



**Mentoring beginning teachers: professional learning for mentees and mentors**

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Mentoring beginning teachers: professional learning for mentees and mentors

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper introduces this special issue focusing on the mentoring of beginning teachers which supports the professional learning of not only mentees but also mentors. The paper identifies the varied aims of beginning teacher mentoring programmes, some of the reasons for mentoring and an introduction to the six research papers published in the issue.

**Design/methodology/approach** - The papers in this issue examine different perspectives relating to the mentoring of student teachers and newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Different types of mentoring relationships are examined in various international contexts. The research, from Australia, the Republic of Ireland, Malta, Norway, Scotland, the USA and Wales, addresses challenges that can occur in mentoring relationships, and enables us to better understand the professional learning that takes place in successful mentoring relationships.

**Findings** - The authors of the papers delineate how critical reflective practice, inquiry into professional practice, collaboration and professional learning for both mentees and mentors are key aims for many mentoring programmes. The six studies used different methods to investigate external and/or school-based mentoring programmes for student teachers and NQTs.

**Research limitations/implications** - A snapshot of current research into professional learning is provided with most studies being small qualitative ones. However, common themes can be identified across countries and contexts. The authors of each paper outline the implications for teacher education for their own contexts, as well as for international contexts.

**Originality/value** - Teacher education programmes employ mentoring pairs and triads in order to develop particular traits and reflective practices in teachers. Research shows how mentor programmes provide classroom experience and professional learning for student and newly qualified teachers as well as professional learning for teacher mentors. University tutors play a key role in supporting not only the mentees and mentors but also the mentoring relationship.

**Keywords** professional learning, mentoring in education, mentoring, teacher mentors

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5 **Paper type** General review  
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8 This special issue of the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* focuses on the  
9 mentoring of student and new teachers from kindergarten to grade 12 schools and the role  
10 mentoring plays in the professional learning of both mentees and mentors. Research participants, in  
11 the studies discussed in the six papers, include student teachers (teacher candidates), newly  
12 qualified teachers (NQTs), school-based and external teacher mentors and university tutors  
13 (supervisors). The aims of the issue are to examine different perspectives on mentoring of student  
14 and new teachers; to investigate some of the processes involved in this mentoring; to understand  
15 the types of relationships that are created in different contexts; to explore new ways of addressing  
16 challenges presented in mentoring relationships; and to better understand the professional learning  
17 that takes place in successful mentoring relationships. While mentee professional learning, such as  
18 critical thinking skills and reflective practice, is of particular interest, mentors' professional learning  
19 is also investigated.  
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29 Many countries have difficulties in attracting and retaining teachers and pressure has increased on  
30 schools and teachers to improve pupil outcomes (Eurydice Network, 2012) and reduce gaps in  
31 attainment (for example, Scottish Government, 2016). With a growing focus on pupil outcomes in  
32 schools across the world, there is a growing emphasis on improving teacher quality (Teacher  
33 Education Ministerial Advisory Group, 2015). One mechanism to achieve both better teacher quality  
34 and improved pupil outcomes is to better prepare student and new teachers for the work of being a  
35 school teacher. Thus, mentoring in teacher education often has the dual aims of personal support  
36 and professional learning because the mentee receives assistance to assimilate into a new role as  
37 well as to develop instructional skills. Universally, teacher preparation across different countries has  
38 become more diverse with university-/community- and school-based settings introduced (for  
39 example, the Teach First Training Programme in England). Worldwide attention is being focused on  
40 teaching as an evidence- and research-based profession (Timperley et al., 2007). All the above  
41 considerations highlight the need for continuing international dialogue and research in the field of  
42 mentoring for new teachers, and this special issue contributes to that dialogue.  
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53 There are many different types of mentoring programme available for student and new teachers.  
54 The authors of the papers in this special issue provide different perspectives on how mentoring as  
55 professional learning is delivered internationally. Empirical research on mentoring in schools comes  
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3 from Australia, the Republic of Ireland, Malta, Norway, Scotland, the USA and Wales. The papers  
4 illustrate how mentoring and professional learning can be implemented to support both student and  
5 new teachers and how the mentoring process can provide professional learning opportunities for  
6 the mentors.  
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11 These mentoring programmes, for those seeking to enter or those who have just entered the  
12 teaching profession, may have different primary objectives. For some programmes, the emphasis is  
13 on providing classroom experience or producing classroom-ready teachers, confident risk-takers or  
14 critical reflective practitioners. In all the programmes, mentoring is perceived to be an invaluable  
15 part of teacher education, and in particular, in teacher induction, when new teachers may feel they  
16 are in a vulnerable situation (Shanks, 2014). There are many variants in how teachers are mentored  
17 in terms of: process; frequency of mentoring activities; preparation or training for the roles of  
18 mentee and mentor; physical proximity of the mentor to the mentee; and mentoring in pairs (dyads)  
19 or triads when a university tutor is involved. All these different factors are influenced by school, local  
20 municipality and national policies, as well as the financial resources available, and the value placed  
21 on teacher professional learning by wider society. Factors related to the individual mentees and  
22 mentors involved may affect their professional learning, for example mentees' individual learning  
23 dispositions (Shanks *et al.*, 2012).  
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34 As I reviewed each of the chosen papers, some common themes emerged in relation to the aims of  
35 the mentoring programmes such as critical reflective practice, inquiry into professional practice and  
36 collaboration between teachers. Clutterbuck (2013) wrote in this journal of examining research on  
37 mentoring in terms of the research background, the definition of mentoring that is used, the context  
38 and process of the mentoring, the outcomes of the mentoring and the relevance of the research. In  
39 reviewing the papers for this issue, it seemed pertinent to ask who, what, when and where, why and  
40 so what in relation to each of the mentoring programmes being investigated.  
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47 • Who is involved? All teachers or only the mentors? The paper by Bentley, Workman and  
48 Overby shows that student teachers were 'adopted' not only by their own teacher mentors  
49 but by all the teacher mentors. External mentors were used in a national mentoring  
50 programme for new teachers in Wales (Daly). Local municipalities, schools and universities  
51 all worked together for student teacher mentoring partnerships discussed by Mtika and  
52 Robson.  
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- What exactly takes place? Is there only formal mentoring or does it happen informally as well? Each paper explains the mentoring activities that took place, such as observations, feedback and support in Beutel and Crosswell's Australian study, structured conversations with set goals and actionable steps (USA, Kindall), feedback after an observation by the mentor or mentee (Malta, Attard Tonna *et al.*), meetings of NQTs, mentors and university tutors (Scotland, Mtika and Robson), regular reflections written by the mentee (USA, Bentley *et al.*) or less formal mentoring, for example with learning conversations (Republic of Ireland, Attard Tonna *et al.*) or more informal mentoring alongside the more formal, for example, general support and advice (USA, Bentley *et al.*).
- When and where does the mentoring take place? The mentors in Beutel and Crosswell and Daly's studies received two days' training each year. The mentoring they provided took place in schools and the NQTs in Daly's study took part in three days' face-to-face mentoring alongside online mentoring. The student teachers in Kindall's study had daily and weekly feedback, weekly training sessions and monthly observations and seminars. In Bentley *et al.*'s study the student teachers were being mentored throughout their yearlong placement in their own and other teachers' classrooms and down the hallway.
- Why is the mentoring being undertaken? It may be to develop professional dispositions of student teachers (Kindall), to develop student teachers to be critical reflective practitioners (Attard Tonna *et al.*), to produce student teachers who have confidence, knowledge and skills (Bentley *et al.*), to produce criticality, dialogue and reflection (Beutel and Crosswell) and/or to bring about change in classroom practice and in pupils' learning outcomes (Daly).

Finally, we come to the 'so what' question, meaning what can we learn from these studies? The perspectives the authors provide point to the fact that professional learning takes place for both the mentors and the mentees in mentoring relationships for new and student teachers. School leaders and administrators, policy makers at national and local level, university tutors and researchers, school-based and external mentors and NQT and teacher student mentees, can all benefit from considering the studies reported in this issue.

Next an overview of each paper is provided. The first two papers highlight the preparation and professional learning that is available to mentors of beginning teachers, the next two focus on what professional learning two mentoring programmes aim to achieve and the final two papers explore how mentees learn from their mentors, university tutors and informal mentors.

Preparing Teachers to Mentor Beginning Teachers: An Australian Case Study

Denise Beutel and Leanne Crosswell present a qualitative case study of 17 mentors involved in a large-scale mentor preparation programme for mentors of beginning teachers in Queensland, Australia. In this mentoring preparation programme, the focus was on reflection, dialogue and criticality. Mentoring was based on a process of collaborative inquiry and encouraging critically reflexive praxis. The professional learning for mentors focused on reflection, dialogue and criticality. This paper contributes to knowledge on the personal and professional impacts of mentoring for the mentor teachers and the contextual factors that make a difference to effective mentoring in schools.

#### External Mentoring for New Teachers: Mentoring Learning for a Change Agenda

Caroline Daly contributes an account of a qualitative study into the professional learning of external mentors. A national programme of mentoring was implemented in Wales to support early career teachers' professional learning. This paper provides results from the narrative analysis of 70 external mentors' learning and development. Daly has produced eight theoretically informed principles to provide a foundation for mentor development programmes to support mentors of early career teachers. She states that embracing uncertainty is essential to teacher mentors' learning and development and that external mentors' boundary-crossing potential supports new teachers' development. The external mentors could be regarded as a community of practice and this professional community brought agency to their learning. Daly suggests that external mentors have highly complex professional learning needs of their own in their work of transforming education through their role as boundary crossers and their ability to disturb schools' routinised practices.

#### Mentoring Pre-Service Educators in the Development of Professional Disposition

Heather Kindall provides an account of the content of mentoring rather than the process of mentoring or mentor professional learning. The student teachers in this pilot study in the USA were mentored about the role of professional dispositions in teaching. The study was designed to investigate whether change and growth about perceptions of professional dispositions can be developed through focused mentoring. This mentoring within teacher preparation may guide student teachers' understanding of their professional growth and development, awareness of their attitudes and their view of complexity in the classroom. A professional disposition inventory provided a consistent tool to structure professional growth and discussions around professional dispositions. The study also brought about learning by the researchers and the honing and expansion of the definition of professional disposition.

### Teacher Mentoring and the Reflective Practitioner Approach

Michelle Attard Tonna, Eva Bjerkholt and Eimear Holland conducted a cross-case analysis of research studies in Malta, Norway and the Republic of Ireland. Mixed methods were used in three separate studies with mentors of student teachers, mentors of NQTs, student teachers, NQTs and university tutors. The mentors were provided with education on facilitating critical reflection for mentees. Reflective practices were employed in the mentoring processes in these three different European contexts and the perceived impact of the mentoring was studied. The authors report on the need for a developmental approach towards mentoring and the need to challenge traditional hierarchical relationships. They also encourage a commitment to collaborative, inquiry-oriented approaches to mentoring. The professional forms of inquiry depend on the type of relationship and collaboration forged between teacher mentor and mentee.

### Being “Adopted” into a Teaching Community: Explaining Mentoring Relationships in a Yearlong Field Placement

Erinn Bentley, Madison Workman and Alex Overby provide a qualitative research study from the USA on the relationship between six student teachers (teacher candidates) of secondary English and their school-based mentors, during a pilot of a full academic year placement in one school department. They consider the student teachers’ growth and the central part that the mentoring relationship played between student teachers and classroom teachers. The mentoring was part of a collaborative process bound up in student teachers’ daily interactions with their mentor teachers, students, peers and their university supervisor. The student teachers were ‘adopted’ by their school-based mentor teachers over the yearlong placement, and honest constructive feedback between the mentor and mentee was possible with the help of the university supervisor. Mentors’ encouragement enabled risk-taking as the student teachers tried out new strategies in the classroom. The authors discuss the informal mentoring that took place ‘down the hallway’ as teachers in the English department took part in mentoring within and as a collaborative community. This approach is not without its challenges, such as ensuring a good match between mentor and mentee, finding placements where there is an ‘open door’ classroom philosophy and spontaneous ‘down-the-hallway’ mentoring occurs naturally.

Newly Qualified Teachers' Professional Learning through Practitioner Enquiry: Investigating Partnership-Based Mentoring

Peter Mtika and Dean Robson detail a partnership-based mentoring model and investigate how both new teacher mentees and teacher mentors learned. This qualitative study investigated the partnership between local authorities, a university and schools in Scotland. The mentoring was part of a local, layered community approach within a national teacher induction scheme. The researchers found that the collaborative partnership approach helped NQTs bridge the theory-practice gap and develop their own reflective skills. The classroom mentors understood they were learning more than just how to mentor NQTs; they were reassessing both their own practice and the importance of engagement with policy and research. The community aspects of the partnership approach strengthened professional networks, reduced feelings of isolation and supported the mentees' practitioner enquiries. Factors necessary for success included the mentees' motivation and the learning environment in the school.

Conclusion

This special issue focuses on mentoring of beginning teachers as a means of facilitating professional learning for mentees and mentors in schools. The aim has been to contribute to the existing body of literature pertaining to the benefits, challenges and implications of mentoring as professional learning for mentors as well as mentees in K-12 (elementary, primary and secondary) schools. The formal mentoring of beginning teachers, encompassing student teachers, provisionally registered teachers and newly qualified teachers, is currently being developed and investigated in many countries. Teacher education programmes employ mentoring pairs and triads in order to develop particular traits and reflective practices in teachers and more emphasis is now being placed on mentor preparation and mentor benefits. In the future, it would be useful to further investigate the role of external mentors and that of university tutors involved in mentoring. There is still a gap in the literature on what happens to mentees and mentors after the mentoring relationship comes to an end (Clutterbuck, 2013), what could be termed the conscious uncoupling of a mentoring relationship.

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## About the Guest Editor

Dr Rachel Shanks is a Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. She is Co-Editor of the journal *Education in the North*, serves on the European Educational Research Association's Open Learning (Network 6) Programme Committee and on the Executive Board of the Scottish Educational Research Association. Dr Shanks has had a varied career having worked in widening participation in higher education, adult learning, benefits advice, trade union education, employment rights and as a law lecturer. This wide-ranging experience has led to her research interests in professional learning, informal workplace learning and community learning and development. She has conducted research into new teachers' workplace learning, the use of MOOCs for professional learning and teacher learning environments. Dr Shanks can be contacted at r.k.shanks@abdn.ac.uk