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**Peiser, G, Ambrose, J, Burke, B and Davenport, J (2018) The role of the mentor in professional knowledge development across four professions. International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 7 (1). pp. 2-18. ISSN 2046-6854**

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# **The role of the mentor in professional knowledge development across four professions**

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# **The role of the mentor in professional knowledge development across four professions**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose** - Against a British policy backdrop, which places an ever-increasing emphasis on workplace learning in pre-service professional programmes, this paper investigates the contribution of the mentor to professional knowledge development in nursing, paramedicine, social work and teaching.

**Approach** - Taking the form of a literature review, it explores the influence of policy, professional and theoretical conceptualisations of the mentor role and structural factors influencing the mentor's contribution to professional knowledge.

**Findings** - Where there are clearly delineated policy obligations for the mentor to 'teach' mentees, mentors are more likely to make connections between theoretical and practical knowledge. When this responsibility is absent or informal, they are inclined to attend to the development of contextual knowledge with a consequent disconnect between theory and practice. In all four professions, mentors face significant challenges, especially with regard to the conflict between supporting and assessor roles and the need to attend to heavy contractual workloads, performance targets and mentoring roles in tandem.

**Practical implications** - The authors argue first for the need for more attention to the pedagogy of mentoring and second, for structural changes to workload allocations, career progression and mentoring education. In order to develop more coherent and interconnected professional knowledge between different domains, and the reconciliation of different perspectives, it would be useful to underpin mentoring pedagogy with Bhabha's notion of 'third space'.

**Originality** - The paper contributes to the field since it considers new obligations incumbent on mentors to assist mentees in reconciling theoretical and practical knowledge by consequence of policy and takes a multi-professional perspective.

**Key words** – mentoring, professional learning, professional knowledge, mentoring pedagogy, third space

## **Introduction**

During the past twenty years, mentoring has increasingly been recognised internationally as a key strategy in professional training and development programmes in education, health care, business and industry. Although the concept of mentoring is not new, it can be difficult to define, with a multitude of definitions and interpretations of how it is to be performed (Crisp and Cruz, 2009). For example, mentoring can be perceived as a ‘helping’ process (Caruso, 1990), a ‘nurturing’ process (Roberts, 2000), a ‘coaching’ process (Clutterbuck, 1991) or a ‘teaching–learning’ process (Earl and Timperley, 2008). Kochan and Pascarelli (2012) explain how mentoring activities can be affected by cultural purpose. For example, ‘traditional mentoring’ involves the transmission of the culture and values of the organisation, whereas ‘transitional mentoring’ is a more collaborative process, respecting both the culture of the organisation and the identity of the mentee. ‘Transformative mentoring’, on the other hand, attributes more fluid roles to both mentor and mentee, laying emphasis on mutual growth and development. Jones *et al.* (2005) suggest that wide variation in mentoring practices are influenced by the multiple mentoring purposes, contrasting settings, and the views of individuals. Similarly, Brondyk and Searby (2013) indicate that different professional contexts with their own unique characteristics influence practices, and Jones and Brown (2011) argue that practices are shaped by complex dynamic relationships within perceived structures.

This paper reviews the literature on the role of the mentor in the pre-service preparation of four different professions: nursing, paramedicine, social work and teaching. In particular, the paper focuses on the mentor’s contribution to professional knowledge development. Müller (2009) explains that professional curricula that straddle the domains of higher education (HE) and workplace have elements of conceptuality and contextuality (p. 217). Acting as ‘linchpins’ between these domains, mentors are therefore ideally positioned for assisting students in ‘knowledge transfer’, involving the application of codified knowledge learnt in the university in particular practical situations (Eraut, 2014). Mentors may also help pre-service professionals to make sense of and reconcile contradictions between the different learning communities in which they are situated (Engeström, 2001).

McNamara *et al.* (2014) highlight how high-quality professional learning requires a dialogue and symbiotic relationship between practical and theoretical knowledge. Importantly, ‘integrated ways of conceptualising and articulating [such knowledge] *needs support from colleagues*’ (p. 296, emphasis added). Calls from policy makers for ‘evidence-based’ or ‘evidence-informed’ practice in all four professions (Department for Education (DfE), 2016a; Health and Care Professions Council [HCPC], 2012, 2014; Nursing & Midwifery Council [NMC], 2008b) further imply that colleagues who support students in their professional learning in the workplace must share responsibility for the development of professional knowledge that is underpinned, or informed by, theory and/or empirical research.

The authors of this paper are tutors in an English university supporting students on professional courses in the aforementioned professions, who welcome the potential of workplace mentors for playing an integral role in professional learning. However, we are also concerned that recent policies favouring a greater concentration of ‘on the job’ learning may make assumptions about the value of field-based experiences without paying due consideration to the complexity of the learning process (Rosaen and Florio-Ruane, 2008) and the necessary supporting structures.

In the main body of our paper, we first examine how (a) policy context, (b) conceptualisations of the mentor role and (c) structural factors identified in the literature in the four professions since 2000 are likely to affect the mentor’s contribution to professional knowledge development. Whilst the literature related to conceptualisations of the role draw on some international as well as British perspectives, discussion of the policy context and structural factors for social work and teaching relate solely to England (as policy for these professions is devolved in the UK), and nursing and paramedicine relate to the UK. The literature was reviewed from 2000 onwards as this was an approximate midway point with regard to the introduction of mentors’ responsibilities for assessing their mentees’ professional skills and knowledge in co-operation with their academic colleagues in HE for the professions under consideration. In teaching, this responsibility was introduced in 1992 (DfE, 1992), social work in 2003 (DoH, 2002), paramedicine in 2007 (BPA, 2006) and nursing in 2008 (NMC, 2008a). The literature search was conducted using Discover, the university library

electronic search engine, inputting the terms ‘mentor’, ‘mentoring’, ‘professional learning’, ‘professional knowledge’ and the respective professions, in addition to consulting useful secondary references. Relevant policy documents were also reviewed for relevance.

Based on our literature review, we then suggest that if the mentor is to play a more effective role in this process, policy makers and professions themselves need to focus more closely on the pedagogy of mentoring. In the concluding discussion, the paper advocates pedagogies in ‘third spaces’ (Bhabha, 1990, 1994), involving the reconciliation and re-engineering of theoretical and practical knowledge into new epistemologies of professional knowledge (Zeichner, 2010).

## **Nursing**

### *Policy context*

The transition of nurse education in the UK, from apprentice-style training in hospitals to higher education institutions (HEI) in the 1990s, transformed the way in which student nurses were taught, supported and assessed in practice. Since 2008, the NMC standards (2008b) necessitate that student nurses have an allocated mentor supervising them for a minimum of 40% of the time in clinical practice. The significant emphasis on workplace learning and the responsibility of the mentor influenced the creation of standards for both pre-registration nurse education and standards for supporting learning and assessment in practice (NMC, 2008b, 2010). The standards created for mentors stipulate the formal roles and responsibilities of mentors.

In order to take on the mentor role, nurses must have at least 12 months’ post-registration experience and have undergone a formal programme undertaken in an HEI (NMC, 2008b). Mentorship programmes, approved by the NMC, have been embedded into nurse education and pay attention to 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, 2008b). Today, mentorship is a key role for all registered nurses (NMC, 2015) and often a requirement for promotion (Greenfield, 2015; Hurley and Snowdon, 2008; Robinson *et al.*, 2012).

### *Conceptualising the nurse mentor role*

According to Casey and Clark (2011), Gopee (2015) and Kinnell and Hughes (2010), the nurse mentor is the central support mechanism for student nurses in clinical placement. Whilst interpretations of the role can be complex and multifaceted, Gopee (2015) has identified consistent functions: teacher, sponsor, encourager, counsellor and friend. Other authors stress the formally educative dimension. Johnson (2015) characterises the mentor as ‘guide, role model, sponsor and teacher’ (p. 23). Andrews and Wallace (1999) and Myall *et al.* (2008) explain that the mentor no longer simply ‘supervises’ practice, but is responsible for linking the theory to practice and the evaluation and utilisation of evidence.

As indicated in the title, the *Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice* (NMC 2008b) policy document requires mentors to take on an assessor role. However, this has caused some disquiet (Bray and Nettleton 2007; Casey and Clark, 2011; Huybrecht *et al.*, 2010). Watson (2000) considers the multifaceted roles as conflicted since students may not wish to seek help and support from individuals who are also judges of their success.

### *Influence of structural factors*

In spite of stringent standards for mentorship, student nurses have reported very varied experiences of mentoring and assessment. Negative experiences have been blamed by both mentors and mentees on the competing commitments of the nurse mentor (Bray and Nettleton 2007; Casey and Clark, 2011; Greenfield, 2015; Hunt *et al.*, 2016; McIntosh *et al.*, 2014; Myall *et al.*, 2008; Willis Commission, 2012), who must delegate appropriately to facilitate the development of the student, whilst also protecting the patient and managing their workload (Gopee, 2015; Hurley and Snowdon, 2008; Walsh, 2014). The NMC (2008b, 2015) stipulates that mentors are professionally accountable for the clinical decisions they make to ensure that patients are protected and cared for safely whilst supervising, teaching and assessing the mentee. Lack of time is also frequently blamed as a barrier to attending mandatory updates and therefore impedes mentors’ professional development (Clark and Casey, 2016).

Jervis and Tilki (2011) and Duffy (2004) contend that mentor stress, time to mentor, confidence in decision-making and the complexities of appraisal can lead to problems in assessment of trainee nurses. Acting as ‘gatekeepers’ to the profession, the mentor must decide if students meet the standards. This heavy responsibility may explain the prevailing phenomenon of ‘failure to fail’ (Duffy, 2003, 2004; Jervis and Tilki, 2011; Rutkowski, 2007); that is, nurse mentors’ unwillingness to fail students on the clinical practice element of the course and the lack of consistency between the numbers of students who fail in practice and academically. A disconnect between clinical practice and HEIs is also identified by Hurley and Snowdon (2008), who established a lack of collaborative planning between colleagues in these two different settings.

A further issue influencing mentoring practice may be the expectation of *all* registered nurses to act as mentors (NMC, 2015). ‘Coercion’ into the role may result in negative mentoring behaviour, termed by Darling (1985, cited in Vinales, 2015) as ‘toxic mentoring’. The requirement to take on the mentor role is further exacerbated by the fact that it is often a criterion for promotion (Greenfield, 2015; Robinson *et al.*, 2012). Since the mentor is responsible for creating a positive learning environment, a lack of enthusiasm and engagement can have a major impact on the student experience (Wilson, 2014).

Nonetheless, the mentor role is not a burden for all, and some are motivated by the fact that it enables career progression, and many claim that it leads to an increase in job satisfaction and fulfilment (Greenfield, 2015; Hurley and Snowdon, 2008). Some mentors also report benefits of keeping up to date with new developments and self-development through discussion and reflection (Huybrecht *et al.*, 2010). Attendance of mentor updates can support the new revalidation process for registered nurses, which requires verification of evidence of continuing professional development to the NMC in order to remain on the professional register (NMC, 2016).

## **Paramedicine**

### *Policy context*



In contrast to nursing, mentoring in pre-hospital practice in the UK is a relatively new phenomenon, although it is an expectation of the HCPC that student paramedics are supported by ‘practice educators’ (HCPC, 2017). The fact that the College of Paramedics (2015, p. 19) advises ‘every patient encounter becomes an opportunity for learning to prepare the contemporary student paramedic for ongoing development within evidence-based autonomous practice’ further suggests the important role of an individual with the responsibility of supporting workplace learning. In spite of this, and an educational curriculum where 50% of the learning takes place within the emergency service hub of an ambulance Trust (College of Paramedics, 2015), there is no nationally agreed framework to inform the work of paramedic mentors (Jones *et al.*, 2012). The fact that those supporting students in their professional learning have been given a variety of names, for example, ‘preceptors’ (Woollard, 2009), ‘practice educators’ (College of Paramedics, 2015; Fayers and Bates, 2011; Lane, 2014) and ‘mentors’ (Armitage, 2010) suggests confusion about the nature of the role.

As Sibson and Mursell (2010b) highlight, the paramedic profession is relatively new to the concept of mentorship and is therefore still finding the best fit. However, this may change in the very near future, by consequence of the shift of responsibility for paramedic education to HE (British Paramedic Association [BPA], 2006), which is gradually strengthening the status and professionalism of paramedicine and paramedics. However, Jones *et al.* (2012, p. 475) argue that if paramedic mentors are to have confidence in their influence on the mentee’s route to professionalism, they ‘need the education, support and resources to do the job that is asked of them’.

#### *Conceptualising the paramedic mentor role*

Given the very recent shift of paramedic education to HE (BPA, 2006), there is a very small body of academic literature on the mentor role and the concept of mentorship within paramedicine. Woollard (2009) describes the mentor and preceptor as ‘role models’ who influence mentees through their behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and set standards for professionalism. Similarly, Chambers *et al.* (2009) consider mentor behaviour as a prototype for mentee conduct. Chambers *et al.* (2009) and Lane (2014), however, also underline the importance of forging relationships and good communication. Whilst Sibson and Mursell (2010a) likewise draw attention to the mentor’s supportive role, they also

emphasise the importance of knowledge transfer. In their view, a 'joined practitioner lecturer', who links theory from the university with practice, would offer students an effective mentor. Sibson and Mursell (2010b) also draw attention to the mentor's responsibility for assisting students in achieving goals related to assessment.

### *Influence of structural factors*

The lack of steer from policy makers means that there is role ambiguity. Jones *et al.* (2012) and Andrews *et al.* (2010) explain how the North West Ambulance Service sought advice and guidance for the role of mentor from the HCPC, but received limited suggestions. Thus, as Woollard (2009) contends, the mentoring model has been left for the individual practitioner to develop. This is increasingly problematic in the shift towards greater professionalisation, where paramedic mentors are supposed to act as linchpins between theory and practice. The move of paramedic education to HE with new models for learning may, in some circumstances, lead to challenges for older mentors trained under a different apprenticeship model in supporting their mentees (van der Gaag and Donaghy, 2013).

A further challenge is the shortage of paramedics within the UK available to support students and newly qualified colleagues. Thompson (2015) established that some students were mentored by newly qualified registrants with inadequate exposure to clinical skills and a lack of experience. A negative placement experience with inadequate support or attention to students' needs is the main reason for leaving a programme of study (Sibson and Mursell, 2010c). Workforce shortages have prompted creative responses at the micro level, involving third-year students carrying out peer mentoring (Best *et al.*, 2008), and at the macro level, with an influx of newly graduating registrants from overseas (Devinish *et al.*, 2015). Lane (2014) argues that more investment into the mentor role is required, yet identifies related challenges in terms of workforce planning.

## **Social work**

### *Policy context*

The term used to describe those involved in supporting English social work students has changed over time and, in fact, does not include the term 'mentor'. Rather, those practising this role have been called 'student supervisor' (Young, 1967), 'practice teacher' (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work [CCETSW], 1989), 'practice assessor' (General Social Care Council [GSCC], 2005) and latterly 'practice educator' (PE) (The College of Social Work [TCSW], 2012). The term 'student supervisor' was replaced by 'practice teacher' when the CCETSW made a policy commitment that all students on social work qualifying courses would be supervised by an accredited practice teacher working in an approved agency (CCETSW, 1989). Further reform led to the introduction of the Social Work degree and a new regulatory body, the GSCC. The title 'practice assessor' replaced 'practice teacher' in 2003, highlighting the assessment role. The necessary accreditation significantly enhanced the professional status and standards of practice teaching (Slater, 2007) and the role of the PE, whose assessment of the student was given equal value to assessments undertaken within the academic arena (Mann, 2016). This change of terminology reflects a shifting policy and regulatory discourse, where there is an increasing recognition of the nature of professional learning and the complexity of assessing students' practice (Shardlow, 2012; Waterhouse *et al.*, 2011).

Today, the PE's role can only be undertaken by qualified and registered social workers who have successfully demonstrated their competence to directly supervise, teach and assess social work degree students (TCSW, 2013) and is only conferred on those who have successfully completed a post-qualifying course at postgraduate level. On this course, PEs develop expertise in adult learning, theoretical perspectives for the academic curriculum, supervision and assessment and anti-oppressive practices. They should therefore be well prepared for the various aspects of their dynamic role.

### *Conceptualising the practice educator role*

Social work education has always emphasised the importance of having a practice and academic curriculum (Valentine, 2004), and it is the task of the PE to connect these two domains. Aside from the roles and responsibilities directly conferred on the PE by consequence of policy discussed above, their tasks 'in the field' are more specifically fleshed out by the Practice Educator Professional

Standards (PEPS) (TCSW, 2013). Within the PEPS, there are four distinct areas: (1) the organisation of learning opportunities for social work students; (2) enabling and supporting the learning and the professional development of the student within practice, (3) management of the student's assessment and (4) engagement in continuous professional development in relation to performance as PEs (TCSW, 2013).

Whilst the role is set out in four distinct domains by the PEPS, Finch and Taylor (2013) point out that PEs can find their work multifaceted and complex. Indeed, the PE responsibility 'encompasses potentially conflictual roles, specifically nurturer and enabler of learning on the one hand and assessor and manager on the other' (p. 247). Ultimately, the PE has more responsibility for teaching the application of theory to practice and student assessment than nurturing and supporting students (Finch, 2014; Schaub and Darlymple, 2013). Charged with the final responsibility for passing or failing a student, the PE plays the critical role of 'gatekeeper' to the profession.

#### *Influence of structural factors*

Despite attempts to develop robust standards regarding practice learning, the PE's role is situated in a challenging context. The profession, as well as social work education, has been undergoing a process of major change and development (Croisdale-Appleby, 2014; GSCC, 2005; HCPC, 2012; Social Workers Registration Board [SWRB], 2010; TCSW, 2012). According to Wilson (2012), the increasing emphasis on managerialism and bureaucratisation can undermine the development of creative responses to issues faced by social work clients and can have a negative impact on the ability of PEs to shape learning in particular ways. For example, they may constrain PEs' ability to support students' development of critical reflective skills and anti-oppressive values (Higgins and Goodyer, 2015; Lee, 2014).

The widening of social work training by the introduction of the undergraduate programme in 2003, and the increase in the number of placement days, has put pressure on the supply of placements. This has been further compounded by the introduction of employer-based models of training and the newly proposed apprenticeship model placements (Parker, 2007; Waterhouse *et al.*, 2011), resulting

in further pressure to an already fragile placement infrastructure (Parker, 2007) and creating an unstable and uncertain position for practice education (Wilson, 2013).

Within this context of diminishing placements, PEs are increasingly finding it difficult to allocate time to support students due to competing organisational and professional demands, impinging on the quality of the dialogue which takes place within practice learning situations (Waterhouse *et al.*, 2011). Further, there are differing and inconsistent practices within social work organisations regarding practice education. Whilst there is an expectation that social workers will take on the PE role as part of their professional development and career progression (TCSW, 2012), and some organisations acknowledge their contribution by financial remuneration and workload release, others do not (National Organisation for Practice Teaching [NOPT], 2014; Waterhouse *et al.*, 2011). PEs who work in organisations where there is a clear collaborative learning culture with a team sharing responsibility for supporting student learning perhaps fair better (Cleak *et al.*, 2016).

## **Teaching**

### *Policy context*

The contribution of school-based mentoring to the preparation of beginning teachers began to be recognised in England in the 1980s, with the establishment of school–university partnerships in an attempt to overcome the theory–practice dualism in initial teacher education courses (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 (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). This statutory requirement continues to be in operation to the present day.

More recently, educational policy has stressed the pivotal role of workplace learning and, by consequence, the contribution of the mentor. The 2010 white paper (DfE, 2010) called for reform of initial teacher training (ITT) with the expansion of school-centred, as opposed to university-led, courses leading to qualified teacher status, and an increase in the time trainees should spend in the

classroom. Support for a school-led ITT system was reiterated in 2016 (DfE, 2016a). In shifting responsibility for ITT from universities to schools, the role of the mentor and their contribution to professional knowledge development becomes increasingly significant. However, up until 2016, policy makers did not define the role of the mentor. Rather, the emphasis was on supporting the mentee to support a particular end, notably the competences or standards for newly qualified teacher status.

Arguably, the recommendation for the creation of ‘national mentoring standards for school-based initial teacher training’ (DfE, 2015), published one year later (DfE, 2016b), set out policy expectations more clearly. The mentoring standards comprise four parts: personal qualities, teaching, professionalism, self-development and working in partnership. However, academics working in the field of teacher education have been researching and conceptualising the role of the mentor for many years. Indeed, it could be argued that the reduction of mentors’ work to four standards, in many respects, oversimplifies the very complex role presented in the literature.

### *Conceptualising the teacher mentor role*

The various conceptualisations of the teacher mentor can be explored in relation to theoretical perspectives and policy influences at different times. In the 1980s, a humanistic influence, inspired by the work of Rogers (1974) and concerns with teacher attrition by consequence of ‘reality shock’ (Wang and Odell, 2002), emphasised the importance of the mentor’s emotional support and the need to develop mentees’ self-esteem. Interpersonal knowledge and skills were prized most highly, with comparatively less focus on practice, content or assessment (Sündli, 2007).

Following Schön’s (1983) work on the role of reflective practice, there was a shift away from a humanistic emphasis towards facilitation of practical reasoning and rational thinking. Through facilitated conversations involving ‘reflection on-action’ (Schön, 1983), that is, the contemplation of events and critical analysis and interpretation of the information recalled, the mentor helps the mentee to construct knowledge which is founded in practice. In this ‘situated apprentice’ model of learning, involving participation in a professional community (Lave and Wenger, 1991), the mentor can

provide practical and contextual support, potentially helping the mentee to connect theoretical learning in the university with teaching (Wang and Odell, 2002). Learning to teach as a social process (Izadinia 2015) in situ suited the ‘practicum turn’ in policy making.

From the 1990s, some teacher educators promoted *critical* constructivism (Wang and Odell, 2002). Concerned that mentor modelling of suitable behaviours led to the reproduction of the status quo, they advocated teacher education with emancipatory and social justice goals (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Mentors and their mentees were to act as agents of change, collaboratively taking an ‘inquiry stance’ (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009) in order to generate new knowledge and change. Parallel to this, there was also some critique of the controlling, bureaucratic and managerialist approach to teacher development (Vonk, 1993), which had come about as a consequence of statutory lists of teacher competences (later teachers’ standards in England). There was a push towards more democratic and participant centred approaches, favouring collaborative mentor–mentee partnerships (Earl and Timperley, 2008; Feiman-Nemser, 2008, 2012; Mena *et al.*, 2016).

As Furlong and Maynard (1995) have pointed out, the way in which mentoring is conceptualised depends on views about learning to teach. For example, the competency view, taking a technical–rationalist line, is more likely to promote a behaviourist approach, whereby the beginning teacher may learn how to implement effective strategies without necessarily understanding the reasons for their success or the philosophical justification for particular approaches. The reflective-practice tradition, on the other hand, encourages the development of ‘intelligent skill knowledge’ underpinned by a deeper understanding rather than just practical teaching skills.

In spite of a variety of theoretical perspectives, research has established that the adoption of one approach to mentoring is unlikely to be effective. Harrison *et al.* (2006) discovered that mentees rated role-modelling behaviour, interpersonal skills and the ability to promote reflective discussion. According to Crutcher and Naseem (2016), good mentoring involves prompting critical reflection, modelling and role modelling, collaborative relationships and knowledge about individuals’ needs. Izadinia (2015) contends that it is the mentor’s role to help mentees to develop their teacher voice and

identity, suggesting that the humanistic and educative orientations should operate in tandem rather than discretely.

These multiple roles, however, present significant challenges. Not only are there tensions between nurturing, the promotion of reflective practice and the need to challenge (Hudson, 2016; Ingleby, 2014), there are also conflicting loyalties between the supporter and assessor roles (Hudson, 2016; Jones and Straker, 2006).

#### *Influence of structural factors*

Hobson and Malderez (2013) examined enablers and constrainers of effective mentoring practice in light of micro, meso and macro factors. At the micro level, mentoring relationships can be influenced by the attitudes of the mentee, but equally by the strategies employed by mentors. Hobson and Malderez (2013) found that mentee learning and motivation was constrained when ‘judgementoring’ occurred; that is, making value judgements of mentees’ practice or thinking. At the micro level, relationships may also be affected by (the absence of) mentor identities (Jaspers *et al.*, 2014; Sündli, 2007). Many identify themselves first and foremost as teachers of pupils rather than supporters of beginning teachers’ learning (Jasper *et al.*, 2014).

At the meso level, schools and teachers are under continual pressure to ensure that their pupils meet academic standards and can therefore be more concerned with pupil progress than supporting beginning teachers’ learning. This can adversely affect the care taken in mentor selection, mentors’ time for observations and feedback and their willingness to attend training to upskill practice (Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Hobson and Malderez, 2013; Jones and Straker, 2006; Thornton, 2014). Whilst such challenges may be averted by strong collaborative learning cultures and /or effective school–university partnerships, when these are absent or relatively weak, the status of mentoring is likely to suffer (Hobson and Malderez, 2013). Hobson and Malderez argue that national policies also contribute to low mentor status and role confusion and conflict, as there is no recognised career progression for those in role and a lack of common understanding about what mentoring should entail,



whilst some policies suggest that mentors should be directly involved in mentees' assessment, which encourages judgementoring.

## **Discussion**

This literature review reveals that the mentor's contribution to professional knowledge development across different professions seems to be strongly influenced by policy guidance, their training and selection and respective traditions in professional learning. The explicit articulation of *teaching* responsibilities in policy frameworks and mandatory training seem to have a strong influence on mentors' responsibilities for linking theory with practice. Although workplace learning has been central to the preparation of teachers since 1992, the nature of mentors' work in schools has been largely open to interpretation. In paramedicine, the literature indicates that the role of the mentor is even more ephemeral. By consequence of the lack of specific guidance, teacher and paramedic mentors have tended to rely more heavily on the workplace context for the construction of professional knowledge, resulting in the frequent relegation of theoretical perspectives.

But are national frameworks with more clearly delineated teaching responsibilities likely, in themselves, to improve the quality of professional knowledge development by the mentor, or is this process also affected by other factors? It may be the case that the existence or absence of policy frameworks for mentoring is related to the strength of a defined 'body' of professional knowledge. According to Hordern (2016), strength of professional knowledge can be influenced by the perceived relevance of propositional knowledge to the workplace, the extent of knowledge flow between the discipline and workplace and/or its susceptibility to being 'structured' by 'alternative logics'.

In nursing and social work, there is a great deal of practical knowledge closely related to theoretical knowledge, which must be taught and learnt in situ. Whilst the relationship between practical and theoretical knowledge in paramedicine is also potentially robust, the recent shift of responsibility for pre-service training to HE in England means that theoretical knowledge is in the early stages of establishing itself as a 'discipline', and that knowledge flows are only beginning to take shape. In teaching, the links between practical and theoretical knowledge are potentially more

tenuous. Furlong (2013) highlights how the field of 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. Furthermore, imperatives in English schools are constantly influenced by alternative logics of political policies and accountability. Here we notice how the mentor's contribution to professional knowledge development may be influenced by both the unique characteristics of a professional context (Brondyk and Searby, 2013) and/or particular political policies.

Irrespective of formalised teaching roles and 'strength' of professional knowledge, however, it seems that mentors in all four professions face the competing demands of their everyday jobs with inadequate workload relief and tensions between their supporting and assessing roles. As Malderez (2015) explains, responsibility for assessment can make for anti-mentoring contexts, impacting the power dynamics in the relationship and potentially impeding democratic and educative mentoring.

In light of these complex contextual influences, what are the implications for improved professional knowledge development across the four professions in England and possibly beyond? First, the authors argue that much more consideration is needed to cohering and interconnecting different types of knowledge, and that this may be achieved through increased attention to the pedagogy of mentoring on statutory mentor training courses across the four professions. Second, we purport that policy makers must adequately resource mentoring in order for mentees to be able to take full advantage of workplace learning.

The authors propose that Bhabha's (1990, 1994) work on the notion of 'third space', where issues are interpreted and analysed drawing on multiple discourses, provides a helpful basis for underpinning mentoring pedagogy, leading to greater coherence and interconnection of knowledge types. In professional learning, McNamara *et al.* (2014, p.18) explain that in third spaces, 'theoretical and practical knowledge and personal and official discourses and aspirations can enter into productive dialogue and, hopefully, effect an epistemological reconciliation'. In third spaces, learning conversations can also take place in a safe environment where both mentor and mentee engage in honest, critically reflective discussion of potentially contentious issues (McIntyre and Hobson, 2016), which may otherwise remain unarticulated.

Although the literature in three of the four professions (teaching as the exception) in our research does not refer to third space pedagogy per se, there are several examples that resonate with McNamara *et al.*'s (2014) conceptualisation of productive dialogue. In nurse education, Spouse (2001) argues that mentors should 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. In paramedic education, Woollard (2009, p. 4) contends that professional learning should provide opportunities for discussing individual beliefs, attitudes and rationale for decisions in the widest range of circumstances, and that the mentor plays a crucial role in this process. In Woollard's view, the professional education of paramedics must promote independent thinking in a manner that moves away from the old apprenticeship behaviourist model where trainees are simply taught what they need to know.

In social work education, Bellinger (2010) maintains that professional education must stimulate the interaction of both classroom and workplace learning in a continuous and dynamic way, and that the quality of professional learning is dependent on this. Bellinger calls for 'generative' collaborative learning, rejecting the notion of the student as a recipient of established expertise from either the workplace or the academic institution. In teacher education, there is also strong support for enquiry-orientated collaborative teacher learning. 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 and McIntyre, 2006). In this process, the support of an experienced and knowledgeable mentor, who uses their professional craft and contextual knowledge as a premise for coaching students and stimulating reflection, is crucial. Such reflection can provide a 'research springboard', whereby theory with a 'small T', that is, the exploration of students' personal and subjective reflections on teaching practice, can subsequently be linked with theoretical notions from a wider and more abstract knowledge base (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999). However, the ability to facilitate these connections arguably demands the mentor's familiarity with a wider knowledge base, which may be lacking. There is thus a strong case for stronger and more effective mentor education in this 'linchpin' role.

In order to support third space learning, and to improve professional knowledge development in general, however, policy makers must resource structural arrangements that allow for this. Mentors should receive clearly defined workload relief for supporting mentees and career recognition and remuneration for their crucial work. Qualifications for mentors should not only include relevant substantive content but also mentoring pedagogy. This should include attention to the learning processes and perspectives of adults, or andragogy (Knowles, 1984). Like Hobson *et al.* (2016), the authors advocate that the assessor role should be separated from the mentor role in order to avoid potentially undemocratic relationships and to encourage the development of safe relationships in which open, honest discussions about professional learning and development needs are more likely to occur.

In professions such as nursing, paramedicine, social work and teaching, where knowledge can be tacit, it would be helpful to consider a range of strategies and pedagogical frameworks, which complement and supplement third space learning, for making 'insider knowledge' more explicit. The embedding of such strategies could improve knowledge flows between workplace and HEIs, leading to more dynamic and strengthened professional knowledge. HEIs and workplace mentors should also collaborate more closely in planning curricula of professional programmes.

If nursing, paramedicine, social work and teaching are to be regarded as professions underpinned by strong bodies of professional knowledge, the processes of its accumulation across different domains clearly need more significant regard. This literature review across the four professions highlights how the role of the mentor continues to be multifaceted and thus, how his/her contribution to professional knowledge development in the form of mediation of different perspectives may be compromised. Given the nature of this paper, which is based on a review of the literature, however, we realise the limitations of our research and that our understanding of this matter would be greatly bolstered by the addition of empirical research. Nonetheless, if policy makers are to hand over a large part of the education of professionals to workplace practitioners, who act as linchpins between communities of practice, it would seem that the need for spelling out the mentor's

role in the educative process, how this differs to previous more traditional and supervisory roles, and appropriate professional development provision are now priorities.

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