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Re-imagining Mentoring as a Dynamic Hub in the Transformation of Initial Teacher Education: The Role of Mentors and Teacher Educators

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Abstract

Purpose

Teacher education in many countries is under reform with growing differences in its form and function. This is indicative of ongoing negotiations around the place of theory, research and practice in teachers' professional learning. However, the demand for mentoring of trainee teachers during often-extended and multiple school-based placements is a relative constant. Indeed, with the trend towards greater school-based professional experience, mentoring practices become ever more critical. This is the focus of this paper.

Design / Methodology / Approach

This is a conceptual paper written from the perspective of an experienced teacher educator in England, drawing on both practical experience and a body of associated research. It can be conceptualised as related to cases of practice, linked to episodes of practitioner research grounded in the ethics of the improvability of practice, the desire to meet the needs of the professional communities and a deep understanding of the demands and cultures of their workplaces.

Findings

Mentoring can be re-imagined as a dynamic hub within a practice development-led model for individual professional learning and institutional growth. Acting on this conceptualisation would allow mentors, trainees and other supporting teacher educators to contribute to the transformation of professional learning practices and educational contexts.

Originality / Value

This paper goes beyond offering helpful guidance to participants and stakeholders in mentoring, or stipulating standards to be achieved, to considering what might be described as a hopeful or transformational stance in relation to mentoring. Teacher educators can continue to bring value to the transformation of teacher education through a focus on mentoring as an educative process.

Key words: mentoring, teacher education, model

Re-imagining Mentoring as a Dynamic Hub in the Transformation of Initial Teacher Education: The Role of Mentors and Teacher Educators

Introduction

Teacher education is in flux and under reform, with growing international differences emerging in its form and function. England mirrors other countries, such as the United States and Australia, offering multiple routes of entry to the teaching profession. To some extent, this flux and diversity is indicative of ongoing negotiations around the place of theory, research and practice in teachers' professional learning. In England, it is also influenced by policy decisions related to growing difficulties in teacher recruitment and the desire to create a more diverse professional community. The perceived necessity for student or trainee teachers to spend substantial time in schools is now a given, with professional and academic elements of programmes being interwoven and integrated through a range of curricular and programme designs. Given the significant duration that student and trainee teachers spend on school placements, or even in salaried positions, the role of their school-based mentors is critical.

This conceptual paper is written from my perspective as an experienced teacher educator based in an English university and draws on both my practical experience in that role and the body of my associated published research. By reflecting on this dual work, I suggest a new model of individual professional learning and institutional growth which can be driven by a focus on mentoring practices. The purpose of this paper is threefold. Firstly, I use this model-making process and its potential as a tool to illustrate the role of research-informed practice development in school-based teacher education, thus making an argument for maintaining university-based research in critical aspects of teacher education. Secondly, I offer the model as a means for those involved in developing, supporting and practising mentoring in initial teacher education to consider its dynamic dimensions and potential ways through which it can be enhanced. Thirdly, I propose that mentoring should be supported as the foundation of future professional development practices and cultures to support and sustain teachers into successful careers. As such, I envisage this paper to be of value to teacher educators (both in universities and schools) supporting mentors and student teachers, to teacher education programme designers including those developing mentor training, to policy-makers in the field and to mentors and student teachers themselves.

Initial teacher education in disrupted and contested territory: the English context

The changes in England with regard to initial teacher education are indicative of system-level changes in many countries. In the English context, the changes to teacher education have been at the forefront of the rapidly evolving and politically sought ‘school-led self-improving system’ (Hargreaves, 2010, 2012). Alternative routes into teaching have proliferated and become more diverse, new training providers have been accredited and the link between universities and teacher education has been eroded. The result is increasing complexity in initial teacher education partnerships and shifts in the financial underpinnings of teacher training. In 2018, the first postgraduate teaching apprenticeships were approved by the Department for Education (DfE) which has jurisdiction in England. This new route is added to the list which includes School Direct, TeachFirst, university-led undergraduate and PGCE (Postgraduate Certificate in Education) routes and Troops to Teachers. The proliferation of routes has altered the nature of collaborative and transactional relationships between participating organisations and individuals. These types of changes to the landscape of initial professional development for teachers form the backdrop, but not the substance, of this paper. The terms initial teacher ‘training’ (ITT) rather than initial teacher ‘education’ (ITE) and ‘trainees’ rather than ‘student teachers’ are now routinely adopted in England. While there is no standard way of defining ITT compared to ITE some people (myself included) do believe that the language of training rather than education is potentially reductive. In this paper I will use the term student teacher to include those referred to as trainees in England and ‘pre-service teachers’ or ‘interns’ in other international contexts, and also ITE (rather than ITT).

In this period of radical reform, student teachers enter disrupted and contested territory, where teachers, academics, school leaders, teacher educators, school-based mentors, policy-makers and student teachers themselves have had their roles and responsibilities changed. Although in England schools designated as academies and free schools (directly funded by the DfE rather than local authorities and often involving a sponsor) are permitted to employ non-qualified staff as teachers, teacher training and education is still seen as an essential component of the teacher supply chain of recruitment, retention and professional development. However, in this landscape, schools, multi-academy trusts, not-for-profit organisations, universities, teaching unions and government agencies continue to reinvent themselves to keep up with changing policy demands. Some changes may open up opportunities for new working relationships. In England, for example, some schools and multi-academy trusts (including teaching schools) have become school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) providers, which provide and are the accredited body for assessing student teachers in terms

of professional standards to gain qualified teacher status (QTS). As national policy has changed rapidly, relationships between government, schools, training providers (including universities) and student teachers as fee-paying consumers have become more complex and dynamic, with power in decision making and funding arrangements shifting year on year and partnerships often becoming vulnerable. This lack of sustainability is evidenced by the difficulties experienced in some areas of even securing school placements for student teachers.

The partnerships which characterise teacher training have been altered, and even with radical programme redevelopment to accommodate the new policy directions, tensions can still arise. This is exemplified by Burch and Jackson (2013) who used Soja's (1997) theory of third space to critique an aspect of the redesign of teacher education programmes in England driven by the impacts of policies based on the rhetoric of 'on the job' (School Direct) training. Burch and Jackson concluded that the desire to engage teachers and university staff in working together, rather than simply working 'with' each other, is not easily realised. Vulnerability also exists at the system level; for example, SCITTs have the discretion to decide whether or not to work with universities who offer an academic programme and qualification running alongside, or whether to only offer the award of QTS (without an academic qualification). There are examples of long-established university schools of education in England which have now withdrawn from teacher education as a result of this insecure landscape, and unfavourable school inspections¹ have resulted in SCITTs losing their accreditation as an ITE provider.

A focus on mentoring whatever the route into teaching

Amongst these significant structural changes in ITE, some apparently familiar practices remain, and mentoring of student teachers during often-extended and multiple school-based placements is one of these. In the context of English teacher education, mentors are more experienced teachers who are designated to support student teachers in developing the skills and knowledge relevant to the profession. Mentors also take responsibility on behalf of the ITE provider for making assessments of the student teacher's progress towards, and then compliance with, the standards for QTS. Given the significance of the role, and the trend towards longer periods of school-based professional experience and training for student teachers, I argue that the quality of mentoring practices has become ever more important.

However, mentoring of student teachers is not a straightforward professional activity. In her work on primary mentoring, Wilson (2014) recognised the tensions inherent in being both the mentor and the

class teacher, using cultural–historical activity theory (CHAT) to explore how activities undertaken for both roles may have contradictory goals. Similarly, in my research I found that the performative characteristics of schools result in some mentoring being ‘buffeted by a system driven by targets, standards and assessment regimes’ (Lofthouse and Thomas, 2014, p216). Changes to ITE provision and partnership arrangements risk making the already difficult activity of mentoring itself vulnerable. These tensions can be exacerbated when student teachers are directly recruited by schools and sometimes fill gaps in teaching staff. It is not unusual, for example, for a salaried School Direct student teacher to become the only teacher of a subject such as music or computer science in a secondary school. They then have the responsibility for pupil attainment and progress without the benefit of an experienced subject specialist line manager, let alone a mentor. In school-led (rather than university-led) ITE provision, the mentor often takes on an enhanced role, but may do so with very little additional time or training. Even when a provider offers additional training, mentors frequently cannot attend due to workload pressures associated with their non-mentoring teaching roles.

Given these challenges, it is perhaps not a surprise that the inspectorate and external examiners in England articulate concerns of variations in the quality of mentoring of student teachers. In response to these past findings, the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) *ITE Inspection Handbook* (2015) requires that mentoring be provided by experienced and expert mentors, responds to student teachers’ needs and improves student teachers’ teaching skills, and does this by modelling good practice in teaching and providing high-quality coaching and mentoring. The need to provide quality assured mentoring was reinforced in 2016 when the DfE published new national standards for school-based initial teacher training mentors, based on work conducted by the Teaching Schools Council (DfE, 2016a). Subsequently, in 2017 the newly formed Chartered College of Teachingⁱⁱ (another new stakeholder in the English education landscape) prioritised mentoring as the theme for a roundtable discussion with multiple stakeholders. In addition, securing the role of mentors during teachers’ extended period as newly qualified teachers is a key aspect of the DfE’s response to the 2017–18 formal public consultation on ‘strengthening’ QTS (DfE, 2018).

While guidelines and quality assurance mechanisms in ITE mentoring seem to proliferate, Burch and Jackson (2013) found that there were still limited opportunities for those responsible for operationalising them to genuinely collaborate or indeed to problematise the potential contradictions of the role of both mentor and teacher, as indicated by Wilson (2014). The new mentor standards, for example, describe the expectations which can be placed on the *mentor* as an individual, rather than

focusing on the how to resolve some of the dilemmas associated with *mentoring* as a practice. Unhelpful patterns of mentoring may emerge, perhaps as the result of cultural norms or the impacts of shifts in policy. Hobson and Malderez (2013) coined the term judgementoring to describe a tendency – encouraged by mentors’ involvement in the assessment of mentees and by the wider performative culture – for mentors to make and share judgements of student teachers’ performance too early in their interactions, with the potential to undermine the supportive and developmental nature of the relationship. This is in stark contrast to the potential development of mentoring as collaborative practice proposed by Sorensen (2012). Developing mentoring as collaboration may be an ideal, but as Kemmis *et al.* (2014) found through their international comparative study of mentoring of new teachers, ‘mentoring as supervision co-exists with mentoring as support, and with weak forms of mentoring as collaborative self-development’ (p. 163). However, as Kemmis *et al.* go on to say, it is inevitable that mentoring exists in and is experienced in multiple forms even within single jurisdictions.

So, despite being a long-standing key dimension of partnership-based teacher education in England, and despite the current shift towards school-led teacher training, mentoring remains a vulnerable practice, meaning that its potential to support the professional learning and development of the entrants to the profession is not yet fully realised.

Initial teacher education as a foundation for professional development

In terms of teacher training and education, progression to employment, teacher retention and success, it is useful and relevant to think about ITE as the first part of a career-long continuum of professional development which is, at least in part, located in schools as workplaces and supported by colleagues in the workplace. The importance of strengthening this continuum was recognised by the European Union’s ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy (2015) which comprised experts nominated by 30 European countries and European social partner organisations in their 2015 report. If we position mentoring as enabling early workplace learning, we can articulate why it matters through Billet’s (2011) view of three core purposes of practice-based learning. This lens would suggest that mentoring should:

1. support student teachers to develop an informed desire to enter the profession and consider possible future career routes (or to decide that they do not want to teach);
2. ensure student teachers have the opportunity to develop and demonstrate the necessary capacities required for entry to the profession (for example, determined by QTS in England);

3. allow student teachers to develop occupational competencies necessary for future professional learning in a range of school contexts and professional roles.

In other words, the impact of mentoring should go beyond ITE and support new teachers to gain the skills they will need to keep developing through continuing professional development (CPD). It is not only important to look at career phases, but also at the inter-relational aspects of professional practice development and learning opportunities. We should not forget, for example, that mentoring itself may be a productive opportunity for professional development for the mentor, not simply because mentors may acquire new teaching ideas brought in by the student teacher, but because mentoring can aid reflection and in some contexts be practised and supported in a way that links it to leadership development (Thornton, 2014). In her analysis of models of CPD, Kennedy (2014) theorised that CPD can be transmissive, malleable or transformative, relating these to the ‘increasing capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency’ (p. 693). I argue that mentoring also has the potential to exist in any of these forms, and as such will often have a legacy in the personal epistemologies that influence how both mentors and their student teachers engage in and with future CPD.

In England, there is the opportunity for the sort of joined-up thinking advocated by the ET2020 Working Group on Schools Policy (2015). The existing DfE policy-level guidance documents on mentoring are positioned alongside additional guidance for other career development components, with the new mentor standards being published at a similar time to both the programme content guidance written in response to the *Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training* (DfE, 2015) and the first ever *Standard for Teachers’ Professional Development* (DfE, 2016b). However, such joined-up thinking can only become reality in the education system-wide enactment of professional development policies, and herein lies a potential problem. The difficulty is that the ‘system’ is considerably complicated by the diverse routes into teaching and the jigsaw of teaching schools, university education departments, private training providers, the Chartered College of Teaching, local authority schools, multi-academy trusts and free schools occupying often competing positions in the landscape in terms of both ITE and CPD.

Thinking differently

Challenging the rhetoric: exercising the wisdom and imagination of teacher educators

University teacher educators have been working in the midst of ITE reform, and in some countries have found themselves isolated due to the shifts in practice resulting from the encroachment of

school-led or privately run provision (such as the SCITTs in England and ‘independent graduate schools of education’ in the United States). From experience and anecdotal evidence, it is clear that in England, the funding for ITE in some universities has become squeezed, and fewer staff (who are now frequently on teaching only contracts, rather than integrated teaching and research contracts), are trying to maintain the standards and procedures demanded by the quality assurance controls of the inspectorate. Much of their current interaction with students, mentors and school-based ITE coordinators can be characterised as relationship management (Ellis and McNicholl, 2015). However, some teacher educators are finding new voices, using their collective expertise from both school and university sectors to challenge the policy-makers’ rhetoric. One such group formed Teacher Education Exchange (a collective of university-based teacher educators and researchers in England) who have imagined what they call Teacher Development 3.0 (Teacher Education Exchange, 2017), building on the work of Kretchmar and Zeichner (2016) in the United States. In their first publication, they identify *transformation* as their objective and state that they

want to imagine what a new and different form of professional preparation and continued development might look like, one that is more effective and sustainable in developing the kinds of teachers we need for the kinds of schools we must have in the twenty-first century. (Teacher Education Exchange, 2017, p. 10)

As a teacher educator, my sympathies lie with their ambitions; I am initially struck by their proposition that to transform the development of the teaching profession we need to include rather than exclude those with varied expertise and to build new relationships and ways of working between stakeholders. Teacher Education Exchange advocates a life-long teaching profession, partly as a response to the growing problems of retaining teachers, but also because life-long teachers are an essential ingredient for sustaining and improving the quality of educational experiences and outcomes, developing significant relationships with learners, parents and communities and carrying the collective memory of the profession. Life-long teachers bring ‘professional wisdom’ (Teacher Education Exchange, 2017, p. 19), which has huge value in the necessary interactional work of supporting and mentoring student teachers.

With my focus on mentoring, I take a similar critical and hopeful stance to Teacher Education Exchange and I continue this paper by offering my perspective on mentoring in ITE. I deliberately use personal and inclusive language. My propositions in relation to the need to continue to develop mentoring are based on my experience over twenty years of professional practice and reflections as a school-based mentor and subsequently as a university-based teacher educator and researcher. This

research led to the development of a conceptual model of practice development for individual professional learning and institutional growth (Lofthouse, 2015).

Thus, I write not only as a researcher, but also as a teacher educator practitioner and as an advocate for change. This positionality is necessary in explaining my conceptualisation of mentoring. I situate mentoring within the complex ecology (not just continuum) of professional development. As such, I consider how we might go beyond offering merely helpful guidance to participants and stakeholders in mentoring, or stipulating standards to be achieved, to considering what might be described as a hopeful or transformational stance. I position mentoring as a dynamic hub through which mentors, their student teachers and other supporting teacher educators might contribute to the transformation of professional learning practices and educational contexts. While my empirical research is situated nationally, and impacted by recent and contemporary policy decisions in England, I draw on research from an international perspective and suggest that given the extent of the ITE and training reform, implications of my conclusions are not limited by national boundaries.

Developing a research-informed model

Much of my own research as a teacher educator can be conceptualised as related to case studies of practice, which fall into two broad categories:

1. Cases of mentoring practice development over which I had influence as a course leader, such as the use of video (Lofthouse and Birmingham, 2010) or observation approaches (Lofthouse and Wright, 2012) in Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE);
2. Cases of practices in schools in which I had academic and practical interest because of their role in professional learning, such as participants' experiences of mentoring and coaching (Lofthouse and Thomas, 2014, 2017).

As a teacher educator working in practice, my research has been underpinned by three ethical principles (Lofthouse *et al.* 2012). Firstly, I have an allegiance with my successive cohorts of learners, who include PGCE students and their mentors, teachers undertaking postgraduate professional development programmes (in coaching and mentoring) and participants in research and development projects. Secondly, I believe that practice can always be improved and indeed that even sustaining quality is not an inert act, and that reflection on practice is the focus for improvement. Finally, I recognise the strategic priorities of the institutions for which I work, which in effect

include the university, the schools and colleges in which my students and research participants practice, as well as the field of education more generally. Thus, I believe that my research is grounded in the ethics of the improvability of practice, the desire to meet the needs of the professional communities and my deep understanding of the demands and cultures of their workplaces. The model proposed in the next section emerged from considered reflections on the accumulated evidence of this research.

The model: mentoring as practice development for individual professional learning and institutional growth

The research and development focus on mentoring described above was a generative and iterative process which was interwoven with my research into other aspects of teacher learning. In particular, this wider research related to teacher coaching (Lofthouse and Leat, 2013) and teacher collaboration, including the use of lesson study in both ITT and CPD, (Lofthouse and Thomas, 2017, Lofthouse *et al.* 2017) influenced my thinking. Through reflecting on my body of research and using that to reconsider my direct experiences working in teacher education, I developed a model of practice development for individual professional learning and institutional growth (Lofthouse, 2015). It is this model through which I discuss a new conceptualisation of mentoring, and I will now briefly illustrate how findings in my previous research have led me to this position. The original model has been summarised in relation to mentoring as Figure 1.

A practice development-led model for individual professional learning and institutional growth through mentoring

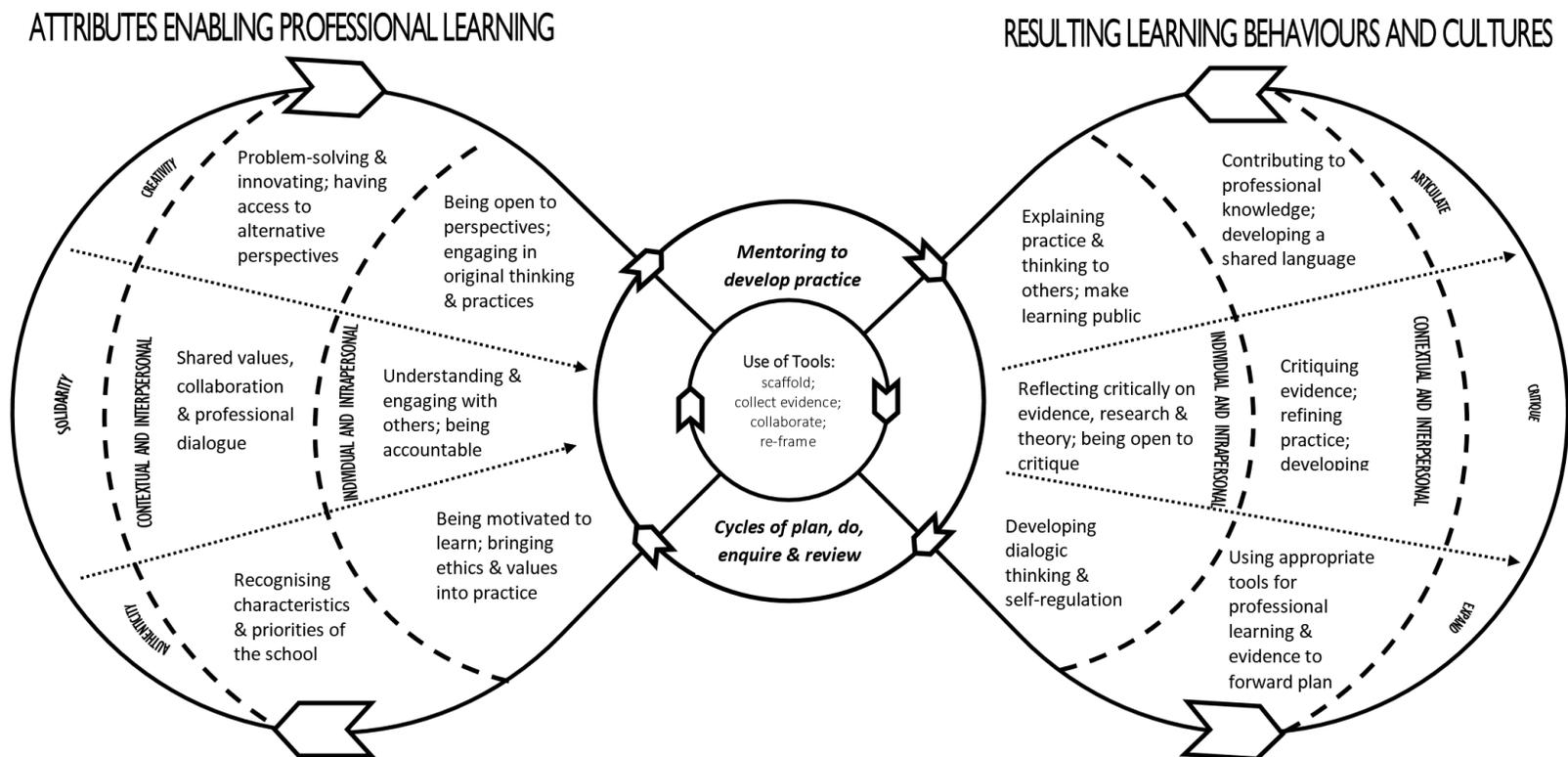


Figure 1

The potential professional learning ecology related to mentoring shown in the model is complex and interrelated. At the centre of the model is the activity, in this case mentoring. This is undertaken with the purpose of supporting the development of the student teachers' practice. The idea that mentoring works through cycles is familiar; at its simplest level, a cycle might be framed as episodes of mentoring with an individual student teacher over the course of a placement, often associated with lesson observations, feedback and target setting. This is often experienced as busy activity, sometimes highly productive, sometimes rather repetitive and always undertaken in the midst of other professional or training activity. Another way of viewing the model in relation to cycles of mentoring would be to reflect on longer time-frames, for example, a student teacher moving between placements as their ITE programme proceeds, taking experiences and learning from mentoring in one placement to the next, or even cycles of mentor development as the mentor gains experience from mentoring subsequent students.

The conversations at the heart of mentoring are crucial, as they promote the cycle of plan, practise, evaluate and review. Mentoring conversation (like all professional dialogue) can be enhanced through appropriate use of tools, which can scaffold learning, collect appropriate evidence from practice, support collaboration or provoke the reframing of previously held beliefs (Lofthouse, 2015). As such tools, such as video (Lofthouse and Birmingham, 2010) or new lesson observation protocols (Lofthouse and Wright, 2012), can be used to trigger and refine the development of more nuanced and productive mentoring. It is in this nuance and productivity that a student teacher's practice development and professional learning can start to become more explicitly related, cumulative and sustained.

On the left-hand side of the model are both the cultural conditions (institutional and interpersonal) and the personal attributes (individual and intrapersonal) which, when aligned, are likely to act as enablers for professional learning based on the development of practice at the centre, in this case mentoring. My research and experience of working in a pedagogic capacity with student teachers and also with teachers who are developing as coaches and mentors suggests that authenticity, creativity and solidarity are significant enablers. In other words, mentoring needs to take account of the specific characteristics and demands of the workplace environment (and educational policy system influencing this), but also provide the student teacher with a safe and supported space for trying new ideas out in practice in that context (Lofthouse, 2015).

The right-hand side of the model proposes that mentoring practices should lead to professional learning, which should result in both mentor and student teacher being willing and able to engage in

articulation, critique and expansion as the outcomes of that learning. This can be at both individual and institutional levels. In practice, this first means that within mentoring conversations the dynamics are such that co-construction of ideas for teaching are possible, and that both the student teacher and mentor could use these ideas to expand their teaching repertoire, leading to opportunities for onward mentoring engagement around joint review. At another level, this would mean that participating in mentoring creates greater capacity to share practices in the wider professional community and to be able to make more informed decisions for teaching which draw on a wide knowledge base held within and unlocked from that community.

The model represents an ideal, and when working well this ecology enables both the mentor and the student teacher to develop their practices and engage in, and benefit from, associated professional learning. The shape and arrows on the model represent the cumulative effects of learning and growth which sustain and renew opportunities for professional learning through the re-iteration of mentoring cycles, with the potential that each cycle allows for further practice development. This can be both the practice of teaching and also the practices of mentoring or being mentored. Recognising how complex effective mentoring practices are, and focusing on developing these practices, can thus be regarded as the rightful hub in the dynamics of ITE. Mentoring can also be developed and deployed productively in a way that supports not only the ITE system but also the development of CPD and practice development in the wider school.

The model as a tool for action

Developing the model in the iteration summarised in Figure 1 represented my own sense making based on my accrued experience and knowledge in the broad field of teacher education and professional development. This has not been a linear process but has been a somewhat chaotic cognitive journey (Lofthouse, 2015). As Cook (2009) proposed, there is a purpose to this 'messy area' in the research process. She suggested that it creates a 'forum for the exchange of perceptions and beliefs, a place of co-construction where strands of knowledge are unearthed and critiqued' (p. 281). In some instances, my 'forum' has been interpersonal, in others intrapersonal. While the model-building stages (through three distinct iterations) were the result of abstract thinking or theorisation based on accrued knowledge and intuition, they have all been influential in my strategic thinking in terms of taught programme design and partnerships for which I have had responsibility as a teacher educator.

I now propose that the model can be used as a tool for the ‘iterative process of theorising and verification’ (Briggs 2007, p. 590) – indeed, that is how it has been and continues to be used in my own research and development work. The original model is not limited to mentoring, but in using it to reframe mentoring in the wider professional learning ecology, the model has become a tool for knowledge construction (Eriksson, 2003, cited in Briggs, 2007) through the development of theorised practice. While the model is not based on systematic analysis of qualitative data from a singular defined research project or professional context (the key methodological approach advocated by Briggs), it is driven by my interpretivist stance as a practitioner researcher. It is also offered as a tool to others; perhaps it will stimulate debate, support reviews of current practice and enable the negotiation of new provision for professional learning and opportunities for practice development through mentoring.

Conclusions and recommendations for practice

Making mentoring development the hub for transforming ITE

Teacher educators take on a range of positions in relation to those they educate (Vanassche and Kletchermans, 2014). Each position affects their ‘action agenda’ and accepted responsibility for ‘learning processes’ (p. 125) and can determine the positions that the learners themselves adopt. For my part, I have produced a model, conceptualised as a result of critical and reflexive engagement with my own and others’ research on professional learning, which can be applied to mentoring, coaching, lesson study, teacher research or other cycles of practice development. It can thus be used to articulate how student teachers and their mentors, and the wider system, might gain the most benefit from mentoring. The model helps me to conclude that there needs to be a deliberate focus by those engaged in, and developing policies for, ITE to develop and enhance mentoring practices, because this may be one of the most productive ways to enhance the outcomes from ITE.

An initial recommendation from the concepts underpinning the model is that developing enhanced mentoring practices could be based on mentors themselves becoming scholars of mentoring practice and taking an activist approach to maintaining its critical position at the hub of teacher education. The risk is that in the school-led ‘ITT’ system meaning, teacher educators have to abandon their ‘knowing’ pedagogic relationships with student teachers. I suggest that these relationships could be sustained and enriched by working in more educative ways with the mentors *and* the student teachers while they are on teaching placements. This could become a genuinely engaging and productive ‘third space’ activity where procedural teacher training partnership management arrangements and

time-consuming relationship management are substantially transformed into collaborative professional learning opportunities.

My second recommendation is that we need to reclaim the language and meaning of teacher education, not in a pedantic fashion or as a semantic attempt to wrestle back control from policy-makers, but because education is different to training. By understanding that development as a new teacher is an educative process, we recognise that it is not simply linear and cannot be boiled down to instruction, modelling, target setting and monitoring. Mentors need to act in many capacities towards their student teachers, and indeed, it helps to view them as school-based teacher educators of student teachers (whatever type of programme they are enrolled on). Through this positioning, it can be made more explicit that the development required of student teachers will be based on, and result in, broad and transferable professional learning, not just an acquisition of skills suited to surviving their training placements. The knowledge and skills they need to develop must be adaptable across a range of complex contexts which they will encounter, and be actors and influencers in, during both their initial and continual career development phases. Creating these opportunities requires some deliberate spaces and employment of informed imagination, as many of those in the sector (in both schools and universities) are locked in to the very busy work of managing programmes and quality assurance.

The potential role of teacher educators in transforming ITE

A further recommendation is that as teacher educators, we need to take care that the reform agenda does not further isolate us, keeping us endlessly busy in practice or pushing us out of practice and back into our metaphorical ivory towers. I propose that in order for university-based teacher educators to themselves sustain their own practice development and professional learning, so that they can make a genuine contribution to mentoring development (for example), they need the individual attributes outlined in the model (Figure 1) and to work in an organisation which supports the same attributes (creativity, solidarity and authenticity). As such, teacher educators need to be offered and seek authentic opportunities for engagement, they need permission to be creative in looking for solutions and they need to work in solidarity with each other, mentors and student teachers. As a teacher educator fortunate enough to be working across teaching and research and in two very different universities, I have investigated professional learning at both micro and macro levels, for example, exploring the dialogue characteristics of coaching and mentoring while also engaging with the imposed relevancies of changes in government policy of school-led teacher

training, such as the shift to School Direct. This gives me a confidence to work and analyse practices at different scales and to recognise the interdependence of these.

In relation to mentoring within ITE, I argue that as a teacher educator (for both student teachers working on their practice and mentors and coaches), I am an insider researcher. For me, like those teacher educators in the Teacher Education Exchange collective, this insider position exists on a spectrum, as my ‘relationship with the researched is not static, but fluctuates constantly’ (Mercer, 2007, p. 13). Within this changing context, we have to develop reflexive positions based on the evolution of what I understand as a normative and interpretive stance, the position from which we view the world. Vanassche and Kletchermans (2014) stated that ‘teacher educators’ reflexive positioning of themselves is a crucial factor in understanding the rationale of their practices’ (p. 119). They cite Davies and Harré (1990) and remind us that we will continue to be prone to selection of research themes, images and stories and underlying concepts from our personal vantage point. I recognise (for example) that my ontology and epistemology relate to my ‘social, political and professional agendas’ (Sachs, 2001, p. 159). Thus, certain aspects of practice and research feature strongly in my consideration of mentoring in ITE because of my working relationship with my professional and academic role and the policies that influence it. The impact of the work of research-engaged teacher educators can be at many levels, if we regularly work with individual teachers and schools seeking to advance professional learning practices, and also have a voice in international publications and at national forums. It is possible for us to conduct research as participants, sometimes close to the practice of teacher education, sometimes with a little more distance, and the research outcomes can directly impact our practices of engagement with the professional communities of teachers and teacher educators. These are the principles that allow teacher educators to fulfil a unique role in the system.

Seeking wisdom in practice

In his consideration of the ‘inconvenient truths’ about teacher learning, Korthagen (2017) reminds us that ‘teacher learning takes place at the connection between theory, practice and person’ (p. 399). He asserted that it is critical to be realistic and to understand that the starting point for developmental change is the individual, encountering and working in the context of their schools. A consequence of this is that I see professional practice (including deliberate and routine actions) as based on knowledge held by the practitioners. What matters is what each individual thinks, feels and wants and how their own ideas motivate them to learn, and there is no reason to assume that this should not motivate mentoring relationships and practices.

Well-developed practices of mentoring can augment practitioner knowledge because they include critical enquiry into and reflection on experience, recognising that the accumulation of experience alone is insufficient for teachers in any stages of development. In addition, I see a key role for phronesis. The Greek term phronesis is sometimes translated as practical wisdom wisely used in context, ‘the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances’ (Thomas, 2011, p. 23), implying the disposition to act truly and justly according to one’s values and moral stance. Phronesis is most frequently referenced to Aristotle, who proposed it as one of three forms of knowledge alongside *techne* (having a material or practical outcome) and *episteme* (theoretical understanding). I believe that mentors, student teachers and teacher educators should develop and apply phronesis to counter the reductionist technical view of education, to extend the practical view of education and in response to adopting a critical stance which rightly problematises dimensions of education. Practical wisdom wisely used in context enables the development of nuanced and sophisticated practice consonant with one’s values. Mentoring, if well resourced, carefully developed and not seen in isolation but as the hub of a learning ecology, could become a critical site and opportunity for the development and application of phronesis. Transformation of teacher education will be based on such phronesis and will be sustained by the resulting practitioner knowledge of those who practice within the system.

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ⁱ In England, Ofsted inspects all ITT providers and state schools under relevant frameworks. If a school which runs a SCITT receives a grading of ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’, it also loses its permission to run its ITT courses.

ⁱⁱ The Chartered College of Teaching was founded in 2017 as a registered charity with a Royal Charter. Their stated mission is to improve the quality of education for children and young people by supporting teachers, championing great teaching and raising the status of the profession. Their current work is focused on England, although membership is open to all teachers globally.