Chapter 5: Mentoring Students on Professional Courses in Higher Education in the Workplace: New Opportunities and Challenges

Gillian Peiser, School of Education, Liverpool John Moores University, UK

Overview

This chapter firstly reviews the changing role of the workplace mentor in three professions in England: nursing, social work and teaching. This review reveals the influence of government and professional regulatory bodies on mentors' work and, where policy has been absent, how educationalists have conceptualised the role. Following this review, the chapter considers some of the collective opportunities and challenges faced by mentors across the three professions, especially with regard to professional knowledge development. The second half of the chapter focuses in on the role of the school-based mentor in the increasingly school-led policy landscape of initial teacher education. The author considers the new and ambiguous demands on the mentor and the implications for university partnership working with schools. Finally, the chapter deliberates the type of future proof investments required on professional courses in higher education involving both mentors and tutors to achieve optimum professional learning experiences for pre-service students.

Introduction

As other chapters in this volume have demonstrated, there are multiple interpretations about the role of mentors in higher education (HE). As Jones et al. (2005) point out, variation in mentoring practices are influenced by the multiple mentoring purposes, contrasting settings, and the views of those involved. The same applies to mentors who support students in the workplace on professional learning courses provided by universities in England. Not only are there different understandings of mentor roles depending on the profession, the role of mentors within individual professions has evolved over time. This chapter will provide an overview of the changing role of mentors on professional learning courses in three professions: nursing, social work and teaching, paying particular attention to the latter, in the English context. It will consider emerging opportunities and challenges for mentoring, the implications for university partnerships with schools to give greater coherence to the professional curriculum, and mentor development.

The Changing Mentor Role Across Three Professions

Nursing

The transition of nurse education in the UK from apprentice style training in hospitals to HE in the 1990s transformed the way in which student nurses were taught, supported and assessed in the practice setting. All student nurses were allocated a mentor who supervised them for a minimum of 40 per cent of the time in clinical practice, which accounts for 50% of the degree course. The very wide responsibilities for nurse mentors were articulated in the Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice (Nursing and Midwifery Council [NMC], 2008) which included eight domains of competence: establishing effective working relationships, facilitation of learning, assessment and accountability, evaluation of learning, creating an environment for learning, attention to context of practice, supporting evidence-based practice, and leadership (NMC, 2008). In order to take on the mentor role, nurses needed at least 12 months' post-registration experience and to have undergone a formal programme undertaken in a university (NMC, 2008). Whilst some authors stressed the role of the nurse mentor as the central support mechanism for student nurses who sponsors and encourages them (Casey & Clark, 2011; Gopee, 2015; Kinnell & Hughes, 2010), there has been growing attention to the more formal educative dimension, which is also evident in the domains of competence in the Standards listed above. Andrews and Wallace (1999) and Myall, Levett-Jones and Lathlean (2008) underlined that the mentor no longer simply "supervises" practice, but had significant responsibility for linking the theory to practice and the evaluation and utilisation of evidence. Up until December 2018, all nurse mentors had a significant assessor role, deciding if the students met the Standards for pre-registration nursing education (NMC, 2010), thereby acting as "gatekeepers" to the profession.

In 2018, however, the nurse mentor role was overhauled and divided with different people taking on distinct roles. The NMC replaced the Standards to Support Learning and

Assessment in Practice (NMC, 2008) with the Standards for Student Supervision and Assessment (NMC, 2018), which came into effect in January 2019. These new Standards split up the responsibilities of traditional mentorship into "practice supervisors", "practice assessors and "academic assessors". Practice supervisors, are any registered health or social care professionals who are no longer obligated to undertake mandatory training or to have accumulated 12 months of experience in the profession, as long as they are professionally registered and adequately prepared for the role. Practice and academic assessors must prepare or train for their roles to ensure they have developed interpersonal communication skills and are able to carry out evidence-based assessments of students (NMC, 2018). These latest developments have effectively removed assessment responsibilities from those supervising practice on a daily basis and place more responsibility for *testing* student nurses' understanding of the relationship between theory and practice on those with assessor rather than supervisory roles. Nonetheless, practice supervisors must "have understanding of the proficiencies and programme outcomes they are supporting students to achieve" (NMC, 2018) which will also include research-informed practice. The rationale for the overhaul of the mentor role has been to increase the pool of professionals to support and improve the quality of learning, effectively distributing responsibilities rather than placing all of them in the hands of one person (Foster, 2019).

Social work

In social work education, the term used to describe those responsible for supervising professional learning in the workplace has changed over time and, in fact, does not include the term "mentor". Those practising this role have been called "practice teacher" (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1989), "practice assessor" (General Social Care Council, 2005) and more recently "practice educator" (PE; The College of Social Work [TCSW], 2013). This change of terminology reflects shifting policy, including the

introduction of a social work degree in England in 2003-2004, where there is increasing recognition of the nature of professional learning and the complexity of assessing students' practice (Shardlow, 2012; Waterhouse, McLagan, & Murr, 2011).

Today PEs must be qualified and registered social workers who have successfully completed a post-qualifying course at postgraduate level, demonstrating their competence to directly supervise, teach and assess social work degree students (TCSW, 2013). The roles and responsibilities of PEs are detailed in the Practice Educator Professional Standards (TCSW, 2013). These include: organisation of learning opportunities for social work students, enabling and supporting the learning and professional development of the student within practice, management of the student's assessment, and engagement in continuous professional development in relation to performance as PEs. PEs have gatekeeper roles, taking final responsibility for passing or failing a student. In social work, there is little emphasis on the supporting or nurturing role. The PE has more responsibility for teaching the application of theory to practice (Finch, 2014; Schaub & Dalrymple, 2013).

Teaching

The recognition of the contribution of school-based mentoring in initial teacher education (ITE) began in England in the 1980s. School-university partnerships were established in an attempt to overcome the theory-practice dualism (McIntyre, 1997). In the early 1990s, school-based training became a statutory requirement of all postgraduate courses leading to qualified teacher status with at least two-thirds of the time to be spent on placement in schools (Department for Education [DfE], 1992, 1993). This "on the job" training was to be closely supported by a practising teacher colleague, or "mentor", from the placement school(s).

Unlike in nursing and social work, the role of the mentor was not defined in a formal framework until very recently. Prior to this, the emphasis was on supporting the mentee to

meet a particular end: the competences or standards for newly qualified teacher status (QTS). The national mentoring standards for school-led initial teacher training (ITT; DfE, 2016) make reference to four domains: personal qualities (with a focus on relationships and interpersonal skills for mentoring), teaching (pertaining to the development of the student teacher's skills), professionalism (promoting to the wider roles and responsibilities of the teacher) and self-development and working in partnership (focussing on the mentor's professional development and collaboration with other colleagues). However, as Douglas (2017, p. 854) points out, the Standards are "voluntary and do not necessarily represent consensus in the field". In England, furthermore, there is still no national requirement to obtain a mentor qualification or to undergo nationally recognised training in order to undertake the role. Given that the Mentoring Standards are only a more recent development, the role of the mentor prior to this has found expression in the academic literature.

Wang and Odell (2002) explain how the original emphasis on a nurturing role to minimise "reality shock" shifted to one that promotes reflective practice through practical reasoning and rational thinking, following the influence of Schön's (1983) "reflection-on-action". The mentor was also to provide practical and contextual support, potentially helping the mentee to connect theoretical learning in the university with teaching (Wang & Odell, 2002). From the 1990s, some teacher educators promoted a critical constructivist approach. They advocated that mentors and their mentees should act as agents of change, collaboratively taking an "inquiry stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in order to generate new knowledge and change. These educationalists also emphasised the importance of democratic and participant centred approaches (Earl & Timperley 2008; Feiman-Nemser 1998; Mena, García, Clarke, & Barkatsas, 2016; Timperley & Earl, 2012;). Whilst different approaches have found particular favour at different points in time, it has been recognised that each has their benefits and should be considered flexibly and cumulatively (Crutcher &

Naseem, 2016; Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006). Whilst in some respects this has led to a lack of a common understanding about what mentoring should entail (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), the mentor has always played a key role in assessing the student teacher for QTS.

Opportunities and Challenges for Workplace Mentors Across Professions

As far as opportunities for professional learning are concerned, the mentor, practice supervisor or PE in all three professions is ideally positioned to assist students to apply codified knowledge learnt in the university to particular practical situations (Eraut, 2014). For example, in nurse education, Spouse (2001, p.515) has explained how mentors can assist students in learning how to recognise and when to use their epistemic knowledge (termed “knowledge-in-waiting”), so that it can become “knowledge-in-use” or phronesis. Acting as a linchpin, the mentor can also assist pre-service professionals in reconciling contradictions between the different learning communities (university and workplace domains) in which they are situated (Engeström, 2001).

This “linchpin” role, however, assumes that the mentor not only has the necessary theoretical expertise, but also the pedagogic skills to enable this knowledge transfer. The former involves familiarity with up to date and broad research knowledge, whilst the latter assumes coaching skills that can draw on experiential and contextual knowledge as a premise for stimulating reflection. Mentoring pedagogy also demands interpersonal skills for interaction with adult learners and awareness of the need to rely less on instincts and intuitions (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010).

The existence of policy frameworks in nursing (at least until very recently) and social work, which set out both the mentor’s teaching role and the requirement to update professional knowledge, arguably support the “linchpin” role better than they do in teaching. Furthermore, in nursing and social work, the relevance of propositional knowledge to the

workplace has always been much more explicit, making knowledge flow between the discipline and the workplace easier and more frequent.

In teaching there is an absence of nationally recognised accredited training and the national mentoring standards for school-led ITT (DfE, 2016) is only a very recent development. Furthermore, the national mentoring standards are voluntary and do not necessarily represent consensus in the field (Douglas, 2017). Translating theory into practice in teaching is perhaps also more difficult since there have been challenges with ascertaining a knowledge base in the field of education. As Furlong (2013) remarked, education has had difficulties in establishing itself as a discipline directly relevant to teaching due to the diversity of areas with which it is concerned.

Whilst nursing mentors and social work PEs may be better equipped for helping mentees to connect theory with practice, mentors in all three professions face challenges in reconciling the demands on them to look after their patients, clients and pupils while at the same time supporting the professional learning of their pre-service students. Peiser, Ambrose, Burke and Davenport (2018) highlighted how across the professions, mentors have inadequate time resources to carry out both roles. It has also been found that mentors face tensions in carrying out their assessor and supporter roles (ibid), although this may be resolved in nursing with the new separation of responsibilities.

In summary, therefore, the mentor has a crucial role to play in "situated apprentice" models of professional learning, in which pre-service students participate in professional communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The mentor can facilitate high-quality professional learning in helping their mentees to integrate and conceptualise different types of knowledge (McNamara, Murray, & Jones, 2014). However, in order for this task to be carried out effectively, it requires particular skills and knowledge developed through specialist training and workload relief from regular responsibilities in order to support students. Whilst the latter

is dependent on government funding, the former has implications for partnership working between universities and the organisations which host the practicum or clinical experience.

In England, the policy landscape for ITE has changed in recent years, with schools being given greater responsibility than universities for professional preparation. This not only throws up a host of new issues for mentoring but also for university and schools partnership working and how they collaborate to provide the pre-service curriculum. The next section of this chapter will now turn to examine these matters in more detail.

Mentoring Student Teachers in a Changing ITE Policy Landscape

Until fairly recently, university schools of education held most of the responsibility for training pre-service teachers in England, although they have worked in partnership with schools, where student teachers carried out teaching practice placements since 1992. In 2012, the then Secretary of State for Education announced plans to give schools greater control over the recruitment and training of teachers on postgraduate routes. Whilst employment-based routes into teaching existed prior to this, a new school-led “School Direct” route was launched in 2012/13. In 2011/12, universities held 80% of the teacher training places (Universities UK, 2014). By 2018/19, this figure had dropped to 47%, with 53% of the places held by school-led providers (DfE, 2018).

On school-led courses, student teachers spend more time in schools with school-led providers taking responsibility for some of the 60 days previously spent in universities on postgraduate courses. This would imply that those who are responsible for their training in the workplace environment need to provide them with more support. The European Commission (2013) has recognised the increased and wide-ranging role of school-based colleagues in ITE due to the increasing popularity of employment based / led routes. In so doing, they have used the term “teacher educator” not only for tutors employed by universities, but also for colleagues who support student teachers in schools. This would

suggest that mentors should now take on additional duties and responsibilities hitherto assigned to colleagues in universities.

So does this mean that there is more onus for mentors to focus on educational research as an evidence base for practice? A variety of policy developments in this regard make the answer to this question complex. On the one hand, the shift of governance of ITE to schools suggests disdain by government of ITE provided by universities. As Cochran-Smith (2016) points out, when looking for reasons for teachers' inadequacies, policy makers have often blamed the gap between theoretical and practical knowledge brought about by university-models for ITE. Shifting ITE to schools was part of a drive to create a "self-improving school-led system", aiming to improve the quality of the workforce by allowing schools to take control of recruitment and training of teachers. Arguably, this transfer of responsibility signalled higher regard for experiential professional learning than professional knowledge development underpinned by research.

School-led ITE has also had new implications for partnership arrangements between university schools of education and schools. University-led ITE typically assigns particular roles to school and university colleagues, whereby each draws on their own area of expertise, but colleagues work closely in partnership with each other. The preference for practical knowledge in school-led models of ITE potentially puts this type of partnership at risk. Mutton, Burn and Menter (2017, p. 26-27) remark how the new ITE landscape represents "a missed opportunity to move beyond administrative conceptions of partnership that focus predominantly on organisational structures to exemplify, or even specify, how the different contributions to trainee teachers' learning through ITT programmes could be brought together".

On the other hand, the national mentoring standards for school-led ITT (DfE, 2016) make reference to the importance of research-informed teaching. Standard 2 states that "The

mentor should enable the trainee to access, utilise and interpret robust educational research to inform their teaching …" (p. 12) and Standard 4 states that "The mentor should continue to develop their own mentoring practice and subject and pedagogical expertise by accessing appropriate professional development and engaging with robust research" (p. 12). As argued by White, Dickerson and Weston (2015, p. 447), however, the expectation of those "with a dual role of teacher and teacher educator to develop an academic identity may be very challenging in terms of time commitment and accessibility to academic studying resources". And as pointed out above, these Standards are not statutory and there is no obligation to undergo training or provide evidence that one has met the Standards before taking on the mentor role.

There are further reasons why teacher mentors may not draw on a research base to support their mentees' learning. As alluded to above, teachers may have difficulty in establishing the relevance of propositional knowledge to the workplace due to the diverse field of education as an academic discipline. This may hinder knowledge flow between the discipline and workplace, leaving the development of professional knowledge susceptible to being structured by "alternative logics" (Hordern, 2016). In English schools, these "logics" involve political policies of accountability, whereby schools and teachers are under continual pressure to ensure pupils meet academic standards. For these reasons, many mentors consider themselves primarily as teachers of pupils rather than supporters of beginning teachers' learning (Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, & Wubbels, 2014).

Against the policy backdrop of an increasingly school-led ITE policy context, Peiser, Duncalf and Mallaburn (forthcoming) investigated how mentors conceptualised their roles, described their work and the factors that impacted on these. Their study established that in some respects the shift to school-led ITE had a positive impact on mentoring practices which were characterised by collaborative self-development rather than monitoring and supervision.

Ownership of ITE (as a school-led provider) seemed to strengthen the “learning community” culture within the school, where mentors and mentees solved problems collegially and democratically for the sake of whole school development. By the same token, mentors supporting student teachers on school-led courses appeared more tolerant of professional learning involving trial and error, collaboratively adopting an “inquiry stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), rather than expecting them to teach in a particular way and also had designated time to carry out their duties. However, none of the mentors who participated in the study (supporting both school-led and university-led courses) made any reference to the contribution of research knowledge to their roles or how they helped mentees to make connections between theory and practice. They did not appear to be taking on the role of teacher educators in the broader sense (European Commission, 2013), to be meeting the research-related standards in the national mentoring standards for school-led ITT (DfE, 2016), or helping their mentees to apply codified knowledge learnt in the university to the practical situation of the school (Eraut, 2014).

It should also be noted that schools entrusted with school-led provision are those that have been judged favourably by accountability measures through Ofsted[1] inspections. Only schools that meet certain criteria – namely, those that have an “outstanding” or “good” Ofsted judgement - are permitted to be the “lead school” in School Direct consortia (DfE 2018). Favourable inspection judgements arguably result in decreased teacher anxiety about pupil progress due to “earned autonomy” (Hargreaves, 2003). For this reason, Peiser et al.’s conclusions were somewhat hedged. It was difficult to say whether the favourable school culture for mentoring was the consequence of positive accountability outcomes or ITE ownership, or a combination of both.

[1] Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills in England that inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.

Implications for university-school partnerships and curriculum development

Taking the position that high quality mentoring of student teachers is mentee-centred, democratic, involves collaborative inquiry, and helps the mentee to make connections between research and practice, what are the implications for university-school partnerships and collaborative curriculum development? Although a significant proportion of ITE provision is now "school-led", very few schools have won the rights to grant accreditation for QTS, which has been conferred to university providers. Furthermore, teacher training courses typically include an academic qualification in addition to the professional qualification of QTS. For these reasons, schools must continue to work with universities in ITE. In the school-led policy context, however, it is possible that partnerships primarily have, or will have, an administrative focus (Mutton et al., 2017).

However, such a focus would be a great waste of potential of the combined value of expertise in both types of institutions and could mitigate against the high quality mentoring practices advocated above. Rather, it would be more sensible for school and university colleagues to collaboratively develop mentor training and ITE curriculum design, where colleagues play to their respective strengths. University colleagues could familiarise mentors with theoretical and research knowledge, whilst school colleagues could promote coaching skills that draw on professional craft and contextual knowledge. Enquiry-orientated, collaborative mentor-mentee learning can also be facilitated through close partnership working. Supported by the mentor in their investigations, beginning teachers can test ideas from the university as well as their own preconceptions in practice against real-world criteria in schools (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). This process enables the integration of experiential learning and research-based knowledge, where school and university knowledge are interrogated in the light of each other, based on a model of "research-informed clinical practice" (Burn & Mutton, 2013). Joined up working in this way should also facilitate

conversations about a more coherent curriculum experience that joins “conceptuality” and “contextuality” (Müller, 2009).

Peiser et al. (2018) argued that in order for mentors to be able to connect and cohere different types of knowledge, attention must also be paid to mentoring pedagogy. They proposed that Bhabha’s (1990) work on the notion of “third space”, where issues are interpreted and analysed drawing on multiple discourses, provides a helpful theoretical basis for this. McNamara et al. (2014, p. 18) explain how in third spaces in professional learning, “theoretical and practical knowledge and personal and official discourses and aspirations can enter into productive dialogue and, hopefully, effect an epistemological reconciliation”. However, for this to be possible, mentors need to be resourced with adequate time, appropriately trained, and be given licence to adopt more neutral roles for the sake of beginning teacher learning, rather than feeling the pressure to bow to systemic demands from school managers (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017). As argued by Helleve and Ulvik (2019, p. 238), whilst

> …mentors and tutors have different responsibilities, they have a common task to fulfil and a need to collaborate. Consequently there should be blurred borders between the two fields. What seems to be necessary is for the two professions, mentors and tutors, to discuss and clarify mutual expectations and to find out how their different competences can act together to the best for the student teachers.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that policy regulation of pre-service education and training of nurses, social workers and teachers has had a strong influence on the role of the mentor. In nursing and social work, professional regulatory bodies also hold sway. In nursing and teaching, the broad direction of travel has been for the mentor to move beyond nurturing, supporting and supervising to promoting research informed practice. In social work, the emphasis has always been more on the educative dimension.

Policy reform, however, has not been unidirectional. As the chapter has highlighted, demands on mentors across the professions continue to be multi-faceted, subject to frequent change, and sometimes contradictory. Mentors have been expected *inter alia* to be competent assessors and facilitators of learning in the wider workplace context. In spite of calls for evidence informed practice, policy makers have sent out ambiguous messages about their preference for different types of professional knowledge. In teaching, the promotion of a school-led ITE system would seem to foreground practical over theoretical knowledge, yet mentors are to promote mentees' utilisation and interpretation of educational research. In nursing, the replacement of the term "mentor" with "supervisor", may also connote greater significance to practical knowledge development and a return to the type of nurse education that preceded the contribution and accreditation of universities (albeit with other individuals formally contributing to a "mentoring team" and a continuing emphasis on evidence-based practice).

In the face of multi-directional policy decisions which create potential uncertainties about the mentor role, there is a need for university tutors and workplace mentors to establish future proof arrangements to optimise professional learning experiences of their students. To bring this about, the greatest priority for curriculum development should be a focus on learning experiences that cohere the university and workplace domains. Whilst the mentor's role will be distinct in its foci on *situated* professional learning and facilitating access to a community of practice, there is a growing need for blurring the borders between mentors and tutors (Helleve & Ulvik, 2019). Rather than bowing to policy demands that shift responsibilities back and forth between those on campus and in the workplace, there should be an emphasis on action promoting constant knowledge flow. Working in this way will provide opportunities for the reconciliation and re-engineering of theoretical and practical

knowledge into new and strengthened epistemologies of professional knowledge (Hordern, 2016; Zeichner, 2010).

However, in order to make this a reality, bold and practical steps must be taken. For example, mentors and tutors require time to collaborate about curriculum design, assignments and assessments that are relevant, fit for purpose and feasible in the field. Whilst curriculum planning is integral to an academic tutor's job, mentors need permission from managers for workload release from daily duties to enable this. To remain cognisant of the daily demands on practitioners that impact on the translation of theory to practice, tutors would benefit from leaving the university to spend some time working in the field. On the flipside, tutors could provide and familiarise mentors with research updates. In turn, mentors would need time to digest and critically assess these. Managers must also be prepared to allocate adequate time resources for mentoring in a "third" space and mentor development must be appropriately designed to cultivate the necessary skills. As the title of the chapter sign-posted, the mentoring of students on professional courses in HE in the workplace does indeed bring new opportunities and challenges. The author acknowledges that some of her suggestions for addressing challenges are ambitious. She would argue, however, that such measures are needed for investment in high quality professional learning straddling the university and workplace and maximising the role of the mentor within.

Questions for Discussion

- To what extent are the types of skills required for mentoring in the workplace on professional learning courses different to those in other areas of HE?
- To what extent are the mentoring skills required in the professions discussed in this chapter similar or different?
- To what extent are professional frameworks outlining the expectations of mentors supporting students on professional courses helpful?

- Do you think that it should be statutory to undergo accredited mentor training to mentor students on professional courses? Why (not)?
- Is the notion of mentoring pedagogy in a third space realistic or idealistic?

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