

Perspectives on Mentoring;

Perspectives / basic principles of mentoring in teacher education

Before tackling possible definitions and forms of mentoring in teacher education it is perhaps appropriate to look at what might be meant by the term teacher education itself. At its narrowest, the term is often taken to mean initial teacher education or teacher formation at the pre-service stage. This has recently been extended to include the probationary/induction stage prior to achievement of the standard for full registration or licence to teach. However, given that teacher education is now seen more as a continuum of ongoing professional development and part of wider life-long-learning, there is a case for broadening the scope for considering contexts for mentoring to encompass the education and development of teachers throughout the various stages of their careers.

Thus mentoring in its various forms can be seen as having a role to play in the following contexts or stages:

- Pre-service teacher education
- Probation / Induction
- Preparation for subject or pastoral leadership
- Grooming for senior management.

Just as all of the above stages or contexts involve individuals in the role of mentees, there is also the inescapable requirement for individuals to act in the role of mentors and for other individuals to be responsible for the training and support of those mentors. Thus, mentoring should be perceived as happening in a vacuum. It should be part of a wider system of organised professional support.

However, within education, mentoring is not always confined to professional staff-staff relationships and purposes. It can also be extended to teacher-pupil relationships and much work in this sphere has been carried out in the United States. Much less work and research has been conducted in the United Kingdom where mentoring is still very much an emerging issue in education both from the adult-adult and adult-child perspectives.

Within the University of Glasgow a recent study "Mentoring and Young People - A literature Review" by John C. Hall, March 2003 looked at mentoring ostensibly in relation to the teacher-pupil context. However, many of his findings and conclusions can be carried over into the mentoring of teachers by other teachers. The following is drawn heavily from this work and is an attempt to paraphrase key points and issues which might be useful to developing a wider understanding of mentoring for those involved in the MINT Project.

Hall points out that the problem with any study of mentoring occurs at the very beginning as the biggest problem for researchers into mentoring is still defining what it is. Simple rule-of-thumb definitions abound in the literature, often drawn directly from dictionaries. A typical example would be the characterisation of mentoring conceived along the lines of the classic strategy whereby the more experienced shall care for and train the less experienced, in a non-judgmental manner'. The emphasis on 'care' and a 'non-judgmental

manner' are the features which are taken to distinguish mentoring from other forms of instruction. However, this does not take us very far: as soon as we attempt to describe what this means in practice, we find we are back in what has been described as the 'definitional quagmire' surrounding mentoring. In that in relation to the professional mentoring of teachers at various stages of their career development, judgmental issues are never far away and indeed are seen as intended outcomes of the mentoring process.

Mentoring, therefore, can hold a range of meanings and the terminology reveals a diverse set of underlying assumptions. For example, mentoring has been associated with programmes aiming at coaching, counselling, teaching, tutoring, volunteering, role modelling, proctoring, and advising. Similarly the role of the mentor has been described as role model, champion, leader, guide, adviser, counsellor, volunteer, coach, sponsor, protector, and preceptor.

A similar range of terms may apply to the mentee, protégé, client, apprentice, aspirant, pupil etc. The process itself may also be described variously as 'reciprocal', 'helping', 'advising', 'leading', or 'facilitating' as 'a collaborative enterprise' with shared ideals or as a 'learning process' by which the mentor leads by example. In general however knowledge and understanding about the processes which take place within mentoring relationships remains at a preliminary stage.

Clearly some of the meanings appear contradictory especially in the absence of explanatory frameworks. This certainly demonstrates the potential for confusion, but does little to indicate what, if anything, is unique to mentoring that can distinguish it from other forms of educational process. The terminology surrounding mentors, mentoring and mentees is bewilderingly various, vague and sometimes misleading (the term 'mentee' is itself an erroneous formation, but is used here as it seems to have established itself in the literature).

Attempts have been made to cut through this 'quagmire' by distinguishing between what is seen as the essential and contingent attributes of mentoring:

Mentoring appears to have the essential attributes of being a process; a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-learning process; a reflective process; a career development process; a formalised process; and a role constructed by and for a mentor. The contingent attributes of the mentoring phenomenon appear as: coaching, sponsoring, role modelling, assessing and an informal process.

However, it is not at all clear that all of these attributes really are essential or applicable to all types of 'mentoring' nor that any such list of attributes enhances our understanding of what remains a very fuzzy and ill-defined concept. In Scotland, the mentoring of probationary teachers is anything but informal. It is highly formalised and is characterised by formal reporting procedures.

Other criticisms of mentoring have focused on other underlying assumptions, particularly the way that modern versions appear to disregard the social context within which the mentoring takes place. Often the contextual factors have been neglected and a deficit model is implicit to many mentoring.

Some of these arguments may make us regard 'mentoring' with some suspicion, but we are still little nearer to deciding what it is. In fact, something called 'mentoring' takes many forms, exists in a variety of settings, and can be employed for a range of purposes. Some attempts have been made to untangle this complex of interacting factors.

In 1996 Philip and Hendry produced an initial typology of mentoring in relation to mentoring of young people.

They identified five different styles of mentoring, which they described as follows:

- 'classic' mentoring – 'a one-to-one relationship between an adult and a young person where the older, experienced mentor provides support, advice and challenge'
- individual–team mentoring – 'where a group looks to an individual or small number of individuals for support, advice and challenge'
- friend-to-friend mentoring
- peer-group mentoring – 'where an ordinary friendship group takes on a mentoring role'
- long-term relationship mentoring with 'risk-taking' adults – 'This style is similar to "classic" mentoring in many respects, but it differs in that it is often a relationship between a young person and a mentor who has had a history of rebellion and challenging authority and who is perceived by the young person as resisting adult definitions of the social world'.

It is probably easy to translate the first four of these mentoring models to contexts in teacher education but the fifth style runs contrary to the perceived intention of mentoring in teacher education which is about conformism, transmission of professional values and perpetuation of the status quo.

Philip also makes the distinction between 'naturally occurring' mentoring which arises from the existing relationships in a young person's life, and 'artificial' mentoring which is deliberately brought about by an outside agency. Much of Philip's work has been concerned with informal 'naturally occurring' mentoring. Others who have looked in detail at this kind of mentoring have included Bennetts, who looked at the experiences of 24 lifelong learners and found that most of their meaningful mentoring relationships had occurred naturally in informal settings. Bennetts concluded that: What is essential to a traditional mentor relationship appears to be its informality, and as what occurs naturally cannot be expected to flourish under artificial constraints there is little we can do to reproduce the relationship.

This is perhaps an unduly pessimistic conclusion but it does have implications for systematised national approaches to mentoring such as the one currently being implemented in Scotland. However, it can be argued that much of the nature of mentoring depends on the purposes and expected outcomes of the mentoring: Helping someone to become a teacher or gas technician or doctor (where both mentor and mentee are likely to be employed on the same basis and subject to the same disciplines) appears to be quite a distinctly different type of activity from helping someone to become socially integrated or escape from disaffection.

There clearly is a distinction to be made between helping someone to acquire the skills and behaviours appropriate to a profession or occupation when they have voluntarily chosen to become a member of that profession or occupational group, where the skills and behaviours are widely understood and recognised, compared to the contrasting position of trying to persuade a possibly reluctant 'disaffected' young person to acquire and display a set of contested social values which are in any case hard to define.

In the UK, the findings from the Mentoring Action Project (MAP) which was concerned with career guidance mentoring suggested four different styles of mentoring.

These were briefly characterised as

1. the 'good parent',
2. the 'learning facilitator',
3. the 'career guidance provider',
4. and the 'social worker'.

When Learning & Teaching Scotland (an organisation funded to support Scottish Education) decided to prepare a website to explain the new Induction process to current and would-be beginning teachers they asked a probationer to define the role of their supporter/mentor?. The probationer's description was as follows:

The supporter/mentor has multiple roles within the induction process, which can be summarised as follows:

- * to organise appropriate CPD activities/tasks
- * to carry out observed visits
- * to monitor and evaluate your progress
- * to assist in completing the interim and final reports.

While not an exact match, there are clear points of overlap and it is even mildly amusing to speculate how many probationer mentors concept of their role would chime with the notion of their acting as a social worker to their young charges.

All of these distinctions, typologies and classifications point therefore, to the fact that mentoring exists in a variety of forms, each of which is located somewhere in a multi-dimensional space. Abstracting from various sources, we can say that there are at least four of these dimensions, which may be characterised in the following way:

1. the origin of the mentoring relationship – to what extent is it a 'naturally occurring' relationship or one that has been artificially promoted?
2. the purpose of the mentoring – to what extent is it instrumental (akin to inducting the apprentice into a craft or profession) or expressive (guiding the naive and undeveloped youth into responsible adulthood)? (We can also add that the extent to which mentor and mentee share the purposes and goals of the mentoring relationship is an important factor here.)
3. the nature of the mentoring relationship – is it a one-to-one relationship or one-to-a group?

4. the site of the mentoring – to what extent is it 'site-based' (for example, tied to a school or college) or 'community-based' (situated in the young person's family, community or wider social sphere).

Where a mentoring relationship is situated on each of these four dimensions will go some way to determining its characteristics. Given this diversity it is easy to see that there are many possible ways in which a mentoring relationship can manifest itself. In one guise mentoring could be almost indistinguishable from a deep friendship, in another it would be hard to say how it differed from any teacher-student relationship. Mentoring is not one thing: it is a range of possibilities.

Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why there is so little agreement about its definition and why so much of the language used about it seems to lead to confusion rather than clarification.

In summation then, mentoring is an ill-defined concept which is deeply contested by some critics who see some manifestations of it as built upon a questionable 'deficit' model. Mentoring exists in many forms which are at least partly defined by the origin, purpose, nature, and site of the mentoring relationship.