

Developing Different Approaches to Mentor Training including the Mentor's own Workplace



People Involved

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Key Words

Mentors' professional development in the work place, effective mentoring, effective approaches to professional development, consistency

Description

In my work as a PGCE tutor and an Institute Partnership Manager, I visit a considerable number of students and mentors in their work place. During these visits I build a picture of the mentoring approaches the students are experiencing. I found a need to examine the experiences of students more closely to understand the impact on the student teachers, their motivation and consequently their professional development. This project will examine in greater detail alternative ideas for work-based training designed to develop efficient and effective mentors. I will draw on work already done on improving work place learning (Evans et al 2006).

I am disappointed by variable attendance at mentor training events. I believe that the difficulties of releasing colleagues from schools are the primary reason. I have identified a need to take the professional

development directly to them in the work place. This project would allow me to reach a wider audience and carry out investigations that will extend our knowledge of learning in the work place. The subsequent effect would be more effective work-based learning for students.

The key findings from my previous research have informed this proposal to develop work-based learning for mentors.

These are:

1. Firstly, students are keen to have a mentor who is a good role model in their teaching and is able to reflect on and analyse their own teaching skills in order to pass them on. However, emerging strongly is that students highly valued the personal qualities of the mentor. The personal relationship between student and mentor is key to their motivation and learning. Sadly, many students had experiences of mentors in my Closed, Inflexible and Negative model where learning was restricted due to a narrow focus on criticism rather than constructive feedback.

My research helped me to understand some mentors approached mentoring as a result of the way they had been mentored. Many had difficulty

acknowledging there were different approaches to mentoring and they had a choice. Due to our reliance on the goodwill of schools to train our students, it is difficult to influence the selection of mentors. I will focus work-based INSET on the mentor/student relationship. Through professional development for mentors, students should be able to experience effective, supportive mentoring in any school they are based in.

2. Secondly, emerging from the research was student teachers feeling there is at times little acknowledgement of learning and development having taken place in their first placement. In my Closed and Inflexible model, some mentors adopted the same style in both placements. At times, they tended to disregard the strengths, experiences and personality of the student teacher. Work-based learning for the student should be a continuum and it was clear in a number of cases that students felt frustrated as they took several steps back at the start of placement two.



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Professional development of mentors must focus more clearly on this continuum and work towards developing a more open and flexible model.



Finally, in a similar issue with the transfer from placement one to placement two, a mentor in a partnership school (one highly valued in the partnership for its diversity and its commitment to working with student teachers) expressed a desire to withdraw from the partnership. The concern was that some student teachers in placement two had been given a final report in placement one suggesting they were highly competent and needed little further improvement. While acknowledging that some students are very competent while others find the learning curve higher to climb, all students still have much to learn in placement two.



The school found it frustrating when as a result some student teachers approached the second placement with a certain complacency despite still having much to learn and experience; for example, in placement one, it is often only possible to gain some experience of marking, assessment and moderation.

The IOE has attempted to address this problem by removing the grades from the final report forms but more needs to be done. This project works towards developing a consistency in this process. Reaching a wider audience through work-based learning would go close to addressing these issues.

My research to date has highlighted the effectiveness of co-construction and the value of learning about learning and I will continue to build on the learning and theories of my colleagues to develop the practical aspects of effective mentoring.

Methodology

An empirical approach will be used. I will make connections between theory and practice to develop my theoretical model.

New mentors who completed questionnaires in July 2005, agreed to assist in the continuation of my research. I conducted a focus group in July 2006 to reflect on the year. I wanted to find their views on:

- Experiences of the personal relationship between student and mentor. Were they aware of the how highly students value this?
- Their impressions and experiences of the transition from Placement one to Placement 2.
- Have they reflected on their own practice and will they change anything about the way they mentor?
- To what extent are my models of mentoring useful in what ways might they be developed?
- Was the professional development they received appropriate – what would make it more effective? What are the benefits of work place learning?

Outcomes

As a result of my research there are a number of outcomes already in place and I wish to develop these further. These are:

- To present my findings at the Conference for Managing Mentors in September 2006
- Two publications: Professional Development Today (May 2006) and an international Polish Journal (in press – July 2006)
- Presentation of findings at Preparing Teachers for a Changing Context Conference at IOE in May 2006.
- Professional Development for Mentors: Subject Inset – to have more balance between the practices, procedures and grading and to focus more closely on the personal relationship.
- Professional Development for Mentors: work-based INSET being requested by schools. Two twilight courses are set up. One in September (pre placement one) to look at procedures together with the skills for becoming an effective mentor and a follow up in January (pre placement two) focussing on grading and transition.



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