

**'Passionate about teaching'
- the role of mentors in implementing
the new professional standards in the
learning and skills sector**

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Work in progress – please do not quote without consulting the authors

Introduction

In his foreword to the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK, 2007) document introducing ‘Further Education Workforce Reforms’, the Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP, affirmed the importance of a workforce in further education that is ‘thoroughly professional and highly skilled’. This paper is an evidence-informed response to the reforms asking what is their impact on staff in colleges who have a responsibility for teacher education. In this paper we are interested particularly in the way that such staff and the students they work with (generally referred to as ‘trainees’) understand the requirement to provide mentoring as a key feature of the implementation of the reformed training programmes.

There are four main sections to the paper. It begins with an exploration of the policy context in which the changes to teacher education for the learning and skills sector have been made. Secondly, there is a consideration of some of the recent literature that explores issues around mentoring in the learning and skills sector as they apply to programmes of teacher education. In the light of this theoretical framework, we then present some emergent findings from a qualitative research project with teachers in the learning and skills sector, undertaken since the introduction of the reforms. We conclude by discussing some of the issues and problems that have been brought to prominence as a result of the reforms.

The policy context

There has been a paradigm shift in the world of post compulsory and adult teacher education in England in recent years. The processes of teacher education have been factorised to become a technical facility – a programme of controlled and managed teacher training. The changes that have taken place in terms of the control and regulation of teacher education programmes are part of a wider agenda in the sector as a whole. Such changes have followed in the wake of the 1988 Education Reform Act that, in the school sector, spelt the end of teacher control over the curriculum (Dale, 1989), and the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act that removed colleges from local authority control. This was achieved through the ‘incorporation’ (privatisation) of FE colleges. As has been noted elsewhere this allowed for increased regulation and intensification of workloads (Esland, 1996).

Until relatively recently teacher educators were able to design and devise their own curricula and teaching programmes with minimum interference from government. The FENTO standards (FENTO, 1999) were introduced across the FE sector in order to: a) inform the design of accredited awards for FE teachers; b) provide standards to inform professional development activity; and c) to assist institution based activities such as recruitment, appraisal and the identification of training needs (FENTO, 1999 p 1). Much has been written about the policy changes that have taken place, including discussion and analysis of the practice of policy construction and of the implications that have arisen out of the policy changes (Ainley 2000; Avis 2005; Coffield et al 2007; Malcolm and Zukas, 2002). Although there is an overarching concern with quality improvement in the policy rhetoric this is never explored in any depth; as a consequence it has been translated into a focus on the readily measurable and technical aspects related to funding, target setting and accountability.

Last year the responsibility for setting standards became part of the ambit of a sector skills council (Lifelong Learning UK, 2007) that delegated responsibility for quality assurance to Standards Verification UK (SVUK). While there is an argument that some regulation of the sector was overdue and, in particular, that it was long overdue that new entrants were accorded a mandatory right to appropriate training (DfES, 2004, 2006), there is disquiet about the form that regulation has taken. The focus of the new regime is directed towards ensuring that 'trainees' meet a set of standards including a minimum core of literacy, numeracy and IT; and that they are directed to a more specifically targeted subject training or pedagogy. Associated with this focus is the expectation that appointing a subject-specific mentor for each trainee will help ensure they become 'effective' teachers.

We have seen increased surveillance and policing of the FE sector through regimes of inspection and review which are modelled upon those operating within the school system. Judged from a policy perspective it would seem logical to apply the same prescription and medicine to the FE sector, despite the fact that the context in which the FE sector operates is very different from the school sector. The learning and skill sector includes staff who are employed to teach on a wide variety of courses and programmes at different levels, with students whose ages range from 14 to well beyond retirement. The qualifications and experiences of such staff are similarly varied.

A central tenet of teacher education programmes has been the assumption that there is a shared pedagogy that can be associated with a strong and enduring professional identity located within a distinct community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) that can be responsive to differing cultures of learning (James and Biesta, 2007). Avis (2005) characterised such qualities as follows:

the importance of learning communities [is] characterized by cooperation, collaboration and partnership. These communities are marked by *high*

levels of trust in which participants are prepared to acknowledge, share and learn from mistakes. (Avis, 2005 p 214 emphasis added)

This contrasts with the approach taken by those responsible for monitoring and curriculum planning and for the new professional standards in the FE sector. For them pedagogy comprises a set of principles and assumptions concerning disciplinary knowledge that is subject based. In the case of trainee teachers, the programme is expected to check their subject knowledge and provide them with a skill-set that will enable them to 'meet the needs' of their learners (Nasta, 2007). Such a view of pedagogical practice is contestable for a number of reasons. Chief amongst them is the assumption that pedagogy can be commodified in a manner that is external to both context and practice. This contrasts with the view that pedagogical practices are very much inhered in what individuals do, both constructing and limiting the potential for action (see Lawy and Bloomer, 2003).

The discourse of managerialism which has ostensibly served to increase 'productivity' and 'efficiency' has also, because of the associated workload pressures, reduced the opportunities for lecturers to question what they are required to undertake. There has been a shift in the underpinning philosophy and rationale of these programmes away from a conception of teacher professionalism that stresses teacher autonomy, service to the community and students, towards an outcome-orientated model of professional practice. While some teachers become fully compliant 'designer teachers' (Sachs, 2001 p 156) whose identifications are role or task specific rather than person specific (Colley, et al 2007), others either refuse to comply or they operate more strategically disguising their commitment to democratic values and identifications (Shain and Gleeson, 1999).

This brings us to the role of teacher educators. We have argued elsewhere (Lawy and Tedder, 2008) that many teacher educators in the learning and skills sector have been placed in an invidious position, aware that they are engaging with and even indeed complicit in sanctioning activities and practices that represent an affront to their professional values and identities. For these individuals, the shift towards targeted skills training, action planning and mapping has been achieved at the expense of analytic and critical skills development. How does mentoring fit within this new training topology? Does it provide a process supportive of trainees understanding and engaging with a community of practice? Can it be undertaken in a way that tutors can accept as good professional practice? Does it help ensure that the training of new teachers in the learning and skills sector is 'fit for the purpose' of developing a workforce that is 'thoroughly professional and highly skilled'?

Researching mentors and mentoring

Our research comprised a study in the south west of England of the impact and effectiveness of mentoring and individual learning plans within the new training programmes. The funding for the study comes from the SWitch Centre of Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT). Although the most substantial institutions in the learning and skills sector are further education colleges, there is a significant number of organisations involved in adult and community learning (ACL) and work-based learning (WBL). Trainers and teachers in such organisations are now expected to use similar systems and procedures for tracking and managing their programmes as their colleagues in the colleges and the project engaged with participants from such organisations as well as with participants from further education colleges.

The research methods comprised semi-structured interviews with a number of trainees, teachers and managers. Twenty-eight interviews were undertaken in the early months of 2008; the research team collected rich qualitative data from ten trainees, from nine teacher educators who fulfil roles as tutors and/or mentors in programmes and also from nine managers, some working in FE colleges and some in other community organisations. All the interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. We are still in the process of analysing data, so at this stage our findings and conclusions are both open and tentative. The interviews discussed come primarily from college-based staff and trainees.

Analysis has been undertaken framed by notions of biographical learning. Alheit and Dausien (2002) define biographical learning as:

a self-willed, 'autopoietic' accomplishment on the part of active subjects, in which they reflexively 'organise' their experience in such a way that they also generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions (p xx)

We considered that this ethnographic approach to data collection and analysis enabled our interviewees to go beyond answering narrowly technical questions about mentoring practice to convey something of what mentoring had meant for them personally, in their own professional development, both within education and outside it. We wanted to try and understand in what ways engaging in narrative processes within systems of mentoring offered a meaningful experience for them.

Turning to some of the specific literature in further education that relates to mentoring, we discovered that at least two of our respondents had participated in a major development project some years ago, a previous initiative that aspired to make a difference to the standards of learning and teaching in colleges. The 'Mentoring Towards Excellence' study (AoC and FENTO, 2001) undertook a broad survey of practices in mentoring and sought to identify and share good professional practice across the sector. The project was sponsored by the

Association of Colleges and the FE National Training Organisation with resources coming from the Standards Fund. There was consultation with 700 learners, 70 teachers and 7 college leaders in 29 colleges and the resulting publication focussed on identifying and sharing good practices and procedures across the sector. Guidelines and activities were published designed to enable college staff to develop policies and processes that would be effective in improving mentoring. The FENTO standards were portrayed as central to this process.

The emphasis on the practicalities of development seemed to have the effect of minimising discussion of what exactly the purpose of mentoring should be. Instead there was a presumed consensus that mentoring could make a contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning and that all teachers in further education – full and part-time as well as agency and supply teachers – would benefit from a mentoring relationship with a fellow professional.

Among the many recommendations that emerged from the study, one that encapsulated the consensus view was the statement that:

Mentoring should be developed and promoted as a supportive and developmental process.

More recently, other writers have offered the further education sector practical guidance on mentoring and continue to advance a view of the process that identifies it as a developmental process within professional practice. Thus Rhodes et al (2004) relate mentoring on the one hand to coaching but also to peer networks as an inherent feature of professional practice:

In essence, both coaching and mentoring are complex activities closely associated with the support of individual learning. Mentoring implies an extended relationship involving additional behaviour such as counselling and professional friendship... Peer-networking implies the facility to work together productively with other colleagues so as to learn from them or with them. Successful networking relationships are at the heart of coaching and mentoring. (p 12)

Wallace and Gravells (2005) similarly attempted to locate mentoring with other professional practices in teaching, such as the counselling skills and the development of networking, and they particularly emphasise the importance of a caring relationship and acting as a role model as important features of mentoring. They advocate models of mentoring practices that are theoretically informed and suggest that a mentee develops 'personal reflective space' in which a mentor can use a variety of skilled interventions to enable such reflection to take place.

In more recent publications, however, it is possible to detect a shift in tone and emphasis. Thus Keeley-Browne (2007) in her guidance to new trainees in the learning and skills sector states that:

As part of your training you will be allocated to a mentor, or learning coach, who will advise you on the general skills of training to teach (*sic*). Your mentor will be skilled in what is called the pedagogy of the classroom. You will also be given access to a subject specialist coach (this may be the same person as your mentor/learning coach) who will help you develop the skills that are specific to your areas of the curriculum.

The system has become one in which a mentor becomes allocated to a trainee to advise on general skills, on 'the pedagogy of the classroom' and on subject issues. A set of functional responsibilities is identified for the mentor that she or he should:

- help to induct you into the teaching area and institution
- provide a varied and appropriate programme of developmental experiences for you
- observe, evaluate and review your work, providing you with feedback designed to help you improve
- liaise with others involved in your training (Keeley-Browne, 2007)

Such functions are clearly intended to address deficiencies found in FE teacher training by OfSTED in 2003, particularly what they found to be a lack of systematic mentoring and support in the workplace. That survey led to the recommendation for workplace mentoring of teachers from the DfES Standards Unit (2004):

an essential aim of the training is that teachers should have the skills of teaching in their own specialist or curriculum area ... Subject specific skills must be acquired in the teachers' workplace and from vocational or academic experience. Mentoring, either by line managers, subject experts or experienced teachers in related curriculum areas, is essential. (DfES, 2004, paragraph 3.6)

A marked contrast has developed in the purposes of mentoring following the intervention of OfSTED and the response by the DfES. The AoC-FENTO vision of professional mentoring can be described as primarily a developmental model while the purpose of the OfSTED-DfES model, geared to the LLUK standards, is primarily judgemental. In reviewing our findings about the views of managers and tutors about mentors, we found aspects of both models represented. However, we are inclined to the view that some elements of these models are fundamentally incompatible.

Table 1: A comparison of models of mentoring

A developmental model (Exemplified in 'Mentoring towards excellence')	A judgemental model (Exemplified in 'Equipping our Teachers for the Future')
Formative Supportive through transitions Focussed on personal and professional development Profession-centred Suitable for all Emphasis on networks Led by mentee	Summative Concerned with standards Focussed on performance Subject - centred Mainly for trainees Emphasis on individuals Led by mentor

Empirical findings

What quickly emerged from our interviews was that there is no simple understanding of what 'mentoring' means to our participants, even if they had undertaken some form of mentor training and development or taken part in mentoring activities. Our interviews showed how past experiences were important in structuring ideas about what mentoring could or should offer though frequently stories of those experiences did not use terms like mentor or mentoring. We found that most (though it is important to stress, not all) of our managers and tutors were able to tell stories of people from their past who had been inspirational for their personal development, perhaps for encouraging their interest in a special subject or in a particular profession. We found that mentoring supported processes of transition and three types of transition could be identified:

- There was mentoring which supports induction into an organisation: it could be into a particular part of a college such as a subject team or a department or school and would involve encouraging familiarity with the resources that are available and with the range of staff who are colleagues
- There was mentoring which supported someone becoming a member of a profession, specifically in our case as a teacher in the learning and skills sector, and developing the knowledge, skills and values appropriate for that profession.
- There was mentoring which was subject-specific, that supported someone meeting the specific demands of a particular subject area.

Our project was designed to find out what was most important to the managers, tutors and students who were interviewed and who either have the responsibility to provide mentoring support or have an entitlement to receive it.

Managers' perspectives

The four managers we report here were all employed within colleges and had responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning; however, their responsibility for related spheres of college activity (such as whether they were responsible for teacher education courses, whether they had a wider responsibility for staff development or human resources) varied between colleges and, indeed, varied for each individual from year to year.

Two of our managers had been extensively involved in the AoC-FENTO study and had contributed actively to the policies and practices about mentoring pursued by their respective colleges. Manager A is a woman in her 50s with more than 25 years experience in further education who emphasised the importance of relationships and facilitation in mentoring. She seemed to doubt that it was important for a mentor and mentee to have shared subject knowledge:

IT]he first issue [is] whether or not the person who actually mentors you is from the same specialist area. But does that matter? I mean my feelings, my take on mentoring, is very much that a mentor can only be effective ... if there's a healthy communication between the two.

She was someone who argued the difference between mentoring and other kinds of professional support and who took care to make distinctions:

[A] coach is one who says you know maybe, "This is how it, this is how it ought to be done, you know, give it a try and see," or you know, in that sort of context. Whereas a mentor is someone who says, "Well how do you think you will best achieve that?"

Thus a coach might be expected to be definitive or authoritative in her area of expertise while a mentor would explore possibilities and recognise the contested nature of much professional practice.

Manager B is male, in his 60s, with many years experience of teaching in a specific subject area and in teacher education with a more recent role in quality management:

the new standards have made absolutely clear that *[pause]* to reach a professional level of teaching one's own subject and mediating one's own subject for learning is an important strand ... (a process) supported by a proper mentoring system, struck one as both overdue and very necessary.

He was therefore sympathetic to the ideas of addressing subject-specific issues through mentoring but had broad expectations of what a mentor should do that seemed to include a role of advocacy for a trainee within the institution where he or she worked. Such an understanding relates to the notion of teachers within a college comprising a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991):

They [the mentors] had a number of things they had to do including informal classroom observation, being available to the mentee, make sure that they were comfortable in their subjects with the professionalism, make sure they got the development opportunities as they needed and the quid pro quo was the person doing the mentoring would be remitted for twenty, twenty-eight, twenty-five hours of their eventual time.

Manager B questioned whether all trainees require subject-specific mentoring, noting how teachers who had been in post for several years already have considerable experience in dealing with their subject and had extensive opportunities to learn about resources and specific curriculum matters: 'they understand their subject very well... better than actually sometimes they understand teaching and learning.'

Manager C was another woman with more than two decades of experience at a third college and she responded to our questions with more specific examples of the help she offered to struggling trainees, help in building confidence, in demystifying course demands. Reflecting on her personal experiences of being mentored, she emphasised the importance of a good relationship that she contrasted with a line management role:

going back to the mentoring, yep you need a buddy. You need that colleague; you need somebody who can say, 'Well, that was rubbish wasn't it?' You say, 'Yea it was rubbish!' You also need someone to keep you going if, you know, to jolly you along and say, 'Oh, keep, you know, nearly half-term' sort of thing. Yes you need the professional standards, we need somebody who's going to make a judgement on you and that's my line-manager.

A fourth manager was one who referred to standards – but not to a set of prescribed standards that trainees are expected to achieve but rather the expectations she had of her trainees. Asked about mentors in her work experience she recalled:

When I qualified I worked with a ward sister who was probably old fashioned ... if you compare her with today, but actually she was very inspiring because her standards were very high, her expectations were very high, education was seen as part of that role

The college managers drew attention to a significant organisational complication in the way mentoring is located within the existing college systems of quality assurance and professional support that constitute a central feature of the learning culture of a college. Contrasts between the different practices of different colleges emerged vividly in discussions around the position of advanced teachers (the term 'advanced teacher' has been used here to embrace the role called variously 'advanced practitioner' and 'advanced teaching practitioner' in different colleges).

Manager B expressed the expectation that advanced teachers in his college would be significant members of the teacher education team:

[Advanced Teachers] are expected, and it's part of the interview process, expected to become teacher educators....We want an [AT] to be able to generalise their own experiences of being expert at their subject, to be able to take it to others in development sessions, in mentoring, in observations across the college and in working with the, with the teacher education team.

Manager A reported that they had tried the same approach in her college but had been unsuccessful:

"Our best practitioners teaching on our teacher training courses!" and, do you know, they hated it. They absolutely hated it and it, it was, it was a big surprise to me They weren't there to simply demonstrate how good they are at teaching science or hairdressing or history ... their core subjects, they were there to teach this other curriculum.

Manager C described how advanced teachers and mentors function in her college but went on to express a frustration that she experiences as a manager: she has line management responsibility for the advanced teachers and has respect for their teaching abilities but finds them hard to manage:

We have a model where our [ATs] are purely supportive and they are all my colleagues.... a new member of staff arrives and they will have their mentor's support, ...but they will also be allocated an [advanced teacher] time (to discuss matters like lesson plans and differentiation) ... They are delightful people, very very good teachers, but there is something wrong in the chemistry. I don't know why, I can't pin it down. I wonder if it's because they're not making judgements?

Among the issues that emerge from discussion with the managers, therefore, are that:

- (a) mentoring depends crucially on the quality of relationship established between mentor and mentee and that appears to be more significant than the subject qualification of the mentor
- (b) mentoring within an organisation is situated within other quality assurance systems such as the functioning of advanced teachers; different colleges make use of such practitioners in different ways and this impacts on the provision of mentoring for teacher education courses.

Tutors' perspectives

What similarities and difference are there among the tutors we interviewed? For this section we have selected comments from four tutors: three women and one man.

Tutor A is a woman with science qualifications and many years experience in teacher education. She recalled her experience of support from a respected head of science:

I had a really good manager at [my previous college]. I mean a really superb manager who managed me as a teacher in the very best possible way you could ever do. He challenged me, he set me targets, constantly monitored what I was doing, gave me huge amounts of feedback, very detailed feedback about what I was doing and how I could improve, allowed me to use him as a sounding board.

In her view, the mentor's role in current training schemes is to present a similar challenge and to create high expectations:

It is about challenging. It's not about being a friend. It's not about placating people and saying, "Yes you're wonderful and you know, how can I help?" It's about challenging....if I tutor people, it's my job to give them the solutions... whereas mentoring is very about equality and about being critical and being, you know, "Have you thought about, what do you mean by that" or those sort of things. Opening doors but not pushing people through them [laughs]

Tutor B is a woman of a similar age to Tutor A though much less experienced in supporting trainees and she commented that the mentor is 'a subject person in education to support people within their actual teaching' but wondered whether the mentor is a mentor 'in the subject as such'. It seemed to be her view that the subject mentor's role was to make a summative judgement about subject competence but that such expertise would then qualify them to contribute more generally to the teacher training.

Tutor C is a man who has recently become involved in teacher education, after many years of experience of teaching in a university as well as in colleges, and

he was one of our respondents who talked of 'being passionate' when he recalled that:

My tutor for the 7407 said to me, you know, "you are obviously quite passionate about education, you're quite passionate about the subject," she said, "have you ever thought of going into teacher training?"

He was asked how mentoring differed from tutoring students or other forms of teaching and commented:

well it's different in as much as I suppose it's not about course, it's not about the academic work, it's about their job, it's about their role, it's about what's working and what isn't working with their role.

Thus he emphasised mentoring as induction into the workplace, a general mentoring rather than a subject-specific undertaking.

Tutor G is a programme leader who mentors teacher education students but does not teach on the courses. She spent many years in training and curriculum development before studying for a Cert Ed qualification and finding employment in a college. She lived in a rural area when she undertook her training and had limited time so thought she would have been unable to arrange anything formal. Nevertheless, she was another who described how other people had been inspirational in her field and crucial to making her the practitioner she is today. She recalled a friendly relationship with a man who took the Cert Ed at the same time and became her 'course buddy':

I mean we did collect handouts for each other and we did E-mail each other about, about things but it was also – I mean it was pure luck but it worked, really worked 'cos he is incredibly grounded and sensible and focused and you can see what I'm like! And, and I was able to sort of, I don't know, I was able to bring a bit a life to the partnership

By way of comparison, she spoke of the deficiency of a more bureaucratically determined procedure when she was recruited to her college:

So although on paper you know, I had this mentor, I never went once to her and she never approached me... I don't think that mentoring is a, is something that just happens, you know, I think it has it, there has to be something there... They gave me somebody whom I thought "I'm not going to her anyway" you know ... she may know a bit more than me, but I wouldn't want to be seen to be asking her!

Tutor G pointed out that a significant amount of mentor-like work occurs through her role as course manager which may or may not get recorded in course files – and almost certainly does not find its way to her trainee's record of mentoring:

If we're talking, if we're talking about the actual subjects, the, the, you know, the course that we're teaching, that is something that I consider as part of my role as course manager... I do that with all the lecturers, so I don't even think about it as being mentoring. ... so we are always talking about, you know, how they're getting with the unit and what this bit of paper, what this bit of writing means, you know, what they're expected to do here. What's the difference between this level and that level.

Some of the issues that emerged from discussion with the tutors, therefore, are that:

- (c) they appear to agree that mentoring depends crucially on the quality of relationship established between mentor and mentee and it was interesting how references were made to 'challenge' and 'expectations'
- (d) mentoring can occur very successfully informally and occurs regularly in formal systems other than mentoring.

Students' perspectives

At this stage of the analysis, we can use three men and one woman to illustrate a range of perceptions and experiences about mentoring among our interviewees.

Student A, a man in his 40s, led a successful career in engineering and management before joining a full-time PGCE course to become a teacher and recalled his experiences of mentoring as a senior manager:

Whenever I've coached or mentored people I've always gone deep, let them get to point where they don't know something, they're not sure of something, a contradiction or, you know, ignorance, "I don't know what you're talking about." "Stop, make a note, that's your objective for the next one. I want to know what that means and you're going to explain it to me and you have a week to do so. Okay? Right, do you want to carry on or do you want to stop?"

Clearly he was a trainee with a developed sense of what mentoring could and should be and skills in being a mentor and he was not particularly impressed by the subject mentor he was allocated within his training programme. Student A makes a distinctive contribution to his department as he has recent industrial experience at a high level in the company where he worked. In certain respects, therefore, his subject expertise is likely to be substantially greater than his college colleagues.

A favourable impression of mentoring provision was gained from a much younger trainee starting a DTLLS course, a man with extensive experience of the catering industry overseas and locally who had decided he could best use his passion for teaching about food inside a college. When asked what he thought were the

qualities of a good mentor he reflected on his own experience of working with a mentor without ever referring to subject expertise:

Well, they've got to be accessible. If you've got a mentor that you can't get hold of it's a very difficult thing. So I'm guessing to be nice but to be honest and straight down the line so you know what you're expected, obviously they can't be a scary person because you wouldn't feel comfortable... I guess that the biggest thing that I'd have to say from [tutor name] is that she's really, really passionate about teaching and I'm guessing that a mentor has to be passionate about what they do.

Two young teachers were taking the first year of a PGCE course on a part-time basis at different colleges and give us some insight into the working of mentoring for them. Student C is a young woman with a creative arts background who talked of the need for a mentor to have 'passion and enthusiasm, I mean that's the main thing'. She had asked for a particular staff member to be her mentor because she found his work and teaching inspirational but he was not available because of too many other responsibilities. Her appointed mentor was a member of staff in the same college department but with a different subject specialism in media. She found him a nice man and an approachable person but not really a help in the development of her teaching abilities.

Student D teaches outdoor education and, like Student C, had someone in the same college department as a mentor. Student D teaches outdoor education and thought his mentor, who teaches sports injuries, was a close enough match. It also emerged that his mentor has experience of outdoor education and of the practical activities Student D want to gain qualifications in. They teach together and have the opportunity both to plan and evaluate the sessions they teach:

he gets really, really good grades from OFSTED and I love his teaching style and I've – the personality behind it, the passion that he's got. It's, it's really good and he's been great with regards to information that he's given me, the feedback that he gives me. We see each other, you know, at least once a week, anyway because I'm in his lecture, we do lectures together and we get five, ten minutes after, five, ten minutes before.

From talking to students, therefore, it emerged that some trainees have mentors where an excellent personal relationship has developed and the mentor makes a valued contribution to a trainee's personal and professional development in their subject specific role, in their role within their own department or institution, in their professional role. Other trainees have mentors who achieve such functions only partially. Tutors we spoke to all had pragmatic strategies for coping with the situation, such as arranging for 'co-mentors' where different individuals took responsibility for different functions.

Conclusions

We found that colleges are in a state of transition with regard to their mentoring provision in the context of teacher education courses and our research draws attention to a number of emergent issues.

Firstly, we have found differing views on the practicality and desirability of subject-specific mentoring. For new teachers recently qualified in their subject there appeared to be a genuine desire to be mentored by someone who is identifiable as an expert with experience close to the subject of the trainee. We found that older trainees are more likely to be expert in their subjects, perhaps more so than other teachers they join: their priority in mentoring is to secure support in becoming happy and successful teachers. Tutors, mentors and managers did not appear to consider that subject-specialist mentoring was quite so important. What was valued more was the quality of relationship established between mentor and mentee. Thus there is a spectrum of understanding about what a mentor is for and what skills or qualities a mentor should have.

Secondly, it has become apparent that mentoring within organisations is situated within many other systems that fulfil similar functions and there are issues around the ways in which mentors and mentoring relate to them. How should mentors relate to advanced teachers and subject learning coaches? What are the respective responsibilities of mentors and tutors in teacher education programmes? Mentoring occurs very successfully informally among friends and colleagues. It occurs regularly in formal systems such as course management systems. We have found that, in some colleges, the advanced teachers contribute particular kinds of mentoring but such a contribution is mediated by the learning cultures of the organisation itself. How can programmes make optimum use of such provision?

Thirdly, there is remarkably little engagement with the issue of what precisely it means to be mentored for a particular subject. Even among our relatively small number of interviewees there was no agreed view of what a 'subject specialist' should be. One tutor thought that having someone available with a higher level of expertise or qualification in a subject simply meant they would then be competent to undertake a general mentoring role. Another tutor considered that 'subject-specific' requirements comprised the ability to advise on course organisation requirements such as assessment arrangements. Another interpretation was that there are particular practices and traditions that need to be identified with particular disciplines. If there are specific pedagogical demands in a particular subject area, is it the subject that is at issue or the students' ability to engage with the subject? Is the priority for the trainee to become part of a particular community of practice, to develop an identity as a particular kind of teacher? That a 'subject' is a problematic concept appears to be unrecognised in most of the literature.

Fourthly, there are issues whether the developmental aspirations of mentoring schemes are compatible with the judgemental requirements of Ofsted inspections.

In seeking solutions to such problems, an understanding of the participants such as can be achieved through a biographical approach to research helps us understand why some decisions are made and some directions of development chosen. In talking of their own experiences that contributed towards them becoming good teachers or good managers, our participants spoke of buddies, of team arrangements and peer mentoring and they talked about line managers. Several participants spoke of line manager mentoring by someone who was respected or inspirational and who was in a position to prioritise support for their staff within their job role. Sometime such arrangements existed within formal structures but for the present generation of tutors and managers, the arrangements they enjoyed were almost invariably informal. Our data suggest that trainees, tutors and managers particularly value personal qualities and relationships with mentors and they admire people who have a 'passion' for what they do. Sadly, you will search in vain for any reference to 'passion' in the statements of national standards that are used to frame courses of initial teacher training in the learning and skills sector.

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