

## CHAPTER 7

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# **EXAMINING THE MENTOR–MENTEE DYAD TO UNDERSTAND THE ROLE OF EARLY CAREER TEACHER STRESS CREATED BY COVID-19**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A phenomenological case study was undertaken to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on K–12 mentoring relationships as assessed by early career teacher mentees. Using semi-structured interviews with 14 early career teachers participating in a formal mentoring program, perceptions of the mentees during the 2020–2021 school year were explored. The findings re-

vealed five themes related to mentee stress. Three themes were identified that increased mentee stress related to COVID-19 and these were complicated instruction, difficult emotions, and complex engagement. However, two themes were identified that reduced mentee stress while teaching during the pandemic and included mentee's digital competency and the leveling of the hierarchy between mentees and mentors. The study is among the first to examine mentor–mentee relationships in public school systems during the pandemic. Despite the increased stress levels reported by mentees, those with superior technology skills were able to insert their expertise into the dyad and thus report transformational, high-quality reverse mentoring experiences. The implications from this study may provide more explanatory power on mentor–mentee roles, cultural influences, and social interactions during a context of high stress when technology skill is a vector for success.

The work life of every public school teacher was drastically impacted when COVID-19 made its way to the United States at the start of 2020. A major disruption after the arrival of COVID-19 was that it all but eliminated the traditional face-to-face delivery of K–12 public school education. Public school systems—geographically separated in the United States and called school “districts”—were forced to rapidly convert to virtual instruction to reduce virus exposure and maintain student education, causing significant modifications to how a teacher's primary job task was performed (Yawson, 2020). The duty to teach virtually during the crisis context of COVID-19 exposed vulnerabilities in the public education system that compounded new teacher anxiety and stress (Belzunegui-Eraso & Erro-Garcés, 2020; Pressley et al., 2021). The abrupt shift in the role of teachers created what was believed to be the single most traumatic and transformative event of the modern era in K–12 public education (Kaden, 2020). Literature to date has identified delivery flaws in virtual instruction, content gaps, social inequalities, student engagement, and the complex home environment (Averett, 2021; Brooks et al., 2020; Lake & Olson, 2020; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

As districts across the United States swiftly converted to virtual formats, many of the traditional resources used to induct new teachers into the profession were redirected and disordered. Important because preparation and planning resources are often considered high priority tools for new teachers to cope with work stress. An unforeseen resource caught in the redirect was the mentor–mentee dyad that's been successfully used by districts to inaugurate early career teachers into the public school system and improve coping skills of teachers new to the profession (Annenburg Institute at Brown University, 2020; Chun et al., 2012; Prilleltensky et al., 2016). Accordingly, teachers new to the profession were left exposed with little support to navigate their new career. Baranik et al. (2010) included stress reduction as a primary benefit of the mentor–mentee dyad through psychosocial support that serves to increase coping skills and socialization for the

mentee. Psychological aspects of mentoring have been linked to facilitating mentee positive emotions and the ability to reframe stressful situations as growth opportunities (Qian et al., 2014). And this study serves as a clear reminder that cultivating such beneficial habits of mind through the mentor–mentee dyad can be significantly disrupted by a crisis circumstance.

Embedded within a career context, mentoring is an implicit relationship characterized by mutual trust and courtesy, while aiming to facilitate learning and development of the mentee (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Mentoring programs in K–12 public education systems have served to address the occupational needs of new teachers; like the isolation a new teacher experiences when facing a classroom alone or the need for on-the-job training because preemployment preparation was insufficient. Providing occupational support for new teachers, along with empirical evidence that demonstrates mentoring as an effective proxy for retention and competency (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014), have influenced school districts to (almost) universally adopt mentoring programs as a means for developing new teachers over the past few decades (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Mentoring interventions in public school systems have also been successful for reducing K–12 teachers' occupational anxiety and stress (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). This is important because K–12 teaching during COVID-19 magnified teacher stress (Obrad, 2020). And a significant predictor of increased teacher stress during COVID-19 is linked to virtual instruction (Pressley et al., 2021)—a pedagogy where teachers have previously expressed self-doubt and emotional distress (Song, 2022).

Even prior to COVID-19 existing research acknowledges teaching is often considered one of the most stressful professions (Bottiani et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2005). Maslach (2003) described how working with people can be emotionally draining, and this drain is only further exacerbated when people are troubled or having problems. As reflected by Wiggins (2020), experienced teachers struggled with their own virtual instruction and diverted their attention to their own problems during COVID-19. Mentoring support constructed to reduce stress for new teachers was instantly disrupted or absent altogether. Although previous research has provided a deeper understanding of stress while teaching during COVID-19, it has not specifically examined the stress implications on the mentor–mentee dyad. This raised the primary research question of the study: “What were the stress effects of COVID-19 on the mentor–mentee dyad in U.S. public school districts?” While other researchers have provided examples that demonstrate teaching during COVID-19 imposed increased levels of stress (e.g., Klapproth et al., 2020; Pressley et al., 2021), there is a need to examine the mentor–mentee dyad during COVID-19 from the perspective of teachers new to the profession and extend the findings to K–12 education and mentoring scholarship. This study

critically analyzes the mentor–mentee dyad of a major urban public K–12 school district located in Texas during COVID-19.

## METHODS

A public information request was submitted to a single case school district to obtain the names and email addresses of teachers with less than 2 years of experience. This information generated an email solicitation inviting 172 potentially eligible individuals to voluntarily participate in interviews. Permission forms explaining the study’s purpose and notifying individuals of rights to stop participation at any time were included with the email. Resulting interviews were scheduled via Calendly or email communication. In total, 14 mentee participants (Table 7.1) were interviewed. Since mentee’s perceptions were co-constructed by the mentor–mentee relationship, two mentor teachers were also interviewed. Triangulation was further accomplished by interviewing the mentor program director (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

### Research Design

The research design for this study adopted a case study with a qualitative phenomenological approach. The case under study is a large Texas

**TABLE 7.1 Individual and Teaching Characteristics of the Mentee Research Participants (*n* = 14)**

Gender (No).	Teaching Years	Teaching Level	Teaching Assignment	Teaching Preparation
Female (P1)	2	Elementary	Prekindergarten	University
Female (P2)	2	High School	Journalism	Alternative
Female (P3)	2	Elementary	Kindergarten	Alternative
Female (P4)	1	Middle School	History	University
Female (P5)	2	High School	Foreign Language	Alternative
Female (P6)	2	High School	English	Alternative
Female (P7)	1	High School	Elective	Alternative
Male (P8)	2	High School	English	University
Male (P9)	1	Elementary	English/Social Studies	University
Female (P10)	2	Elementary	Special Education	Alternative
Female (P11)	1	Elementary	English/Social Studies	Alternative
Male (P12)	2	Middle School	English	University
Female (P13)	2	Elementary	Music	University
Male (P14)	2	Middle School	English	University

school district that has operated a formal mentoring program for first- and second-year teachers for 20 years. Importantly, the district under study did not modify their resources or delivery of their mentoring program for the 2020–2021 school year to account for COVID-19—no consideration was given to the influence virtual formats might have on the mentor–mentee dyad. The phenomenological approach uses human perception and understanding to increase the knowledge of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon as the researcher reflects through participant passed lived experiences (Creswell, 1998). According to Creswell (2007), research in phenomenology describes the meaning that individuals derive from their lived experiences as a basis for concept or phenomenon. It is the experience, as lived, that is the authority of the meaning in phenomenological reflection (Van Manen, 2017). As a method of research, phenomenology allowed early career teachers to share textual experiences of their lived events that led to the essence of their perspectives for study.

## Data Collection

Due to social distancing requirements, virtual interviews ranging in time from approximately 40 to 120 minutes were digitally recorded. A semi-structured format with a question guide allowed for a conversational style to facilitate data collection until the point of saturation was reached (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The resulting audio transcripts were immediately transcribed using a combination of the Sonix.ai service and manual editing as each audio recording was replayed. A multi-step data examination approach using thematic analysis was employed by the lead author. After each interview transcript was verified as accurate, the transcribed data was highlighted, and codes were created with the assistance of the MAXQDA Pro software to identify text and words relevant to answering the research question. After no additional codes emerged, the coded data was exported to Excel and examined for similarities and overlaps. Reductions and consolidations were completed, and the final codes were grouped into major thematic categories. The first four interview transcripts, resulting codes, and initial thematic categories were reviewed by a senior researcher to ensure codes accurately reflected interview results before additional interviews were conducted. The codes and themes were validated and remained consistent through the remainder of the data gathering process. Additionally, documentation regarding the mentoring program was reviewed to gain an understanding of the program’s design and implementation processes. The documentation included mentor and mentee training materials, program expectations, timelines, mentor–mentee monthly meeting agendas,

observation forms, and tours of Google classrooms used to store and create accessibility for program participants. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Texas at Tyler.

## RESULTS

The present findings suggest quite clearly that teachers undoubtedly were affected by anxiety and stress while teaching during COVID-19. Both new and experienced teachers alike expressed multiple conditions that affected their perceived level of stress. Five themes were observed that addressed the primary research question: “What were the stress effects of COVID-19 on the mentor-mentee dyad in U.S. public school districts?” Three themes were consistent with previous research indicating a perceived level of increased anxiety and stress while teaching during COVID-19. The three themes that aptly served to increase stress were complicated instruction, difficult emotions, and complex engagement. However, two themes were identified that reduced mentee stress while teaching during the pandemic and incorporated mentee’s digital competency and leveling of the hierarchy between mentees and mentors.

### Factors That Increased Mentee Stress

Next, the three themes that increased new teacher stress and their implication on the mentor–mentee dyad are explained. These themes have implications for understanding the relative importance of mentorship, or lack thereof, on stress during a crisis context. But because these themes are consistent with other research on teacher stress during COVID-19, they are highlighted for importance on the dyad with overall implications left for the reader to explore from prominent research on the subject (e.g., Pressley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021). Instead, the priority is given to understanding the implications of the research findings from the perspective of decreased new teacher stress from dyadic interactions in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

The first finding that increased new teacher anxiety and stress was that virtual teaching was complicated and effective instruction was difficult in this format. The mentees expressed that their stress was initially magnified because they felt alone when trying to figure out strategies on how to deliver virtual instruction that effectively engage students. Because lesson planning is at the center of effective instruction (Butt, 2008; Courey et al., 2013), crafting effective content and lesson planning—as a form of mental representation of conceivable classroom settings—is frequently considered

an exercise that decreases the stress of teaching, especially for teachers new to the profession. The impetus to change their lesson plan to fit virtual teaching caused even more stress for new teachers because they perceived a lack of support from their mentors, who themselves were facing the same virtual challenges.

It was expressed by many of the mentees that their interaction with their mentors was marginalized during COVID-19, and they highlighted these limited interactions with their mentor initially repressed their confidence to successfully deliver subject matter to their students—who themselves were disengaged. Mentees were consistent in their assertion that one of the most difficult challenges they encountered while teaching during COVID-19 was how the fundamental job of instructing students changed. When teachers must change the method that they were fundamentally trained to teach, there is often a knowledge gap encountered that disrupts the link between pedagogy experience and the actual practice of teaching (Ball, 2000; Brouwer, 2010). The strategies that new teachers had previously adopted through their own training were diluted by the demand to change pedagogical methods. Traditional lesson planning was insufficient to meet the challenge of virtual teaching and one participant summarized this by saying “like these days that lesson plans are, you know, so, so very, very important because it’s like the student is literally not in front of you.” Another participant expressed “nobody really knew what we were doing” during this time of just trying to stay “above water.” Overall, mentees perceived virtual instruction delivery as complicated, and they initially felt marginalized by the lack of support from their mentors to streamline virtual content to effectively engage students.

The second finding demonstrating increased new teacher anxiety and stress was difficult emotions. The psychological and biological links between emotions and stress, and the deleterious effects on an individual’s health is well documented (e.g., Schneiderman et al., 2005). All participants shared forms of erratic emotion because of the unique challenges faced while teaching during COVID-19. Participants reported anxiety had escalated from the need to balance their new teaching career with the need to effectively engage in virtual instruction. Some teachers described the stress they encountered with not knowing if their teaching methods were successfully connecting with students. The feeling of loneliness was also an emotion described by many of the participants after initially being tasked to deliver virtual instruction. They also expressed concern for many of their students who were left alone at home to figure out virtual learning by parents who were COVID-19 essential workers.

The emotion of loneliness was exacerbated by quarantine efforts to control COVID-19 and perpetuated avoidant behavior (Wu et al., 2021). This is an important link to draw from because several participants expressed

their stress was magnified by the avoidant behavior of their mentor. For example, fear of contracting the virus was assumed by one participant as a likely reason for her mentor's lack of support. She bemoaned "Like, no relationship. I don't know if he's like that. I mean, I don't know. And this is because COVID-19? He's hiding or I mean, he is older, but I don't know if it's that. I don't know." Another participant, a first-year teacher who had no previous experience with the mentor-mentee dyad, noted, "We have to sort of distance ourselves and make sure that we're staying safe. Now, I guess because of staying far away from one another, that's our main goal instead of just okay, let me come to help you."

When a mentees relationship with their mentor is not what they expected or what they desired they can feel alienated (Scott, 1992). Participants reporting perceptions their mentor violated their expectations felt their mentor's behavior distracted them. Instead of finding self-fulfillment in the mentor-mentee experience or their mentor relationship, participants found themselves focused on trying to figure out how to effectively teach during COVID-19 on their own; a characteristic of the mentoring relationship that can lead to erratic emotions and related stress (Dennis et al., 2009; Hökkä et al., 2017).

The third finding that increased new teacher anxiety and stress was complex engagement. Complex engagement thematically captures the participant's experience engaging administration, mentors, and students during COVID-19. The topic of engagement was frequently cited by participants as a source of stress. The difficulty teachers have experienced engaging students during COVID-19 has been empirically highlighted as a significant source of stress (Pressley et al., 2021). This is important because quality student interaction promotes class participation. When teachers can use participatory forms of instruction, they validate alternate ways of knowledge acquisition (Delgado et al., 2020). Participants frequently characterized the engagement during COVID-19 as complex and resulted in limiting their ability to engage students in contributing to their learning experience. Virtual instruction impacted teachers' ability to manage their learning environment, resulting in poor student engagement and they were left to quickly figure out engaging techniques (Ahshan, 2021). One participant expressed it like this:

... changed the way I educate because it has me to look for, and search for, and do lots of research to look; how can I further engage my students... it upsets me to see my students online, and I'm asking them questions and they aren't answering back. Or I'm assigning easy, simple assignments and they aren't turning them in. And so, it just causes me to constantly look for new ways to engage my students and look for new ways to teach the content.



Other participants further expressed stress and anxiety around student disengagement. They perceived students needed teacher and peer interaction; it increased the pressure of designing persuasive subject matter that worked for both settings. Another participant stated, “You know, there is one that falls asleep or like gets up and walks away.” He further expressed the belief that students needed interaction “because I’m sure they’re just by themselves at home. There’s nobody else with them, no other kid. So, they’re wanting that interaction with the class and with the kids online as well.” Participants’ concerns with complex engagement also extended to a perceived lack of parental support for the virtual students. One teacher noted they were “having trouble with certain students who, they show up to the virtual meetings, but there is nothing. Like no response from them. Parents aren’t there to help” either. These concerns are valid to student development and other studies have highlighted student disengagement during COVID-19 as loss of learning that could last a lifetime (Dorn et al., 2020).

### **Factors That Decreased Mentee Stress**

The first theme recognized for decreasing new teachers’ stress while teaching during COVID-19 was digital competency. The rapid transition to virtual formats exposed that many veteran teachers were less confident in their technology skills compared to their classroom acumen. Participants expressed that traditional face-to-face teaching methods were grossly inadequate in the virtual environment. Historically, teachers (and learners) are given time to develop and hone their confidence and skills with virtual tools that enable pedagogical progression. The urgency to transition to virtual teaching rendered obscure any strategic progression and the participants perceived this left many educators scrambling for answers.

The participants perceived distinct differences in the dynamics between themselves and their more experienced counterparts, even as all teachers equally struggled with COVID-19 challenges. The participants reported their technology skills increased opportunities for collaboration in facilitating and designing virtual lessons. They expressed that these collaborations created a sense of equality with experienced teachers that had not been previously realized. The current crisis context offered a basis to close the gap on cross generational relationships (Frey, 2021). Prensky (2001) noted the occurrence of these generational gaps in education early in the technology evolution. Older generation members were slower in adopting technology while the younger generation was more comfortable and acclimated easier to technology environments. COVID-19 created the opportunity for many of the mentees to utilize their technical skills and assist the experienced mentors, along with other experienced teachers, with operating

equipment, setting up virtual classrooms, and with the conversion of instructional content to virtual platforms.

In a traditional year, mentees reported both experienced teachers and mentors had been unwilling to actively share their content or lesson plans. However, the participants perceived the mentors' lack of technology skill(s) served to expose deficits that offered an occasion for the mentee to insert their own experience in a noncontingent, need-based giving way—an unforeseen role reversal that narrowed their perspective of the mentor–mentee gap. Importantly, the participants perceived the experience to take a leadership role in virtual teaching was, for the most part, self-organized. The need for increased collaboration expanded the prospect for communal-based norms. Communal norms may explain how mentoring relationships, characterized as mutually beneficial and interdependent, predict growth and learning as well as professional and personal development for both mentees and mentors (Ragins & Verbos, 2017). This finding expands the focus beyond the dyad to incorporate the influence of the crisis context in the mentor–mentee experience—especially when technology is a core need to a successful outcome.

The second theme recognized for decreasing new teachers' stress while teaching during COVID-19 was leveling the hierarchy. Technology demands placed on the teachers during the pandemic aptly served to elevate mentee's input into the mentor–mentee dyad. Experienced teachers were especially ill-prepared to handle the challenges of virtual instruction. All teachers, in essence, became new. Mentees were sought after for advice and assistance with technology adaptations. A process was created in which the mentee led with collaborative knowledge being constructed toward rapid delivery of virtual formats. The reduced mentor–mentee gap helped to erase the stigma associated with being a new teacher. A sense of equality emerged as veteran teachers served as the content providers and the mentees became the content converters. This ability helped to eliminate the intimidation of being a new teacher and transformed the mentees into valuable resources for their campuses.

## DISCUSSION

The study is one of the first to examine the mentor–mentee teacher dyad during the crisis context of COVID-19. Areas of common concern in the mentoring research literature often correlate to lack of theory development and focus on dyadic relationships (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). The current study expands the focus beyond the mentoring dyad and considers contextual influences and related developmental networks. The findings that implicate the context of

COVID-19 provided an opportunity for mentees to inject their technology skills and better collaborate with their mentors which may be useful for advancing mentoring theory.

The need to respond to the stressors created by the pandemic led to instances of informal collaboration and reverse mentoring. These interactions were not formally facilitated by the public school district but spontaneously developed due to the needs of context. Further, these instances of reverse mentoring extended beyond the formal hierarchical dyadic arrangement established by the case district. Mentees participating in these spontaneous informal collaborations where their expertise was sought after and provided value to experienced teachers were more likely to report their mentoring experience as transformational.

These collaborations were self-organized through an extended developmental network as a means of surviving the context of the pandemic. This finding contributes to the notion that a crisis context may have underexplored implications on the traditional mentoring model. This does not necessarily obfuscate Kram's theory of developmental phases in the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1988), but it does indicate the succeeding phases of the traditional mentor–mentee dyad should be viewed critically in a crisis context. Cognitively adapting the context and inner patterns of the environment places emphasis on the social construction of knowledge in response to the setting (Fletcher & Mullen, 2012). Knowledge created socially is typically the result of a willingness to mutually exchange ideas, viewpoints, and beliefs (Chakravarthy & McEvily, 2007).

Traditional mentoring literature has commonly focused on exchange theories to explain the mentee benefits which occur because of mentoring (Dominguez & Hagar, 2013). Despite this reliance, exchange theories have been deemed insufficient to explain transformational experiences such as those reported by mentees in the current study. To explain the high-quality mentoring relationships which developed, the theoretical lens must be broadened. Relational mentoring, which is based on a communal approach where mentors and mentees experience mutual growth, learning, and development, provides a plausible framework for explaining this developmental relationship during the pandemic. Mentees became valued resources and perceived their technological knowledge as a sought-after commodity. The context of the pandemic promoted a communal relationship through a redefinition of the early career teachers and the experienced teacher roles (Barnhart, 2020). Relational mentoring theory applies tenets of relational and social cognition theory to explain the complexities of mutual, reciprocal, and empathetic high-quality mentoring relationships (Gammel et al., 2017; Ragins, 2013). This contrasts with previous research that implies mentees historically perceive mentors unwilling to actively share their content or lesson plans, fostering a power

imbalance (Stang & Lyons, 2008). For example, Hargreaves (2002) found after researching 50 elementary and secondary teachers that more experienced teachers failed to share substantial feedback during collaborations and characterized the lack of shared content as a trust betrayal—a mentor ideology that any balance of power infringes upon the authoritative mode inherent to the traditional dyadic relationship. But this betrayal may implicate negative well-being effects on new teachers and Hargreaves et al. (2018) highlight this concern.

Importantly, because of the emergent need for digital competency, mentees were able to negotiate differential power dynamics when their technology expertise became the conduit for delivering education virtually. Experienced teachers struggled with how to design lessons for virtual formats and how to use technology to facilitate teaching in the new environment. This unprecedented period of uncertainty created a situation where all teachers were learning together how to navigate the new normal. All participants reported informal collaborations where the inexperienced and experienced teachers brainstormed and performed problem-solving together to find solutions to common challenges. These engagements did not occur as a product of traditional mentoring dyad, but rather as a response to the context of the crisis. The impact of these opportunities to collaborate and to provide mentoring resulted in reports from the mentees of feelings of importance, significance, and value. A sense of increased efficacy and belonging was perceived by the mentees when their input and skills mattered. These findings could have implications for advancing mentoring theory by informing a context where mentee–mentor balance of power was conditionally and spontaneously created in a context of high stress.

## **Implications for Practice**

Several implications for practice emerged from this study regarding the need for preemptive measures to mitigate the additional classroom stressors related to the pandemic. In addition, two insights involve the utility of reverse mentoring and the mentee’s technology skills as stress-reducing mechanisms during a crisis context.

Access to content and the ability to successfully engage students is a common concern for early career teachers. These concerns were exasperated by the pandemic due to hindrances on normal interactions and the need to deliver instruction in multiple formats. K–12 districts could assist by ensuring instructional resources are readily available in multimodal formats and mechanisms are in place to effectively train early career teachers prior to the beginning of the school year in these formats. Mentors should be

equipped with an understanding of how to transition content to virtual formats. The distress expressed by the mentees due to the additional pressures created during the pandemic could be allayed by taking proactive measures to incorporate mental health and emotional wellness as a required component in the formal mentoring program. The inability to successfully engage students could be improved by taking steps to actively prepare for future shutdowns of the traditional classroom setting. Keeping students actively engaged is always an instructional consideration. However, preparations for future crisis events should consider the possibility of virtual instruction which requires additional considerations for maintaining a similar level of active student engagement.

Findings which hold promise for mitigating stress for the mentees were mentees' technology skill, which helped mentees level the hierarchy between themselves and their more experienced mentor. The pandemic created an environment where all teachers were equally encumbered. But the mentees had skills sets which became valuable to the experienced teachers. In the current study, reports of the hierarchical leveling and utilization of mentee skills were associated with increased efficacy in job performance and positive attitudes toward the case district, mentors, and colleagues. To utilize these insights, public school systems and campus leaders could take steps to develop a culture where superiority bias of experienced teachers is eliminated. In addition, mentoring programs could be designed to assess new teachers prior to their inaugural year to identify their areas of expertise and skill sets. Actions could be taken to create reverse mentoring opportunities for their areas of expertise to be shared and utilized by other teachers. These recommendations are summarized in Table 7.2.

## **Limitations**

This research has the inherent case study limitation of generalizability. Further, limitations of this study included a small sample size—as are many qualitative studies—which may have narrowed the findings despite data saturation. Also, results of the study relied upon honest, unbiased, and accurate participant perspectives and unbiased research analysis and interpretation. Future research recommendations would be to replicate the current study at different case districts to determine if similar findings are present. In addition, future explorations of reverse mentoring which incorporates the perspectives of other members would determine if the growth, development, and positive outcomes reported by the mentees were mutually experienced by all parties.

**TABLE 7.2 Application Template for Reducing Teacher Stress in a Crisis Context**

COVID-19 Impact	Illustration	Principle	Preemptive Tool
Complicated instructional content	“How do I teach a lesson when I’m going virtual and face to face at the same time? I would like to see that. More of how to do two things at once, when you have students face to face and how to manage that.” (P11)	Traditional instructional delivery was insufficient in virtual environment	Increased emphasis on multimodal instructional content delivery
Amplified difficult emotions	“It’s hard, it’s really hard, COVID has taken our normal to a different level. It’s really hard because I don’t, I don’t know how much I can take this.” (P5)	Heightened sense of insecurities, fear, isolation, and loneliness	Strategies to increase social and emotional supports
Complex student interactions	“Right now, five kids are supposed to be virtual, but they don’t show up. One kid shows up at random times and decides he’s going to play with this fan on top of his bunk. He won’t respond to anything.” (P10)	Lack of student engagement	Increased focus on identifying non-traditional instructional techniques
Mentee technology skills	“I feel like it’s gotten better now because it’s kind of like, OK, I need this now. I need your (technology) help. I need this. It kinda made everybody vulnerable and I feel like it created even safer space to ask for help and to receive.” (P12)	New technology is an opportunity to transfer knowledge	Identify early career teacher skills to utilize as resources
Leveling of the hierarchy	“We’re all on the same page. it’s new to everybody . . . It’s broken down a stigma of having a mentor . . . So I think that’s what has given me the desire to reach out a lot more, because I know that we are going through the exact same things . . . I know that we are all in the same boat.” (P13)	Sense of equality and shared purpose	Consider alternatives to the reliance on dyadic, hierarchical mentoring relationships

## CONCLUSION

This research is among the first to examine the mentor–mentee dyad during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings revealed the value of the early career teacher’s technology skill when the mentees were afforded the opportunity to utilize those skills to assist colleagues. These findings demonstrate the utility of reverse mentoring for explaining the transformational experiences reported by the mentees and as a mechanism to reduce mentee stress during a time of crisis. The implications for practice for this study relate to understanding the preemptive measures school districts could take to reduce teacher stress and the utility of the mentee’s technology skills as a stress-reduction mechanism for the mentee. Mentee’s reporting the ability to use their technology skills as a means of aiding and supporting veteran teachers consistently reported transformational, high-quality relationships with their mentors. These types of high-quality relationships create interpersonal connections which are characterized with experiences of positivity, vitality, as well as reductions in anxiety and stress (Ragins & Verbos, 2017). Mentoring programs could be designed to assess early career teachers’ skill sets and ensure there are opportunities for their areas of expertise to be utilized by veteran teachers.

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