

'From Mentor to Mentored'

Sarah Fletcher
Lecturer in Education,
University of Bath, Bath,
England BA2 3LF

Abstract

This paper examines one person's perceptions in changing role from being a school based mentor and teacher to being herself mentored on becoming a lecturer in education. It identifies some of the more and less successful aspects of the mentoring experience and suggests provisional guidelines to improve the present system used in one HEI (Higher Education Institution).

After more than twenty years as a teacher in a variety of schools and as a mentor as part of the Licensed Teacher Scheme in Bedfordshire, I joined the School of Education at Bath University. That I have managed to settle in, to enjoy my work as a lecturer and to be well under way with research for a PhD is due in no small part to the efforts of my mentor. Though the journey from being a mentor to being mentored has been a challenging and at times a difficult one, it has nevertheless been rewarding.

On arrival at the University I was assigned to work with a mentor who had been selected before my arrival. This was reassuring as it suggested that my needs had already been examined, but I was concerned that my mentor and I might have very different views about the work we were to do together. I was also concerned about how I would react to being mentored after being a mentor myself. The selection had obviously been sensitively planned and we had much in common; a vital attribute of a potentially successful working relationship. J. and I share, for example, a passion for classroom teaching.

In temperament too there are similarities as we both have a strong urge to fight

abuses of power and position. We are about the same age and we have several shared life experiences. Again this is a crucial factor in our partnership because it means that she has a deep understanding of my standpoint on a number of issues fundamental to my wellbeing, my preferred lifestyle and my family. Since my mentor has a much stronger research profile than myself, with a string of publications in academic journals and experience of supervising students studying for higher degrees, she has been ideally placed to provide me with specific guidance and advice.

My expectations of the Mentoring Experience

It is important to identify the expectations of the mentee in an enquiry into the success of a mentoring programme because mentoring is a process of negotiation and development for mentor as well as mentee. A useful parallel can be drawn with the observations of Furlong and Maynard (1995) who examined factors affecting novice teacher development:

'we discovered ... the speed of the student's progress through the different stages from 'novice teacher' to 'professional educator' is profoundly influenced ... by the attitudes and beliefs they hold and the way these interact with the attitudes and beliefs of their supervising teacher.' (p.98)

My expectations were framed by two principle factors: my own experience as a school-based mentor and the information provided by the University's Personnel Department. It is important to point out that I came to the mentoring situation in

HE with a fundamental belief in the value of mentoring and felt empowered by the knowledge that although my own experience as a mentor had not been without difficulties I felt these had been a spur to reflection and had enhanced my understanding of the possibilities of the mentoring role.

After taking part in a mentor training programme run by Bedfordshire LEA I became responsible for mentoring two Licensed Teachers, and additionally, one newly qualified teacher (NQT) and a mature entrant to school teaching with wide experience of adults in FE. The work with the two Licensed teachers was organised on a formal basis with weekly meetings, in school time where the timetable allowed and out of school where this was the only available option.

School-based Mentor to Licensed Teachers

The programme I assisted in devising for my Licensed Teachers was centred around competences much akin to the D.F.E. guidelines set out in Circular 9/92 (HMSO). Each competence provided the basis for regular discussion during mentoring sessions, with more time allotted to target setting in areas perceived to be problematic. There was regular monitoring of the Licensed teachers' work with classes through in-lesson observation either by myself or by a member of the senior management team in school. Additionally, the Licensed Teachers were encouraged to keep a log of their experience and this provided a further basis for discussion. Both of the Licensed teachers were encouraged to observe other teachers at

work and to discuss pedagogical techniques with those members of staff. Arrangements were also made for the Licensed Teachers to visit other schools where they could observe other experienced subject teachers.

From School-based Mentor to HE-based Mentee

As a result of my experience as a school-based mentor I came to the HE mentoring programme with the following expectations:

- that it would be based on a structured competency based programme with regular monitoring of my progress against set criteria.
- that there would be a regular timetable programme of sessions to work with my mentor using the competences as a basis for discussion and target setting.
- that it would be a flexible programme which would allow me to observe other colleagues including my mentor working with students.
- that monitoring of my progress by my mentor and senior staff within the School of Education would be based on discussion with me and observation of my practice.
- that the mentoring programme would involve co-operation between myself, my mentor and senior staff in the production of a profile and assessment of my capabilities as a new lecturer in education.
- that my previous experience as school teacher and mentor would be

recognised and a mutually agreed programme devised which would be tailored to my particular needs.

Bath University's Mentoring Programme

During the Induction week at the University, the Head of Staff Development asked me how I would feel about being mentored. We talked in general about what mentoring entailed, in terms of having a critical friend and adviser within the department to assist me in successfully completing my probationary period and graduating, as it were, as a 'professional' lecturer. It was encouraging to be asked about my experiences as a school-based mentor and I felt that a genuine effort was being made to take account of my previous experience as a teacher-educator.

Perceptions of my mentor's expectations of her mentee

On meeting my mentor I was struck by her desire to know me not solely as a colleague but as a friend. She took time to get to learn about my personal circumstances: Had I found somewhere suitable to live? How would I/my family cope with me working for long periods away from home? This assistance in basic survival and her friendly, supportive interest helped ease me through an initial period of personal upheaval. Above all, J. explained the three facets of my new employment: teaching, research and administration.

In the early weeks I was particularly grateful for her close monitoring of my progress as a new entrant to the profession. She made a special effort to

introduce me to other staff and to tell me a little about them so I would feel more at ease. If we could not meet for a mentoring session, she contacted me by telephone and, though the mentoring sessions were organised largely on an ad hoc basis, they were frequent and geared to my needs.

I think I has seen her role as a 'gate-keeper' for me. She has deliberately and repeatedly put opportunities in my path, geared to enhance my professional standing. She invited me, for example, to co-organise a mentoring symposium at ECER (European Conference for Educational Research) at Bath University. She suggested I attend important lectures at the Centre for School Improvement, introducing me to colleagues there. She made a point of praising my work in the presence of members of the department, gaining me access to support from a wider range of colleagues than I might otherwise have had.

Stages in a Mentee's Professional Development

Furlong and Maynard (op. cit.) identify several stages in a novice teacher's development which are

'dependent upon the interaction between individual students, their teacher education programme and the school context in which they undertake their practical experience.' (p.70)

The stages they discern appear to start with a stage of 'Early Idealism' where they demonstrate early understandings of their role as a teacher, their relationship with children and the nature of teaching and learning. The second stage is

characterised by a drive for 'Personal survival' which involves feeling vulnerable, the desire to be seen as a professional (a teacher) the drive to 'fit in' and a realisation that they need to challenge their early stage of initial idealism. Next comes a stage where there is a conscious effort to become

established as a teacher (as a professional) and there is consequent concentration by the novice on teaching strategies and emulation of expert practice. Having gained basic confidence and competence, novice teachers begin to relax a little and their learning appears to reach a stage of 'Hitting the plateau'. The final stage is likely to require direct intervention from mentor and tutor in order to enable the novice teacher to reach the stage of 'Moving on.' At this final stage the expectations and beliefs of novice teachers need to be systematically challenged with the intention of forcing the novice to evaluate his or her whole understanding of the role of the teacher.

Stages in my own Professional Development

The model proposed by Furlong and Maynard correlates, to a certain extent, with my perception of my own development from novice to professional lecturer. As Furlong and Maynard (op. cit.) stress, there is not necessarily a linear progression between the stages. I felt I moved through the different stages in what can best be described as a process of spiral progression. Each stage was 'visited' on a number of occasions, sometimes with the intention of moving on and sometimes I found myself musing over an aspect of a stage without any conscious decision.

Having been appointed to the post of lecturer, I experienced a state of early idealism and euphoria approximating to the first stage of Furlong and Maynard's schedule. It had been my wish and my intention for several years to move from teaching pupils to teaching teachers to teach. In part, my school-based mentoring had been deliberately undertaken as a precursor to applying for the new post, a move which I saw as a logical extension of my own teaching. This initial stage of idealism had largely taken place before I arrived at the University for the first week, but to some extent it remains as it did throughout my school teaching career and I hope it will continue to remain.

Stage 1: Setting out the boundaries

On joining the department, I was struck by a sense of apprehension and self-questioning. I had gone through a process of deliberate self cross-examination before applying for the lecturing post and I had contacted many colleagues and friends already working in HE in order to sound out their views on the new environment. I did this intending to establish boundaries in which to frame my own impressions of the new post.

Stage 2: Personal Survival

Having satisfied myself I had made the correct career decision, I looked at my own expectations of HE and the suggestions made by the people I had contacted. By this time I was engaged in the activities of the Induction week. The questions I asked during induction sessions reflected my desire to test my hypotheses about the new environment.

Stage 3: Alignment

This is where my model varies somewhat from that proposed by Furlong and Maynard. It was an exciting and challenging time lasting for the majority of my first probationary year. During this period, I revisited the first two stages on several occasions, each time with increasing confidence. I realised that many of the skills I had brought with me were transferable to my new post and that adults was not so very different to teach than sixth form students. I realised that my work of the past twenty years was a valuable commodity in this new environment.

Stage 4: Consolidation

This stage apparently approximates to the one Furlong and Maynard term, 'Hitting the Plateau.' It lasted for much of the second year of my probationary period. I was reasonably confident in my ability to teach novice teachers, to carry out administrative duties and basic educational research. This was a positive experience tinged with the overtones of stagnation Furlong and Maynard's terminology implies. I deliberately sought to consolidate my teaching, in that I changed the teaching programme and teaching methodology as little as possible from the previous successful year.

Mid year, the Head of School asked me to broaden my profile of activity by contributing to a programme of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for practising teachers. This was a difficult time and I felt the need to further consolidate my current work within the School of Education before moving on. My mentor was not initially

party to discussions concerning the change in my role causing difficulties for us both. In retrospect, it was a useful development as it enabled me to view my HE work more widely.

Stages in Mentoring correlating with my own CPD

The stages I set out for my own development into university lecturing were re-addressed within the mentoring process as and when the need and inclination to reconsider my standpoint arose. They can be identified within five stages:

Stage 1: Setting out the boundaries

Stage 2: Personal Survival

Stage 3: Alignment

Stage 4: Consolidation

Stage 5: Moving on

Stage 1: Setting the boundaries

The first stage of my development, 'Setting the Boundaries' coincided with a similar stage of enquiry for my mentor. She probed gently but thoroughly to find out about my experience, personality,

personal circumstances and professional aspirations. Without a mutual process of sounding out the mentoring relationship between us could not have grown. My priority was to find out as much as I could about my new environment. My mentor's priority was to find out as much as she could about me, so she would be well placed to tell me what I needed to know.

Stage 2: Personal Survival

I took the time and trouble to establish that I felt 'safe' by ensuring I knew what I needed for day to day survival. The

initial stage of mentoring I would term the 'Enquiry Stage', and after that came an initial 'Training Stage'. J. concentrated on telling me what to do, where to be and who to see.

Stage 3: Alignment

J.'s role during my period of alignment was largely one of teacher-educator. She encouraged me a great deal, by actively pointing out my achievements and my strengths and increasingly by empowering me to do the same. She played a leading role in consciously demystifying the research process and I recall, with gratitude, her diagrammatic representation of how to construct an academic paper. I literally needed to see what she meant. In this stage of the mentoring process, J. was often more proactive than reactive, anticipating what I would need to know and building this into our mentoring sessions.

Stage 4: Consolidation

J. was at her most challenging during this stage. While maintaining a high level of encouragement and trust she provided a safe source of criticism for my decisions and offered a range of different professional perspectives by which to view courses of action. I am not sure whether J.'s move to a more critical stance was a proactive one – it may have been. I suspect she was also reacting to my increased drive towards what Maslow (1977) calls 'self-actualization', the final stage in his hierarchy of needs, the stage of needing to be what one has the potential to be.

Stage 5: Moving on

I cannot yet comment on the suitability of the mentoring to this final stage in my journey from novice to professional since I have yet to travel this stretch of the path through and beyond the third year of my probationary period. I hope the final stage in the mentoring process will approximate to Furlong's (1995) 'co-enquirer' stance where my mentor will work alongside me offering critical insights into my work but increasingly welcoming a reciprocal critical insight from me.

Criteria for Successful

Mentoring

The University of Bath's guidelines for mentors state that the mentor 'should establish a friendly and supportive relationship with the new lecturer. Through regular but informal contacts the mentor should be prepared to provide support, guidance and assistance in such matters as

- any personal problems associated with the new appointment
- integration into the department and institution
- understanding the administrative methods and organisation of the university
- guidance in the establishment of research activity
- preparation and delivery of teaching
- exploration and exploitation of all resources available to support this teaching
- guiding his/her practical teaching and indicating teaching strategies appropriate to the discipline

- liaison with Directors of Courses, Course Tutors etc.'

Certainly my mentor has given much help in the first four and in the last of the areas set out above. Rightly, I. has concentrated on those areas and in particular on the establishment of research activity, where she perceived I would need, and I have sought, most support. She has sought feedback regarding my teaching capabilities and has offered substantial support in working with the various personalities within the department.

According to the guidelines for mentors published by the Open University (1994), there are four functions central to the role of mentor:

- professional education
- assessment
- management of learning opportunities
- support

Though my mentor has attended to these functions, in terms of providing suitable support the expectations of senior staff cannot always be covered by mentoring or university induction programmes. One incident that comes to mind was when all new lecturers were informed that they should take a turn at chairing the Staff Meeting within the School of Education.

It takes time and experience to know how such meetings work in terms of staff politics as well as organisation and a novice chair might well hinder the passage of important proceedings. It would be helpful if there were a networking system for new staff to offer

each other support and advice. It might be useful to arrange an informal termly meeting, certainly during the first year, for new lecturers to get together and swap ideas. Additionally, new staff need interim written feedback on their progress. It might be appropriate to institute a competence based system whereby novices can chart, in consultation with their mentors, their progress over the probationary period. Despite some inherent difficulties in adopting a competency based model of teacher training there are advantages for the novice (Whitty, G. 1994)

'Most members of the group felt that the process of thinking through the issues had helped to demystify teacher education, provide clearer goals for students ... and provide a firmer basis for induction and further professional development.' (p.44)

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, I felt the first year of my mentoring experience was more successful than the second. My mentor has been reactive in personal terms and proactive in broadening my research experience during this second year. I feel we could have been more proactive in looking at the opportunities next year offers, for, according to Field and Field (1994)

'The promise of mentoring lies not in its contribution to novices' emotional well-being or survival, but in its capacity to foster an inquiring stance towards teaching.' p.67 Field B. and Field, T. (eds) 1994)

To summarise the key points in my transition from school-based mentor to HE-based mentee I would make the following observations:

- The school-based mentoring led me to expect a structured mentoring programme organised on a formal as well as an informal basis.
- The HE based mentoring I have experienced has been organised largely, though not exclusively, on an ad hoc basis.
- There have been recognizable stages in my development from novice to professional and these approximate to the stages identified in novice teacher development.
- The HE mentoring programme I have undergone has recognizable stages and it has substantially met my needs.

References

- Berrill, M. (1992) 'Structured Mentoring and the Development of Teaching Skill' in Wilkin, M. (ed) *Mentoring in Schools* London: Kogan Page, pp.155-172
- Field B. and Field, T. (eds) (1994) *Teachers as Mentors: a Practical Guide* London: Falmer
- Fullerton, H. (ed) (1994) *Facets of Mentoring in Higher Education* Birmingham: Staff and Educational Development Association
- Furlong, J. (1995) Conference notes from *Linguist to Language Teacher* London: CILT
- Furlong, J. and Maynard T. (1995) *Mentoring Student Teachers: the Growth of Professional Knowledge* London: Routledge
- Smith, P. and West-Burnham J. (1993) *Mentoring in the Effective School* Harlow: Longman
- Whitty, G. (1994) 'The Uses of Competences in Teacher Education' in Williams A. (ed) *Perspectives on Partnership* London: The Falmer Press