

# **Mentoring and Coaching stories – the learning journeys of lecturers undertaking Post Graduate study in Mentoring and Coaching**

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## **Abstract**

This paper focuses on the learning journeys of a group of lecturers who chose to undertake Master level study in Mentoring and Coaching at the University of Worcester. It includes extracts from their assignments and their reflections on their own professional development and learning as a result of the course. In all cases a greater understanding was achieved of mentoring and coaching in terms of clarifying the ambiguity around the definitions, improving their own skills and development as a mentor and coach and increasing awareness of the complex dynamics of the helping relationship. Clear benefits are demonstrated not only as a result of the critical reflection and research that form part of master level study, but also in terms of improved outcomes for students.

## **Introduction**

During the last three years eight lecturers at the University of Worcester have undertaken a master level module entitled Mentoring and Coaching. Seven were involved in supporting initial teacher training in different contexts and one was involved in advising students on employability. All were using mentoring and coaching skills in their professional role. The participants chose to undertake the study for a number of reasons; an interest in developing their skills at a deeper level; exploring new models of mentoring and coaching; building a more comprehensive toolkit as a mentor or coach and looking for new ways to approach their work with students.

The module, which was delivered over three Saturdays, provided these colleagues with the opportunity to reflect upon their work, to learn about new models through engagement with literature and to deepen their understanding of mentoring and coaching through research and critical reflection, leading to an improvement in their practice.

As the tutor on this programme, I was struck by the diversity, complexity and richness of the research undertaken by this group and by the personal insight arrived at through self reflection, dialogue with colleagues and engagement with the literature and theory.

This paper presents these coaching and mentoring stories and experiences. It seeks to discover what the benefits were to the participants in taking the course and what the impact has been on their professional practice. The participants provided qualitative feedback through emails and personal conversation and contributed edited extracts from their assignments along with reflections on the outcomes and learning from the course.

The paper further seeks to draw out and interpret the emerging themes. The word 'story' is chosen to represent the unique perspective of the participants. Together these constitute a web of ideas and perspectives contributing to a community of interest and practice. This pooling of the stories and experiences creates a rich tapestry that reveals patterns of mentoring and coaching behaviour.

## **The Definition Debate**

A key area for clarification at the outset of the course was that of definitions. The terms mentoring, specialist coaching, coaching and tutoring were understood by the participants and were broadly in line with the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (CUREE, 2005). However, variations and interpretations are evident in the stories reflecting different contexts, views and perspectives.

Mentoring and coaching is now a key development tool evident in all parts of the education sector. It is embedded as a desirable and sometimes required skill for education professionals. For example, it plays an important part in the teaching standards both pre and post threshold, it is a requirement for those undertaking the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) to be supported by a trained in-school coach and it has emerged as an important strategy to support continuing professional development for teachers (DfE, 2010, CfBT, 2010).

There is a well established body of literature that provides a theoretical foundation for the training and mentoring of new and trainee teachers (Anderson&Shannon, 1988, Brooks and Sikes, 1997, Furlong&Maynard,1995, McIntyre, D.& Hagger, 1996, Tomlinson, 1995, McIntyre and Haggard, 1996,) Since the 1980s mentoring is a recognized term to describe the support provided by experienced teachers undertaking the supervision of trainee teachers.

Beyond the education context there is a wide literature on mentoring and coaching. It is central to all helping relationships and is integral to leadership development, performance management, induction and professional development. The work of writers such as Downey (1998), Flaherty (1998), Zeus and Skiffington (2000), Whitmore (2001) and Clutterbuck (2004, 2007) have informed a great expansion and development in this area.

There has been an increasing awareness of the importance of mentoring and coaching and yet despite the vast literature there is still confusion about the definitions. The terms mean different things to different people and are understood differently in different contexts. This was a key issue addressed in all of the assignments.

## **Directive or non-directive?**

The definition debate was explored on the course, through reflecting upon the directive to non-directive spectrum (Downey, 1999). This model offers a spectrum of helping behaviour ranging from the directive (telling, directing, instructing) to non-directive (questioning, listening). Implicit here is also a parallel spectrum moving from judgmental to non-judgmental. Clutterbuck (2001) takes this further with his stretching-nurturing continuum. A key challenge for all mentors and coaches is to navigate these positions for the benefit of those mentored and coached. To some extent the position adopted on this continuum reveals the philosophical view point of the mentor or coach in relation to notions of learning and reflective practice. The wisdom in being in the right place on the spectrum at the right time is one of the most valuable mentor skills.

Coaching as non directive helping has increased in popularity in recent years and in its stance that learning is best achieved through helping others help themselves, has challenged some views of mentoring. This has mirrored broader changes in education and society and is in line, as Clutterbuck (2004) has suggested, with a growing emphasis on good answers to good questions, guidance to dialogue, an hierarchical approach to a humanist one, from exclusive to inclusive relationships and from one powerful relationship to a network of supporting relationships.

The central question faced by all students and participants in mentoring and coaching is which is the most effective way to support the learning of others especially where the activity, such as teaching, is complex and not easily reduced to skill based activity? This question is at the heart of the mentoring and coaching stories as described. Understanding this will shape the nature of the relationship.

The non-directive position facilitates learning, empowerment and self direction and motivation more effectively than the directive approach. Support is more effective where listening, empathizing and questioning is the predominant mode rather than telling and directing. The directive position is completely appropriate however, when instruction is required. This debate draws on theories of learning (Kolb,1985), psychology (Maslow,1954, Bandura,1998) and reflective practice (Schon,1983). Exploring this issue will serve to deepen understanding of the role of the mentor coach and indeed tutor, so that those charged with this responsibility develop a skillful and sophisticated approach.

Short extracts from the assignments are presented here. They offer a multifaceted picture of how mentoring and coaching operates within one group of HEI professionals in one University.

The extracts are in the participant's own voices and present individual perspectives on mentoring and coaching. The edited excerpts were checked by the authors. As a post script the participants were asked how their engagement with the course has impacted on their practice, what has changed and been learnt and how they now view the practice and impact of mentoring and coaching. These are presented at the end of the paper.

## **Developing a personal understanding of the role of mentoring and coaching in Initial Teacher Education School Experience**

**Branwen Bingle - Senior Lecturer**

*As a teacher-educator I feel there is an obvious need to use a range of strategies that will enable learners to develop their skills, and while lectures and seminars go some way towards this goal, without a more personal relationship with an individual who can provide this spectrum it would be difficult for many students to fully realize their potential. While the personal tutor system gives the students a "mentor" in the sense of individual guidance and pastoral support, it is as part of the School Experience (SE) tutorial relationship that most professionally-specific mentoring-coaching takes place. However, despite the benefits of using the techniques of mentoring-coaching in professional development and training, the role is made problematic within the context of school placements as tutors and students will often not know each other prior to the School Experience (SE) placement starting (the first meeting of mentor and mentee may well be the pre-practice tutorial) and the relationship can end after a few weeks, with a new mentor being allocated for subsequent SE placements. This presents particular challenges, not least in establishing an effective and productive mentoring-coaching relationship.*

*"Coaching" and "mentoring" have featured in a variety of ways throughout my professional life as a teacher across Primary and Secondary education. As a lecturer in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) I became interested in unpicking the concepts and practices of coaching and mentoring in direct response to my role, which demands me to be more critically aware of the process in order to support multiple learners effectively on a vocational course in an academic environment.*

*Previous experience led me to view coaching as a method that exclusively concerns the development of specific skills and competencies, rather than a deeper knowledge of an area of practice; and while I agree with Clutterbuck's (2007) view that "Coaches act as external stimulators to the potential that other people hold within them" I had felt my role (as a teacher and middle manager) was more that of mentor.*

*Mentoring, which I had personally defined as being less directive and more enabling of a deeper understanding through guided reflection and participant-centred learning, is a term being used increasingly in education, especially in response to an emphasis on CPD. I was given the role of professional mentor in my final year of teaching in order to support a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). This process was scaffolded using the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (2005), which formally placed me in the role of experienced colleague. Despite the label "Mentor", I used distinctly directive methods for supporting the learner through a process of target setting and reviewing: the focused record sheets that had to be completed as part of the process, using the Core Standards for teachers as success criteria, seemed to require more of what I had previously seen as a competency-based coaching approach.*

Branwen goes on to fully explore this definition debate drawing on Pask & Joy (2007) who advocate joining the terms mentoring and coaching into one word, mentoring—coaching and Clutterbuck (2007) who frames support against ten competences. There is reflection on the barriers to coaching as a result of working in a competency based context. This leads to a realization of the importance of core values,

*I realised that the model was not as important as identifying the competencies that represent my personal ethos and values within the process: that, as long as I am working within a system such as ITE (initial teacher education) with criterion referenced achievement, to time constraints and a myriad of official documentation that makes it difficult to structure the process to suit the needs of the individual, it is more important to utilize the principles of being an effective mentor-coach than to identify a structural model for the process at this time.*

## **Exploring mentoring in a contextual agenda: What's in it for me?**

**Jane Whittenbury – Senior Lecturer**

Jane had completed her Masters dissertation in 2008 researching into the mentoring of new members of academic staff in the centre for primary initial teacher training. A key question was asked – what's in it for me? There is no doubt that the process of mentoring and coaching is time consuming. In a highly reflective and honest account focusing on one mentoring and coaching relationship, Jane explores the definition debate and acknowledges early mistakes, such as asking too many questions. Through exploring expectations and outcomes, supported by engagement with literature and theory Jane redefines her understanding of the role leading to a deeper engagement,

*Each partnership is unique in its context: each party will bring individual needs and experiences, skills and beliefs. In my definition of mentoring I refer to a 'contextual agenda'. The context of the mentoring relationship is influential as,*

*'each mentoring pair brings to the relationship a set of expectations about the purpose of the relationship, about their role and the behaviours they should adopt, and about the likely outcomes'.(Clutterbuck, 2004, p.14)*

*I feel that these contextual aspects form a vital platform on which to build a successful partnership yet they may not be understood or even acknowledged by those involved. Without being challenged about his or her knowledge of the potential of mentoring, mentors may focus only on practical issues based on their own experiences, thus missing out on the developmental nature of a mentoring relationship.*

*I can look back now and answer honestly that my engagement as a mentor was not as effective as I would have liked in the initial period of mentoring. I was new to the role of mentor and did not fully understand the strength of mentoring. Only completing a module on mentoring and coaching, being a mentor and undertaking my dissertation really opened my eyes to the potential of mentoring and the role I could play.*

*With this increased understanding, I started to engage much better in my role. I was not there to pre-empt and answer all the questions but to listen and hopefully help my mentee find her own answers. I believe there was a shift in our relationship, a move towards a partnership where we both had things to contribute. Perhaps this was because I stopped seeing my mentee as someone I had to 'train' but as an equal (if not in experience, in job title) and she stopped seeing me as a 'fount of all knowledge' but more of a sounding board for her own ideas. This was an interesting development, perhaps borne from the fact that we were comfortable with each other, having become firm friends as well as colleagues.*

*By the third term our relationship had moved on again. We were encouraging each other with our own professional development, my mentee often finding time to ask me how my Masters was going and making me think about my research, thus prompting me to do some more! There was a new air of confidence surrounding her yet she still came to me for advice and sometimes approval – something I found very humbling, for here was a competent woman, acknowledged by others as capable of even more than she was doing at present, still using me as a mentor.*

*I can honestly say that completing my Masters has led to an enhanced understanding of mentoring which has certainly informed future practice, not only in terms of mentoring but also in my teaching. Discussions with my mentee about her agenda made me consider my own academic practice and gave me the confidence to take risks. I was at a stage where I needed to grow in my own confidence and mentoring provided me with a vehicle for doing that. I also needed an intellectual push, making me reflect on what I did and how I would work differently with my next mentee.*

## **A Recipe for Effective Mentoring and Coaching of Primary Graduate Teacher Trainees**

**Catriona Robinson – GTP Course Leader**

Ingredients: 21 GTP mentees, 21 school based mentors, 1 UW mentor and GTP course leader.  
Serves, 1 GTP provider.

Catriona heads the GTP programme and works with very large numbers of school based mentors. Having discovered that few of the mentors had had any training or time to consider their roles she rather creatively envisaged a recipe for success. Research was undertaken using questionnaires and interviews which informed a training programme based on the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching,

*As the course leader for the Primary Graduate Teaching Programme (GTP) at a Higher*

*Education Institute, I am responsible for training school-based mentors in order to successfully support GTP trainees. The mentoring and coaching role I believe is crucial for the development of not only the trainee teacher but also school-based mentors, myself and ultimately the Institute in which I work. In my experience where mentoring and coaching are executed well, the learning experience is often better for the trainee.*

*Working in a collaborative manner enabled me to start finding solutions to the problems surrounding GTP mentoring and coaching and hopefully this story will demonstrate one solution that has informed and impacted on my practice. The terms mentor and coach have been used interchangeably, as I believe there are many factors that affect the role including the mentees level of experience and the time in the coaching relationship.*

*I discovered at a GTP mentor development afternoon, that none of the school-based mentors had any knowledge of the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (CUREE, 2005) nor were they aware of any coaching or mentoring models, least of all put this into practice. At best some mentors had opted to mentor a GTP trainee in order to continue their professional development with promotion in mind rather than considering the importance and value of the mentor role. At worst mentors were chosen to do the job without consultation or consideration of whether the individual had the skills, inclination and commitment to do the job well.*

*This alarmed me, as the quality of the mentoring experience and the relationship between mentor and trainee should be of a high standard especially as the school is the main training provider through the GTP.*

*With this in mind, I undertook research to discover what the mentees' perception of an effective mentor relationship might be, if indeed the mentors/coaches actually needed training and knowledge of the Framework (ibid), whether they exhibited the skills and attributes desirable for establishing effective mentor. The results were used to design a training programme.*

*This training was given to all GTP mentors on the use of the National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (ibid), along with a joint mentor/mentee training session and a taster session for mentees where each trainee considered their roles within the mentoring relationship.*

*The most significant finding was the impact of the mentor specific training I conducted with the mentors. This action was taken because research questions highlighted that none of the mentors had been trained for their role. Many exhibited the skills and attributes desirable in a coach (Clutterbuck, 2004) however for effective mentoring and coaching to take place one would think that it would be desirable for the mentors to have some training in this area. Up until this point mentor development sessions for GTP informed the mentor about the course, expectations of the trainee and the administrative side of the mentor role. It was clear the training had a positive impact on the coaching relationship, resulting in a more cohesive and trusting bond between mentor and mentee. Although it could be perceived that this may have happened anyway due to the time in the mentoring relationship. However, in light of this finding I am left contemplating whether further training and consequently the apparent enrichment of the mentoring relationship, would enable mentor's to challenge their protégés more readily and that mentees would rise to this challenge in order to reach their true potential?*

## **'Can I ask a quick question?' A small scale enquiry into the nature, value and role of informal coaching and mentoring in Initial Teacher Training**

**Sue Irving - Senior Lecturer**

Sue was particularly interested in the kind of helping relationship and personal dynamic that existed between herself and the trainees. The focus of her research was the nature, value and role of informal mentoring;

*The rationale for undertaking a small-scale research project, into the nature and value of informal opportunities, was sparked by reflection on personal and professional concerns or "critical incidents" (Oxtoby 1979, cited in Bell, 2003, p.151), which revealed my different responses in formal and informal mentoring situations. For example, I felt a little anxious when carrying out formalised procedures for school supervision, as clashes of interest can arise when acting as a mentor and assessor. This contrasted with the high level of job satisfaction when informally approached by a trainee with: 'Can I ask a quick question?' Underpinning my contrasting responses and perceptions was a "tentative proposition" or (Verna and Beard, 1981, cited in Bell, 2003, p.24) that informal, mentoring could be of equal or greater value than formal practices.*

Research was undertaken with final year trainees who had often approached Sue with 'quick questions'. Themes explored in the research also included rapport, spontaneity and importantly the relationship between informal and formal mentoring.

*The features of trust and autonomy in informal practices were further endorsed by one trainee's written comment that:*

*"[for a] question related to subject knowledge I would go to the tutor who was taking me for that subject. [for] a general query...I would go to a tutor I got on well with and trusted."*

*This sense of trust and recognition of expertise, as valuable factors in the nature of informal mentoring, is echoed in research undertaken by Leslie, Lingard and Whyte, which revealed that mentors should be trustworthy, non-judgmental and accessible (2005, p. 695). Although this research was carried out in a medical faculty, there is some similarity with the professional, practice-based nature of teacher trainee courses. Clearly rapport, is a significant feature of these trusting relationships, and it is evident from the students' responses that accessibility and approachability are aspects of this, exemplified by: "I feel the approachability of the tutors is key [and]...tutors who make themselves available... are the ones that you tend to approach".*

*Further evidence that rapport and mutual respect is a feature of these informal relationships is that trainees invariably, seek permission for guidance, by politely asking "Can I ask..." (my italics). Building rapport involves a complex set of sub-skills, which is discussed in a wide range of literature, for example; Megginson and Clutterbuck devote a comprehensive chapter to "Establishing and managing the relationship" (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005, pp.17-36).*

*In my view the nature, role and value of informal mentoring opportunities are that they give trainees an invaluable empowering learning experience. Trainees are in control of the process and plan their 'quick questions'. They are also in control of the learning environment and timing, for example choosing the venue, usually neutral such as a classroom or corridor, and the initial time-scale of a few minutes.*

Choosing a tutor with whom they have rapport, has a further benefit of enabling trainees to trust

the outcomes of the conversations. I have concluded that informal practices are neither equal nor greater to formal practices, but instead are different and as such play a valuable role within the formal professional, reflective practices that are part of the trainees' development. However, it seemed to me, an important aspect of mentoring is found in Whitmore's claim that it is as much about the way these things are done as about what is done (Whitmore, 2001 p.6).

*The informal coaching and mentoring skills or techniques used by tutors role were relevant here and could range, according to Thomas and Smith's perspective from directive to non-directive (2006, p.27). The unpredictable nature of the contents of an informal mentoring encounter adds a layer of complexity and requires great expertise on the part of tutors, when approached with a quick question. In a relatively short space of time the skill of switching and interweaving different coaching and mentoring techniques is required.*

## **Coaching - Mentoring and the GTP tutor: how far can I go?** **Heather Crabtree – Senior Lecturer**

*As a GTP tutor I had previously encountered some difficulties in finding the best way to work with some singularly demanding trainees so I was keen to adopt a different approach to my tutorial work. I wanted to explore whether if were more skilled in the art of coaching-mentoring the time spent in tutorials could be more beneficial to the trainees.*

*The scope of my research was very small and focused on critical reflections on my own practice. In order to identify the elements of mentoring-coaching, with the trainee's permission, I recorded two consecutive one-hour tutorials which occurred at the beginning and end of my input sessions on the Coaching and Mentoring module.*

*Part of my own ethical dilemma was the extent to which my carrying out this piece of research would impact on the level of support that I was able to offer the trainee. Could participating in this actually have a negative impact on him and hold him back? If my skills of coaching and mentoring were lacking then he may receive less support during tutorials than he otherwise would have done. I was also struggling with my own concern, aware that I was considered by him as the "expert", what if by withholding useful advice I was actually making the course more difficult for him? A leap of faith was needed that required me to be convinced that allowing the student to work out the solution for themselves (Malderez and Wedell 2007:126) would provide a positive outcome.*

*Analysis of the data coupled with emails and professional conversations we subsequently had leads me to conclude that this particular concern was unfounded as the trainee showed a good level of reflection throughout the tutorials and more importantly appeared to feel empowered by the outcomes of each tutorial.*

*".... Oh, that was great, I feel a lot better now". (comment at the end of the second tutorial)*

*It became apparent that the nature of the questions I was asking required him to think carefully*

*about his own way of thinking and working:*

*"That's an interesting one! I'll have a think about that."*

*"I think I have to! I'd not thought of it in that way".*

*However, a closer analysis of the conversations shows that these comments derived from moments where as the mentor-coach, I veered more towards the directive and was offering*



*suggestions rather than waiting for him to come to his own conclusions. Although this does not necessarily devalue the experience for the trainee, the understanding gained from these questions may have had more impact if it had been directly generated by the trainee himself rather than intimated by the researcher.*

Heather's focus was very much on the development of her interpersonal skills and practice. She acknowledges progress in her understanding and a growing interest in the relationship between mentoring and coaching, empowerment and fostering learning independence.

*I felt empowered by the fact that my instincts about my level of empathy had been vindicated, however, it was in listening where I felt that there was actual development in my practice over the two tutorials. This was clear not only in the amount of time during which I spoke which decreased from the first tutorial to the second by approximately 10 minutes but also in the "deep listening" (Eldridge and Dembkowski, 2003) or what is referred to in the Mentoring and Coaching Framework (2005) as "active listening".*

*I was actually in the moment, listening to what was being said and then responding to it, rather than listening and trying to work out where the speaker was going next or what my own response to them might be.*

*Finally, Turnbull (2009) suggests that if the coaching relationship is successful then inevitably the coach themselves will notice an increase in their own awareness. I feel that the process of trying to identify myself as a mentor-coach has equipped me with skills which will serve me well both professionally and personally and I can say without doubt that the journey thus far has been very enlightening.*

## **Can a friend become a mentor? An investigation into the relationship between mentoring and friendship.**

**Rose Watson – Employability Development Officer**

*Can a friend ever become a mentor? If so, how does mentoring in an informal context differ from organisational mentoring? Can a formal mentoring relationship lead to an equal friendship?*

Rose explores a number of definitions of friendship and compares these with widely agreed definitions of mentoring such as 'a more experienced individual willing to share their knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust' (Clutterbuck, 1994), or of coaching '...to create a psychological space...providing a supportive yet challenging relationship and dialogue' (West and Milan, 2001)

*So what is the relationship between friendship and mentoring? Undoubtedly both involve elements of trust, support and respect, and Agnes Missirian (cited in Clutterbuck, 1994) argues that there is some recognition that the most successful mentoring relationships can often lead into strong friendships. The idea of 'mutual trust' mentioned by Clutterbuck (ibid) appears to be crucial, with Pahl (2000) suggesting that the development of friendship involves a spirit of mutual awareness.*

Rose goes on to explore the crucial differences between mentoring and friendship and related notions such as critical friend and professional friendship. After gaining feedback from mentees and drawing on a reflective journal some key themes and understandings emerge. All involved notions of support, listening, and confidentiality.

*In addition, some people favoured the 'expert' approach, with 'words of wisdom' being mentioned, whereas others suggested a personal development approach with reference to 'the whole person' and 'different perspectives' This can be accounted for by differing understandings of the terms 'coaching' and 'mentoring.'*

Understandings of friendship included mutual support, shared time, mutual understanding, and honesty and commitment.

*Most felt that the overlapping areas included support, respect and interaction. One person brought up the notion of 'critical friend' in references to challenge, honesty and openness.*

*Differences between the two roles included: power disparities, mutuality (mentoring generally seen as one way), defined roles in the relationship, organisational restrictions and boundaries, and references to the degrees of choice in the two relationships.*

*Concerns about whether a friend can become a mentor focused around the need for clear boundaries, notions of 'critical friendship' with some thinking they wouldn't challenge a friend, and mutuality and shifts of power. The notion of prior knowledge was also raised, with the suggestion that this have both a positive and negative impact on a mentoring relationship.*

*It has become apparent throughout this study that people have differing concepts of mentoring and coaching. Where mentoring is seen as a relationship where an experienced member of staff offers a junior or new one direction or support, there is likely to be an unequal power relationship and a lesser degree of mutuality. In this case, friendship may be less likely to exist earlier on in the relationship, although it may emerge as the relationship matures. Having said this, a client-centred, developmental approach of coaching or co-coaching may well be congruent with the role of a critical friend. In this case the crucial element is the equal power relationship and the degree of mutuality, where friendship and mentoring/coaching may well be compatible. In either case, in order for the relationship to be successful, boundaries need to be agreed, either explicitly or tacitly, and rules may need to be renegotiated if the relationship changes over time.*

### **What makes an effective mentor or coach?**

Joy Stanton - Senior Lecturer

Joy's interest was in finding out different perspectives on what makes an effective mentor and coach. This was the research area for her MA dissertation.

*My purpose was to try to discover more about what makes an effective mentor/coach for trainee teachers in a school setting. In order to do this I focused on both the teachers' and students' view of the relationship: what they felt was successful in the relationship and what concerned them.*

*Initially, my research focused on mentors' and students' views of the special attributes of a successful mentor in school. There was a good deal of agreement about these from the students and mentors, with teachers and students valuing good inter-personal skills over and above what might be termed professional or mentoring skills. Frequently mentioned were skills and qualities such as 'open communication', 'listening', 'mutual trust' and 'supportive'. However, the students were also eager for 'good feedback' from their mentors and wanted their mentors to be confident practitioners, this was something not mentioned by the teacher mentors. In order*

*to understand the mentoring/coaching relationship more, I turned my enquiry to find out about what activities mentors and students were engaging in to promote the professional growth of the student. Interestingly, from my evidence there was a clear mis-match between what teacher mentors said that they did with student teachers and the mentoring activities that the students said they actually experienced. One explanation for this might be the tension between mentors' 'espoused theories' and their 'theories in use' (Schon, 1983).*

*University based teacher educators tend to be focused on developing the reflective practitioner and although teacher mentors and trainee teachers reported that critical reflection had been encouraged through dialogue and questioning, the degree of reflection and whether it related to the student teacher's underlying values and beliefs about teaching and learning was uncertain. In fact, my own findings seemed to indicate that both teacher mentors and student teachers tended to hold a 'theory into practice' (where what was learned in university was then tried out on school experience) and a 'trial and error' approach to professional learning on school experience which may or may not have allowed for any in-depth reflection on the students' underlying values and beliefs.*

This research has suggested important avenues for further development at the heart of which is a consideration of the special attributes knowledge and circumstances that might lead to a more effective mentoring relationship between mentors and student teachers.

### **The Returner's Story** **Alan Perrigo – Senior lecturer**

Alan leads the Returner course for teachers and describes the strategies used to address the needs of local teachers wishing to return to the classroom. He identifies a lack of confidence and a need to refresh knowledge and understanding. Alan goes on to suggest that mentoring and coaching provides a vital link with positive reflective practice,

*'I thought once a teacher always a teacher. There is always that wee bit in you that lingers on. If you enjoy teaching, it will always be there' Robinson et al (1992). This reference taken from research carried out by the Scottish Council for Research in 1992 reflects the essence as to why teachers want to return to the profession. They have enjoyed past successes and now feel it is time to start again. This story is about how a Return to Teaching course can provide the platform for teachers who want to renew their skills and update their pedagogy and knowledge in the Primary field. My story is about how this success can be gained by the impact of good mentoring support in order for these returning teachers to achieve their goals.*

*Throughout this journey there needs to be a strong sense of self belief and efficacy, as goals can be realistically achieved. Forde et al (2006 p16), refer to feelings of self- efficacy and suggest that it is 'the extent to which we believe that we have the capacity to achieve what we think of as desirable outcomes'. They also support these feelings within the individual, by considering the need to set goals, think strategically, optimistically and persevere in any challenge set for them. Therefore, the key aims of this course are to refresh teacher's skills in a classroom environment and extend their professional knowledge and competences. Again added to this is the importance of building an individual' sense of purpose and self worth, in knowing that they can achieve success by embarking on the journey of self discovery and development.*

*Returners also need to feel empowered and challenged, Page and Czuba (1999) define empowerment as 'a process that challenges our assumptions about the way things are and can*

*be'. They add to their definition that it is about 'change' and that if this happens then empowerment can be a meaningful concept. I see my role on this journey as being the 'catalyst' to enable the individual to work through this 'process of change'. It is about 'supportive mentoring', which is a vital element of professional development. 'Mentoring helps people understand and work through change and so contributes to the achievement of the Mission or Strategy '(Alred et al ,1998).*

This is also supported by The National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (CUREE,2005) in stating that 'mentoring is a structured process to support professional learners through significant career changes'. The returner's journey is one of self discovery and in the belief that they can make changes in their own professional development and practice.

### **Concluding thoughts**

These brief extracts indicate the complexity and richness of the detailed research and reflection in the assignments. The participants have all achieved their aims stated at the start of the course and have learnt a great deal which will inform and improve their work as mentors and coaches. For some this has been about gaining a greater clarity in their role and an increased confidence in using mentoring and coaching skills, such as choosing directive or non-directive helping behaviours. This has led to increased confidence in understanding the dynamics of the mentoring and coaching relationship. For others it has resulted in establishing new approaches and practical strategies such as enhanced training for school based mentors which will make a positive difference. For some the outcomes were unexpected, 'Curiously, I feel that, at the moment, the biggest impact has been in my personal life where I have really been much more cautious in giving out advice.'

The group identified a number of key learning moments during the course. These centered around the basic skills of mentoring and coaching; listening for meaning, questioning for understanding and holding back wisdom for the benefit of others. Further, they were asked to reflect on their learning from the course and their thoughts are included below:

*This module has really helped me to think about both my professional relationships, and also the nature of the 'helping' and 'critical' friendships in my wider life. By understanding further the context of helping relationships, and the impact of power disparities, mutuality and boundaries, I hope to be able to forge more effective relationships to help colleagues and students learn and develop.*

*Discussions with my mentee about her agenda made me consider my own academic practice and gave me the confidence to take risks. I was at a stage where I needed to grow in my own confidence and mentoring provided me with a vehicle for doing that. I also needed an intellectual push, making me reflect on what I did and how I would work differently with my students and my next mentee.*

*Since undertaking the PG Cert in Mentoring and Coaching my practice has changed in many ways but I have been mostly influenced in terms of leadership and course design. I have helped facilitate enhanced mentoring and coaching by providing school-based trainers with appropriate training thus offering GTP trainees an improved training experience. This has resulted in more trainees attaining grade 1 'outstanding' by the end of their GTP year, a significant indicator of the impact that enhanced mentoring training may have had.*

*Carrying out a small-scale research project into the nature of informal coaching and mentoring practices, led me to value and respect the importance of these practices for trainees, as well as an understanding of the high level of skill required by tutors on daily basis.*

*As a result of undertaking the Mentoring and Coaching module I identified key points which I wished to inform future practice. I felt it was important to agree an outcome for the meeting with a mentee at the beginning of the tutorial to provide a focus for discussion, and I have implemented this strategy, although I have found that by asking questions regarding the purpose for setting up a tutorial prior to actually meeting it allows me to prepare better for a focused discussion.*

From my view as the tutor on this course it has been interesting and very rewarding to work with colleagues. There has been a deep engagement with the issues around mentoring and coaching and ongoing research and development in this area. The participants have operated at the 'forefront of professional practice' and there has been a strong relationship between theory and practice.

Three key themes have emerged from the assignments and student reflections. These help clarify important elements that have arisen from the course and from the student's research. The first concerns role conception - there is a need to continually reflect on the relationship between the mentor and coach and the mentee, coachee. Discussion of the terminology surrounding mentoring and coaching is more than semantics, it provides a necessary and illuminating critique of the activities. It helps move beyond an adherence to one position or another, to recognition of the complex, dynamic inter-relationships involved in one person helping another. Clutterbuck uses the term developmental space which is helpful for both the mentor and mentee (2004). Key words used in all assignments were; partnership, collaboration, uniqueness, trust, empowerment, respect, friendship, enabling and relationship. The effective mentor works to establish and develop all of these.

Clutterbuck and Wynne (1994) suggest mentor, coach, counselor, networker and facilitator in a similar mode as role descriptors. There is a growing recognition that the mentor can undertake all of these roles. Thomas (2004) refers to this as a triangle of support involving coaching, mentoring and counseling, all needed at different times.

The second theme is that of communication. Understanding the 'mental model' of the mentee by the mentor is an important first step in supporting learning (Senge, 1999) The key skills of building rapport, listening and questioning and moving on, as well as providing feedback, emerge as areas for ongoing research (Creasy&Patterson, 2005). The skills are used to enable the mentee to gain awareness and understanding and importantly, as Whitmore suggests (2002) take responsibility.

Finally all participants in the mentoring and coaching activity can be empowered through successful helping relationships. This leads to an increase in self confidence and self – efficacy. It encourages high levels of intent and a belief in the 'capacity to achieve a desired outcome' (Bandura, 1998) The assignments demonstrate that mentoring and coaching develops emotional intelligence, personal growth and critical thinking. Saying the right thing at the right time as well as asking difficult questions and providing challenge is a potent combination.

The contributors to this paper have gone on to develop and deepen their expertise as a mentors and coaches. A number of the group continued with their study to a Post Graduate Certificate in Mentoring and Coaching and some have focused on this area in the dissertation work.

They are part of a developing community of learners who are inspired and are inspiring others through mentoring, coaching, tutoring and helping, which is proving so often, to be transformational for professional learning.

A new group of colleagues have started the PGC in Mentoring and Coaching this term (Summer 2011) There is therefore much potential for future collaborative research.

Please contact the authors for a full transcript of the assignments quoted here.

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