Project Report

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR MENTORS:

A choice or an imposition – which is more effective?

People Involved:
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Introduction

This report is the culmination of a project based in the Centre for Excellence in Work-based learning (WLE) during 2006/7. The project responds to the diverse, often negative mentoring experiences of beginning teachers by extending and enhancing the existing provision for the professional development of mentors. The aim is to achieve effectiveness in the fundamental mentoring process, enabling positive mentoring experiences for all students. The mentor/mentee relationship is a complex one – the mentee in this context being a beginning teacher.

Throughout this project two strands emerge. Firstly, the resistance to work based learning when the learning is imposed. Secondly, the effectiveness of the mentors' professional development when voluntary and its subsequent benefits to students.

Professional development courses are held regularly at the Institute of Education. These are subject specific or generic creating many opportunities for mentors to attend. Attendance, however, is often disappointing. Previous research (Rodger 2005) indicates pressure of time together with costs of releasing staff are key factors. This project seeks to address this problem by facilitating opportunities for learning in the workplace, in this context the school, thus reaching a wider audience.

It is usual practice for courses to be evaluated and comments acted upon. For the purpose of this project, a more extensive research approach to the collection of data is adopted. Mentors and beginning teachers are also interviewed and observed. Views on the timing and location of the learning are of particular interest. Analysis of the data collected from evaluations together with interviews and observations is presented and supported by comments from participants.

Workbased Learning

There is a growing trend in the Western world to acknowledge the workplace as a rich resource of knowledge and skills and to maximise these benefits by using the site as a place for learning (Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird and Unwin 2006). Technological and socioeconomic changes in our society mean no job now is for life. Continuing professional development embedded in life long learning is crucial to the well being, not only of society in general, but to individual growth and job satisfaction (Evans et al 2006). Whilst this trend is recognised, it is important to explore the potential of work based learning together with the tensions and limitations it embraces. These conflicts are examined in this report.
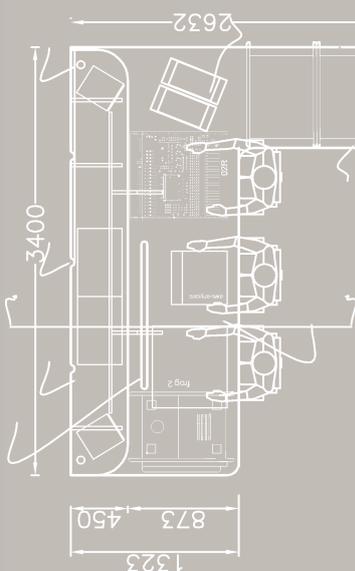
Traditionally, work based learning focused on vocational skills offering a form of apprenticeship or 'learning on the job' (Arthur, Davison and Moss 1997). Plumbers and joiners tended to learn in this way, extending their knowledge, embracing new methods and continuing their development throughout the duration of their employment as a means of retaining employability. This learning, referred to as training, implies an 'intervention which is formally structured and involves the transfer of a body of knowledge' (Evans et al 2006:7). The credibility of work based learning within Higher Education continues to be an area of controversy (Guile, 2005), however its value is being recognised more and more. Some academic disciplines, for example medicine and teaching, use the workplace as a means of experiential learning exposing learners to situations they will have as practitioners. This situational learning (Evans et al 2006) is an integral part of study and development.

Evans et al contextualise work-based learning in three different ways. Learning FOR the workplace applies to the combination of job-related training and general study that may or may not be directly related to a particular job. Job-related training ultimately is a benefit to an organisation and general study is of particular benefit to the individual. Learning THROUGH the workplace refers to the understanding between employee and employer that continuing professional development may be part of the 'package of employment' (Evans et al 2006:8). Learning IN the workplace suggests the different forms of learning that happens day to day. This can be formal with courses being offered on site or indeed much informal learning takes place through social interaction, working with a mentor, observing others and learning through trial and error.

Learning to be a teacher and assisting someone in the process brings together elements of all three. The studies of subject and pedagogy (learning FOR the workplace) come prior to the experiential learning (learning IN the workplace). Learning THROUGH the workplace in this context refers to the continuing professional development provided by the organisation – in this case – a school.

The work of Pickering (2007) in a previous WLE project, explores the professional learning of a group of recent graduates on a Masters of Teaching course. These graduates are teachers at the beginning of their career. What is dominant in the findings is the desire to be actively involved in learning. These participants feel passive when an 'expert' merely transmits knowledge and does not empower them with responsibility for learning. Whilst the participants in this current project are more experienced teachers, Pickering's findings offer useful insights into more effective facilitating of INSET courses. By empowering school-based mentors with the choice of attending professional development courses in their workplace, they may then be more effective in contributing through the workplace to the professional development of beginning teachers and newly qualified teachers. This will utilise the 'workplace both as a site of learning and as a site of access to learning' (Evans et al 2006:4). This research project focuses on analysing the data, identifying new insights and understandings in order to encourage skilled teachers to become effective mentors.

I would concur with Evans et al in rejecting the notion that 'learning that takes place in specialised educational institutions is inherently superior to learning that takes place in settings such as the workplace' (Evans et al 2006:28), however, for work based learning to have any degree of success it must have explicit aims and purposes and it is crucial that time and space is provided (Evans et al 2006).

The work of Hodkinson and Hodkinson (cited in Evans et al 2006) is valuable to this project exploring another strand of

teacher learning. Their study of secondary school teachers analyses the notions of expansive and restrictive learning environments. They see expansive environments as those which develop teachers professionally through collaborative learning within and outwith their departments, offering opportunities for attendance at offsite courses all within a supportive and encouraging environment which focuses primarily on the needs of the teacher as well as the needs of the organisation.

There is a feeling that the constant changes in the teaching profession imposed by the Government, means teacher learning focuses more on the immediate needs of implementing new policies and practices. This leads to frustration within the profession where teachers feel learning is restricted to needs other than their own. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) refer to this as a restrictive environment where learning can be isolated. There is no time to attend offsite courses – the main focus of learning being short training programmes directed at a particular government intervention. The perception is that the only way to develop professionally is to change job.

This project highlights the fact that work based learning does include both expansive and restrictive practices, but much has to do with the willingness of the participants to engage with different approaches to learning in order for both to be effective.

Background to the Research
Working regularly in schools leads me to the conclusion that many schools are responding to the continuing need for effective mentoring by embedding this form of professional development in their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes. The Institute of Education responds to requests from schools by facilitating courses in their workplace – the school. This allows colleagues to gain access to this form of

CPD without the pressures of travel and class cover requirements. These courses provide a vehicle in which to explore in more detail the effectiveness of learning in the workplace.

Initially two schools requested INSET. The first required two sessions – one early in the academic year, the other midway through the year. These were timed to coincide with beginning teachers' placements within the school. Both were twilight sessions. Attendance for all ninety staff was mandatory.

The second school requested one INSET only, to be held on the first day of the new academic year in September. This school's idea is to target prospective mentors in each department. Throughout the academic year these mentors are expected to develop the skills of their departmental colleagues thus sharing knowledge and building a wider base of mentors. Seventeen staff were selected to attended this INSET session. These INSET courses were originally the main focus of this research project, however, effective marketing brought requests from another two schools.

The first of these additional schools requested two different sessions. One for staff new to mentoring, the second for experienced mentors wishing to develop their skills. Both sessions were voluntary and held in the afternoon of an INSET day immediately prior to a holiday period. This school is keen to offer accreditation for mentoring. This acts not only as an incentive but it gives the role of mentoring a higher status. Eleven staff attended the first session and a different eleven attended the second.

The second of these requests had a different remit. Staff had the opportunity to learn coaching skills to assist all colleagues and pupils. Again this continuing professional development is embedded in the school development plan. The course consisted of two twilight sessions and fifteen volunteers took part.

Two more INSET sessions entered the frame of this project and, as in the previous two, their contribution to this research is crucial. These were two offsite courses held at the Institute of Education, University of London. These courses for new mentors were voluntary and dependent on schools allowing staff to attend. They were held in the afternoons of two days during term time. A total of thirty-two participants took part.

Methodology

It seemed important to develop research methodology which would embrace this eclectic mix of evidence-based situations. A qualitative approach is used to establish mentors' perceptions of courses offered together with their effectiveness in the workplace. Through general discourse and more formal evaluations, participants were able express opinions, enabling me to develop more appropriate learning opportunities. Responses to evaluations elicited the emergence of a number of themes relating to dissatisfaction with the workplace as a site for learning. These themes are examined and explained further when set in the overall context of the INSET sessions offered in the work place.

Another approach to the research enters the frame - the triangulation of observation, interview and focus group establishing if the learning collaboration between mentor and mentee is now more effective. Interviews and focus groups are an effective way of coming face to face with participants; however, it must be acknowledged that people respond to questions, questioner and environment in different ways (Bell 2006). Bias cannot be ignored as questions are designed to elicit a particular response, therefore a particular slant may result in feelings or facts remaining uncovered. As schools are particularly busy environments, the interviews and meetings described tended to take place in a variety of places, some of which, due to external factors, were inappropriate.

Previous research (Rodger 2005) indicates too many beginning teachers as having negative mentoring experiences. My varying roles at the Institute as mentor/coach, researcher and lecturer allow me to observe these experiences from different angles. Bell (2006) directs us to Lomax (2002:124) who provides questions for action researchers to focus their enquiry. 'Can I use my knowledge and influence to improve the situation'? and 'Can I improve my practice so it is more effective'? (Lomax 2002 in Bell 2006: 8). These questions are relevant here and become the focus of this research. I am using my knowledge and experience to influence a change in mentor training from predominantly dealing with the completion of documentation, towards an appreciation that mentoring has as its central core a combination of personal, professional skills and attributes. Is it possible to 'improve the situation' for mentees?

Method

This paper draws its findings from the data collected at the aforementioned INSET courses facilitated during 2006/7, together with observations of lessons and the debriefs which followed. The evidence base also includes reports from interviews with mentors and beginning teachers.

In total 161 participants attended INSET for mentors. A further fifteen received training in coaching skills. All participants were asked to complete evaluations.

In two of the schools, six beginning teachers were observed teaching and being debriefed by their mentor. Both were interviewed after the sessions. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Also, a focus group consisting of all beginning teachers was held in each school. The meetings were recorded and transcribed. Questions to the beginning teachers focused on issues mentors had been particularly asked to

address. The students were unaware of these issues when responding to the questions. A total of 27 beginning teachers contributed to this stage of the research. As the focus of this study is exploring the effectiveness of the work place as a site for learning, discussions and interviews with beginning teachers are appropriately analysed and written up elsewhere (Rodger, 2006). It must be acknowledged, however, that they made a valuable contribution to the understanding of effective mentoring.

Finally, four students agreed to take part in a focus group filmed in the Centre for Work Based Learning. This film is currently being edited and will be added to the mentoring section of the Institute of Education Partnership website and the Centre for Work Based Learning website. This will add another vehicle for mentors to gain access to professional development opportunities from their workplace.

All participants were made aware of this research project and consented to take part.

Findings
Analysis of the data highlights the importance of comparing learning in the work place to learning held offsite. It is important to understand the negative feelings of participants when the learning is imposed. Equally there is much to be gained from examining the enthusiasm for learning when that learning is voluntary, comes with the opportunity of accreditation and participants engage fully with the concepts. The evidence suggests that the timings and location of courses together with mandatory them being versus voluntary are crucial to the research.

Further analysis highlights a flaw in the design of the questions. Bell (2006) identifies the need for questions to be designed that will elicit the required response. When asked for their views on the advantages of learning in the work

place, results show the dominance of social concerns, for example, child care and travel issues rather than focusing on learning. There is also a feeling from the evaluations they are used as a vehicle to be vociferous about the imposed nature of the learning – particularly at a time of day which participants feel is inappropriate and not conducive to effective learning.

CASE ONE – WORKPLACE LEARNING – IMPOSED

Into the Lion's Den – the context
The first school requested two twilight sessions. Attendance for all staff was mandatory. Due to activities earlier in the day, the large assembly hall had not been arranged as requested. From my observations and an analysis of the data several issues emerged.

Timing, logistics and relevance
Participants arrived late requesting an early finish. Already time had been removed from the two-hour session requested. Negative body language suggested the teachers were already resentful, disengaged and disenchanted. My understanding from the senior management was that many staff were already involved in mentoring beginning teachers or newly qualified teachers. Others were involved in mentoring each other through career progression. It seemed mentoring was high on the agenda of this school. Despite highlighting the benefits of developing mentoring skills for the present and the future, the resistance to the professional development if the need was not immediate, is clear in the responses to the evaluations:
'The fact that we were forced to go. I would prefer training to be relevant and useful, the whole school was present even people who are being mentored themselves'.

'Not particularly relevant to me. I do not mentor so – relevance'?

'Not likely to mentor in the future so not really relevant. I feel like you should be doing other stuff when you are in school'.

Interesting to note that the word 'relevant' appears in all these comments suggesting if the need was not immediate, then it was not relevant. Also interesting was the feeling that 'teachers had a general distrust and disregard for mass INSET sessions' (Pickering, 2007).

The INSET was interactive with a mix of group activities, reflective dialogue and engaging with real life scenarios. A discussion of the underpinning theories meant the session was very varied, however participants appeared unwilling to cooperate and were difficult to motivate. From the following comments it is clear the timing of the session contributed to the feeling of disinterest amongst the participants:
'It's sometimes hard to shrug off the school day and become absorbed in the session'.

'A little overwhelming at the end of the day'!

'Can't think – I am too tired – sorry'!

Participants also found it difficult to engage with the session if they felt other work had priority as is illuminated by this comment:
'Feeling that all your work is 'just next door' or 'over in the office' and you could be doing it'.

Having to engage with new and different concepts after a full teaching day, particularly if other work takes priority, is clearly a problem for participants. As the 'expert' who had been engaged by the school I felt, and understood, their resentment. I argue this questions the wisdom of INSET at the end of the day.

Completed evaluations were analysed fully. Participants were invited to suggest content for session two. The work of Pickering (2007) influenced my desire to involve the participants more in their learning by acknowledging their suggestions, gearing the programme towards collaborative, interactive learning. I entered the 'lion's den' for the second time.

This time the hall had been organised as requested, however, on arrival participants declined the request to sit in groups moving the furniture around to suit themselves.

Once again, they arrived late, requesting an early finish. My introduction included praise for the excellent feedback received from beginning teachers interviewed, regarding the mentoring experiences within the school. A visible change in their demeanour suggested this pleased them. They became more positively engaged and cooperative for the remainder of the session. One participant, sitting close to me in session one asking what felt like deliberately awkward questions, began the session in the same vein, however, soon changed, became engaged and cooperative and finally declared at the end 'the session was excellent – you know your stuff'. Sadly, despite a concentration on the importance of the personal relationship between mentor and mentee, one mentor was reported to have introduced themselves to the student teacher as the 'Hitler of mentoring'. I found this surprising and disappointing given the value placed on effective mentoring.

Engagement with activities and discussion appeared more positive. There had been a request to observe a student teacher on film with the opportunity to engage in discussion. This request was included in the session; however participants seemed to engage only with the negative aspects of the lesson together with the use of DVD with comments like:
'DVD was too long.'
'DVD was a waste of time.'
Despite evaluations being slightly more positive overall, the more negative

aspects of timing and social problems remained dominant.

Engaging with peers

Another theme to emerge throughout these sessions is the value of engaging with the co-construction style of learning - reflecting and discussing with peers - in a familiar environment. This appears to be a strength of the INSET. Those who felt able to comment positively on this form of expansive learning (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2003) highlighted the benefits. 'I would much rather it happens at school, so I can hear the opinions of fellow teachers. I seldom get to work with other departments'.

'It is an opportunity to reflect on my own work and gain ideas from other teachers'.

'You are in an environment where you feel comfortable and secure in sharing your opinions'.

'I think it is essential and helps us move forward as teachers and as a school'.

Several participants, however, expressed the opposite view, highlighting difficulties when: 'There could be situations with staff having internal conflicts'.
It is also important to acknowledge tension felt between the security of working with peers and the insecurity some colleagues felt in speaking truthfully. Thus their learning is inhibited. This suggestion of conflict comes some way to explaining why some participants appeared so unwilling to cooperate with the group activities and discussions.

Preference for offsite learning

It is significant to note from evaluations that a number of participants recognised that the familiarity of remaining in the work place hindered the extending of their experiences and ultimately their learning. The benefits of attending offsite courses, meeting new colleagues, sharing ideas and broadening views are acknowledged. Woodward (1996)

concurs with this when he offers the opinion that 'individuals whose knowledge and experience are limited will be less disposed to new learning, and hence to change and innovation, than those with a more diverse knowledge base' (Woodward 1996:4). One argument is that the purpose of continuing professional development is to step outside the safety box and embrace different perspectives and experiences. Will limiting learning to the work place hinder this?

It also emerged, that when participants did NOT know each, other they felt more secure:
'You could gain a broader experience from sharing thoughts and ideas with other schools/areas of education'.

'Refreshing to be away from own school environment'.

'Tend to find networking useful offsite'.

These comments suggest participants preferred the offsite environment.

Positive Aspects

Finally, when asked for views on positive aspects of workplace learning, the comments focused on the more practical issues of travel and childcare. Participants feel that staying on site means little change to domestic arrangements. It is also clear that the issue of extended travel was one they were keen to avoid feeling that staying on site was more cost effective and a more efficient use of time:
'Lower costs, less travel, efficient use of time'.

'Childcare and getting home quickly'.

One participant offered this benefit:

'I prefer on site as it is easy to access and fits into the school timetable/calendar. The needs of the school can be addressed better with onsite training'. This comment highlights only the benefit

to the school and not to personal professional development.

Overall, from these sessions, the impression given is it is very doubtful if learning is effective when that learning is imposed.

At the time of going to press, I was invited into this school again to deliver a session on coaching skills to 9 participants. This time an element of choice had been given, however there was uncertainty as to if they would attend and how many would attend! As before, they arrived late and I was asked to cut the session by 30 minutes. Clearly this school has some work to do in engaging the staff in appropriate professional development and empowering them with choice. It may then be more effective and worthwhile for all concerned.

Let us now turn to examine similar themes and some additional ones when the work place learning is voluntary.

CASE TWO – WORKPLACE LEARNING – VOLUNTARY

Different experiences – the context
Of the three schools offering voluntary INSET, two offered it during INSET days – one at the beginning of a new academic year, the other just prior to a holiday. The third school held the INSET in twilight sessions; however, there was an incentive. Staff would build up a number of twilight sessions and school term would finish one day early for the summer break.

For all of these sessions, rooms were set out as requested. All ICT was in place, refreshments were available – something which had been missing from the imposed INSET. Programmes were available outlining the content of the sessions. Staff arrived on time engaging me in social conversation therefore creating a positive, welcoming atmosphere.

Timing and logistics
There seemed little problem with the timing of these courses. Understandably, there was a feeling on the first day of the academic year of other work having priority, however, as this session had been arranged prior to the holiday period, they were prepared. Those attending on the last day before a holiday were anticipating the break but were still very keen to learn and enjoy the day as suggested by these comments:
'Makes it more of a special occasion'.

'I like the continual learning curve'. Hopefully, the comment 'It is an extra holiday' suggests the feeling of being relaxed and enjoying the occasion. These schools wished to offer participants the opportunity to take part in further study for accreditation should they wish. Another incentive. Comments like this were typical:
'Particularly enjoyed encouragement to undertake things that lead to certification/accreditation'.
Participants acknowledged the benefits of continuing professional development to their careers confirming the notion that learning through-out a working life can equip you with the skills necessary to cope with an ever changing world (Evans et al 2006).

Engaging with Peers
Participants displayed a willingness and cooperation to engage in all discussions and activities. There was no feeling of hostility or resentment towards the facilitator – just a feeling of engaging with the expertise, challenging some ideas and offering new ways of thinking. Rich and fruitful discourse revealed much learning was taking place. Once again comments supported this:
'It is an opportunity to reflect on my own work and gain ideas from other teachers'.

'I learn from them as they learn from me'.

This comment acknowledges the development of both the person and the school, which is positive:

'I think it is essential and helps us move forward as teachers and as a school'.

Here participants refer to working towards a similar goal making reference to perhaps one disadvantage of having the INSET offsite:

'Good to work with colleagues about how to implement something, rather than offsite which tends to get into mass whinging'.

The suggestion here is that learning can be inhibited.

The DVD clip was shown generating much lively discussion. The focus was on the positive aspects of the lesson. These groups had difficulty criticising negatively. Perhaps this is because the general demeanour and atmosphere of the sessions was entirely different, being much more positive.

Positive aspects
This time when asked about the benefits of learning in the workplace the comments again highlighted some of the social issues of travel and childcare, however these were not quite so dominant.

Praise and thanks were offered to the facilitator with expressions of provoking much to think about and much having been learnt. Acknowledgement of the professional development is highlighted in this comment:
'Exceptionally helpful as it improves my professional skills - helps us move on and up'.

These comments suggest that participants will be more aware of their mentoring role and will put learning into practice:

'If I was mentoring again, this would have been a very comforting and useful session'.

'Made me aware of my role and gave me useful ideas for dealing with a range of situations'.

'Made things much clearer. You were great – thanks'.

Finally, this comments sums up a major benefit of any work place learning:

'Professional development is very important in any workplace. It prepares you better in delivering your role more effectively'.

Overall, comments suggest that when the learning is voluntary it is more effective and, very important, enjoyable.

CASE THREE – LEARNING OFFSITE

The context
For the purposes of this project, all offsite courses for mentors were held at the Institute of Education, University of London. The majority of participants were new to the role - a few attending wished to develop skills further - but all had volunteered to attend and had been released by their schools. Once again, similar themes emerged and will be explored within the different context.

Timing and logistics
Courses were held in the early afternoon. Participants arrived promptly. The venue was as requested and refreshments were available. On arrival, participants immediately engaged in conversation discussing the programme and exchanging views, ideas and experiences from their own schools. There was already an atmosphere of learning and engagement. All were eager to share good practice, learn from one another and were significantly more focused and less tired than at the end of a long teaching day.
Sessions included a variety of personal reflection, collegial dialogue, observing clips of beginning teachers' lessons together with addressing the administrative procedures and practices involved. There was no feeling of

resentment. All had come with a clear purpose and aim - to learn about the process of effective mentoring.

It appeared from the research that all felt able to concentrate and focus more because they had left their work behind and there was no feeling of it being 'just next door'. This comment supports this:

'I feel more focused out of school – it is refreshing to be away from my own school environment'.

Only one colleague suggested an advantage to the course being held in his workplace:

'I could have relaxed and eaten lunch quietly and you could have eaten your bagel on the run!'

Overall, there was more engagement with the learning.

Engaging with peers
All participants come to courses with a degree of knowledge. It is the role of the facilitator to draw on that knowledge through encouraging reflective discussion. The learning then becomes collaborative. The power of previous experiences together with the presentation of new ideas and theories combines to build new knowledge (Vygotsky 1978). The benefits of social interaction with colleagues from other schools which offsite learning inevitably allows for, is dominant in the evaluations from participants. There is a clear acknowledgement that removing oneself from a familiar environment is beneficial to developing new ways of thinking:

'Tend to find networking useful offsite'.
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'New opportunities for learning development – opportunities for new links'.

'I feel I learn more and pick up more ideas from others. Good to find out how other schools do things and made connections. I enjoy a change!'

The learning community is evident here. Acquiring knowledge allows participants to return to schools, share the knowledge and widen the knowledge base of mentors.

Positive aspects
When asked about the positive aspects of courses off site, these groups did focus on the learning. The critical reflection on their own pedagogical practice and the sharing of knowledge with others dominated, together with the benefits of being out of the usual working environment free from distractions and interruptions as said here:
'You are dedicated to the objectives of that day and less prone to distractions'.

The afternoon timing was also positively evaluated. On completion of the INSET, participants were not returning to school and there was a feeling that their working day had ended. Afternoon is often acknowledged as a real danger time 'for a slump when feelings of lethargy, drowsiness and foggy brain' are familiar (Briffa 2000: 48). Having lunch and refreshments supplied helped to stifle this feeling and also seemed important to making everyone feel valued.

DISCUSSION

For professional development to be effective it must have clear purposes and outcomes together with the willingness of the participants to engage with the theory and practice (Guile 2005). This research investigated the effectiveness of different approaches to learning. The discovery of new skills and practices for personal professional development was the purpose. The outcome was to enable effective mentoring for all beginning teachers.

There is no doubt that in this project, participating schools recognise the value of using the school as a 'site for learning' (Evans et al 2006). There is clear recognition of the range of professional knowledge 'on site' and the value in

sharing that knowledge in an engaging and collaborative way. What is evident throughout, however, is how different the learning experiences are. My evidence shows, in the case of the ninety participants expected to attend a twilight course, the session was counterproductive, as the participants clearly resented having this imposed on them. Many felt the acquisition of mentoring skills was irrelevant to them at this time and could not relate to the possibility of this being professional development for the future. The Senior Management in this school was engaging with the concept of learning THROUGH the workplace (ibid), however, had not empowered participants with the element of choice in their own professional development. Again we can see the similarities to be drawn from the work of Pickering. His research focuses on a group of teachers early in their careers; this research focuses on a group of more experienced teachers with a very particular remit. The feeling from both groups is that participants did not want to engage in any way with imposed learning. An element of choice leads to more enjoyable and more fruitful experience. In this project, the resentment towards the 'expert' illuminated the participants' feelings about the Senior Management's view of professional development.

Hodkinson and Hodkinson's notion of expansive learning environments (cited in Evans et al 2006) is more in evidence where the learning is voluntary and participants are empowered with making a choice about their learning. There is a feeling that the needs of the teacher are as important as the needs of the school. The evidence from this research shows how engaged participants were, how positive their attitude was and how much they valued the 'expert' when they had chosen to attend.

A vital part of the learning experience for mentors is encouraging a reflective approach examining critically current practices of mentoring within their school. They also examine closely their own contribution to this practice exploring areas for improvement. As it is valuable to construct new learning from existing knowledge, this process of personal reflection allowed participants insight into the concerns and apprehensions of the beginning teachers they mentor. This not only enhances their practice but also the experiences of the beginning teachers. This would support Cunningham's theory that 'the mentor who is a reflective practitioner will be most able to empathise with trainees' anxieties, because they remain far from complacent or blasé about their own performance in the classroom' (Cunningham 2005: 26). Independent learning can be isolating so engaging in collegial dialogue is a positive step forward in promoting collaborative learning. The success of learning through social interaction depends on attitude to and immediacy of new skills and their relevance to current occupation (Vygotsky 1978). This research demonstrated that when positively engaged in the learning, mentors gained much from being members of a learning community whether in the workplace or offsite.

It was encouraging to note that in one of the voluntary INSETs the participants were all directly involved in mentoring beginning teachers. The senior management, here again in a different context, recognised that the workplace is a rich learning community. They intended to create a culture of sharing knowledge. In this case, participants were to adopt the transmission model of learning, sharing their new knowledge with other colleagues thus extending the knowledge base of mentoring within the school – an example of expansive learning. Cascading knowledge in this way is an effective result of learning in the workplace. It acts as an incentive to staff entrusted with this knowledge sharing. This not only enhances their professional development but also that of other

department members.

On a more practical level, this school felt it was more cost effective employing one person to facilitate INSET. This knowledge transmission seemed more effective than releasing members of staff to attend INSET held offsite.

Overall the research supports the notion that for workplace learning to be effective there has to be an element of choice. People will engage with the learning if they are empowered with the decision making about their own personal progress. Learning is severely hindered when it is imposed and is therefore counterproductive.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence from this research supports Evans et al's claim that the workplace is a rich resource of knowledge and skills which, when articulated and shared, can result in developing and enhancing the professional knowledge of the workers. Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages to learning IN the workplace (Evans et al 2006) and offsite learning. Both have a place in contributing to the personal development of professionals together with job satisfaction (Evans 2006). All participants in this project commented that for the learning to be useful and worthwhile, it must have a clear focus, (Guile 2005) be relevant and be embedded in the Continuing Professional Development programmes of schools. Perhaps the best way forward is to explore the possibility of a combination of expansive and restrictive practice. All new and developed skills should be followed through. Staff felt INSET became irrelevant if schools did not use these skills to their benefit or acknowledge the personal professional development it offered.

Let us turn to look at how some barriers to learning can be overcome.
Participation in learning should be

voluntary.
I referred earlier to learning through the workplace being an understanding of the continuing professional development that is part of the 'package of employment'. In the school context, clear communication is required between Senior Management and staff as to the aims and objectives of professional development courses. Clearly, if courses are mandatory, learning is curtailed due to the resentment and hostility felt. This is projected towards the 'expert' brought in by the school and the experience is negative for all concerned. It is important for staff to be given the opportunity to learn collaboratively within an expansive environment (Ibid), however, choices must be given. From this experience, participants were more open and receptive to learning when they had volunteered.

Timing of courses is crucial.
Evidence from this research highlights imposed learning combined with the end of a school day is not conducive to learning. When a twilight course was attended by volunteers who also had an added incentive, it was felt the learning would have been more effective earlier in the day when staff were less tired and less focused on the issues of tomorrow. To avoid the complexities of releasing staff from teaching commitments, INSET days present an ideal time. The learning earlier in the day, when staff have no teaching commitments was rich, positive, reflective, collaborative and beneficial to both the school and those taking part – a form of expansive learning.

Courses need to take place in a pleasant working environment conducive to creating positive learning. It was interesting how often participants commented on the value of refreshments being made available. Areas set up in advance gave the impression of an environment ready for learning. Participants here were more willing to respond to collaborative work than when courses were held in halls with furniture in disarray.

The mentoring role still requires the goodwill of teachers as there is no clear policy on remuneration or time for what is a valuable contribution to the teaching profession. Offering the opportunity for certification or accreditation is clearly an incentive. In this case offering accreditation immediately gives the role status and can been seen as appropriate professional development.

Finally, it is clear social interaction is an integral part of the learning. Participants enjoy the experience and their learning is enhanced when interaction plays a pivotal role in the learning. Despite there being differences between learning with known colleagues and new colleagues the sharing of good practice together with new ideas and areas for development seemed to be the most beneficial part of courses. In work based learning it is important for any facilitator to encourage collaborative learning.

From the analysis of the data, it is evident that both workbased and offsite forms of learning have a valuable place in the overall personal development of professionals. The key issue should be one of choice. I would argue that schools should offer courses both on site and offsite and allow participants to choose which is most beneficial and effective for them, their needs and their future. Schools and other institutions will always offer courses for development, however, their effectiveness lies in the quality of the facilitation together with willingness of the participants to engage in the learning.

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