LEARNING TO TEACH: MENTORING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The use of mentoring has nowadays become a predominant practice for the professional placement component of pre-service teacher education programs. Research however has identified that being an effective teacher does not make you an effective mentor. The mentor phenomenon (Little 1990) has achieved a meteoric rise in teacher education internationally over the past couple of decades. Whilst mentoring is now a major feature at various phases of teachers' professional development worldwide, the present entry focuses on the mentoring of beginning teachers during their initial teacher preparation (ITP) courses and subsequent early induction into teaching.

Teacher mentoring is characterized by multiplicity in a range of aspects, from variations in meaning carried explicitly or implicitly by the term itself, through the emphases and strategies characterizing alternative approaches, to different ways of implementing and organizing mentoring in practice – all of these variously informed in turn by a range of ideas and theories relating directly or indirectly to professional learning. As background to the current research picture regarding beginning teacher mentoring, we briefly sketch the nature of its recent advent, the theories and perspectives potentially informing it, and the varying relations of such theoretical resources to practical mentoring.

Mentoring

Traditionally, mentoring is an one-on-one relationship between a younger protégé (Mentee) and an older mentor whom regularly in-person; however, modern mentoring occurs in a variety of forms. Some of the approaches to mentoring are: peer mentoring, group mentoring, virtual mentoring, flash mentoring and reverse

mentoring (younger employees mentor older ones). To address increasing diversity among employees, some agencies and businesses have adopted cross-cultural, cross-gender, and cross- generational strategies in their mentoring programs.

"Mentoring" entered the vocabulary of teacher education in the early 1980's as part of a broader effort to professionalize teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1998), and has been used to describe the process of assisting beginning teachers in their career. Mentoring helps the novice grow professionally and personally, through the guidance of an experienced individual. This process can be defined as a "dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both" (Healy &Welchert, 1990). According to **Jung (1958)** the mentor "embodies knowledge, reflection, insight, wisdom, cleverness, and intuition." Mentors can provide beginning teachers with practical, specific help in working with students and parents, providing instruction, and dealing with the school environment (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles, & Niles, 1992).

Literature supports the need for beginning teachers to learn to reflect on their own practice (Reynolds, 1992; Schon, 1983; Schon, 1987; Tremmel, 1993). Growth in teaching skills, including reflection, is not automatic, and often happens through colleagues (Jordell, 1987) or through direct assistance, support and encouragement from mentor relationships (Theis-Sprinthall, 1986; Wildman et al, 1992). Reflection provides the opportunity to learn through experience and to be confronted with the need to abandon previous theories so new theories and skills may continually develop (Schon, 1983, 1987).

Research which considers the concept of community (Dewey, 1954; Rousseau, 1991) also has implications for the ways in which beginning teachers are socialized, affected by the school culture around them, and able to develop a support network. A number of studies have linked the presence of community in schools not only with positive outcomes for students (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Comer & Haynes, 1991; Crawford & Aagaard, 1991; Hopfengerg et al, 1990; Wehlage et al, 1989), but also with higher benefits for teachers. These benefits

include higher teacher morale (Bryk et al, 1993; Johnson, 1990; Louis & Miles, 1990; McLaughlin, 1993; Meier, 1992), a greater commitment to the school and manifestation of collegiality (Bryk& Driscoll, 1988; Comer & Hayes, 1991; Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988), a greater sense of empowerment (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Comer & Hayes, 1991) and the ability of teachers to change and improve their practice (McLaughlin, 1993). Teachers who feel empowered and committed to their school and colleagues are more likely to stay at the school for a longer period of time (Dworkin, 1987) and invest more time and energy into their teaching and relationships, thus providing even greater benefits to the students.

Research on Mentoring

The last two or three decades have witnessed an explosion in the number of research studies and publications dealing with various aspects of mentoring. However, this work is decidedly disparate and few comprehensive studies are available. Furthermore, the evidence base relating to the effectiveness of mentoring remains limited, doubtless partly because of the inevitable difficulties of disentangling the effects of mentoring from other kinds of process and influence. Nevertheless, a number of common and useful findings have begun to emerge with respect to the mentoring of beginning teachers.

The conditions for effective mentoring

Contextual support for mentoring

The success of mentoring programs in general and of particular mentoring relationships is influenced by a variety of contextual factors. The most consistent finding in this area is that mentoring is more likely to be effective where teacher-mentors are provided with additional release or non-contact time in which to prepare for and undertake the mentoring role, while successful mentoring is further facilitated where timetabling allows mentors and mentees to meet together during the working day. There is some evidence that mentoring is

more likely to lead to positive outcomes where mentors receive financial reward and/or some other form of incentive or recognition for their work; where it is carried out in contexts which are relatively free from excessive emphases on

externally determined goals and agendas; where mentors are committed to and involved in the design and evaluation of the broader programs of which mentoring is a part and where such programs are coherently integrated and not characterized by "fragmentation" amongst the contributing school- and higher education-based teacher educators.

Mentoring is also more likely to be successful where it takes place within schools which are characterized by collegial and learning cultures and which value "learning teachers" (Edwards 1998), where both mentors and mentees have access to support outside of the mentoring relationship and where there are mechanisms in place for both mentee and mentor to initiate without blame the establishment of an alternative pairing.

Mentor selection and pairing with mentees

Research confirms that the success of beginning teacher mentoring is at least a partial function of the ways mentors are selected and paired with mentees: not all good or experienced teachers make good mentors, and not all good mentors make good mentors of *all* beginning teachers. Mentors should be effective practitioners who can model good professional practice and be "professionally respected" by their mentees, but perhaps most importantly of all, they should want to do the job and be committed to the work of mentoring. They need to be supportive, non-judgmental and trustworthy, have a positive demeanor, possess good listening skills and the ability to empathize, as well as the willingness and ability to take an interest in beginning teachers' work and lives.

Mentoring has been found more likely to be successful where decisions about mentor-mentee pairings take account of mentees' strengths and limitations, and where the mentor and mentee get along both personally and professionally. Mentoring also tends to be more effective, other things equal, where mentors teach the same subject specialism as their mentees but less effective where they are the mentees' head teacher or deputy head teacher, the latter being explained in terms of more senior colleagues finding less time for mentoring and beginning teachers tending to be more inhibited by high status within the school staff structure

(Hobson et al 2007, Johnson et al 2005).

Mentoring strategies

Like all forms of teaching, mentoring is most effective where it addresses and responds to the needs of the learner/mentee. This means that mentors of beginner teachers should respect the individuality of their adult learner mentees, taking account of mentees' particular learning styles and concerns by way of strategies that are appropriate to the stage of development they are at. However, as Wang and Odell's (2002) review in the context of reform-oriented teaching reminds us, mentoring must keep sight of its particular goals. Thus there are indications that early in the mentoring relationship mentors should help mentees to identify and engage in critical interrogation of their conceptions of teaching, learning to teach and mentoring, including discussion of the nature and advantages of different forms of reflection, since these can otherwise present barriers to mentees' professional learning and development. Mentors should also seek to agree with mentees the individual goals of the mentee and the objectives of the mentoring relationship, and should revisit and review these objectives and goals periodically and, where appropriate, revise them.

Whilst the extent to which mentors are able to address mentees' individual needs can be pivotal to the success or otherwise of mentoring, research has also found a number of general approaches, strategies and tactics to be effective and likely to be valued by beginning teacher-mentees.

Firstly, effective mentors provide their mentees with emotional and psychological support, make them feel welcome, accepted and included, and are approachable. Secondly, effective mentors are those who not only dispose of sufficient time and do spend time with their mentees, but do so on a regular basis. Thirdly, effective mentors allow their mentees an appropriate degree of autonomy to make decisions and to develop their own teaching styles, whilst not being too laissez-faire or hands-off. Fourthly, a considerable number of studies have found that one of the most valued aspects of the work undertaken by mentors with beginning teachers is lesson observation (both of and by the mentee) which involves analysis of the

processes involved. Mentors' observation of the lessons of their mentees tends to be valued most where the objectives of the observation are agreed in a pre-observation conference, and where the post-observation conference focuses on specific aspects of mentees' teaching and includes constructive comment from the mentor. It should be conducted in a sensitive, non-threatening way, providing an opportunity for genuine dialogue in which there is joint explanation and exploration of perceptions leading to agreement on the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee's teaching. The latter deserves some emphasis in the light of indications of teacher mentors failing to challenge their mentees' assumptions sufficiently (e.g. Edwards 1998). The dialogue should also include discussion of the likely impacts of observed teaching actions and leave the mentee with clear ideas on how they might overcome any problems and work towards improving weaknesses. Such discussion would also hopefully be located within attempts to scaffold mentees into deeper levels of thinking and reflection about teaching and learning.

Finally, a number of writers have argued from a variety of perspectives that collaborative teaching, including planning and reflection, by teacher mentors and their mentees offers a mentoring strategy with strong potential for realization of many of the themes listed earlier in Table 2. Apart from a small number of exceptions (e.g. Burn 1997), however, research on such a strategy is so far notable by its absence.

Mentor Preparation and Support

Many have argued that since even excellent school teachers may not be effective facilitators of adult professional learning and because the mentoring role is a relatively new one that can clash with traditional norms and structures of teaching (Little 1990), it is important to provide mentors with preparation and support. This should be practical and specific, including strategies for such functions as observation and discussion of mentee teaching, promoting mentee reflection and discussing pedagogical issues with them. But on the basis of research findings (e.g. Bullough 2005) and the kinds of modern perspectives on professional knowledge and learning mentioned earlier, it is equally concluded that such preparation must

go beyond the behavioral inculcation traditionally associated with "training" and include the cognitive resources and supported participatory opportunities needed to develop intelligent mentoring capability and identity. Writers such as Bullough (2005) suggest the utility of mentors engaging in discussion of mentoring with other teacher-mentors and university-based teacher educators. However, whilst Graham (1997) provides evidence that such forms of collaborative inquiry are effective in overcoming mentor isolation, the evidence base regarding the effects of different kinds of mentor preparation is generally still rather sparse.

Effectiveness and Benefits

From its modern outset, teacher mentoring has been seen as holding the promise of professional motivation and development not only for beginning teacher mentees, but also for teachers providing the mentoring, and thence benefiting schools and educational systems more broadly.

Benefits for mentees

Research suggests that one-to-one mentoring is an important, if not the single most effective, method of supporting and facilitating the professional development of trainee and neophyte teachers. A wide range of benefits of mentoring for beginning teachers have been documented, including reduced feelings of isolation, increased confidence and self-esteem, professional growth, increased self-reflection and problem-solving capacities, and the assimilation of their mentors' practices. The benefits of mentoring featuring most commonly amongst research findings on this issue relate to mentors' provision of emotional and psychological support, important because mentees' emotional condition is argued to have wide consequences for their progress. A number of studies (e.g. Bullough2005, Moor et al 2005) have reported evidence of mentors boosting the confidence and increasing the morale and job satisfaction of beginning teachers.

Research also points to the impact of mentoring on different aspects of the developing capabilities of beginning teachers, most notably their behavior and classroom management skills, and their ability to manage their time and workloads (e.g. Moor et al. 2005). More generally, mentors have also been found to play an

important role in the socialization of beginning teachers, in helping them to learn and adapt to the norms, standards and expectations associated with being a teacher in a given context (Wang and Odell, 2002).

Benefits for mentors

A wealth of evidence coming predominantly from mentors' own accounts indicates that mentoring beginning teachers tends to have a positive impact on the professional lives of mentors themselves. Firstly, with respect to motivation and commitment, research has found that many mentors derive satisfaction from undertaking the mentor role, especially through seeing their mentees progress and noticing evidence of their own impact on mentees' teaching development. Through the responsibility involved, through mentors feeling reassured when their ideas are 'validated' by university tutors, feeling less isolated as teachers and enjoying increased collaboration and enhanced professional recognition, mentoring is thus found to consolidate mentors' teacher identity and to increase their sense of self-worth.   Studies report mentors claiming increased confidence in their own teaching, improved relationships with pupils and colleagues, and a generally revitalized or reenergized engagement with teaching.

In a study typical of many others in its outcomes, Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005) found that 70 per cent of mentors in a school-university ITP partnership program in Hong Kong claimed to have benefited professionally from their mentoring role. Reported gains included new and improved teaching strategies, enhanced knowledge and use of ICT,   improved communication skills, greater self-reflection, and increased knowledge and support capability with respect to the professional development needs of beginner teachers and others.

There are multiple sources of potential impact upon mentors' own learning via their involvement in mentoring beginning teachers. Perhaps the largest body of research evidence in this area relates to mentors' learning through self-reflection or critical reflection on their own practice. Most mentors in Lopez-Real and Kwan's (2005) study thus suggested that the mentoring process "forced them" to reflect on their own teaching, for example, because they "felt compelled … to account for and

explain the reasons for their [teaching] methods" (p.19), while many of the mentors involved in research conducted by Hagger and McIntyre (2006) were also said to have welcomed the experience because "it made them think about their own teaching". Mentors have also reported learning from their beginning teacher mentees, from their participation in mentor training courses, from university-tutors in university-school partnership ITP programs and, more generally, from increased opportunities to talk to others about teaching and learning.

Benefits for schools and educational systems

It might be expected that some of the above reported benefits of mentoring would produce consequent gains for these teachers' pupils and schools. The evidence on this particularoutcome is limited, however, again partly because of the complexity of researching it. There is however growing indication, largely from the United States, that mentoring programs for teachers in their first years in the profession can under certain conditions increase retention and stability, in that teachers who are mentored are both less likely to leave teaching and less likely to move schools within the profession (e.g. Johnson et al 2005).   It is also possible that schools and educational systems may benefit from the enhanced retention of those teacher-mentors who become more confident, committed and capable as a result of their participation in mentoring. There is limited direct evidence of this to date, though in the UK Moor et al (2005) noted a number of additional benefits for schools involved in this kind of mentoring program.

We now turn to what research tells us about the conditions under which the benefits of mentoring are most likely to be realized.

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