CHAPTER 9
PAIRS, PEERS AND PEP TALKS: MENTORING IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES
Teresa Moore and Pam Gargett

Abstract

In recent times mentoring has gained renewed popularity as a means to induct pre-service and beginning teachers into their initial workplace. In this chapter we present a review of literature that focuses on the nature and role of mentoring in the workplace. Specifically we explore the positive dimension of mentoring, plus the 'dark side'. Within this literature review we argue that the success of mentoring lies within the relationship formed between a mentor and mentee and how the mentor and mentee view the purpose of the mentoring relationship.

INTRODUCTION

Recently there has been furor in the media pertaining to the deficiencies of teacher education. This furor ranges from concerns from parents about the falling standards in schools (Livingstone, 2007b) to the teachers themselves purporting that “We're not ready for school” (Livingstone, 2007a, p. 1-2). Increasingly the answer has been to use induction programs and mentoring support (Livingstone, 2007c). Lessening the knowing–doing gap within teacher training is a vexed space, with many teacher training programs arguing that the solution ranges from increasing the time spent in the classroom to reverting to apprenticeship models of training. Mentoring has gained renewed popularity in recent times as the means to induct pre-service student teachers and new teachers into the demands, expectations and requirements of the teaching profession (Marable & Raimondi, 2007; Moore, 2003; Stoekking, Leenders, DeJong, & Van Tartwijk, 2003).

The research literature pertaining to mentoring is comprehensive. This chapter focuses on selected literature reviewed as part of a larger literature review for a research project forming the doctoral study of one of the authors. The doctoral research focuses on the relationships formed between mentor teachers and pre-service teacher student mentees during a six-week internship. The selected literature highlights recent findings concerning the characteristics of mentors and the role of mentoring in the teaching workplace. In the following sections we explore this literature to present an argument about the nature and role of mentoring in teacher training, the positive and negative dimensions of mentoring, and finally we postulate that the success of a mentoring relationship lies in how the mentor and mentee view the purpose of this relationship.
SO WHAT IS MENTORING?

We define mentoring as a professional workplace relationship with a colleague that enables the enhancement of professional practice and knowledge. In the context of our teacher education program mentoring has taken the form of having a pre-service teacher student assigned to a mentor teacher who is currently practicing in a classroom. The pre-service teacher student attends the class for a set period of time in this case, a six-week period of shared teaching. It is the role of the mentor teacher to both mentor and appraise the teaching of the student and also during this time employment interviews are held with the pre-service teacher students who are hoping to receive job offers from the State Education system.

Mentoring has served many purposes over the years; As Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent (2004) discuss, mentoring has played a significant role in the teaching, inducting and developing of skills and talents of others and it is only in recent years that this has taken on a more formal dimension. Historically, young men venturing into the world of commerce, trade and scholarly ventures sought out a patron or mentor who would then provide support and introductions to the ‘right’ people in order to build their careers and reputations. This idea has remained but perhaps the purpose has shifted somewhat as we move further into the 21st century. Many organizations see formal mentoring programs as an opportunity for increasing the potential and learning of their employees with the added advantage of increased returns on their investment in social and human capital. Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996) highlight that employees who are new to specific professional practice are required to be inducted into the “Discourses” of their new profession and to become recognisable as persons in that profession. In other words, new professionals must know the signs and language of their profession, in order to know themselves as persons of that profession, thus belonging to a particular community of practice. In the following section the nature and role of mentoring is explored.

THE NATURE AND ROLE OF MENTORING

From the literature it can be seen that outcomes of mentoring include career advancement, the learning of new skills, increased competence in one’s role and socialization (enculturation) into the organisation’s climate and culture (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999, p. 7). As the mentoring relationship continues, the “mentees identify with the organization…[and] may learn to adopt the organisation’s frame of reference and to define problems and issues through that frame which builds organizational culture and commitment” (Long, 1997, p. 118). At the same time, Eby, Lockwood and Burts (2005, p. 8) postulate that outcomes for mentors may include rejuvenation in the field, enhanced self-image and a sense of fulfilment. Mentors also report developing new perspectives on their organization, enhanced managerial skills and the private benefits of developing a personal relationship.
with another individual (Eby & Lockwood, 2005). The spectrum of mentoring experiences ranges from the functional through ineffective to dysfunctional. It is worth noting that even the most successful relationships will experience negative events. Eby and McManus (2002) suggest that it is the relational quality between the mentor and mentee that will determine whether this negative event remains as an isolated experience or whether it will continue to influence the relationship.

Many mentoring relationships have positive outcomes and are very successful relationships where the mentor continues to have some kind of relationship with the mentee that extends beyond the time of the formal mentoring program.

Mentoring supports both individual and collegial learning in the workplace and has the potential to change school cultures (Moore, 2006). There are certain expectations associated with the ‘teaching’ workplace. Both Manuel (2003) and de Vries (2004) point to the perception that being the ‘good teacher’ means someone who can easily blend into the current workplace culture. It’s about how well you ‘fit’ with your workplace, keeping in mind that the workplace is not a homogeneous entity. In this day and age, when there is competition for jobs, to be seen as a good worker you need to devote commitment to, and to demonstrate total focus on, your job. For those people on contracts or casual work, being seen as ‘fitting in’ often means the difference between working and being unemployed (Moore, 2006). Moore (2006) suggests that ‘fitting in’ can also be seen as creating a niche and establishing an identity within that workplace. Mentoring within the context of teacher training provides a way of introducing the pre-service teacher to the workplace.

THE ROLE OF MENTORING IN TEACHER TRAINING

Australian teachers require specific training and must meet mandated criteria for registration across the States and Territories. Currently there are one-year graduate entry training programs sitting alongside the traditional four-year degree programs. Graduates from both programs require support in the workplace. Because many contemporary beginning teachers have had previous careers and experience in alternative workplaces they will have differentiated support needs. Hargreaves (1997) describes teaching as being difficult, complex, demanding and emotional work and in this context beginning teachers are expected to function at the level of experienced teachers (Manuel, 2003, p. 145). This means that beginning teachers require both socio-emotional support and technical support in order to deal with all the attendant issues that arise in the contemporary school workplace. Mentoring has the capacity to provide a conduit between the expectations of the workplace and the wide range of personal and professional experience and knowledge of the people now entering teaching (Moore, 2005). Martínez (2004) suggests that workplace mentoring will be of even greater importance and complexity. At the same time, she highlights the lack of specific training for mentors and that this “neglected” area will no doubt negatively impact on the mentor and mentee.
Mentoring provides the opportunity to establish professional networks between experienced teachers and in-coming graduates. Within these professional networks there is the opportunity to share ideas, guide colleagues, provide support and work collaboratively to deliver quality educational experiences for all learners. At the broader level, mentoring also serves to promote the concept of continuing professional learning in a supportive environment. This learning leads to a shared understanding of school norms and practices, mitigates teacher isolation (Carter & Francis, 2000) and serves as a basis for further development of personal teaching philosophies through practice. Mentoring in the field of teaching is also a practical response to the “reality shock” experienced by beginning teachers “when faced with the demands of teaching practice and with the gap between their ideals and the reality of everyday school life” (Koetsier & Wubbels, 1995, p. 333). Finally we would also argue that mentoring has the role or at least, the potential to retain new graduates and reinvigorate existing teachers as they each reflect on professional practice, professional values, professional knowledge and their personal identity as teachers (Moore, 2005).

THE BRIGHT SIDE AND DARK SIDE OF MENTORING

Commitment from school leadership is essential to the success of mentoring programs when developing a “whole of school” culture towards supporting beginning teachers (Dymoke & Harrison, 2006). But at the same time Dymoke and Harrison (2006) suggest that some of the collegiality and collaboration that underpin a “whole of school” approach to developing a supportive community of practice is contrived. They found that this contrived collegiality is actually regulated and compulsory and operates within fixed parameters (Dymoke & Harrison, 2006). This is particularly so when induction or mentoring has a dual role: firstly, increasing the knowledge and pedagogy of the beginning teacher through practice and secondly, assessing of their practice through performance management.

Martinez (2004, p. 95) suggests that mentoring has potential that is both promising and risky. We would agree that this process is not neutral, particularly with the mentoring of beginning teachers by experienced teachers (Martinez, 2004). Existing practices, both good and bad, may be passed on to beginning teachers who may feel that they are not in a position to critique and/or resist certain practices. The lack of appropriate support through such programs as mentoring is often cited as a major reason for the high attrition rates among beginning teachers.

Martinez (2004, p. 95) has previously suggested that mentoring can be seen as “acritical occupational perpetuation of existing practices and patterns of inequitable outcomes for children” . Martinez (2004) draws attention to the shifting patterns of recruitment and retention of teachers occurring in Australia. Schools are finding it difficult to staff particular schools in rural and remote areas and to appoint suitably qualified maths and science teachers and
teachers appropriately trained to teach children with special needs. Consequently beginning teachers often end up being appointed to these positions and will have corresponding trouble in finding suitable mentors at their school.

In times of teacher shortages assigning experienced teachers as mentors could be perceived as a quick, simple, low maintenance fix (Martinez, 2004) – a pragmatic solution to the ‘deficit’ model associated with university training of teachers, often anecdotally cited by those who support the apprenticeship training of teachers. But, even teachers who are mentors have few answers about how to ‘magically’ transform the impossible teaching contexts often assigned to beginning teachers. On their initial appointment, many beginning teachers are given the most difficult students, the worst classrooms with the poorest facilities (Martinez, 2004) and are often left to sink or swim (de Vries, 2004). While coping with the worst class the beginning teacher is also developing pedagogical practice, responding to parent and colleague expectations and finding their place in a profession that is often seen as ‘eating its own’ (Carter & Francis, 2000; Manuel, 2003).

Young, Bullough, Draper, Smith and Erickson (2005) add that mentoring is seen as being emotionally demanding and a source of vulnerability for both the mentor and the mentee. Young et al. (2005, p. 170) also suggest that the “mentors may limit their mentoring to what they believe to be for the mentee’s own good”. In other words, the mentor shapes and indoctrinates the mentee’s practice to that required to ‘fit in’ an organisation or socialises the beginning teacher to reproduce the status quo rather than guiding them to develop their own pedagogical practice. This raises the question for us in this research of: how does the mentor teacher shape the pedagogical practices of the pre-service teacher mentee during the internship and with what consequences?

Adlesi and Bizjak (n.d.) and Feiman-Nemser (1997) state that having a clear model of what is to be achieved from the mentoring experience is essential. Jones and Straker (2006, p. 165) found that mentor teachers tended to draw on their own “teacher knowledge” without taking into account “the specific aspects of adult learners and the generic principles underpinning mentoring”. This would suggest that there is an element of ‘do as I do’ being conveyed to the mentee. This is supported by Edwards and Protheroe (2004) in that many pre-service teacher students they interviewed felt they were acting as “proxy teachers” in the delivery of a pre-planned curriculum without encouragement of experimentation and growth. This demonstrates a strong emphasis on perpetuating the “status quo” through the use of particular mentoring practices, however Swales (2002) raises questions about this practice. By using reflective practice strategies, as suggested by Harrison, Lawson and Wortley (2005), means that the mentoring relationship does not become simply an exercise in role modelling.

While traditional mentoring does have benefits for the participants, with the mentee gaining support and knowledge and the mentor gaining from opportunities to reflect on practice (Le Cornu, 2005), traditional power hierarchies often remain
with this kind of relationship. These hierarchies influence and shape behaviours and practice, especially when the mentor is also passing judgement on practice that counts towards degree completion and teacher registration. In this situation the mentee is likely to conform to whatever is suggested or modelled by the mentor. Axford (2005) draws attention to this in her study of undergraduate students, where the students were confronted with power relationships in their workplaces that subsequently shaped their workplace behaviours, signalling both the positive and negative aspects of mentoring. Therefore while mentoring relationships have much to offer in the way of support for new workers in any workplace, the limitations, plus the positive and negative aspects of mentoring, must be considered.

**IT’S ALL ABOUT PAIRS, PEERS AND PEP TALKS IN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS**

Hale (2000) postulates that care is needed when matching mentors with potential mentees. The attributes of the pairs involved in the formation of mentoring relationships are influential as this matching is “arguably a key determinant of success in establishing a viable and successful relationship” (Hale, 2000, p. 223). However, there does not appear to be any practical guidelines grounded in the research literature about how to go about this matching; apart from Siegel, Smith and Mosca (2001), who advocate the use of the Myers-Briggs type indicator as a way of matching mentors and potential mentees.

Various studies have noted that the ages of the mentoring partners (Finkelstein, Allen, & Rhoton, 2003) and their gender (Bauer, 1999) also impact on the resultant mentoring relationship. Cox (2005) argues that it is not only the characteristics of the participants that influence the nature of the mentoring relationship but also the reasons for the mentoring relationship and the way in which the mentor has been recruited. Other determinants, external to the mentor and mentee, may include the reasons why the relationship has been initiated. If, for example, administrators have pressured an experienced teacher to take on the role of a mentor, there may be resentment. If the teacher chooses to mentor as a way of building honour and prestige or if s/he is chosen to trouble-shoot with the mentee, it is unlikely that a successful relationship will be possible (Trubowitz, 2004).

Among the common characteristics of ‘good’ mentoring relationships and also of ‘good’ mentors is the concept of emotional intelligence (Meggison, 2000). Implied here is the way in which a mentor uses her or his experience wisely in order to guide the mentee. Another common characteristic of ‘good’ mentors, according to Ellinger (2002), is having a strong sense of ‘self’ and a desire to help others. Bower, Dier, Morzinski and Simpson (1998) suggest that an ability to balance the measures of challenge and support afforded to the mentee is also found in successful mentoring relationships. Although they commonly have only one ‘follower’ mentors need to exhibit leadership qualities (Appelbaum, Ritchie, & Shapiro, 1994). Another strong attribute commonly seen among ‘good’ mentors
is a willingness to act as a role model in displaying appropriate values, attitudes and behaviours (O’Neill, 2005) plus a willingness to invest precious “professional and personal time” into the ongoing process of the relationship with the mentee (Kalbfleisch, 2002). Investing this time as ‘pep talks’ especially when the beginning teacher may be feeling low can assist in providing a morale boost.

These characteristics of successful peer relationships can also be seen as strategies that can be used purposefully to develop effective mentoring relationships (Bouquillon, Sosik, & Lee, 2005; Lee, Theoharis, Fitzpatrick, & Kim, 2006). In summary, the following attributes are common across the “good mentor”:

- The mentor needs to be ‘ready to be an effective mentor’.
- They should embrace their ability to communicate (both speaking, listening and in written form).
- They should overtly plan, organize and manage (their classroom activities).
- They should create a network of support for the mentee.
- Share their professional knowledge and professional vision.
- Engage in collaborative problem solving.
- Create a repertoire of effective consultation skills.
- Consider how they would like to be treated and strike a balance (of power) in their relationship with their mentee. (Lee et al., 2006, pp. 4-7).

CONCLUSION

Beginning teachers can challenge experienced staff to think about those taken-for-granted practices (Ewing & Smith, 2003); they can also be caught between staffroom tensions and experience pressure to conform to particular workplace cultures, especially where there is resistance to change in teaching practices and curriculum content by long serving teachers. Manuel (2003) warned that if the beginning teacher overtly or covertly subverts the norms of the staffroom the toll can be high, resulting in being subtly ostracised or ignored by colleagues. In such cases beginning teachers can be told that they are not working as part of the team. This has consequences for self-esteem, self-efficacy and the construction of a professional identity as a teacher. Beginning teachers have knowledge of current curriculum documents and new teaching and learning strategies that can be shared as a valuable resource rather than a threat (Moore, 2006). We suggest an alternative mentoring model through the pairing up an experienced teacher mentor and a pre-service teacher mentee in a peer relationship. This peer relationship can be encouraged through the sharing of knowledge, practices and pedagogy in what can be seen informal ‘pep’ talks. We argue that the mentor teacher should not be involved with any appraisal of the mentee’s practice in the classroom. This would then create space for the mentee to develop their pedagogical practice under less stressful conditions but within the safety of a mentoring context. This kind of relationship can then be extended when the pre-service teacher mentee moves into the role of beginning teacher.
From the literature reviewed and presented in this chapter, it can be argued that there are both positive and negative aspects of mentoring. Mentoring has been a strategy for the induction and enculturation of specific workplace practices for many years; teaching is no exception. However, mentoring is the new 'buzz' word and strategy serving as an adjunct to the perceived deficit model of university teacher training. It is also a strategy for acclimatising the pre-service teacher student and beginning teacher into the contemporary educational workplace. From the literature, it could be argued that successful mentoring results when mentors and mentees develop a peer relationship, where power hierarchies are reduced, where there is a sharing of old and new knowledge through informal pep talks and when there is support for both mentors and mentees. As to how the successful mentoring relationship 'clicks' with both participants we suggest lies in how the mentor and mentee view the purpose of the mentoring relationship.

REFERENCES


