

During the practice of mentoring the community college student, the mentor TOC developed the mindsets, tools and strategies to best support community college students on their journey to become teachers. Some of the practices they learned included: (1) Building trust and coaching with compassion over time to empower; (2) Following the mentee's lead and tailoring support in early exploration; (3) Creating a multi-level system of mentoring support; (4) Improvising using online tools to meet students where they are at; (5) "No sugar coating": Sharing the realities of teaching. In the following section, each practice will be elaborated further.

Building Trust and Coaching with Compassion Over Time To Empower

The mentor TOCs from CPTP were encouraged to develop the mentoring relationship over multiple semesters and many of them were paired with the same student over multiple semesters until they graduated or transferred. The longer duration of the mentoring with the community college students was a significant factor in building the trust needed for a deeper relationship. The pandemic restrictions also added another layer of complexity because the mentors met with their students primarily online (some never even met in person). Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the mentors were able to cultivate a rapport with the students through patience and determination. As Romy elaborated on how she went about establishing a relationship with her mentee:

> Even when we did do a Zoom, she turned off her camera at the beginning…It took more than one semester for me to actually get to know her a little bit better and for her to open up to me and to share what was going on with her.

Romy expressed a common behavior the mentees engaged in at the beginning of the mentor process, where they would turn off their cameras while video conferencing. Luckily, that action did not deter Romy in cultivating a relationship with her mentee. She noted that it took a whole

semester to be able to have her open up about challenges she was going through with her family and eventually she turned on her camera. Romy's practice of patience and continuing to show up paid off in the end with her sharing more and building that bond.

Nina also talked about how the longevity of the relationship was an important piece to her. Not only did she stay with her mentees over multiple semesters, but she wanted to stay in touch with both her mentees even after their graduation from community college. She expressed:

> I wanted to keep that relationship with her and then with the one this semester. I had her spring semester last year and fall this year. I just want to see her through until she finishes the program at the college. And with my other one, I like her too. I hope that we can continue if she chooses to continue with the program. Next semester, I would like to be her mentor again because honestly I enjoy talking to them, learning about their lives and just spending time with them whenever we can.

Nina found genuine enjoyment in the time connecting with her mentees and thought it was worthwhile to follow them along their journey to become a teacher. Each semester, she requested to be rematched with her mentee and their relationship developed even further. Nina did not even meet her mentees in person until they finished with the program, but they were able to forge a lasting friendship that would follow them well beyond the program. The intention to build a long-term relationship with the community college students, possibly until they actually become teachers, is important because of the lack of connections with TOCs once they enter the workforce. Mentorship, sustained over multiple years, starts to build an important network and for these students as well as the mentor TOCs, who see their mentees as future colleagues.

Because of the practice of developing the mentoring relationship over time, mentors got to know the mentees on a more personal level, cementing the trust between them; it felt different than a purely professional connection. Christine described the special relationships as:

> I didn't feel like it was a teacher-student type of relationship. I felt like it was kind of more like a...I don't want to really say friend, but more like that, rather than me saying, 'You do this and you need to do that, you should do this.' It was a more open conversation about where they would like to go…So I think having that kind of open relationship with them where we can basically talk about anything has been great. And it wasn't like that in student teaching. Student teaching is...you're there for specific educational reasons, whereas in CPTP, it doesn't have to be that way; you can develop a relationship and share and be there for them in another way.

Christine conveyed how she considered her mentee as more of a friend and that their relationship was less of a hierarchical interaction. Occupying the space between the personal and professional allowed them to be more "open" with each other and for the mentor to support the student in other ways beyond the professional aspects of their goals. Essentially, many of the mentors learned about the mentee as people, not just teachers. Christine further shared how that friendship surprised her. She said:

> I think that when you open that door for a personal relationship, it changes. We know that, as with a friend, if you share something with them and they just listen with their whole heart, you really feel like they're empathetic or sympathetic. You want to share more with them, so I think it's the same thing that it provides. It is completely different from what I thought it was going to be.

Christine talked about an important aspect of the CPTP mentorship in that the trust and sense of closeness over time allowed her to be “empathetic” and even share her vulnerable side with the mentees. It felt different from just a working or transactional relationship and was an unexpected result of Christine’s mentorship practice.

Some mentors, like Valerie, got on such a trusted level with her students that she could anticipate when her mentees were not feeling well and would probe further. She talked about how she developed this listening skill:

> I just think we grew to know each other. And then when we were kind of talking, I could sense where she was having difficulty or when she was not feeling chipper that day or not really wanting to talk about something. I think that's when I kind of pried a little bit, and I got a little bit more out of her. She was a lot more willing to talk and to share things at the very end. So then while she was able to share things, then I was able to kind of get more in depth in our conversations and what I was sharing. It wasn't so surface level.

It was significant that Valerie was able to see a change in the rapport with her mentees over time and notice the depth of personal sharing growing between the pair. Valerie struck a balance between being intrusive and empathetic enough to develop a space where her mentee felt comfortable to talk. This unique relationship was not “surface” level and allowed the personal to fuse with the professional.

Carl reported a similar situation where the vulnerable exchanges over several semesters with his mentees created bonds that were long lasting. He communicated:

> I don't go right into you need to get your work done. I'm like, ‘Hey, what can I do to help? How are you doing?’ to have a personal conversation first. And I tell them, something's going on with me. The same way I do my students in the classroom. They know if I have

> a doctor's appointment. They know if I haven't been feeling well or my car broke down. I share that stuff with them too, because that's the real world. So even though you and I are talking about your hours, like here's the real world for me, and I need to know the real world for you. So it develops. I think one of the things that I've noticed about a lot of my mentees (and God is good on this one), they have been very open. The ones who have spoken to me, it didn't take us long to have that connection. They felt free and open to have discussions with me, so that's good.

Because of their closeness and wanting to be "real" with them, Carl was not afraid to share both the good and bad experiences with his mentees. His authenticity encouraged mentees to open up and as a result they felt an affinity with Carl where he still gets texts from them a year later, even after they graduated.

Eva also experienced a change in her interactions with her mentees that became more personal and comforting. She said:

> I think initially they're a little apprehensive about sharing things with me because I'm someone that they really don't know. We had to build trust over time and just kind of understand that I'm here to support them, and I think that just took a semester. Once they got to know me and saw that I was going to offer them the best advice that I could give them based on my past experience or from other people's experience, they were more comfortable with me. I just feel like it's grown since day one for sure. And you know, the thing is that you know when it grows when you can get off topic from a workshop and talk about personal things that are happening in their lives, because I want them to feel comfortable to be able to share things like that.

The trust did not occur right away for Eva and her mentees. She noticed their timidness at the beginning, but when they saw her effort and patience, they slowly began to warm up. For Eva, it took about a semester of time to carve out a brave space where her mentees felt they could share with her and "get off topic" to the personal parts of their lives in their conversations. Her perseverance in developing the relationship with her community college mentees paid off and allowed for a deep enough trust where they could let her in to support them.

A majority of the mentor TOCs practiced a type of coaching that was infused with compassion and care for the mentee's wellbeing and empowerment. There was no prescribed agenda or pressure for pairs to focus solely on teaching or to meet certain standards and instead, the mentors followed along whatever pathway the students took them. The mentees had the agency to choose the workshops and topics they wanted to discuss, while the mentors listened, adapted, and supported. The top-down power dynamics of a typical teacher-student relationship is exchanged for one that is more horizontal and shares power between the two participants. Moreover, the mentors learned a type of coaching that was less concerned about pedagogy or evaluation, and more about affirming and encouraging, especially through difficult times.

One way in which this coaching was carried out was when the mentor was mindful of the mentee's different situations and responsibilities and lets go of the need to control or problem solve their situation. Zoe understood this practice when she said:

> As teachers, we have this issue of control. I want you to finish this at this time. But with being a mentor, I have seen that they have other priorities and other exercises that are likely more important. For example, they have to review for an exam, so they couldn't complete this two hour, three hour requirement that they have to submit for EAM for this week. So you have to give them time.

Zoe expressed the differences between being a teacher to the student versus a mentor and how important it was to give the mentees autonomy to make their decisions around their priorities. As a mentor, she had to accept that she had a different role to play that required relinquishing a sense of control that a teacher may be used to. The mentee was not a student in their class but someone who was an adult and colleague capable of taking responsibility. In this case, it was EAM hours that the mentees had to complete. Zoe learned to give up some of that control for her mentees to decide whether or not to complete the EAM hours and supported them through their personal commitments even though it prevented them from finishing the program. It was more important for her to be understanding and supportive of their other responsibilities, even if it meant that it did not meet her original timeline for them.

Rachel experienced a related dilemma where her student came short of finishing his mentorship hours, but she emphasized how she was more concerned with his well being first and foremost. She explained how she dealt with the challenging situation:

> I did have the one mentee that didn't finish and he had like five hours left, and we couldn't get in touch with him. I text and called and text and called and contacted all of our people, our contacts at Axel College and they texted, emailed, and called as well. There wasn't any word. And probably four months later he finally texted back and said sorry, and just didn't really explain. I just wished that he was okay. So I think that the only thing was being really concerned and worried about his health, and then if he was okay. Not so much that he was five hours short and didn't finish the program, but just that he was okay.

Rachel acted with genuine care and concern for her mentee whom she had been working with the entire year. When communication with him vanished, she went through multiple channels to make

sure he was alright. When he finally responded to her, she was not upset but glad that he was okay. However, it reset her expectations around what she was able to control within her mentees' lives and allowed her to take a step back to look at the situation where he did not finish in a more holistic light.

It was important for the mentors in the coaching practice to listen, not necessarily to solve the problem or be the savior, but to affirm and provide resources so that the mentees could find their own solution. As Nina pointed out:

> I've learned to communicate better, be more accommodating. And just adjusting to what their needs are, improvising when we're communicating that, not just relying on my agenda that I had. Really, just based on what they say, I'm providing what they need during the conversation if they ask for it.

The mentees took the lead and as Nina explained, while mentors learned how to "accommodate" and "improvise" based on what the mentees communicated. Nina did not engage in giving unsolicited advice or immediate problem solving, but instead, provided what was requested "if they ask for it." Such a restrained stance that takes a step back rather than impose a solution or an agenda and leaves room to empower the student.

It can be tempting in the mentor position, with all the experience they hold, to tell the mentees what to do or try to mold them into being a similar teacher. However, as Sheryl explained:

> Just like our students in front of us, everybody has a little package they come with, and I think understanding and being more of a listening ear versus let me tell you what I know, I think is critical. I want to say I first started with, 'let's look at this article' so instead of me being like a teacher to her, I shifted to tell me about more... Let's talk about this or where do you ...it was more we shifted to that and we did do a few articles. I think they

> read a lot of articles. I think just getting them comfortable and seeing me as a support, then they start to ask some questions about some classes. I think just being a listening ear and treating them more of "How can I help you?" versus "This is what we're gonna do."

At first, Sheryl admitted to acting in "teacher" mode with her mentees and trying to "tell you what I know," but when she realized that it was not effective, she switched to being a "listening ear" instead. Sheryl reiterated the distinction of actually listening and creating a supportive environment as opposed to talking at the mentees and trying to impart her own agenda. It was a "critical" behavior change that helped her build a close and empowering relationship with her mentees.

The mentors often described the familial feeling they had with their mentees, similar to a parent or older sibling, so their communication styles reflected the same sense of compassion and care that they would show their family members. For example, Christine described herself as a "mom" to her mentees and expressed:

> Some of the students that I've talked to, have worked with, have shared personal stories and personal struggles that they're going through so I think that's definitely something that's different, that we can have a relationship on different levels. We can talk about school. We can talk about…I mean, I've even done research for some of my students, something completely unrelated to education. For them to know I have somebody that I can reach out to, and not necessarily that we have to talk all the time, but leaving them a short little text that 'Here I'm thinking about you,' 'is there anything that you're struggling with or need?' or 'I think that is really great!'which we didn't do any of that when we were just doing the in-class mentoring.

Christine had worked with other student teachers from formal mentoring programs before and noticed the differences between her relationship with them compared to the CPTP students. For

example, her mentees shared their "personal stories" and could talk or text outside of the classroom, sometimes not related to education at all. The informal nature of their relationship that extended beyond the classroom was important in reaching the student and creating stronger bonds to help coach them through tough times.

After getting to know the community college students and developing their relationship, a majority of the mentors talked about the "soft skills" they helped to coach their mentees on during their time together. With most of the community college students being first generation, such soft skills are an important part of demystifying the "hidden curriculum" of higher education and giving them the tools to navigate the unspoken norms and culture of postsecondary life and the teaching pathway.

For instance, Rachel's experience with her mentee was characterized by building out his confidence and social skills enough so he could get an education job. She described his circumstances and what she did in her practice to draw out his confidence.

> I think with the one that first began that dropped out of Berkshire because he didn't know anyone... he felt lonely and isolated. That was a really long haul. He still doesn't drive. He's very dependent on his family, but for the first time he got his first public education job. And like I said, he has a resume; he's building that. So I feel like over time he's kind of explored a little more, not being so much of an introvert. He's attending staff meetings, which he never would have done before. So he's asking now, he's being a little more forward. He's not afraid to ask questions, whereas before he was kind of scared. But when you have someone that says you can do it, it's okay, let's practice. You do something like that without being embarrassed, and when you get to real life, you're a little more confident. So I think all of the role playing and just building confidence over

time with this particular mentee was amazing.

Rachel saw the introverted and lonely qualities in her mentee and saw that confidence was an area for growth. By engaging in role playing and encouraging him to join things like staff meetings, she brought him out of his shell, helped him to become more independent, and prepared him to be able to land his first education job. These practical skills and empowering experiences are not explicitly taught in academic classes, yet are vital for student success. Thus, Rachel acting in her mentoring capacity, filled a gap for the student and contributed to her own learning about how to best motivate others.

For other mentors who initially had mentees "ghosting" or missing check-ins repeatedly, they saw these situations as an opportunity to work with students on their communication, organization, and time management skills. Sheryl encountered that very situation where her mentees kept skipping meetings without telling her:

> So in the late fall, I did have to have a conversation like, 'Okay, please, let's value each other's time.' So I had to have the conversation of committing to a time, committing to be a little bit more consistent. Then that's when she shared that she was struggling a little bit financially, and I said, 'Okay, well, that's all it takes for you to communicate and then we can make adjustments there.' So then she would text like, if she was going to be late to a call. She's like, 'I'm running 15 minutes late.' I have no problem. That's fine. So it got better. That's it. I think mentoring is important to support all students, because there could be a community of students that may not have the support. And for example with my student, helping her get organized, helping her get up, prioritizing, and speaking to her in a way, like a mom (because she may not have that support at home).

After having the difficult conversation about respecting her time, Sheryl's mentee disclosed her financial struggles and her personal challenges that made it difficult to commit to a meeting time. Sheryl was understanding of her situation, but reminded her about the importance of improving communication and had her practice it with her. The coaching she engaged in was setting high standards and boundaries around communication, but still provided support to meet these goals. In essence, Sheryl was setting her up for future success in professional roles, like teaching, that require time management and clear communication with colleagues. She also was aware of the fact that these types of skills and cultural norms may not be learned at home, especially in first generation households. But since she had a trusting relationship with her mentee, similar to a "mom," she was able to deliver critical feedback in a way that felt comfortable and effective to spur change in behaviors.

Lastly, the coaching the mentors practiced was filled with positive encouragement that reminded the mentees that they belonged in the profession and had all the tools to succeed. However, they were the ones who ultimately had to use these tools. Celine summed up this type of affirmation in that:

> I want to tell my mentees, you have all that, are you willing to do it? And you can do it too. Because sometimes it's like, 'oh, but I'm scared.' Don't be. You can do it. You're in the right place.

Celine demonstrated a stance that did not try to make decisions for the student, but instead gave them the power to make their own decisions and complete their goals. With a majority of the community college students coming from historically underrepresented groups (e.g., first generation, BIPOC, etc.), it was especially important that she reminded them of the assets they possessed and reassured them that they had a place in education.

Following the Mentee's Lead and Tailoring Support in Early Exploration

In traditional teacher education, there is little time to explore and try different subjects, grade levels, etc. before making a decision about what to teach, let alone if they want to teach. It assumes students have experience in the classroom and are ready to go when they enter into credential programs, but in reality, not all do. Early teaching exploration at the community college level gives students the benefit of time (at least two years worth) to be exposed to all that is offered in the education field in order to make an informed decision. Many of the mentor TOCs who have been in formal mentoring programs saw this switch from preparation to exploration a refreshing and much needed part of a teacher's journey. Through her mentorship practice, Christine realized the value of this early exploration at the community college level in that:

> I think this kind of program before students actually go into a teaching program could be life changing. If I had something like that... I mean everything I did was working with kids, yet that [teaching] never really entered my mind. So I think having those opportunities for somebody to say, 'I really don't know what I want to do. Maybe I want to work with kids, maybe I'll try it out.' So I think having experiences for those students who don't know what they want to do, or even for those who do to get more information. Because I do know some teachers who have gone through the whole program, gotten into a class and said, 'This is not for me.' So I think that any way we can prepare students and giving them as many experiences as we can for them to make a decision is just amazing.

Christine made the observation that community college students in this mentorship program have an opportunity to "try out" teaching as a career in a low stakes investment rather than pay upfront

like teaching candidates and find out later that teaching “is not for me.”And there are also students out there who, similarly to Christine, may not realize their potential and love for teaching until they get a chance to try it out and have people, like mentors, who can guide them in making a decision.

Celine also learned that giving community college students a chance to get a taste of teaching would allow many more to recognize their natural abilities for the job. She shared what she imagined the students were going through in their decision making process:

> I think that when they're in community college, they don't really know exactly what they want. And this is a good opportunity for them to see if they really want to be teachers…And also some kids, they don't realize that they will be amazing teachers until they get into the program. Yeah, it's like some kids are like, ‘Oh, I just want to go into daycare or child development or oh, they offer some money here. So I will take it.’ But once they are in there, they're like, ‘Yeah, I want to do this. It's not easy, but I want to do it." or ‘Yeah, this is what I want to do. It feels so easy for me.’ There are some teachers that they naturally have that, and I have seen those kids that they are like, ‘Yeah, I want to do this. This is fun.

Celine touched upon the fact that not all her mentees knew what they wanted to do and were using these years to explore the possibilities. Some had certain expectations of teaching, but when they actually stepped into the role and classroom, it permitted them to envision a possible future as a teacher because it felt “easy,” “naturally” or “fun.” Their path could have easily been steered away from teaching had Celine not stepped in to show them their promise.

Eva echoed the benefits of guiding the mentees in their exploration so that they understood the realities of teaching and education early on. She explained how she went about being transparent in her mentorship advice:

> And so I think it's just important to kind of be honest so that they know fully what they're getting themselves into, because education doesn't have to just be teaching. There's so many different areas that you can explore, and so if they're wholeheartedly not looking at this being a long term thing then maybe we start exploring other options outside of teaching (which my mentees have not expressed), but just having an honest, open relationship with them about the good, bad and ugly.

Eva's desire to be "honest" and not sugarcoat the teaching profession is important for students to digest so that their expectations align with the truth. Her willingness to follow her mentee's exploration journey, even if it led away from teaching, is important in relieving the pressure of making a choice now and truly enjoying the process of exposure to different aspects of education. Taking the time to understand the "good, bad, and the ugly" of teaching and other education jobs not only helped current students before making their life-altering career decision, but it has the potential to help them to stay in the profession for the long run if they receive firsthand experience to know it is a good fit for them.

Melody also wanted to highlight the highs and lows of being a teacher with her mentees and to expose them to other careers in education besides teaching. She explained the varied strategies she used throughout her mentorship to help reassure and guide their thinking:

> Hey, it's okay not to know. This is a safe place. Let me help you make that decision. I'm going to show you everything I can about the reality of being a teacher. Look how great: during Christmas, your desk is full of Christmas presents, and you have the Christmas

> party and all that! But then we have this SST where we have to have that difficult conversation with that parent, like your student is really struggling. What can we do to support? So they got to see the highs and lows and like what do you think of that? And teaching isn't the only thing that will get you into a classroom, you can be an occupational therapist or you can be a school site counselor or a psychologist or an administrator.

Melody's perspective on exploration was that it should be a balanced portrayal of the teacher role where there were positive perks like parties and gifts from students, but also challenging scenarios such as difficult conversations with parents. Exploration in practice also meant that they looked not only at teaching, but other fields in education like counselors, psychologists, or administrators. Many of the mentors did what Melody did and arranged meetings for their mentees with other school staff or non-teacher colleagues in their networks if they showed interest in other education career paths.

Melody also spent time ensuring the community college students received experiences in different grade levels so that they get a feel for the type of classroom they want to be in for the future. Melody was serving as a TOSA at the time, so she had the opportunity to access multiple classrooms for her mentees to visit. She spoke about the well-rounded exposure that she was able to provide them:

> She came in to observe (so she had already seen a lot of these classes on Zoom), but she actually got to sit in a TK classroom. She actually got to see our infant program and got to see what it was like. There's little children who have these difficulties. She got to go into a fourth grade classroom where there's lots of vocabulary and lots of interesting things happening there. All the classrooms had interesting things going on, but they were

> just different so that was beautiful. And she was the one who said this isn't really for me, which I'm so glad that it didn't cost her really anything but a bunch of Zooms.

From infants to transitional kindergarten to fourth grade, Melody's mentee received firsthand experience (Zoom and in-person) in each of these classrooms and finally made the decision that teaching was not for her. However, she was able to make this informed decision before paying a lot of money and spending a lot of time for a teacher preparation program only to find out that it was not a good match. In the process, Melody did not try to force or persuade her mentee to stay on the teaching pathway; instead, she was responsive to her mentee's curiosities, created a holistic experience for her to try different grade levels, and supported her fully even when she wanted to pursue other careers. Melody saw that choice as a win for the mentee and a win for the profession, because her mentee could now find a better fit position that she would be happier in.

The CPTP program had little formal mentoring curriculum or pacing, but encouraged the mentors to develop the relationship based on the mentees' unique interests and needs. Thus, the mentors were guided by what the mentees wanted to learn and they often made it a point to start with goal setting when establishing the relationship. Rachel elaborated on this mentee-led process:

> At the beginning, I always ask them, 'What is your goal and what do you want to get out of this?' And that is what I focus on throughout the entire semester together. Let's focus on that goal. How do we even get inching towards it? Small victories are more important than one large one.

This initial conversation with her mentee was important so that Rachel adapted to whatever her mentees' goals were instead of imposing what she thought the community college students needed. She also broke up the larger goal into smaller milestones and at a pace that fit the mentees' timeline. For Rachel, one of her mentees was interested in getting an education job while he was

pursuing his studies at the community college while another mentee wanted to switch jobs. She explained how she went about aiding both of them with the jobs as the mentor:

> I think the biggest thing was going from not even knowing what a resume is to applying to EdJoin and being successful and holding a job for over a year at an elementary school. He was really proud of himself and what he learned…Another one would be just a lot of role playing. So recently, my mentee was not happy at the elementary school she was working at and so she was like, 'How do I get out of this? How do I do this?' So we kind of just went through the whole scenario, how you'd say, 'I'm uncomfortable because of this, this and this. And I would appreciate it if I had some kind of support in this' or possible transfer or, just kind of came up with solutions. So I think problem solving together, role playing together.

While some mentees were just testing out the waters of education, others were ready to gain job experiences around teaching. A majority of the community college students in the program worked while going to school and some of those jobs were in education (e.g., paraprofessionals, tutors, etc.). In Rachel's case, her mentees asked for her help in searching and applying for first-time jobs as well as navigating challenging scenarios at the workplace. As a mentor who is currently in the teaching field, possesses a larger network of educators, and has gone through the hiring process herself, Rachel was able to utilize her resources to tailor her support for the mentees based on where they were in their education journey.

The mentor TOCs made it a point to practice giving the mentees autonomy and responsibility for their own exploration, while they walked this journey, not in front or in back, but truly alongside them. For some, this was a welcome position to be in, such as with Michelle

and her mentee. Michelle talked about how her mentee's great questions guided their conversations and let her take the lead in setting their meeting agenda. She exclaimed:

> I loved meeting with her. We would watch little short videos or something. Because she would ask specific questions. She was very, like I said, for being so young, she was laser-focused. So she would come with questions. She would have like a list of questions we would go over at the beginning of our meetings, which was amazing, because I'm not like that. So we would go through the questions and then whatever we couldn't answer, we'd either look for or we looked later on when we weren't together. And then when we came back together, we would talk about it.

Michelle's delight and joy in spending time with her mentee was evident. Even when looking for the answers to the mentee's questions, Michelle opened up a space where they could do it together and not assume that she had all the answers. Her engagement with the mentee's inquiries in such a positive attitude made a difference in creating a deep bond with this mentee. By following the journey of exploration along with her mentee, Michelle also allowed for her own personal learning and reflection.

Teresa engaged in a similar process to learn how to tailor the mentoring to meet the mentees where they were. She reflected on the adaptive nature of her mentorship with her mentee:

> When we first did our mentor mentee orientation, the first meetup, we said, 'Okay, what are your goals? What are you trying to achieve through this program? How can I best help you?'...So, one person might say I want to learn a little bit more about students with special needs. I know that okay, throughout the program, we'll design resources or you'll get to visit a class or come to a professional development meeting that's on special needs so that we can help you to grow in that area and also to become more knowledgeable and

see if that's something that suits you.

After speaking with one of her mentees who was interested in special education, Teresa was able to design a program that involved things like classroom visits or training that dove deeper into that specialty to see if it sparked further interest in teaching and special education. The line of questions and listening she engaged in created a personalized experience tailored specifically to the mentee goals. In addition, Teresa focused her mentorship on being responsive to the students' desire to be exposed to different grade levels/subject areas during observations. She offered the following structure of her classroom visitations:

> We also had opportunities to observe. So I would just kind of set up the classroom in the back of a first grade room and I would just tell my friend, 'Okay, go ahead and do your thing. The girls are going to observe.' So they would observe a half hour in a kindergarten, they'd go a half hour in the first grade, and then the next hour we would come back, "Okay, what did you see? Tell me what you learned. Tell me what you noticed. Tell me what was a-ha for you.' And so we just kind of spent the next hour kind of debriefing like, 'oh my gosh, I really liked the kindergarten teacher because I saw all these fun things.

Teresa, who was also a TOSA, had access to multiple classrooms through her colleagues, so she arranged for her mentees to observe different classrooms (kindergarten and first grade) based on their interests. But Teresa took it a step further to reflect and learn about her mentees' reactions via debrief sessions. She demonstrated that the tailoring of the mentorship to engage students was an ongoing process that required a feedback loop or check for understanding so that mentors were aware of the range of support they might provide.

Valerie shared the organic development of her relationship with her mentees and how she discovered and responded to their interests:

> We would just start off like how's your week been? How's your day been? Kind of what are you talking about in classes? And I never really went into something trying to say like, this is what I want to tell her today. It was just kind of like, "Oh, this is what I'm doing in school and I don't really get it" or "This is what I did this week" and then something would just pop up in my head. I would say, if I couldn't get it right then in there, or we couldn't get that resources at that time, then I would just write a note and then I'd say okay, "Next time I'm going to have this prepared for you or I'll email all of these videos or websites that you can go and research." It just kind of flowed.

The semi-structured and flexible nature of Valerie's conversations with her mentees "flowed" and took whatever direction her mentee wanted it to go. Valerie also started off by just checking into their wellbeing and what they were learning in classes, so that she could translate theory into practice. And whatever she did not know or answer immediately, she always made sure to follow up. Valerie did not have a set agenda or a "know it all" attitude, instead she truly listened so that she could be responsive to what was being brought up in conversation with her mentees.

No two mentees were the same in where they were in the teaching journey, so it was vital that mentors truly listened to their goals and provided differentiated support along the exploration process to mentees. Shannon demonstrated that type of customized mentorship for each of her mentees as she said:

> One of my other previous candidates, she wanted to do art. And so every Friday we have a teacher that comes in and does art with our students. So I was like, 'hey, perfect. You want to see what this looks like? This is what it is.' And so she's like, 'You know, this is

> something that I would like to do' and so I kind of just gave her a little bit more of that. So I just tailor it to what they want to see and what they want to do. I've had other students that they don't want to come in and observe or they don't have the opportunity because they were not able to drive or they were working. So it was more like, 'Okay, let's do this. Let's do a book club. Let's talk about what we're discussing.' So it looked different. So every single one of them has been different. It's not like I can say, 'Oh yeah, this is clear cut what we need to do.'

Not only did Shannon "tailor" the teaching experiences for her mentees such as the one who was interested in teaching art, she also took into consideration the community college students' commitments and constraints (e.g., transportation, jobs, etc.) when sharing different experiences. There typically is not a "clear cut" set of instructions of what to do, but Shannon was able to learn about her mentee's preferences and got creative to help them explore and get inspired for teaching.

Creating a Multi-Level System of Mentoring Support

Mentorship is often thought of in terms of only the one-on-one relationship, but in reality, successful mentorship requires multiple levels of support, including support for the mentor as they support their mentee. The CPTP project structure was built intentionally to have multiple levels of mentorship where the student not only interacted with the mentor, but also a Success Coach, community college staff, and the wider educator community. The mentor had access to programmatic resources in the form of relationships, so they did not have to feel like they were mentoring this student alone. The mentor TOCs took this mentorship opportunity to turn to colleagues, administrators, other mentors, and the program teams to ask for advice, answer questions, offer varied experiences to their mentees, or look for encouragement when faced with

challenges. The practice of mentoring actually forced mentors to learn to look outside of their classroom and engage with others who might be able to help them in their role..

Mentorship that is structured at multiple levels creates a collective sense of responsibility in the development of the mentee. According to Nina, the CPTP staff and community were essential in enhancing her role as a mentor and increasing the number of opportunities to explore teaching for her mentees. She spoke highly of the program's workshop offerings to students through the Teacher Mentoring Network:

> Additionally, what CPTP does is that they provide workshops that supplement things that they may not learn in those courses, like classroom management and how to do an IEP, or other workshops that they've been doing, like working with students with special needs. I never took a class specifically for students with special needs. And so it's nice to have the regular course work that they need and also workshops available and people to talk to that gives you just a very wholesome preparation for a teacher program.

Because of their busy schedules and minimal capacity, mentors were not expected to host or attend workshops with their mentees. However, their main job was to circle back with them to talk about the workshops they attended. As Nina shared, the CPTP program team and community colleges were the ones hosting workshops and opportunities for students to earn their 30 hours of mentorship. This delegation of activities among different stakeholders of the program ensured the students receive a more holistic or "wholesome" development than traditional classroom education or mentorship alone allowed.

Also, having a program of support staff behind the mentors helped them when there were challenging situations with their mentees. When Michelle was not getting a response to any of her communications with her mentees, she reached out to the community college staff and shared:

> I was too embarrassed at first to talk to the people at [the college] because I thought I was a big failure. So how embarrassing right? They don't know me and it's like here I can't already work with somebody. It's like, 'oh, wow, look at Michelle. She can't even do this.' So that was scary for me, but they never questioned me. They never made me feel like a failure.

The college staff intervened and were able to make contact with the mentee to figure out what was going on. They kept Michelle informed of what was going on, reassured Michelle of her knowledge and experience as a mentor, and encouraged her to not give up. Once she was able to communicate with her mentee, they were able to finish out the program together. For many of the mentors, they experienced a similar situation where mentees would disappear and it took several attempts and the building of the relationship (sometimes with the help of the community college staff), to finish the program. But overall, the patience, dedication, and perseverance that the mentors and the program staff showed to their mentees often resulted in a fruitful mentoring relationship and positive student outcomes.

The mentors not only had the support of the program staff but also support from their fellow mentors and the Teacher Mentoring Network that was established by the program. Having access to a broad range of educators who were dedicated to mentoring future teachers meant that they could tap into different expertises and resources to help their mentees. For example, Romy shared how this wider network of mentors worked for her: "Because in our program we have teachers, we have college teachers, we have high school teachers, not just elementary school," so when she was faced with a question, she could say to her mentee, "Hey, I don't know the answer but probably the program might have the answer, or I could find someone in CPTP that might know that answer

or whatever resource or help you need." That structure was in contrast to the non-CPTP student teachers she had in her classrooms where:

> It was just one on one; it wasn't a support system. And it wasn't events or activities that kind of allowed you to actually meet other people and other grades and others…So CPTP has more support, more resources...just the workshops that they gave. Like I wish I would have had that going in.

For some mentors, support came in the form of help from their administration or colleagues at their school site. Especially for mentors who told their schools sites or have fellow mentors on campus, it made it easier for them to do things like schedule different classroom visits for their mentees. Mentors like Shannon were able to recruit several teachers on her campus to become mentors, so they were able to collaborate to troubleshoot or create activities for the mentees. She recalled:

> I think so because at one point, we even said, "Okay, if you're having trouble meeting with your teachers, how about we do a book club? And we're like, okay, you do the book club and you do this okay, I'll do observation." So it became kind of a team, where we kind of said okay, "If you can't meet, this is what you're going to do or like okay, you can do a YouTube and have that discussion about a TED talk or something."

The tag teaming and team-like mentorship that Shannon helped to spearhead created a sort of mentoring hub to support the community college students coming to their campus. It pooled resources, gave mentees more exposure to different mentors and access to different activities, and gave mentors thought partners amongst their colleagues to help when they were facing "trouble meeting with" their mentees.

Although Carl did not have any other mentors at his site, he got many of his teaching colleagues involved in supporting his mentee. He thought it was very important that his mentee got a chance to visit multiple classrooms while she was on his campus, so he tapped his team of teachers to help out. He mentioned the helpfulness of his teacher peers:

> Like when I walked around to tell them I had someone come in, like they immediately were like what day? I gotta check my lesson plan. It goes back to our environment or campus, but they were like switching their lesson plans to make sure that when she came, they were actually doing something that she could use. Like she would see it and be able to use it for her own personal experience. So I'm blessed to have teammates that I have.

Leaning into his existing professional relationships, Carl informally created a mentoring network around his mentee so that she was exposed to more teachers and their different styles of teaching. Carl's colleagues were very receptive to have his mentee join them to observe that they were willing to change lesson plans to tailor the topic to the student.

Thus, behind every student was a mentor, who in turn had many more people behind them. The multiple levels of support meant that the student was never alone in their journey to become teachers; the mentee was connected not only to the mentor, but also their social capital that gave them access to a larger pool of relationships and resources that would be important over the course of their career. Christine summed up that multi-tiered system of support in that:

> I really do think that as mentors, when we can do that, when we can develop a relationship like that, it helps them in their next relationships. Even if it's not me or if it's you know somebody else in their program or if somebody they're working with or working for, they see that there are people who care.

Christine's insight sheds light on the fact that the power of the mentor-mentee relationship is that it extends beyond just that single relationship. Once the relationship is formed, the student can tap into the mentor's network and vice versa so that it helps them develop new or the "next relationships" in the future. More importantly, the students can understand and feel the multiple levels of support from program staff and the mentor's colleagues. It gave Christine (and ultimately her mentees) the sense that, "there are people who care " that they succeed and become teachers. Mentor TOCs felt like part of a larger social movement where they were working with people who believed in the same thing of increasing the number of teachers of Color. And with their already busy schedules, tapping into program staff or colleagues for support gave the mentor TOCs extra capacity to mentor.

Improvising Using Online Tools To Meet Students Where They Are At

Another unique aspect of this mentorship program for community college students was that it was implemented during the height of the COVID pandemic closures. Because most of the mentors and mentees were restricted from meeting in person, it prompted adaptiveness and flexibility around how the mentorship experience would play out. In many ways, the forced move to online was a blessing in disguise because it made mentorship accessible and efficient for both parties, especially during a challenging time. Additionally, remote learning and online communication has long been a staple in the community college space, so the transition online was not so stark for the students and actually welcomed.

Most in-person teaching observations stopped during the pandemic, however, most of the mentor teachers found creative ways to use Zoom and online technologies to still continue giving opportunities for mentees to observe in the classroom. Roger was one of those mentees who made the online environment work for his mentee's observations. He described:

> I liked how I was able to just start Zooming and then I would just pop up the camera in the back of the classroom and they would just watch…So she was just observing one of my challenging periods and then one of my students, he was having a meltdown…And I remember when class was over and then students left. And then I was just kind of following up with my mentee on the chat on Zoom. And I said, 'hey, did you see everything?' And she was like, 'Yeah, was your student Okay?' and I was like, 'Yeah, they will be fine.' So it was nice to kind of see her just see the reality of teaching in the classroom from the outbursts of students or different commotions that could happen and then her feeling concerned and asking me…So those are experiences that they would see up front, up close once they're in that classroom setting. But I like how in this case, for them just to watch on a zoom, for example, can be really powerful, because they really get to see a bird's eye view of what's happening.

Even though Roger's mentee was restricted from coming into his classroom, the advent of Zoom video conferencing technology during the pandemic and Roger's creative thinking made it possible for the mentee to observe class sessions. Being able to observe challenging instances of student meltdowns or what a typical day is like in a classroom is a vital experience for future teachers to understand the "realities" of teaching. But the fact that this was done online was also a plus for students still trying to decide if teaching is for them, as it requires little investment upfront and opens up accessibility for students who may not have public transportation or the time (due to work or child-rearing) to physically come into a classroom during the day.

Melody took the Zoom observations to another level by connecting with her colleagues and arranging for her mentee to go into multiple Zoom classrooms. She explained this strategy:

> It was actually really neat because we were Zooming, I was able to connect with my peers

> that do my job at the other schools on our site. And like, 'Oh, hey, Sandy, do you mind and my student teacher pops into your Zoom and into your class or into third graders?' So my student teacher [CPTP mentee] then was able to see kind of everybody in the district.

With location and physical space or distance not being an issue, Melody's mentees could hop around to different grade levels, subject matters, or school sites depending on what they were interested in. Even with the loss of in-person connection of a typical observation, the students gained a chance to view a variety of classrooms in a safe environment.

Teresa found another workaround with the COVID restrictions to enable her mentees to experience observations and still be able to talk about it with her. She shared:

> It was a little harder because as you mentioned, with the pandemic they had to get vaccinated and this and then you had to have permission. So it was a little hard. But one of the things that we did was to find places that didn't demand such a restriction and those were places that they were able to visit. So even their own child's classroom or something like that, and they would come back and discuss what did you see? What do you want to know more as a result of what you saw? How can I help you in this area that you want to be more knowledgeable in?

One of her mentees was a parent, so they were able to observe in their child's classroom for convenience and accessibility. Teresa improvised and turned a simple visit to pick up their children a learning experience by being able to ask the important reflection questions for them to think about. It was an efficient and also effective way for the mentor to make use of what was already available to her mentee and would engage her the most (since it was her son's classroom).

Despite the COVID pandemic being a challenging time for education and teaching, the flexibility of the program and the adaptiveness of its mentors (and mentees) allowed for relationship building and teaching exploration to continue. Nina expressed this sentiment:

> I love that it's accessible or flexible. We don't have to meet at a certain place, at a certain time, or in a certain format. I love that they allow us to meet on Zoom, if possible, in person, if we want, through text message or email. It's very accessible, and especially with everyone's crazy schedules, it's hard to find a place like a physical place to meet and so just giving us a wide variety of options to be able to communicate and form those relationships and keep the communication going. It's a big plus in my opinion.

COVID or no COVID, the busy "crazy schedules" and locations of both the mentors and mentees still would have made frequent in person meetings difficult to nearly impossible. Thus, the advent of technologies like zoom, text, and email, during COVID times actually normalized this type of communication. Community colleges have long used asynchronous, distance learning technologies to be able to accommodate student's busy lives, but being able to use them in the context of the program made it "accessible" as well as intimate enough to foster relationships. As Nina mentioned, the mentors and mentees felt empowered to choose how and when they met, so they were able to make the mentorship work for them.

Several mentors talked about never even being able to talk on video calls with their mentees, but emailed for most of their relationship, while others only talked on the phone and texted their mentees for the duration of the mentorship.Valerie described her experience with the adaptive strategies she employed to get in touch with her mentee:

> This mentee, I haven't even seen on a zoom call for whatever reason. We couldn't get on the whole last semester on a zoom call. And then I tried to even FaceTime her, but she

> has an Android so she said she can't FaceTime. So then we ended up talking on the phone a few times. And that's how we kind of kept it up, just talking on the phone or text messaging, because I think by me trying to call her and talk to her for a while stressed her out. So we just kind of text messaged, so it was a lot different than having that scheduled zoom call every couple of weeks.

Through trial and error, Valerie and her mentee found a communication method and schedule that would fit them. Valerie never gave up in communicating with her mentee and was responsive to her preference of talking on the phone and texting.

Nina also had different expectations coming into the program and had to shift her communication format to fit the situation and availability of her mentee. At first, Nina had a set schedule with her agenda and wanted to meet on Zoom. But she quickly found out how challenging it was to have such a structured check-in because of the busy lifestyles of the students or their lack of access to technology (e.g., unstable internet connection). Thus, she had to change to be more flexible with her time and methods to make it possible to meet. She said:

> We communicate mostly through email, because she's a very busy woman. She's a mom, she's a student, and she has a lot of challenges with her family. And she's always running around doing something, so it's always through email. So luckily, we have been able to maintain communication and a really positive relationship, where she opens up about her personal life, things that she's done in her workshops, and she asked lots of questions. She's very motivated and very engaged in what she's doing.

Nina had to shift her communication expectations and rethink the idea of a set agenda or timeline. Instead, she followed the lead of her mentee and found that email worked the best to fit her

mentee's busy schedule as a student and mother. They were still able to complete the mentoring program using email and even developed a positive and personal relationship over the platform.

Sheryl also went through a trial period of different online communication modes and found that it was constantly changing to adapt to her mentee. She said:

> Last year, we started with a lot of zoom. I noticed she didn't feel as comfortable in scheduling that Zoom. I said okay, we're gonna need to dah da dah, and it would just be a little bit...it just didn't feel as she was opening up, which is weird. It really is weird. So then I started to shift to text check-ins. And then I started to shift to phone calls. We would do a little quick phone call. I would say, 'Okay, I am in my car between 3:45 and 4:45, before I pick up my children and my home life begins.' So she would just call and say, 'okay, what's going on? Just checking in. What's this class? Make sure you're staying on top of it. I noticed there's a few assignments that we're not getting some hours in.' Then I had to shift to a Google doc calendar and that really worked with her, because I think she can see okay, we're not communicating as much or then she would type, so it's different trying to understand how their communication works best for them.

From Zooms to texts to phone calls, to a Google Doc, Sheryl went through many different channels to find what worked for her mentee and her own schedule. And sometimes even when one method was not working, they were able to easily shift to asynchronous technologies or fit in time in the ten minutes she had between school pickup. They both made an effort to stay in contact and were willing to try new methods as their personal schedules and responsibilities changed.

Instead of scolding or giving up entirely, the mentors' patience and empathy with communicating was key in supporting the community college students wherever they were at. As Romy explained:

> I had to meet her where she was. I had to understand that she's going to school, she's tasked three jobs and that it's not going to be on my time. Even though I am doing this to support her or to help her, I want to be available to her whenever she was able to. After the first semester, I learned how to make myself available when she's able to give me a phone call, if it was on her break from work or through email. Even if she's emailing me, and I told her it's okay to email me at one o'clock or 4:30. I will respond the next morning or the next day and don't feel obligated to respond right away, but to respond within three to four days…So I think it was being flexible and meeting them where they need it. And just talking to them, honestly.

Romy demonstrated how she stepped into the student's shoes and felt compassion towards her mentee's limited time and energy. To accommodate, she opened up her schedule to her as much as possible, but still set enough boundaries to instill a healthy set of expectations for the relationship. Flexibility in their time and the constant feedback via talking made it work for mentors like Romy.

Eventually, classroom observations and in person meetings resumed post-COVID, so many of the mentees successfully transitioned into the physical classrooms with their mentors without skipping a beat. Melody had a mentee who got to experience her class online and then in person once the district let guests come again. She talked about the transition to a hybrid environment:

> They got to work with students, they got to pull small groups. The students that they had been observing via zoom, they got to actually meet them in person. They really enjoyed it and the students enjoyed it, even though it was short lived, they really enjoyed it. And we still keep in touch too. So it was kind of a combo of in person and Zoom.

Online technologies were vital in creating and maintaining a connection for mentors like Melody

and her mentee during the pandemic times. They even used it with the students and the digital tools provided a great segway to move in person without too much disruption. As the pandemic comes to a close, the normalization of these online technologies continue to provide a flexible and adaptive space to explore teaching and sustain mentorship with community college students.

No "Sugar Coating": Sharing the Realities of Teaching

More than half of the mentor TOCs talked about how they wanted to provide a type of mentorship that showcased the realities of teaching in hopes that their mentees got a fuller picture of what teachers actually do. In their words, they did not want to "sugarcoat" the profession. They hoped to temper the mentees' expectations by balancing reality with inspiration. By doing so, they are ensuring that those most passionate about teaching understood what they signed up for and would be content with it in the long run. In sharing the realities, the mentor TOCs were influencing the quality of the future teaching force by making sure the students felt like teaching was the right fit for them before they made their decision.

Shannon used the mentoring time to re-set expectations of what teaching looked like so that the mentees understood what teachers truly dealt with on a daily basis. She noted:

> Because then you just give them the straight out like, 'This is what it [teaching] is! it's not this: you're gonna put a sticker on your paper and you're gonna put a stamp on it and the kids are gonna be sitting there ready and ready to learn, and they're gonna have all their pencils sharpened.' No! There's gonna be a kid biting the pencil or breaking the lead of every single pencil, and saying, 'I don't have a pencil.' And I think mentoring is… because they're in the trenches, and I hope that's what we're trying to get them to see that this is the reality of teaching.

Shannon did not want to paint just a rosy picture of teaching for her mentees, but to give a balanced account of the ups and downs of being a teacher at the practitioner level, or "in the trenches." It was important that the mentees hear anecdotes such as the one Shannon shared about her students' different reactions when given a pencil and how they might go about managing a classroom. These real situational examples and solutions can differ vastly from the theories and content that student teachers learn in their credentialing courses.

Shannon elaborated further about the misalignment of what happens in a teacher's classroom and what is taught in teacher preparation. She said:

> So I think there's that disconnect, and I'm talking about 20 years when I went through my education. But even seeing the teachers now, I do think there's that disconnect of what the reality of a classroom is. And even when you do student teaching, I feel like now they do only like half a semester or like only certain days. They don't do a full year, or they don't do the majority of it. So I feel like you don't see where the students start in third grade, let's say, and how they ended in third grade, like the struggles of the structure of it. And I think that's the disconnect why teachers feel like it was easy.

According to Shannon, going through credentialing programs, pre-service teachers who have never been in the classroom or only get a short glimpse of it in "half a semester" may think teaching is "easy," and may find out too late the "disconnect" of what actually happens in the classroom versus what they read in their books. Expectations and reality do not often match and this disconnect in teacher preparation has not been resolved in the past 20 years.

> Michelle also agreed that theory and practice are still too disjointed in teacher preparation. There's some of the fundamentals that are still missing. So that's where we could kind of fill in the gaps where I could tell them things about staff meetings or professional

development, how that works for teachers.

Michelle saw herself and her mentorship as a way to reconcile theory and practice. She talked about the politics of staff meetings for her mentees and even invited them to professional development opportunities at her school. These are the daily realities of teachers that may not always get touched upon in the mentee's academic courses.

Teresa also discussed the sometimes mundane day to day routines and sometimes very challenging experiences that teachers go through, focusing on the relationships that need to be built as a teacher. She said:

> So I thought about everything that I am doing now and try to show them that okay, I know you want to become teachers, not just about lesson planning and executing them, but it's liaison with other teachers, liaison with your principal, talking with parents and having a good relationship with students.

These "soft skills" and relational practice with different parties go beyond just the "lesson planning" within a classroom. Pedagogical and content knowledge is only one aspect of being a teacher, and Teresa tried to provide the other equally important knowledge of teaching, which include cultivating connections with students, parents, colleagues, administration, etc.

Celine reiterated the need to show a more balanced version of teaching to the mentees that differs from what they imagine or have seen on TV or the movies. She said:

> I think that as a mentor that's one of the most important things that I want to communicate: the need for good teachers, the need for not perfect teachers…That there are days that are good, but there are also days that are bad. I bring the awareness that teaching is not just a perfect career and as we have seen in some movies, you become rich and famous being a teacher? Nope. That a lot of times you are right behind the scenes and

> that's where you can make a difference…The awareness for my mentees to see what true teaching is and then make up their own minds, so if I show that it is good even though it is a hard working profession and all that, and when they start having a bad day, they will be like okay, this too shall pass.

Celine calls it "true teaching" that she wants to share with the mentees and it is not an attempt to persuade them to go to teach. Instead, it lays out all the good and bad, and the students are empowered to decide if it is for them. Celine further elaborated how this move to change the teaching force needs to be a collective effort that will have collective impacts on the community:

> I love teaching and I see the difference that I can make. But if it's only me doing that, it is not enough. So whenever there is the opportunity to tutor people or to mentor people, (more is mentoring), I take it and especially when it comes to teachers. I think I'm invested on that, because I see the kids, I see my community (and hopefully I will have lots of grandkids), they will go to school but it will be so sad for me that just because the teacher is not there for the right reasons. It can affect the life of the kid.

The motivation for Celine to mentor is rooted in this bigger cause that extends to her grandkids one day. She hopes that the future teachers who she mentors will be able to be in the profession for the "right reasons" and truly care about their students.

Mentor TOCs believed that being aware of the challenges is crucial to the success of a future teacher of Color. Carl's mentorship involved a lot of care and passion for the work, but he also wanted his mentees to reckon with its challenges. Carl said:

> The one thing that I love about the mentoring is that I don't think I ever sugarcoated anything. If something sucked, or it was going to be difficult, that was said at the outset, and you had that choice, whether you were going to battle through it or not, but it wasn't

> sugarcoated. It wasn't like, oh, it's gonna be okay. No, it's not going to be okay. So what are we going to do now? But you have to remember, that's a real person, I don't want to set anyone up to think that you're going to walk in class one day, and all the kids are going to be well behaved. And they're going to be on grade level, because that is not the truth. That is not how it happens.

Carl avoided the superficial and went to the "truth" and realities of teaching in under-resourced schools. If the mentees were given only the fun and rewarding parts of teaching and expecting that the "kids are going to be well behaved," it was going to set them up for failure or a huge culture shock. Carl was not going to sugarcoat it for his mentees, but he was someone they could depend on to talk through the challenges and problem solve together.

Melody used those very same words of not "sugarcoating" anything, but still providing a "safe space" to process the challenges. When she talked about her contribution as a mentor, it was to:

> I think maybe, giving them my story and giving them a safe place to sort of process all that. And from a person who is not going to sugarcoat it for you, I'm not gonna lie to you. This is what teaching is, that this is the reality of it. And then also a connection.

Melody also wanted the mentees to recognize that she would be someone who they could trust enough to tell the truth in their best interest and to prepare them for the challenges ahead. However, along with the hard truths comes the connection and secure relationship with mentors like Melody provides a cushion for the tough aspects of the job.

Melody wanted to guide mentees with the challenges, but she also saw mentorship of the community college students as an opportunity for the mentees to tease out if this profession is truly

a good fit for them. She talked about how important it was to be transparent and have frank conversations about the realities of the job and if they would be able to handle it. She shared:

> Even in the credential program. I'm like, 'Oh, girlfriend, this is not for you.' You know, they're combative, they're not patient. They're like, 'I'm gonna finish my teaching credential if that's the last thing I do.' I'm like, 'You're gonna waste time and money. Let's have that conversation now.' And with these potential teachers [in CPTP], one of them was like, 'You know what? this wasn't for me. You're very nice. And this was all neat and thank you for showing me around. But I've decided not to.' Well, hey, great, then that's one teacher that's not going to be in the system, reluctantly. But I did mentor one gal who has a little baby. And she's like, 'I think this is what I want to do. Like I see the value in it and you know, her baby...She saw how much this is impacting her personal life. And I am like, "Great, well, then that's, one for the teachers..' So, I think just kind of seeing that you can kind of help sort of steer that conversation or maybe even have an impact on their future. That's big. It's going to be a win for the teachers, either way, because you're either putting teachers in the system that want to and care about it or kind of steering them in another direction if this is not for them in a safe way. They're not losing anything, but just a couple of hours of our weekly meetings.

Melody's relationship and discussions with her mentees intervened earlier in the career decision making process and helped them make an informed decision about whether or not to go into teaching. By doing so, Melody played a crucial role of finding students who were better fits for teaching and knew what to expect coming into it. The mentees' future students benefit from a teacher who is intentional about the job and staying for the long haul.

Learnings from the Context of BIPOC Cultures, Communities, and Identities

The context of a teachers of Color mentoring students of Color who come from the local community created a space of enormous reflection and learning in regards to the mentor's identity, personal growth, and role in a diverse teacher pipeline. The BIPOC identities of the mentor teachers helped them relate to the mentees and created a sense of belonging for the students of Color. There was a deepsense of kinship and responsibility among the mentors to make sure the teaching pathway was open and inviting for future teachers of Color from the community colleges. (1) Utilizing cultural similarities to create sense of connection and belonging; (2) Being Part of Equity Work and Feeling Responsible for the Development of More TOCs**;** (3) Recognizing the uniqueness and assets of the community college student mentee

Utilizing Cultural Similarities to Create Sense of Connection and Belonging

As teachers of Color, the mentors were able to relate to many of their mentees of Color due to their similar ethnic cultures or racial identities. The deeper level of empathy and sympathy due to the cultural alignments bolstered the connections between the students and mentors and created a sense of belonging. Their cultural backgrounds helped the mentors in being able to understand the familial responsibilities, expectations, and pressure that the students go through in their path to become a teacher. As Rachel mentioned:

> So all of my mentees have been of Latino descent as well. And so I think by sharing that common background, we understand the familial obligations that sometimes bring us home from an outside college…. How do you handle all of these intersectionalities of race, gender, family job, studying who you're with, who you're around your support system, your network, all of that we had really similar backgrounds and so with that it was easier to connect, knowing that maybe we had a lot of siblings or nieces and

> nephews and, Do you all live together? Do you not live together? Where do you study? How do you find a quiet space? Those kinds of nuances that maybe I would understand, maybe somebody else wouldn't. What do you mean a quiet space? It's like, you know, they're in the corner in Zoom and trying not to let anyone see and putting mute on the whole time. Because it's a busy time (it's after school and nieces and nephews are home etc.), so not only with family obligations, but also with job commitments.

Rachel connected with the mentees because of her shared Latinx culture and understanding of the familial “obligations" or large multigenerational households that many of her mentees occupied. These “nuanced” situations are the norm for Rachel and she wanted to help her mentees be able to reconcile their differing identities with their schoolwork and path to becoming a teacher.

Like Rachel, Teresa also confirmed the kinship she felt with her mentees as a woman of color pursuing the teaching profession. She said:

> I think it made the relationship building much easier because they have similar struggles. They're in similar environments. Even if it's not like a work environment, but in the sense of the community that they're in… it helped for a good relationship to be built because we could understand each other and maybe how things were like growing up, how things are now, what you're trying to achieve, and maybe the same barriers. Both of them were women, they were women of color. So I think that kind of helped because our experiences are the same. And even though we differ in terms of maybe the knowledge that I have, but in the sense of, they have to get over the same challenges that I have to go over to be where I am now.

As Teresa pointed out, the same upbringing and “barriers” along her teaching journey as a woman of color made it much easier for her to establish a closer relationship with her mentees. It created

a sense of “community” or that they were all in it together, so she felt like her lessons could be shared with some authenticity and value for someone else in a similar situation. As she points out, the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity played an important role in Teresa’s cultural upbringing that was akin to her mentees.

Nina’s identity as a Latina played a large role in the affinity to her mentees and what they were going through. She commented:

> All three of them (mentees) are Latinas, and I'm Latina. And so when they speak to me about their personal life or what they're working on, I understand. I can sympathize with what they're going through, because I had similar experiences with my family. I think that helps them feel some sort of connection with me. I understand what they may be going through (Not totally, of course), but on some level. With one of my mentees, we primarily speak in English, but sometimes a Spanish word comes in there. And when I want to communicate something or she wants to communicate something, it's better done in Spanish. So she'll say something like ‘ponte las pilas,’ like ‘put on your batteries’ is what it translates to or ‘I have to try harder,’ ‘I have to really focus on what I'm trying to get accomplished.’ It makes it easier to connect with someone from your similar background, for sure.

Her shared identity with the mentees opened up a space for the “personal” in this professional relationship. Even the words of encouragement (“ponte las pilas”) that Nina used are tied back to their common language and cultural references. She acknowledged that she did not have all the exact same experiences or thoughts, but having gone through parallel familial situations helped her to sympathize and understand more of her mentees’ lived experiences.

Because of the deeper connections in culture and identity, Melody believed it was important to utilize the relationship to be a role model and advocate for her mentees. Melody mentioned:

> And then just culturally, it was a nice connection because there are parallels in our upbringing, culturally, you know, I could relate. You have your mom that stays at home or your dad that works and it's usually labor intensive. I mean, our stories were very similar, and it kind of helped. Yeah, and you know what? Here I am with my classroom and my students, and I own a home. My life has balanced out very nicely, but it did. It was a very bumpy kind of tricky start because you're kind of on your own. I didn't want them to feel like that, and I wanted them to know that I wanted to be their biggest advocate, biggest ally.

Melody also came from a Latinx background and one where traditional gender roles were the norm. She did not grow up with a lot of money either, so she admitted the "bumpy" start that she had in her teacher pathway. It was something that her mentees could relate to, but Melody wanted to change their mindset and trajectory by showing them how someone like her could "own a home" and make it out successfully to fulfill their goals. Having been in their shoes once, she wanted to be their biggest ally and champion.

As a mentor of Color who also identified as queer, Roger made it a point to talk to students about how minoritized identities and representation play a role in education. He said:

> I think it's important for me to explain and to share why our students see themselves in us...So I think with us as mentors, it's important because we can talk about things that we would normally avoid if we were still new teachers. So I think when they see a mentor or a more experienced teacher of color, bring these things up, then they can see that the

conversation could be a little bit more normalized. And maybe they would feel more empowered, or more comfortable to enter those conversations with their mentors.

Roger felt that as teacher of Color role models for these students of Color, it was important to "normalize" conversations about race, sexual orientation, and the many identities of a teacher. In fact, they have a responsibility because they are more seasoned and may be in a position (e.g., tenure) where bringing up these topics will not get them into trouble. These are conversations that may never be addressed in the formal schooling of the mentees, but in a mentorship space, can be crucial in not only developing their critical consciousness but also cultural relevant pedagogy.

Socioeconomically, many of the mentors TOCs also shared backgrounds marked with poverty and making ends meet, matching their mentees' experiences. Sheryl remarked:

> I grew up in a Hispanic home with parents that were house cleaners. My parents worked really hard. We just didn't have a lot growing up, so I empathize with that. So the community we serve are hardworking students. Many of the children are probably raised predominantly by their grandparents because their parents are working, especially now as I'm hearing a lot of stories from parents that are struggling, which I think we all are. Financially, we're getting hit. So the community that we work for need the school, need the district. So I'm a huge mentor for teachers at my site to put that in perspective.

Sheryl's socioeconomic experiences growing up and how it mirrors the upbringing of the students she teaches was an important motivator for her to be a mentor. Sheryl's story allowed her to connect and "empathize" with her mentees who came from working class backgrounds. She also wanted those who were going into her community to teach to understand the socioeconomic contexts as well as the cultural nuances of the families they are serving. The school space can be a lifeline for students who face economic difficulties.

Carl also talked about how growing up poor in a dangerous neighborhood affected his ability to connect and inspire his mentees. He relayed:

> I'm from Flint, Michigan. So I grew up in a very crime ridden area. We had to fight to survive. I know what it's like to go to bed without food. I know what it's like to have one car in a family that barely works, weather conditions… My incoming freshman class in high school was 2000 students. And when we graduated four years later, there were only 182. So I know what it's like to go to a funeral; I know what it's like when your friends commit suicide, like it was rough. So being what I look like and being where I'm from, I take a lot of pride in explaining to people that not only can you do what I've done, but your job is to be better than me. Because if I made it out of my situation, and I'm able to give back to my community and yours, you should take what I'm giving you and do even better than that.

Carl was not afraid to disclose the tough upbringing he had with his mentees in order to show that it is possible to "make it out" of this situation and not let poverty and violence define him. The challenges he faced eventually shaped his future as a culturally-responsive teacher who serves his community.. In fact, he wanted to be a role model to other future teachers to show that if he could do it, anybody could do it (and do it even better was his hope).

For Shannon, she understood the realities of teaching and the lower salaries, but felt it was important that her mentees, many of whom come from lower socioeconomic households, to understand how teaching can be a viable career. She said:

> I mean, I didn't grow up in the best community, and I can say, 'Yeah, I do live in a very nice community now, and I feel like I was able to have that dream, and reach that dream.' So I want our teachers to know, 'Hey, you can be a teacher. You can make your financial

means. You don't have to live in poverty, as a teacher. You can have a good life as a teacher.

Coming from a similar underresourced community herself, Shannon knew some of the stigmas and questions about finances that the students were struggling with in their decision to go into the teaching profession. Thus, she connected her background to the students' and tried to show how teachers can make a living and move up the socioeconomic ladder.

Another intersecting identity for the mentors of Color was their immigrant status and older age when they decided to pursue teaching as a career. Zoe was someone willing to share this information with her students in hopes to motivate them. She remarked:

> I'm open about telling them I'm an immigrant, and I hope they would also consider I am successful in my field, so that hopefully inspires them. Because I just came here in my midlife already, and they've been here since they were young. So I would try to push them and encourage them and let them think that you can be more successful if you really put your mind into it.

Lastly, a majority of the mentor TOCs identified as a first-generation student when they were going through college and that helped them identify with their community college mentee's experiences of being the first in their family to pursue higher education. Melody described how that first-generation status was meaningful in her mentoring relationship:

> I know what it's like to be the first one to go to college and your English isn't very good and your parents' English was not good either. And they can't really help a whole lot, so you're kind of having to figure things out on your own. I totally related to all of that.

Romy also shared how the first generation identity blended with her Latinx identity so that conversations with her mentee blended the multiple cultures, struggles, and traditions they shared:

> The three of us have that we are the first ones in our family to go to school and to try to get that degree and be able to actually give back to our community and encourage our students to do the same thing. So, I think that we can relate to each other, that we are able to speak Spanish to each other and be able to feel completely comfortable with us in that way. Even talk about recipes or some of the activities that we do or have within our family, like some of the traditions that we have in our culture. I think we're able to relate to each other that way and brings us closer to each other.

The personal pieces of their lives were able to be brought out of both mentor and mentee and allowed them to connect beyond just pedagogy and teaching. Through talks about family, recipes, or wanting to give back to the community, the mentoring relationship went much deeper. As Christine disclosed to her students:

> I said when you're first generation, it's even harder because your parents or whoever (unless you have siblings who have gone), they don't know what that perspective is. You sometimes can feel alone in that. So that's why it is important to surround yourself with friends or with getting involved in a mentor program is amazing because then you have that person that you can call and talk to.

Christine knew that being first generation is a lonely space but great mentors who mentees can simply "call and talk to" is a valuable resource in order to succeed. The relationship of a role model and confidante who knows what it is like to be in the student's shoes becomes a significant piece in the trajectory of students of Color and their continuation in the teaching pathway.

Being Part of Equity Work and Feeling Responsible for the Development of More TOCs

For some mentor TOCs, mentorship was a chance to learn and be part of social justice work within education and to express their advocacy for causes they believed in. Mentoring serves as a

space to develop the mentor TOCs' critical consciousness and ideas about ways they can change the system. Being part of CPTP gave Nina that realization when she shared:

> I want to say it's making me more of an advocate. It's kind of like practicing what you preach. So I tell my mentees, you know you have to advocate for yourself. If you want to accomplish these goals, and you're not getting the resources that you need, you need to go and find them…If I believe in, for example, bilingual education. The dual language program has a lot of obstacles or has a lot of challenges and sometimes administration doesn't see it or doesn't prioritize it as much as they should. I have to do my part in advocating and being part of a group that advocates for more resources and opportunities for dual language.

When encouraging her mentees to advocate and stand up for themselves, Nina felt like she had to follow her own advice and stand up for what she believed in, which was bilingual education. She declared to her mentees the ways in which she would advocate for more resources for overlooked dual language programs so that it could be prioritized by her leadership.

With Roger, he felt drawn to the mentorship program because of its social justice focus and wanted his mentorship to reflect his values. He talked about the need to be part of this crucial equity work with new teachers:

> That's really important for me to see the offerings and PDs focused on equity, and not being afraid to use that language and to talk about race and gender…And these issues do show up in the classrooms. So it's important for teaching preparation to talk about these things. So I really liked that too that this program isn't afraid to talk about DEI issues and to make that connection with up and coming teachers.

It was vital that there was an alignment of Roger's belief in equity and the program's use of DEI practices and language in its mentorship components. This type of DEI-centered mentorship allowed Roger to live out his ideals and grow as a social justice leader. For mentor TOCs, having a larger social justice mission at the core of the mentorship was an important factor in recruitment and retention of the teachers of Color in the profession.

Celine had been a longtime supporter of teachers of Color even before CPTP. She created a community college scholarship for ESL teachers because she was passionate about making sure there are enough resources for that special population. Being part of CPTP mentorship allowed her to contribute to the cause of increasing the number of teachers of Color. She shared her reasoning behind wanting to be part of the bigger cause:

> So when we have more teachers that are of color, my hope is that those teachers understand or make the effort to understand that we have the blessing in this case. We have the blessing to have access to lots of cultures in our schools…So as a mentor, I also want to help recruit teachers of color that can go and teach those little kids of color and can go and tell them it is okay to be different.

Celine was explicit about her mission as a mentor was to recruit TOCs who understand diversity as a "blessing" and want to teach students of Color. The program gave her the opportunity to make a direct impact towards that mission and develop her as a change agent in her community.

On the other hand, Sheryl recognized the inequity that many of her mentees faced and saw her mentorship as a way to level the playing field by providing more resources to those who needed it. Sheryl articulated:

> So two different students, going the college path, even though they're faced with the same you know, assignments and objectives, they're not coming into the school with the same

> supports. So having that mentorship and even myself, I can understand my student and support her. I will hope that she feels, "Okay, I have someone that can help me stay on track."

As someone who was once in her mentee's shoes, Sheryl could relate to the community college students who were coming into the teaching pathway with different "supports." By helping her mentee "stay on track" and be someone she can depend on, Sheryl saw these actions as her contribution to equity work.

However, not all mentor TOCs shared this mission nor were they all similar in their critical consciousness. Eva was at a different point in her DEI journey, expressing some views of "colorblindness" during different parts of her interview, but through the CPTP mentorship, she began to understand the importance of representation:

> I do understand how it's powerful in the sense of having people from different backgrounds in the education system and how powerful that is for a future teacher. Because everyone wants to see how they can fit in. I think, in that sense, it's impactful and it's brought light to the way I see it now that I talk to my mentees and they share their work and stuff. But at the beginning, I really didn't know how that was all going to come into play. And now I can see more so the impact that it has.

Even though Eva was not at the level of advocating for DEI yet and wanted to avoid talking about race altogether, she was starting to come around in terms of the importance of diversity in education. In the beginning, she mentioned not really comprehending how diversity would play out in the mentorship, but through her mentee interactions and exposure to more DEI content, she started to shift her views to acknowledge the assets of a diversified workforce. Thus, no matter

where they individually are at in terms of their DEI knowledge, mentorship can be a welcoming space for mentor TOCs to either start or continue to develop their critical consciousness.

Many of the mentor TOCs felt a calling to increase the representation of teachers of Color and thus were motivated to become mentors. There was a sense that they could influence the recruitment and development of culturally-diverse teachers. Zoe shared:

> So it just reminds me of this one conversation in Spider Man and also in Batman: 'Bad things happen when good people don't do something.' So it's also with mentoring. You don't expect a good teacher when you don't do something to help them.

Zoe's Spiderman metaphor speaks to the feeling of urgency and weight of their role as mentors in growing quality future teachers. For Zoe, teacher representation was an equity issue in the U.S. that goaded her to be a mentor for community college students interested in teaching. She added:

> I'd like to encourage different backgrounds, specifically because this is also one issue that we cannot deny in America. Although we say it's a melting pot of all cultures, that there's an existence of discrimination and so I would like equity for everyone (for all different people to experience success and also what they want to achieve in their life.)

Zoe acknowledged the racism and "discrimination" that still exists systemically in America that prevents people of Color from becoming teachers and a pathway to climb the socioeconomic ladder.

Teresa also reflected on this responsibility to attract more students of Color to go into the profession and be the role model for these students so their future students will benefit:

> It [the community] needs more teachers that look like us, feels like us. I really want to see Black and Brown children being inspired, being educated, being cared for. So when I think about mentorship, how can we be the positive role models for students at school,

> and how can we influence their lives in a good way? You know, some of us, our lives look like theirs when we're younger. And so how can I be of good influence for these kids? How can I do my best to make sure that when they get out of here or when they graduate?"

Teresa mentioned her personal connection to the cause because she saw herself in the lives of the mentees of Color. She wanted them to succeed and to be the person who can make sure they make it to the end of their studies as she had.

In a similar vein, Celine expressed how important it was for their students that these future teachers of Color make it to the other side as in-service teachers. She conveyed:

> They see that it's like a mirror. When I was going into teaching, I didn't see a lot of teachers of Color. And seeing especially African American teachers is really hard in my school. We don't have any and seeing Latino teachers is very hard to do, because we don't have that many, but we need them because we have a high population of students of Color. So they need to see other people that they can relate to because as I told you in the beginning, you know, these kids, we can make a difference in their lives for good, bad or ugly. And when they see that we respect their culture, that we understand their culture, that we look like them. They find different role models.

Celine later elaborated about being one of the only teachers of Color at her school (and the only Spanish speaker on staff), which predominantly served students of Color. She experienced firsthand how hard it was for her students and their families not to have their teachers understand the culture and sometimes even demean it. When she was going through school, she rarely saw anyone who looked like her. Thus, she was adamant that more representation was needed in the profession in order to build a more culturally-competent and empathetic teaching force.

Romy also recalled not seeing anyone who looked like her, especially among her educator colleagues and how those experiences informed her mentoring of students of Color.

> But in my other courses, I was one of two Latinas who ended up taking the classes. And even working in South Central LA, the majority of the teachers were White. They did not look like the students they served…When I go to district meetings, just where I am, there's only a handful, it's the three of us, the same four people. So I think about how to navigate between those two worlds and not be afraid to still say what we value and that we're valuable, and that we do it all. Because I think sometimes we're told to not speak our mind or because we don't know better or because you're not the majority.

Being in the minority group, Romy often felt that her voice was suppressed and that her cultural identity was denigrated, so she wanted to make sure her mentees had the tools to navigate "between those two worlds" of the minority and majority groups. Her experiences code switching and often being one of the few teachers of Color in education spaces needed to be shared with future teachers of Color in hopes that they'd feel empowered and "valuable." It became her duty to change their trajectory so that they did not have to go through what she went through alone.

Melody took up the task of recruiting and developing more students of Color into teachers further by talking directly to her students or former students to spark ideas of going into teaching. She even talked to them about joining the CPTP mentorship program if they were attending the local community college. She mentioned:

> I want to start kind of putting it in their heads like this might be a path for you. It can be…I feel like sometimes, perhaps culturally, you kind of just do what your parents say. Or you kind of follow the family plan. And sometimes there isn't. It's like, 'you got to start working, sweetie. Go to Walmart and just start working. Our family needs money.'

> But if they're willing to put in that tiny bit of time upfront to finish school, your $20,000 a year Walmart job could easily become your $50,000 a year teaching job because my students are super capable. They're just as capable as any other, so I think that definitely. Relating to another teacher of color would be number one that encouraged me.

Melody sensed that coming from a similar cultural and socioeconomic background to her students, she knew the hesitations and stigmas attached to teaching and was able to genuinely talk about how the teaching job changed her life. She felt obligated to set her students and mentees' expectations higher and reach them earlier in their career decision process.

Recognizing the Assets of the Community College Student Mentee

The typical community college student does not fit into one box; their backgrounds range vastly when compared to traditional college students. For the mentor TOCs, the mentorship experience gave them a chance to learn more about the community college mentees and the diverse identities and life experiences they are bringing to teaching. Moreover, they also learned about their community through the students' lives and better understood how to support future teachers at a critical juncture in their teaching journey.

Diversity in life experiences

About half of the CPTP mentees were younger students, fresh out of high school. For most of the TK-12 mentors, especially ones who mentor in teacher induction programs, they are used to mentoring traditional university students who may be a bit older, go to school full-time, and/or already have their bachelor's. The exposure to younger students and some of the challenges they encounter was eye-opening. This was the case for Melody, who shared about her mentees:

> Our teenagers are going through so much, and these gals were just 19 and 20/21. I didn't realize how much pressure and how much stress these very young adults are

> experiencing. One was a young mom. One was one of five siblings and her four siblings were struggling with mental illness, and not just like, 'I have anxiety.' It's like, 'No, I'm dealing with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety and depression.' And it's like, 'wow and you're here dealing with that, trying to go to school, trying to become a teacher....' So I guess I took it for granted. My life is so sheltered. I guess I didn't realize how much stress and pressure our youth have to experience.

As a teacher for elementary students, it is a rare experience for Melody to encounter high school or college-aged students, so the interactions with her mentees became a window into what this population was facing in terms of obstacles and responsibilities they were juggling. Melody acknowledged her own blindspots and "sheltered life" because her relationship with the mentees showed her the immense pressure the younger students were dealing with at home (e.g., family caretaking, mental health issues, etc.). The personal bled into the professional for the mentees, even at such a young age, and it was important for the mentors to be aware and empathize with what was going on personally before they could address the professional aspects of teaching.

On the other end of the spectrum, the other half of CPTP mentees were older than the traditional college-aged student and pursuing teaching as possibly a second, third, or fourth career. These students came with a wealth of life experience and a different set of motivations and maturity than younger students. As Romy explained:

> One of my mentees (she's already in her 60s), she already works full time and is thinking of getting her BA and she's at a completely different place as far as asking. With her, I was able to get her books, I was able to give her play-based activities because that's my thing.... She was able to come visit me in my classroom when finally I was able to do it, and I met with her for lunch. I went to visit her, I met her husband and she met my

> daughter. We got together to have coffee (not all the time) but then during the summer, we did do that even when we didn't have to do the hours. And when we did, it was conversations about teaching and teaching strategies.

Romy's mentee was actually older than her and was already a certificated teacher, but she was looking to move up still in her career as a credentialed teacher. Romy picked up on the type of support that was needed from her, such as finding class materials and talking strategies. With Romy's mentee, there was more certainty about her career choice, an understanding of her time constraints because she worked full time, and a strong desire to learn from each other. Romy was able to develop a relationship that was less like a trainee and more akin to a friend and colleague, where they would have their families meet and spend time together outside of work.

The diversity in ages of the community college students also meant that many had family obligations to balance with school work. Community college is often a good place for students with children to start their journey into education as it offers the flexibility in schedule and online options that gives them the ability to take care of their family. As Eva learned about her mentee:

> One is a mother of two small children, single mom, and so she just is a really go-getter. She wants to do well. And she really wants to show her children that learning doesn't have to stop. And so she's trying to be that role model for them. And she's trying really hard to like, make sure she is fulfilling that role, because I'm always praising her for her sacrifices.

There were many CPTP students who were also parents and teaching was an opportunity for them to not only provide for their children but also offered the chance to develop their own skills. In Eva's case, she learned of and was inspired by her mentee's work ethic and resiliency as a single mom who was continuing her learning to be a role model for her children. As a community college

student with children and a family to support, the motivations and drive to become teachers takes on another dimension. The perseverance and ambition of the community college students to accomplish their academic goals become heightened because their children and family's future depend on it. When Eva listened to stories like this from her mentees, she was touched and wanted to make sure that her mentee was given the praise and recognition she deserved.

Zoe also talked about how her mentees faced several personal challenges as they pursued their academic goals. She explained:

> They have to provide for the family financially so they would have work instead of just being focused on their studies. Another thing is some of them have immigration fears, those thoughts that anytime they can be deported or their family members can be deported or some other tasks that come on the way while we're both planning.

Providing for the family was not just for students with children, but in a reversal, many of the students were working to help out their parents as well. Zoe also talked about the struggles of her mentee, which included family members being undocumented and the pressure it placed on them as they were going to school. The mentor TOCs came to recognize that their community college mentees had enormous responsibilities at home that often produced tension with their studies and journey to become teachers.

However, the mentors were pleasantly surprised about the amount of motivation the students had in reaching their goals. Roger shared his respect for these mentees and their diligence when he said:

> I think I learned from them that they are full time workers; they're their full time students. They are people that are just working hard, you know in terms of finishing their requirements, and then eventually transfer out. They were very ambitious, very

> motivated. And I liked how they were just sort of very responsible and their time and maintaining communication with me when we did go back and forth in terms of scheduling and things like that. So I did appreciate that they seem to be driven and motivated.

Despite their demanding schedules, Roger's mentees showed him their determination and ambition to transfer and become teachers. As a former community college student himself, Roger empathized with their need to work full time while going to school and to shift their mentorship check-ins as needed. Luckily, Roger was able to accommodate and adapt to changing schedules because he was confident that they would finish their requirements.

Carl echoed his regard for the students' tenacious spirit and illustrated the unique opportunity that community colleges offer for students who are still trying to figure things out. He described:

> You might have wanted to go to school, but there were so many things stacked against you, or you still haven't figured out what it is you're good at or what you want to do, or there were some life circumstances. When you look at a community college (and this is from my experience), there was something that was going on that kept getting in the way, but they're still fighting for it. And I've always loved the drive of students who took that chance to go to that community college to figure it out, whether it be financial, emotional, family, whatever.

Having worked with community college students and going through community college himself, Carl understood the unique circumstances and background that community college students come with. They are fighters who are steadfast in getting their education at the same time that they tend to their obligations at home. Luckily, the open access mission of the community college system

gives people a second chance or an opportunity to explore or "figure it out." For Carl, he joined the program specifically because it was supporting community college students and he became impressed with their resiliency.

Through CPTP mentorship, the mentor TOCs learned about the diversity of the students not only in terms of race/ethnicity, but also age, immigration status, family structures, years in school, and where they were in their teaching journey. However, the common theme that emerged was primarily around the admiration for the community college students' determination to pursue higher education while also balancing family and professional lives.

Desire to Give Back To Their Community

Another key learning that the mentors learned from the mentees is the desire of community college students to give back to their community through teaching. Zoe recognized this sense of service in her mentee:

> It gave me hope that there are young people still wanting to pursue teaching in spite of all the negative ideas that the media has put upon teachers. Because one of my mentees said that the reason she wanted to become a teacher, she was inspired by her former math teacher. And that was really incredible. So that says that being a teacher has a strong influence with these little children and that motivates them to give back also to the community.

Zoe's mentee shared that her reason for joining the teaching profession was driven by her experiences with an inspiring teacher and desire to give back to a community that gave so much to her. Community college students have strong ties to the local community because many of them grew up there and want to stay close by after graduation, thus making them ideal candidates for

GYO programs. The mentors observed in the mentees a strong intrinsic motivation among the mentees to work in the community they understand and value.

Likewise, Michelle saw the drive to serve the community in her mentees. Michelle explained:

> She wanted to be that teacher she said she never saw in her classroom. So I was going to do all I could to keep her... then my student last semester (who was Hispanic), she wanted to bring that to special education. So knowing that they're going in there with that already at the forefront of their mind, to me that just shows that they're going to be more active and they're going to be more looking for that change or bringing that with them to school.

Michelle noticed how her mentees wanted to become a teacher to be the role models in their community that they never had growing up. The service mentality and the community connection of the future teachers was a recurring learning expressed by the mentors.

Different Parts of the Teaching Journey

The diversity in ages and life situations of the community college students also meant they were in different parts of their teaching journey. The open access mission of the community college as well as the exploration emphasis of the program attracted a variety of students interested in teaching. As Christine shared about her younger mentees:

> They didn't really have experience. It was like kind of, 'I'm taking child development classes. I think this is what I want to do. But you know, I'm not sure.; Whereas the other ones, they came in and knew what they're doing. They knew, 'I need these hours to finish.'

The mentees fell on a spectrum of not being sure about teaching to those already working in the field. It is different from a typical teacher candidate who has already made the decision to become a teacher and is concurrently studying education. Christine's mentees demonstrated the range of possibilities in their journeys and prompted her to be very flexible and tailored in how she supported their mentees.

The mentor TOCs found that the supports that worked with one student would not necessarily work with another. Romy demonstrated the differentiation she used to meet her student's needs:

> Whereas with my other mentee, she was still even considering going into teaching. She just needed help with being able to organize her schedule. She was struggling. She was also struggling with her classes. She also unfortunately lost her grandmother so that was really hard for her. I did tell her not to be afraid to ask for help as far as counseling, if you find you still need help because it's a difficult thing, but also don't consider dropping out just because it got hard because she didn't do well that semester. It was more school/academics focused, not so much yet teaching, because she didn't need that then. So I think it's just that it was different. It was completely different mentees, different experiences, and different supports that they needed.

Some, like Romy's mentee, didn't need teaching/pedagogical knowledge just yet. As a first generation student, she needed Romy to help her with time management and emotional support to keep going. Therefore, it was essential that mentors avoided a cookie-cutter method and instead, needed to be responsive to where students were at in their decision to teach and differing experiences in the classroom.

11 of the 15 respondents did not initially see teaching as a career until somebody such as a teacher, family member, or friend who recognized their teacher qualities encouraged them to look into it. A majority of the mentor TOCs often had other careers (e.g. yoga instructor, security guard, parks and recreation leader, etc.) not related to education before making the decision to become a teacher. Most were older and had families by the time they decided to go back to school. A majority of them also had nontraditional pathways into teaching (e.g., community college, emergency credentials, post-baccalaureate, residencies) instead of going straight into the traditional path of a bachelor's degree and credential program after high school. Their varying trajectories and life experiences were similar to many of the community college students they mentored, so in many ways, the mentoring experience was a mirror to the past. And by getting a chance to reflect, learn, and connect the contexts of their past experiences and their mentee's current journey, mentor TOCs are able to recognize the value of their identity, but also the community college student identity and what assets they bring to the pathway and the profession.

Learnings from the CoPs with Pre-service and In-service TOCs

The ongoing dialogue and learning that happened in the CPTP mentorship pairing was akin to a Community of Practice (CoP) of pre-service and in-service TOCs. For the mentors, this opportunity to continue and deepen their teaching practice provided a plethora of benefits, both professionally and personally. The benefits and inspiration they received from mentorship indicate a possible way to retain TOCs and keep them fulfilled in this line of work. In the following section, I will elaborate on the following aspects of mentor TOC learnings when in the same space as pre-service teachers from the community colleges: (1) Feeling valued, refreshed, and empowered; (2) Facilitating reflection, awareness, and empathy; (3) Inspiring their own professional development; (4) Connecting and Collaborating with the Community; (5) Finding a sense of hope for the future.

Feeling Valued, Refreshed, and Empowered

Lower salaries, long hours, and negative media portrayals of teachers continue to plague the teaching profession, and as a result teachers are feeling disrespected and overlooked. When TOCs get a chance to step into the role of mentor, it makes them feel valued and empowered for their experiences and knowledge. The appreciation of what they provide for their mentees takes on a different meaning for newer teachers (less than 10 years teaching) and veteran teachers (more than 10 years). For newer teachers, mentorship helps to build their confidence as teachers while for veteran teachers, mentorship elevates their role in the community.

Due to the demands of being a novice teacher (and possible skepticism of their ability to mentor another new teacher), it is rare for formal mentorship programs to tap into novice teachers to be mentors. However, mentorship can be beneficial for newer teachers to solidify their reflective practice and to realize their own potential as a mentor. Mentor teacher Teresa, who was a new teacher with six years of teaching under her belt, said:

> I'm so grateful for the opportunity, because even for me, I never knew I had all of this inside of me. As I mentioned, when I was first asked, it was like me? a mentor? No, I need more years! I need more time!

But when a colleague encouraged her to apply to be a mentor, she enjoyed it so much she stayed a mentor for the program for over two years. She explained her realization:

> I had learned so much even over the past six years as a teacher that I could really pass to someone else. I am grateful for the opportunity to realize that, okay, I have something to give also to someone else and to make a difference in this world.

Even with only a few years of teaching experience, being a mentor was an important factor in Teresa feeling like her knowledge and experiences mattered to others and could make an impact.

It validated her experiences as a teacher and gave her a space to learn of her capabilities as a mentor.

Valerie, a more recent teacher graduate, only had three years of teaching experience when she applied to CPTP. She articulated her initial hesitations as a mentor due to COVID disruptions and her lack of experience:

> I was kind of going into it a little bit nervous. Will I really have all the answers?..I just wanted to help and because it was through COVID, I didn't really have great high expectations of helping or being able to be on campus with them or anything like that.

However, once Valerie was able to develop the relationship with her mentee, she felt confident in her ability to help. Whether it was checking on the student's transfer process or wellness, Valerie recognized the mentee was not looking for someone with "all the answers," but truly someone who was supportive and willing to be a sounding board. She commented:

> It exceeded my expectations because of the resources that I was able to share with my mentee and the knowledge that she was willing to receive and just take that advice in and ask those different questions and help her through. I feel like I really did help her through.

Valerie was surprised at the extent of her knowledge and the receptivity the mentee seemed to show towards her advice. This helped Valerie to build confidence in her lived experiences and learn about her capacity for mentorship. Overall, the newer mentor teachers in the program initially shared feelings of doubt and anxiety around their inexperience, but over time, mentorship opened their eyes to the knowledge they possessed. Despite having less years in the classroom, these new mentor teachers felt like they had something to offer the mentees and it empowered them.

As a current TOSA, and with hopes of going into administration later in her career, Zoe saw mentorship as an opportunity to practice her coaching skills and build up the belief in herself to be a leader. She observed of CPTP mentorship that:

> It gave me confidence that I can be a motivator for someone. And then it helped me a lot with my work, because I know that I can be effective and influential. I mean, that helps me build confidence in myself, when I know I have an impact on another person and it's being appreciated.

Through mentorship of her mentee, Zoe learned about her ability to be "influential" in motivating others. The skill to motivate was useful for her work with encouraging students, but also her fellow colleagues.

For Romy, mentorship developed her capacity to be more vocal with her colleagues about making changes at her school in the name of equity. Being able to reflect and share her teaching philosophies and practices to her mentees, Romy realized that:

> I think I've also learned to be more outspoken with them [fellow teachers]. Sometimes we go with what's current because it's like, "Oh, yeah, this is what we've been doing traditionally." And now it's like, "No, why? Why are we doing this? What's the intentionality behind it?"... I can say, "No, I don't think that's okay. Or no, I don't think this is.. or can we really think about this? Is this best for our students and what's best for our families?" And I'm not afraid of saying those things now..It gives me that sense of like, I do know what I'm talking about. And I'm not the only one who is thinking this also; there's other people who also believe this or in agreement or we're starting to change our way of thinking and I think I feel valuable, honestly.

The interaction with her mentees allowed Romy to feel like her ideas and critical opinions had merit and should be shared with her colleagues. In contemplating and discussing policies and practices of the school, she saw how certain inequitable decisions were made because they were "traditional" instead of being supportive of students. With the validation from her mentees, Romy felt emboldened enough to vocalize dissent among her school community and become a change advocate for the benefit of the families in the community.

As a newer teacher, Valerie also felt apprehensive about bringing up issues with her more veteran colleagues. But after mentorship, she mentioned how she was able to become more outspoken about her views to her fellow teachers because she was encouraging the same behavior to her mentees. She remarked:

> I think when I talk to my mentee, and I let them know…I think I've been more vocal after practicing what you preach, right? So I was preaching that you need to speak up and share your views and everybody's view matters. So I think I started to do that and that helps me change.

Valerie knew that she had to role model the confidence she was expecting of her mentees and was empowered to say something when she faced a conflict with her peers. It would have been hypocritical if she did not practice what she preached. Over the course of her mentorship, Valerie's insecurities transformed into assurance and courage to make herself heard.

For the seasoned teachers, mentorship was a way to acknowledge their efforts and value the profession they have dedicated their life to. Carl, a veteran teacher and mentor with over 20 years of experience, noted how grateful he felt having the community recognize and support his work with future teachers. He revealed:

> In our field, it can be very thankless. You don't always get a pat on the back, so it's nice

> every once in a while when someone is just like, "Hey, we're here for you. I don't even need an award or a special pin or something but to know that somebody's out there working just as hard as you for the same goal. That breeds a lot of respect and a lot of love and a lot of comfort.

According to Carl, after 20 years of being in the profession, the accolades and gratitude come few and far between. Teaching can often feel like an isolating and "thankless" job because teachers are often going above and beyond their relegated duties to help their students (and usually without recognition or comparable compensation). However, through his mentees and the program staff he was interacting with as a mentor, he felt the appreciation and "respect" for his contributions. Seeing others' tenacity to achieve similar goals reaffirmed his "love" of the profession.

As a veteran teacher with almost 30 years of experience, Michelle also had an opportunity as a mentor to re-examine her negative views of the profession and restore her faith in teaching. She divulged:

> If I ever had to watch a video on how to disarm a person with a gun, I would have looked at you like you had grown a horn! But these people coming in, see this, and hear it and they still want to be teachers! So it gives me faith and happiness and a little bit of pride because it's like "wow." It is an honorable profession. I think we're not treated like that sometimes, but I think we're here to do the good work and everybody's life is touched by a teacher. So it's nice to know that there's people that still want to do it.

Michelle remarked sarcastically but also seriously about the stark realities of teachers nowadays, which include having to learn to disarm a gunman in the case of a school shooting. It is a reality she never thought she would have to face and felt that nobody would want to become teachers when saddled with such responsibilities. However, working with her mentee and seeing her

determination to become a teacher despite the dangers and negativity surrounding the profession helped Michelle change her negative outlook and even roused some "pride" for her chosen career. The fact that young people still believe that teaching is an "honorable" and respected position was something that surprised her and made her think twice about the field.

Mentorship also uplifts the teaching force because it is a recognition that the profession deserves investment, especially for pre-service teachers. In the program, mentor teachers and the mentees each receive a stipend for completing the mentorship hours every semester. On top of the financial incentive, the mentoring pairs also receive structured program and technical support to help the relationship grow. Sheryl, a teaching veteran of 22 years, shared how she felt learning about the program incentives for teacher mentorship:

> I feel it is putting education high by investing in your teachers, your upcoming teachers. I think putting a strong support in education is what we desperately need…Valuing the profession and valuing educators' time…it is very important that the community see that they're not just the teacher. They're educators, educating the community so that the community can thrive and grow.

Shreyl saw how the paid mentorship opportunity gave "value" and significance to the educator's time and experiences. She wanted others to see the ties between the educators and how their success is tied to the community's overall success. Like other skilled jobs such as a doctor or lawyer, the recognition of teaching as another skilled job worth investing in validates the important role teachers play in the fabric of a community.

For the veteran teachers who may have become jaded by the system, mentorship re-ignited their joy and passion for the work. In the instance of Michelle, she had a mentee whose excitement for education was infectious and reminded her of how fun teaching could be. She voiced:

> It's just fun to me. It's the enthusiasm that they bring. I think that at this age and this stage, it kind of...I'm not quite as enthusiastic as they are. So to work with them, it' refreshing and it's exciting. It breathes new life into it, I think.

Being in the presence of eager mentees who have yet to be bogged down by the system can be inspiring and is like a breath of fresh air for longtime teachers. The happiness and satisfaction from these positive interactions with her mentees were essential in keeping Michelle interested in continuing as a mentor for several semesters.

Also as a program that is trying to inspire new teachers to get into the profession, the mentors are actively engaged in reminding themselves the reasons behind why they love to teach. It can be an important piece for retention of teachers. Christine said:

> You can talk about what you love to do, which is teaching and that you can share all of your experience, all of the funny things that we go through daily. I mean, it gives you the opportunity to impart your knowledge to someone who's interested in teaching. It is fun! Even though it's really not work on our part, other than just encouraging the students to get their hours.

Because there were simple requirements to the mentorship and room for flexibility, it was a "fun" experience for both mentor and student, and thus creating a positive space to learn in. According to Christine, it did not feel like work to her as she was able to share something she loved and be encouraging. There was no penalty or evaluation involved since this was an exploration program, so Christine was empowered to do whatever was best for the student.

The mentor TOCs overwhelmingly expressed a feeling of amazement and hope knowing that their mentees were going to enter the profession. Before mentorship, many of them harbored pessimistic views of the teaching line of work due to all the negativity surrounding education.

Whether it was working overtime for low pay or dealing with the politics and disrespect of the profession, most of the teachers were skeptical that young people of Color would actually choose this career trajectory. They were pleasantly surprised when they saw the opposite. Students of Color from the community colleges showed determination and deep interest for the teaching work. The mentors were reassured that the future of teaching would be in good hands once these students became teachers.

Michelle highlighted how her confidence in the future of the teaching field grew after she met her mentees. She described her feelings about the mentorship experience,"If I can be a part of something good, that makes me happy. And it makes me feel like there's hope for our future because people still want to be teachers and our kids will be in good hands." Michelle was surprised that in light of the negative stereotypes of the job, these mentees still made the decisions to become teachers to make a difference. To Michelle, the caliber and dedication of her mentees fostered an optimistic outlook for education and for the future students they will serve.

Romy also expressed her weariness about the challenges in the education system, but felt there was a light at the end with her mentees. She noted:

> As someone that has gone through the system and works in the system, the education system is flawed… To me, if we didn't learn to do things differently now, then when are we going to? And not be afraid to speak up and say things like, "Oh, I don't think this is the best way to do things." And it's hard to do those things, but I think with the new generation that are more outspoken, it just gives me hope that hopefully they can do that and be open minded.

Having gone through the system and worked in it for over 20 years, Romy knew of its flaws and the trepidation to speak up to make significant changes. Through mentorship, Romy became

inspired by the strident spirit of the next generation and foresaw them disrupting the status quo in education.

The idea of having their mentees continue to carry the torch of teaching was also a sign of profound respect for Carl and the profession he dedicated his life to. He beamed:

> It's very humbling to talk to them and know that there's people out there who are still grinding to do what I do. Because it makes me feel good about my career and knowing that when I finally exit, there's people who love it and care enough about it that they're going to take my place.

It was a positive experience for Carl to see students who love the work and the students as much as he does. As someone who is now at a point where his career is now more in the past, mentoring allowed him a chance to look forward to the next generation of teachers. He also touched upon the idea of legacy and how the impact of mentorship can outlast him, spanning generations

Facilitating Reflection, Awareness, and Empathy

Mentorship on the part of the mentor requires building the muscle of self-reflection and awareness in order to advise or coach somebody else. The mentor TOCs actively engaged in constant reflection of their own practices because their mentees would ask direct questions or participate in activities that prompted discussion.

For Sheryl, the act of sharing best practices to her mentees meant that she had to re-examine her own experiences as a teacher. She recounted:

> Any time that I am supporting a teacher, it puts me back into remembering to practice what you preach type thing, but also remember best practices. It reminds me of, “Okay I need to do this.” I have a little bit more awareness. Because I think I'm so in this job, I do it every time. And then when my mentee asks me a question, I say, “Oh, yes, we can do it

this way. Or this is why." It brings me back to situations that I've had, and then I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna try that tomorrow."

The day to day of a teacher can feel like a routine without moments to actually pause and reflect on what is happening. Sheryl pointed to the fact that mentoring and having to share best practices with her mentee interrupted her day to day in a positive way. It prompted an "awareness" of her behaviors because she had to answer or explain her practices to her mentee. The mentorship space served as a "reminder" for Sheryl, who actually translated what she shared into action in her classroom by trying it out "tomorrow."

Rachel solidified the practice of reflection a step further by journaling along with her mentees. By doing so, she was able to understand more about motivations in order to help her mentees achieve their goals. She said:

> Sometimes we journal together. It's a reflective journal. So yeah, (it) gave me a reflection of myself and the growth and how I am positively leading them, inspiring them. Yeah, you do learn a lot about yourself, your inner motivation and what those forces really exist when you're leading someone and trying to motivate them to reach their goals as well.

When Rachel got her mentees to journal, she ended up journaling and growing alongside them. During these reflective times, she was able to think deeply about her own motivations and leadership style in the mentoring relationship. Rachel's experience demonstrates how the mentor engages in reflection just as much as the mentee does in the process.

A majority of the mentor TOCs talked about how mentorship disrupted the monotony in the job because it encouraged an awareness of others and created an environment of connection. Michelle, who was going on two decades in the profession, knew firsthand how, "It's easy to be complacent. It's easy to just sit back and keep teaching the same thing." So when her mentee would

come to the mentor check ins with a little notebook of questions, Michelle recollected, “It made me revisit things that maybe I had learned or looked at before, and then it made me excited to try it again.” The mentees kept Michelle on her toes with their varying interests and it allowed her to learn more than if she just taught in her classroom the same things everyday. Another mentee she had wanted to know more about special education, which was not Michelle’s concentration, but she did the research anyway to be able to give some information to her mentee. She noted:

> I've never been a Special Ed teacher. I've had inclusion kids, I've had mainstream kids, so I can only bring that perspective. I've never been in a full (inclusion class); I've subbed in Special Ed classes, but it made me revisit some of the things that maybe I had learned before or find new things.

As she helped her mentee with getting connected to Special Education information, Michelle was able to “revisit” and learn new things about teaching for special education students. Despite being a longtime veteran in the profession, Michelle realized she still had new content to learn and fields in teaching yet to explore due to her mentee. Even though she did not have much experience with Special Ed, Michelle still embraced the fact that she had more to learn about it and even felt excitement towards it.

The mentor TOCs also shared experiences where they felt mentorship of the community college mentees brought community into the classroom. For Romy, having the mentees in her class was a welcome break from the status quo because it allowed her to be more aware of the world outside of her school. She said:

> It's so easy just to be in your classroom and with your school and your peers and be comfortable with that. But with CPTP, it's like you are with a different group of educators that have different experiences (especially those in community college). I think going

through this programming allows me to really pause and reflect and be aware.

Because she gets to talk with her mentees about their experiences with inequity, Romy's increased awareness led her to investigate her own biases and recommit to pursuing DEI in her teaching. She further clarified:

> That's the other thing, I'm now learning about my own biases, right? Especially when I first started teaching, I made so many mistakes and understood that my intention was great, but I didn't do what was best. So I think as I'm reflecting on my career, it gives me that opportunity…There's still so many things that I have to unlearn and realize that, this is not appropriate or it's not correct, or how can I be more inclusive and more equitable and validate and support my students.

There is a misconception that all mentor TOCs will be innately equipped with the skills to teach diverse students, but in reality, what Romy's example points to is that fact that DEI is an ongoing learning process for all teachers. Mentorship is but just one space where that learning could happen. The more she shared with her mentees, the more she recognized her "mistakes," "biases," and things "to unlearn." This self-awareness is typically one of the most challenging, but also one of the most important first steps towards changing individual behavior to be more inclusive and equitable.

The reflective periods and sense of awareness that the TOCs gain from their relationship with the mentees ultimately fosters empathy on a much deeper level. CPTP was Nina's first opportunity to mentor community college students, so she was not used to her students rescheduling and canceling check-ins last minute. At first, she felt disrespected and wanted to quit. However after figuring out an asynchronous system of communication with her mentees and learning more about their familial responsibilities that interfered with their meetings, Nina

understood better how to meet the needs of the mentees and ultimately her students. Nina explained:

> So that's when I started learning, to listen to understand and not to impose a judgment right off the bat based on how someone is acting towards me or how they're responding to something. Like taking a step back and trying to understand their point of view before make any assumptions or decisions or anything like that. It's been eye opening for me.

Instead of judging and jumping to conclusions about her mentee and why they were unresponsive, Nina took "a step back" to reflect and tried to imagine what the mentees were going through. As a teacher already in the classroom, she might have forgotten what it was like to still be at the beginning of a career and juggling a challenging personal and work life with academic courses. Nina's mentees brought her awareness and "eye opening" experiences that bred empathy and understanding for her students.

Shannon, a veteran teacher and TOSA, talked about how her mentee's undocumented status allowed her to hear firsthand the barriers that posed for future teachers of Color, especially those without a permanent status. She described:

> One of my previous candidates, she is in the Dreamers act. So she's like, 'Shannon, I can't work. I need to be able to work." It made me realize that I don't know what that struggle is or I don't know how to help them in that situation, because I didn't go through that struggle.

Shannon worked with the program team at the community college to provide resources to the mentee in need and provided hope as much as possible in light of the situation. She said:

> I've learned a lot of how we all have our struggles in our own ways. And sometimes we only see our own struggles…And so it's kind of just giving where there is light at the end

of the tunnel, regardless of your situation. Their excitement at times when they do see like, "Okay, yeah, that is what I want to do."

Realizing how her mentee continued to strive to be a teacher even though she knew she was in a system that was not set up for undocumented students was inspiring. For Shannon, talking to her mentee allowed her to step out of her routine and truly understand another person's struggle as well as perseverance. The empathy Shannon built with the mentee and the sharing of different teaching options and support for her situation created the "light at the end of the tunnel." Overall, many of the mentor TOCs had related experiences to Shannon where their relationship with the mentee created a space to develop their capacity for self-reflection, empathy, and awareness.

Inspiring Their Own Professional Development

The mentorship of future teachers at the community college has also been proven to be a great training ground for current teachers wanting to advance professionally. Considering that coaching and mentorship is a central component of education leadership positions (e.g., administration, TOSA, etc.), the mentor TOCs viewed their time as a mentor to be very helpful in honing practical skills for their current positions as well as for their future professional endeavors.

As a TOSA, Melody worked in a coaching role and found that the conversations with her mentees helped her to understand her own thought processes and motivations for teaching before she implemented coaching with her colleagues. She observed:

> The more I would sort of facilitate these discussions with my mentees, the more I would realize, "Oh, this is kind of this is a big deal. I need to kind of unpack this a little bit more." And even when I will go home with my own children, working with them, working with the staff, when I have to present at a staff meeting, (I think) how are they (my teachers) processing? And how are they gonna receive this information? How am I

delivering this information? There's homework that needs to be done ahead of time.

The “unpacking” and “homework” Melody did before she met with her mentees became a practice that helped her in the TOSA role. She would try out different guiding questions and strategies with her mentees before taking it to her Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at her workplace. She further explained:

> Those strategies that work with the mentees work also when I'm trying to facilitate a PLC or a staff meeting or whatever. Asking those guiding questions, giving them that wait time and all that is important to help them grow. So I feel like it's helped me a lot because it's given me more strategies, it's given me opportunities to practice, and it's also helped me to get in their ear like, Hey, this is going to help you go mentor someone!

Melody seized the mentoring space to exercise and try out different facilitation techniques she planned on using in different contexts with other teachers at her school (e.g., staff meeting or PLC). She even utilized her coaching role to persuade others into becoming mentors themselves. Being a mentor made Melody into a better teacher leader at her school because it gave her real-time practices with training educators and adult learners.

Mentor Eva also shared how her coaching skills changed over the course of her mentoring relationship with the future teacher:

> I think that's really important, as a mentor, is to just first listen, and don't offer any kind of advice or suggestions or anything until they have asked for it. Because sometimes people just want to vent, and so I think that's just natural for me just to kind of offer my two cents... And so I think with this, I've kind of learned more to be a better listener and just kind of offer when asked.

Before her mentorship experience, Eva acknowledged that she used to jump to problem solving mode and offer unsolicited advice rather than just listening. Being a mentor, she grew into someone who practiced active listening and patience before offering any advice. The skill of listening is one that can be used in many workplace contexts and a vital ability if Eva were to move up either as a teacher leader or in administration.

In a practical sense, CPTP mentorship also provided leadership opportunities or encouraged the mentors to go back to school. For example, the program started a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for the mentors to collaborate with each other on problems of practice in regards to supporting their mentees. And within the PLC, there is an opportunity for mentor leaders to develop as they are at the forefront of organizing and facilitating the sessions. As a mentor and PLC participant Christine expressed:

> I'm involved with the PLC…We talked about different ways that we could motivate the mentees. So I think that I am not just going through the motions right now. I think that I'm just really aware of the things that I'm doing in class and how, because it has been difficult with some of the mentees to keep them motivated to come.

Christine served as a PLC leader for the mentors and used the role to avoid complacency or "going through the motions." Instead, she utilized her extensive experience in the classroom to help other mentors have a successful relationship with their mentees. Getting the PLC space to actively process mentoring challenges and brainstorm with other teachers around motivations or pedagogy for future teachers sets the mentor up for future PLC leadership or instructional coaching.

Another mentor leader saw mentorship as a way to solidify and affirm his decision to mentor novice teachers full time, especially with a focus on DEI. Roger said of the experience:

> Mentoring definitely inspired me to see that oh, I can do this full time, working with new

> teachers. So it definitely prepared me for where I am now in my current role, so I'm very grateful for that. And then finally, I would say that it's motivated me to do more speaking, so I do plan to facilitate some professional development not only in my own district, but also through the county office, on what it means to be an effective mentor. More specifically, a mentor with a DEI lens and like what role we can play in helping our new teachers specifically.

Getting a chance to be a teacher educator and work with new teachers was what Roger needed to make some professional decisions about his future in education. With plenty of years of teaching under his belt, he was ready for the next step to grow his career and passion for DEI. He became a TOSA the year after he joined CPTP, and he attributed the preparation it gave him for his current role. In addition, CPTP was a unique mentoring space because of its DEI framework and focus on increasing the number of teachers of Color. It allowed Roger to see how a DEI-infused mentorship was possible. Roger now is still working as a TOSA, but also studying mentorship as a doctoral student to better understand how he can help future teachers.

Zoe was a mentor teacher who aspired to be a principal one day and saw the benefits of working with the future teachers in her potential, future role. She said:

> Also I could see how aspiring teachers are feeling right now towards education. And if ever I do have an administrative position, I could better serve them and assist them in identifying what their needs are before they apply as a teacher.

If Zoe were to step into an administrative position one day, she would be dealing with hiring, coaching, and supporting teachers daily, thus she saw her mentoring position as a great way to test and gauge how to identify teacher needs and understand their feelings to better help them. Thus, mentorship of future teachers can be a natural training ground and pipeline for positions as teacher

leaders and administration at the school. For mentor TOCs, they see mentorship not only as giving back to the community, but also a way to advance their professional standing.

As mentors go through the act of exploring teaching with their mentees, the exposure to new information and growth of their students inspired many of the mentors to practice what they preach. Celine shared that:

> I see the new generation is different. I see changes that inspire me to go to conferences, to keep learning, and a lot of other things…Anyway, after my first mentee, I decided to go back to school and do my second master's degree. So I finished it. So I think it's very inspirational.

The theme of lifelong learning and growth is echoed through Celine's actions. Even as Celine embarked on her eighteenth year of teaching, she still desired to study more, go to more conferences, and evolve. Seeing students from all different backgrounds continuing their education motivated Celine to continue learning and even get another degree. Mentorship not only provides mentors a chance to advance their professional lives, but can also inspire them to grow academically and intellectually as well.

The different generations involved in the mentoring space and the varying technical skills they brought to the mentors, also was a common theme. Many of the mentors, some of them finishing school decades ago, talked about how the mentees enlightened them to new technologies that they could utilize in their classroom. Valerie noted this technologically enhanced generation and how it helped her continue to learn:

> There's so much more that these mentees are getting in their classes because there's so much more technology than when we were going to school. So I think that's also going to help me in the future if they share that with me. Yeah, keep learning, I guess.

Celine reiterated the sentiment of mentees teaching her about technology and keeping her at the forefront of what is new when she remarked:

> And I will say, keeps me on my toes. I want to do this, and then I learned a lot from them too. It's like new things, how is college now with all the technology that we have, so it helps a lot to keep me up to date. And to inspire me to keep on studying because I realized that you cannot rely on all pedagogy because generations are changing. So the fact that I'm able to mentor a young person helps me to do that.

Unless a teacher actively seeks out new technology or actively is engaged with new teachers using new tools in their classrooms, it can be hard to keep up to date with what is out there for teachers. Young people at the community colleges and those who are actively taking education courses, like the mentees, may be more in tune with what new thing is out there to connect with students as teachers. Thus, as the mentors develop an ongoing relationship and conversation about what the mentees are learning, it is only natural that they will get exposed to the new tools and technologies. Celine was one of those mentors who did not shy away from what she did not know and became open to learning about new technologies alongside her mentees. As a teacher, she was inspired by her mentees to continue developing her knowledge about her students.

The ability to work with community college students and being exposed to the community college system was also a motivator for many of the mentors to join the program. Nearly half (6 of the 15 mentor TOCs) mentioned, without being prompted, that they had future goals of teaching at the community college level in the next phase of their career. Therefore, the connections they were getting out of the mentorship experience would hopefully help them move up to the next level of teaching. However, breaking out of the TK-12 space and breaking into community college

can be difficult without some sort of bridge. For mentor teachers like Rachel, this program was the bridge:

> Being a mentor for the community college student, or college student in general, is really different from being a high school teacher. So I know one thing for sure, I definitely want to be at the community college level.

The mentorship not only gave this high school teacher the exposure to older students and the higher education space, but it solidified her desire to work for the community college. Some mentor teachers talked about applying to community college positions without any connections or experience and as a result, not getting an answer about their job application. When they saw the mentorship opportunity and a chance to form a relationship with the local community college, they took it. The high interest level of TK-12 teachers in transitioning to the higher education space is a professional development opportunity that was unlocked as a result of their participation. CPTP Mentorship therefore provided a reasonable pathway to community college teaching and expanded their knowledge of how to best serve community college students in anticipation of working in that field one day..

Connecting and Collaborating with the Community

The relational focus of the CPTP mentorship creates room for mentors to feel a strong and deep sense of connection with their mentees. The connection brought down classroom walls because community, in the form of a student.

The mentorship is set up in a way where the pair gets to know each other over a longer period of time and can talk about more personal things other than just teaching. It is less transactional compared to traditional mentorship and as a result the mentors feel integrated into the mentee's lives in an almost familial fashion. Christine shared this sentiment:

> One of my first students, the one that I've had for a year and a half now, when I started to see the struggles, I really wasn't expecting that. I think I realized it has definitely helped me with my other mentees. Just that the door needs to be open and it doesn't just have to be about education. It can be about anything, it can be about life struggles, it can be about 'I really don't know if this is something I want to do' or it doesn't have to only be education. It's open and you can develop a lifelong relationship with this person. 'If you ever need anything, call me up, you can come in anytime'. In that respect, what ended up happening is not what I thought going into the program, but I see now that it's amazing! It's amazing what the program is offering these students, and I've gotten so much out of it just with a few students that I've had and being able to communicate with them and to help them through situations.

Christine conveyed the chance for mentors to cultivate a "lifelong relationship" that is more like a friendship and familial rather than strict colleague. It is the type of relationship that straddles formal and informal mentorships and creates a comfortable environment for "life struggles" to be shared amongst the pair. By working through tough situations together (teaching related or not), Christine felt like she could extend an open door policy for this mentee to drop by or talk anytime. This is the type of support and compassion that not all TOCs are able to receive or give in other formal mentorship programs for induction or even amongst their colleagues.

Similarly, mentor Carl described the relationship with his mentees as almost like a father figure. As a long time teacher and mentor, he enjoyed getting to know his mentees on a personal level where he was always reachable and willing to help. As Carl described:

> The beauty of it is I still have ones that are no longer my mentees that still contact me. They'll still give me updates. And I love it. So like the holidays roll around, I'm getting

> text messages from them, Merry Christmas or Happy New Year, whatnot. I'll text message them, “Hey” when they transfer. I think one of them is at CSU now. And so she needed to get hours for her new class, and she called me. And I'm like, “Absolutely!”

When his former mentee needed field hours for her teaching class, she easily had the connection with Carl to ask for help (whereas other students may have to cold call or rely on references). He loved the fact that they reached out to him to check in still even though they are no longer in the program. The longevity and depth of these mentorship relationships is important to the mentor TOCs, not only on a professional level (as many of these mentees will be their future peers), but also on a personal level.

Mentor Nina also felt the same familial bond with her mentee when she explained:

> I feel like I'm a part of their life. One of my mentees, she already graduated last year, and I had her for a complete school year for the fall and winter semester. She invited me to the CPTP celebration. I was there to present her for recognition and she introduced me to her family and so it was really nice to be able to do that even though we only met through Zoom.

Nina mentions the powerful fact that her sense of closeness with her mentee was developed almost entirely online. She only met her mentee in person at her graduation celebration after a whole year of mentorship on Zoom, but Nina could see the impact she made on her mentee. The benefit of a relationship formed online is that it can be sustained online once the student moves on to their transfer institution. Like Christine and Carl, Nina shared that she wanted to extend the relationship beyond the mentoring program as they were able to form a close bond and would be colleagues in the future. Other mentors talked about writing letters of recommendations and providing references for their mentees when they applied for jobs. The networking and capital building for the TOC and

community college mentees provided both emotional and practical benefits for the mentor-mentee pairs.

However, the relationship building and networks actually extended beyond just the mentor pairs. The mentors, who came from different schools across Los Angeles, utilized the built-in network of mentors in the program to learn from each other. Teaching can be a very isolating profession when teachers keep to their own classroom, but for mentors like Romy, mentorship provided an opportunity for teachers to venture outside of the classroom. She remarked:

> Sometimes we tend to just close our classroom and be in our own room and try to do things on our own. But for me, it's like, we learn in collaboration and our students get better when we collaborate with our teachers…And I'm getting just close to my own school, my own community, and that's it. But I think for me, it's like being able to talk to other teachers at other sites.

Thus, the mentors viewed mentorship as a collective and collaborative effort, not an isolated one. The mentorship allowed Romy to get closer to other mentor teachers and also feel a sense of belonging at her school and community.

Christine had a comparable experience and outlook about learning from other mentor teachers in the program PLC group when she shared:

> I always love to hear other teachers' perspectives and hear their joy or hear their difficulties. We can commiserate together, both positive and negative. I still enjoy that. I enjoy the collaboration and I enjoy the mentees. I enjoy developing that relationship and being able to share my knowledge with them.

Bonding over their shared mentoring journey created a sense of kinship and belonging for Christine. Even with the more challenging parts, she felt like they could “commiserate” together

and support one another with their knowledge. As a result, mentoring can form relationships beyond just the mentor-mentee pair, but instead extend to the network of mentor teachers involved.

Learnings from the Culture of Mentorship and Reciprocity

Mentor TOCs view their role and the purpose of mentorship is to humanize teacher development, and ultimately, the TOC pipeline. It is an alternative to the status quo of teacher preparation that is overly transactional, theoretical, and riddled with barriers for students of Color. As students of Color who went through the system themselves and made it to the other side as teachers, the mentors have a unique understanding of the teacher education system and what their role can be in transforming it. Many of the mentors critically reflected on their experiences going through the pathway and the barriers riddled within it. Eva brought up the status quo of teacher education as being full of obstacles when she expressed:

> I mean it hasn't changed since I've left. I've been out of teacher education since 2010. So what is that? Like 13 years? I feel like it's still the same. You still have to take classes, and it's a lot of hoops. And that's where I'm honest with my mentees and knowing that this is an ongoing thing. Just when you thought that you finished this class, there's another class around the corner, there's another test around the corner.

Eva mentioned that even a decade later, she noticed that the content and practices of teacher preparation has stayed stagnant, including the "hoops" that are entrenched in the system. Whether it is an additional "class" or "test" forced upon new teachers, these barriers continued to endure, with little end in sight.

Melody confirmed the various barriers that pre service teachers typically faced during induction and how it is a completely different experience with CPTP. She disclosed:

> So my induction students, I should say they have huge skin in the game. This is their

> career, like they need to clear their credentials. They have homework assignments, they need to do them. They are teaching, they're in the classroom. They're having to balance and navigate the demands of being a full time classroom teacher and being new. Plus the demands of the mentor program, which the induction family will tell you: it's not about the paperwork, it's about the relationship, which is all good and true. But at the end of the day, there is a lot of paperwork that needs to get done because of credentialing and certifications and all that important stuff. But like the nice part about CPTP is it really is relational. It really is about the weekly meetings are great and the hours are great, but there's not really other layers of red tape that you have to go through. I think that makes it very inviting, because it really does become about a relationship.

As Melody described, working full time, going to school, being part of a mentorship, and loads of paperwork to clear credentialing is what characterizes the induction student experience. An already overwhelming experience of licensing feeds into another overwhelming experience as they head into the classroom as a brand new teacher. However, with "huge skin in the game" such as student debt and time/energy spent on the profession, preservice teachers do not have much flexibility, time, or room to change. As a mentor for induction students, Melody admitted that the mentorship program in teacher education actually had more to do with paperwork around requirements rather than the relationship. On the other hand, CPTP bypassed the bureaucracy of teacher education and truly created an "inviting" program centered on relationships instead of hoops or paperwork.

Eva also agreed on the vast amount of paperwork and time it takes for induction mentors to participate in traditional teacher preparation programs. She said:

> Because I feel like in the teaching program, it's always like you have to show why you are getting this. There's always paperwork attached to it, which kind of turns off a lot of

> teachers because we're already bombarded with so much. And so I think that is something that kind of drew me to this, and I think draws others is that yeah, I can lend my expertise and yet not feel so overwhelmed with adding something to my plate. So I think that's like the main difference is that you don't have to feel like you are just bombarded with so many requirements of you during your busy day. And it's open ended, whereas the credential program it's, 'No, we're focusing on this and this is what the student needs and how are you going to help them?

As Eva shared, traditional teacher mentorship often involved much paperwork and a prescriptive relationship style where mentors felt "bombarded" by the requirements. The CPTP mentorship was different because it was more open, accessible, and involved very few requirements or paperwork, so it helped draw more teachers to become mentors.

When mentorship prioritizes checklists and evaluative measures over the relational aspects, the mentors felt that what ends up happening is a much more transactional connection. As Romy put it:

> I know when I was in college, all we had to do was do our due hours (complete hours, go and volunteer in classrooms), but you never got to talk to the teacher. You would go and do your two-three hours and 'oh, please sign this paper' and that was it. And I think with the CPTP program, it's like you actually built that relationship with an actual teacher…And then I know, the last two hires came to my classroom and I got to talk to them. And I was like, they haven't gotten this training or they haven't gotten this exposure to it. And it's just like, 'Why? why haven't they?' To me, it's just like, why has that change not happened at the credential program.

Romy admitted that when she was in the credential program almost two decades ago, she never got to interact with her mentor teacher beyond asking her to sign off on hours. And when she talked to the new teachers at her school, she was surprised to find out that the current teacher programs are still not that much different from the one she graduated from in terms of its transactional nature.

Michelle got to experience being a mentor in two different contexts: one for another mentoring program that prioritized observations and one for CPTP. She denotes the differences:

> So this one was way more hands on. The other one I never really met the people. I think one time they had us for something at the College and that was the first time I'd ever been able to put faces. I didn't mind; I didn't. The students came with the criteria that we had to fulfill. And it was fine. There was no pressure. The students came to my class. I never really had to touch base outside of class unless they wanted to do something.

In comparison with Michelle's other mentoring experience, she could not even remember the faces of the students she mentored because they would come, get what they needed, and leave. There was not the space nor the structure to facilitate the development of a relationship that transcended the walls of the classroom. Whereas with the CPTP relationship, Michelle felt like she got more out of it because it was more "hands on" and interactive, thus pointing again to the relational nature of the space.

When she was a student, Nina remembered the overwhelming nature of going through a teaching program and saw that her mentees faced a similar challenge. She commented:

> Well, thinking back to when I was becoming a teacher, the teaching credential program tries to support you the best way possible to prepare you to become a teacher, but there's still so many things. It's so overwhelming receiving all the information in addition to the teacher preparation and your assignments. Just navigating how to apply to a teaching

position or do you want to become a teacher or do you want to be an interventionist? What kind of teacher? Elementary school middle school high school, a specific language? There's so many dual immersion programs nowadays. It gets a little overwhelming.

The teacher education space assumes that students have had the experiences to make an informed decision regarding their education career, however, as Nina pointed out, there are so many different roads that a teacher can go down and students are often hit with all of these options all at once during their schooling.

For Melody, the theoretical and structural parts of teaching were not nearly as important as the actual heart of the teacher. She criticized how:

> I feel like higher ed can probably do a better job of being more real. And like, yes, it's like 90% heart, like you really care about this. I can teach you all the standards, and I can teach you all the strategies, but if you don't care about the kids and this is not a priority, you're not a good teacher.

The passion for the work and the care towards the students were seen as essential aspects of the job that were more important than "standards" and "strategies." Melody wanted to see teacher prep be more realistic and explicit about the social and emotional skills of being a good teacher, not just the practical components.

Shannon shared similar sentiments about the disconnect between the credential granting institutions of higher education and the actual practice of teaching. She said:

> And I'll go back to like my student teachers that I've had in my classroom, where they come in and they expect me to just give them my lesson plan and say, 'Here you go teach it.' And I'm like, 'Nope, no one did that for me.' No one's going to do that when you sign your contract and say, 'Here are your keys to your classroom.' No one's going to do that.

> And they're like, 'What do you mean? Don't they give you a curriculum or something?' I said, 'You might get a pacing guide. You might get your textbooks, but nothing tells you how to teach and how to put it together.' So a lot of that has been where I have to say, 'You're going to learn how to put it together and show me that lesson.'

Even with her recent student teachers, Shannon noted how the expectations of the student teachers did not meet the realities and challenges of teaching. The expectation that "pacing guides" and "curriculums" would be handed over easily was a shock to Shannon, so she wanted to make sure that her mentees had a clear picture of the amount of preparation and work good teachers engaged in.

For someone like Celine, she realized that traditional teacher preparation lacked the diversity, equity, and inclusion content that she believed was so important when teaching a diverse student body. She criticized:

> We need to improve it…. When I was going to college (and even now they see), the only class that really taught about multiculturalism was my ethnic studies. And my students are from all different cultures. The students in general, especially here in California, and I think around the United States because we are a country of immigrants. We need to also learn to understand how to deal with other cultures and that I have to learn on my own. Nobody taught me about that. And now that I have talked to younger people, I see that it's the same problem. I have to tell them about it. And you know if they give them only one class, that is not going to help.

As Celine points out, most of the DEI content is often relegated to one class at the university, so anyone interested in this type of work had to find resources on their own. Knowing how important it was that students developed their cultural competency, Celine took it upon herself to develop

her skills and talk to younger people about multiculturalism and the richness it brings into education. In that sense, Celine became a vital source for the development of the student's critical consciousness because no such learning space existed like this in their classrooms.

Rachel shared similar sentiments about the importance of DEI and social justice work that was missing in teacher preparation. She remarked:

> There's a program where you just attend classes and all of a sudden you're a teacher? I'm thinking, well, first of all, they're lacking all of the education they need, but second of all, there isn't much of a social justice lens at all. It's just a fast track to something that shouldn't be fast tracked. It's really strengthened the values that I have for social justice.

To Rachel, just attending classes is not enough to become a teacher; the real world learnings and social justice lens are lessons for teachers that should not be rushed, but need time to be developed and understood. This missing piece in the system strengthened Rachel's resolve for social justice and making sure that lens is used with future teachers.

Skills that the mentors helped their students with were not limited to the practicalities of getting a job or managing time, but also included development of a critical consciousness. Roger explained his stance on the importance of teacher mentorship through a social justice lens when he said:

> Teaching preparation can be very colorblind. So as teacher leaders, it's important for us to train our new teachers to not come in colorblind and to be able to see that all these things are happening in the classroom: That our students' identities and lived experiences are very important, and we have to be sensitive to that. In addition to knowing your content, classroom management, of course, but we know that teaching now in 2023 requires more skills…I think a special set of skills and it's not impossible. Yes, it's more complex, but I

> think that when we are staying up with the times and aware of what's going on, especially in the social political realm, then that makes us relevant teachers and effective teachers.

To combat the "colorblindness" of the education system, teacher mentorship with a critical race lens can be an important factor in changing views and behavior of future teachers. As Roger pointed out, to be an effective teacher in diverse classrooms, it was vastly important that teachers not only know content or behavior management, but they should also be able to understand "students' identities and lived experiences." Critical consciousness development can happen early on during teacher education at community college so that future teachers can cultivate culturally sustaining pedagogical practices as they move through the educator pathway.

Romy also pointed out how mentorship gave her students a chance to develop their critical consciousness and think about DEI topics, which still is a rare opportunity once the teachers are in the field. She said:

> And that's where I tell my mentees like you guys are getting so much more things that me as a teacher we're still fighting for, or we're asking for, as far as learning about diverse students and more inclusion. You're getting it first because even as educators, we still haven't gotten it.

DEI topics in education often are relegated to either one class or not focused on at all, so Romy wanted to let her mentees know how valuable it is that they are already being exposed to DEI so early on and able to engage in these conversations. Teachers from her generation are still fighting for those DEI skills to be taught. In the end, while the mentor TOCs called out the status quo and challenges in teacher preparation, the culture of mentorship in the CPTP program helped them to see how they could serve as the very ones to change things for the better. In this culture, mentor

TOCs learned how to rehumanize teacher learning and recognized how essential they are in leading the movement to diversify a GYO teacher pipeline.

Creating a Culture of Mentorship and Reciprocity among TOCs

The function of the mentor TOCs in a GYO teacher pipeline is to create a culture of mentorship and reciprocity among teachers of Color. In the next section, the mentors share about the mutual benefits of mentorship and how the cycle of mentoring keeps giving and receiving, especially for teachers of Color.

Desire to Give Back and Getting Something In Return

Although it may not always be portrayed that way, mentorship is a two-way street, where benefits are exchanged. The sense of reciprocity was strongly evident among the mentor TOCs. Melody shared:

> But until you're in there like facilitating a discussion and really trying to help that person, contribute and grow. You know, you're not growing. It's best if you're doing it sort of together so that I think that mentor and the mentee, you're equally learning from each other. It really is such a neat relationship.

Growth was happening on both ends of the relationship, not just one. Melody felt like she was learning from her mentee and vice versa. Michelle also made note of the reciprocity that she felt towards the mentees, “I think they bring so much to me. So I feel that it's completely reciprocal, the fact that I hope I'm giving them something worthwhile, and they're giving me something worthwhile.”

Carl also talked about the rejuvenation he felt as a mentor and being inspired by his mentees. He said:

> I know I do what I do, I love it. I'm good at it. It is a great feeling at the end of the day.

> But it's rejuvenating to mentor someone who you see is working so hard to do what it is you do. So I wouldn't say it's changed me per se, but it's a reminder to continue to stoke my own fire. Because I feel like the better I get when I get those mentees coming in, they're going to be better if I keep getting better, because it's a rubber band. So you know, if I pull you're going to follow me. And then eventually when you snap forward, you'll go past me.

Carl used the metaphor of a "rubber band" where the benefits for both mentor and mentee snap back and forth so that both can move forward. Having mentees, Carl knew that he had to continue to learn, grow, and "get better" so that his mentees could do the same. His motivation and growth was tied to his mentees and their success.

Eva almost quit being a mentor because she felt like she could not offer the in person experience that others could provide, but her mentees would not let her. She said:

> I felt really bad because I'm in a virtual setting where they're not physically able to come to a classroom, have kids, volunteer and get really that hands-on experience some of the other mentees are getting. So I really questioned whether it was something that I wanted to do again, another semester, but they begged me. They're like 'No! stay on! We don't want to get a new mentor, please.' So I felt like I really owe that to them. So anyone that's willing to stick it out with me, I'm here for them.

The relationship Eva built with her mentees was so strong and engaging that for them it was more important that she stay with them along the journey. She realized it was less about all the classroom visits she was not able to give them, but more about the relationship with her. She "owed" it to them to stick it out and because they were there for her.

Teresa also felt that special bond to want to stick it out for her mentee. She said:

> So even for this semester, to be honest, she was one of the reasons I came back. As I said, initially, I would have come back but just to know that she was also coming back, it encouraged me more to sign up. And so I think having a good relationship with my mentee and just seeing her progress and her growth, even as we went out. I wanted to see the finished product, the reward of this all and so it really molded me, motivated me

She wanted to see her mentee grow and succeed, so the relationship kept her in the program. Teresa illustrates the powerful retention component for the mentors is the deep relationship they felt with the mentees and wanting to see them grow and reach the finish line. They knew it would take time and investment on their part, but they had motivation to keep showing up for their mentees.

For Sheryl, there were very practical benefits she was hoping to get out of giving her time and energy to mentorship and it was to find and keep more teachers. She said:

> We've had a big revolving door in education. We've had..(I've been in Kinder the last seven years but I've taught K through six). So seeing new teachers come in and in one month saying I don't think I want to do this. I'm like, "wow, how does this happen?" Probably in the last seven years, I've had four that have quit by fall. That's a lot. And I asked them, 'Well, how much time did you serve talking to an educator?"

Sheryl experienced firsthand the "revolving door" of educators leaving her schools because of the isolation and lack of connectedness to other educators to support them. It would boost staff morale and benefit her school community if more teachers were able to stay. Sheryl: Maybe they'll say, "Oh, I know somebody there, and I just hope that they will complete the journey to prepare them for the profession of teaching and hope that they come back and serve our community.

Romy also reiterated the fact that her mentorship is bringing back benefits to her because it would mean that her school would have access to more paraprofessionals and TAs from the community colleges to support their students. She said:

> But I think if we start with mentees that can work in a classroom and get compensated for their time also. Because we are in dire need of paraprofessionals and teachers' assistants, and it will be great that they are already going to community college, getting these courses to learn, and then they're applying it in the class."

Paying It Forward: Mentoring begets Mentoring

A common theme emerged about the cycle of mentorship that keeps paying it forward. Many of the mentors talked about how they wanted to be the mentors they wish they had growing up. And then there were others who talked about how the mentors they had while becoming a teacher were vital in their success, so it only made sense for them to be that mentor to someone else. The mentorship culture is apt to grow if the mentee utilizes their experiences in the program and eventually return to become mentors in the future.

Being the Mentor They Wish They Had

Going through the teaching pathway as one of the few students of Color and/or first generation students can be a very challenging road without a mentor. Many of the mentors had lived experiences that mirrored the students, and upon reflection, wished that they had a mentor when going through their teaching journey. For example, Romy mentioned how lonesome it was to not have a mentor or anyone to help her navigate the system as a student of Color. She said:

> I didn't have a mentor, but I think I want to be that person that supports them and gives/provide that... I'm grateful. I think just because there aren't that many of us. First of all, there's not. I understand that our education system (how can I word this nicely?)...our

> education system…80% are White women, where sometimes we stand out. For me, to navigate between those professional environments, sometimes it's hard. Even when I went through my credential program.

As a Latina student going through her credential program and her teaching career in the LA region, Romy found that the teaching profession and its predominantly White spaces to be challenging to her minority identity. She knew how difficult it was and did not want other students like her to experience the same type of isolation and marginalization. Therefore, she wanted to be the supportive mentor she never had while going to school.

Christine shared a similar sentiment of wanting to be an encouraging and inspiring role model to her students, which is someone she also never had. She noted how that effected her:

> I didn't really have somebody who was that person that said, 'Oh, you need to go into teaching, it's fabulous. You're gonna love it.' I didn't really have a person like that. It was just really getting involved with subbing and when I started to research and find out if this was something I really wanted to do. Teachers were telling me it's not anything like subbing. It's just completely different because subbing can be difficult.

Christine did not have anyone to show her what teaching could be like, so she had to find her own way of teaching. There was no mechanism or structure at the time for Christine to explore becoming a teacher besides going into the classroom via substituting. However, the transient nature of such a job does not allow for mentoring relationships nor can it paint a realistic picture of being a teacher. Now with a program like this and with guidance from an experienced teacher, the community college students may be able to avoid the roundabout way to teaching profession that Christine experienced.

The “suffering” was what Nina wanted to relieve for her mentees in their journey to become teachers. She said:

> It's so overwhelming receiving all the information in addition to the teacher preparation and your assignment…I want to try to help others and not have them suffer as much as I did, but make it an easier experience for them so that they don't get deterred away from it because it is very important. I feel like it's important to get as many students of Color and teachers of Color with a wide variety of experiences. For many of us, because of the challenges that we face, it gets harder for us and maybe we'll just say well, you know what, this is too difficult; I should do something else to support my family or whatever. And so, I want to do my little part and mentor to share my experience with them and see if they can connect with that and just try to help them however they need to be helped.

Nina saw her role as trying to “make it an easier experience” or helping the students overcome the barriers and overwhelming nature of teacher preparation. As someone who went through the process herself without a mentor, Nina knew that those challenges could build up and deter students of Color from the teaching pathway. She believed that whatever help she was able to provide right now would hopefully retain as many of the students and teachers of Color in the future.

Being the Mentor They Had

While some of the mentor TOCs went through the teacher preparation process without any mentors, others talked extensively about how mentors were vital to their success. Because they understood and reaped the benefits of having an influential and supportive mentor (many of whom were also mentors of Color), they felt that it was their turn to pass this experience forward to their

mentees. Teresa was one of these teachers who was mentored and felt passionate about the mentoring relationship. She talked about her commitment:

> So I told myself that I wanted to do the full two years because I know the benefits of what having a mentor is. I know the benefits of having a mentor, and I wanted other people to get that benefit that I had. Also I had a good relationship with my mentee…I felt like when I had a mentor, I saw things in a school that my other counterparts didn't see (who didn't have a mentor). And so I realized that even when I started in my first year, there were other teachers who started after the same time, and they left the school before because they didn't have certain things under their belts to manage what was there.

Teresa attributed both her retention in the profession and this mentoring program to her mentor. They allowed her to see the realities of being a teacher and helped her to "manage it" whereas others who did not have a mentor struggled to stay at the school.

Celine experienced a mentor at the beginning of her teaching career and it made her into the teacher she is today:

> I was very fortunate that in my second year or my third year as a teacher, I think I got a wonderful mentor. Out of the goodness of her heart, she came to my classroom. Her name is Jane, and she really helped me to revamp my classroom. I think that her advice has been very valuable in my career…I consider the mentors, the program, so it was super valuable for me. I would not be a teacher without it.

Celine had first hand knowledge of the power of mentoring to support teachers, especially in the early years of their career. The care and practical advice she gave to Celine "revamped" her classroom and gave her what she needed to be a competent and inspiring teacher for the long haul.

She also linked her staying in the teaching career because of her mentor and felt motivated to join this mentorship program because of the value she saw in it.

Melody's teacher of Color was the inspiration and reason she joined the teaching profession as well as mentorship programs. She noted her motivations:

> And so when CPTP came around, I'm like wow, this is kind of an opportunity to be that person that helped me get off and running. That it was a teacher of color that encouraged me to be a teacher. I never thought about that until CPTP, to be quite honest. I didn't. I just really liked her. Ms. Lopez inspired me. Yeah, but why? Duh, because we related! She was just like me. We spoke Spanish, we were Hispanic, we were middle of three hour stories were similar. I don't know, there was just something about that connection that now I'm like, 'well duh, I didn't have that connection with my male teachers or my PE teacher or whatever.' It's like it was her; It was my Spanish teacher. Why? Because I guess I saw myself in her and perhaps she saw herself in me. And that's why she was always very encouraging. 'You know, you'd make a really good teacher. Have you ever thought about being a teacher?' So, I think now I tell my kiddos that all the time.

Having someone who related to her and who initially planted the idea of being a teacher made such an impact on Melody that she knew she wanted to be the person to help another future teacher "get off and running." In this case, the teacher's similar identity to her held a lot of significance in creating a strong connection, more so than any of the other teachers on campus. The connection made the encouragement more special, so Melody always made it a point to display the same empowering attitude toward her students and mentees.

Similarly, Nina also mentioned how the Latina identity of her mentor was an important factor in motivating her not to give up during her educational and professional journey. She elaborated:

> It was nice to see someone like that who shared similar experiences to what I was going through and being able to succeed in his field. It serves as an inspiration… I have a mentor. She's also a professor. She's Latina, and she has a very similar experience. She understands the different challenges that a Latina, and as a woman (not even just a Latino in general), but as a Latina, I know what challenges we face and she's like, I went through this through XYZ and I know that you went through XYZ and just know that you can do it. Don't give up. It's not impossible. So it's very motivating to hear and to see that they experienced similar experiences and that they've reached the level that they're at. I hope that I can do that to my mentees.

Nina was able to identify with her Latina professor and saw her as someone who successfully overcame her challenges to be in her position. Her role modeling and guidance as a mentor instilled faith in Nina that she could achieve her professional goals. The empathetic and role modeling style of mentorship she received as a student trickled down to her current mentees. Thus, the cycle of mentorship keeps on repeating itself.

Eva's mother, who was a teacher, became her mentor because she did not have a formal mentor opportunity in her program. That mentorship experience moved her to want to give back to the community by helping someone else going through the teaching journey. She shared:

> I felt like it was something that I can do to give back to a community who is within our district and also to a person that was once like me in my shoes. I didn't have this opportunity to connect with another teacher and help me in my earlier years. I was

> actually very blessed to have someone in my family, such as my mom, to give me some inside information on what to anticipate. But for some people, they don't have that. And so I was thinking that this is my way to lend an ear or help them in any way that I can to navigate all the ways of teaching. It's not just about how you qualify for it (whether taking multiple tests or signing up for this class or that class, it's also about making connections), there's so many different things that you can do before you get into the teaching credential program that I discovered. I want to be able to be that person that helps them discover those things sooner than later.

Eva really saw her role as someone who not only helps mentees navigate the practical qualifications to become a teacher, but also the social aspects of it ("making connections") that are less talked about. Eva is engaged in a form of social and cultural capital development that can sometimes be just as important as the content and pedagogical knowledge in helping a future teacher succeed.

Becoming Change Agents for Mentorship and TOCs

Another role that the mentor TOCs saw themselves engaging in is one of a change agent advocating for mentorship and teachers of Color in the community. The mentor TOCs spoke about the impact of their mentorship with the community college student as being part of a larger movement to create a diverse teaching force that will transform the education system. In fact, they saw the benefits of the mentoring relationship reverberating beyond the student-teacher pairing and felt that it would affect the wider community for many years to come. The relationship between the current teacher and future teacher actually becomes a key resource in achieving a sustained, community-based educator force that can meet the needs of the students.

Shannon became known as a teacher leader for mentorship when she initiated recruiting more mentor teachers into the program. Her direct school community was impacted because so many of her teachers ended up becoming mentors, so several of the mentees came for classroom visits and met other teachers at the school. She mentioned her ambassadorship:

> I ended up recruiting a lot more teachers on my site. Teachers got started mentoring, and actually when a couple of other teachers reached out they're like, "Shannon, you're always mentoring. I want to do that too." And so other teachers kind of said, 'How do I do it?' I'm like, 'Okay, send them [the community college] an email. Here you go. You just tell them you want to mentor.'

It was a common sight to see CPTP mentees around the campus that a culture began to build on campus and got other teachers interested. Shannon became the go to ambassador to find out more about the program, get mentors started, and all around thought partner to troubleshoot when another teacher was facing challenges with a mentee. She would even get the teachers to try out book clubs or meetings for all the mentors and mentees to get together. Through her CPTP experience, Shannon was a changemaker by opening up the doors for teachers in her community to become teacher leaders and mentors.

Melody was a changemaker, but on the opposite end of the pipeline; she actively used her mentoring role to recruit more students into the mentorship program and teaching pathway:

> I definitely see more potential CPTP students in the community. Like when my students come back to visit. Like, "Oh. Guess what? I'm in the AVID program or I'm in the Honors Program." "Oh, good. Well, if you're considering Rustic Canyon College, you might want to consider our CPTP program." So I think just kind of like, when I'm out in the community and when I'm serving the community, whether it's through an event, or

> reconnecting with former students, it's like keeping that on their radar. "Hey, consider it, just consider it. Just try it out and see what you think." And two students are back now, here at my school, because we've kept that connection and both are instructional assistants that want to be teachers. So it definitely helps to keep a pulse on the community."

Knowing that there is a mentorship program like this and understanding how it benefited students of Color interested in teaching, Melody became an advocate to get more of her former students or people at community events to join and "keep it on their radar." She understood the Grow Your Own aspect of it, so she outreached to the former students/instructional assistants to let them know about this resource. Being a mentor teacher leader who believed in the program, she felt compelled to get outside of her classroom, "keep a pulse in the community," and promoted more students of Color to consider the teaching pathway.

Eva delved into the short term and long term impacts of her mentoring role. She felt that her current students benefited from seeing someone from their community coming into the classroom and continuing to learn for a career in teaching. She said:

> I feel like in the end, I hope there's like a dent of positivity that comes out of this. Whether it's my kids interacting with a mentee that comes in to observe or whether it's the kids seeing how adults still go to school to pursue a future career. Those kinds of things I think all go hand in hand. And then it just brings about a positivity in the sense that the kids can also engage with someone other than myself, right? Because sometimes it's nice just to have a guest in the classroom. And I think it's just nice all around. It's impactful, whether it's big or small.

The small interactions the students had with the mentee of Color served as another space for role modeling and letting students know about teaching as a viable career option. The “community” comes into the classroom and exposes Eva’s students to“someone other than” herself who can provide a fresh perspective. The mentee observer also demonstrated to the students that “adults still go to school to pursue a future career” and enhances the idea of lifelong learner even further.

Christine also referenced the impression that students got from seeing the community college students come into her classroom to learn about teaching. She wanted others to understand:

> And so I think it could impact students to see that this is something... I want to be a teacher and this is something I can actually do! So I think that in that respect, I think it has a great deal of impact on our community, especially because we do have a high speaking Spanish population and lower income that kids you know, sometimes are not encouraged. And so I think that this does provide encouragement, especially if the kids, if the mentees, come from around the same areas. You know, "oh, I went to school right around the corner from you... I went to this school..."And so I think they see, even though it's years in the future for them, I still think that it does have an impact on them.

Seeing even more the representation of future teachers at the community college who look like them and perhaps come from the “same areas” or speak the same language as them is shifting their ideas of the profession. Christine saw it as a way to change the narrative of the teaching workforce and what it could be, which is a viable and welcoming environment for teachers of Color. She thinks those experiences and interactions make it so that her students can say, “I want to be a teacher” and that it is achievable.

The immediate change in mindsets and behavior as a result of the mentees coming into the classroom is evident. But the mentor TOCs also did not want to leave out the long term effects

they see from a mentorship program like this. Eva talked about the long term impact of mentorship and how her mentees in the program most likely will be first to sign up as mentors in the future if a program like this existed:

> You know, what I do as a mentor is kind of hopefully an eye opener for them because if they ever have that inkling where they want to share their expertise too, maybe in the future they can seek out this program and offer the future teachers the same opportunity to get that same valuable experience.

This was a common narrative and expectation that the mentor TOCs held for their mentees, in that the "eye-opening" experiences they are sharing now will not only result in a future teacher of Color, but a future teacher of Color who is ready to give back to the community by becoming a mentor to other future teachers. Like many of her colleagues, Eva was thinking a few steps ahead to how the culture of mentoring begets mentoring and understands the longer-term impact she had by engaging with these students in the short term.

This connection of their mentorship to a bigger mission was a theme that kept repeating among the mentor TOCs. As a teacher scholar, Rachel became so interested in mentorship that she decided to pursue a doctorate to study it. Her belief in mentorship and getting students of Color across the finish line to become a teacher was now a part of her purpose and she wanted to continue mentoring in the long run. She expressed:

> The feedback that I get from the mentees is so rewarding that I want to continue. I want to pass it on, pass it forward, and continue passing it forward because nothing but good can come out of this program and the mentorship and the way the students are being cared for, challenged, and loved at the same time. That is so needed for future teachers of Color. So I believe in every aspect of this program.

As someone who has reaped the rewarding benefits of mentorship and understands the bigger picture of getting more future teachers of Color in the community, her positive relationship and experiences as a mentor motivated her to want to "pass it forward." Rachel will continue to pass it forward not only by the practice of mentoring but also by the scholarly research she will be contributing on mentorship of teachers. Mentorship is the gift that keeps on giving.

Teresa saw the mentorship opportunity to be a different way to prepare future teachers of Color in an empowering way, that in turn, will affect their future students. She said:

> I think about all the students that are going to be changed as a result of this. I think about all the teachers that are going to be even more ready and feel like they've learned a lot and being able to go into the classroom and feel confident to teach and to execute.

Teresa hinted at the indirect impact that she and other mentor TOCs will be having on "all the students" who are fortunate to have a teacher of Color who has been mentored. Teresa's did not want her mentoring end goal to stay contained with her mentee, but instead, she saw it as a way to benefit all the future students this teacher will have in their classroom. Having this future teacher "feel confident to teach and execute" at a high level and for culturally diverse students translates into better outcomes for students.

Roger echoed a similar mindset to Teresa when asked about this effect on the community. He said:

> But do I think I have an effect on what I'm doing within the wider community? Of course! I think my work with new teachers, ultimately is going to impact their work with their students and their students within their community with their home. So in a way, I think I'm sort of indirectly impacting them.

Roger references how his mentoring work will not only impact the students, but also the "home"

they come from, and ultimately, the wider "community" they are a part of. Roger was also pursuing his doctorate in education, focusing on mentorship, and understood his work of training future educators through these relationships as essential in building community-focused and culturally-competent teachers who can bridge the home community with the school community.

For Romy, who was about to retire, she saw her role as "passing the torch" of changemaking to the next generation:

> As I'm ending my career, as I'm coming to the end towards the later part of my career...what do I stand for? What is it that I believe? And I've been able to now word it better and explain why it's important. Why is it important for us to still continue to carry that on and be able to pass that torch on. That is what's most important: Being able to say, "Yes, I'm almost at the end of my career, but it's up to you guys to now make this change in our system.

As someone who has long advocated for her students of Color and nearing the end of her career, she saw mentorship as one last shot at advocating even further and leaving a legacy that would go beyond her tenure as a teacher. She was hoping that her mentorship would instill in the mentees a passion for advocacy on behalf of the students they will one day teach and to "make a change in our system."

Summary

In this chapter, I reported the findings from analyzing 15 interviews with mentor teachers of Color involved in the CPTP program for aspiring teachers at the community colleges. The analysis highlighted the mentorship experiences of teachers of Color and how it contributed to their growth into community teachers as well as their understanding of their role in cultivating the next generation of teachers of Color in a GYO teacher pipeline.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The teaching profession has been dealt with two crises at this moment: a teacher shortage and a diversity problem. However, these two challenges do not need to be mutually exclusive, and instead should be looked at as an opportunity to increase the number of teachers of Color (TOCs) to serve the diverse student population. Yet, challenges in recruiting and retaining TOCs still remain due to systemic barriers along the teaching pathway, both pre-service and in-service. Nonetheless, there are promising practices to recruit and retain TOCs, including Grow Your Own (GYO) and mentorship programs that have potential to infuse community into teacher preparation and development. While positive outcomes have been associated with GYO and mentorship programs, issues around varied fidelity across different sites, the lack of a DEI lens, and scaling issues have made these programs difficult to sustain. In addition, mentorship programs couched in traditional preparation and professional development programs and geared towards a mainly White audience, often follow transactional, evaluative, and individualistic structures that end up feeling culturally isolating to TOCs. As a result, informal mentoring relationships that TOCs build with the community (outside of the institution) have demonstrated effectiveness in creating communal spaces for a sense of belonging and learning about themselves and the diverse students they serve. In addition, mentoring has typically focused on what the mentee receives, but rarely does it focus on the benefits and growth of the mentor. Another overlooked opportunity in teacher preparation is mentorship at the community colleges, where a pool of qualified and diverse students ready to give back to their community and can be recruited and supported through the teaching pathway by TOCs.

This study attempted to shine light on the undervalued assets of TOCs and community college students in a diverse teacher pipeline that can bring about transformative change in education. My research investigated the mentorship experiences of mentor TOCs in a GYO model of teacher preparation and development centered around the community colleges. Utilizing the concept of Murrell's (2000) community teacher" as a guiding framework, I analyzed how TK-12 mentor TOCs experiences and relationships with community college students aspiring to be teachers fueled their own growth as mentors, teachers, and social justice leaders.

This phenomenological qualitative study used data from 15 interviews with mentor teachers of Color in the Los Angeles area who participated in the Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) program that paired current teachers with students at the community colleges who were interested in teaching. CPTP's structure and the participation of majority BIPOC mentor teachers served as an alternative to the status quo ways of traditional teacher preparation and development that was overly transactional, evaluative, hierarchical, individualistic, and culturally isolating. Instead, the mentor TOCs from CPTP practiced a mentorship that valued responsiveness, empowerment, horizontal power structures, communal and relational ways of being, and culturally enriching experiences. The process of growth and learning flowed both ways and created a sense of reciprocity and belonging that is key in the retention of TOCs in the profession.

To better understand the perspective of mentor teachers of Color and how they grew through the mentorship experience, the following research questions were investigated:

1) How does the experience of being a mentor to community college students aspiring to be teachers contribute to the learning and development of teachers of Color?

2) How do mentor teachers of Color perceive their role and impact in a Grow Your Own teacher pipeline that seeks to increase the number of teachers of Color?

The major findings from the study are that the experience of mentoring community college students interested in teaching creates a space for mentor TOCs to learn and develop into "community teachers" as they prepare the next generation of teachers of Color. As a result of their role in a GYO mentorship program, the mentor TOCs rehumanized teacher preparation and development and played a crucial role in sustaining a diverse teacher pipeline from the community colleges. The findings advance the limited scholarly research on the experiences of mentor teachers of Color and their continued learning and growth through their role. It also extends the idea of Murrell's "community teacher" from the preparation space of White pre-service teachers into the professional development of BIPOC, in-service teachers, who benefit just as much from being mentors. Additionally, the uplifting of the community college students and a community-based GYO teacher pipeline in the diversification of the teaching force is a significant contribution to the field.

In this chapter, I summarize and interpret the significant findings and explain how the results contribute to the existing literature. Next, I detail implications for practices for mentor teachers and education leaders who want to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers of Color, implement culturally sustaining GYO mentorship programs, and center community college students in teacher preparation. Then, I will identify the limitations of the study and suggest future research topics. Lastly, I will share my reflections and conclusions.

Discussion of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of mentor teachers of Color in a GYO mentorship program for aspiring teachers at the community colleges and how it

contributed to the mentor's learning and development. The findings provide evidence for the learning and growth that happen for the mentor TOCs in the mentorship experience with community colleges. Mentor TOCs developed in the four key areas that define a "community teacher": (1) Practice of mentoring community college students; (2) Context of BIPOC cultures, communities, and identities; (3) Communities of practice with pre-service and in-service TOCs; (4) Culture of mentorship and reciprocity.

Blending the Professional with the Personal: Learnings from the Practice of Mentoring Community College Students

The TOCs learned about the community through their mentee and developed their ability to support community college students in a culturally responsive way. Although most of the mentors never explicitly called their practices culturally responsive, implicit in the stories they shared were the tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy. By blending the personal and professional in their mentorship practices, the mentors learned how to meet students wherever they were at in their teaching journey. The following culturally responsive practices were employed by the mentor TOCs to best support their community college mentees.

The mentor TOCs gave the relationship patience and time to build the trust that was needed to support the community college student. That also meant that when students did not respond or missed meetings, mentors did not give up contacting them and used their perseverance to reach their mentees. As a consistent force who kept on showing up for the mentees, the mentor TOCs became someone the students could rely on and it helped them to open up. In the EAM model, coaching with intrusiveness and proactivity is encouraged and TOCs took up that practice, but they also conducted this coaching with the utmost compassion and care.

However, coaching was also infused with empowerment where TOCs worked on building

the mentees' soft skills and pulling the curtain behind the "hidden curriculum" of higher education so that students could navigate the barriers inherent in the spaces of the teaching pathway. Important skills and knowledge such as how to develop critical consciousness, communicate professionally, manage time and prepare for job interviews, were just some of the life skill building that the mentor TOCs addressed with mentees. With a majority of community college students being first generation, these skills were vital in whatever field they end up pursuing in the future.

Another practice mentor TOCs engaged in was following the mentee's lead in exploring teaching and tailoring the experience to match the mentee's interests and goals. Guided early exploration at the community college level (before the students make a choice about going into the profession and what grade or subject areas they will teach) is important for students to make an informed decision with little investment upfront. The mentor TOCs also made sure to not "sugar coat" the profession, but to give them real and authentic experiences that could help them think critically about their commitment and alignment to the profession. Especially when the student is a first generation student and first generation teacher, this extra time and intention to explore with a mentor is a crucial step in making sure that the career is the right fit. These experiences in the early phases of recruitment and career development have long-standing implications down the line for retention of TOCs.

For students who historically have been marginalized in education, the welcoming (and even paid) opportunity to explore teaching sends an inclusive message that invites them to try it out and that the profession values what they can bring. Because of the freedom to decide on the mentorship activities and the fact that this mentorship took place during the pandemic, the mentors got creative with how to tailor the experience to the mentee and their interests. They continually were flexible and adapted to the changing needs and circumstances of the student as their

relationship progressed. The online space proved to be conducive for early exploration, customization, and collaborative processes that were accessible and met the needs of community college students.

The mentor TOCs also utilized a multi-level system of support to help with mentoring. Whether it was program staff, fellow teachers at their school, or the Teacher Mentoring Network, the mentors tapped into the knowledge and experiences of others also dedicated to the success of their mentee. Thus, the mentor never was really alone in mentoring their students and could seek support whenever necessary. The responsibility of mentorship became a collective effort rather than an individual one.

The Responsibility of Leaving the Door Open Behind Them: Learnings from the Context of BIPOC Cultures, Communities, and Identities

By mentoring aspiring teachers at the community colleges, teachers of Color opened up the walls of their classroom to create personal and professional learning opportunities for themselves as well as a community where the mentor's cultural knowledge, identity, and lived experiences were welcomed and valued. As the TOCs reflected on their experience mentoring aspiring TOCs, it was evident that mentors saw themselves as role models who had a responsibility to leave the door behind them for future TOCs. The cultural similarities they had with the community college students led to a strong sense of connection and belonging for both parties involved. While commonalities among ethnic/racial identities were most prominent, intersectional identities with SES, first generation status, and gender/LGBTQ were also present. Goodwin (2004) also found that the identities and lived experiences of teacher educators of Color were extremely valuable for students of Color:

Given their unique experiences, these respondents are uniquely positioned to empathize

> with students of color because they have been where these students now are and can discern hidden potential in children of color because they themselves have had much potential as learners, talents there that may have escaped the eyes of mainstream Educators.

The mentor TOCs also used this experience to recognize the uniqueness and assets of the community college student, which included a diversity in lived experiences, a strong desire to give back to the community, and a resilience factor that would make them great additions to the profession. Additionally, mentor TOCs knew that their contribution as a mentor was a part of a bigger social justice mission. There was a sense of shared responsibility among TOCs for the development of culturally responsive, quality teachers of Color for the sake of their future students and the community.

In her conceptual model, Yosso (2005) proposes an asset-based lens in viewing the cultural capital of communities of color and acknowledges the wealth they can bring to education and the fight for social justice. "Grow Your Own" designs are built along this fundamental idea of the value in looking within the community for strength and solutions rather than the deficit lens of needing to be "rescued" or marginalized. A mentorship program like CPTP that centers on race and is composed primarily of mentor TOCs and students of Color who come from the community colleges (another marginalized space in the education sector), is trying to flip the dominant narratives that persist about these communities.

The contextual learning in and among communities of Color was a significant outcome for mentor TOCs in this program. It is presumptuous to reserve culturally responsive learning and critical conscious development to pre-service classes or one day professional development workshops at the beginning of the year that are geared towards White teachers. Teachers are

continually learning and honing their craft to better serve their students, including teachers of Color. The assumption that all teachers of Color have all the knowledge and skills to teach diverse students is essentializing and does not give them space to deepen their understanding of the community, social, justice, and critical understandings of race, ethnicity, class, and culture. Such knowledge of the community integrates practice and theory is constantly shifting and iterative no matter how seasoned the TOC is, so opportunities such as mentorship can be very important for this type of learning to happen among this undervalued group.

Hope for the Future: Learnings from the Communities of Practice with Pre-service and In-service Teachers

The community, in the form of the community college student, came into the mentor TOCs' classroom and the relationship that formed created a Community of Practice for reflection and connection. As many of the TOCs shared, and literature confirmed, teaching can easily be an isolating and individualistic profession, especially for teachers of Color. Many teachers of Color do not have the chance to venture outside of their classroom or school walls, but as mentors, it provided a unique opportunity to integrate the community into their everyday consciousness. Thus, learning becomes a communal and iterative process that happens in context and with others.

The findings reinforce the idea that teachers are "generative" learners who need to be able to integrate new and existing knowledge to continually learn and solve unfamiliar problems in teaching and practices (Franke et al., 2001). This learning process requires teachers to re-frame themselves as both teacher and learner, which tends to happen in the context of collaborative inquiry, also known as Communities of Practice. The student-mentor relationship is considered a Community of Practice where the teacher mentor is prompted to reflect and reconsider their own prior understandings and meaning of teaching and education (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The

role of expertise and creator of knowledge is decentralized, no longer lying with university education program best practices or solely with the "expert" mentor teacher. Instead, teachers and mentees work together to construct local knowledge ("knowledge of practice") and connect their daily work to larger social and community contexts.

When applied to this study, the mentorship Communities of Practice with in-service and pre-service teachers yielded the following outcomes for the mentor TOCs. The mentoring relationship facilitated reflection, awareness, and empathy among the TOCs so that they could think about the things happening beyond their classroom. Their familial and friend-like relationships with the mentees also produced a sense of connection that integrated their personal and professional identities and offered a safe space for contemplating practice that may not always be available for TOCs at school sites with hostile racial climates.

In terms of growth, the TOCs also felt inspired by their mentees to continue their own professional learning. Whether it was utilizing the mentorship space to hone their coaching and facilitation skills or building their confidence as a leader, mentoring served as a prime space for professional development. However, they also developed personally, as mentorship gave them a chance to be part of equity and social justice work by developing their critical consciousness and contributing directly to dismantling inequitable systems in education. Mentoring allowed them to become better teachers, leaders, and advocates.

Finally, the mentor TOCs' experience as a mentor prompted them to feel valued and empowered. For newer teachers, this came in the form of building confidence in themselves as teachers. And for veteran teachers, it elevated their role in their community and helped them to find the joy and passion in the work again. Overall, being a mentor to the community college

mentees gave them a renewed sense of love and hope for the future of the profession and the community that is lucky to have these qualified and passionate teachers.

Rehumanizing Teacher Preparation and Development in a GYO Pipeline: Learnings from the Culture of Mentorship and Reciprocity

Mentor TOCs were essential players in building a culture of mentorship and reciprocity among current and future teachers of Color. Almost every TOC talked about the importance of mentorship (or lack of mentorship) and how that impacted their own lives and their journey into teaching. Some saw this opportunity as a way to give students the mentorship they were lucky to receive or to give them the mentor they wish they had. Their motivations hearkened back to their time as pre-service teachers of Color and their experiences getting through the pathway. They saw a little bit of themselves in the community college students and saw mentorship as a way to redress the injustices they faced or repay the kindness that was shared with them. The mentor TOCs recognized that by giving their time and energy now to the community college students, they not only were receiving something in return, but that it would be a gift that would keep on giving. Overall, there was an impression that the mentees would pay it forward in the future for other TOCs. Mentorship begetting mentorship and the reciprocity TOCs felt towards each other were themes that emerged from the mentor TOCs' narratives and directed attention to the role that they play in sustaining a GYO teacher pipeline.

Lastly, mentor TOCs were able to realize their potential as advocates for mentoring and students of Color through this mentorship experience. The change in mindset and behavior to become "change agents" and equity leaders is vastly important in transforming the education system. For mentor teachers who have gone through and feel disillusioned by the system, the mentoring relationship created a space for critical reflection and empowerment, developing them

as change agents in their respective schools. Villegas and Davis (2008) found that most of the research on diversification of the teaching profession continues to focus too much on representation rather than the preparation needed for TOCs to promote equity and alter systemic inequities in student achievement. Thus, mentorship provided an ideal training ground for the mentor TOCs to promote equity and to prepare their mentees to do the same. As Goodwin (2004) shared, "Teacher educators of color possess an empathic understanding of the lives of children of color, which results in a strong desire to engage in social action and redress inequities." Therefore, mentorship allows them to fulfill that desire. Many of the mentor TOCs came into the profession with a strong commitment to communities of Color (all of them worked in Title I schools with diverse student populations) and public service, so through mentorship they are able to live out their values by bringing along other TOCs into the profession.

Mentor TOCs and the Development of Murrell's "Community Teachers"

The mentor TOCs in the CPTP program continued their learning and development into Murell's "community teachers" by mentoring the aspiring teachers at the community colleges. The mentorship experience gave the TOCs space for "contextualized knowledge development" of their students and community and empowered them to become "change agents" who play a valuable role in creating a humanistic and diverse teacher pipeline. It was also an opportunity for them to "give back" and thus exhibiting a key characteristic of community teachers who feel a sense of commitment and service to their community. Thus, teacher learning is not limited to internalization of classroom theories, but also takes place in the context of situated activities such as a mentoring relationship (which can also be considered its own community of practice). While Murrell's definition of "community teachers" is typically used in the teacher preparation realm and applied

to the development of preservice teachers, this study demonstrates that "community teachers" can and should be extended to the professional development of in-service teachers of Color.

In the context of this study, a "community teacher" is someone who chooses to metaphorically break down classroom walls to engage with the community and give back by supporting the development of a future teacher. The bravery to let others from the community into their space resulted in an exchange of benefits and learnings that has reverberated throughout education.

Mentor TOCs developed in the four key areas that define a "community teacher": (1) Practice of mentoring community college students; (2) Context of BIPOC cultures, communities, and identities; (3) Communities of practice with pre-service and in-service teachers of Color; (4) Culture of mentorship and reciprocity.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study point to the prioritization of mentorship and centering of the community colleges in a diverse GYO teacher pipeline. The valuable role of community colleges and its student population in the recruitment and retention of teachers of Color cannot be understated and more resources should funnel to these sites to support these students moving through a GYO teaching pathway. In addition, mentorship structures and programming should not be sidelined as one of many interventions to support students of Color trying to become teachers; mentorship needs to be looked at as a primary driver of increasing the recruitment and retention of TOCs in the profession. Building out a robust mentorship component in GYO programs will be crucial in integrating equity and sustainable structures to diversify the teaching workforce.

At the local LEA level, school districts and leaders can support and encourage their teachers of Color to be part of GYO mentoring programs like this because it not only helps their

teachers grow in a meaningful way, but it also is a way to cultivate a relationship with future teachers of Color who can come back to teach at their schools. This structure hints at a long term workforce strategy that helps to recruit and retain diverse current and future teachers.

The culturally responsive mentorship practices for community college students that were identified by the mentor TOCs also suggest engagement strategies and tools to support them through the teacher pipeline. For mentor TOCs, the learning and empowering opportunities from mentorship allow them to live out their "community teacher" objectives better than any one day professional development workshop on DEI. Mentorship as professional development for TOCs is a different way to think about teacher growth and learning.

Recommendations as a result of this study are as follows: As a GYO pipeline, CPTP can be replicated via (1) centering the teacher prep work at the community college; (2) Having an equity and community integrated framework and set of objectives; (3) Prioritizing mentorship with TOCs and invest in recruit/retaining them as mentors; (4) Valuing and empowering current TOCs in teacher preparation and development work.

Limitations

As an exploratory study with a small number of participants, the generalizability of the findings is always something to consider when applying the results in other contexts. The study sample also excluded the mentor TOCs from the Early Childhood and community college grade levels, which have different pathways than the TK-12 space. A more representative sample of the program would include these other grade levels as well. Another limitation is that the CPTP program ended this year due to funding cuts, so the question of sustaining mentorship comes into play and tracking the long term effects on students and mentors is no longer possible.

Recommendations for Future Research

While the CPTP program had a majority of mentors of Color, there were still some White mentor teachers who participated. It would be interesting to conduct a comparison study of the mentorship experiences for White mentors to see what type of learning and development occurs for them. A follow-up quantitative study that takes these preliminary findings and tests it on a large scale with all the mentor teachers in the program would help with generalizability and would triangulate these findings.

The student impact and outcomes, specifically for those matched with same race mentors, would also be an important follow up to better understand what the mentees experience and the value they see in mentor TOCs.

In addition, the study chose to concentrate on TK-12 teachers, but other education pathways such as early childhood education and community college levels would also benefit from further research on community-based mentorship and its effects in recruiting and retaining more TOCs into the profession.

The unexpected, but fruitful move of the mentorship program to the online space during the pandemic also is a fascinating story that unfolded. The adaptive learning and communication during this unique period added a layer of complexity to the mentoring situation for TOCs, but in some ways, made it much easier to scale mentoring at the community colleges. Thus, looking more at the interactions online and the possibility of utilizing more of these asynchronous technologies to engage community college students in career exploration is worth also noting.

Lastly, in looking at sustainability of mentorship programs, new models such as teacher apprenticeship, are promising areas of development that can make teaching more financially viable

for TOCs and builds on the GYO strategy. More research is needed in this new area to see if it truly makes the education pathway more equitable and community-centered.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Intake Form

QUESTION	ANSWER OPTIONS
First and Last Name	Open-Ended
City of Residence	Open-Ended
Which race/ethnicity best describes you?	American Indian or Alaskan Native Asian/Pacific Islander Black or African Hispanic White/Caucasian Multiple Ethnicity Other (please specify)
Gender Identity (select all that apply)	Woman Man Transgender Non-binary/non-conforming Other (please specify)
Did you attend a community college? -If yes, what is the name of the community college?	Yes (Community college name) No

Were you a first-generation college student?	Yes No
What school did you attend to receive your bachelor's degree?	Open-ended
What did you get your credential in?	Open-ended
How many years have you been teaching?	Open-ended
How would you describe your school setting?	Urban Rural Suburban Other (with write-in option)
Are you a former student at the school you currently teach at?	Yes No
What grade/levels do you teach?	Open-ended
What subject(s) do you teach?	Open-ended
Have you mentored before CPTP? If so, please share the brief context of your mentorship experience including how many years you've been mentoring	Open-ended

How many total students have you mentored in CPTP?	1/2/3/4/5/6/7+

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today about your experiences as a CPTP Mentor. Before we proceed, I want to go over a few things:

- The purpose of this interview is to explore the experiences of mentor teachers in a Grow-Your-Own, teacher pipeline program for future teachers at the community colleges. If at any time, you feel uncomfortable discussing a topic, or simply do not have experience in that area, just let me know and I can move on.
- The information gathered in this interview will be presented in the context of my doctoral dissertation. Individually-identifying information will be kept confidential. Findings will be shared in an aggregate report.
- The interview will be recorded so that I can accurately capture our conversation. You are more than welcome to stop the recording or interview at any time. I anticipate that the session will last between 45-60 minutes.
- Any questions for me before we begin?

Warm Up

1. Why did you become a teacher?
2. Describe briefly the school you work at
    a. Students
    b. Staff/peers
    c. Admin

Key Questions

3. Recruitment: How did you become involved as a mentor in the CPTP program? What drew you to this work as a mentor?
    a. What about the CPTP mentorship program attracted you?
    b. What did you believe you could bring to the mentorship experience?
    c. What prior experiences or knowledge about mentoring did you bring into your mentorship practice?
    d. How is this program different or similar to other mentoring programs you have been a part of?

4. Development: How has mentoring in CPTP influenced or changed you 1) as a mentor 2) as a teacher?
    e. Please state below in what ways you consider being a mentor has enhanced your professional development, if at all.
    f. What have you learned about yourself? About your mentee?
    g. What mentoring situation do you remember very clearly? For example, did you have a positive experience, in which you thought" Oh, yes…", as an "eye opener"? How did this situation stimulate your development?
    h. Did you have any problems, such as conflict situations, dilemmas, or an (internal) conflict, as a mentor teacher? How did you cope with that? How have you changed due to this dilemma/situation?
    i. How has your mentor role affected your professional relationships with your colleagues? In school?
    j. How has mentoring influenced your views of education/schooling?
    k. How has mentoring influenced your views of your community?

5. Experiences: Please describe your role as a mentor and relationship with your mentee.
    l. How did you work with your student(s)? What are some examples of the kinds of things you did together with your mentee?
    m. How has your interaction with your student shaped your understanding of the role of the mentor?
    n. Does your background play a role in your mentorship relationship? If so, how?
    o. How did your relationship change over time with your mentee?
6. Retention: Why did you decide to mentor for more than 1 semester?
    p. What allowed you to continue being a mentor? Is there anything you would need from the program to continue mentoring long term?
    q. What supports at your school help or would help you to continue mentoring?
    r. What are some barriers that would dissuade or prevent you from mentoring?
    s. If you were to give advice to another teacher in preparation for their new role as a mentor in this program, what advice would they give them?

Closing

Is there anything else you want to tell me about CPTP mentorship and its impact?

Thank you for your time! I appreciate being able to hear about your insights and experiences.

Appendix C: Recruitment Tool For Interviews - Email script

Hello Former and Current CPTP Mentor Teachers,

My name is Yvonne Tran, and I am currently a doctoral student in education at UCLA. For my research, I am studying the experiences and development of mentor teachers in "Grow Your Own" (GYO) mentorship programs for community college students exploring the teaching profession. Particularly, I want to understand the experiences of mentors who:

(1) Have participated in CPTP for at least 2 semesters

(2) Identify as a Teacher of Color

(3) Teach in the TK-12 setting

If you meet all three of these criteria, I would like to invite you to a 45-60 minute online Zoom interview in the month(s) of December 2022/January 2023. The findings will be used to help improve CPTP and future mentorship programs for future teachers at the community college. Participation in this study is voluntary and is not mandatory in order to be part of CPTP. All data will be de-identified and analyzed in aggregate, so individually identifying information will not be revealed or published. As a token of appreciation for participating, I will be sending out $40 gift cards to interviewees.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please reply back to yvonnehtran@g.ucla.edu as soon as possible. More information will be sent to you after you indicate your interest. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best,

Yvonne Tran

Appendix D: Recruitment Tool For Interviews - Email reminder

Subject: Reminder! Invitation to Participate In an Important Study on Mentor Teachers

Hello Former and Current CPTP Mentor Teachers,

An email was sent last week recruiting for my doctoral research at UCLA. I am still looking for eligible participants to learn from. For my research, I am studying the experiences and development of mentor teachers in "Grow Your Own" (GYO) mentorship programs for community college students exploring the teaching profession. Particularly, I want to understand the experiences of mentors who have been with CPTP for at least 2 semesters, identify as a Teacher of Color, and teach in the TK-12 setting. If you meet these three criteria, I would like to invite you to a 45-60 minute online Zoom interview in the month(s) of December 2022/January 2023. The findings will be used to help improve CPTP and future mentorship programs for future teachers at the community college. Participation in this study is voluntary and is not mandatory in order to be part of CPTP. All data will be de-identified and analyzed in aggregate, so individually identifying information will not be revealed or published. As a token of appreciation for participating, we will be sending out $40 gift cards to selected interviewees.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please email yvonnehtran@g.ucla.edu as soon as possible. More information will be sent to you after you indicate your interest. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Best,

Yvonne Tran

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

TITLE OF STUDY: It Takes a Village to Raise a Teacher: The Mentorship Experiences of Teachers of Color Cultivating The Next Generation of Teachers

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Yvonne Tran

SPONSOR: Dr. Lorena Guillén

The following information is provided to inform you about this research study and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to reach out with any questions you may have. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions or to end your participation at any time. Withdrawal or refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way.

If you wish to participate, please sign the consent form and return it to the principal investigator, Yvonne Tran. You will sign the form and email an image of the signature page to me at yvonnehtran@g.ucla.edu. Please keep a copy for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experiences of mentor TOCs and their development within a "Grow Your Own" (GYO) teacher pipeline program for community college students exploring the teaching profession.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be in this study, you will be interviewed once for approximately 45-60 minutes regarding your experience and goals as a mentor teacher in the Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP) program. This interview will take place remotely using Zoom.

The study will include up to 15 CPTP mentor teachers from across different school sites and have participated in the program for at least 2 semesters. I will collect names, email addresses, and a

short intake form for each interview participant. However, responses will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be utilized if/when necessary in reporting procedures. Participant identifying information will not be shared with anyone other than the principal researcher of this study.

***Please place your initial below to allow us to audio record the interview (if you do not consent, the researcher will take notes instead of audio record)*:**

_____ ***I consent*** **to video/audio recording**

_____ ***I do not consent*** **to video/audio recording**

COMPENSATION, COSTS, AND REIMBURSEMENT

Participants will receive a $40 gift card after the interview via email . No costs are associated with your participation in this research.

RISKS

There are no known physical risks associated with taking part in the study. However, questions being asked may make you uncomfortable and if there is a breach of confidentiality, there may be embarrassment and/or a loss of social reputation. Also, completing study activities may be an inconvenience to your time. If you feel uncomfortable during any portion of the study, you may discontinue and end the data collection at any time. If any particular question causes discomfort, you have the right not to answer.

BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to the participant for taking part in this study. I anticipate that the study will inform teacher preparation scholarship, professional development, community college scholarship, and program improvements for the local community and education field.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM STUDY

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative to participation in this study is to choose not to participate.

- You may decline or discontinue participation at any time
- You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later
- If you wish to stop, please tell us right away
- At any time, you may leave this study early or withdraw your data from the study

You may be taken out of the study if:

- Staying in the study would be harmful
- You fail to follow instructions
- The study is canceled
- There may be other reasons to take you out of the study that we do not know at this time

If a participant says that they would no longer like to participate, any data they wish to be destroyed from the study will be discarded and will not be used for the remainder of the research. All recording and transcription files from the computer and any recording devices will be deleted. Their name will be removed from the list of pseudonyms.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researchers will do their best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be physically and electronically secured. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security. The research team and authorized UCLA personnel may have access to study data and records to monitor the study. Research records provided to authorized,

non-UCLA personnel will not contain identifiable information about you. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not identify you by name. Employees of the University may have access to identifiable information as part of routine processing of your information, such as lab work or processing payment. However, University employees are bound by strict rules of confidentiality.

Confidentiality will be ensured through careful procedures. Interviews will be conducted in private and consent forms will be stored in a locked, secure location where only I will have access. Identifying information will not be used in the storing of data. Data will be kept on a secure, password protected computer using encryption software. After the video and audio files have been transcribed, they will be destroyed.

The data will be stored on a password-protected drive that only I will have access to. The data will be kept until the completion of research projects related to the data. All research will be completed within three and a half years – by December 2025.

I intend to share back the information that you provide to us during the interviews in ways that serve you and the students. Every effort will be made to ensure that no specific data will be connected back to particular research participants.

If the results of the study are published or presented, I will not use your name, or any other identifying information. Data will be presented in the aggregate to the public. Any quotes from you will be entirely de-identified.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your decision to participate or not participate in this study is solely up to you and without penalty or loss of benefit to which you are otherwise entitled. If you wish to withdraw from the study or

withdraw your data from the study, please contact the principal investigator (Yvonne Tran) at the University of California, Los Angeles at (714) 914-4583 or yvonnehtran@g.ucla.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

Participant's Statement

I have read this informed consent document and the materials contained in it have been explained to me verbally. All of my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Printed Name of Participant

Date

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