

**Title:** Mentoring the Mentors: Supporting Clinical Educators through Professional Development

The purpose of this practice report is to examine findings from an evaluative study of a university-based professional development program designed to support educators committed to mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers. This program is grounded by three specific ideas that directly align with the focus of the 2015 GERA conference. First, this program serves as an effective model for providing cooperating teachers with an opportunity to further their knowledge about the practice of teaching and develop a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with learning to teach. Second, during the professional development participants are engaged in a critical examination of both their teaching beliefs and trends in education research and policy. Third, this program not only provides a concrete example of how the Association of Teacher Educator (ATE) Standards can be used to create effective models for meaningful professional development, but it also highlights a number of variables and environmental supports critical to the development of pre-service teachers. The presentation has four primary objectives:

- Address the various challenges cooperating teachers encounter when mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers.
- Introduce the rationale, purpose, and structure of a university-based professional development program supporting educators mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers.
- Discuss findings from an evaluative study examining the impact of a university-based professional development program supporting educators committed to mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers
- Brainstorm how colleges of education and public schools can develop collaborative partnerships to support the development of effective cooperating teachers.

This professional development program, which was developed and facilitated by MSU Denver teacher education faculty, aims to not only provide cooperating teachers with quality professional development to support their work as mentors, but to also ensure these practitioners understand how to prepare pre-service teachers with the skills needed to consistently support student learning and increase achievement. Practitioners charged with mentoring the next generation of teachers need access to this type of professional support. The following research questions guided the evaluative study:

1. What level of confidence do teachers hold in their in ability to accomplish the MSU Denver Cooperating Teacher Summer Seminar objectives?
2. What perceptions do teachers hold regarding their level of confidence to positively influence pre-service teachers sense of efficacy for teaching, commitment to the profession, and potential impact on student learning?
3. What strategies did mentors use to support the pedagogical and emotional development of pre-service teachers during their clinical experiences?

Educators who make a professional commitment to mentor pre-service teachers are not always adequately prepared to provide the types of support most beneficial to beginning teachers. In fact, many times cooperating teachers do not understand the challenges and difficulties commonly associated with the supervisory process or how to effectively communicate with those learning to teach. Levin (2002) alludes to this pattern, noting that clinical experiences are essential to effective teacher preparation yet are perhaps the least intentional component of the process. Moreover, professional development priorities in school districts rarely focus on providing cooperating teachers with research-based strategies to support effective mentoring practices. Consequently, cooperating teachers do not typically receive training that prepares them to be an effective mentor; hence, it is unlikely they ever learn how to effectively support the growth and development of pre-service teachers. This research presentation will explore the development, implementation, and significance of a university-based professional development program supporting educators committed to mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers.

The topic of this research presentation is significant for three specific reasons. First, schools need to have well-developed professional development programs in place that adequately support teachers who are charged with mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers. This presentation presents one approach to effectively addressing this issue. Second, many cooperating teachers have never been provided opportunities to formally develop and articulate a personal philosophy of supervision. Hence, it is important to draw attention to effective strategies for facilitating opportunities to engage in this process. Finally, this presentation highlights the need for K-12 schools and colleges of education to work together to provide professional development for educators committed to mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers.

Three participant outcomes are anticipated. First, attendees will leave the presentation with a broader understanding of the challenges educators encounter when mentoring and supervising pre-service teachers. Additionally, session participants will be informed of topical research highlighting the significance of mentoring and linking effective mentoring with high-quality clinical experiences. These outcomes will draw attention to the need for K-12 schools and teacher education programs to pay closer attention to the significant role of cooperating teachers and develop training opportunities. Second, participants will be exposed to a professional development model that can be implemented within the contexts where they work. Study findings will highlight the need to provide support to cooperating teachers about what it means to be an effective mentor. Finally, participants will share ideas about how to effectively develop collaborative partnerships between colleges of education and K-12 schools to support the development of cooperating teachers. Finding ways to recruit and train high-quality cooperating teachers is an issue that demands thoughtful discussion.

Levine, M. (2002). Why invest in professional development schools? *Educational Leadership*, 6, 65-68.