Developing mentoring as a space for [trans]formative conversations

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Formative

• .... serving to form something, having a profound influence on a person’s development

Transformative

• .... causing a marked change in someone, to change in form, appearance, or structure, to metamorphose
3 engagement activities
3 research propositions
3 reflective questions
Engagement activities

- Paired conversation
- Individual observation
- Small group review
Paired conversation

• Who do you talk with about your own work?
• Why them?
• What do you typically talk about?
• Are your conversations ones during which, and from which, you learn?
• Does your practice change as a result?
Individual observation

• For each of the next 3 images ....

• Note down a few words or phrases to describe the nature of the situation and interaction
Small group review

• What might these two activities tell us about conversation as part of mentoring students teachers?
Research propositions

Cautionary tales → Mentoring ‘spaces’ → Developing mentoring talk
Cautionary tales

We train teachers up just to break them down

AFTER a recent round of school visits, on which I observed student teachers, I found myself taking stock.

I have been training teachers for more than a decade. I have seen four standards rewritten, designed PGCEs split between professional and master’s level, accommodated the changes needed to welcome School Direct and worked with trainees doing university courses. I have interviewed hundreds of prospective student teachers, watched thousands of lessons and developed working relationships with dozens of mentors.

The numbers creep up, questionnaires completed, qualifications awarded and jobs secured. Am I proud? Yes. But my overriding thought is how pleased I am that I don’t know the number of teaching posts abandoned by those bright newcomers who have so much to offer. When I go back into schools, people I had hoped would become mentors are often no longer teaching.

And why is this? Well, we have subverted school visits to provide support, coaching and the opportunity of chats with distracted mentors as we dash along corridors. Summaries of trainee teachers’ progress often extend only to “I hardly see them”, “They’re doing fine” or “We’re still working on the same two targets”.

I observe lessons from behind a pile of “evidence files”, trying to make sense of the context and the practice I must assess teaching and learning in a snapshot.

And then there’s the lesson review: “Let’s talk about learning – your pupils’ and yours.” I try to resist the inevitable routine of ticking off targets – they are a poor substitute for professional reprieve.

This system is devoid of passion and has been simplified beyond use. We need to work harder at the entrance stage of the profession to ensure that these talented teachers stick around.

People I had hoped would become mentors are often no longer even teaching.

It is difficult for teachers to engage in interaction [with each other] with sufficient frequency, specificity, and depth to generate new insights into teaching dilemmas or to foster instructional innovation.

Horn & Little [2010]

Judgement and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education

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MENTORING ‘SPACES’

PHYSICAL / TEMPORAL ‘SPACE’

What activities occur;
How individuals undertake their activities;
How the space is configured & set up;
The productiveness of actions.

SOCIAL ‘SPACE’

How individuals connect & relate to each other;
What roles are taken;
Formal or informal relationships;
Significance of power, trust & solidarity;
How individuals feel in the social space.

SEMANTIC ‘SPACE’

What is said & written;
The nature of the language used;
The balance of formality or informality;
The meaning, intention & comprehensibility of communication;
How communication is received & responded to.

Developing Mentoring Talk

Stimulate
Know how to initiate thoughtful reflections and stimulate decisions but also know when to hold back and let the other take the initiative.
Use what is available to create stimulus, to provoke discussion. Try video, agreed observation notes, teacher learning journal, pupils’ work, planning etc

Scaffold
Introduce a sense of scale in discussion. Be aware of the relationships between...
Critical moments (unplanned but interesting),
Planned learning episodes,
The lesson as a whole,
Broad themes which open up discussion about Teaching and Learning,
Big ideas – exploring the relationship between school, individuals and society.

Sustain
Think about your tone of voice – keep it neutral and curious.
Create opportunities for time travel - think ahead, think backwards, think laterally.
Create a dynamic conversation in which there are opportunities to share problems, to pose & respond to questions, to extend thinking, to build solutions.

(Lofthouse, 2017)
Reflective questions

In mentoring what are our formative and transformative aims?

How can we create a space for [trans]formative conversations?

What changes can I make in my practices?
Useful reading and references

• Lofthouse, R (2016) Teacher Coaching; A collection of think-pieces about professional development and leadership through teacher coaching. Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, Newcastle University, UK http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cflat/assets/Documents/Coaching%20Collection%20Lofthouse.pdf

• Lofthouse, R., Leat, D & Towler, C. Improving Teacher Coaching in Schools; A Practical Guide, CfBT Education Trust


• Lofthouse, R. & Thomas, U. (2017) Concerning collaboration; teachers’ perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices. Professional Development in Education, 43 (1) 36-56

• Timperley, H. http://www.aitsl.edu.au/professional-growth/research/professional-conversations