

HANDBOOKS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS



# Working with your Student Teacher

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# 3

## Preparing for the student teachers' arrival

### Preparing the modern languages department

Before getting under way with the actual process of training the new student teachers, the modern languages department might usefully consider the following issues as a basis for departmental discussion sessions:

- Do all of the modern languages staff understand the value as well as the responsibility of ITE in their department?
- Which staff can offer teacher training in the department at this time?
- Which classes will benefit from having a modern languages student teacher?
- How soon might a student teacher be expected to take over a class?
- What on-going INSET will be needed to prepare staff for mentoring and how will this information be passed on?
- Is there a departmental handbook and scheme of work in operation which can adequately inform and support the student teacher?
- How will the department receive whole school support for the training programme?
- What extra time and cover for the subject mentor's classes will be needed to accommodate mentoring and mentor training?
- What funding will be allocated to the department from the HE allocation to the school budget for books, release time, photocopying and lesson cover to allow mentoring to take place?
- How will the student teacher's progress be assessed?

Having determined the department's readiness to accept the challenge to come it is time to choose a suitable subject mentor. It is important to try and include the whole team in the decision making, as their involvement will be essential if the student teachers are to receive the support they need.

### Who should be the subject mentor?

Though this might be the head of department, he or she is not necessarily the most suitable person to undertake the training of the new student teacher. Delegating to a departmental colleague might be a better choice, particularly if this subject mentor can offer the same languages as the student teacher. It may be possible (and desirable) to rotate the mentoring role in the department, if there is more than one member who is willing and capable of taking on the role and adequate training is available for them. At some stage during the training period each member of the department might have an opportunity of working with the trainee in the cycle of planning/observation and discussion. Not only is this likely to strengthen team spirit but, in addition, the student teacher will have the opportunity to reflect on a variety of approaches.

### Why do teachers take on mentoring?

Is it some mysterious wish to try and cram even more work into an already crowded day? Is it in the hope of advancing their own career? Is it because they have a genuine wish to take a hand in bringing new blood into their chosen profession? There is quite simply no one good reason . . . but there are many nevertheless!

It is very important to analyse why you, as an individual, want to develop this role in order to identify the skills you are likely to need, those which you already have and those which will need working on.

Anyone who has been involved in mentoring is soon aware that the process of developing the necessary skills cannot be satisfied by an initial training period alone. Developing as a subject mentor is an open-ended process, much akin to the training of teachers. The early stages of the development process are rather ones of identifying the skills that are likely to be needed and taking stock of the strengths and weaknesses that an intending subject mentor brings to the new role.

There are many excellent mentor training schemes in operation throughout the country and the best recognise that mentor training is an ongoing obligation both for the sake of the mentor and the student teacher. No two mentoring situations can ever be identical and so it is not possible to have one successful experience in order to guarantee another. The role of the subject mentor varies according to each student teacher and each institution.

Before we look in detail at what the subject mentor must do, it is worth considering how the traditional role of supervising student teachers on practice sessions differs from that which is now evolving.

## **How mentoring differs from supervising**

Mentoring entails a conscious process on the part of subject mentor and student teacher to analyse teaching performance, refine and improve it with the intention of becoming a more proficient teacher. Research shows that it is through reviewing your own practice that you come to be in a stronger position to advise someone else, thus both the subject mentor and the student teachers are in a climate of growth.

In the past, responsibility lay primarily with the HEI. Now, the school and the HE tutor share responsibility for training. Since it is possible that the school will receive student teachers with little or no experience of their chosen profession a supervisory role would clearly be inadequate.

'In the teaching profession, supervision is not what it can be in industry (overseeing and inspecting), nor what it is in social work (accountability for statutory casework). It is support and facilitation to enable someone to become more effective and is geared to their needs.' (Wilkin 1992)

The support and facilitation mentioned here require access to a body of facts to explore with the student teachers but they also require far more than factual know-how. It is, of course, vital to have knowledge of the process of becoming a teacher and the issues which face new teachers. A subject mentor also needs the skills to enable student teachers to reflect on personal choice and personal difficulties at a time of change and to take what they learn from one situation and adapt it to improve another.

## **Qualities of a subject mentor**

The following are a useful starting point. Mentors should have an ability to:

- work with adults and to share experiences
- develop and maintain open communication and an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect
- stimulate reflection and review of performance
- see things from another person's standpoint
- identify problems and resist the temptation to offer solve-it-all solutions
- identify areas needing attention and, even more importantly, set and keep to realistic targets
- consider every mentoring situation as a new challenge.

According to G.F. Shea (1992): 'Mentors are people who have a special or memorable helpful effect on our lives. In particular, they:

- set high expectations of performance
- offer challenging ideas

- help to build self-confidence
- encourage professional behaviour
- offer friendship
- confront negative behaviour and attitudes
- listen to personal problems
- teach by example
- provide growth experiences
- offer meaningful sayings or quotations
- explain how the organisation works
- coach their mentorees
- share critical knowledge
- offer encouragement
- assist with their mentorees' career.'

This seems a tall order for the subject mentor to meet in addition to a heavy teaching load and possibly other responsibilities within the department. Shea's recommendations are a guide for mentors to aspire to; we are not looking for super heroes and heroines!

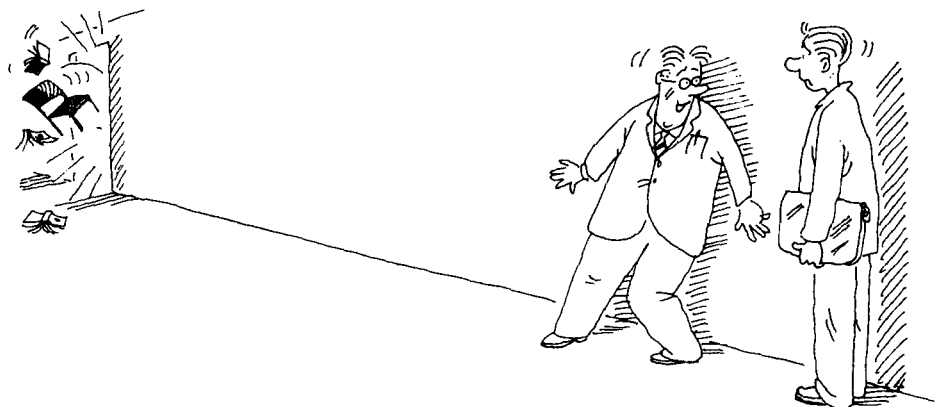
### **Good subject mentors**

Good subject mentors not only recognise but also value the strengths and weaknesses that their student teachers embody, and they have a clear impression of their performance too. This insight comes as a result of developing mentoring competences. A well designed training programme will nurture the skills of mentor and student teacher alike for they are inter-dependent.

According to the training package drawn up by the Manchester Metropolitan University, effective mentors have certain personal and professional qualities. They tend to be:

- experienced teachers; not new to the school
- knowledgeable of the school and its systems
- given status through promoted post (if only they were!)
- empathetic nurturers
- good problem solvers
- rational, clear thinkers
- strategists
- calm in crisis, not placid
- well-organised
- good communicators.

An intending subject mentor needs to develop a good picture of the skills and knowledge that will be needed for effective mentoring. This means drawing up an inventory in effect. One way of doing this is to measure your performance and attitudes against a pre-determined set of criteria. As Smith and West-Burnham (1993) point out, 'Using profiles to self-reflect . . . can help individuals to recognise their achievements in a detailed and positive way.'



*"I won't introduce you. It's better if you establish your own relationship from the start."*

## The responsibilities of the subject mentor

A detailed checklist appears in Appendix 2 on page 47, but the following list provides an overview for identifying areas of subject mentor responsibility:

- to allocate the time available for the student teacher to plan, observe, engage in debriefing after observation and team teach with a variety of departmental staff
- to select the range of classes so the student teacher gains experience in working with pupils of all abilities, ages and motivation levels in the school
- to arrange for the student teacher to assume increasing responsibility for taking teaching groups
- to confirm the number and timing of the sessions when the student teacher will be observed teaching
- methodology
- to enable the student teacher to take part in activities outside the classroom that form part of the teacher's role e.g. exchange visits, parents' evenings, departmental meetings, writing pupil profiles, etc.

### Case Study

During a school policy review meeting in March, the head teacher announces that two departments, modern languages and maths, will be involved in arranging ITE for student teachers from the beginning of the next school year.

Judith has been head of the modern languages department for three years now in this Upper School. She is very interested in mentoring and would like to be the subject mentor. She teaches two subjects, French and Spanish, to A level.

In her department there are three other teachers. Pam, who is second in department, has recently moved from FE and has relatively little experience in teaching French below A level. Her second language is not offered by the school.

Brian is in his first year of teaching. He is keen to do well but lacks confidence in his own ability to organise things. As a result, he needs a great deal of support from Judith. He teaches French and Spanish but finds teaching French above year 10 very demanding.

Fabienne, a French national, has been teaching for three years at the school where she took part in the Licensed Teacher Scheme with Judith as her mentor. She is well-organised and demands very high standards of herself and others. Recently she has taken over responsibility for teaching German in the school as she is the only specialist in this language.

### A possible solution

In spite of Judith's responsibilities as head of department, it would seem, from the information available, that she would be the best choice of subject mentor. However, she has little time to offer for mentoring and others in the department might share the role. While she shoulders overall responsibility for the mentoring and appraisal of the student teachers:

- Pam could offer support in A level French teaching
- Brian and Fabienne are well placed to work with student teachers in exploring ways to improve organisation in teaching
- Fabienne and Brian could share their experience in teaching to GCSE level in their principal and second teaching subjects.

## Preparing the way – the school's role

The school should aim to offer the student teachers as much support and information as possible about its organisation. Obviously much will depend on what is feasible within a particular training partnership, but it might be possible to send some of the school's documentation, for example the staff handbook and the handbook for new pupils, to the student teachers before their first visit so they have some idea of what to expect.

Certainly, by the end of their first day, the student teachers should have spent time in the department meeting the staff they will work with and in particular getting to know their subject mentor. This means having all documentation prepared well in advance and all staff ready to take on their new and challenging role.

On their initial visit, student teachers should be shown around the department and told how to obtain appropriate help if the subject mentor is not available. Details of the induction period are set out in Chapter 4 and, naturally, it is important to plan this well in advance too.

## Summary

- Adequate preparation of personnel and resources in the modern languages department must precede the student teachers' arrival.
- The choice of subject mentor is not restricted to the head of department.
- Mentoring demands identifiable skills and strategies.

## Action plan

- ⇒ Find out how the school intends to support the training programme.
- ⇒ Identify subject mentor training needs and how they will be met, preferably prior to the arrival of the student teachers.
- ⇒ Discuss the practicalities of organising ITE in the department.
- ⇒ Decide who will be the subject mentor(s).
- ⇒ Be prepared to provide the student teachers with detailed information about the department as early as possible.

# 8

# Mentor development

In Chapter 3 we looked in detail at the mentoring role. We are assuming that most mentors will receive or will have received some training to enable them to carry out this role. It is hoped that an ongoing programme of support and training is provided in the future to extend the skills and knowledge of existing mentors and to help new mentors get under way.

Having received some basic training, many mentors will wish to extend their understanding of their role. It is consistent with the notion of continued professional development that they should want to do so. How then are mentors to develop their practice?

## Identifying areas for development

If you look back to Chapter 3, at the lists of qualities that are desirable in a mentor, you will be able to draw up a list for your own use, identifying those where you feel a need for further development. Avoid being too critical of yourself but above all, be realistic. If you find that even after an initial period of training and experience in mentoring, that your time management skills, for example, are not what they should be, take heart! There are plenty of excellent books available as well as management courses to help you.

Much of the further expertise that you feel you need will result from your own efforts to identify and then solve problems, from related reading and discussion with other mentors and HE tutors. You do not necessarily have to attend a formal INSET session. Of course, if suitable INSET is available you should take every opportunity to play an active part in it. Further training comes in any number of forms, not just those designated 'Further Mentor Training' in the HE or school diary. Obviously mentoring is a field where teachers can learn a great deal from discussion with their HE colleagues.

## Networking

As soon as the initial training programme for mentors gets underway, so opportunities arise for networking. Contacts made at meetings provide an invaluable source of information, support and a chance to swap ideas for improving practice in mentoring. Without the contacts provided by fellow mentors and HE tutors, it can be difficult to keep abreast of what is really happening in a particular department. As one teacher put it, 'One session which involved team-teaching with fellow mentors in one another's schools, made me realise some of the practical problems and worries of my student teachers.'

Further mentor development comes not only from INSET sessions, but more importantly from the mentors' consideration of particular training needs and a pro-active approach to acquiring them. Further development is an active process where skills are refined, ideas challenged and modified.

It can be difficult and at times disconcerting for mentors to realise that they lack the necessary skills to handle a particular situation as well as they would like. It is vital to remember that student teachers are likely to feel the same, especially when they have worked successfully in fields outside teaching. Perhaps the most serious problem that can arise is that of appearing to lose face. The student teacher comes with a wealth of experience of life outside school and it may be difficult to accept the role of beginner in terms of teaching. Similarly, the mentor comes with a richness of successful teaching and it is sometimes hard to understand why someone else cannot immediately grasp why they are running into difficulties with a class.



*The life cycle of a mentor*

## When should mentor training take place?

In some cases, mentors will not have to consider this as it will already have been decided between the school and the HEI. Where this is not the case, training opportunities are likely to require some negotiation. Let us consider two examples where this has occurred.

### Case Study 1

In school A the school mentor has sufficient non-contact time to visit the HEI during school time to discuss the training course. The members of the modern languages department have a busy timetable and are unable to attend INSET for mentor training in school time. The mentor is invited to attend training sessions after school run by the HEI and the mentor is paid for attending. INSET is given by the school mentor to colleagues on staff training days.

### Case Study 2

In school B staff training days are sometimes devoted to mentor as well as student teacher training. Mentors and student teachers have registered satisfaction at being able to report back on what they are doing to colleagues in other departments, not directly involved in the mentoring process. The student teachers, normally in the modern languages department, spent the day with the maths team. Later, one said, 'I'm really surprised to see that the maths department sets their groups inside the class according to their ability. What would happen if we split up the mixed ability year 11 Spanish class like that? Can we cater for groups working at different levels in an oral lesson?'

### Some points for discussion

There is much to be gained by mentors looking beyond their departments and adapting a cross-curricular approach. Seeing what is happening in another area of the school will often provide a springboard for new ideas. In the case studies outlined above, for example, a marvellous opportunity was provided for the subject mentor to reflect on practice in other departments and to discuss possible repercussions of such a change with the modern languages staff.

## Where should further mentor training take place?

There are three main options:

- in school
- in HEI
- LEA or other sources.

Mentor training can take place in school – it does not necessarily involve the mentor in leaving the premises to follow an ongoing training course at the local

HE. However, where such HE INSET schemes do exist, it is obviously in the mentors' interest to take advantage of them. There is much to be said for gaining a wider perspective by talking to others not so intimately involved in mentoring on a day-to-day basis in a particular department.

## **Mentoring and whole school development**

Mentor development after the initial period of training is having a very positive and modifying effect on old boundaries and practices inside schools. Mentoring is a unique activity in that it is neither entirely pastoral nor entirely subject-based. It is both and more! Because of this, mentor development is very much a part of whole school development; it is worthwhile emphasising the point again that it is not the mentor alone who undertakes to train the student teachers so much as the entire school.

## **Qualifications in mentoring**

Many HEIs, among them Manchester University, are offering mentor training as a module in a professional training award. Similarly, it is possible to register for an NVQ related award through the Institute of Training and Development Assessor and Verifier Award Scheme. In the Luton area, for example, it has been possible to gain a certificate awarded by the CNAA in Structure Mentoring through a short course of study at Challney Boys School.

On a national level, there are an increasing number of courses being organised by various organisations. ALL and CILT are both closely monitoring the changes as ITE becomes increasingly school-based and their national conferences provide an invaluable means of keeping up to date with current developments in the field.

## **Relevant literature**

There is a burgeoning literature on the subject of mentor training but it might be helpful to highlight just a few which we have found to be of value. An excellent introduction to the subject is *Mentoring in the Effective School* ed. Smith, P. and West-Burnham, J. (Longman 1993). The same team at Manchester Metropolitan University have extensive experience of mentor training and have produced *Mentoring: a core skills pack* (1992) with a complementary publication entitled *A guide to mentoring in the secondary school* by Smith, P. For further details contact: Crewe & Alsager College, Crewe Green Road, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 1DW.

## **Summary**

- Mentor training is professional development.
- It is a long-term commitment by all members of the partnership – not merely an initial period of INSET.
- Through the school, HE and other agencies, mentors have at their disposal the necessary support for professional development.

## **Action plan**

- ⇒ Negotiate a clear job description as a mentor.
- ⇒ Define your needs as a mentor, given your particular job description and experience.
- ⇒ Find out how, when and by whom your particular needs can be met.

### Point to consider

What can the subject mentor and department do to get the best out of each and to help them grow?

## 4 Modelling good practice

One way in which the teachers will exert a strong influence is by modelling good practice. Student teachers consciously and subconsciously pick up aspects of the teachers' style. It is often amusing to see even the teachers' mannerisms reflected in the student teachers' performance.

## 5 Asking the student teachers to identify issues for treatment

This approach represents a good model for learning. It is the opposite of the 'top-down' approach mentioned in 1 whereby steering the student teacher by your questions it should be possible to ensure that all the major issues that can be covered are covered.

## 6 Action research

An extension to this would be an action research model (cf Hopkins 1985, Buckby & Calvert 1990 and Calvert 1994) whereby student teachers:

- identify an area that they want to, need to and are able to improve on
- set themselves clear goals
- determine an action plan
- use research techniques to collect data
- examine the data and draw conclusions
- hypothesise on the results and make further developments.

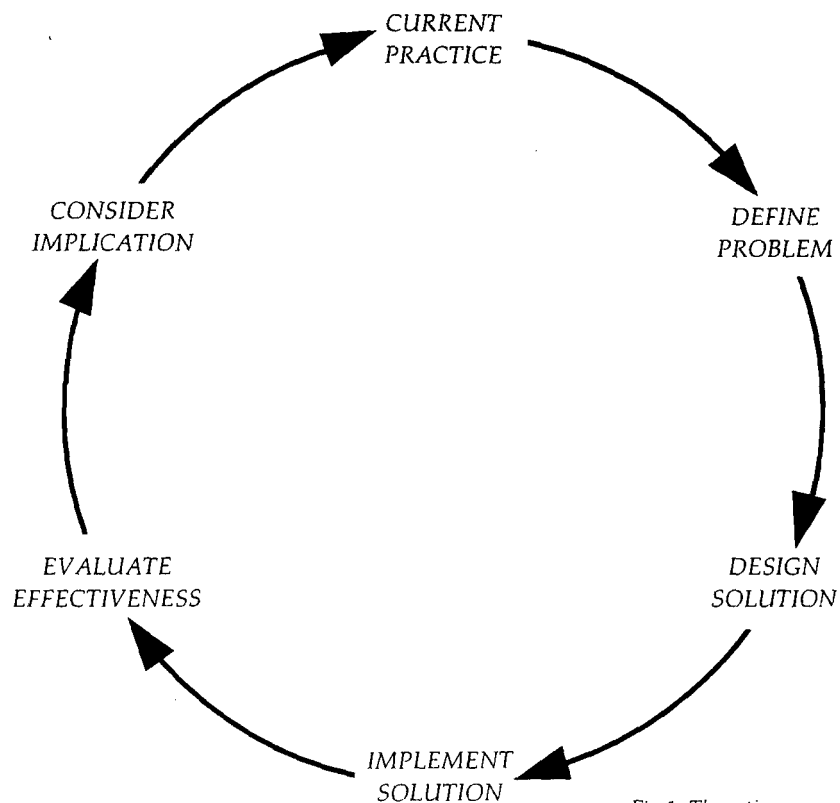


Fig 1: The action research cycle



## HANDBOOKS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS

**Working with your Student Teacher** is a practical guide to the changes that have taken and are taking place in initial teacher education. This guide sets the changes in context, explains the complementary roles of the school and the Higher Education institution, examines the training role of the teachers and suggests ways in which teachers can prepare for and look after student teachers in a modern languages department. Photocopiable sheets at the back provide helpful reference and checklists.

Whether you are involved in the training of student teachers or are a student teacher yourself, this book will help to clarify some of the issues facing you and provide invaluable guidance on developing a successful partnership between student and trainer.



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