

Mentoring Student Teaching Residents with the Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model

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This study investigates use of the research-developed Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model for mentoring student teachers during their year-long residency. Mentors completed weekly conference planning forms and tracking sheets indicating their use of the five moves in the GIR model: modeling, recommending, asking questions, affirming, and praising. Conference planning forms were deductively coded for the five moves; data were triangulated with tracking forms. Results demonstrate that, over time, there was a decrease in the mentoring moves of modeling and making recommendations; as residents' gained experience, mentors relied on the less-supportive mentoring moves of questioning, affirming, and praising. The GIR Model for Mentoring provides a conceptually simple approach for matching mentoring moves to student-teachers' changing needs.

Keywords: Student teaching, mentoring, teacher education, field experiences, preservice teachers

Introduction

The United States has over 3 million public school teachers, making up the largest college-educated profession in the workforce (Goldhaber et al., 2020). Student teaching, hosted by an in-service mentor teacher, is an important part of teacher preparation, usually required for teacher licensure (Dever et al., 2024). During student teaching, mentors provide emotional, social, and instructional support (Burger, 2024). Such support may include modeling, recommending, questioning, affirming, and offering praise. These moves are actions mentors take to support student teachers, as depicted in the Gradual Increase of Responsibility model for mentoring and coaching (Collet, 2012, 2022). This mixed-method study investigates use of the Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model for mentoring student teachers during a year-long residency, asking: How (if at all) does the support offered by mentors change throughout the student teaching experience?

Literature Review

Learning is a complex social and relational process supported by activity within communities of practice; it involves interactions between people, tools, and communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leontiev, 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). This is true of teachers' learning as well as that of their students. Risko et al. (2009), in their survey of research on reading teacher education, considered variables that influenced how knowledge about teaching developed. They found that pedagogical content knowledge increased when coupled with procedural knowledge, when opportunities for application were present, and when guidance was offered. These aspects of learning are present in the student-teaching

experience, unfolding as the supervising mentor teacher (mentor) scaffolds the student-teaching resident's (resident) experience.

Scaffolding Learning

Learning is supported through scaffolding that is adaptive and responsive, gradually releasing responsibility from the expert to the learner. To be effective, support should be continuously adjusted; providing support when it is no longer needed may stifle learning. Wood and Middleton (1975), in their early work on scaffolding, found that continuing to model once a learner has gained competence undermined the learner's agency and resulted in decreased self-confidence. More recently, Daniel and colleagues (2016) found that over-scaffolding, or providing more support than is needed, may limit engagement and restrict responses. Pomerantz and Pierce (2013) found problems associated specifically with over-modeling, noting that it reduced motivation. More appropriately, scaffolds are removed when no longer necessary, enabling more learning control (Puntambekar, 2022). Accordingly, scaffolding moves should change to support learners' gradually increasing ability. This adaptive role is described in Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) Model.

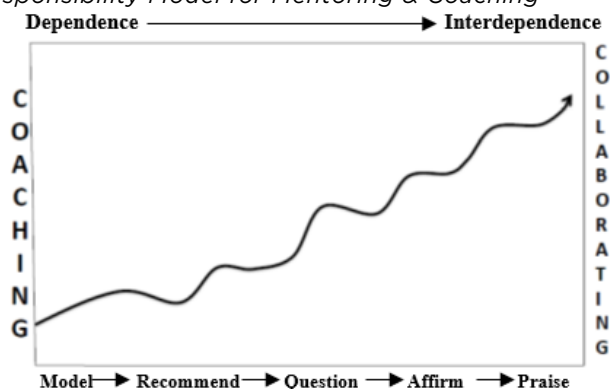
The GRR model depicts the varied scaffolding needed as learners move toward independence. The Model, designed to guide instruction in reading comprehension, has been applied to students' literacy learning for over 40 years (Weaver, 2002) and has potential for adult learning as well, specifically teacher education (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Sweeney, 2003). The current study examines use of an adaptation of the GRR Model: The

Gradual Increase of Responsibility (GIR) Mentoring Model (Collet, 2012; see Figure 1). The GIR model adapts Pearson & Gallagher's instructional model to describe phases of mentoring as residents' experience increases.

Like the GRR Model, the GIR Mentoring Model portrays intentional scaffolding to support successful learning. It describes changes in mentoring that occur as residents

Figure 1:

Gradual Increase of Responsibility Model for Mentoring & Coaching



gain experience and expertise, with support changing in both quantity and quality over time. The Model describes a decrease in the amount of support provided as well as a change in the type of support. By modeling, making recommendations, asking inquiring and probing questions, affirming student teachers' appropriate decisions, and praising, mentors provide varying and decreasing scaffolding which moves residents toward interdependence and collaboration. The Model emphasizes the dynamic nature of residents' zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) and the importance of staying within this zone during mentoring.

The GIR Model grew from research on support provided by mentors in a reading clinic (Collet, 2012, 2015). The model has also been applied in inservice teacher settings (Collet, 2014, 2022). The current study applies the GIR Model in a preservice teacher-education context, examining use of the mentoring moves as residents progress through their student-teaching experience.

Methods

This study examined the participation of six residents and 13 mentor teachers in a student-teaching residency at an elementary school in the South Central United States. Student teaching was a year-long experience that included three different grade-level placements for each resident (some mentors participated in more than one placement, but with different residents). The study considers whether and how the support offered by mentors changed over the course of the student-teaching experience. The investigation suggested a mixed-methods approach (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This case study foregrounds the experiences of mentors by examining records of weekly interactions

with residents. Data collection instruments are described below.

Context

The placement site for the six student teachers seeking their Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) had 627 students in grades kindergarten through five. This site has a diverse population, with 59% Hispanic, 25% white, 10% Pacific Islander, and small percentages of other ethnicities represented (State Department of Education, 2020). Of the 13 teachers who served as mentors, 11 have a master's degree and three are National Board Certified. Teaching experience ranged from three to 25 years. The six residents at this site had no previous formal teaching experience.

Data Sources and Analyses

GIR conferencing guides (Appendix A) were used to analyze mentoring practices. Although dialogue between mentors and residents was ongoing, the conferring guides were completed by mentors as a planning and reflection tool for more-formalized conversations with their residents that occurred each week. Mentors marked on the GIR form which mentoring move (model, recommend, question, affirm, or praise) was most supportive for their resident at that time. Researchers also qualitatively analyzed each conferencing form, determined whether there was a match between the dominant move marked and the description of the mentoring conversation in the planning and reflecting sections of the form. This process included coding the written notes on the form for which of the five moves was dominant and then checking this code against what the mentor had marked on the form as their intended dominant move. For example, if several recommendations

were included in the notes, and the mentor had marked “recommend” as the intended dominant move, this would be considered a match; however, if the mentor had marked “question” as the intended dominant move, and examples of questions asked were not included, this was noted as not matching. To strengthen reliability, 10% of conference forms were coded by a second researcher, with inconsistencies resolved through discussion before the remainder of the forms were coded.

Procedures

Mentors participated in ongoing training in use of the GIR model for approximately 20 minutes during the hour-long weekly mentor meetings that were standard for participation with student teachers in this educator preparation program. During this segment of the meeting, mentors discussed the mentoring moves and considered which might benefit their residents at that time. Weekly conferring forms were collected at this meeting.

At the beginning of each grade-level placement, it was suggested that mentors allow time for student teachers to observe in their new classroom. In this way, modeling was encouraged

as an initial mentoring move. As each placement progressed, mentors were encouraged to flexibly use the mentoring moves described by the GIR model in ways that would best meet the varying needs of their residents.

Findings

Analysis of GIR conferencing forms revealed that, during each of the placements, mentors moved gradually from more-supportive moves (modelling, recommending) to less-supportive moves (questioning, affirming, and praising). This process was variable and differed for each resident/mentor pair, and the increase of responsibility was quickest and most evident during the third placement. The most-frequently occurring move for each week in placement one is pictured in Figure 2. The most-frequently occurring move for each week in placement two is pictured in Figure 3. The most-frequently occurring move for each week in placement three is pictured in Figure 4.

The reported modes mask irregularities in the way mentors supported individual residents. For example, although questioning is the most-frequently occurring move during Placement 2 Weeks 9-12, one mentor, who was working

Figure 2:
Placement 1 Most Frequently Occurring Move

Model	X	X	X	X					
Recommend	X				X	X	X	X	
Question								X	X
Affirm									
Praise									
(week)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Figure 3:
Placement 2 Most Frequently Occurring Move

Model	X	X	X	X													
Recommend				X	X	X	X	X						X			
Question									X	X	X	X			X	X	
Affirm													X	X			X
Praise																	X
(week)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17

Figure 4:
Placement 3 Most Frequently Occurring Move

Model	X	X			
Recommend					
Question			X		
Affirm				X	X
Praise					X
(week)	1	2	3	4	5

with a less-skilled resident, continued to use modeling and recommending as her dominant mentoring moves for weeks 9-11, marking week 12 as a combination of recommending and asking questions. In contrast, beginning in week 10, a mentor who was working with a more-skilled resident indicated that affirming was a dominant move (along with asking questions and offering praise). Even in these instances, however, there was a gradual move toward less-supportive mentoring practices.

As a check for accuracy in mentors' self-determined dominant mentoring move, GIR conferencing forms were evaluated to determine whether there was a match between the move marked as "dominant" by the mentor and information recorded in the planning and notes sections. The move mentors marked was aligned with their comments on 89.4% of the forms.

Discussion

Findings lend support for the descriptive and potential prescriptive power of the GIR model for supporting mentoring communities of practice among mentors and residents. Modeling, a common practice among instructional coaches working with inservice teachers (Saclarides, 2022), was also a regular mentoring practice with student-teaching residents in our study. When modeling, the mentor teacher demonstrates how to perform a skill, offering a visual example. Modeling can occur in the context of instruction with students or during conversations with the student teacher. Like Woulfin and Rigby (2017), who studied the practices of literacy coaches, we found that modeling was initially an effective practice to support growth. Modeling includes the intricacies of real classrooms while allowing teachers to deliberate in ways that can lead to new insights (Walsh et al., 2020). When making recommendations, mentors offer suggestions to improve instruction. This mentoring move, which was also dominant early in placements, has found support in the literature. For example, Collet (2012, 2015) found that effective mentoring of PSTs in a reading clinic included recommendations; Knight (2019) cautions that instructional coaches must honor

teachers' agency when making recommendations, a finding which may also have implications for preservice teachers; this bears further study.

Previous research demonstrates that asking questions supports student teachers' autonomy and authority. Averill and colleagues (2016) found that asking questions supported decision-making and reflection and empowered novice teachers. In our study, asking questions became a dominant coaching move as residents gained experience, especially during their long second placement. About half-way through the year-long student-teaching experience, mentors seemed to acknowledge their residents' increasing expertise by minimizing recommendations and maximizing decision-making and reflection by asking questions. Toward the end of the second and third placements, mentors turned to affirming and praising as dominant mentoring moves. Although residents may still have been looking to their mentors to confirm that they were making sound instructional decisions, mentors' responses acknowledged residents' appropriate performance. Verbal affirmations demonstrate awareness and responsiveness to concerns, shifting attention in a positive direction (Collet, 2012, 2022; Heineke, 2013), and sincere praise that acknowledges significant effort and accomplishment is usually well-received; praise builds rapport and provides emotional support, in addition to sustaining motivation (Tian & Louw, 2020). Although demonstrated in previous research in other contexts, the current study demonstrates the value of affirmation and praise as mentoring moves in a student-teaching context. Extant research has demonstrated the value of modeling, recommending, questioning, affirming, and praising in work with inservice teachers, suggesting that the GIR model has potential not only for instructional coaches, but also for instructional leadership in other roles as a means of enhancing sustainable communities of practice within schools. The current study underscores the value of these moves with preservice teachers as well. Further, the transition from modeling and recommending to questioning, and later to affirmation and praise, confirms these mentoring moves as a gradient

that increases responsibility.

Conclusion and Implications

Replication of this small-scale study in other contexts would provide further insight regarding use of the GIR model when mentoring student teachers. However, building as it does on previous research with use of the model in other contexts with preservice and inservice teachers (Collet, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2022), the current study suggests that the GIR model describes mentoring that gradually increases residents' responsibility over the course of a student-teaching experience.

Findings offer nuance to the theoretical construct of communities of practice as interactional; in mentor-resident dyads, the five mentoring moves act as tools to adaptively scaffold student teachers in their teacher education journey. Further, because previous research has demonstrated that mentors sometimes do not change their approach over time to match the increasing expertise of novice teachers (van Ginkel et al., 2016), the GIR model has prescriptive potential as a model to guide student-teacher mentors, supporting mentors as they match their mentoring to their residents' needs. Aligning with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (1978), mentors offer support that enables student teachers to successfully navigate the complex responsibilities of teaching. Although the GIR model is conceptually simple, supporting mentors' decision making, in practice, each of the five mentoring moves is complex and nuanced. Future qualitative studies of mentors and student teachers could provide thick descriptions of these mentoring moves, support implementation and further refining the Gradual Increase of Responsibility model as a guide for sustaining effective communities of practice. Although such future research will add nuance to implementation, previous research and findings of the current study endorse the recommendation that teacher education programs include the GIR model in mentor preparation programs.

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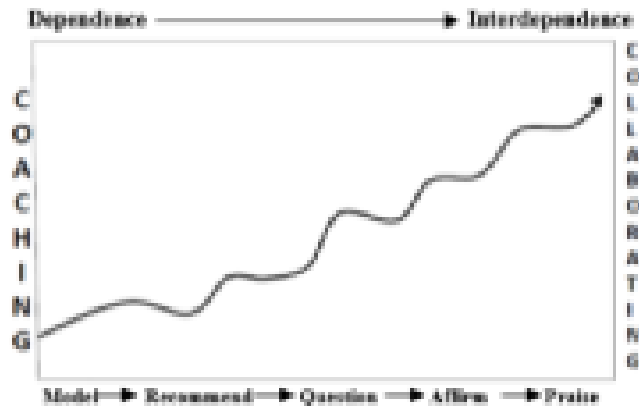
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Appendix A: GIR Conferencing Form

Conference Plan for Gradual Increase of Responsibility (GIR)



Resident's Name _____

Date _____

Focus _____
(teaching skill or content)

Mentoring Move _____
(model, recommend, etc.)

Check coaching practices you might use:

Modeling	Recommending	Questioning	Affirming	Praising
☐ Provide a video ☐ Model in conference ☐ Model with students ☐ Model instructional decision-making	☐ Teaching strategy ☐ Content or skills being taught ☐ Developmental processes ☐ Standards/ the curriculum	Promote reflection: ☐ What stood out? ☐ Why did you..... Promote analysis: ☐ What makes you think that.... ☐ What might the benefits be? ☐ What are some other ways.....	☐ Validate practice ☐ Agree with plan ☐ Confirm information	☐ Commend practice ☐ Praise plan ☐ Applaud knowledge

Other things to stay mindful of:

Notes during coaching session: