

Mentoring and Teachers: The Implications of Reconceptualising Mentoring

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Abstract: Mentoring is an old idea that is being hailed as an important strategy for teacher professional development. But how is mentoring conceptualised and implemented in this context? Conceptualisations of mentoring range from the traditional view of an expert-novice relationship to more recent conceptualisations of mentoring as a developmental partnership or shared adventure. However, the way that mentoring is conceptualised impacts on all facets of the implementation of mentoring. In particular, it influences the way the roles of mentor and mentee are understood, how participants come to engage in mentoring, and how they are prepared and supported. This paper examines different conceptualisations of mentoring and their appropriateness for the professional development of educators. It then explores the implications of adopting a partnership view of the mentoring relationship for developing and implementing mentoring as a professional development strategy. Issues addressed include the language used, the context in which the mentoring takes place, the selection process, the preparation for participation in mentoring, the support available to participants and the likely outcomes of a mentoring partnership.

Keywords: Mentoring, Teacher Development

MENTORING HAS BECOME a popular professional development strategy in Australian educational settings in recent years (DEST, 2002; MacCallum & Brooker, 2006; Martinez, 2004). Within primary and secondary education, mentoring programs can serve different groups, such as pre-service teachers, new teachers or those returning to teaching, and new leaders or principals (Barnett & O'Mahoney, 2005; Carter, 2005; DEST, 2002; Herrington, Herrington & Olney, 2005). It is a common strategy aimed at retaining new teachers in the early years of their career (Martinez, 2004; Schuck, 2003). In tertiary settings, mentoring assists junior academics to develop their research and teaching as part of the academic community and provides support for academic women (in particular) seeking promotion (Butarac & Rowland, 1999; Gardiner, 2005).

A recent review of the training opportunities for participation in mentoring (MacCallum & Brooker, 2006) raised a number of issues in relation to how mentoring is conceptualised and how this conceptualisation is translated into program implementation. One finding of the review of training was that the implementation of formal mentoring programs for beginning teachers differed from those organised for junior academics in universities. For example, whereas preparation for mentoring involved mentors and mentees in the latter instance, both rarely participated as partners in beginning teacher programs. The university mentoring programs for women focused on preparation for both mentors and mentees,

and also arranged social events and topics of interest in order to bring participants together to share experiences and develop wider networks. These programs provided a collegial model of mentoring and support. Mentoring programs for beginning teachers more often than not had training programs for mentors, with little or no reference to preparation for mentees. School-based programs with a follow-up day of training or conferencing appeared to be building a collegial model of mentoring for mentors, but rarely included mentees.

This paper argues that a partnership view of mentoring is consistent with current understandings of teacher education and professional learning, and hence program implementation needs to reflect this view. The first section outlines different ways that mentoring has been conceptualised and discusses the relation of these conceptualisations to educational practice. The second section details the implications for the development and implementation of formal mentoring programs in education and argues that the way that mentoring is conceptualised impacts on many facets of a mentoring program. In particular, it influences the way the roles of mentor and mentee are understood and how participants are selected, prepared and supported.

The Concept of Mentoring

Mentoring is an old idea, the origin of which is thought to date back to Greek mythology and the relationship between Mentor and King Odysseus's son Telemachus. When the king set off to the Trojan



War, Mentor became father figure, teacher, role model, approachable counsellor, trusted adviser, challenger, and encourager. A similar kind of role is present in a number of cultural traditions (such as the cultural practices involving elders in Aboriginal culture, the Shi-fu or wise man in ancient Chinese culture, the guru-disciple tradition in Buddhism). Some definitions of mentoring adopt this traditional conceptualisation of an expert-novice relationship. This is often referred to as an apprenticeship model of mentoring (e.g. Field, 1994; Martinez, 1993).

An alternative conceptualisation of mentoring is that of a partnership between mentor and mentee (Martin, 2000) or a developmental alliance (Hay in Morton, 2003). While the mentor primarily takes the facilitative role, the partners both participate in reflection and professional learning. In a similar vein, Baird (1993) describes mentoring as “a shared adventure” (p. 54) that involves both collaboration and challenge to foster effective personal and professional change. Mullen (2000) takes the partnership conceptualisation further by proposing the notion of collaborative mentorship or ‘co-mentoring’ in the context of a school-university partnership in which each participant has knowledge and experience to bring to the relationship.

In elaborating the concept of co-mentoring, Clarke (2004) distinguishes between formal mentoring, informal mentoring and co-mentoring on the basis of a number of characteristics. Clarke suggests that in formal mentoring the communication flow is “one-way from mentor to protégé”, in informal mentoring communication “takes place in an informal manner” and in co-mentoring “dialogue occurs” (p. 127). Similarly she argues that formal mentoring is non-reciprocal whereas informal mentoring and co-mentoring involve “reciprocal benefit”. Selection processes also differ and Clarke suggests that participants have little or no input in formal programs while in the other forms of mentoring they choose each other. Clarke’s understanding of formal mentoring is essentially the traditional expert-novice conceptualisation with co-mentoring being a friendship of peers, which grows out of informal mentoring.

A different kind of notion of mentoring is evident in Gehrke’s (1988) conceptualisation of mentoring as ‘a gift’. She developed her ideas from the 1924/1967 work of Mauss and 1979 work of Hyde, both of whom considered gifts within a gift exchange economy as opposed to a market economy. There are four phases of giving and receiving (1) the “*creation of the gift*” (which might include new ways of seeing things) by the giver, (2) the “*awakening*” transformation from being given the gift, (3) “*commitment to labo[u]r to deserve the gift*”, and (4) “*passing the gift*” (increased in worth by the labour

of the recipient) to a new recipient (Gehrke, 1988, p. 192). She maintains that considering mentoring in terms of the market economy, such as organisational productivity and individual success “obfuscates the nature of the mentor-protégé phenomenon” (p. 193). Further she argues, settling for market economy relationships may result in “fewer transformational awakenings, less personal perfection of talent, and less unity with others” (p. 193). Although this conceptualisation posits a more experienced and a less experienced participant, each is active in the relationship.

Both Clarke’s and Gehrke’s analyses highlight the primacy of the relationship in mentoring, which could be considered a synergetic space in which many things are possible. While the notion of the gift economy encapsulates the voluntary act of kindness Clarke associates with informal mentoring and co-mentoring, it is not an easy concept to translate into formal mentoring programs in organisations that seek strategies to achieve professional learning outcomes for their employees. Mentoring programs in universities, in adopting partnership models of mentoring, appear to have been able to achieve these kinds of relationships within a formal structure (Butarac & Rowland, 1999; Gardiner, 2005).

Which kinds of conceptualisations, then, are most appropriate for mentoring in school contexts? In an examination of the entry experiences of new teachers, Martinez (1993) argues that there is a mismatch between an apprenticeship view of teacher support and the notions of reflective practice that permeate current approaches to teacher learning. Further, Martinez (1993, 2004) warns that many mentoring programs have been premised on a deficit view of teacher education and of beginning teachers. In such models, the “major purpose of mentoring has been to ensure that the new teacher to a particular site fits in quickly, with least disturbance to the ways that ‘business as usual’ is conducted” (2004, p. 105). Martinez (2004) adds that some recent programs, such as the New South Wales [NSW] Teacher Mentor scheme, have moved beyond that model. In doing so they acknowledge the “worth of teacher education and the positive contributions that beginning teachers make to school communities in their ongoing efforts to enhance learning and life outcomes for children” (p. 105). New teachers may well be up to date in terms of reflective approaches to practice, outcomes based education, use of new technologies, and new developments in their discipline area(s). A partnership view of mentoring recognises the contributions of all participants and the mutual benefits possible to a greater extent than an apprenticeship view.

Carter (2005) suggests that in the literature on mentoring in the workplace, the role of the mentor

is more associated with facilitating the learning of another and creating a context for growth, rather than a teaching role. In theory at least, expert teachers in the role of mentor might be expected to model reflective practice and support new teachers in their own reflective practice. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that teacher mentors inhibit the development of new teachers' reflective practice (Ballantyne, Hansford & Packer, 1995) unless a collaborative professional context is created (Wildman, Magliaro, Niles & Niles, 1992).

This paper argues that at the heart of the development of a mentoring relationship that creates possibilities for reflection and growth is how mentoring is conceptualised and how this conceptualisation is translated into implementation.

Language is one aspect of conceptualisation that permeates the mentoring literature, and the current language of mentoring may focus our attention on the traditional view of mentoring. The words mentor and mentee (or mentoree) suggest different kinds of roles and inequality in the mentoring relationship, and the “-ee” suffix of nouns denotes “one who is the object of some action” or “receives something” (The Macquarie Dictionary, 2005). Although the word protégé is often suggested as an alternative in workplace contexts, it comes from the word ‘to protect’ and has connotations of patronage and protection. Terms such as ‘co-mentoring’, ‘participants’ and ‘mentoring partners’ may better project notions of partnership.

The Functions and Roles of Mentoring

No matter which conceptualisation of mentoring is considered, participants take on one or more roles within the relationship, such as counsellor, role model, partner, giver, receiver. Through these various roles the context for growth is created. Traditionally, the focus is placed on mentor roles that are specified up front and become the focus of mentor preparation. In order to identify the role of the mentor, Wunsch (1994) recommends that program developers choose a clear *operating definition* that “reflects the needs of participants and the goals of mentoring within a particular institution” (p. 28) and this serves to guide the choice of mentoring activities. Other writers consider that the role of the mentor should not be decided up front by program developers but should be defined by participants (e.g. Wildman *et al*, 1992). The argument is that if the role is designated too tightly, the participants may surrender some of the uniqueness of their particular mentoring relationship.

These roles or elements of mentoring are often grouped in some way to highlight the essence of mentoring. From Jacobi's (1991, p. 510) review of mentoring in undergraduate education the main

components of a mentoring relationship are (1) emotional and social support, (2) direct assistance with career and professional development, and (3) role modelling. Similarly Baird (1993) describes the role of a mentor as an amalgam of (1) Carer, (2) Helper, and (3) Sharer. These ‘roles’ may be present to some extent in any mentoring relationship but may differ with participant needs and assume varying importance over time. In the context of mentoring educational leaders, O'Mahony (2004; Barnett & O'Mahony, 2005) describes three influential roles that mentors provide in nurturing the growth of others. Although consistent with the elements above, in O'Mahony's roles the social and emotional aspect is less explicit, and the focus is more on negotiating, challenge and developing practice. The roles are (1) Guidance, through the words and actions that give direction through the maze of leadership decisions and challenges, (2) Facilitation, of relationships with exposure to exemplar role models and provision of learning experiences that both stretch and confront, and (3) Input, related to developing effective leadership practice (2004, p.3).

There are many definitions of mentoring which attempt to describe mentoring and the inherent roles. The following definition is often quoted in workplace mentoring and takes account of the need for mutuality in a relationship as well as acknowledging the core roles.

Mentoring is a complex, interactive process, occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal or psychosocial development, career and/or educational development, and socialization functions into the relationship... To the extent that the parameters of mutuality and compatibility exist in the relationship, the potential outcomes of respect, professionalism, collegiality, and role fulfillment will result. Further the mentoring process occurs in a dynamic relationship within a given milieu. (Carmin in Carruthers, 1993, pp.10-11)

This definition doesn't ascribe specific roles to the mentor or the mentee and implies that mentoring provides opportunities for professional development of all participants.

An aspect missing from the definition above, and rarely included in definitions, is that of reflection. However, Ballantyne *et al* (1995, p. 300) include “critical reflection and feedback on practice” as one of four major mentoring functions. Carter acknowledges the transformative potential of reflection in mentoring, such that it

Enables teachers to reflect on their work, question their practices and challenge the assump-

tions that underpin schooling and approaches to education. (Carter, 2000, reproduced in DE&T, 2002)

If mentoring is to be conceptualised as consistent with the educator as reflective practitioner (Martinez, 1993, 2004) then a fourth core element or role – reflection - needs to be present.

How do these role conceptualisations translate into practice? Morton (2003) discusses mentoring within the tertiary sector, but her comments about the role of the mentor in mentoring are equally applicable to the school sector, particularly in relation to new teachers. Morton says

The mentor's role is in helping the mentee to come to their own informed conclusions about the issues or ideas they are toying with, through discussion of the mentor's observations and experiences. It would be useful for the mentor to discuss with the mentee the possible consequences of continuing with the same approach, but it is not the mentor's role to make them change their ways! (Morton, 2003, p. 5)

Morton's understanding of the mentor role is consistent with a focus on professional learning and critical reflection. Similarly in the context of mentoring student teachers, Edwards and Collison (1996) maintain that mentors may not change students' images of how they want to operate, and perhaps shouldn't anyway, but that they can perhaps "enable students to explore the implications of wider varieties of practice" (p. 29).

In interviews conducted as part of *An Ethic of Care: Effective Programs for Beginning Teachers* research (DEST, 2002), different understandings of mentoring were encountered. While 82.6% schools (indicated in responses of supervisors) claimed to use mentoring, only 39.9% teachers indicated that they had experienced mentoring. Much of the mentoring may have been informal as less than one third of the supervisors reported providing training for mentors or gave them time release to perform the role. In addition, supervisors' responses about their views of the role of mentors pointed to a conservative or traditional interpretation in which the experienced teacher passed on knowledge and teaching strategies, rather than facilitating critical enquiry and reflection. This is despite the notion of mentoring as a learning experience for adult mentors being acknowledged for many years (Bove & Phillips, 1984).

Implications for the Implementation of Mentoring Programs

In order for a partnership view of mentoring to be translated into effective mentoring programs, the

implications for development and implementation must be acknowledged and articulated. To illustrate this point the context in which mentoring occurs, selection of participants, preparation and support for mentoring are discussed.

The Context of the Mentoring Program

The context in which the mentoring is to take place can support or frustrate the development of mentoring relationships. If power relationships or structures are in opposition to the development of open, trusting and potentially challenging mentoring practices, then a program is unlikely to work optimally (Colley, 2003; Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, 1996; Wildman *et al.*, 1992). McCann and Radford (1993) envisage mentoring taking place in schools which are "professional learning communities, where it is systematically acknowledged that everyone has something to contribute and something to learn about teaching and learning" (p. 26). The characteristics of such a school are (1) an open climate where staff are ready to collaborate and cooperate and discuss their work, (2) a commitment of the principal and senior staff, and (3) a clear understanding of the educational purposes (McCann & Radford, 1993, pp. 26-27).

However, McCann and Radford (1993) maintain that collaboration which invites critical reflection is rare.

The history and culture of teaching have placed teachers in the role of knowers and tellers working in isolation with few opportunities to share professional knowledge... Combined with a history of professional isolation, this makes teacher collaboration seem threatening rather than exciting and empowering. (p. 39)

This is particularly so when mentoring involves beginning teachers. Some teachers perceive collaboration and mentoring as asking for help which might suggest professional failing (McCann & Radford, 1993). In this context, with its deficit implications, it is difficult to develop conversations about teaching which do not appear to reflect on teacher competence.

With increases in computer use, the internet has developed as a context for online mentoring. Several Australian universities have developed online mentoring programs for their teacher education graduates (Herrington, Herrington & Olney, 2005, Schuck, 2003). While this approach is built on the concept of learning communities, beginning teachers have been slow to take advantage of online chats with mentor teachers. Schuck concludes that many may prefer face-to-face mentoring although a common reason given for lack of participation was the over-

whelmingness of the first months of teaching. Perhaps the online environment lacks the social and emotional support that is possible in face-to-face mentoring contexts, although the online environment may appear less threatening (MacCallum, 1995).

Selection

The definition of mentoring presented earlier in this paper (Carmin in Carruthers, 1993) pointed out the importance of mutuality and compatibility in a mentoring relationship. Clarke (2004) mentions the importance of friendship in co-mentoring relationships, and the greater likelihood when participants choose each other. In most tertiary programs, attempts are made to match participants based on interest or request (Butarac & Rowland, 1999; Gardiner, 2005) or to assist academics to find a suitable mentor (Sydney University Network [SUN], 2005). In the recent mentoring program for beginning teachers in NSW, the appointment of Mentor Teachers means that new teachers have little choice in selection of a mentor (DET, 2006). Western Australia is trying a different system with new teachers being responsible for nominating a suitable "Collegial Support Person" (WACOT, 2007). It is unclear how these differences impact on the effectiveness of mentoring in these contexts.

Preparation for Mentoring

A majority of mentoring writers suggest that the mentoring role does not usually come naturally and that some form of training is needed (e.g. Butarac & Rowland, 1999; Walker & Scott, 1993). Walker and Stott (1993) argue that learning such behaviour may need to be a continuous process throughout the mentoring program and even into subsequent programs. For this to occur mentors need to be available on a medium- to long-term basis. Further, research conducted at the University of California, Irvine, revealed that 80% of mentor teachers believed that some form of training was helpful (University of California, n.d.). The evaluation of the NSW Teacher Mentor Program (DET, 2004) also reiterated the need for mentor teachers to be adequately prepared for mentoring activities, such as (1) debriefing after stressful school-related incidents, (2) informal meetings of mentor teacher and new teacher, (3) demonstration lessons delivered by the mentor teacher, and (4) classroom visits (with feedback) by the mentor teacher.

Is 'training' what is required? Carter and Francis (2000) critique the use of the word 'training' in reference to mentor preparation. They argue that the word implies the delivery of "predefined and decontextualised skills" (p. 6) when mentoring is a highly contextualised learning strategy. Further, mentors

have different needs and expectations due to their wide range of professional experience. The alternative approach suggested by Carter and Francis involves opportunities for mentors "to meet and engage in a professional dialogue focused on professional practice and the development of new understandings about learning and teaching" (p. 6). Conceptualising this as training, they argue, may not be productive or professionally liberating. Similarly, Walker and Scott (1993) argue that mentees have different developmental needs, take different levels of experience into a mentoring relationship and mentors often have vastly different strengths. On the basis that every mentoring relationship is unique they recommend against trying to prepare mentors for every potential situation, and instead argue for encouraging mentors to adopt the style with which they are most comfortable and which suits the developmental needs of the mentee.

However, there is a proliferation of mentor 'training' available (MacCallum & Brooker, 2006). Some is generic and available online, in manuals or as training packages. Other mentor training is specifically developed as part of a particular mentor program or takes a generic model and modifies it to meet the specific needs of the participants. Most training schemes include (1) an introduction to the concept of mentoring, and the likely benefits to participants, (2) details of the particular mentoring program and the roles and responsibilities of mentors and mentees, (3) stages in the development of a mentoring relationship, (4) some techniques and tools for mentoring, and (5) recommended activities, specific to the program aims or needs of participants. Some programs also include specific background information on the mentee group (e.g. the characteristics of beginning teachers), principles of adult learning, what mentoring is and is not, and self-reflection exercises. While these topics might provide useful background, how the content is conceptualised and presented, and who is invited to attend are critically important in developing an effective mentoring program consistent with a partnership view of mentoring.

Explanation of the benefits is claimed to enhance the likelihood that participants will value the mentoring relationship and commit to it. McCann and Radford (1993) argue that teaching is uncertain and collaborating with another teacher is inherently risky, so that some teachers may be reluctant to participate in a mentoring program. Advantages might be considered at both the personal and the professional levels. Skills and techniques are commonly included (e.g. Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005), such as setting goals, clarifying and understanding situations, and stimulating creative thinking, all of which are useful for both mentors and mentees.

Preparation for mentoring framed within professional learning and based on reflection and critical thinking is becoming more prevalent, allowing good mentors to adjust their mentoring communications to meet the needs of individual mentees. In order to do this mentors need a deep understanding of their own communication styles and a willingness to critically examine their own teaching. Rowley (1999) argues that mentor training needs to engage mentors in completing and reflecting on self-inventories that provide insight into their own communication styles. In addition, mentors need frequent opportunities to participate in high-quality professional-growth experiences and examine their own ideas and assumptions, so that they can enhance their work as a mentor teacher (Rowley, 1999; Tomlinson, 1995). In this way they develop transparency about their own search for better answers and more effective solutions to their own problems and are willing to learn from colleagues, including beginning teachers (Rowley, 1999). This would enable mentors to encourage beginning and student teachers to reflect critically on their own classroom experiences, “re-conceptualise their naïve notions of teaching and incorporate research findings from beyond their school experience into their developing understanding of the teaching/learning process” (Field, 1994, p. 72).

Mentor ‘training’ that takes account of these principles models reflective practice and also provides time for dialogue with peers. It takes account of the previous experience of mentors and mentees and uses this in development of reflective activities, which emphasise the professional learning of both mentor and mentee. If at least some preparatory workshops involve both mentors and mentees together, their common search for effective solutions is made explicit.

Ongoing Support

While some mentoring programs focus on training at the beginning of the program, a growing number of program evaluations point to the need for ongoing training and/or support of mentors involved in mentoring. An evaluation of the NSW Teacher Mentor Program Pilot (DET, 2004) reported that principals and teacher mentors were “overwhelmingly positive” about local conferences that allowed them to actively engage with colleagues in local networks, share resources and exchange experiences. Experience from training of mentors for youth mentoring programs has shown that more than a day of training at the beginning of a program can be

overwhelming for some mentors (MacCallum & Beltman, 2003). After meeting with their mentee, many mentors are more aware of their own needs with respect to preparation and support.

Conclusions

Mentoring is growing in Australian educational institutions. This paper has identified different conceptualisations of mentoring, from an apprenticeship model to views based on partnership that may be considered in the development and implementation of a mentoring program. Although most Australian programs have adopted a partnership approach consistent, in principle, with the concept of the reflective practitioner and professional learning, it appears that these conceptualisations may not have been translated into all aspects of the programs (MacCallum & Brooker, 2006). In part, this may be due to the nature of the language of mentoring and the idea of training for mentoring, which imply notions of apprenticeship. An agreed more appropriate language for mentoring in educational contexts, such as ‘mentoring partners’ would assist in this regard.

It is less clear that school leaders and school communities are aware of the different conceptualisations of mentoring and the role mentoring might play in professional learning and educational reform. The preparation of participants in mentoring is particularly important in this regard. However, mentoring is being introduced into schools and institutions, which may not be supportive of mentoring or of a mentoring program. If educational contexts are to be supportive of mentoring, there is a need for mentoring to be promoted more widely, and seminars and workshops made available for more teachers and leaders to develop an understanding and culture of a partnership approach to mentoring.

Research on mentoring in Australia is sparse and often is focused on the documentation (and sometimes evaluation) of a specific program. More research is needed that details the characteristics of the partnership models of mentoring being proposed and the relation to how these conceptualizations are translated into program implementation. The findings could be utilised in promoting and effecting mentoring for professional learning and the building of collaborative professional communities.

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