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## Partnering Educational Leadership and Preservice Teacher Candidates to Conduct Virtual Classroom Observations via a Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model

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## **Partnering Educational Leadership and Preservice Teacher Candidates to Conduct Virtual Classroom Observations via a Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model**

University faculty from an Educational Leadership Preparation Program and Preservice Teacher Preparation Program, after numerous conversations, learned of the recent challenges that Teacher Preparation Providers are having in their attempts to effectively supervise and observe preservice teachers in the field. Additionally, Educational Leadership Preparation Providers noted their Educational Leadership Candidates were having difficulties fulfilling their required clinical practice, which requires 250 supervised field experience hours as per statewide accrediting agency requirements (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2023). Furthermore, as many districts moved to a fully online or hybrid delivery model amid the recent global health pandemic, Covid-19, the conduct of observations and engagement in leadership tasks began to look very different with this shift in learning. Faculty capacity, time management, and shortage of effective supervisors were noted as challenges that called for innovation to best serve those in our preparation programs. A discussion ensued as to how one might utilize the limited resources and opportunities necessary to attain effectiveness in preparing aspiring school leaders and teachers for their future work in schools.

To address this challenge, the researchers proposed a model with the goal of having Educational Leadership Candidates in their preparation program partner with Preservice Teacher Candidates to conduct classroom observations/evaluations. This model presented is practitioner-based and provides a mentor to the teacher candidate who can conduct virtual classroom observation using a state-mandated assessment system for evaluating teachers. This would allow the Educational Leadership Candidates to engage in classroom observations/evaluations in an active setting to get practice in conducting classroom assessments. Educational Leadership Candidates would then be supported in satisfying their required supervised field experience hours required by the state licensure agency to obtain initial leadership certification. Preservice teachers would engage in post-conference meetings to get reflective and authentic feedback from current leadership practitioners, which is intended to provide another layer of feedback to support university faculty to effectively mentor students in a supportive manner during their preservice tenure. Teacher candidates may benefit from engaging throughout their preparation programs in learning how to develop practices that are reflective and to have the means to understand the impact of their instruction on student learning (Sturkie, 2017). Furthermore, reflection practices lead to a greater examination of the impact on students' achievement, teacher candidates' application of theory to practice, and teacher candidates' awareness of the benefits of the reflection process, that are all key throughout their supervision experience. Thus, this research proposes a new model for Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs through a "Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model," which is intended to be beneficial to both the school leader as the evaluator (Practitioner-Based Mentor, Educational Leadership Candidate) and the Preservice teacher (Preservice Teacher Candidate) as the recipient of the feedback.

### **Review of the Literature**

This review of the literature will include an examination of the need for program improvement in Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs based on the benefits of classroom observations and evaluations that utilize varied mentoring experiences, which

include reflective and authentic feedback during engagement in a post-conference discussion. A focus will be on the benefits of this model to both the Educational Leadership Candidate as a Practitioner-Based Mentor and to the Preservice Teacher as the Preservice Teacher Candidate.

### **Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs**

Seminal research that is still relevant today denotes a continued criticism of Educational Leadership Preparation Programs in that they do not provide meaningful, authentic internship opportunities for school leader candidates (Levine, 2005). This proposed model is aimed at attaining those meaningful and authentic experiences during preparation programs. These criticisms are specifically directed at universities for ineffective and inauthentic practices in preparation programs developed to prepare school leaders (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012), and it is these aspiring school leaders who will go on to conduct classroom observations and evaluate teachers when serving in future leadership positions. Additionally, as program improvement is a continued need, a focus on leadership preparation is merited, specifically in the selection and training of aspiring school leaders (who are current Educational Leadership Candidates). This will allow universities to take a vested interest in the professional growth of preservice teachers in preparation for their leadership responsibilities after program completion.

Considering that often university-based educational leadership preparation programs may not be properly training school leaders, we need to invest in the effectiveness of educational leadership programs (Tingle et al., 2017). Educational leadership programs continue to need opportunities to further strengthen their programs, and this requires programs to be “innovative and exceptional” (Jackson & Kelley, 2002. p. 192). Additionally, preparation programs require a significant investment in evidence-based practices requiring resources to support program improvement, provide ongoing collaboration and mentorship, and provide opportunities to make connections to the field by applying theory to practice. For preservice teachers, the opportunity to engage in meaningful and constructive conversations is critical to their preparation during this time when teachers are most likely to be influenced by feedback and reflection (Danielson, 2010). Such a model, as the one we are proposing as a preliminary evidence-based research model, is potentially quite powerful in introducing an “unbiased” observer, such as the Educational Leadership Candidate (aspiring or current school leader), resulting in a disruption of the traditional and long-standing student-teacher-triad (Yee, 1968). In turn, the model provides an opportunity for feedback that is potentially not influenced by personal and behavioral factors typically characteristic of one in a supervisory role (King, 2008). It is for these potential benefits to both Educational Leadership and Preservice Teacher Candidates that we seek to present this Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model that may be implemented in Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs to address the challenges (e.g., time, capacity, scheduling) which faculty face in their efforts to effectively support the preparation of both aspiring school leaders and teachers. Often educational leadership and teacher preparation programs are housed in different departments, as is the case at the research institution, and this proposed model aims to bridge the divide between these seemingly intertwined programs.

### **Benefits of Providing Classroom Observations**

School leaders evaluate classroom teachers by conducting classroom observations, engaging teachers in pre- and post-observation conferencing to examine their classroom teaching and learning practices, and providing feedback in a formal, annual performance evaluation (Zepeda, 2012). The teacher evaluation process in recent years has focused on the improvement

of teacher quality (Mireles-Rios & Becchio, 2018). Thus, many states have adopted high-stakes teacher evaluation policies, which have increased expectations for instructional leadership tasks, including the evaluation process (Derrington, 2014). Thus, leadership preparation needs to ensure that Educational Leadership Candidates are well prepared to engage in these classroom evaluations and post-conferencing sessions as they prepare to secure or continue in leadership positions. Because of new policy implementation, adjustments must be made to instructional leadership practices (Lochmiller & Mancinelli, 2019), and these evidence-based practices need to be at the forefront of both Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs.

The foundation of evaluation practices has been framed around clinical supervision to include a pre-conference, formal observation, and post-conference to ensure teachers are embedding core curriculum and instructional standards (Sullivan & Glanz, 2005). However, there has been some criticism that supervisors frequently use a checklist format rather than an experience with reflective and authentic feedback, which takes considerably more time. There is value in providing school leadership with professional development to balance operational and instructional responsibilities, and one of these major responsibilities is engaging in a sound evaluation system (McBrayer et al., 2018). When examining the utilization of evaluations and conferencing, it is important to note that high-stakes, state-mandated evaluations are important. When collaborating with supervisors and mentors as they guide preservice teachers, engagement in a feedback cycle is essential, and this requires the use of classroom observation, data-driven feedback, and time for reflection.

This form of effective feedback links the theoretical knowledge provided via teacher preparation to the training and practice implemented at the schools where preservice work (e.g., observations in methods courses, student teaching) is taking place (Tas et al., 2018). The standardized and formal classroom observation process was initiated not to add challenges to teachers but to support them in planning for teaching and learning by providing evidence-based practices needed to be successful in the profession (Barrogo, 2020). The goal of evaluation should be to empower teachers to reflect on their own teaching and identify pedagogical needs by initiating innovative teaching and learning for the advancement of students (Danielson, 2010). Teachers-in-training need proper support to garner confidence to teach students in real-world and active classroom settings. Classroom observations are noted as a pertinent element of the educational system to make sure that preservice teacher candidates are prepared for their classrooms once employed (Jogan, 2018). Through classroom observations, supervisors and mentors provide guidance to teachers in gathering data on individual behaviors and interactions in the active educational setting. These classroom observations and reflective conferencing experiences could be in either a physical and/or virtual setting, depending on the plan of action that the district and school are operating under. “To learn and improve, instructors need specific feedback about where they have been successful and where they have fallen short” (Benton, 2018, p. 4). Formative evaluation has proven to be beneficial, as it reveals areas in need of improvement, such as lack of clarity and conciseness in practices such as lesson planning, curriculum alignment, and data-based decision-making (Rahimi & McBrayer, 2022).

### **Benefits of Mentoring**

The level of mentoring and support has a significant impact on how preservice teachers experience and derive meaning from their clinical experiences in the field (Jamison et al., 2018). There is a need to develop a set of standards to establish norms or requirements, that “clearly and comprehensively describe the key elements of quality mentoring and a quality mentor” (Ellis et

al., 2020, p. 2). Effective supervision is necessary to ensure growth in student learning. Dipaola (2018) suggested that “to become a supervisor is to become a leader of leaders, learning and working with teachers and students to improve instructional quality. Goal setting and problem solving become site-based, collective, and collaborative activities” (p. 102). Teachers who strive to be “agents of change” encourage collaboration in the workplace, allowing preservice teachers active involvement in planning, management, and teaching to foster preservice teachers’ “growth” (Korth & Baum, 2011, p. 2). For the mentee working with a mentor, the outcome is intended to enhance psychological health, foster more positive attitudes, and in turn, lead to gains in student achievement (Lockwood et al., 2010). Furthermore, positive outcomes associated with mentoring include persistence, social and academic integration, and overall academic success (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp, 2010). Hastings and Kane (2018) interpreted effective mentoring for leadership development as a “long-term, one-on-one dynamic process of role modeling and reflection designed to amass knowledge, skills, and self-confidence for personal development and leadership empowerment” (p. 18). The positive outcomes of mentoring partnerships include learning to work collaboratively and gaining a better understanding of how to have beneficial field-based experiences (Andrew et al., 2019).

Collaboration between university faculty/supervisors and teacher educators during preservice experiences can lead to significant professional learning as well for the mentors involved (Grimmett et al., 2018). In seminal work, Levine (2011) suggested key features of professional supervisory communities to ensure supervisees are supported in an appropriate manner. These include promoting collaboration between supervisors, collective responsibility within supervisor-supervisee relationships, promoting joint activity in access to practices associated with supervision and logistical information, ensuring trust and interpersonal familiarity, and fostering positive morale. It is encouraged for supervisors to partake in an active role when observing preservice teacher development to encourage this trusting and supportive mentorship. In Teacher Preparation Programs, Preservice Teacher Candidates need time in the field to supplement their coursework and align teaching with the theoretical frameworks they are learning. Early teaching experiences in clinical practice permit teacher candidates to know and engage with students as they can instruct in these classrooms as the lead teacher while having support of an experienced supervisor (Greathouse et al., 2019). Through classroom observations employing a standardized observation instrument, preservice teachers can process and reflect on their practice through clearly indicated learning goals and outcomes, while mentors can provide preservice teachers with effective feedback to closely monitor their professional progress (Tas et al., 2018).

Preservice teachers need support throughout this challenging learning process, and mentor supervision is of fundamental importance in that mentor feedback is often considered the most significant part of supervision (Le & Vasquez, 2011). Thus, preparing mentors for this role in the process is pertinent and crucial. Furthermore, it has even been suggested that providing feedback largely defines a mentor’s work (Bjørndal, 2020). Working with a mentor and participating in the final field practicum experience are often noted as two of the most formative elements of Teacher Preparation Programs, even though some teachers only encounter these experiences at the end of the preparation program (Doran, 2020). Additionally, mentors are considered to be central to the growth of teachers, yet many programs continue to struggle to secure sufficiently experienced mentors or to train mentors in alignment with current evidence-based practices addressed in the university curriculum (Sober, 2020). Thus, it is necessary and

important to leverage mentors as a source of expertise for ongoing professional development of teachers (Doran, 2020).

### **Benefit of Providing Authentic Feedback**

A trusting relationship between a supervisor and preservice teacher may be developed through dialogue providing clear feedback of progress and areas of continued improvement, allowing for transparency in sharing skills and knowledge, examining unaccommodating assumptions, and considering unprecedented knowledge and professional opinions of preservice teachers during complex encounters (Levine, 2011). Additionally, preservice teachers benefit from an interdependent mentoring strategy by having the opportunity to discuss their lesson ideas during conferencing. Furthermore, supervisors and mentors share many experiences drawn from their own teaching careers and strategies from their days in the classroom that developing teachers may benefit from hearing and learning about. Lastly, preservice teachers have multiple opportunities to receive feedback on their lesson planning, learn to value the feedback, and implement the feedback to improve their teaching skills. A benefit for preservice teachers is the opportunity to reflect on their classroom performance with an experienced educator (Jones & Ringler, 2020). Although performance-based feedback has varied in terms of delivery method, this feedback has proven to have a positive effect on specified teacher skills (Coogler et al., 2020). Students often perceive that receiving feedback helped them improve their teaching (Simpson & Clifton, 2015) and feedback contributed to the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills (Bautista et al., 2014).

Feedback enhances active learning and commitment to the tasks at hand and has important implications for their empowerment in the learning process (Panadero & Dochy, 2014). In addition, receiving feedback is associated with the integration of knowledge (Boud & Molloy, 2013) and the acceptance of errors as cognitive aspects involved in the learning process (Ion et al., 2018). Preservice teachers receive additional, targeted feedback and attention beyond what a single instructor can provide, from a mentor who gets to know them as they build relationships throughout the semester while being actively engaged in the classroom in real-time (Andrew et al., 2019). Furthermore, this feedback can also be delivered in a more personalized and immediate manner through individual debriefing sessions or in small mentoring groups. Effective feedback provides preservice teachers support and direction on their teaching performance (Levine, 2011). Preservice teachers noted perceiving feedback from University Faculty Supervisors as most effective when it guided them in improving teaching performance, providing them suggestions for refining classroom management, and enhancing their teaching pedagogy (González-Toro et al., 2020). Mentor feedback is vital to the development of teachers (Widdall et al., 2019) as performance feedback has been used to improve instructional and classroom management skills, and these outcomes have also demonstrated that feedback is most effective when delivered immediately (Sweigart et al., 2015). Cornelius and Nagro (2014) found that performance feedback provided during students' field experiences could lead to increased implementation of evidence-based instructional strategies with fidelity. It is our goal as researchers and as scholarly practitioners through this model to immerse both school leaders and teachers in quality discussions surrounding evidence-based pedagogical practices.

### **Online Classroom Observations and Conferencing**

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, teaching and learning have significantly impacted schools nationwide, calling for the implementation of online learning systems and applications

(Rasmitadila, 2020). This crisis has shifted to a new phase, and it is the time for innovation to meet these virtual learning needs (Dhawan, 2020). Giffin (2020) noted that using both synchronous and asynchronous instruction, evaluators can observe pre-recorded lessons, providing them greater flexibility during the conduct of the observation. “The video can be used to provide feedback specific to their instruction and offers an opportunity for deeper reflection and explicit coaching” (Giffin, 2020, p. 5). Additionally, this research further supported the benefit of recordings as these allow the ability to re-watch the recorded lesson, which can “help ensure greater accuracy when evaluating the teacher’s performance” (p. 5). Thus, the potential for all pre- or post-observation conferences and feedback can occur over video conferencing to supplement in-person whenever possible, providing an alternative to the traditional face-to-face classroom observation.

A positive spin of virtual evaluations may be that leadership candidates will not need to leave their school of employment to conduct classroom observations and provide mentoring support (Lewis & Jones, 2019). Additionally, face-to-face instructional support is logistically difficult to schedule, requires travel, and may take time away from classroom responsibilities (as many leadership candidates are currently classroom teachers) as well as taking time away from leadership duties, if in a leadership position. The feasibility of University Faculty Supervisors in conducting consistent on-site observations of preservice teachers in many cases is challenging, due to distance from campus, having students in multiple locations, and needing available times for observation (McLeod et al., 2018). However, if those conducting classroom observations viewed the observations and provided feedback at their convenience, this would offer flexibility in the process of delivering feedback in a timely, authentic, and meaningful manner. Furthermore, video-based coaching coupled with solid feedback could prove to be beneficial to both leadership and teacher candidates. To aid in such instructional coaching and feedback, video capture and annotation technology could be utilized collaboratively between the evaluator and the Preservice Teacher Candidate.

Web-based coaching has been found to lead to higher self-efficacy of preservice teachers (Anderson, 2020). Another benefit of online coaching/mentoring is that teachers can learn new online strategies (Atkins & Danley, 2020), which are becoming more relevant for teachers who employ a hybrid or fully online mode of instruction. Additionally, “the importance of quality communication, collaboration and cooperation at all levels was amplified” during the reliance of online observations during COVID-19 (Atkins & Danley, 2020, p. 36), causing interest in the future of this model. We propose that this model can serve well in the future as various degrees of hybrid and online teaching formats evolve and become more of the norm.

In summary, the literature demonstrates there is a need for program improvement in Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs, and there are some challenges in securing effective mentors for teacher candidates as well as meeting the mandatory clinical practice hours required by state licensure mandates. One of these improvements may be the inclusion of classroom observations and evaluations that are virtual and utilize varied mentoring experiences to include authentic and reflective feedback as well as post-conferencing in a non-consequential environment such as the one we are proposing. The benefits of this feedback to both the mentor (Educational Leadership Candidate in the case of this study via a Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model) and the Preservice Teacher Candidate may prove to be vital in enhancing the classroom evaluation system. By designing an innovative Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model to have Educational Leadership Candidates partner with Preservice Teacher Candidates through the usage of virtual classroom observations and

evaluations, University Faculty Supervisors may have the opportunity to address several challenges. These include capacity in their preparation programs and providing Candidates another level of much needed support as they prepare aspiring school leaders and teachers. In turn, Leadership Candidates garner valuable experience conducting classroom observations/evaluations in an active setting.

### **Methodology**

The following overarching research question guided the study: How can faculty engaging in the preparation of Educational Leadership Candidates and Preservice Teacher Candidates partner to develop a Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model that utilizes reflective and authentic feedback via virtual classroom observations, evaluations, and post-conferencing? The review of the literature provides both foundational and current elements needed to develop a model to reimagine traditional classroom observations and evaluations currently conducted with Preservice Teacher Candidates. The development of this model provides the opportunity to examine the assessment of Preservice Teacher Candidates from a supportive and non-consequential lens to make the outcome more authentic and reflective by utilizing the support of leadership candidates.

To examine the research question, the researchers conducted a preliminary activity in their courses and partnered an Educational Leadership Candidate with a Preservice Teacher Candidate to conduct a virtual classroom observation, including online post-conferencing for authentic and reflective feedback. Based on this successful interaction and our preliminary review of this process, our goal is to further develop a model for Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs that can be utilized and sustained in these challenging times and in the future as we navigate a shift to virtual and hybrid learning amid the ongoing health pandemic. The goal is to connect two preparation programs, one being a graduate Educational Leadership Preparation Program and one being an undergraduate Preservice Teacher Preparation. This will be done to implement a model as a *voluntary* course activity for Educational Leadership Candidates to attain their required Supervised Field Experience hours by conducting online classroom observations and evaluations of the Preservice Teacher Candidate. Licensure requirements for the Educational Leadership Candidate require 250 hours of Supervised Field Experience hours in a one-year period (two semesters) for initial Educational Leadership Certification according to the guidelines of a statewide national accrediting agency. In turn, the Preservice Teacher Candidate is provided the opportunity to engage in an online classroom observation and evaluation with authentic and reflective feedback from a current educator in the field. This educator would be serving in the role of practitioner-based mentor, and one who does not hold any role of authority over the teacher candidate and therefore is likely to be viewed as a mentor rather than a supervisor.

### **Setting and Participants**

This study is taking place at a large institution of higher education in the southeastern United States, Great State University (GSU), a pseudonym as a partnership between two programs: one being a graduate Educational Leadership Preparation Program and the other being an undergraduate Teacher Preparation Program. The Educational Leadership Preparation Program involved in this study at GSU is the M.Ed. EDLD P-12 graduate degree program. This program is designed to prepare Educational Leadership Candidates for entry-level P-12 school leadership positions. The program is a 36 graduate credit hour program administered through



twelve required courses. Embedded in the Leadership Professional Core and the Teacher-Leader Core, the Supervised Field Experiences are a guided 250 hours of field experience in a clinical practice setting, led cooperatively by the University Faculty Supervisor and the district/school partner mentor. The curriculum is based on an inquiry approach that emphasizes foundational knowledge and skills, including research skills applicable to a multitude of education topics and issues. This approach is intended to enhance current and future educational leaders' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The program is open to P-12 educators currently holding school-level positions below the principal and district positions that do not supervise principals. In addition, this program leads to initial leadership certification, which is administered by the state licensure agency under a two-tiered Educational Leadership Preparation Rule (Tier 1, supervise those below the principal and Tier II, supervise those at the principal level and above).

The Teacher Preparation Program involved in this study is an initial teacher certification program, designed to prepare Preservice Teacher Candidates for certification in grades 6-12 in a designated content area. Through this program, candidates engage in field-based work (practicums) each semester while enrolled in the program. Through these supervised practicum experiences, candidates are involved in hands-on training in middle and high schools where they can learn and apply their knowledge and skills to become career-ready before graduation. While the number of hours in the field and the experiences related to clinical practice are scaffolded throughout the program, it is expected that Preservice Teacher Candidates plan and design instruction that demonstrates developmentally and culturally responsive practices as well as integrate technology to deepen student learning. Preservice Teacher Candidates are observed, evaluated, and provided feedback using an evaluation instrument that addresses instructional and professional characteristics and is modeled after a state evaluation instrument for Preservice teachers. Preservice Teacher Candidates are partnered with a faculty member designated as the University Faculty Supervisor to observe the candidates and provide feedback to them. It is common practice that field-supervisors have multiple teacher candidates assigned to them for the purpose of supervision and evaluation during one term. This fact, the researchers argue, may mean that supervisors have far too many candidates to be truly effective.

Due to the challenges, University Faculty Supervisors face in conducting authentic classroom observations and evaluations, further restricted by recent budget cuts and loss of faculty, the researchers are proposing a Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model to combat some of these hindrances. The design and future implementation of this model is intended to provide virtual classroom observations and evaluations that utilize varied mentoring experiences which include authentic and reflective feedback and post-observation conferencing. The benefits of this feedback to both the mentor (Educational Leadership Candidate) and the Preservice Teacher Candidate (Teacher Candidate) may prove to be pertinent in providing effective support to both aspiring school leaders and teachers as they engage in an effective assessment process to ascertain the skills needed to be successful in the field.

The model we are proposing is to be implemented and examined in the fall semester annually. Through this model, one of the researchers will be teaching an undergraduate field-based practicum course and the other a graduate educational leadership content course, as part of the state certification requirements for a master's degree in educational leadership. The undergraduate field-based practicum course is taken by Secondary Education majors in their senior year of the semester prior to their last and final student teaching experience and in conjunction with two other Education courses. This course is designed to provide a supervised field-based teaching experience in a secondary classroom. Through this course, Preservice

Teacher Candidates are expected to apply teaching and assessment strategies to support diverse learners in various classroom settings, meaningfully and effectively utilize instructional technology to support student learning, and thoughtfully reflect on instructional practices to successfully impact student learning. Through this experience, Preservice Teacher Candidates are involved in teaching four lessons to their students under the direction of the classroom-cooperating teacher and under the supervision of the University Faculty Supervisor. Two of these lessons will be observed by the University Faculty Supervisor visiting the on-site classroom, providing feedback directly to the Preservice Teacher Candidate. The two other lessons will be pre-recorded by the Preservice Teacher Candidate, and these recorded lessons will be shared with the University Faculty Supervisor (one of the researchers), the Educational Leadership Preparation Program instructor (a second researcher), and the Educational Leadership Candidate (serving as the Practitioner-Based Mentor). The Educational Leadership Candidate will be assigned to a Preservice Teacher Candidate, and the Educational Leadership Candidate will conduct a formal observation and evaluation with feedback on the pre-recorded lesson, using the state-mandated instrument required by the Teacher Preparation Program at the institution.

Upon completion of the observation/evaluation of the Preservice Teacher Candidate's performance, the Educational Leadership Candidate will arrange a virtual post-conference to provide authentic and reflective feedback to the candidate based directly on the observed lesson and the instructional/professional standards outlined in the observation instrument. The purpose of this post-conference is for the Educational Leadership Candidate to provide authentic/reflective feedback to the candidate in a supportive, non-consequential environment. Also, the Leadership Candidate will provide opportunities for the teacher candidate to reflect on their practice during the conference. It is in this way that we are supporting the Educational Leadership Candidate's opportunity to engage with the Teacher Candidate as a Practitioner-Based Mentor, giving teacher candidates the opportunity to reflect on their practice prior to any consequential, professional assessments of their teaching. For the purposes of this model, the teaching observations assessed by the Educational Leadership Candidates will not be included in the Preservice Teacher Candidates' final grades. This will further ensure that the observation/evaluation/feedback sessions are an authentic example of reflective practice without any added layer of consequence.

Participants engaging in this model will be selected on a voluntary basis. Participants will engage in five hours of virtual training prior to the observations/conferences. The training will be led by the researchers involved in this study. The training will consist of an introduction to the instrument along with a 1.5-hour video training session conducted by university clinical faculty. Further, the Educational Leadership Candidates will engage in inter-rater reliability training on the instrument itself using published online lessons as part of the five-hour training. Additionally, the leader candidates will review the online pre-recorded classroom observation/evaluation to prepare authentic reflective feedback (two-hour time commitment) and engage in a one-hour reflective session via post-conferencing to receive feedback. Following the conclusion of the evaluation, all participants will engage in a one-occasion focus group lasting 1.5 hours to discuss the overall process and outcomes related to the experience. The findings will be reviewed with all participants in a thirty-minute review session totaling 10 dedicated hours to the overall implementation of this model.

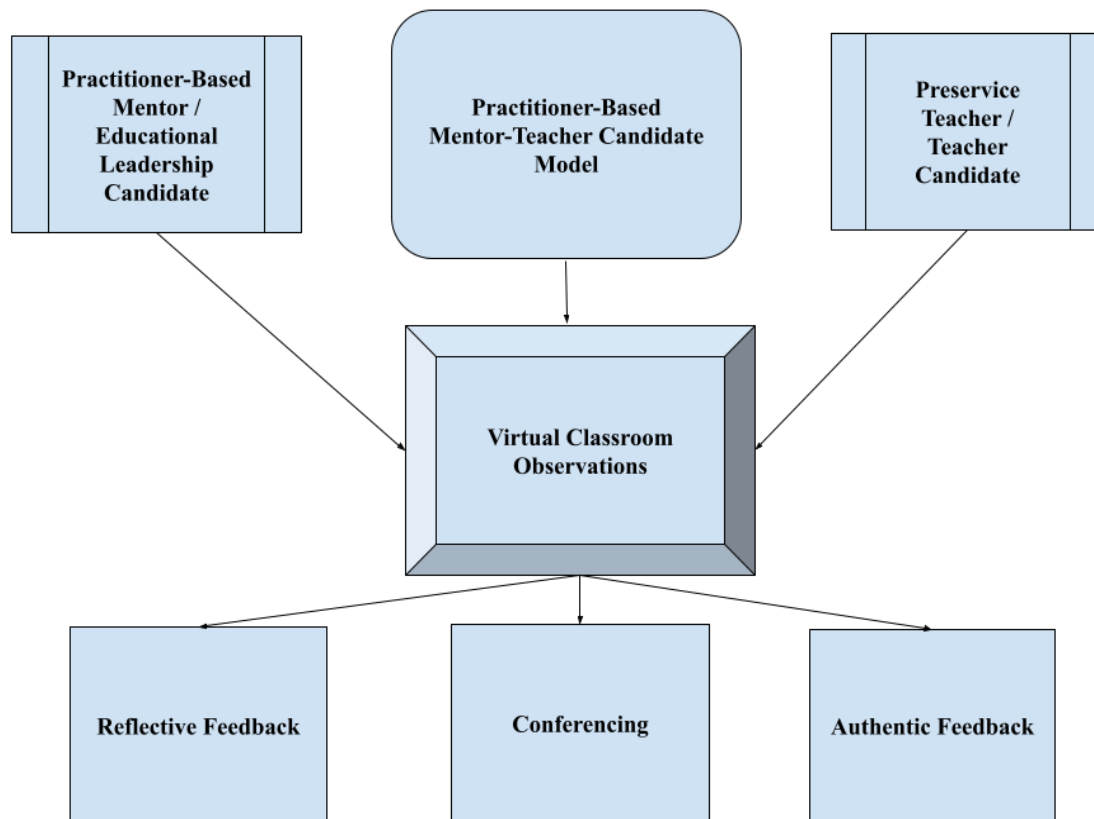
### **Pilot Study**

In a recent published study, the researchers piloted this model with a test group (Rahimi & McBrayer, 2022). One leadership candidate and one teacher candidate were paired to test the model. Data were collected and reviewed and included a pre-recorded classroom lesson and aligned lesson plans from the preservice teacher, and a one-hour pre-recorded virtual post-conference between the leadership candidate and the teacher candidate. Themes and patterns were identified to better understand how this two-way model of support for supervision may be beneficial to both candidates. The major themes noted included the benefits of reflective and authentic feedback, the benefits of utilizing a collaboration between leadership and teacher preparation programs, and the benefits of developing positive mentor relationships. Findings from the post-conference indicated that this model was positively received and provided benefits to both the leadership and teacher candidates. To note, these conferences were authentic and unscripted, and while the researchers had access to the post-conference, the researchers did not participate in or observe the conferences in real-time but rather viewed the pre-recorded session at a later date. The researchers' goals were to identify evidence-based practices that may help them strengthen this proposed model. An example of an identified evidence-based practice was that during the post-conference, the leadership candidate asked the preservice teacher candidate to first reflect on their lessons themselves before providing any formal feedback. The teacher candidate was asked to reflect on their instructional decision-making, student engagement, assessment of student understanding, and to give an overall evaluation of their classroom performance. The leadership candidate suggested ways to adapt the lesson and asked thought-provoking questions. Topics discussed included strategies learned in teacher preparation courses around student engagement and classroom management, assessment strategies, lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and setting professional goals and aspirations to better understand the Preservice teachers' depth of knowledge. Overall, the post-conferencing resulted in positive feedback, and the session concluded with the leadership candidate offering professional and practical advice evident of a mentor-mentee relationship. Through this pilot, the researchers sought to continue this work as both the leadership and teacher preparation programs desire to strengthen their program offerings and positively impact educators' preparedness for our current classrooms to ensure effective teaching and learning.

### **Results**

The Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model being proposed seeks to disrupt the traditional student teaching triad (Veal & Rikard, 1998; Yee, 1968), wherein the University Faculty Supervisor and school-based Classroom Teacher observe and evaluate the Preservice Teacher Candidate to provide feedback. Our model purports to offer a new dimension to closing the observation/evaluation/feedback loop for aspiring teachers. Through partnering with an Educational Leadership Preparation Program, Preservice Teacher Candidates benefit from practitioner-based mentor feedback to garner support without the power dynamic that currently exists within the traditional observation/evaluation/feedback approach. We are hoping to examine this model as a means of supporting both the preparation of teacher candidates, as well as leader candidates as they hone their (potential) future skills of instructional leadership through conferencing and mentoring. With the ultimate goal to impact student learning and achievement in P-12 classrooms, we are aiming to examine this model and its benefits to the field of leadership and teacher preparation. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
*Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model*



### **Discussion/Conclusion**

Our model meets the demands of leadership and teacher preparation in that those serving as University Faculty Supervisors are beyond capacity and need support to provide Preservice Teacher Candidates with effective feedback via classroom observations and post-observation conferencing. Additionally, Educational Leadership Candidates need evidence-based practices and strategies that are relevant to their development as an instructional school leader and to aid in the meeting of the required Supervised Field Experience hours to attain state licensure. Our model provides a perspective that recognizes alternative means to the traditional model for conducting classroom observations and evaluations, which we believe will be beneficial to educator preparation programs of all kinds.

This model has the potential to address a problem of practice within both Educational Leader Preparation Programs and Teacher Preparation Programs, as both struggle with adequately meeting program requirements and needs. A successful pairing of these student groups has the potential to create a powerful collaboration through a pedagogical approach in which the teacher candidates are engaged with future school leaders who they collaborate with as mentors. The cultivation of the preservice relationship between these two pre-professional groups can allow for a productive mentor relationship related to observation but may also have another potential impact on the co-preparation of these groups. As suggested in seminal work by Levine (2011), this mentorship should be comprehensive, with clear feedback on progress and

areas of necessary improvement, shared knowledge of the mentor and teacher, and an examination of assumptions within the practice of teaching and learning.

Practitioners may use this conceptualized Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model as a tool to conduct classroom observations and evaluations that are more conducive to providing candidates authentic and reflective feedback to address the capacity and challenges that University faculty working in these programs are faced with as we prepare both school leaders and teachers. The model clearly frames the conduct of classroom observations and evaluations as a continual process, which has the potential to improve performance if the focus is on authentic and reflective feedback delivered in post-conference opportunities. This inclusion of authentic feedback further advances the responses of preservice Teachers in detailing the importance of feedback, inclusive of steps to guide them to improve their teaching performance, suggestions for refining classroom management, and ways to enhance their teaching pedagogy (González-Toro et al., 2020). As preparation programs plan, the model can be used to discuss varied ways to conduct classroom observations and evaluations and further transform the experiences Preservice Teacher Candidates have in teaching and learning within their pre-service teaching and learning requirements. Additionally, the Educational Leadership Candidate gains the experience of conducting real-time classroom observations and evaluations that are composed of all the elements proposed in the model. Further, this model addresses a key component of online-oriented observations and feedback which provides greater accuracy in evaluating the teacher's performance, suggested to invoke higher self-efficacy of preservice teachers and provide opportunities for them to develop their mentorship skills through online platforms (Anderson, 2020; Atkins & Danley, 2020; Giffin, 2020). Both Leadership and Teacher Candidates will comprehensively grow in their skills as they engage in a more authentic and reflective educational journey.

It can be daunting to balance the contrasting feedback of support and encouragement with constructive criticism for areas in need of improvement during the evaluation process. Such feedback should involve preservice teacher candidates' strengths and weaknesses during both planning and teaching stages, to provide valuable information for growth for both parties (Korth & Baum, 2011). While this model is applicable to any discipline engaged in providing performance feedback, we see immediate application within our own work through educational leadership and teacher constituents. There are also potential unrealized benefits from leader and teacher candidates working more closely with each other during their preparation programs. It is expected that these benefits will arise through the implementation of trusting, interpersonally familiar, and positive relationships (Levine, 2011). We are hoping this model encourages future collaboration and parallel preparation of these groups. Through a collaborative model, current and aspiring school leaders will not only be providing important contributions to the preservice teacher, but also students in the classroom will benefit from the novel knowledge and social support of these emerging professionals (Korth & Baum, 2011).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Our major recommendation is a study to apply this new model in our current Educational Leadership and Teacher Preparation Programs to determine the outcomes of the Practitioner-Based Mentor-Teacher Candidate Model in an upcoming semester. By using this model, the researchers could provide the training and supplemental support to implement this new process for observing and evaluating Preservice Teacher Candidates as the mentee. Through this partnership with the Educational Leadership Candidate as the practitioner-based mentor and

assessor, opportunities are provided to attain evidence-based strategies to advance as instructional leaders, specifically related to classroom observation. Furthermore, it is encouraged for supervisors to actively engage in the creation of shared practice with supervisees by taking an active, observational role (e.g., taking notes and/or debriefing with preservice teachers on their progress; Levine, 2011). The researchers' goal is to implement the model and record the conferencing between the Educational Leadership Candidate as the practitioner-based mentor and the mentee. From these, we could determine evidence-based strategies to discuss as well as challenges to face, which could be the basis for the development of an interview protocol we could utilize within focus groups to better understand the impact of the model and processes contained within. Once this research yields outcomes related to the success of this model, there are implications for long range opportunities to collaborate and bring together future leaders and teachers for shared improvement of innovative preparation programs.

### **Conclusion**

Given the benefits of implementing this model, the researchers acknowledge that there will be challenges on both the leader and teacher preparation program sides. From the initial pilot study, the researchers examined interactions between a leader and teacher candidate and believe this model can serve as an evidence-based practice for educational preparation programs (Authors, 2022). As is often the case, leadership and teacher preparation programs are not housed in the same department and thus, there is a disconnect in the operational processes of each program. Finding commonalities and working in mutually beneficial collaboration will be key to the successful implementation of this model. Open dialogue and clear communication must be at the forefront of this work to provide the required elements and in our case, accrediting mandates needed, to satisfy both programs. That being said, we feel the benefits will far outweigh the challenges and if both parties are willing to learn from each program and adjust as needed, we see this model as being a tool for both programs to advance the work of educator preparation. We also see potential benefits for including other educational programs in the collaborative preparation of candidates. As educational preparation programs look to enhance the experiences of their students, introducing them to the work and study of other educational professionals can have an increased impact on the potential for transformational practice in the field.

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