

NATIONAL CENTER FOR

**TEACHER
RESIDENCIES**



Reimagining Mentor Professional Learning for Teacher Residency Programs

An Overview of the First Year of an Action
Research Project Focused on Creating a
High-Quality Professional Learning Program
for Mentor Teachers

Emily Davis, Ph.D. | Elizabeth Hearn | Tyiesha Hoskins

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Acknowledgments

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About NCTR



The National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing, launching, supporting, and accelerating the impact of teacher residency programs. Headquartered in Chicago, NCTR's mission is to disrupt historical educational inequities by advancing the teacher residency

movement to prepare effective, diverse, culturally responsive educators. For more information about NCTR, please visit nctrresidencies.org.

About TDN

Teacher Development Network LLC (TDN) collaborates with educational organizations to optimize mentoring and induction systems for preservice and early career teachers. TDN's goal is to improve retention, teacher quality, and student learning. For more information, please visit teacherdevelopmentnetwork.com.

About the Authors

Emily Davis, Ph.D., is the founder of Teacher Development Network LLC (TDN) and an expert on the development of high-quality induction and coaching programs for both new and experienced teachers. Prior to founding TDN, Dr. Davis held research and leadership positions at Stanford University and New Teacher Center and served as the program

director for the [Santa Cruz/Silicon Valley New Teacher Project](#). Named a Fulbright Specialist, as well as a Phi Delta Kappan and ASCD Emerging Leader in the field of education, Dr. Davis is a sought-after consultant and professional developer. She is the author of numerous articles and blogs on teacher mentoring, induction, and coaching topics, including [Making Mentoring Work](#) and [Tech Request: A Guide to Coaching Educators in the Digital World](#). She continues to mentor new teachers as a daily reminder of the complexities of learning to teach.

Elizabeth Hearn serves as a Director of Programs at NCTR. She joined the staff in 2022, and in her role, she supports teacher residencies in NCTR’s Network. Prior to joining the NCTR team, Hearn served as the founding director of the CREATE Teacher Residency in Atlanta. The vision of the CREATE program—reflecting her core values—is to establish “a compassionate, skilled, anti-racist educator for every student.” Hearn’s support included the navigation of intense political challenges, securing multiple grants, and developing engaged partnerships with a broad range of organizations. She is proud of CREATE’s impacts, including 96% of their Black new teachers remaining in the teaching profession for at least five years. She has also served as a science teacher and a researcher studying the neurophysiology of social attachment.

Tyiesha Hoskins serves as the Associate Director of Programs at NCTR, bringing years of experience as a culturally responsive educator, curriculum developer, and a previous teacher resident from one of NCTR’s members—the East Harlem Tutorial Program. She joined the NCTR team in November 2022, and in her role, she supports organizational efforts in NCTR’s Network by co-designing and co-delivering culturally and linguistically sustaining practices-aligned programming and consulting to teacher residencies. Prior to joining NCTR, Hoskins was a special education teacher and dedicated her teaching career to delivering culturally and linguistically sustaining practices to her students so that educational experiences affirm their home languages and communities. She cultivated a sense of “belonging” and meaningful learning opportunities for her students to thrive at their highest potential and build students’ critical consciousness.

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Photo on the cover: Cynthia Fitz-Wilson is a teacher resident at Dallas Teacher Residency. She is pictured with her mentor teacher, Chaslyn Reynolds. This picture was taken at Ben Milam Elementary School.

Reimagining Mentor Professional Learning for Teacher Residency Programs

An Overview of the First Year of an Action Research Project Focused on Creating a High-Quality Professional Learning Program for Mentor Teachers

Introduction

Unlike the long history of research on mentoring programs for certified teachers in PK-12, which has culminated in a reasonably consistent view of the value and role of inservice teacher mentors (Strong, 2009), research on preservice mentoring has not led to the same clarity (Ellis et al., 2020). Therefore, with support from a [Supporting Effective Educator Development \(SEED\) grant awarded in 2022](#), the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) partnered with the Teacher Development Network LLC (TDN) to answer the question:

What does high-quality professional learning for mentor teachers look, sound, and feel like in the context of a teacher residency program committed to disrupting historical educational inequities?

The ultimate goal of this multi-year project is to develop, pilot, and codify a mentor professional learning program that aligns with [NCTR's Levers for Equitable Teacher Residencies](#) and can be used by all teacher residency programs within NCTR's Network. NCTR and TDN collectively envision students of color and students from low-income backgrounds having equitable access to a diverse array of effective and culturally responsive educators as a long-term outcome of this work. This project will also provide important and long-overdue learning on the importance of preparing mentor teachers for their central role as field-based teacher educators and ensuring mentor teachers are supported in ways that help them develop affirming, collaborative, and generative relationships with their teacher residents.

To answer the project question, NCTR and TDN drew from [NCTR's Network of teacher residencies](#) across the country to conduct an in-depth study. The initial stage of the work, conducted during the 2022-23 school year, was designed to better understand what is currently happening related to mentor professional learning in NCTR-affiliated teacher residency programs and to explore potential promising practices. To do so:

- In the winter of 2023-23, five teacher residency leaders from three NCTR Network teacher residency programs were identified and interviewed. Many were already doing work related to mentoring professional learning that supported teacher residents of color.
- In the spring of 2023, a working group comprised of the leaders of the aforementioned teacher residency programs and nine additional NCTR Network teacher residency program leaders from a broad range of teacher residency program contexts was formed to develop a vision for mentoring success in the context of a teacher residency program and make recommendations for mentor professional learning that would help residencies attain that vision.
- Throughout this phase of the project, NCTR and TDN pulled from the theoretical and empirical literature on mentoring, professional learning, equity, social justice, and other relevant fields. They also sought direct feedback from teacher residents and mentor teachers on their experiences and needs to inform the work.

Written at the end of the first year of this project, this report explores:

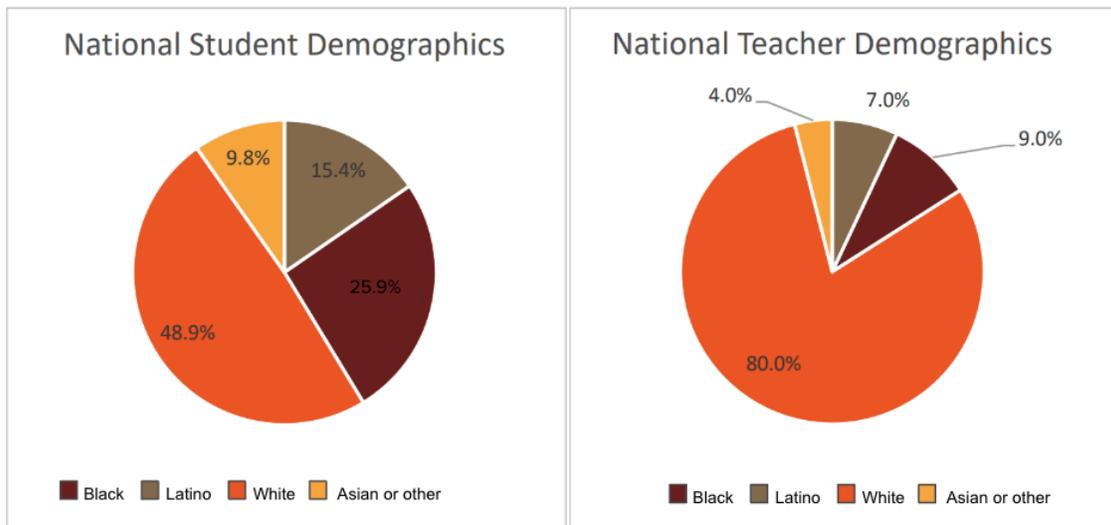
- 1. What We Know:** Mentors matter in teacher residency programs;
- 2. Results from Year 1:** Defining residency mentor teacher success;
- 3. Looking Ahead:** Four promising practices in mentor professional learning; and
- 4. Recommendations:** Ideas for teacher residency program adoption.

What We Know: Mentors Matter In Teacher Residency Programs

For more than two decades, university and PK-12 school leaders have sounded the alarm about declines in teacher education enrollment, growing teacher shortages, and increasing rates of teacher attrition (Sutcher et al., 2016). Despite a 6% uptick in enrollment from 2019-2021 (U.S. Department of Education, 2023) and declining student numbers in public schools (Cohen, 2023), educator preparation enrollments and completions are still at 70% of what they were 10 years earlier according to the most recent Title II data (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). These trends have placed constraints on the ability of schools to hire the teachers our nation's schools require to serve our K-12 students well. The pandemic accelerated these already alarming trends, leading "53% of public schools...[to report] feeling understaffed entering the 2022–2023 school year" (Institute of Education Sciences, 2023).

Exacerbating education’s overall workforce challenge is a lack of diversity in the teacher pool. Currently, 80% of public school teachers are white, while only 9% are Latino, 7% are Black, and 4% identify as Asian or other. These demographics are in stark contrast to a national student population that is 48.9% white, 30% Latino, 15.4% Black, and 9.8% Asian/other (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. *National Student and Teacher Demographics¹*



With clear data on the many academic and social-emotional benefits of a racially and ethnically diverse teacher workforce for all students, the current makeup of the teacher workforce is deeply concerning. Research shows that when Black students have at least one Black teacher, their likelihood of graduating increases by 39%. When Black students have two Black elementary school teachers, they are 32% more likely to go to college (EdTrust, 2014). Low enrollment in preparation programs and high attrition rates of teachers of color are both contributing factors to the low representation of teachers of color in the field. “The declining numbers of Black and Hispanic students majoring in education is steeper than the overall decline in education majors” (Machado, 2013), and teachers of color have a turnover rate of 18.9%, compared to 15% for their white counterparts. Black teachers, specifically Black male teachers, have the highest turnover rates (Hinkey & McCorkell, 2019).

Extended Field Time Matters

As states and districts search for strategies to address these crises in the field, many have turned to teacher residency programs, which “blend a rigorous full-year classroom apprenticeship for pre-service teachers with academic coursework that is closely aligned

¹ Adapted from EdTrust (2014). *Understanding the national shortage of teachers of color.*

with the classroom experience” (NCTR, 2023c). An expanding body of research suggests that teacher residency-trained teachers stay in the classroom longer than their traditionally trained peers (Guha et al, 2017). Teacher residencies also help diversify the teacher workforce (NCTR, 2023). For a range of reasons, teacher residencies— specifically those within the [NCTR Network](#)—are better able to attract candidates of color than other educator preparation models (Carver-Thomas, 2018) and retain them (Chu et al., 2022; Coffman, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 2012; Garza et al., 2014; Guha et al., 2017; Papay et al., 2012). In 2019, when only 27% of students receiving education degrees were people of color (NCES, 2018), 69% of teacher residents in programs within the NCTR Network identified as people of color (NCTR, 2023a). Furthermore, many NCTR teacher residents (83%) work in Title I schools (NCTR, 2023c) where there are often a majority of students of color and where teacher turnover rates are 50% higher than national averages (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These are often the schools hit hardest by teacher shortages (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). While the growing evidence about the impact of teacher residencies seems promising and positive, how to cultivate deep and courageous change to contribute to dismantling oppressive structures and systems is still a developing area for research. Efforts like NCTR’s [Black Educators Initiative \(BEI\)](#) provide the field with a strong starting point for what might be needed within the context of teacher residency programs (Madhani et al, 2022) and clarify that creating the conditions for students and teachers to truly flourish will require further study of every component of educator preparation programs, including the socio-political-historical context of the communities teachers come from and will serve.

Learning to teach and thrive in schools takes time and practice. Over the last decade, the field of educator preparation has begun to recognize the importance of extended time for teacher candidates to learn and practice in the classroom to ensure they are fully prepared for the complex realities of teaching in today’s schools (Hascher & Kittinger, 2014; Temiz & Topcu, 2013) as well as improve candidate preparedness (Ronfelt et al., 2014). This notion is driven, in part, by novice teachers’ frequent complaints that “their training had not prepared them for the ‘real world’” (Willingham, 2018). As a result, candidates may now spend up to a full school year in the classrooms of practicing teachers, depending on the state and program. While teacher residency programs were not the first to include extended field time in their educator preparation programs, they have made a longer and more intensive field experience a central component of their model (Guha, 2016). NCTR describes its vision for the residency year this way:

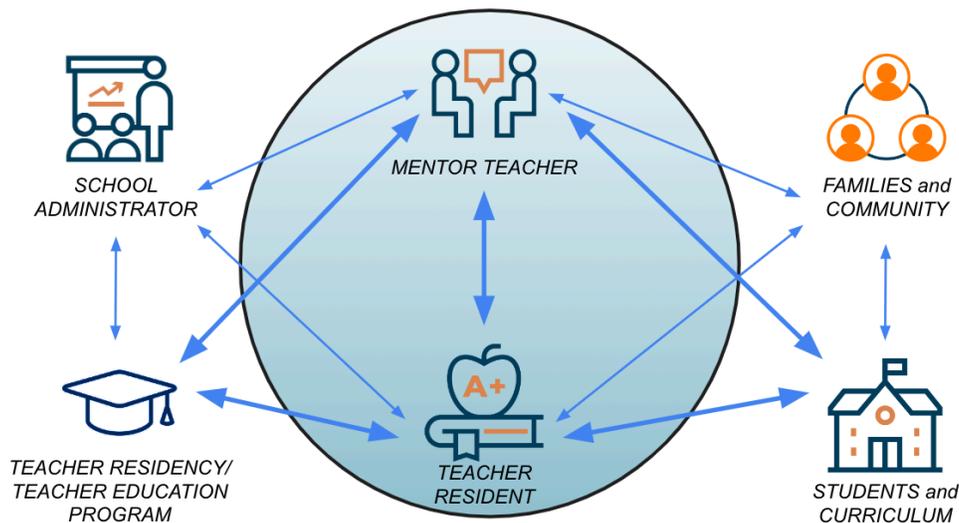
The clinical experience centers on a yearlong, culturally sustaining experience aligned to the organization’s mission and vision. Equitable teacher residency programs include a yearlong clinical experience in which teacher residents’ learning

is designed around their effective implementation of High-Priority Resident Practices that facilitate student achievement. The clinical experience also includes a carefully orchestrated gradual release of teaching responsibilities where, by the end of the clinical experience, teacher residents are prepared and confident to be teachers of record (NCTR, 2023c).

Mentor Teachers Matter

Central to the success of a residency year experience are the veteran teachers who open their classrooms and practice to teacher candidates (Zeichner et al., 2015). Teacher education programs often refer to these experienced educators as cooperating teachers, host teachers, lead teachers, or master teachers. NCTR generally refers to them as mentor teachers in an effort to clarify that they do more than simply make space for residents. Consider the graphic below that illustrates the critical positioning of mentors as guides for the teacher residents as they navigate unfamiliar and essential relationships with a wide range of people in school communities:

Figure 2. Centering Mentor Teachers in Teacher Residencies



For the purpose of this paper, veteran educators who host and support residents in their classrooms will be referred to as mentor teachers. Teacher candidates are also referred to by a range of titles including intern or student teacher, depending on the type of program, their stage in that program, and/or the school/district in which they are learning to teach. NCTR refers to those learning to teach within residencies as teacher residents. Thus this paper will refer to them using that term going forward. In both residencies and other teacher education programs, teacher candidates frequently report that their mentor teacher, not their teacher education program instructors, most impacted how they think about and enact

teaching (Clarke et al., 2014). Mentor teachers work alongside teacher residents in the classroom daily and are, therefore, often teacher residents' most impactful instructors. Teacher residents observe and often emulate how mentor teachers approach and talk about students and the curriculum, set up learning environments and address incidents, interact with other educators and administrators in the building, and discuss and interact with parents and the community. Because mentor teachers work both within the context of their school and the teacher residency program, they must also navigate the various (and sometimes competing) expectations of these two systems. Mentor teachers need a working relationship with and knowledge of the teacher residency's requirements and course expectations, as well as of their own school and systems' requirements and realities, and be able to model for teacher residents how to successfully navigate these systems. Additionally, mentor teachers are responsible for directly teaching residents how to be effective classroom teachers and members of the professional teaching community.

Mentor teachers' knowledge and skills are crucial to the long-term success of both the teacher residents and their future students. In the context of residency programs, mentor teachers' abilities to build and model professional, collaborative, and respectful relationships with teacher residents; create adult learning environments that are welcoming, meaningful, and appropriately scaffolded; and ensure teacher residents develop the important mindsets, language, habits, and skills teacher residents need to launch into their own classrooms are particularly crucial. Beyond the technical aspects of teacher practice, mentor teachers can also significantly impact teacher residents' sense of efficacy (Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012), connection, and commitment to the education community (Klassen & Chiu, 2011). Teacher residents who have strong working relationships with their mentor teachers—who feel welcomed, appropriately challenged, supported, and can bring their full selves to the experience—report feeling more ready for teaching, are more optimistic about the profession, and are more likely to seek out and benefit from mentoring as early career teachers (Boyd et al., 2006). These outcomes make it much more likely that these teacher residents will stay and grow in the field (Ingersoll, 2011; Boyle et al., 2023), which is what the field needs most amid a severe national shortage of certified, highly skilled teachers.

Yet, despite mentors' centrality to teacher candidates' success, many mentor teachers in all types of educator preparation programs are viewed mainly as hosts who offer teacher candidates a setting to observe or practice teaching and little more (Feiman-Nemser et al., 2022). Anecdotal data suggests many are not notified of their role as mentor teachers until just weeks or days prior to the teacher resident's first day, and many are not asked if the added role is one they're interested in engaging. The low value teacher education programs often place on the role of mentor teachers is also reflected in how they are compensated for the hours of guidance and support. On average, mentors in traditional

teacher education programs across the country make about \$200 per semester (Goldhaber, 2020). These are not the conditions needed to create successful field-based learning for teacher candidates.

Intentional Professional Learning for Teacher Mentors Matters

Being an excellent teacher of K-12 students does not necessarily translate to being an effective mentor of adults (Moir, 2011). Like teaching a class of students, supporting a new adult teacher-candidate requires a specialized set of knowledge and skills. In addition to the skills named in the previous section, mentors need other skills including, but not limited to areas such as observing and giving feedback, scaffolding residents through increasingly complex instructional planning, leading reflective conversations, supporting classroom management, and helping residents navigate the complexities of working in a professional space. To develop those skills, mentor teachers need intentional learning experiences that offer them a chance to make meaning of content, practice applying it in increasingly complex situations, and be supported and coached as their understanding of the desired skills develops over time. Despite broad consensus in the field that this is what learning to mentor requires, educator preparation programs as a whole, including teacher residencies, do not uniformly create high-quality professional learning systems for creating effective mentor teachers (Zeichner, 2005).

Traditionally, educator preparation programs, including many teacher residencies, provide mentors with little more than basic information—a handbook, a calendar, and an evaluation rubric. Most do not provide intentional programming to equip mentor teachers with the full range of knowledge, skills, and tools necessary for mentoring a teacher candidate toward readiness for licensure and effective independent teaching, let alone how to help them think about and navigate the complexities of race and power dynamics in schools. Even where structures exist to provide mentor teachers with professional learning, they do not necessarily address topics and skills that lead to a rich and supportive learning environment for teacher residents, particularly teacher residents of color (Gist & Bristol, 2022). This means that even field-focused teacher residency programs cannot always claim their programs are consistently effective at ensuring new teachers have access to the learning experiences they need.

This lack of focus is particularly startling because educators who host teacher residents in their classrooms are uniquely positioned to have the most powerful influence on how teacher residents think about teaching and students and how their instructional practice may develop. In other words, mentors are essential for developing a new teacher’s capacity to engage in culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy, develop critical

consciousness, and anchor their work in compassion for the students and families they serve.

This disconnect between the importance of the mentor teacher role and the investment in the development of the educators who engage in it means teacher residents are not only losing out on opportunities for meaningfully designed learning experiences in classrooms (Zeichner, 2002) but many, in all types of educator preparation programs, are being driven away, even “pushed out” because their mentor teachers are inadequately prepared to serve them. Furthermore, the dynamics of race and power—between the mentor teacher and teacher resident or between the teacher resident and other members of the school community—can lead to significant difficulties if mentor teachers have not learned specifically about these topics and are not themselves actively supported.

According to a 2022 report on the recruitment and retention of Black educators, NCTR-affiliated teacher residency programs across the country note that while retention in programs is high overall, when teacher residents of color do step away, it is often because their mentoring relationship does not feel healthy or productive (Madhani et al, 2022). The report specifically mentions that Black residents are more likely to report adversarial or unsupportive school environments, leading to a higher turnover rate (Amos, 2020; Campoli, 2017; Griffin & Tackie, 2016; Rowland et al., 2023). Similarly, in NCTR’s annual surveys of mentor teachers for NCTR-affiliated programs (NCTR 2023b), mentors sometimes express feeling unsupported in their mentoring role or struggling in their relationships with teacher residents, as illustrated in this quote from a mentor for the 2022-23 school year:



It was extremely stressful when expectations and guidelines were not being met and frustrating. It seemed like the program just kept making excuses for the resident rather than owning his actions and coming up with a way to support it.

Generally, the root of these challenges is not overt or easy to see. They often stem from a lack of knowledge or awareness about the personal, interpersonal, and racial dynamics and systems that influence how mentor teachers and teacher residents interact with one another, students, and others, as exemplified by this mentor’s response in NCTR’s 2022-23 survey (NCTR, 2023b):



It was very hard to be myself in my room and I struggled with having to share so much of my classroom with someone who was very different from me. I was very stressed for the majority of the year.

To fully actualize the promise of the teacher residency model, programs must, in addition to selecting effective teachers to serve as mentors, equip mentor teachers with the knowledge and skills required to build positive partnerships, navigate difficulties, and support the growth of all types of teacher candidates. As the following responses from NCTR’s 2022-23 mentor survey show (NCTR, 2023b), when teacher residencies fully support mentors, their mindsets and practices are often powerfully and positively transformed:



Guiding a struggling resident has demanded a heightened level of empathy, patience, and self-reflection. Navigating through this complex relationship, while providing the needed support, has improved my interactions with mentees and students alike.

I have found that the experience of mentoring a resident in my room has transformed my teaching practice and student learning. I am more purposeful, reflective and collaborative in a way that benefits my students’ overall daily performance.

Mentoring has provided me the space and opportunity to differentiate for an adult learner, which has made me even more reflective of my own teaching practices.

Even the best mentor professional learning programs are geared mainly toward helping mentors develop a general set of mentoring knowledge and skills (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005). While there appears to be some attention to mentoring for equitable student outcomes (Bragg et al., 2019), few programs have developed reliable methods for intentionally and successfully teaching educators how to be culturally responsive mentors. Teacher residencies need to be sure that mentor teachers have the knowledge and skills to model, practice, and coach teacher residents using techniques that intentionally build affirming, collaborative relationships and ensure teacher residents have learning experiences that fully prepare them to thrive in their own classrooms and ignite student learning.

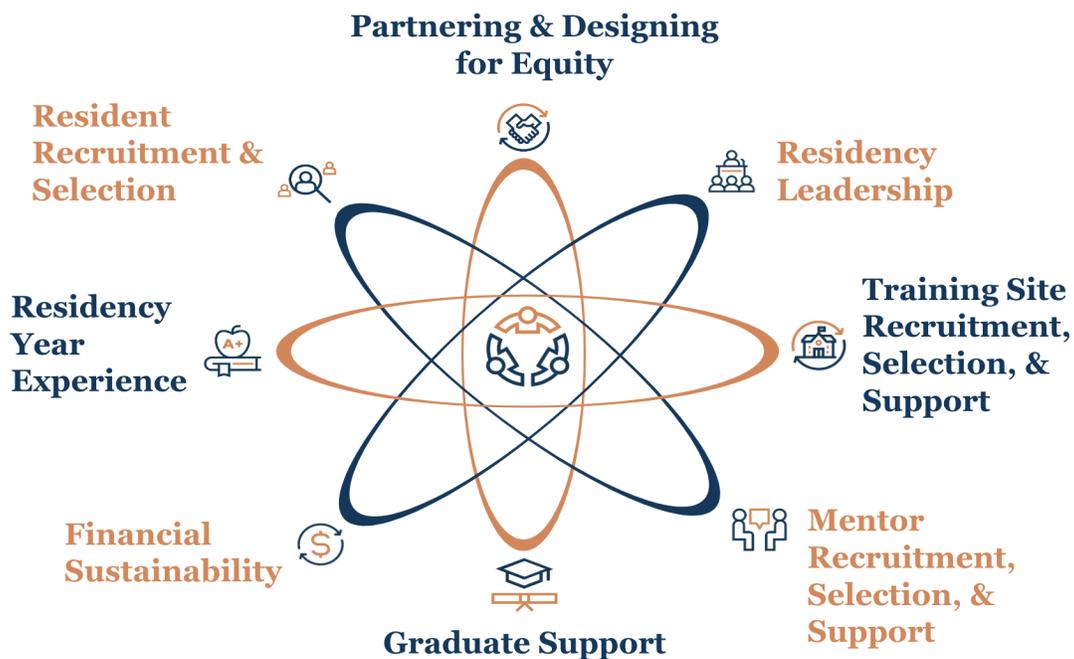
The consequences of not facing these challenges extend beyond the teacher resident and mentor teacher, as well. Students—those for whom schools and school districts were created—are served poorly when mentor teachers and teacher residents struggle. Students, their families, and society as a whole need excellence from our educational system, and when the adults positioned to care for students do not have what they need to succeed,

student growth and joy are compromised. Furthermore, given that the teacher residency model is designed to serve as a lever to address the enduring and systemic inequities facing children of color and/or those living in under-resourced communities, when mentor teachers or teacher residents are in conflict, unprepared to navigate their roles, or quit, the entire teacher residency falls short of achieving its goals and societal inequities are further perpetuated.

Building A System of Support for Teacher Mentors Matters

Designing and implementing an effective professional learning system for mentors that addresses the issues described in the previous section is a complex and layered endeavor in a teacher residency program. As program leaders are well aware, teacher residency program success requires an aligned systems approach to achieve its goals. [NCTR's eight Levers for Equitable Teacher Residencies](#) spell out these interconnected components (See Figure 3).

Figure 3. *NCTR's Levers for Equitable Teacher Residencies*



Developing effective mentor professional learning within the context of a teacher residency, as described in the Mentor Recruitment, Selection and Support lever (see Figure 3), is a more complex endeavor than in other educator preparation programs because of the cross-organizational partnerships at the foundation of—and necessary for the success of—these residencies. All of NCTR's Network teacher residencies are built on cross-organizational partnerships, which involve some or all of the following organizations:

universities, school districts, nonprofits, state education agencies, and/or unions. Each of these partner organizations typically precedes the teacher residency and therefore has already established beliefs about what high-quality teaching and learning look like, expectations for teacher and student performance and engagement, and a socio-political-historical context to which they are responding. Teacher residency partnerships further invite complexity through overlapping and often competing spheres of influence. While these complexities pose challenges to effective mentor recruitment, selection, and support, they are also the reasons that a strong aligned system to enact this critical aspect of the work is needed. If these different organizations continue to work and think in contrast instead of concert, the discrepancies, gaps, and misalignments that cause new teacher strife are likely to remain in place.

As with teacher resident programming, partner organizations need to spend time developing a common vision of mentor teacher success that details what teacher mentors should know and be able to do and how programs wish them to go about it. This vision needs to take into consideration both the specific learning goals the teacher residency program holds for residents and the context and needs of the schools in which teacher mentors and residents work.

Time is also an issue. Given the limited number of hours and days available for professional learning and the need for mentor teachers to have access to initial and ongoing professional learning, partner programs need to work together to consider how they will create a regular space for mentor teachers to engage in that learning during contract hours.

Developing aligned systems for mentor teachers' learning can be formidable, especially when the residency serves residents in multiple schools and, in some instances, school districts. However, given the centrality of mentor teachers to the success of teacher residency programs, leaders in all partner organizations would do well to ensure the professional learning needs of mentors are central to decisions about time and resources and thoughtfully developed to meet the needs of all parties involved.

Results From Year 1: Defining Residency Mentor Teacher Success

Developing a vision of what high-quality professional learning for mentor teachers looks, sounds, and feels like within the context of teacher residency programs committed to disrupting historical inequities is the central work of this project. NCTR and TDN have laid out a timeline for developing an answer to this question and a work plan for this project, as illustrated in Figure 4. The work will be conducted in several phases that will allow partners to first define mentor teacher success and the key elements involved in that success, and

then refine a curriculum to support mentors in developing the mindsets, knowledge, and skill sets required to meet that vision.

The initial stage of the work, conducted during the 2022-23 school year, was designed to better understand what is currently happening in NCTR Network teacher residency programs related to mentor professional learning and to explore potential promising practices. Five teacher residency leaders from three NCTR Network teacher residency programs were identified and interviewed. These leaders were selected for their forward-thinking work related to mentor professional learning and attention to supporting teacher residents of color. The deep-dive interviews included questions about what mentoring currently entails in their teacher residency programs, how they develop and support mentor teachers, and their successes, challenges, and wishes for mentoring in their residencies. Particular attention was paid to the needs of residents of color and mentoring practices that exist to support them.

In phase two (see Figure 4), a working group was formed to begin developing a vision for mentoring success in the context of a teacher residency program. The working group was composed of the original residency program leaders interviewed during phase one, plus leaders from eight additional NCTR Network teacher residency programs. The 12-residency program working group (see Figure 5 below) represented a broad range of organizations from across the country and reflected the Network's organizational diversity in terms of program size, setting, leadership, funding models, and demographics of residents served. All members were committed to the success of teacher residents of color and were at different stages in developing programming, structures, and systems to support mentors.

Figure 4. Project Timeline

Defining Stages of the Project

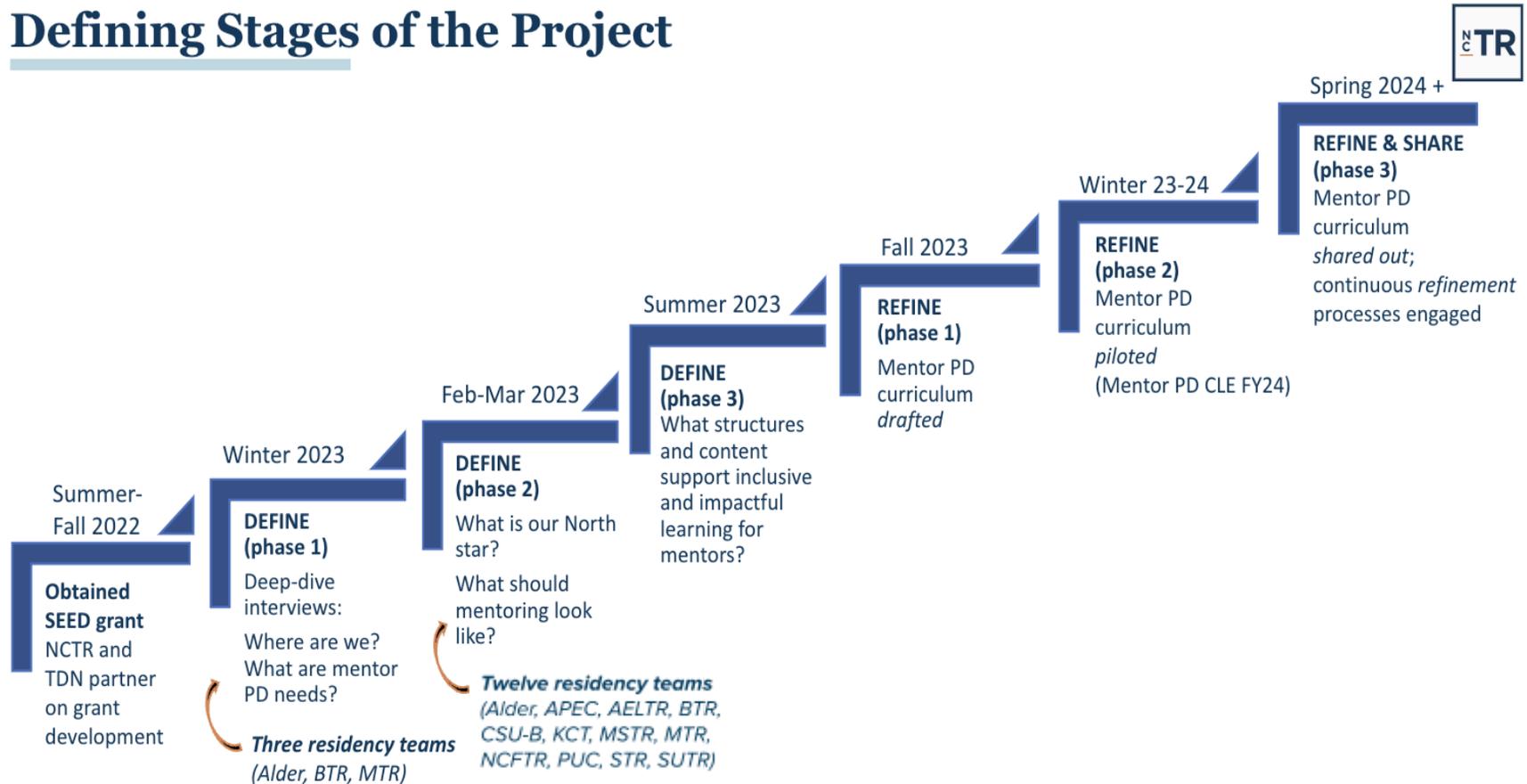


Figure 5. *Participating Teacher Residencies*

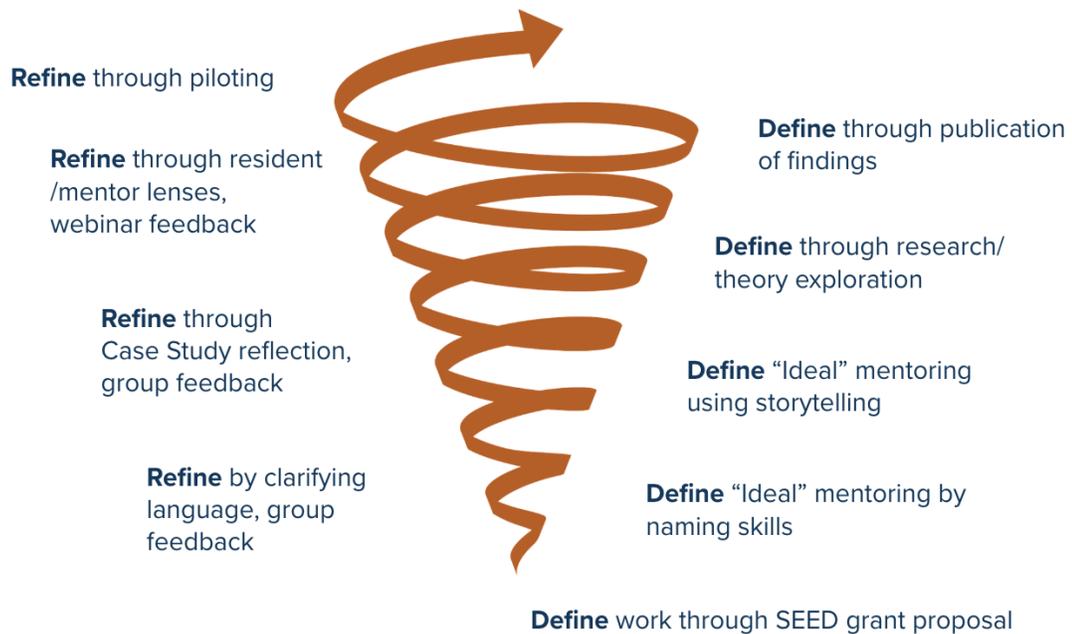
<p><u>Alder Graduate School of Education</u> (Alder) <i>California</i></p>	<p><u>California State University-Bakersfield</u> (CSU-B) <i>California</i></p>	<p><u>Norman C. Francis Teacher Residency at Xavier University</u> (NCFTR) <i>Louisiana</i></p>
<p><u>Alternative Pathways to Educator Certification at Columbia College</u> (APEC) <i>South Carolina</i></p>	<p><u>Kansas City Teacher Residency²</u> (KCT) <i>Missouri</i></p>	<p><u>Partnerships to Uplift Communities</u> (PUC) <i>California</i></p>
<p><u>AppleTree Early Learning Teacher Residency</u> (AELTR) <i>Washington D.C.</i></p>	<p><u>Memphis Teacher Residency</u> (MTR) <i>Tennessee</i></p>	<p><u>Seattle Teacher Residency</u> (STR) <i>Seattle</i></p>
<p><u>Boston Teacher Residency</u> (BTR) <i>Massachusetts</i></p>	<p><u>Minneapolis and St. Thomas Teacher Residency</u> (MSTR) <i>Minnesota</i></p>	<p><u>St. Paul Urban Teacher Residency</u> (SUTR) <i>Minnesota</i></p>

This larger group worked together over a series of six meetings in spring 2023 to define what high-quality mentoring looks, sounds, and feels like. Figure 6 illustrates this working group's spiraled learning approach to naming the values, mindsets, and skills of an effective mentor.

²During the process of writing this publication, Kansas City Teacher Residency has since changed their name to The Educator Academy, still serving the Kansas City, Missouri area.

Figure 6. *Spiraled Learning Approach*

Framework Development Path



The process included recurring opportunities for the working group to define concepts by sharing experiences and ideas, followed by reviews and critiques that ultimately synthesized and refined the working group’s ideas. Participants considered case studies and unpacked what effective mentor teachers do. They also collected stories of mentoring experiences that were impactful and what it was that was happening that made that experience so powerful. In addition to drawing from the working group members’ experience and knowledge, the facilitators drew upon a range of sources, including researchers, expert practitioners, scholarly articles, and practical texts from within education and adjacent fields. These sources, listed in Figure 7, were introduced by working group members and NCTR/TDN facilitators at strategic points in the process to support the development of a common vision, language, examples, and structures. A complete list of references is included at the end of this paper.

The result of this working group’s effort is two-fold. The first is a working common definition of equity as it relates to this particular project (Figure 8). This set of definitions is drawn from a wide range of literature (Figure 7), NCTR’s work on equity, and the working group’s knowledge. Creating this common definition was a crucial step in the process, as it defined a desired state.

Figure 7. Sources Informing the Work

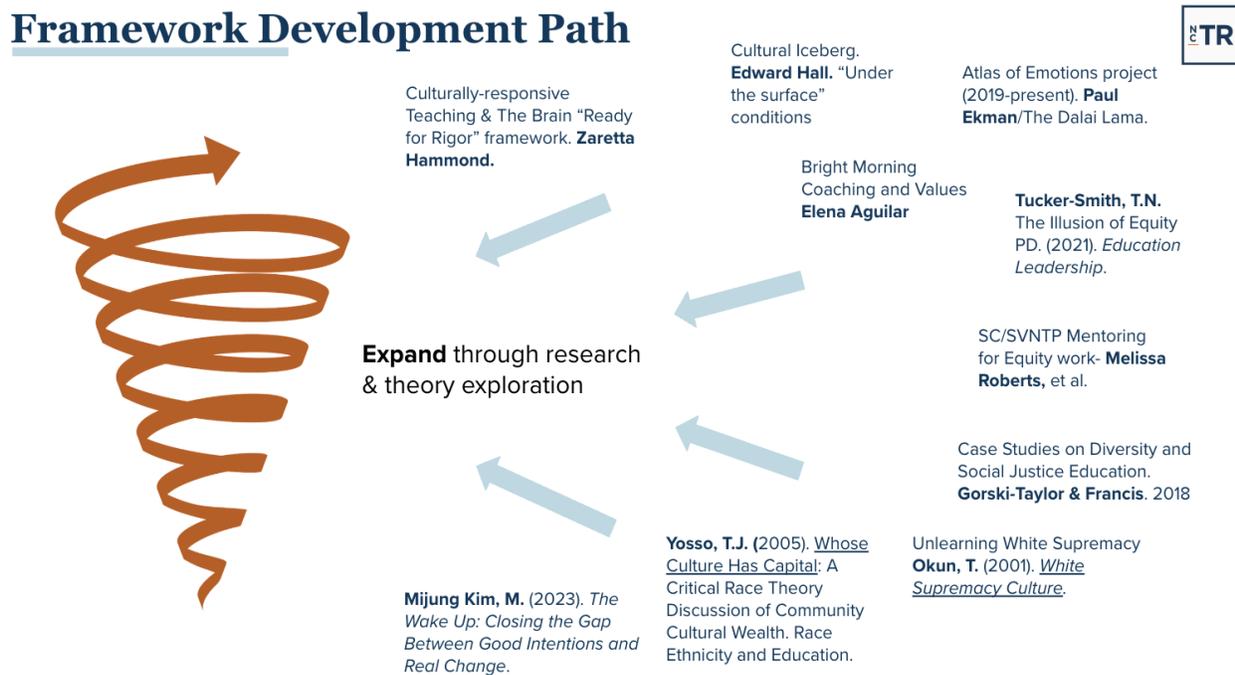


Figure 8. Defining Terms

When we use the term “equity” in this context, we mean:

- **Equity centers the humanity of all involved.** Therefore, we aspire to understand, connect, and honor the positionalities and intersectionalities of all learners and value their strengths.
- **Equity is not one-size-fits-all.** Instead, we seek to provide just-in-time, appropriate, and rigorous opportunities for all learners.
- **Equity is a practice.** It must be intentionally and consistently centered in the work between mentor teacher and resident teacher and in their collective work with students, families, and communities.
- **Equity is empowering.** It results in a sense of belonging, deep learning, and efficacy for everyone.
- **Equity pushes against dominant white cultural norms that are implicit in the education system.** It requires unlearning/norming and relearning/norming for all involved to make lasting internal, interrelational, institutional, and ideological changes.

The second result is the *Portrait of a Residency Mentor* (Portrait) (Figure 9). While there are many roles, responsibilities, and bodies of knowledge that mentors need to effectively do all of what's expected of them every day (such as guiding the development of residents, expertly teaching students, engaging parents, and navigating school systems to name a few), Portrait is a guide that articulates the knowledge, values, mindsets, and skills of self, others, and systems that directly impact mentors' ability to build affirming and collaborative relationships with teacher residents that maximize opportunities for learning. In essence, the guide is designed to reveal a profile of the dispositions and actions of impactful positive mentoring that have previously been a hidden curriculum of learning to mentors.

Portrait includes three dimensions (Mijung Kim, 2023) that build upon one another. Each dimension includes a defining set of characteristics and a set of actions mentor teachers might take within that dimension. Beginning in the "**Grounding**" dimension, mentor teachers reflect on and develop an awareness of their values, identities, and mindsets. They also turn outwards, seeking to know their teacher residents in the same way. This foundation prepares mentor teachers for the "**Orienting**" dimension, wherein they seek to develop an understanding of the context and the historical inequities in educational systems and engage in an "unlearning" of normalized beliefs that reflect hegemonic or dominant cultural perspectives. They also deepen partnerships with teacher residents, thereby increasing their capacity for collaborative learning between the mentor teacher and teacher resident in the classroom setting. Finally, in the "**Moving Together**" dimension, mentor teachers focus on operationalizing the interpersonal and systems-level understandings of the "Orienting" dimension through the creation of educational spaces (their classroom and/or entire schools) that center the humanity of teacher residents, students, families, and communities. This three-part Portrait seeks to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the knowledge, skills, and mindsets necessary to foster equitable and transformative mentoring practices that have previously been unstated.

Portrait represents an ideal state towards which mentor teachers and the programs that support them will strive. Within the context of this project, Portrait serves as a set of guiding principles towards which all plans for residency mentor professional learning will aim. While the members of the team have given their approval of Portrait and the preceding definition of equity, it is the team's goal to have the finer details of the guide become increasingly clear and vivid through piloting and further reflection. In the project's next stage, an expanded team of NCTR-affiliated teacher residency leaders will work with the NCTR and TDN facilitators to develop, pilot, and refine a mentor professional learning curriculum aligned with Portrait. Following that stage, a select group of NCTR residency programs will work with the NCTR/TDN team to pilot Portrait and its accompanying curriculum in their contexts.

Figure 9. *Draft Portrait of a Residency Mentor*

Dimensions	Characteristics	Actions
Grounding	Understand self and teacher resident within systems through intentional exploration of values, intersectionalities, and positionalities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engages in self-reflection and develops an internal awareness of one’s own identities, positionalities, values, mindsets, and biases and how these influence their work and interactions. ● Fosters growth mindset, resiliency, and willingness to adapt practices and patterns to align with new learnings. ● Develops an understanding of residents as whole individuals.
Orienting	Actively unlearn normalized beliefs and comprehend historical inequities. Empower mentor teacher and teacher resident to navigate complexity and institutional barriers through critical equity-centric principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establishes inclusive approaches to collaboration that foster a mutually beneficial learning partnership. ● Offers teacher residents opportunities to reflect upon and make meaning from their experiences. ● Helps teacher residents understand the complexities of education systems and how to navigate through those systems. ● Strives to unlearn the norms and ideologies of society and systems. ● Centers the development of agency through a combination of care and productive struggle for teacher residents. ● Models and expands mentor teacher and teacher resident capacity to work through conflict and tensions constructively.
Moving Together	Intentionally act in ways that create high-quality educational spaces that center and empower the humanity of educators, students, their families, and communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Makes sacred space for reflection and discussion pertinent to the development of the teacher resident as a whole person. ● Approaches teacher resident development in a manner that affirms their identities and fosters ownership, agency, and resilience. ● Models metacognition through narration of practice and thought transparency. ● Examines their own pedagogy practice and seeks feedback from the teacher resident in a manner that mirrors traditional feedback cycles from mentor teacher to teacher resident. ● Assists teacher residents in developing strategies for knowing learners as multifaceted individuals and using that information explicitly in planning. ● Develops adaptive expertise of mentor teacher and teacher resident through iterative and rigorous cycles of inquiry.

It is worth noting that Portrait focuses specifically on the mentor teacher’s work as a field-based educator of teacher residents. While there are many other bodies of knowledge a mentor teacher might need in their role as a classroom teacher, such as how to teach

reading effectively or key aspects of classroom management, the content of mentor professional learning should focus specifically on helping each individual mentor teacher, and the collective cohort of mentor teachers, to develop the significant body of knowledge and tools needed to maximize teacher resident learning and skill development. This core content includes the actions listed in Portrait (Figure 8) and additional underlying coaching knowledge and skills crucial to enacting the actions listed in Portrait effectively. This knowledge and skills include, but are not limited to:

- Racial identity development (Facilitating Racial Equity Collaborative, 2021);
- Understanding the components of adult learning theory (andragogy);
- Utilizing mentor language, stances, tools, and protocols;
- Attending to the developmental continuum of teacher residents;
- Developing metacognition about one's own practice and supporting the development of it in teacher residents; and
- Addressing relational challenges in ways that build professional trust.

In May 2023, NCTR shared Portrait with a wider audience of NCTR teacher residency program leaders through a webinar. The webinar's goal was to consider what mentoring looks, sounds, and feels like in the context of a teacher residency program committed to challenging and correcting oppressive structures and systems and explore and reflect on NCTR's draft of Portrait of a Residency Mentor.

The webinar began by introducing Portrait. Participants then viewed video clips of interviews with mentor-resident pairs as they answered questions about their experiences, such as:

- To what degree does race or other issues of identity inform or impact your work together?
- What, if any, needs went unmet for you this year?
- What are the core values and mindsets around supporting a teacher resident?
- What professional development has been or would be helpful for you as a mentor teacher?

Following each clip, participants heard a teacher residency program director discuss their thinking about the connections between the video clips and Portrait.

Engagement during and feedback following the webinar was very positive. Several participants expressed appreciation for the video clips and how they supported their understanding of Portrait, approval for the layout of Portrait in three clear and building dimensions, and excitement about ways they could use the guide within their contexts. Several programs requested information about how to participate in the next stage of work. Specific comments included:



I appreciate this [Portrait] because it addresses the hidden curriculum of mentoring.

I appreciate that there is a recognition that [mentor teachers] need coaching and training, too. We recently surveyed our former [mentor teachers] regarding what they think training should consist of. We will use these ideas to inform the work we do in our mentor development academy sessions.

Thanks so much! This was great! I'm looking forward to referencing this great resource to continue to inform the PD we provide for our mentors!

Following the webinar, several program leaders shared Portrait with their mentor teacher teams and then collected and shared reflections from those teams with the webinar facilitators. One participant reported:



I shared the [Portrait] with my mentors, and they really liked using it as a self-evaluation and thinking about ways to deepen mentor professional development moving forward. There were some clear patterns that arose! They loved that it was centered in student learning and only three categories!

Another teacher residency program leader asked mentor teachers to share how strongly they agree that Portrait is aligned with their vision of a successful mentoring program. Respondents consistently indicated alignment as a 3 (agree) or 4 (strongly agree) on a 4-point scale. Their feedback expressed an appreciation for how Portrait names and prompts the unpacking of key concepts of their vision. They also expressed a need for coaching in the areas described in the guide:

Knowing yourself and your biases is crucial. Being able to critically self-reflect needs to be taught in mentor coaching. However, as stated in the framework, willingness to adapt and realign also must be taught. Many people can reflect, but action after that is where they get stuck.

I love the metacognition and self-talk. Along with the constant inquiry. Both also need training and not just theory.

Working group members also offered several suggestions for improving Portrait. Specifically, to avoid jargon, further clarify terms, and ensure specificity in training:



When you state unlearn norms, you need to be clear on whose norms you are referring to. The reason I state this is because depending on the community in which one grew up, the norms may vary. I would just clarify that section of that statement.

The [Portrait] may be jargon-heavy. Maybe [paring] it down all around. For example, words like positionality.

Revisions of Portrait will be ongoing and will drive and be driven by the piloting phase of the work.

Looking Ahead: Four Promising Practices in Mentor Professional Learning

As shown in Figure 2, the 2023-24 school year “Refine” stage of this project includes designing and piloting a curriculum to accompany Portrait. In this phase, a significant question for the team to answer will be: *What structures support inclusive and impactful learning for mentor teachers?* As the work moves forward, the team is mindful that there are many layers of knowledge and skill that mentor teachers utilize daily, many of which extend beyond the project's scope. Portrait and professional learning curriculum is intended to frame what mentor teachers individually and collectively need to know and do to help their teacher residents develop as learners.

While there is little in the literature about equity-focused professional learning for mentor teachers, there are some studies aimed broadly at best practices for designing educator

professional learning that have relevance to this work and are drawn upon here. For example, Linda Darling-Hammond (2017) and Zaretta Hammond (2020) provide suggestions for content and structures that can be particularly powerful for adult learners focused on equity. Four promising practices of different grain sizes and levels of specificity have influenced this work to date and will continue to provide a foundation for the curricular design phase. These practices are described below. Some are connected more directly to specific Portrait dimensions than others. In those places, that connection is named within the description of that practice. Additionally, specific examples of curricular structures are offered for each practice and are drawn from both the research and direct experiences of the working group that designed Portrait. It is also worth noting that the first practice listed below is described in more detail than those that follow it. This is because building a culture for mentor learning is critical for meaningful engagement, and the nuance required to effectively develop and maintain that culture is often overlooked. Additionally, the remaining practices in this section depend on and reinforce the aforementioned intentional culture of learning, meaning this practice is the lynchpin of success and, therefore, deserves additional time and attention at this juncture.

Practice 1: Intentionally shape a culture of learning.

As Zaretta Hammond so eloquently wrote in *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2015), “All learning happens through culture. Thus, we all have culture.” During the initial (Portrait design) phase of this project, working group members underscored the importance of including the development of a “brave space” culture—a climate conducive to honest dialogue and risk-taking (Arao & Clemens, 2013)—during the second (curricular design) phase.

Considering that Portrait defines ideal mentor teachers as able to engage in personal and often challenging reflections (Grounding), unlearn normalized beliefs informed by white dominant culture, comprehend vast systemic inequities impacting schools and education (Orienting), and practice public use of (sometimes nascent) language, skills, ideas, and tools, it is understandable that intentional efforts to develop a supportive culture and climate for their learning are essential. Mentor teachers are being asked to do things that are uncomfortable and challenging for many people, so the design of their learning environments must consider who they are, what they know at the outset, how they exist in relationship to each other and the schools, and what supports will most effectively scaffold their growth as a group.

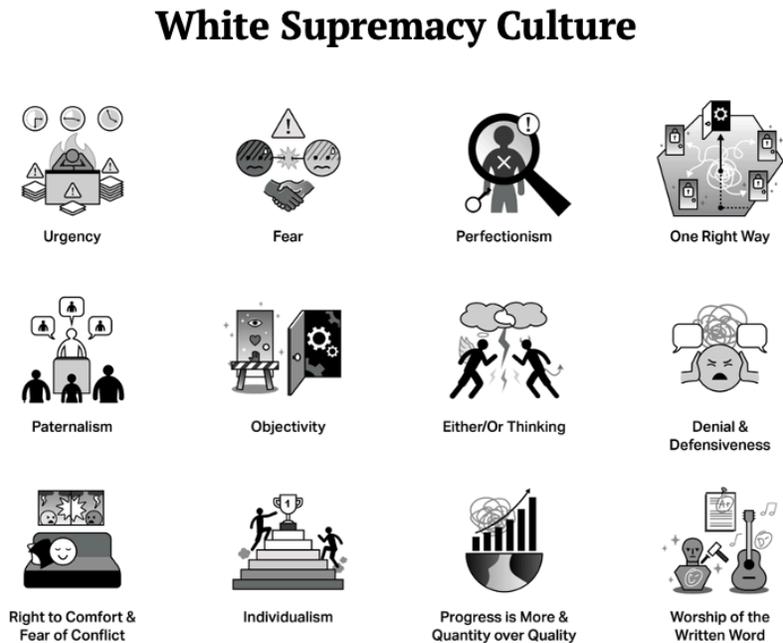
Simply bringing mentor teachers together is not enough to ensure that a learning environment full of rich and informative reflection that allows mentor teachers to engage in the work described above will develop. It takes time and consistent effort to make it

happen. During interviews and working group meetings, several participants shared examples of how patterns of interaction that elevate or devalue certain voices and/or uphold white supremacy norms can damage relationships, so facilitators must remain ever-vigilant and proactively work to support mutually empowering partnerships. To this end, the working group suggested that facilitators:

- Co-construct the agreements for group conduct with mentor teachers. While each group must develop their own agreements, the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools (2024), drawing from the work of Glen Singleton and Curtis Linton (2006), offers the following agreements as examples:
 - stay engaged
 - speak your truth
 - experience discomfort
 - expect and accept non-closure
 - pay attention to patterns of participation
 - engage contextual confidentiality
 - speak directly (as soon as possible) to a person if they have said or done something that caused hurt or harm
- Intentionally work to build and maintain a culture that safely fosters challenging dialogue.
- Create new ways of facilitating and working together so facilitators and participants recognize and push against white supremacy cultural norms such as those in Figure 10.
- Employ practices that intentionally slow thinking, pursue critical thinking rather than knowledge transfer, and allow for non-closure.
- Use protocols that create the psychological safety and brave spaces needed to engage fully in mentor professional learning by ensuring all participants understand what will happen and what is expected at each stage, intentionally building and sustaining more equitable participation patterns, and minimizing patterns of participation that leave some participants feeling unwelcome, unsupported, or unheard.
- Utilize affinity groups that enable mentors to come together and build connections based on shared identities and characteristics or interests.
- Remember that turbulence is often part of the group development process. It will take time for your group to coalesce. Discussion and debate are often necessary for

successfully creating a high-functioning group. Lean into those discussions, utilize community agreements, and use group facilitation skills to ensure your team moves through the “storming” phase to the “performing” one (Tuckman, 1965).

Figure 10. *White Supremacy Culture*³



As facilitators intentionally work to shape a culture of mentor learning and build processes such as those described in the list above, a helpful tool may be to ask these four questions posed by Linda Darling-Hammond (2017):

- Does [our process] honor the funds of knowledge each person brings to the conversation?
- Does [our process] give participants from marginalized communities/identities greater access to the flow of the discussion?
- Does [our process] give participants more agency in directing the conversation?
- Does [our process] give participants a more robust cognitive workout by leveraging their everyday modes of communication?

These questions, used alongside other protocols and rituals, can help participants understand what will happen and what is expected at each stage and can intentionally build and sustain more equitable participation patterns.

³ Based on the work of Okun, T. (1999). *White Supremacy Culture*. www.dismantlingracism.org

Building a culture for mentor learning is critical for meaningful engagement. The remaining practices in this section depend on and reinforce the aforementioned intentional culture of learning. Facilitators, for example, may wish to reference “Tools for Addressing White Dominant Culture” (ND), which offers “something different” than those shown in Figure 9. They include alternative norms such as “Community and Collectivism” instead of “Individualism” and “Systems and Complexity Thinking” instead of “Either/Or Thinking.”

Practice 2: Center active learning and reflection.

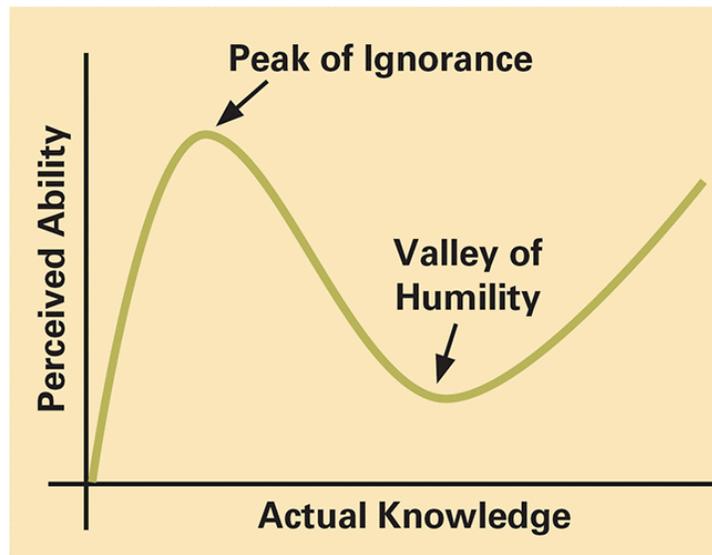
At its heart, mentoring involves reading a situation, gathering data from a constellation of cues, and determining one’s approach in real time. This is complex work that requires time and practice to do well. Therefore, the most effective mentor professional learning is organized around regular and iterative cycles of active learning. These cycles provide space for mentor teachers to:

- Learn and unpack new ideas and approaches;
- Practice applying them with others who are also learning; and
- Reflect on those experiences and adjust their thinking and approaches.

As John Dewey famously noted, “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience” (1933). Therefore, learning to internalize and enact new mentoring skills takes more than just practice. It also requires reflection upon their learning and practice, receiving feedback on their practice and progress, and time and support for making meaningful changes to their practice. Especially when working with topics related to equity, facilitators must create regular time and space and use clearly communicated guidelines to encourage metacognition—to focus on how they are learning, what is changing, and what that means for them.

Especially when learning to effectively enact the components found in Portrait, explicit practice and reflection ensure mentor teachers are not left in what Tucker-Smith (2016) refers to as “the valley of humility,” wherein mentor teachers know they need new knowledge and skills but do not yet have the knowledge or skills to make the change (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Graph of the Dunning-Kruger Effect



At the heart of this is the opportunity for mentor teachers to engage in real-time practice with others, notice how their mentoring efforts impact others, reflect on those experiences, improve their knowledge, and then take new actions. This cycle builds not only knowledge and skill but also a sense of self-efficacy and the readiness to take on new aspects of their work with confidence.

Active learning activities for mentor professional learning might include:

- Examining the benefits and constraints of a protocol for looking at student data. As a mentor community, practicing or role-playing the protocol with a partner using a sample data set, and reflecting on the experience and mentor moves needed to facilitate this protocol with teacher residents.
- Learning new mentoring language frames, engaging in repeated and well-crafted practice coaching conversations and role plays wherein mentor teachers try on the new language frames, and then debrief with one another.
- Unpacking a post-observation conference protocol, viewing and analyzing a recording of a mentor's post-observation conference, and discussing next steps.

An added bonus of organizing professional learning around active learning and reflection cycles is that mentor teachers are engaging in a sequence of steps they will, in turn, guide their teacher residents through, especially as described in the “moving together” dimension of Portrait. Being transparent with mentor teachers about the professional learning model's components and structures and providing mentor teachers with time to process their

experiences as learners will support their ability to replicate this model with teacher residents.

Practice 3: Utilize models.

When learning something new, sometimes the most helpful tool is a representation of what that concept looks and sounds like in practice. Appropriate models might include but are not limited to:

- Curating and sharing a well-selected collection of videos of classroom instruction, mentor-resident coaching conversations, mentor teacher and teacher resident reflections on their interactions, and interviews with other stakeholders about their perspectives and experiences.
- Demonstrations and modeling of specific protocols, language, or mentoring moves.
- Work samples (i.e., completed mentoring tools, teacher resident lesson plans, student work analysis) mentors can unpack to understand protocols as well as teacher resident, student, and mentor teacher work.
- Case studies that reveal the intricacies of mentoring or teaching interactions and consider mentor moves and their implications.

Facilitative structures and equity-centered sense-making strategies, such as those described in promising practices one and two above, can be engaged to maximize the power of these models to guide participants in understanding what they are seeing and how the models might influence their work.

Working group members described and shared several facilitation strategies that support engagement with models, including:

- Reviewing and unpacking common texts, videos, and curriculum as a community to help develop a common vision, language, and tools.
- Listening to the voices and stories of those engaged in this work, such as mentor teachers and teacher residents. This strategy was a powerful tool used by the webinar facilitators to help participants unpack and understand the mentor professional development framework.
- Engaging with well-crafted case studies that consider the full complexity of the context, including well-rounded people managing a range of demands.

- Bringing forward problems of practice or framing dilemmas faced by mentor teachers in the community to use jumping-off points for discussion and problem-solving as a community.
- Engaging in triad coaching practice wherein one mentor teacher serves as a metacoach—observing for language, moves, and the results of those moves and providing feedback and support to the mentor teacher who is practicing.

Practice 4: Deepen learning through the coaching of mentors.

Learning within a mentoring community is crucial for developing culture, shared vision and language, and making meaning through collaboration. However, since the work happens in the field when mentor teachers and teacher residents work together, mentor teachers also need support *in situ*. So, in addition to mentor teachers supporting mentor teachers, a critical support structure is the real-time coaching of mentors. In-field coaching—where program leaders coach mentors in real-time as they engage in their daily work with teacher residents and students—is one of the most powerful structures for quickly developing a mentor’s practice. In-field coaching might include:

- Engaging in cycles of learning that mirror work mentors and residents do together (i.e., understanding context, setting goals or focus areas, gathering and reviewing data together, considering next steps, and reflecting on work together).
- Working alongside the mentor and resident as they explore a topic connected to residency coursework.
- Thinking with the mentor or resident about how to best navigate a situation within their partnership, their context, or their classroom.

When done well, each of these models for in-field coaching can build trust between program leaders and mentor teachers (New Teacher Center, 2021). They can encourage mentors to try new ways of working that are more in alignment with the Portrait and can help mentors and residents navigate the complexities of working inside residencies and partnerships that can be fraught for many reasons. Savvy program leaders will also find in-field coaching an opportunity to gain a deeper insight into residents, mentors, and the contexts in which they work, thus allowing them to better align their professional learning offerings and systems with the realities of the work and the context in which both teacher residents and mentors work.

During interviews with mentor teachers earlier in this project, one mentor teacher noted that when the program leader spent time with the mentor teacher and teacher resident in their classroom providing coaching support, it made a significant difference in their practice.

While most teacher residency programs include in-field coaching for teacher residents, this extension ensures alignment of process, knowledge, and practice across all elements of the teacher residency team.

These four promising practices will serve as the backbone for designing the mentor professional learning curriculum in the next stage of this project. In collaboration with teacher residency program leaders, the project team will design, pilot, and refine a series of learning modules that embed these promising professional learning practices to support mentor teachers in developing the mindsets, knowledge, and skills outlined in *Portrait of a Residency Mentor*.

Next Steps for Teacher Residency Programs

While this project is still in progress, there are already several ways teacher residency program leaders might utilize the ideas in this report in their own programs.

1. Use Portrait to guide mentoring program outcomes with stakeholders.

Given the need for leaders within residency partner organizations to develop a common vision of program success and, more specifically, of mentor teacher success, Portrait might serve as the starting point for the development of a collective understanding of the knowledge, skills, and mindsets a highly effective mentor teacher needs in the context of a residency program committed to disrupting historical educational inequities.

2. Use Portrait to guide mentor teacher recruitment and selection.

Consider how the elements contained within Portrait might help residency program and partner organization leaders clarify their common selection criteria and “look fors” when observing teachers who might serve as mentors. Further, sharing Portrait with teaching staff in a school may help attract mentor teachers who are ready and eager to speak directly about and purposefully engage in identity work and justice-centered practices, including reimagining classroom spaces that lead to improved experiences and outcomes for all students.

3. Share Portrait with current teacher residency mentors.

Consider taking Portrait back to the residency program’s current team of mentors and using it to facilitate a discussion about whether this document aligns with their vision of mentoring success and to determine where mentors might want and need more support.

4. Use Portrait to guide the development of a professional learning scope and sequence for mentors.

While a professional learning scope and sequence is being developed during phase 2 of this project, residency program leaders might consider crosswalking the knowledge, skills, and dispositions found in Portrait with the current mentor professional learning program's curriculum. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions does the mentor professional learning curriculum already address? Which ones might require more attention?

5. Share Portrait with teacher residents to support their understanding of the mentor-teacher role.

Consider the potential impact of resident awareness of Portrait on their experience. For example, one program in the working group brought Portrait to the residents in their program to reflect with them on what their mentors may be trying to do and what their role as residents is in advocating for themselves and for their mentors to be working on these skills with strong positive outcomes.

6. Use the four promising practices to update mentor professional learning.

Consider how current mentor professional learning structures either use or do not use the four promising practices outlined in the previous section. For example,

- Do facilitators and mentors work together to develop a set of community agreements?
- Do mentors have regular opportunities to practice with new ideas, skills, and tools in real-time, get feedback, and try again?
- Do professional learning activities include case studies, models, and work samples for mentors to interact with and reflect on together?
- Do mentors have an opportunity to receive coaching support in the field?

Program leaders do not need to wait for further guidance to begin enacting these strategies for programmatic improvement. Taking on any of these tasks would immediately have a powerful and positive impact on mentor teachers and the residents they serve.

Conclusion

Designing high-quality professional learning for mentor teachers is critically important and also complex. Mentor teachers play an essential role in bridging the learning environments of educator preparation courses and the in-school clinical experiences. Residencies depend on mentor teachers to help guide teacher residents to become effective, culturally responsive, and committed educators who will thrive in their jobs. In order to do this well,

mentor teachers will need thoughtfully designed, ongoing opportunities for learning, both with their role—alike colleagues and one-to-one with a coach. The professional learning content will need to focus intentionally on the concepts described in *Portrait of a Residency Mentor* and be designed around the promising professional learning practices outlined above. The concepts and skills will also take time to develop, meaning mentor teachers will need regular, iterative opportunities for learning, practice, and feedback.

Developing a robust mentor professional learning curriculum will go a long way toward helping teacher residencies achieve their goal. Mentoring is only one part of the greater residency structure. And, given the complexity of that structure, success relies heavily on developing strong partnerships among residency leaders and stakeholders. There must be a common vision of excellent teaching and mentoring amongst leaders, teacher education faculty, mentor teachers, and teacher residents to ensure that all parties know what success looks like and can align their support for mentor teachers and teacher residents at the heart of this model.

As the design and development of the mentor professional learning curriculum progress, the team leading this work will, therefore, also consider connections with other layers of the teacher residency system and [NCTR's Levers for Equitable Teacher Residencies](#) (2021).

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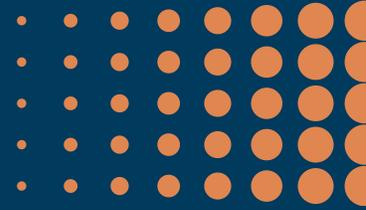
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