

Professionalising the college workforce through mentoring and professional learning: a neglected perspective on enhancing quality

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Published items and Integrative Statement submitted in fulfillment of the regulations of the Institute of Education, University of London, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Publication

Abstract

This submission contains an Integrative Statement of 23 000 words (including footnotes and references) and a total of six¹ published items. Together, these form the basis of my application for the award of the degree of PhD by publication.

The Integrative Statement attempts to show the coherence of my published work and demonstrates my ‘deep and synoptic’² understanding of my chosen field. I argue that my work has made a significant contribution to a sector of education that has both been neglected and prone to serial and sometimes disarticulated reforms. I also contend that it is a sector that has generated a dominant discourse of quality improvement through strategies encompassing such elements as competition between institutions (ostensibly driving up standards), stronger regulation and control, and an overarching emphasis on the ‘auditable’.

In such circumstances, there has been a notable neglect of any purposeful focus on the manner in which professionalism may be enhanced, to the benefit both of teachers and their learners. Such professionalism as may derive from collective ways of working and from an engagement with the notion of the ‘learning professional’ has largely been absent from the policy discourse, at both national and institutional levels. The potential of mentoring to play a central role in a professionalising strategy has been a particular concern for me.

The specific and distinctive contribution I claim to have made is in the form of my examination of the ways in which mentoring as a supportive activity for teachers may not only significantly aid in professional formation and the improvement of teaching quality, but also thereby assist in the national policy goal of raising standards of learner achievement. The focus in much of my published work has been on mentors’ individual motivation, attributes and skills, broadening out in one particular article to an analysis of institutional factors that appear to have a strong influence on the environment in which mentoring may take place. The content and focus of the items being submitted is thus essentially concerned with professional learning and development, in particular when supported by skilled mentoring within environments that are appropriately resourced and where their ‘architecture’ and ethos meshes productively with the nature of effective mentoring.

Even more broadly, two published items being submitted explore aspects of professional learning. I use the medium of the Integrative Statement to draw out some explicit links between these and the professional challenges being faced by practitioners in the post-compulsory sector. I also in my statement relate important elements of my own writing to a range of relevant literature, demonstrating my engagement with and understanding of perspectives from this literature.

¹ Five are included in the main body of the submission, and one is provided as Appendix 1.

² Notes for Guidance of Applicants, PhD by Publication, Institute of Education, 2009.

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Section 2

Publications {page numbered individually}

Sole authored journal articles:

'Some have mentoring thrust upon them': the element of choice in mentoring in PCET environments. Published in *Researching Post-Compulsory Education*, Vol 9, No 2, Autumn 2004 [pp 271 – 282]

'All the right features: towards an 'architecture' for mentoring trainee teachers in UK further education colleges'. Published in *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol 33, No 1, 2007 [pp 83 – 97]

'So where do I go from here?: college mentors' continuing professional development'. Published in *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol 31, No 3, 2007, [pp 283 – 289]

Sole authored book chapters:

'Mentors and models of professional learning'. Published as chapter 3 in *Mentoring teachers in post-compulsory education*. David Fulton, 2005

'Critical incidents in professional life and learning'. Published as chapter 9 in *Exploring Professionalism*. Bedford Way Papers, 2008

Section 3

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Section 1

Professionalising the college workforce through mentoring and professional learning: a neglected perspective on enhancing 'quality'

Integrative Statement to Accompany Submitted Publications

Introduction

In this statement and in all my published writing I have been concerned to develop a form of *engaged scholarship* (Boyer, 1990, 1996) addressing predominantly a practitioner audience, but at the same time aiming to influence academic and policy discourses. I have consistently tried to argue that a genuine focus on professionalism and on the role that mentoring may play in bringing about substantive improvements in quality in the post-compulsory¹ sector has been at best marginal to a dominant discourse favouring such eminently auditable and quantifiable indicators as retention rates (for learners) and the possession (for staff) of a basic minimum licence to practise. Yet, in an educational and social climate where the challenges faced by new entrants to college teaching far exceed those that can be prepared for within the current framework of initial teacher education, something far more than benchmark qualifications to teach appears to be essential. That 'something', I contend, is the inception and sustenance of true professional learning communities amongst practitioners, with the activity of mentoring² at the heart of such communities.

The statements above may perhaps seem 'manifesto-like', but in fact are based on my very direct experience of having been involved with college teaching, and teachers – in ways I detail at a later point in this statement – and to some extent on empirical work, in a fairly broad sense. My belief is that until relatively recently

¹ This term (the generally accepted boundaries of which are described on p.5) is quite probably the term with most currency. There are, however, ongoing debates – and even certain difficulties – over its appropriateness. It does seem, though, to better suit my purposes than the use, say, of 'further education', 'learning and skills', 'college' or 'lifelong learning' sectors. This is not, however, to ignore the widespread use of such terms – in particular of the staple with probably the longest service, 'FE'.

² For brevity's sake I will introduce my use of this term as signifying the guidance and support of relatively less experienced teachers by others with the acknowledged skills and attributes needed to assume such supportive functions, within both formal and informal structures and settings.

the sector of education with which I have been concerned, both as a teacher and latterly as an 'academic', has been marginalised. This stance feeds significantly into my motivation to elucidate some of the ways in which a reorientation of certain ostensibly professionalising strategies would represent a positive improvement for teachers and their learners in colleges.

This integrative statement comprises three principal elements:

- **Part A** is a contextualisation of the five published items I am submitting for consideration. This locates the *origins* of the work within my professional and academic practice, reviews and problematises certain key elements of the sector of education that forms the backdrop to my writing, provides a *rationale* for my having embarked on writing for publication, and begins to make claims for the *significance* and *distinctiveness* of the submitted items when considered as a whole.

- **Part B** consists of "an analytic commentary on, and synthesis of, the works included"³. This section identifies the evolution of my approaches to exploring my 'field'; it does so by evaluating the contribution of each individual item, and by setting them within a narrative that attempts to demonstrate their interrelationships and *thematic coherence*. This section also includes a review of the ways in which the individual items might be revised, extended and updated in the light of my reflections and experiences subsequent to their publication. I make significant reference to the conceptual connections that I would seek to make with literature that has either been very recently published by other authors, or which was extant at the time of my own writing but which word count constraints as stipulated by editors or publishers precluded me from citing at an earlier stage. This component of my statement is designed to provide further evidence than is embedded in the items as originally published of my "knowledge of and critical engagement with relevant literature"⁴.

³ PhD by Publication – Notes of Guidance. Institute of Education, University of London, January 2009.

○ **Part C** of my statement seeks to review, critique, and to some extent reiterate, my own claimed understandings, contributions, and originality. It adopts a more forward-looking stance than the preceding two sections in that I endeavour to highlight the *potential* ways in which perspectives such as those I have deployed in my work might be of relevance to a sector of education that will no doubt continue not only to shift in size and shape, but to be, of necessity, adaptive to changing socio-political agendas. When alluding to the notion of 'potential', I base certain of my statements on evidence regarding the *present* adoption and impact of certain propositions, and theoretically informed strategies, that I have been involved in formulating.

⁴ Ibid.

Part A: Contextualisation

'...mentoring, while generally acknowledged to be 'a good thing', has not proved unproblematic to the sector'. (Hankey, 2004, p.390)

The Phase and the Learners

It seems appropriate to begin my integrative statement by providing a relatively extended *contextualisation* of my published work, thus it is hoped avoiding the possibility of its being viewed in a vacuum.

The examples of published work that I have submitted primarily represent an ongoing attempt to contextualise and analyse certain key dimensions of mentoring as a neglected professional activity in what is generally termed the *post-compulsory* sector of the UK's education system. I move somewhat beyond these boundaries in the two items that were originally book chapters, in that I focus more broadly on professional learning, not merely that taking place within mentoring relationships.

My writing, overall, has had a concern with four important notions (or 'contextualising domains'), namely:

- *college quality and effectiveness*⁵;
- *professionalism*;
- *professional learning communities*;
- *effective mentoring within such communities*.

In exploring the dimensions of effective mentoring, I have sought to *link* the four overarching contextualising domains referred to above. In doing so, I have drawn extensively on key elements of my own professional autobiography and 'life history' (Huberman, 1993), in particular on my experiences as a college teacher, a

⁵ Some of my earlier published work, for example in the area of college improvement (e.g. Cunningham, 1999), cannot be included in this present submission, falling as it does outside of the time period stipulated in connection with applications for the award of PhD by Publication.

mentor and, most recently, a trainer of both new college teachers and their mentors. This autobiographical consideration will be amplified later, following a summary of what I hold to be certain of the defining features of the 'post-compulsory' landscape.

The broadest notion of 'post-compulsory' has at one time or another encompassed teaching environments as diverse as those listed below:

- Sixth Form Colleges
- General Further Education Colleges
- 'Land-based' colleges, specialising in agriculture and/or horticulture
- Adult Colleges and Adult Education Institutes
- Community and Outreach settings, e.g. hostels for the homeless
- Prison education (a field presently receiving particular attention)
- Private training institutions, especially those delivering contracted or franchised courses that are equally likely to also be on offer in any of the above institutions.

In my writing I have focused almost exclusively on the general further education college (increasingly abbreviated as GFE, or occasionally as FEC). It has been evident that the stresses and strains of professional life – with, in my thesis, a concomitant accentuated need for mentoring – have been greatest here. For example, by comparison with the sixth form colleges (SFCs), where staff often 'inherited' the relatively more favourable conditions of service of schoolteachers that quite frequently formed the initial staffing caucus, the GFE teachers have fared relatively poorly. Furthermore, another valid comparison with the SFCs is that the degree of selection of the student intake that is possible is often far more constrained in the GFEs: these colleges are avowedly (and unashamedly) inclusive, and have tended to employ a high degree of flexibility over the entry qualifications sought by specific programmes. From extensive professional experience as a GFE practitioner and subsequently as an extremely frequent visitor to colleges across a wide geographic area, it is for the most part incontestable that a selective suburban SFC, often with formalised links to certain local schools, is largely a different world from an inner city college located in an

area with high rates of socio-economic deprivation. It is within this latter specific setting that the challenges of workforce development, and of quality improvement, have probably been most pronounced, and within which I have had particular aspirations for the influence of my work on the quality of mentoring.

For many years the GFEs were collectively described as the 'Cinderella Service' (see e.g. Randle and Brady, 1997), highlighting that while catering for millions of learners, and employing tens of thousands of academic and support staff, the sector was almost entirely neglected in the policy discourse. A possibly cynical perspective here might be that the colleges have simply lacked firepower: for example, the threat of a wide-ranging schoolteachers' strike has tended to create far more political – and parental – disquiet than would a withdrawal of labour by college lecturers protesting against under-resourcing, pay rates or governmental interference with curricular matters. The 'balkanised' nature of the colleges' workforce is also relevant here: witness the very title of the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) document introducing 'overarching professional standards' for *teachers, tutors and trainers* – and even this listing, of course, omits such key workers as learning support assistants, an increasingly important group (LLUK, 2007).

When the GFEs did begin to figure more significantly in the public and political imagination it was often against the backdrop of the negativity of the workforce to the implications of the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, the legislation famously 'freeing' the colleges – from its chief proponents' perspective – from local authority jurisdiction. The stresses and tensions set up by the 1992 Act, and which were played out for the remaining years of the 1990s (and some have argued that this process is ongoing) have been well documented by Randle and Brady (1997) Ainley and Bailey (1997) and many others.

There has been a particular focus on the organisational and operational dysfunction set in train in the colleges by changes that were 'too deep, too fast' (Randle and Brady, 1997, pp 124/125). Such changes have been analysed as a dimension of a 'modernisation' project for post-compulsory education (as part of the public sector as a whole), set in train via a series of initiatives during the lengthy Conservative government(s) of the 1980s and well into the 1990s.

Acknowledging the work of Bottery (1996) Robson and Bailey (2009, p. 100), for example, describe how the 'principal characteristics of public sector reform are interventionist and professional management, the setting of measures of performance in quantitative terms, and the allocation of resources linked to these measures or targets'. Shore and Wright (2000) described a 'wave of change' as having swept over the whole of the public sector, and Ball (Ball, 2001, pp. 222-223, emphasis added) viewed this as encompassing an '*ethical retooling* in the public sector which is replacing concern for client need and professional judgement with commercial decision-making'.

The 'interventionist' nature of the changes remarked on above has been well described by Shain and Gleeson (1999) and much of the content of their by now very well known paper remains valid. However, under the kind of resource allocation model alluded to above, the colleges have not fared well. Accordingly the GFEs were still being described in 2005 as the 'neglected middle child' of the British education system (Foster, 2005). From an important OfSTED study and report in 2004, *Why Colleges Fail*, certain wider points than mere funding matters appear worth noting. Geographically, it had been found that the majority of 'failing' colleges happened to be in the southern parts of England

... where there is intense competition among post-16 providers and where the GFE college is often very much *an institution of last resort*, particularly for 16-year old school leavers. A GFE college's intake is non-selective. Increasingly, such colleges are dealing with young people whose educational successes to date have been minimal ... Almost without exception, inadequate colleges have few teaching staff able to respond effectively to the particular needs of the kinds of young people who, 10 years earlier, would never have remained in education after the statutory school-leaving age. (OfSTED, 2004, p.3, emphasis added).

Elsewhere in the same document, a 'free for all' approach to the recruitment of learners is commented on negatively (ibid, p.4). Thus for a number of years now, teaching in some colleges in particular (and not all of them located in southern England) has presented a range of serious challenges to new entrants. In Gleeson et al's (2005) study many staff in the GFEs perceived that their professional lives centred more on welfare than on teaching:

George, a Business Studies tutor...feels more like a welfare officer. This shift, from 'teaching to welfare', arose in a number of interviews. It is seen as one of the consequences of a social inclusion policy that has involved colleges in recruiting ever younger, more 'marginal' and vulnerable students into a variety of vocational programmes that are inappropriate to their needs or beyond their reach...practitioners move from being accredited subject specialists with expertise such as 'an economist', through higher order teaching – 'a lecturer' – followed by what some see as a slow downgrading of their professional status as it changes to being 'a teacher' of lower status courses, towards a 'welfare' or 'key skills' function. (Gleeson, Davies and Wheeler, 2005, p. 453).

The significance of the challenges alluded to above was also largely attributed to the changing nature of the college intake by Robson (1998, p.591), who observed that:

'The nature of teaching in FE has always varied enormously and continues to vary within the different curriculum areas. As the sector has expanded its provision, so its character has become more complex and the demands upon teachers have increased'.

In one of my first published papers I referred to the above trends as producing 'a *fertile seedbed for [teacher] failure*' (Cunningham, 1997, p. 365, emphasis now added). Expansion of the range of accredited courses on offer, the 'post-Kennedy' drive to *widen* participation rather than merely increasing it numerically (Kennedy, 1997), the ways in which the GFEs have stepped into the breach to accommodate, in some local authorities, disaffected – even 'school-refusing' - young people, have all in fact been pertinent to bringing about a highly challenging situation.

The article mentioned above was written during a period when I was involved (on a consultancy basis) with the design and delivery for a college management of 'individual support programmes' for a small number of lecturers deemed to be at risk of grievance procedures initiated by members of the student body. It was while involved with this work that I saw the confluence of the factors described above. Two particular aspects of the responsibilities I was given are worth comment. Firstly, *de facto*, I was essentially mentoring the individuals concerned. And, secondly, that they were almost without exception highly experienced staff – certainly not beginning teachers. What appeared evident both from mentoring

conversations with them, and from observing their classroom practice, was that they were seriously disoriented by the rapid changes in the sector and in its students that they had encountered since joining the college many years earlier, pre-incorporation. In brief, their dominant perception was that they had moved from teaching relatively motivated (even if previously underachieving) students to having to work with often disaffected and sometimes aimless youth. The frequent recurrence of the phrase “it’s just bums on seats” captured the sentiments around awareness of managerial imperatives to maximise institutional funding by recruiting and retaining students, or as they were often termed ‘units’. A close colleague at the Institute of Education with strong – and nationally acknowledged – research interests in post-compulsory education would typically refer to ‘unit farming’. This term implied that colleges appeared to be demonstrating tendencies to maximize funding by encouraging more and more students to stay on and follow further courses after completing those they had originally enrolled for; this often seemed to occur even when the ‘follow-on’ courses did not strictly speaking represent *progression*. Practitioners of my acquaintance increasingly described their ethical concerns regarding this trend.

If anything, of course, more than a decade further on from when Randle and Brady, Shain and Gleeson and others were depicting the travails of post-compulsory education the complexity and demands seen within it are in certain respects even greater. With now an annual total of approximately six million students studying in the post-compulsory sector, despite this it might be claimed to be an *ailing* one, or as I will term it later, a *beleaguered* one. Seemingly bombarded by both a rhetoric lauding its potential and its accomplishments, and a set of policy and curriculum initiatives demanding often rapid responses and realignments, it continues to be almost unfailingly described by insiders, including its postholders at the highest levels, as an under-resourced phase of UK education. It is also associated with issues of relatively low employee morale (and stress-related illness), and an absence of strategic ‘mission’, as illustrated by the OfSTED report (2004, p.4); this speaks of the ‘failing’ colleges unearthed by its study as having ‘a very vague idea about their particular educational mission’.

Continuing connotations of inferiority, or at least of an inequitable lack of parity, when compared to, say, school sixth form provision, and the sixth-form colleges, (including the pay rates associated with these parts of the post-compulsory landscape) afflict the GFEs, rendering the challenges to teacher morale here quite pronounced ones. There has occasionally surfaced a rhetoric of the advantages of collaborative arrangements between institutions as one strategy for improving matters; this is however, in my view at least, greatly overshadowed by the detrimental effects of the realities of fierce competition in the realm of student recruitment. (A number of advertisements placed by colleges in a local newspaper serving N.E. London recently included one actually encouraging potential applicants *to transfer their registrations from their original first-choice college*. (Waltham Forest Guardian, Sept. 2008). At its worst, this kind of situation seems to veer close towards 'dog eat dog' because of what Freidson (2001 in Hoyle, 2008, p301) has termed 'the pathologies that stem from material self-interest in the market place'.

The challenge of 'entitlement'

Special reference deserves to also be made to the rise of student entitlement (a phenomenon not of course unique to the post-compulsory sector but one whose rise we could equally readily trace in both schools and universities). Gorringe (1994, in Spours and Lucas, 1996; Cunningham, 1997, p. 6), in a much quoted phrase, referred to post-incorporation colleges being in the business of 'attracting, retaining and delighting paying customers' - the customers of course being students. In the highly competitive, target-driven, environment in which colleges have had to operate since Incorporation in 1993, the aim of providing such services which, if not actually 'delighting' the student body at least meet their *entitlements* (as well as, crucially, allowing colleges to maintain their financial viability), has been absolutely central in understanding the ethos of post-compulsory education.

The student entitlement issue, in particular, has been one of my major concerns when writing for, and working directly with, either teacher trainees or those whose

professional work includes mentoring such trainees: 'best practice' connotes for me not only an approach seeking satisfaction in the quality of one's own work, but also a concern to ensure that the quality of learners' experiences is maximised – whether the 'learners' are college students or mentees.

There has been, as with most 'quality-related' initiatives which have impacted on PCET, some debate about whether the dawning of the 'Charter era' (beginning in 1993, more or less coincident with Incorporation) has actually effected any real improvements in the student experience, or has merely signalled the arrival of another set of high minded (if not always that elegantly expressed) 'ought to have' statements. "*Putting the learner at the centre of all we do*" – or close variants on this phraseology - is fairly frequently encountered in colleges' mission statements, and in their student charters. And, in a number of quite specific ways it is hard to argue with what most published statements and charters tend to say about, for instance, such a component of 'service delivery' as the nature of the grading and comments students can expect to receive following the submission of assignments. Who would quibble with an undertaking to learners that 'work is assessed regularly and promptly. You will be kept informed of your progress...'. (Coleg Glan Hafren, n.d.)? The high degree of importance attached to speedy formative feedback on written work – say within a three-week period – is absolutely in line with sound educational thinking on such issues. Similarly, an emphasis on supporting students' *individual* learning needs is wholly concordant with what research tells us enhances the quality and depth of learning and it is, therefore, legitimate – unarguable, even - to hold it as an institutional aspiration.

However, in the process of making what are, legalistically speaking, virtual promises, are colleges sometimes providing undertakings that will challenge even the very best, most experienced, teachers? This kind of question is of high relevance within my writing as a whole, as my contention is that the post-compulsory sector, in endeavouring to be compliant with both legislation and the 'philosophical' thrust of perspectives such as those of Gorringe, cited above, has moved ever farther towards advertising 'products' that it may, in reality, find hard to pull off their shelves for learners. And, at the heart of trying to address this

conundrum we find the teachers – and those other professionals, specifically mentors, who find themselves having to support them.

A 'beleaguered' sector?

It is therefore with this combination of challenges being faced by both of these groups – teachers and their mentors – that my writing has been primarily concerned. I believe that the post-compulsory sector is currently making a number of unwarranted assumptions regarding the capacity of both groups to effectively respond to the challenges I have outlined. Further, the present discourse of quality enhancement in the colleges is neglectful of what I have argued is the centrality of supported as well as supportive teaching. It would appear that policy preoccupations as expressed through the many and varied levers and drivers to which I have referred at one point or another in the body of my work continue to seriously underplay the significance of professionalism, professionalism, the role of learning communities and, within these, the role that effective mentoring might assume in enhancing and accelerating professional learning. All such considerations have generally been neglected, and are still largely subservient to a dominant discourse, and legislation, that has focused on more easily *measurable* human resources 'outputs' such as, inter alia, the numbers of college teachers completing initial teacher education, those gaining specialist qualifications, and the uptake of CPD within guidelines embodied in the '30 hour' rule. (And the outputs alluded to here relate to what is but a small proportion of the directives targeting the colleges: vastly more policy takes as its prime concern issues in the curricular or funding domains).

Policies and initiatives that rightly focus on the student – or, as so frequently now, the 'customer' – have, probably from the launch of the DfE's Student Charter in 1993, emphasised notions of entitlement, achievement and excellence; they have not, however, been paralleled by comparable attention being paid to an interrogation of how precisely college teachers will be supported as they strive to both support the policy changes and assist their students to cope with reaching the required standards in these key areas. (It is also notable that where teachers are having to respond to occasional instances of what we might term 'entitlement

aggression' they do not in general appear to be well served by relevant guidance materials). In other words, *linkages* between attaining excellence in the student body and anything similar in the workforce charged with promoting and supporting this goal have for the most part been absent. It is in this kind of regard that the occasional use of '*Cinderella sector*' can probably still be justified⁶. A rather similar syndrome is discernible if we survey the even broader landscape of policies relating to the *overall* quality of college provision; here, too, there seems to be something of a vacuum in which such desirables as 'flexibility', 'transparency' and 'responsiveness' have not been connected explicitly to either the professional attributes that would be needed in the frontline staff 'delivering' these 'goods', nor, in general, to any means of developing these attributes.

This is not the appropriate place to offer a full analysis of all of the syndromes alluded to above, which when considered together I take as justification for my use of the term 'beleaguered'. The dramatic changes we are now witnessing (and those that are quite probably still in store), are unlikely to ameliorate the situation; new agendas around closer engagement with employers and the desirability of embedding personalised learning (to mention but two strands in the modern policy discourse affecting the post-compulsory sector) are superimposing themselves on an already pressured educational sphere. The *de facto* raising of the school leaving age to 17, and of the 'participation age' to 18, will almost certainly exacerbate a situation wherein the desire to present an inclusive front to the wider world – especially with regard to issues of equity and social justice - will cause many college teachers to ponder whether they are to be expected to merely cope with the excess of less than motivated 16+ pupils who are likely to be unwanted by their schools. There will no doubt be an actual expectation that the GFEs will accommodate learners who have demonstrated an inability to cope with school life. Yet many teachers will no doubt continue, as did 'Emma' in Salisbury and

⁶ Note, for example, its having occurred in a very recent radio broadcast exploring a range of key issues in the colleges. (Abrams, 2009). Also of interest is the perspective of a correspondent (Tony Fort, FE lecturer, Blackburn) to the letters page of the Education Guardian (15/12/09), who writes: 'Fiona Millar informs us of the success of a young man taken into care who, having previously been let down by the school system, was able to achieve at his local college of further education. Ms Millar describes FE as "the often overlooked Cinderella of the education system". Might I suggest that it will cease to be referred to in this way when educational journalists write more attentively?'

Jephcote's (Salisbury and Jephcote, 2009, p. 13) study, to view their professional roles as including a

'strong commitment to the notion that FE provided opportunities for their students to compensate for the shortcomings of their previous educational experiences...they conceived of their proper professional role primarily in terms of establishing supportive relationships with their students, rather than simply in terms of imparting a body of knowledge on the basis of subject expertise'.

In an attempt to address the kind of problems outlined above I have argued that it is vital that the sector fosters a collaborative professional culture, with mentoring at its core, because such a culture has two particular and twinned capacities. Firstly it has the potential to imbue a highly variegated sector of education – possibly even a 'rag bag' of institutions from the most critical perspective that is on occasion encountered – with a significant semblance of *cohesiveness*. Secondly, the issue of *motivation and morale* of the workforce will be far more actively addressed when institutional energies appear to be being strategically directed to improving matters. Together, these two capacities are ones that articulate especially convincingly with the construct of a *signature pedagogy* that I elaborate at a later stage in this statement.

The Policy Paths to Improving Teaching Quality

What has *actually* been in evidence is that, in what appears to conform to Barnett's notion of a 'supercomplex' (Barnett, 2000) professional realm, we see in the colleges a situation where not one discourse but several are simultaneously demanding attention and responses; none of these have any obvious connections to the important matters I raise in the final paragraph of the foregoing section. Where they are, however, connected is that they have been generally perceived as exacerbating the problems of the sector rather than directly addressing them.

We can discern the dominance of such altruistic concerns as the need for the sector to play its part in enhancing social inclusion, widening participation and

generally assisting in fostering social cohesion and justice; at the same time, however, the discourse of 'value for money' has meant far more demands that even main grade staff engage with strategies for cost-cutting and for entrepreneurial activity. Some fairly fundamental tensions have been created: ensuring the maintenance or improvement of 'market position' (through results) may not be at all easily squared with wishing to cater to learners who are being 'let go' by their schools, yet failing to gain admission to a number of other, more selective, institutions. Add in such newer imperatives as 'employer engagement' to a long list of policy drivers and there is little wonder that professional life in many colleges is so very stressful.

'The modern professional can be forgiven if she or he feels like a small animal caught in the headlights of an oncoming car at nighttime' (Barnett, 2008, p. 199). Within this level of supercomplexity, 'the *challenge* to professionalism lies in the handling of multiple discourses' (ibid, p. 190). After many years of adjustment – painful in many regards – to the funding methodology and auditing regimes of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) and, subsequently, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), colleges are now in some crucial aspects reverting to a situation in which their principal 'structural' relationship will once again be with the local authorities. (I have not researched manager and practitioner sentiments in this context, but one suspicion I have is that at least among longer serving staff an element of the surreal may be discernible as a consequence of this particular policy turn: "Haven't we been here before?" is a wholly valid question).

However, it appears that when Barnett's 'multiple discourses' – or those of prime relevance to the post-compulsory sector – are surveyed, we are able to observe the continuing ascendancy, or privileging, of those around 'efficiency, effectiveness and equity', and the still barely visible nature of any real discourse pertaining to the collegial nature of professional life. I argue that there has been, and is, a fundamental failure to *connect* in truly meaningful ways concerns over 'the three 'E's' with the needs of *the teaching force itself*. In recent times, it is as if there has been a degree of wishful thinking underpinning both national and local policy for the sector: broadly such thinking seems to be based on the interlinked propositions that within (relatively) better resourced colleges, where the utilisation of ICT allows

for high degrees of independent, personalised learning, a workforce that is both *certificated* and *held effectively to account* will be able to 'deliver' student achievement and student satisfaction. 'Professionalism' in such a construct is thus primarily evidenced through results, rather than being seen in terms of genuine concerns for learner achievement (leave alone for their enjoyment of the educational experience) or for the professional identity and potential for self-actualisation (Maslow, 1954) of those 'delivering' the results.

Another of my key arguments is that the factors and developments outlined above are *especially and directly impacting* on new entrants to the post-compulsory teaching workforce; LSC guidance notes and directives may well typically have been addressed to senior management teams – even CEOs of college corporations – but their ramifications generally affected (possibly 'afflicted') all staffing levels, often most especially those who actually teach and in particular those whose resilience in the face of challenges has been able to be least strengthened by professional experience. Furthermore, such individuals have, 'at the point of entry', been subjected to a number of legislative and other shifts relating to access to a teaching post, the framework within which competence for beginning teaching is monitored and assessed, and the bureaucratic and other structures pertaining to professional formation (or, more minimally, early career development).

For example, the newly-introduced requirements relating to participation, annually, in CPD activities – the so-called '30 hour' stipulation – and those in respect of compulsory registration with the Institute for Learning (IfL) are but the latest increments to a series of such developments, dating from the formalised acknowledgement in 2001 of the importance of initial teacher training in ensuring consistency in the quality of college provision for learners. (I refer here to the statutory instrument of 2001 introducing the requirement that 'endorsed' initial teacher training courses be followed by all new entrants). The sector now 'displays significantly more regulatory control than related areas of public sector provision in health care, schools, higher education, social housing, police, local government and social services.' (Gleeson et al, 2005, p. 448). The introduction in 2007 of the requirement that new entrants to teaching in the post-compulsory sector hold or be

'working towards' 'QTLS' [Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills] is a significant – and from some perspectives actually quite belated – aspect of the particular trends illustrated here.

The kind of policy shifts to which I allude above (many of them associated with the initiatives overseen by the New Labour government that assumed office in May 1997) were aimed at rectifying underperformance in the colleges – and the 'benign neglect' which Young et al (1995) saw the college sector as having suffered from historically. It was actually with the publication of the seminal OSTED/Audit Commission (1993) report, 'Unfinished Business', that in my view this situation began to more than subtly alter. The report describes the extent of wastage, post-16, caused by the failure to complete their programmes of study of many young people. The appearance of 'Unfinished Business' in the same year as the colleges fully assumed their status as corporations may well have been coincidental; however, the significance of 1993 for the sector is unquestionable. It is possible to trace the subsequent growth of awareness, *translated into policy*, of how college teachers play a pivotal role in the UK education system. Most especially, the role they have in the skills development of a national workforce (often viewed, because of its poor overall standards, as impeding international competitiveness) has been infinitely more central to policy debates than was the case even in the late 1980s.

Additionally, with the growth in the level of concern over the links between non-participation in education and the rise in such social afflictions as drug use and teenage violence we have seen a much greater onus being placed on the colleges to promote, both through more strategic 'focus' and higher teaching quality, wider access, inclusion and social cohesion. However, to reiterate the key point made earlier, quite where the *connections* are to be found between the policy rhetoric of enhancing teacher quality and the nature of the lived experience of practitioners is hard to discern. In a wide range of policy formulations that have been of seminal importance for the college sector, there is a void where encouragement for – still less, incitement to – professional reflexivity, collaboration and creative autonomy might reside. My writing has, collectively, been endeavouring to inject elements both of concern for, and actions designed to promote, *real* professionalism into this

void. Specifically, I have focused on the promotion of mentoring as a viable, and key, facet of professionalising a workforce that is acknowledged to be extremely diverse – ‘fragmented’ is probably not an exaggeration - in its origins and professional values and affiliations (Lucas, 2002; Robson, 1998), and – partly as a consequence of these characteristics – to have lagged far behind the schools workforce (leave alone comparisons with more established professions) in moving towards achieving full professional status.

I do, however, need to acknowledge that it would be a striking example of self-aggrandisement were I to claim any sort of ‘lone voice’ status. In the kind of sociopolitical and educational environments such as I have described, the quality of the ‘educational experience’ has in fact been tied, by some policymakers, academics and practitioners, ever more firmly to assuring the quality of those primarily responsible for ‘delivering’ the experience. Key documents such as ‘Colleges for Excellence and Innovation’ (DfES, 2000) are beacons in the manner in which they forcefully stated why it was that far greater attention be paid to

“ the development of the teaching staff, and senior management, in further education. It is they who are the essential resource who make the difference between learning which fails in achieving its objectives and that which is effective... we [cannot] continue in a situation where too many further education teachers have no formal qualifications or where, in too many cases, professional development is still *insufficiently embedded in a culture of continuous improvement.*” (DfES, 2000, 24/25, emphasis added).

Similarly, the major survey report compiled by OfSTED, three years later, in 2003, is essential reading for anyone wishing to identify a key point in the transition from the ‘before’ of (patchily provided and accessed) teacher training for the college sector and its present state (and near-certain future). The report set out to review the quality of FE teacher training, and made a number of critical observations: the summary of the report’s findings actually begins by stating that:

‘the current system of FE teacher training does not provide a satisfactory foundation of professional development for FE teachers at the start of their careers. While the tuition that trainees receive on the taught elements of their courses is generally good, few opportunities are provided for trainees to learn how to teach their specialist subjects, and

there is a *lack of systematic mentoring* and support in the workplace'. (OfSTED, 2003, p.5, emphasis added).

While I have argued at various points throughout my writing that the discourses of, on the one hand, college improvement and quality and, on the other, workforce development and professionalisation have often been largely devoid of specific references to mentoring (or of such constructs as learning communities⁷), here we had, for once, clear importance being attached to enhancing subject-specific mentoring. The recommendations made in this regard – and others - were unequivocally endorsed by the Standards Unit of the DfES in the following year (DfES, 2004). As can easily be imagined, the reverberations of the OfSTED survey were of the very greatest significance in teacher training circles, but crucially so too were they for the colleges or other post-compulsory institutions hosting or employing trainees. In this kind of context, I can probably claim no more than that, in part, my writing has tried both to keep alive and to translate into practical forms – before the need for actual resurrection became evident – some of the principles that began to see the light of day around the mid-2000s.

The publication of the 2003 OfSTED survey can, in fact, be viewed as the almost precise moment when, belatedly, mentoring as a facet of a *professional project* such as that alluded to by Whitty (Whitty, 2008, p.32) began to occupy a more prominent position in the discourses connected to the scope and purposes of the college sector – although as I have argued, it has hardly, at any point, been in what could be described as a *central* position; this is, in fact, another of my principal arguments, one meriting reiteration in this statement. I have identified no properly convincing evidence, as yet, for the movement from the margins to the mainstream of a discourse embodying a genuine concern for professional learning and any recognition of the value of informed, effective mentoring. Yet, as a device for professionalising – and empowering - college teachers, the privileging of such a discourse might well perhaps have mitigated some of the worst, deprofessionalising, effects of what has been the very high degree of control of the

⁷ I have in general used the term to refer to settings in which shared experiences, the availability of peer support (and, ideally, expert facilitation if not actual supervision) create the conditions needed for arriving at collective solutions to perceived challenges, or – sometimes – to changes viewed as negative.

college sector (when compared to other public services) that Gleeson et al (op cit) referred to, above. Such a discourse might have been playing an integral role in the sort of 'natural history' of professionalisation observable many years ago to an author such as Wilensky. (Wilensky, 1964).

Personal Motivation and Engagement

My interest in, and concerns over, mentoring as a dimension of professional practice in the college sector, and of improving the experience of learners within this sector, derived from a genuine desire to play a part in improving practice as much as (if not more than) it originated in a fascination with relevant theoretical constructs. As a 16-year old school-leaver, it was the post-compulsory sector that gave me – as it has done large numbers of others – a second chance of educational success, and of progression to university. Within a few years of completing my teacher training, and then working in schools, it was the colleges to which I returned as a teacher, and remained so employed for over 17 years. It was during this extended period of working with – often disadvantaged, sometimes challenging – diverse learner groups, from 16 year-olds to very mature adult returners, that the absolute centrality of the relationship between committed tutors and their students became clear to me as being the prime determinant of achievement. As it was expressed so eloquently many years following this particular passage in my professional life, a key concern that emerged for me was: 'how an increasingly fragmented sector might be transformed into an inclusive, equitable and effective learning system... [where] *the relationship between learners and their tutors ... constitutes the real fulcrum of the sector*'. (Coffield, et al, 2008, p. 157, emphasis added). Furthermore, it appeared inescapable, from my quotidian encounters with tutors and learners that 'teacher professional development [is] the fundamental *lever* for improving student learning... teacher quality trumps virtually all other influences on student achievement.' (Thompson and Wiliam, 2007, p.2, in *ibid.*, with emphasis again added).

It is important to reiterate that the post-compulsory sector is presently subject to greater central direction and management than other education sectors. Partly because colleges have traditionally been welcoming to second chance students who have experienced little educational success and have a vocational emphasis, FE has traditionally had lower status than other sectors. The teaching workforce has been the subject of increasing casualisation, is notably feminised in many curriculum areas, and has a high turnover. These syndromes have left it open to more extreme forms of managerialism, stricter auditing disciplines and more severe funding changes than either schools or universities. (Nash et al., 2008).

Such important innovations as, firstly, a Charter for Further Education (DfE, 1993) and then the adoption by each individual college of its own Student Charter laid out for prospective and current students what they could expect from their studies, and from the staff who would support them in these. Such documents provided, in effect, 'checklists' against which the actual experience of college life can be measured. Where there is a misalignment, i.e. where what is being delivered fails to match what has been promised, students are actively encouraged to draw this to the attention of relevant staff and/or bodies. While it is, of course, laudable that college learners are inducted into what they ought to merit in terms of professional behaviour on the part of their tutors, there seems little doubt that additional stress may thereby be engendered in the latter group.

In a financial climate where a smaller and smaller 'core' of established staff enjoys relative security while their casualised counterparts on the periphery increase in numbers, it is probably inevitable that practitioners perceive and experience a negative environment. As Ball (Ball, 2008, p.56) describes this kind of situation, where 'performativity' is paramount, 'All of this can take its toll. Performativity comes to be inscribed on our bodies as well as our minds, making us tired, stressed and sometimes ill...'. The 'flexible workforce' ideal of many senior managers is, for many college staff, hardly sufficient camouflage for the fact that it facilitates easier removal of those deemed to be underperforming, and the kind of real terms cutbacks such as non-replacement of postholders where natural wastage has occurred, or in such circumstances re-advertising posts on lower salaries and inferior conditions to those previously enjoyed. Writing with a rather

broader set of institutions than the colleges in mind, Green (2009) has posited a *deformation of professional formation* as a consequence of managerial targets.

In such circumstances, it early on appeared to me that the support needs of new entrants to teaching – and not uncommonly, also the needs of more experienced practitioners – were perceived to be of much less significance than those of the student body. '[Teacher] learning is not the prime objective of either government or schools' (Evans et al, 2006); my contention would be that 'colleges' might easily be added to the proposition. I will amplify this theme somewhat in part C of this statement.

Eventually, therefore, by taking certain proactive steps that it would be unnecessary to detail here, I 'converted' my interests, and my commitment, into assuming certain responsibilities for the support and supervision of more junior colleagues. Ultimately, by a not-uncommon process within education of professional 'migration', I moved into a more or less full-time teacher training role and, as a major dimension of this, also acquired mentor training responsibilities. All of this is set out here simply to provide a set of origins, and more importantly a *rationale*, for having sought to 'work on', at doctoral level, a particular sector, and particular professional challenges within that sector. Life-changing events take place within it.

However, clearly it was neither adequate nor appropriate to attempt to embark on the 'writing for publication' element of the academic life for which I eventually exchanged my long involvement in post-compulsory education solely on the basis of a portion – however substantial – of my own professional life history. My newer professional commitments and enthusiasms included seeking to develop certain strongly interrelated arguments relating to the *general neglect* of mentoring as a dimension of both professionalism and quality enhancement in the colleges. If the college sector as a whole (i.e. at the macro-scale) had, as I have mentioned, been subject over the years to a 'benign neglect', as Michael Young (Young et. al., 1995) had termed it then at the smaller scales of individual institutions and departments I began to see evidence of a parallel, in the context of there being a widespread failure to acknowledge practitioners' – in particular, new practitioners'

– needs for the high degree of professional support required in increasingly turbulent times. Assumptions appeared to me to have been made regarding practitioners’ resilience and resourcefulness that effectively amounted to a ‘meso-scale’ case of neglect. My paper published in 2000 reviewed a number of the ways in which, not always resilient, beginning practitioners manifested anxieties regarding their early ‘close encounters’ with the realities of college teaching⁸.

The key document ‘Equipping our Teachers for the Future’ described the necessity for ‘a step change in the quality of teacher training’ (DfES, 2004, p.4). However, at this point in time and for a significant period subsequently, mentoring did not feature at all as a proposed strategy in professionalising the college sector; it does not appear at all in index entries for a number of the standard ‘how to teach in FE’ texts which were and still are being recommended to cohorts of teacher trainees, and it remains a rare index item. Nor was the activity of a great deal of significance in submissions being made to the relevant academic journals. In the important preamble to the first ever set of national standards for teaching and supporting learning in FE, the Further Education National Training Organisation Standards (FENTO, 1999) mentoring is similarly absent. Overall, in fact, mentoring, at least as far as the college sector is concerned, has been a sidelined area. Further evidence of this is found, for example, in realising that in an important text published in 1999, on FE in the 21st century (Green and Lucas, 1999), there are no index entries at all for ‘mentor’ or ‘mentoring’; nor was there much attention paid to the activity in the first FENTO–approved book on teaching in the college sector (Wallace, 2001). In the latter volume, mentors’ contributions to initial teacher training would appear to consist merely of the provision of a lesson evaluation or a ‘witness statement’ for a trainee. The topic fares somewhat better in one of the best practical texts on college teaching (Huddleston and Unwin, 2002, 2nd ed’n) although even here we are only looking at five or so sentences. More recently, however, our paradigm is one in which training to teach in colleges and other post-compulsory institutions differs greatly from when it was an almost entirely voluntaristic matter. Both the *quality* and *quantity* of training new

⁸ Although falling outside of the allowable time frame for published items being formally submitted with this application, I supply *Cunningham 2000* as Appendix 1 for its hopeful value to the reader in more fully contextualising the challenges I am attempting to depict.

entrants receive has become more of a government priority – even if the role of mentoring within current arrangements, and more broadly that of professional learning communities in the colleges, remain from my perspective generally under-explored.

The ‘documentary’ evidence summarised above can be set against some findings derived from an interrelated set of limited, and small scale, research studies of trainees and their mentors that I either conducted or collaborated in over a six-year period (1998-2004). This research was, incidentally but importantly, framed and made possible by my involvement in the major programme of initial teacher education for the post-compulsory sector offered by the Institute of Education (IoE). It is thus only appropriate to indicate that in one particular item in my list of submissions *insider research* was of some importance in the construction of certain of the arguments that were being presented. In another, published too early to be legitimately included as part of this application, the same consideration applied.

The IoE’s post-compulsory training programme had, and has, both full-time and part-time pathways – as do the majority of those offered by HEIs – and I was for some years contributing fully to both of these, including leading the full-time pathway from 1998-2003. In connection with these responsibilities, a very large amount of my time was spent in colleges, observing classroom teaching, meeting with practising mentors, and taking part in numerous informal discussions with key staff involved in activities such as managing curriculum departments, staff development, and human resources. Additionally, I held (and still hold) External Examiner appointments entailing scrutiny of both written assignments and practical teaching being assessed on ‘sister’ programmes at other HEIs. The relevance of all this is that the activities have allowed me to maintain a high degree of contact with the sector in which I had myself (as mentioned above) taught for many years; put simply, I remained in touch with the real concerns of the colleges and their inhabitants – students, tutors, mentors and managers.

I began to devote very significant professional efforts to understanding the nature of effective mentoring, as well as enhancing the practical steps that it was possible

to take to improve the immediate experience of trainees. (The latter endeavour included the writing of a handbook specifically attempting to meet the needs of new mentors with whom the IoE would be working, and subsequently an 'effective practice' guide for use more widely. (Cunningham, 2005)). I have retained undiminished my interests in, and concerns over, the nature of the processes underpinning effective mentoring as I first started to develop these interests and concerns in the context of leading a full-time PGCE course. The dimensions of this effectiveness, and how it may be further enhanced at both individual and organisational levels, continue to be of prime academic and professional interest to me.

Some further considerations and influences

Another important strand of my professional activity which has both an overarching and general relevance in explaining my current interests and understandings is that I have had for some years at the IoE a set of responsibilities (currently at the level of Director for Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement, Faculty of Policy and Society) relating to the quality assurance of taught programmes. A sizeable proportion of the provision that falls within my present remit happens to comprise a suite of training courses for intending and current college teachers; this therefore facilitates my continuing insight into, and dialogue about, the concerns mentioned above, and most specifically of the ways in which the training (and college-based mentoring) being offered both by the IoE and in post-compulsory workplaces is – or is not – meeting trainees' needs.

In addition to these dimensions of my current employment and practice, I lead that module (*Foundations of Professionalism in Education, 'FoP'*) of a part-taught doctoral level programme requiring course participants to study and reflect on a wide range of issues in modern professional life; within the specific context of this teaching I am caused to continually extend and deepen my own understandings of professionalism so that I am optimally able to respond to questions posed regarding professionalism, professional learning, etc. Besides my role in designing the FoP module, I make regular inputs to the taught programme in the areas of

professional learning (including the role of critical incidents), assume special responsibility for the assessment of assignments with a post-compulsory education/professional development focus, and induct and mentor new members of a shifting programme team. I could describe as the pinnacle of my achievements so far in the context of leading FoP my editorial work in taking to publication '*Exploring Professionalism*', from which the second of my two book chapters included in my submission has been taken. This book (with Foreword by Sir David Watson) has quite rapidly been adopted as a key resource across a number of universities, e.g. Cardiff University and the Open University, offering professional doctorates.

Alongside these kinds of major professional responsibilities, and importantly for this section, I would also wish to observe that as a trained, practising mentor-coach (Pask and Joy, 2007), *I myself* have what I would claim to be the advantage of systematic, regular professional 'encounters' that cause me to constantly interrogate, and refine, both my understanding and my deployment of mentoring and coaching skills. To remain in good standing as a member of the pool of IoE-based staff able to offer coaching support to colleagues self-referring, or being referred, to this institution's free service, I am required to attend monthly supervision sessions; these are facilitated by two nationally known figures, whose standards of monitoring practice to ensure its effectiveness are high. I am, furthermore, involved in offering training externally to PCET practitioners as part of their continuing professional development (See Appendix 5, for example).

Essentially, then, both as a practitioner and as an academic, I have strong, ongoing, 'connections' with the nature of certain key challenges being experienced in professional life, especially within educational settings. Thus the publications in my submission and the perspectives in this integrated statement are, first and foremost, grounded in the kinds of awareness - including self-awareness - *promoted by the professional work I am myself engaged in*. This work includes even those activities that are, on the face of things at any rate, a range of largely 'bureaucratic' endeavours associated with 'quality', and ensuring compliance with internal and external regulatory frameworks.

Finally, I would wish to indicate that there are a number of distinct reasons why I view the area on which I have written over the years as conforming to what Judith Bell described as a '*non-trivial*' project (Bell, 2005). In particular, I would wish to draw the strongest possible attention to that part of my role as Programme Leader (1998-2003) for the IoE's PGCE Post-Compulsory training course entailing each academic year identifying, inducting and supporting a 'cohort' of mentors who would be involved in the support of the trainees⁹ being recruited by my colleagues and I.

My professional learning deriving from having had this responsibility included what were for me some crucially important elements. While the apparent benefits to the trainees of *effective* mentoring were evident (and are elucidated in a number of places in my writing) so too were the problems caused by *ineffective*, unsupportive (and unsupported) mentoring; key questions began to take shape in my mind around what factors might come into play in determining the kind of 'mentoring experience' trainees received – what underlay the great differences in experience being reported, year in, year out, by individuals? It appeared that much was at stake, in a situation where, quite routinely, potential new entrants to college teaching were describing states of demotivation and anxieties over the career choice they had made – as well as offering on occasion absolutely damning verdicts on the mentoring practice (and even, sometimes, of the classroom teaching) they had encountered at first hand. These were, after all, the individuals whose contributions to the achievement and empowerment of often 'second chance' learners were going to be of crucial importance; as I have mentioned already, having been such a learner myself it was not at all difficult to engage with, firstly, the ways in which teachers '*make a difference*', and, secondly, following on from this, the role of the mentor in enhancing the abilities of teachers to do so.

⁹ The terminology here aligns with that adopted by OfSTED; in the practical, everyday, context of the course in question individuals were and still are actually designated Beginning Teachers (BTs).

Part B: Analytical commentary on significance of, and interrelationships between, individual items:

I am basing this application for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by publication primarily on those publications listed and described below. I will attempt to demonstrate in this section of my statement that the five publications presented have a convincing coherence, and that together they constitute a body of work whose overarching perspectives are both to a degree original, and also have had a significant impact on the development of the relevant professional community. This and other parts of my integrative statement also make references – which I trust will be found to be purposeful – to a number of other, earlier, pieces of my published work where aspects of these appear to articulate strongly with the five publications (or six if Appendix 1 is included) contained within this bound selection.

The elements of *coherence* to which I would wish to draw attention at the earliest stage are:

- the specific focus of four out of the five submitted items on a sector of education which has been comparatively under-represented in the literatures of professionalism, professional learning, professional identity, the formation of communities of practice, and mentoring, when examined alongside a large body of school-focused work (e.g. Watkins and Whalley, 1993; Maynard and Furlong, 1993; Fletcher, 2000; TTA, 2003);
- my concern to move beyond a preoccupation with individual skills and attributes, by adopting an approach that takes in both broader organisational issues, and that can also accommodate and exploit relevant theoretical perspectives;
- an emergent commitment to playing an active role within the ‘professionalisation project’ (Whitty, 2008) that neither runs the risk of appearing to evangelise mentoring, nor fails to recognise the very real constraints – financial, managerial, or broader political ones – that continue to affect the post-compulsory sector. My own personal conception of a ‘project’ to professionalise work in the college sector encompasses a concern to strongly emphasise to my audiences

that the college teacher/lecturer/mentor is first and foremost an individual with the potential to operate as what might be termed a *public good professional*. This perspective may perhaps seem to some to be an idealistic and possibly even a rather archaic one; professionalism as an activity understood as working for the social and public good is in many senses in crisis, due at least in part to fairly broad public anxieties around probity – or, rather, lack of it – and self interest. Amongst professionals themselves, the onslaught of technical-rationality may often appear to crowd out more humane, democratic considerations such as the empowerment of individuals – the aspiration of making their lives ‘go better’. Even though a developed world context such as the UK is a vastly different environment from those with which a writer such as Sen (2008) has long been preoccupied, certain dimensions of his conception of a responsibility for *reducing injustice where one has the power to do so* may even apply.

The above three elements impinge on all five of the items being submitted as part of this application. Each item is, to reiterate, concerned with mentoring and/or professional learning. My writing typically seeks to relate these processes to enhancing the quality of teachers’ professional understanding and practice, and by extension the experience of diverse learner groups within post-compulsory education.

Before describing in detail the significance of each published item I am submitting, a very brief overview may be of some value. In this, only, I have numbered consecutively each item as follows:

Item 1, ‘**Some have mentoring...**’ demonstrates the significance to teacher trainees of their mentors. It goes on to explore the nature of mentors’ motivations and the professional rewards they find in undertaking the activity.

Item 2, ‘**All the right features...**’ examines the organisational features, both practical and less tangible, that are likely to comprise a college’s potential to support effective mentoring.

Item 3, **'So where do I go from here?...**' attempts to bring certain new perspectives to bear on the professional growth, development and progression of mentors themselves. It has a far stronger focus on the motivations, aspirations and developmental needs of mentors than my other submissions.

Item 4, **'Mentors and models of professional learning'** is concerned to reveal the ways in which effective mentoring practice may purposefully exploit certain key theoretical perspectives; at its simplest, it argues for the utility of underpinning theory as a dimension of mentoring's role in enhancing professional learning.

Item 5, **'Critical incidents in professional life and learning'** consists of a body of material that is probably the most clearly self-evident from its title than those of my other submissions. It is less concerned with mentoring relationships, but more with exploring critical incidents – that may in an important sense serve as a powerful vehicle in supporting mentoring.

Item 6, **'Beginning close encounters'** is supplied as Appendix 1, the most significant of my six appendices. In some important respects it sets the scene for – at least – items 1-3 in setting out the kinds of needs and anxieties experienced by new college teachers, the group whose mentoring I went on to extensively reflect on and write about.

Sole-authored articles in refereed journals

'Some have mentoring...' (2004)

This article originated in my concerns to identify some of the factors that were coming into play in the Institute of Education's partner colleges when mentors were being designated to support trainee teachers on placement for their practical teaching experience. As both a personal tutor and programme manager for the full-time PGCE Post-Compulsory course, it was evident (from written evaluations, meetings with student representatives, and discussion with my own tutees) that the quality of trainees' college experiences were determined by a complex set of

considerations. Drawing on this range of sources and a questionnaire survey I concluded that the main factors determining the quality of trainees' experience were the following:

- *Geography* – where a college was situated in relation to London's socioeconomic, cultural and ethnic mosaic;
- *'Curricular opportunity'* – the degree to which a trainee's specialist interests and expertise could be accommodated within the range of programmes on offer at a particular college;
- *Collegiality and 'solidarity'* – whether a trainee perceived that they were isolated within a placement, or had relatively easy access to peer support; even where a number of trainees were being hosted at a college, contact with peers could not always be taken for granted if the institution was based on several sites;
- *Relations with mentors* – this emerged as the single most important recurring theme over a period of years, and for most purposes the area in which, in theory at least, the IoE ought to have been able to have the highest degree of (a) influence, and (b) jurisdiction. This observation contrasts with one that could probably be made regarding the first of the elements referred to above, viz geography: essentially, hard-won placements were, and largely continue to be, eagerly accepted by ITE programme managers even when it appears probable that certain trainees may be daunted by their location, for instance in parts of London well-known for social disadvantage.

In the light of the significance that was clearly being attached by trainees (and by their personal tutors, my colleagues in delivering the PGCE, PC) to relations with mentors, the ways in which the latter had come to the role appeared to be one of several areas meriting research. From numerous interactions with trainees (alongside material deriving from annual surveys of new recruits to IoE training programmes) that informed my article on 'close encounters' (Cunningham 2000; see Appendix 1) it was increasingly clear that the question of an accessible, informed and motivated mentor was of central importance. However, this, as I

have argued, has been a notably neglected facet of the experience of training to teach in the colleges. Whether I would gain any insights into the extent to which trainees were ‘encountering’ mentors whose professionalism accorded with Bottery’s notion of a professional holding *expertise*, acting *altruistically* and with a measure of *autonomy* (Bottery, 1996) remained to be seen.

I would now wish to set the above observations within a far broader construct, that of ‘signature pedagogies’ (Shulman 2005(a); 2005(b)). Shulman has observed that in the classical professions such as medicine and law, certain features of professional preparation and formation are so distinctive and pervasive that their existence convincingly represents what he terms ‘signature pedagogies’. For example

in the law, [exist] the quasi-Socratic interactions ... [and] the first year of law school is dominated by the case dialogue method of teaching, in which an authoritative and often authoritarian instructor engages individual students in a large class of many dozens in dialogue about an appellate case of some complexity. In medicine we immediately think of the phenomenon of bedside teaching, in which a senior physician or resident leads a group of novices through the daily clinical rounds, engaging them in discussions about the diagnosis and management of patients’ diseases. (Shulman, 2005a, p. 52).

Within the current arrangements for the preparation of new college teachers, we might of course recognise such elements of training as the requirement placed on ‘novices’ to regularly supply lesson plans for sessions that are to be taught (either in ‘microteaching’ contexts or in actual college classrooms). There is also, virtually universally, an explicit requirement to engage in reflection on their performance – the ‘reflective practitioner’ model essentially being ‘pervasive’. However, whether we could construe these kinds of elements of a standard initial training programme as equating to a ‘signature pedagogy’ is in my view and Shulman’s doubtful: their features are not uniformly applied and their overarching benefit simply cannot be assumed. Participation in ‘microteaching’ events and other such features of the teacher trainer’s repertoire is certainly of value, and almost certainly will play a part in enhancing the trainee’s professional practice. But, ‘a true professional does not merely practice: he or she performs *with a sense of personal and social*

responsibility' (Shulman, 2005b, emphasis added) and in the examples cited by Shulman they work closely with a senior member of the profession in a manner akin to mentoring. It is particularly notable in fact how the work of colleagues with some seniority in supporting and supervising novices in law and medicine is relatively recently becoming established as an actual requirement within nursing as well.

Adoption of mentoring as a signature pedagogy within the post-compulsory sector potentially endows the committed mentor with special opportunities; in particular they can play a strong role in the socialisation of newcomers into the traditionally 'empowering' and inclusive ethos of the college sector. In the 'ideal type' mentoring relationship some of the features of a signature pedagogy are actually already in evidence. Furthermore, mentors' own professional practice is both *model* and *beneficiary* as it enters into, and is reflected through, the mentoring dialogue. This state of affairs is actually discernible in certain of the quotes I incorporated into the paper.

So it is in the realm of mentoring new entrants (in particular), assisting in their socialisation into their chosen professional field (whether or not in this context we choose to invoke the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) to help explain how, overall, the socialisation process is being played out), that we might perhaps begin to argue that the work of mentors such as those in my study could be depicted as an embryonic 'signature pedagogy'. With a more generous word count allocation, this perspective might have been woven in alongside my concern to emphasise the stated professional benefits to mentors themselves of having engaged with the activity despite on occasion not having actually sought out such an involvement in supporting new college teachers during their pre-service training.

However, to at least indicate certain of the key findings from the study described in this paper the first would fairly clearly be the evidence that mentoring practice, and the experiences therefore of trainees, was highly inconsistent; this aligns well with an observation made in the important OfSTED (2003) survey mentioned earlier. At the one end of a continuum was located the trainee sentiment that 'I have felt

totally supported, encouraged and respected during my placement, and advice has been given in a positive constructive manner', while at the other was the damning '[The mentor] hasn't got a clue – hasn't read the mentor handbook'¹⁰.

These inconsistencies were somewhat akin to those unearthed by Hankey in her 2004 study of 'the good, the bad and other considerations'. A significant proportion of the variations in mentoring practice, and therefore of the experiences of trainees, is attributed by Hankey (2004, p. 395) to the fact that the colleges have not been subjected to the same degree of regulation in this sphere as have schools; for example 'the issue of an untrained teacher mentoring a student is unlikely to arise in the schools sector'. She also cites the pay disparity with schools as being an unhelpful factor: 'the request to mentor a student can be perceived, not as an opportunity for personal and professional development, but as yet another demand being made on an already overstretched teacher' (ibid, p. 397). We find in this particular study a range of trainee experience that extends from '... she was fabulous' (ibid., p. 393) to 'you know what was the matter with her. I discovered subsequently that her timetable [for a part-time post] had been cut by half, her working hours, and so she'd decided that 'cause she wasn't getting paid for it she wasn't going to supervise me or give me any feedback' (ibid., p. 393).

To return to my own study, mentors' views, as they were expressed as responses to my survey questions, were often highly reflective and open. There was a reasonable degree of evidence that they had felt both valued and *professionally extended* by having taken on the role. 'You can't just say to the BT [trainee teacher] "I've always done it this way" – you have to justify yourself'. Another mentor recorded that the experience of mentoring had been 'very valuable', that (s)he had 'enjoyed the challenge' and that 'it helped me self-evaluate'. Self-justification, self-evaluation – these are surely signifiers of a taking-stock, a process of re-examining the 'how' and 'why' of one's own professional practice, and indications that the notion of mentoring potentially having *reciprocal* benefits may well be a case of the reality, occasionally at least, being in accord with the

¹⁰ The latter comment was possibly especially dispiriting given the priority and effort I had devoted to producing the handbook in question.

rhetoric that is often associated with the activity. Beyond this, perhaps we may also discern in mentors' sentiments ways in which some of their satisfactions can be aligned with key findings from the 'Goodwork' project (Gardner et al, 2007, p.5): mentoring as work that is 'engaging, enjoyable and feels good' could actually be achievable.

A second particular outcome of having worked on this article is that I was caused to reflect in a much more focused way on what appears to be a strong and fundamental relationship between mentor attributes and trainee attitudes. Overwhelmingly, in the very many informal discussions with both groups of individuals that were taking place at the same time as the paper was taking shape, the 'gut-feeling' was being reinforced that the quality of mentor support flavoured trainees' first impressions of the college sector almost as significantly as had their early interactions with learner groups, and with the physical and social environment of the colleges. As the well-known study that explored the question 'Why do they do it?' had found 'those of the trainee sample who had been well supported by their personal mentors ... had strengthened their commitment to teaching in FE'. (McKelvey and Andrews, 1998, p. 362).

The paper was one that did appear to attract a good degree of positive interest, and led to certain specific invitations to agree to new commitments that would draw on my expertise. For example, not that long after its appearance I was called on by a refereed journal to write a 1000 word review of a major text on mentoring in international contexts. (Cullingford, 2006; review supplied as Appendix 2).

'All the right features...' (2007)

One of the principles that emerged from the work cited above (and from many brief accompanying notes sent to me by survey respondents) clearly pointed to the need for colleges, as organisations, to engage more fully and positively with the value of the professional work being carried out by mentors. Additionally, and repeatedly, in such forums as annual Induction/Training and Sharing of Good Practice events, mentors drew attention to a perceived mismatch between an

organisational (meaning both College *and* Institute of Education) focus on individual attributes and performance, and the neglect of a broader perspective, one that fully engaged with collegiality and support structures for mentoring. Such a broader perspective would acknowledge that mentoring as a professional activity is, certainly, a supporting one – but also needs, fundamentally, to be *supported*. To take things one stage further, one might even claim that ‘fervour without infrastructure is dangerous’ (Freedman, 1993, in Watkins 2007, p. 118). In some senses, it appeared to me, there was a significant element of sheer chance in whether, across the colleges, mentoring was or was not being properly resourced and supported; this was the inconsistency drawn attention to so emphatically by OfSTED in 2003, and alluded to much more recently (though in the context of higher education) by Williams (2009, p.2, emphasis added): ‘If it’s important that we do something well, we must *actively take steps to make sure* that we indeed do it well. We can’t leave it to chance’.

As a contribution to the ongoing academic and professional debates around effective mentoring, the construct I developed in this particular paper, that of *institutional architecture*, has been of some significance. It would be to overstate the case to claim that my propositions have led to any radical change in the ‘grammar’ of the way colleges view considerations of infrastructure, but certainly there is evidence that both the practitioner community (teacher trainers, mentor trainers, staff developers) and writers for an academic audience have been engaging with them (see, e.g., citation in Thompson and Robinson, (2008). In its simplest form, the notion hinges on ways in which a positive organisational culture, with a number of concrete manifestations of such positivity, can create the conditions in which mentors’ work will thrive.

Even where the total number of staff engaged in mentoring in any one college may be a relatively small proportion of the whole, as Fullan (2001) has noted, the potential for educational change to be engendered by small groups of practitioners is in fact considerable. Timperley and Alton-Lee’s (2008) study has drawn very strong conclusions indeed regarding the relationship between the enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities for teachers with significant positive effects on pupil learning and achievement in environments of significant learner diversity.

This is a thesis that in my view has high transferrable value as far as college learners are concerned, especially in the context of such outstandingly diverse learner groups as are found in the great majority of the London colleges in which IoE trainees have been placed or employed.

The article argues that there exist institutionalised barriers to realising the aspirations for creating a far more all-encompassing framework of mentoring within colleges and other post-compulsory institutions. Such barriers are in fact rather more numerous than the simple matter of mentor numbers, as was at one point being suggested by Lucas (2004), whose points I will shortly be illustrating. The sector will need, I argued in this paper, to invest significantly more resources *to build the capacity* of individuals to effectively assume a mentoring role. Furthermore, while some argue that in modern organisational environments ‘everyone needs a mentor’ (Clutterbuck, 2004), it is unlikely, realistically, to be possible to claim that everyone in the colleges – no matter how knowledgeable they are within their curriculum specialisms – can *be* a mentor. The dispositions, or attributes, of many skilled teachers are sometimes such that they can indeed often equally effectively form the basis for mentoring as they can for teaching.

Whether or not, though, we can *always* assume that the principles of ‘praxis’, as Freire termed it, apply to mentoring activity is in some ways probably questionable. So too is the likelihood of there *consistently* being the right organisational conditions to motivate and to inspire commitment. I view praxis as embodying meaningful activity based on reflection – ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (Freire, 1970, p. 36). Within the immediate ‘world’ of the colleges it will be helpful, I would argue, if the ‘transformation’ does not have to begin to be worked in an environment that is at least not fundamentally hostile. Conditions that are seriously neglectful of facilitating teachers giving some priority to enhancing their own *professional* understandings, as well as ensuring they are alert to changes within their *subject* domains, are unhelpful.

Such dispositions as are alluded to above will, therefore, need to be conceived of within a broader set of notions, and practicalities, especially the following three key issues that are, among others, identified and dealt with in the article:

- the ability of an institution to adequately *motivate* staff to undertake mentoring – to incentivise the activity, including by means involving explicitly raising its professional status (a theme dealt with fully in the following publication in this submission). Further, it may well be the case that a central initiative, the design of which practitioners themselves have had no opportunity to contribute to, ‘is likely to provoke a measure of scepticism or suspicion from staff [who] are invariably suspicious of central initiatives that may add to existing workloads or benefit managers rather than practitioners or learners’. (Cox and Smith, 2004, p. 25). In Cox and Smith’s college case studies, ‘fear of increased paperwork’ was an inhibiting factor in staff perceptions and inhibitions regarding any ‘college-wide quality improvement initiative’ (a descriptor which would undoubtedly be applicable to a mentoring system) and ‘staff resistance was also likely to occur where knowledge-sharing was seen to have ‘procedural’ aims and not be focused directly on the needs of learners or staff’ (ibid.);
- the necessity to put in place effective induction and support systems for mentors, fully exploiting the benefits of such theoretical constructs as Lave and Wenger’s (1991) ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, the perspectives of writers such as Stoll and Louis’s (2007) on professional learning communities, and the even broader notion of ‘learning spaces’ as put forward by Savin-Baden (2007);
- mechanisms for evaluating the *outcomes* of mentoring, so that it can be ascertained where a system is succeeding and where it needs further refinement. (However, I acknowledge in Part C of this integrative statement that objective measurement of the value of a mentor’s work may be in some senses problematic).

Although each of the above would merit a paper in its own right, I have of necessity at times had to be more succinct. For the present, however, and simply to slightly amplify why I judge, for instance, the last of the above three issues to be of significance, in an otherwise highly praising recent (i.e. ‘Grade 1’) OfSTED report on the *overall* quality of a particular HEI’s training programme for new college teachers, we find the comment that there was found to be: ‘insufficiently

rigorous quality assurance of placements and *mentoring*'¹¹. Notwithstanding the constraints of word count, the procedural and philosophical understandings of quality assurance and enhancement that have become fuller the longer I have been professionally involved in this area of academic life would now allow me to incorporate certain additional insights into this particular publication.

Similarly, the original paper largely ignores the potential for fuller use of electronic means within organisations to more effectively facilitate mentoring relations. 'E-mentoring' would now, in a revised version of the publication, be given some prominence; the notion aligns both with the vastly expanded significance within colleges of e-learning (students' access to materials on college intranets, for example) and the high likelihood that many new teacher may themselves be members of the 'Web 2.0 generation'. In other words, there is now arguably a 'naturalness' to employing e-mentoring as a dimension of overarching strategies to extend the scope of the professional dialogue at the heart of mentoring. Mentors may increase the degree of interaction with their peers as well as with their mentees, thus allowing greater integration both horizontally as well as vertically. They may find use of electronic means aids in the kind of coordination activity involved in liaising with host teachers to gain sufficient access to classes that may be either observed or taught by pre-service trainees. Mentors holding what are essentially *lead mentor* or *strategic mentor* (Yorks and Humber, n.d.) roles (though terminology may differ across institutions) could find communicating with a team of mentors more efficient.

None of the above observations would imply that mentors' face to face time with either trainees or their own peers will be reduced. As is – or ought to be – the case when considering modernising practitioners' approaches to learning and teaching. The arguments in favour of a degree of e-mentoring are around the ways in which the mentoring repertoire may be extended: my conception is one of *augmenting* what has been possible, rather than discarding it. As such, it would appear to mesh usefully with one of the '10 elements of a successful strategy [for sharing

¹¹ (OfSTED, 2008), emphasis added).

good internal practice]’ promoted in a relatively recent discussion document (Cox and Smith, 2004, p. 33):

4. the use of ICT systems to disseminate good practice.

The only significant caution I would wish to now incorporate into an extended version of this particular published item would be in relation to mentors’ ability to engage in boundary-setting. The very flexibility that draws positive attention to e-mentoring also potentially licenses mentees to make assumptions about the ‘24/7’ availability of their mentors. Expectations around the kind of instant responses that electronic means facilitate could well need to be tempered by relatively assertive guidance with regard to what it is and is not legitimate to anticipate as being a component of this kind of mentoring interaction.

One further possible extension to the range of issues being addressed in this particular paper would be to attempt to construct an argument around certain dimensions of what might be proposed as a ‘signature pedagogy’ *for mentor education itself*. This would offer a parallel to the notion of signature pedagogies for inducting new entrants into college teaching. Its concern would be with the kinds of participatory learning processes (Webb et al, 2007) that are amenable to institutional facilitation, recognising that *local circumstances* will sometimes dictate that there will be variations of principle and process (ibid). The importance of ‘cultural context’ has also been stressed by Harding (2006), for example. These kinds of issues, and the perils of an over-rigid national prescription, were in an international context emphasised in a major OECD review (OECD, 1996, p.11):

The more complex a professional activity becomes, the more policy interventions have to take into account the view of practitioners and leave space for *local adaptations* ... practical problems cannot be solved for the institutions by central regulations (emphasis added).

Subsequent to the appearance of my paper, it has quite rapidly become apparent that in the field of medical education far more attention is being paid to issues of professionalism and the part played by training organisations in its promotion (see, e.g. Brater, 2007) and a revised and updated version of the paper could now

incorporate some comparisons with the developments we are witnessing in medicine. Further, although communities of mentoring practice are at least alluded to in my original publication, my focus on dimensions of the '*who mentors the mentors?*' question would be susceptible to considerable further expansion.

'So where do I go from here?...' (2007)

Moving on from my concerns as set out in the previous paper, I endeavoured to illuminate the nature of mentors' motivations, their own professional development, and the important dimensions of incentivising and rewarding the activity. Overarching all three of these issues was for me the question of mentors' professional *identity*. How assuming the role of mentor alongside what would typically be a wide range of other teaching, pastoral and administrative roles could contribute to the acquisition of a confidently held professional identity has been a central concern of mine; certainly my own mentoring practice, and my (for the most part positively evaluated) attempts to model best practice as a teacher, trainer and mentor, have played a significant part in boosting my professional confidence, and in concrete ways have allowed me to seek - and sometimes secure - career advancement. This holds especially true in an environment that continues to judge staff primarily in terms of research output. The paper under discussion here in some respects articulates most convincingly with the first item in my submission, 'Some have mentoring...' in that both are primarily focused on the self-perceptions of mentors as opposed to the interrogation of dimensions of effective mentoring practice. 'So where do I go from here?' goes further than exploring self-perceptions, however, in that it tries, for example, to point up the mismatch between the growth in professional confidence and prowess that may accrue from engagement with mentoring, and the presently extremely restricted rewards and recognition that are in general being given by post-compulsory institutions.

In a number of important regards, a key question that had emerged for me might well be summed up in the title of McKelvey and Andrews' (1998) well-known paper "Why do they do it?". This explored the motivations of trainee teachers on a PCET-focused training programme; I was essentially posing the very same question with

regard to those whose responsibilities included supporting such trainees. Although not fully exploiting relevant theoretical work in areas such as professional identity and motivation, I found a number of the key findings reported in this paper certainly resonated with perspectives such as those of Huberman (1993) and Healy and Welchert (1990). Healy and Welchert's work on the 'transformative' potential of mentoring *for both parties* is especially interesting: their propositions include the fact that for mentors the mentoring relationship may be 'a vehicle for achieving a midlife "generativity"... meaning a transcendence of stagnating self-preoccupation' (Healy and Welchert, 1990, p. 17).

Although typically employing rather less 'academic' phraseology than that above, many mentors with whom I have worked have commented on exactly this – the ways in which the activity of mentoring allows – requires, even – a decentring and a focus on trainees' needs and aspirations, as opposed to dwelling on one's own dissatisfactions and grievances. This process articulates in a very significant way, I would argue, with the growth of confidence in one's very professional *identity*. (And pride in this identity, I would further argue, can owe as much to the sense that one is deploying in one's mentoring the same kind of *principled ethic of care* (Salisbury and Jephcote, 2009, p. 14) as is required of the effective teacher of college students as it derives from, say, subject expertise).

From a practitioner's perspective – as opposed to a more strictly academic one – the data reported in the article provided a heartening snapshot of the ways in which, despite the many observable challenges faced by experienced PCET teachers, they quite often remain prepared to engage in professional activities that significantly merit the criteria for *extended professionalism*. (Hoyle, 1974). This observation runs counter to that made by Lucas, who has been concerned with enticing sufficient appropriately qualified and motivated individuals to actually come forward and become mentors; for example:

'A culture has developed in some subject and vocational areas where narrow ways of teaching have become entrenched ... In some areas, subject knowledge resides in a teacher who could be seeking training themselves. In some other subject areas, existing expertise is so weak

that *finding good mentors* will be problematic'. (Lucas, 2004, p.6, emphasis added).

A possible advance in the area of supplying a broader range of incentives for experienced practitioners to engage in mentoring would be to explore further than I have already done certain issues around credentials and status. The 'credentialisation' of the college teaching (and management) workforce has to date encompassed such developments as the introduction of specialist specifications for teachers of Literacy and Numeracy (FENTO, 2001) and proposals for the inception of formal qualifications for college principals and vice principals on a par with the National Professional Qualification for Headship, as required within the school sector.

However, despite this overarching trend towards making a fuller range of specialised certification available, there has been little by way of allocating formalised credit, resulting, e.g., in additional salary increments or other inducements for appropriately 'active' college staff in the way that is evident within the school sector. Being designated a '*subject coach*' will, no doubt, be viewed by some mentors as bestowing a degree of professional status sufficient to meaningfully complement the satisfactions that individuals in my 2004 study had referred to, such as 'very much enjoy[ing] supporting new lecturers into the profession' (Cunningham, 2004, p. 277). But to *actually increase* the pool – or the numbers in Lucas's 'pot' – then it would appear that a fuller engagement on the part of both colleges and the relevant policy-making bodies with the notion, and practicalities, of accrediting mentoring is necessary. Achievements on programmes or modules offered by such institutions as Oxford Brookes and the IoE, entailing specialist mentoring-coaching studies, could within current frameworks for professional advancement in the sector be deemed worthy of some remuneration in the same kind of way as a range of other 'badges of success' already are. Possibly this is an argument I might have made more forcefully in 'So where do I go from here?'.

Sole-authored chapters in books

To now turn to the two book chapters submitted, I would wish to emphasise that their major focus is on *professional learning*, and in particular 'learning on the job'. These have become very specific areas of interest for me, as they have done for such authors of stature as Evans, Unwin and Fuller, and Eraut (observing which is not to imply in any way my own credentials to be grouped alongside them!). Again, my connections with 'the field' arise not only through my academic work but through ongoing and regular teaching/tutorial commitments on programmes such as the Certificate, Diploma and MA in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education¹², and the MTeach (Post-Compulsory); all such programmes recruit practitioners, and on each of them there is a specific onus on such practitioners to bring to the learning environment their own current issues and challenges for exploration with peers.

However, in both of the chapters submitted, I have had a definite concern to interweave theoretical perspectives with material relating to the, often quotidian, experiences of the types of practitioners with whom I have been interacting. Reviews and endorsements of the published work in question have noted this concern. I view the significance of extant theory, and its further development and refinement, as essential to provide solid underpinnings for professional work in my chosen fields.

Mentors and models of professional learning (2005)

This chapter forms part of a book aimed at bringing together a number of principles and practices in effective mentoring, and applying these to the specifics of working with teachers – primarily new teachers – in post-compulsory education. The book is presently being revised and updated with a second edition in prospect. In connection with this development, it should be stated that an important new section, albeit a brief one, concludes the submitted chapter. In this conclusion, I endeavour to

¹² This is an important Institute of Education programme (for which I was for a period Programme Leader) that includes in its intake all our newly appointed, inexperienced, lecturing staff.

strengthen yet further my claims concerning the utility to practitioners of theory, and of being able to bridge a 'theory-practice gap' between the work trainees are engaged on as part of their university-based programme, and their teaching in post-compulsory education. In this connection I now cite, for example Eraut's (1994) highly positive views of the 'disposition to theorise' (p.71), and Ball's (1995) notion of theory as providing us with a tool for 'thinking otherwise' and offering us ' a language for challenge and modes of thought, other than those articulated for us by dominant others' (p. 226)

My concern in the chapter was to find convincing ways in which those college teachers contemplating embarking on mentoring, as well as practising mentors, might identify not only a legitimacy in relevant theoretical perspectives but, more positively, discern useful ways in which such perspectives might actually enhance their practice. It may well have been possible to 'bypass' theoretical considerations altogether in a review of mentoring practices – to say as Williams has put it with regard to his 'maxims' of quality assurance that 'they represent no more than things I have observed and learnt' (Williams, 2009, p. 2). But I wished to go beyond this point, and seek ways to promote the *intelligent* effort highlighted by Williams (ibid., p. 1). To come at things from a slightly different angle, the chapter is about that type of 'knowing' which is about 'ourselves, our theories and our actions within a context of the wider world ... [this] *critical knowing* is concerned with a critical understanding of the self, the manner in which we act, and the personal theories that inform our actions. Critical knowing results in a greater *awareness* and may provide the possibility to change our actions in the direction of more desired objectives' Pearson and Smith, 1985, pp. 74/75, emphasis added). This form of knowing lies at the core of both effective mentoring and of forms of extended, reflective, professionalism.

In my article 'Some have mentoring...' mentors often appear to be motivated by a degree of altruism; although they may not typically use the term, there are elements of *emotional labour* (Hochschild, 1983; 2003) in how they may see their work – they adopt a nurturing, caring approach to dealing with new entrants who, to cite but one cause of anxiety in trainees, 'may experience difficulties in their relationships with students, especially in the early stages of their careers' (Robson and Bailey, 2009, p. 110). I simply based my approach to how I would synthesise

and render accessible some relevant perspectives on an awareness that it would be primarily in the context of illuminating strategies being adopted in such circumstances that mentors would be interested. I concur with Eraut (2007) in his contention that:

While education and practice settings each have both theories and practices, they have very different cultures and different discourses... People who work in both contexts have to be bilingual, but this does not mean that they become good interpreters. (p.404).

While I make no claims for the originality of expressing my standpoint in such a fashion, the chapter therefore simply originates in the proposition that 'there is nothing more practical than a good theory'. The two quotations prefacing the chapter were selected to give emphasis to this starting point, so we have, for instance, a writer to the *Education Guardian* voicing the opinion that 'practice without a grounding of theory is likely to be sterile at best, and ineffective and damaging at worst', and Michael Eraut posing what are in my view certain crucial questions:

How feasible are the aspirations of those who hope to codify teachers' craft knowledge? It is not difficult to find maxims or practical tips to pass on to beginning teachers, but what do they all add up to? ... Can an amorphous collection of practical principles be said to constitute a grounded theory of practice, or is this mere wishful thinking? (Eraut, 1994, p. 68)¹³

The chapter elaborated the applicability of theories such as those put forward by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and Dennison and Kirk (1990) and was received positively: '[the book] provides a logical discussion around key principles and concepts, *which have been well underpinned by theorists* to persuade the reader of the benefits of mentoring to the workplace organisation.' (Bell, 2005, emphasis added). The especially gratifying aspect of this particular review was that it was written by a senior practitioner in a large FE college.

¹³ Both the writers I refer to were addressing issues arising from the initial training of teachers, but the perspectives cited appear to have equal validity to the case of the induction and development of mentors.

Her perspective contrasted for me in a highly positive way with my recollection of an incident I had been involved with a few years previously; I hesitate to describe it as truly *critical* (in the manner of the topic of the final publication in my submission, below) but it certainly had provided a good deal of food for thought.

What had taken place was the – highly disgruntled - withdrawal from an in-service PCET ITE programme of a tutor working in one of the vocational areas; in an angry letter to the programme leader (fortunately not myself, although I was a core member of the teaching team) he had announced that a principal reason for his departure was his experience of having been taught by “*academics and mere theoreticians*”, with little to offer by way of grounded insights and practical guidelines, to assist him in teaching relatively challenging learners, in relatively challenging circumstances. The irony of the situation, and the complaint, lay simply in the fact that every member of the core teaching team that the individual concerned would have been coming into contact with was actually far from being in any full and true sense ‘an academic’: a close colleague and I, for example, were at this point in time continuing to teach on a ‘0.5’ basis in large inner city colleges! Yet, quite clearly somehow a perception had been engendered in the mind of at least one programme participant not only that we were, as trainers, a detached and ‘unaware’ group, but that – or so one infers from the phrasing of the letter referred to – ‘theory’ was utterly hopeless as a dimension of a college teacher’s understanding and practice. The incident seemed to represent a superb illustration of Eraut’s claim that ‘more heat than light is created by perpetually contrasting theory with practice, and by assuming that there is only one kind of theory’ (Eraut, 1994, p. 59).

One particular irony embedded in the situation surfaced only some time afterwards. I have been privileged over the years to work with a number of skilled craftsmen (and women) who have turned to college teaching and begun their in-service Cert.Ed. at the IoE. They have come from backgrounds as diverse as plumbing, motor vehicle maintenance and hairdressing. A number have initially experienced difficulties with adapting to the conventions of the ‘academic writing’ required alongside demonstration of their classroom competence – and in truth some have never fully conquered the demands of such writing. However, following

the inception of a Master's programme in Teaching in Post-Compulsory Education, a number have progressed to this level of study, and, with focused support, have gained an MA. It was with a particular pride that I learnt of a former trainee of mine, a painter and decorator (and an outstanding teacher, working in an especially challenging inner city college) that he recently gained a Distinction on the programme. The moral of the story, to possibly state the obvious, is that 'theory', of which there is a substantial amount to be covered on an IoE MA, is not necessarily inaccessible, an insurmountable barrier to understanding and to achievement. My former student, for one, spoke highly positively of the ways in which his having to grapple with theoretical – and policy – matters had meaningfully broadened his insights into the context of his professional work.

In brief, then, even though the chapter being submitted as part of my application is only a rather abbreviated depiction of the ways in which theoretical underpinnings of mentoring practice can be helpful, for one commentator at least, cited above, the work does possess a positive value. In a way, it is a small but I hope significant attempt to raise the profile of 'engaged scholarship' (Boyer, 1990, 1996) – here used to signify the potential for increments in a mentor's theoretical knowledge base to purposefully interpenetrate and enhance their professional practice. In Boyer's 1996 formulation of his ideas around engaged scholarship, this kind of process genuinely sees the development of a reflective practice in which theory and practice *inform each other*. In my own view, Power's work (Power, 2008, p. 157) on 'the imaginative professional', although it focuses far more on the utility of sociological rather than psychological perspectives, is also of clear relevance here. She argues for perspectives on professional life and work that move beyond over-individualised or over-deterministic concerns to ones that 'force us to consider what varieties of men and women now prevail in this profession. What varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted?'. So, theory, along with travel, may well simply 'broaden the mind', to put it simplistically, or, to borrow from Power again, if we are to aim to better equip professionals to respond articulately and creatively to challenge and change, 'the more sophisticated their understandings, the greater the chance of developing such creative and articulate responses' (ibid.).

There is, as acknowledged in the chapter itself, but a small selection of theory incorporated, the selection largely being based on personal experience of the degree of interest – or otherwise - generated at mentor training events by the various theoretical perspectives being ‘unveiled’ to those attending. Thus mentoring ‘stages’ or ‘life cycles’ were given special prominence in the short chapter. Such constructs had been identified as seeming to hold special relevance within a mentoring context where time constraints were of almost overriding importance (the short training programmes followed by trainees, and the even shorter period being spent within college placements probably leading mentors to search for ‘synoptic’ outcomes to their inputs). In this kind of context, it seems quite clear that the notion of structuring a mentoring relationship with the relatively speedy transition of the mentee to *independence* becomes a priority; numerous mentors-in-training have raised with me as a key issue the question of ‘letting go’ without their trainees perceiving that they are being cast adrift at too early a stage simply because the mentor has other matters to which they need to attend.

However, to indicate the scope for future extension of the chapter’s coverage should the opportunity arise, i.e. were the relevant word count stipulation to be the subject of greater flexibility, I would wish to indicate below certain further perspectives that I believe could similarly engage mentors.

One of these is possibly present in the form of debates over ‘multiple intelligences’ (MI) (Gardner, 1993; Salovey and Mayer, 1990). This area of educational theorising, along with the ‘learning styles’ (LS) (Honey and Mumford, 1982) construct and its subsequent evolution (e.g. Butler, 1999) has of course latterly been the subject of significant criticism (Coffield et al, 2004). Notwithstanding this observation, both MIs and LSs, have frequently been viewed in the colleges as of utility in encouraging – if not actually requiring – tutors to engage more fully with differentiation and personalisation. There is, additionally, evidence from a number of colleges that the learners themselves are encountering during the ‘diagnostic’ process – and later on, as part of the tutorial curriculum - questions around their learning preferences. The ideas therefore have a currency in the colleges, even if they are now a little devalued by comparison with their previous status. They have a capacity to promote debate and argument, at any rate. In this context, therefore,

the notion of mentors considering using MIs in work with trainees ('learners') could possibly be introduced into an expanded chapter.

For a higher education setting, Harding (Harding, 2006) has described how various intelligences posited by Gardner could be both explored and 'acted on' within the coaching-mentoring relationship; the interventions being proposed could assist individuals in working towards their specific professional goals. A MI 'toolbox' (ibid) was created by Harding that on examination I felt could offer practitioners in further education a similar broadening of their conceptual repertoire, especially if we accept the truth of one of Harding's starting points, that 'Organisations and individuals are using coaching and mentoring relationships to help facilitate the change process, as it provides an opportunity to design a personalised programme of development which can help an individual to learn how to learn' (ibid, p. 19). As I have indicated in Part A, above, and as has probably become a commonplace, the post-compulsory sector is certainly one in which 'the change process' provides a strong motif for professional activity. And, if we also concede that the construction of meaning by trainees will derive not only from supportive induction and support as offered by mentors and other colleagues but *from their own individual learning capacities*, then tabling for discussion some questions around mentors' readiness to conceive of some ways in which MIs might *possibly* be coming into play could be found to be warranted.

Critical incidents in professional life and learning (2008)

This chapter features in the volume *Exploring Professionalism*, which I edited. *Exploring Professionalism* received at the time of publication strong endorsements from some of the UK's foremost academics with an interest in the professions, and professional learning. Professors Michael Eraut (Sussex), William Richardson (Exeter) and Eric Hoyle (Bristol) each contributed 'for publication' positive views; I quote the latter's endorsement in full below:

These are testing times for the professions. They are widely regarded politically as roadblocks to modernization and reform and governments have legislated accordingly. As a consequence of this, we have seen the steady incorporation of professionalism into managerialism as a mode of

organising work in complex social and economic systems. It is thus an appropriate time to give deep consideration to the future of the professions. This has been admirably fulfilled in this collection. The issues of professional knowledge, institutions, power, ethics, work-patterns and identities are explored afresh in this scholarly work.

My contribution to *Exploring Professionalism* (besides a 2000-word editorial preface) clearly falls within the area Hoyle alludes to in his final sentence as professional knowledge, with my prime objective being to focus on what I had come to view as a type of event – the critical incident (CI) – that is of the highest importance in professional life generally, and within the challenging environment of PCET specifically. I argue that the CI has the potential to be a core focus of effective mentoring. Time and again, what my colleagues and I encountered in our tutorial discussions with trainees was a predominance of issues and queries arising from one specific ‘teaching event’, or an interaction (occasionally ‘pair’, or linked series, of interactions) with a mentor. The same theme, incidentally, was repeated in our conversations with mentors when visiting colleges for practical teaching observations. Following on from the typical brief overview of how a trainee was fitting in/progressing, mentors tended to speak of highly specific one-off ‘cases’:

‘S/he did have quite a tricky problem one day with an especially difficult student’;

‘I think s/he’s feeling suddenly overwhelmed after we passed over a share of the mock GCSE re-sits, who can be hard to motivate’;

‘The reaction to my first post-observation debriefing was really defensive’.

These kinds of statements seem to lend weight to the proposition that while the very routine of life as a new – or more experienced, for that matter - college teacher always has the potential to cause new professional learning to occur, it is the more episodic or ‘out of the blue’ matters that frequently have the greatest impact on how such learning may come about. For example, in the last of the three scenarios mentioned above, someone who has probably been getting used to the presence of other teachers (or staff such as learning support assistants (LSAs)

working with learners with additional needs) in their classroom, will have realised that this kind of situation has now become fairly commonplace: present times are so far removed from the era of the classroom as a teacher's 'secret garden' that it is probably going to be relatively rare that they are 'unobserved', and they will therefore need to develop ways of feeling as comfortable as possible in such situations. Yet it takes the situation to a significantly greater, more serious, stage when one of the individuals present is a trainee's mentor and, as above, for the first time will be proffering judgements on the effectiveness or otherwise of the teaching they have witnessed. 'Defensive'? I have personally witnessed trainees becoming *terrified* at such a prospect. In these circumstances, it seems almost unremarkable that *whatever* is said by the mentor will be of critical importance, and reflected on at length. Even when a mentor has adopted every single principle of best practice, and is adept at using the language and tone of a critical friend for, especially, a first observation, there does still seem to be something about the occasion itself that lends it at least an embryonic criticality.

My views here are far from idiosyncratic ones: the curricula of virtually all ITE programmes preparing individuals to teach in the sector now include explicit focus on the nature of CIs, and in most if not all cases require of trainees that they engage, for assessment purposes, in analytical work around such events (See Appendix 4, parts (i) and (ii), for example). There are strong arguments that such analytical work will enhance the degree to which teachers' reflective skills can be exploited as personal and professional resources: 'Whatever else we may say of it, reflexivity provides one avenue for teachers to take charge of their own learning and development on their own terms, in ways that specifically and systematically include the idiosyncratic, contingent aspects that are so crucial in their work (and in their understanding of their work) but which tend to be largely overlooked in the reductionist discourses of official policy' (Moore, 2004, p. 169). Beyond doubt, I would argue, there has been no home in the 'reductionist discourses' referred to by Moore for any serious debate about ways of promoting focused reflection in the beginning or more experienced post-compulsory teacher, and essentially it was this fact that underlay my wish to give some greater prominence to CIs.

The 'data sources' for the chapter, as I make clear within it, are ones deriving not from formalised empirical studies, but from my professional experiences in such settings as CI workshops. Clearly, as I make explicit in the chapter, very serious ethical issues may have been posed by the inclusion of any material that might have allowed for the remotest possibility of individuals being identified. I am wholly confident that the degree of anonymisation and editing of detail I employed would eliminate any such possibilities. (My awareness of the ethical issues likely to arise derived at least in part from having led at undergraduate and postgraduate levels 'research methods' modules both for the IoE and Greenwich University). I have adhered in my academic and professional life to Hack's precept that it is 'worth standing back for a moment and considering what effects your actions might have on others...' (Hack, 1997, p.37). The monthly supervision sessions I am required to attend to remain in good standing as an IoE coach (and which typically incorporate the sharing by participants of CIs) are conducted on the basis of Chatham House rules, and this fact too is highly conducive to my 'ethical vigilance'.

I was concerned in the chapter to stimulate a wider awareness of the role that I believe CIs play in accelerating and heightening professional learning, and to make, at an appropriate point, at least implicit the way in which a dialogic relationship with a mentor may help in unearthing 'criticality'. Along with the chapters written by my co-contributors, a principal aim of including the perspectives I offered was to provide for readers 'resources for fruitful [further] concentrated investigation', as was hearteningly discerned by at least one reviewer (Mitchell, 2009, p.25). As well as anticipating its utility as a reader for education professionals embarking on professional doctorates, in both organising the collection of papers as a whole, and specifically in terms of how I structured my own contribution, I wished to 'offer insightful and illuminating theorisations for a wider audience' (ibid.) At the risk of being found guilty of something of a contrivance, the use of 'illuminating' by the particular reviewer cited here certainly aligns with one notion I introduced into my chapter: I wrote that CIs only properly merit their occasional description as 'lightbulb moments' if we envisage the process of 'illumination' as being more akin to that supplied, relatively gradually, by most newer, energy-efficient, bulbs as opposed to that produced by the now

generally phasing out short-life tungsten filament variety (Cunningham, 2008, p. 168).

One other element of this chapter I will now highlight is my proposition that the ‘criticality’ of an incident will most fully emerge following a period of focused reflection, such reflection as may be effectively facilitated by ‘professional talk’ – in particular, dialogue with a mentor. Such dialogic work I present as offering considerable advantage over what, by contrast, I describe as an ‘individual, insular, process’ (ibid, p. 167), especially where there are, for instance, subject-specific points of contact, i.e. both mentor and mentee share a curriculum specialism (one of the key desirable preconditions for effective workplace mentoring that was highlighted by OfSTED (OfSTED, 2003). ‘A skilled mentor will be able to bring out, and insightfully review, the professional ramifications of what has been described by their mentee as having taken place; this elucidation may be a highly important part of the process of conceptualizing an event as a critical incident’. (Cunningham, 2008, p.167). The kind of dialogue I envisage within mentoring relationships is one I note as being only rarely ‘one-offs’, being ‘typically part of an ongoing interactive process’ (ibid).

It was important for me to identify within the chapter at least the above ways of articulating my consideration of critical incidents as a dimension of professional learning that may possibly – on account of their apparent ‘obviousness’ - be prone to being overlooked within the overarching significance I attach to the value of mentoring relationships in the workplace. This aim was, I hope, fulfilled in *Critical Incidents in Professional Life and Learning*. The fact that this chapter appears in a book that was described by David Watson in his Foreword as having “caught a distinct wave”, to make “a significant contribution” and to deserve “to be widely read across the contemporary scene” is a matter of very special professional and academic pride for me.

The publication of *Exploring Professionalism* was but one aspect of the development in my professional life of a broader engagement with the nature of professional work and professional learning. Other activities in which I began to be involved included accepting invitations to speak at important events focusing on

professionalism, with engagements at such HEIs as City University and the University of Warwick. (See Appendix 3). Although it is unfeasible for me to construct a properly evidenced account of any impacts such engagements will have had on the practitioner community (or communities), I hope this may have been significant to some degree for some participants at such events. Further, having been nominated by the IoE, i have very recently been appointed as a Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Auditor. In this kind of role, as a member of an institutional audit team, I would almost certainly be able to play a part in influencing thinking within some universities, at least regarding the nature of effective professional practice and its enhancement within learning and teaching contexts.

Part C: Concluding Observations and 'Horizon-Scanning'

Both in certain sections of the work submitted for consideration as part of this application and in other writing and 'live' contributions of mine I have argued that mentoring appears to represent a credible, positive, professional activity – one with a potentially highly important role to play in enhancing both the professionalism of the college workforce and, in parallel, the achievements of college learners. In arguing thus, two things should be stressed. Firstly, that I have not aimed to proffer my own grand, overarching theory as either an underpinning for, or explanation of, best professional practice; my preference mirrors that of Eric Hoyle (his own being strongly influenced by Merton) for exploring logically interconnected conceptions which are limited and modest in scope ... what Merton refers to as *theories of the middle range*, or theories that are intermediate to the minor, everyday working hypotheses, and the all-inclusive speculations of the 'master conceptual scheme' (Johnson and Maclean, 2008, pp 3/4). Thus, what it is that I have presented is a set of intertwining theoretical – and practical - perspectives that collectively constitute a conceptually sound framework relating to insightful professional practice in a specific area, that of mentoring, and to the nature of professional learning – one with parity, at least, to any 'master conceptual scheme'.

The second element of my work that I would wish to re-emphasise here is that I have aimed to provide some kind of a counterbalance to what I perceive as a *dominant discourse* of quality improvement in the college sector that has clearly privileged managerial, data-hungry, approaches to teacher performance, at the same time as playing down – or even, simply, ignoring – the improving potential of such 'ideal type' dimensions of professional life as the existence of collegiality and learning communities. In some ways legislative shifts have, I argue, been presented as offering a *reprofessionalisation* of the college teaching workforce yet in actuality have had impacts that have been experienced as aspects of *deprofessionalisation*. Although not addressing the travails of the college sector specifically, but writing more broadly on current education policy, Ball seems to capture well the ways in which various 'policy moves' are

creating a new episteme of public service through a 'reshaping of "deep" social relations' (Leys, 2001: 2) which involve *the subordination of moral obligations to economic ones* (Walzer, 1984) so that 'everything is simply a sum of value realised or hoped for' (Slater and Tonkiss, 2001: 142). Productive individuals, new kinds of subjects, are the central resource in a reformed, entrepreneurial public sector. (Ball, 2008, p. 51, emphasis added).

The education policy developments that have enveloped the college sector, in particular those changes witnessed post-1986, are certainly ones that have helped displace teachers' 'moral obligations' in favour of cultivating their awareness of, and responsiveness to, such economic imperatives as the 'throughput' of learners. We appear to live in an era when we have become *calculable* rather than *memorable* (Ball, 2009). The privileging of particular indicators have driven practice, and reduced if not eliminated the discursive space in which practitioners might engage in moral reflection on ways they might seek to link principles to practice (ibid.).

There is much that has impacted on the post-compulsory sector since I first began to take it as the setting for my writing for publication. There have been, and are still, major debates concerning the scope and mission of the colleges; however, the policy documents and shifts arising from initiatives that have seen the light of day under several successive Secretaries of State have predominantly focused on curriculum change (e.g. the Curriculum 2000 initiative, or the adoption of the 14-19 Diploma), funding (e.g. the Act of 1992), or governance and management, but only extremely rarely have they been genuinely concerned with enhancing the professionalism, cohesiveness and status of the workforce. Ball again, writing on 'performativity':

[Performativity] operates within a framework of judgement within which what improvement is is determined for us, and 'indicated' by measures of quality and productivity...its effects are to alter our working practices, our goals and satisfactions *and our identities* – our sense of who we are at work. In a sense it is about making the individual into an enterprise, a self-maximising productive unit operating in a market of performances. (ibid., p. 52, emphasis in original)

Because of this kind of emphasis on the 'auditable', then, 'that which cannot be made explicit... is in danger of becoming redundant'. *ibid.*, p. 53). In a changing, often beleaguered, sector it has quite probably been such notions as the merits of collegial reflection on practice that have been rendered highly subservient to narratives and professional exchanges centred on outcomes, returns and – most significant overall, performance. In a wide range of ways, colleges have been subject to the same kind of 'target fetishism' (Gray, 1997) that has afflicted other organisations. One college principal provides us with a glimpse into how 'performance' has become a preoccupation:

Interviewer: And how about your future teaching staff – what are they going to look like?

John Latham {Principal and CEO, Cornwall College}: High-performing, results oriented and driven. (Heppell, 2007, p. 132)

It has been the near-absence of counterbalancing, less managerial and more humanistic – 'softer', some might say - perspectives than that represented above that has been an absolutely fundamental stimulus to my writing. I concur fully with Green's contention that

There is an urgent need to re-think the way professionals account for themselves. It is only if we recognize the limits to what needs to be made explicit for accountability purposes that we shall have any hope of management practices not undermining, systematically, the professional judgement of agents and the ends (*teloi*) of professions. (Green, 2009, p. 128).

I have been concerned to address an audience that is either working in, or has a strong academic interest in, a sector that 'has changed radically and is still changing ... and in which 'staff may become worn down by the internal tensions between national and institutional policies, requiring staff to be simultaneously flexible, innovative, collaborative, competitive, successful in meeting targets, constantly up-to-date with paperwork, and accountable on a daily basis'. (Edward et al, 2007, p. 170). (In other words, practitioners living in Barnett's frame of 'multiple discourses', as mentioned earlier).

By contrast, 'measurement in coaching and mentoring is often difficult... and sometimes measures only trivial things' (Harding, 2006, p. 21). Yet, as a strategy for 'help[ing] teachers develop teaching skills in their own specialist or subject area' (DfES, 2004, p.5) mentoring ought to be viewed - I would argue - as an activity of the very highest importance; its role in the transition which all beginning teachers undergo from novice to competent - or better - practitioners is, I would contend, crucial. Mentoring systems when they are operating effectively represent concrete supporting activity, not merely an increment to the aspirational rhetoric that has plagued the policy discourse of post-compulsory education. It is the adoption of mentoring as a centrally important dimension of the professional formation of college teachers that would provide the *signature pedagogy* (Shulman, op. cit.) that is presently lacking but clearly of so high a degree of significance in such professional realms as medicine, law and architecture.

There would, additionally, appear to be arguments to support the view that (a) the mentoring role will not be effective where a supportive institutional framework, or *architecture*, is lacking, (b) that it warrants and needs valid theoretical underpinnings, (c) that it is presently still somewhat under-recognised and incentivised as a dimension of mentors' *own* CPD, and (d) that it is most purposefully and productively construed as but one component - albeit a most important one - of professionalism and professional learning. *These kinds of interlinked arguments are those which have shaped the backbone of my writing, both that included in this submission and a number of earlier published items.*

In such writing, I have not only, I hope, been focused narrowly on the manifestations of mentoring, and of quality enhancement, with which I am most professionally connected. It needs to be remembered, additionally, that within an overarching conception of professionalising the college workforce, a fully fledged mentoring system ought not to be exclusively concerned with the needs of *new entrants* to teaching - the several hundred individuals who each year pursue full time training courses, and the thousands at any one time following part time, in-service, routes to a teaching qualification. Mentors in colleges may well be involved in the support of newly qualified teachers (although at the time of writing

the government is persistently shying away from the formal introduction of an actual probationary year in the sector, as would be applicable in schools (DfES, 2004a)); they may also be part of a departmental or institutional strategy to support underperforming teachers, and they may even develop a role in mentoring new mentors (i.e. peer mentoring). In sum, the 'relevance boundaries' of my work are, I would claim, far wider ones than might initially be supposed.

Crucially, I have always fully recognised that the post-compulsory sector is one that may pose problems – outside of the realms of academia or policy - in simply understanding what it is, and what it is supposed to 'do'. My own transition from schoolteacher to college lecturer was not straightforward – and I am myself, as I have mentioned earlier, at least in part a product of the post-compulsory sector. And, when I myself began to teach within it, I would absolutely definitely have placed the highest value on having a mentor to assist me in unravelling its complexities and challenges. There were, and remain, a number of points of distinctiveness and 'difficulty' that newcomers and others find daunting to comprehend: 'walking into a dark room' was how one respondent in a 2007 study of learner-educators describes the situation (Spenceley, 2007, p. 91). Another expressed the sentiment that he 'didn't realise it would be so knackerung ... and didn't realise the amount emotionally it took out of you' (ibid, p. 93).

The need for mentoring support in such circumstances, where mentors are able to offer – as a basic minimum – empathy and survival strategies, appears to me to be paramount. Although writing of support in far more general terms than that of a mentoring relationship (being 'part of a team'; the importance of collegiality), I believe that one of the concluding points from this particular study does have special resonance as far as mentoring's potential to retain college staff is concerned: 'Without this support they will fail and the sector will lose not only a potentially valuable resource but both the learner educators *and their learners* will continue not to walk, but to stumble, in a dark room' (ibid, p. 95, emphasis added). What is thus at stake is the future of a very large number of individuals indeed. A rather different politics of professionalising the college sector may or may not fundamentally alter for the better their life chances, but certainly in my view merits fuller exploration. If such an exploration could be paralled by an expansion of

empirical work – opportunities for which I have personally found rather scarce – this could provide us with the basis for a far more impressive and empowering professionalisation project than we have thus far witnessed.

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Section 2

Item 1:

'Some have mentoring thrust upon them'.

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'Some have mentoring thrust upon them: the element of choice in mentoring in a PCET environment'

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Abstract

This short paper explores the issue of whether teachers in colleges are being selected or directed to assume mentoring responsibilities with regard to one full time, pre-service, PCET ITE course, and whether any links are discernible between their attitudes to mentoring and the origins of their involvement in the activity. There is a particular focus on examining the extent to which prospective college-based mentors have expressed a preference to be designated as such, or have been, on the other hand, either 'passive' or actually coerced into an involvement with the scheme described. On the basis of a postal survey, it emerges that mentors' initial reactions to becoming involved in mentoring beginning teachers have overwhelmingly been positive ones. Furthermore, once engaged with the role their intentions have been to continue in it. Some suggestions are made regarding possible ways in which college-based mentoring might be further incentivised, given the appeal it largely already appears to hold, on the basis of a small scale study.

Introduction

In common with virtually every institution training new teachers for work in the college sector, tutors at this HEI have been scrutinising the end of course evaluations completed by our most recently departed cohort. Given the attention which has been paid by OFSTED inspectors to evident inconsistencies in the quality of mentoring over the 2002/03 session (throughout which the first ever 'survey inspection' of FE teacher training in the UK had been in progress) the issue of mentor support was of special interest to us. More widely, of course, the attention which must be paid by colleges to mentoring trainees on in-service programmes has been much higher on the agenda. As Merrick (2003) reports, this is by far the larger group of individuals for whom training is being provided at any one time and 'the government is likely to pledge improved support for new lecturers, including the wider provision in colleges of mentors for advice and support' (Merrick, 2003, p3).

As in all previous years of the life of our full time programme, inaugurated in 1993, responses to evaluative questions on this crucial component of our beginning teachers' (hereafter BTs) experience have revealed a tremendous variation in the ways in which mentors have endeavoured to provide the subject-specific support we ask our partner institutions to supply.

Comments ranging from 'my mentor proved an asset throughout my PGCE year. Her experience provided a good insight into what a beginning teacher needs to cover' and:

My mentor has been my most important resource during my PGCE year. I have felt totally supported, encouraged and respected during my placement, and advice has been given in a positive, constructive manner. My mentor allowed me to discover and develop a personal style of preparation and delivery which increased my confidence in my own knowledge and abilities. Above all, my mentor placed a large amount of trust in me and treated me as a member of the course team right from the start. I felt extremely welcome and valued

to: 'hasn't got a clue – hasn't read the [mentor] handbook' perhaps serve to illustrate the inconsistencies which have yet again emerged.

When BTs' perceptions of the mentor support they had received during the first term of the PGCE year were canvassed there were, however, generally positive messages being conveyed. In a written (anonymised) evaluation exercise it was found that 53% of BTs described this support as having been 'very useful', and 34% as 'fairly useful'; the total of 87% of the respondents opting for these descriptions is clearly encouraging, and affirming of the commitment most mentors were bringing to their role. Only 3% of our respondents used 'of very limited use' to sum up the support they had been given by mentors during this crucial early stage of their 2002/03 training programme.

Some ethical issues

Clearly if BTs are being asked to cooperate with evaluation exercises of the kind alluded to above it is, of course, only appropriate that their anonymity is guaranteed; we would not wish to receive a sanitised, politely (or 'politically') edited version of someone's perceptions of our programme, or of the vitally important college-based experience. In the main BTs would probably be reticent over allowing the identification of even those mentors whose professional practice has been wanting in one or other regard, to the extent that it amounted to having been 'of very limited use' in facilitating an individual's early professional development. On the face of it, the function of identifying underperforming (in one regard at least) members of a college's staff is, in any event, significantly beyond the jurisdiction of a HEI which happens to use the institution for teaching practice placements.

However, this does leave us with a problematic situation if we wish to attempt to seek any possible correlations between BT satisfaction and positive mentor attitude to their own role, or, conversely, BT dissatisfaction and mentor indifference or grievance regarding being asked to assume this responsible role alongside the responsibilities of a – usually full time – teacher in an urban college. It is not possible with any degree of methodological soundness to link the individuals in the mentoring relationship in this way. (This is quite apart from the obvious ethical, and highly sensitive, dimensions of so doing).

Rationale for present study

Nevertheless, it occurred to the present writer that it might well be at least a worthwhile endeavour to research the ways in which colleges appear to be selecting mentors for their involvement with a HEI training scheme. This might elucidate something of the balance between those staff who actively seek such an involvement and those, on the other hand, who 'have it thrust upon them'. We might have hypothesised that evidence of the existence of a significant proportion of mentors in this second category would tend to increase the incidence of BTs reporting less than wholly positive, learning, experiences in their placements. As Stephens has expressed this (although in the context of school- rather than college-based mentors), 'Mentoring only flourishes when it's perceived by senior managers as an important aspect of staff development rather than a tiresome burden to be landed on unwilling and unprepared shoulders.' (Stephens, 1996, p4).

On the other hand, of course, it is necessary to acknowledge the possibility that a mentor who may not have actually expressed a positive interest in being so designated might, simply as a result of the affirming, or self-esteem – perhaps even 'professional identity' - enhancing, dimension of being approached about assuming the role, be almost immediately content. Further, over the course of a PGCE year, some may become enthusiastic about the role once some of its satisfactions become manifest. Many mentors who have supported our BTs have drawn attention to the nature of these satisfactions and rewards, including the

ways in which the presence of a new 'temporary colleague' has caused a beneficial degree of self-examination regarding their own professional practice; as one former mentor expressed this, 'you can't just say to the BT "I've always done it this way" – you have to be prepared to say why, and to justify yourself'.

Additionally, there is much anecdotal or circumstantial evidence to support the view that for mentors and the curriculum departments in which they are based there exist sound, pragmatic, reasons for wishing to construct for BTs a positive, professional, experience out of the training year. This is simply because in the relatively new climate of staff shortages in a range of subjects (as, of course, is now acknowledged by the extension of the government's 'Golden Hello' scheme to certain PCET specialisms) a BT might possibly be enticed to take up their first post at a 'placement' college which has proved congenial. Put at its simplest, there are probably very few mentors who would not want to see a promising BT stay around as a new colleague.

Background to the study

With such considerations as those briefly outlined above in mind, a small scale questionnaire survey was designed, to elicit the mechanisms by which college-based staff had been nominated to be involved with the support of BTs on their placements. By the close of the 2002/03 PGCE course, some 80 successful BTs (from an initial enrolment of 99) were completing our programme and being awarded their PGCE. They had been accommodated in some 25 or so London region colleges, institutions ranging from inner urban general FE colleges to a

few relatively selective sixth form colleges in leafier environs. Each of these had been paid a fee (£1000) for each BT for whom a placement and mentor support was to be provided, and as the awarding HEI the Institute offered an induction for new mentors, the prospect of a 'sharing of good practice' event at the end of the PGCE year, and personal copies of the handbook referred to in the negative quote incorporated earlier in this account. We have no jurisdiction over the selection of mentors, and there is at the time of writing no person specification for the role. Although we would prefer that mentors possess moderately lengthy experience, there is evidence that individuals with quite restricted experience (including, at the extreme, NQTs) are being deployed. On the other hand, and more positively, each year an increasing number of such teachers in the mentor role are in fact graduates of our own scheme and thus have the great advantage of knowing at first hand what kinds of demands it makes on BTs.

Each mentor who had been named by partner colleges as responsible for a BT (and whose BT had successfully completed the PGCE course) was contacted postally and asked a restricted number of questions requiring only brief responses. The questions were as follows:

- (1) Was 2002/03 your first year as a mentor for a beginning teacher?
- (2) Did you ask for, or apply for, this role?
- (3) If not, were you asked, or told, to take it on? By whom?
- (4) Would you describe your feelings about this as positive, neutral or negative?

(5) Is it likely that you will be continuing in the role in 2003/04?

(6) If not, please supply a brief (one or two sentence) explanation for this.

The 'minimalist' design of this postal survey was fundamentally influenced by a strong awareness of the relatively limited energies, and patience, most college teachers would have left at the end of a year in present day PCET. Although it was an observation made a decade ago, it does often seem that 'The profession ... [has] become demoralised, stressed and alienated' (McGinty and Fish, 1993, in McKelvey and Andrews, 1998, p 359). For many college teachers, the challenges of implementing the Curriculum 2000 reforms have been such that they are barely retrieving some equilibrium in their crowded lives.

Presenting already pressured staff with a fuller, more probing, range of questions did not, therefore, appear to be a viable proposition. However, it is still necessary to appreciate that 'The questionnaire will always be an intrusion into the life of the respondent, be it in terms of time taken to complete [it], the level of threat or sensitivity of the questions, or the possible invasion of privacy' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p245). The writer was also extremely aware of potential anxieties in the respondent group that the research being conducted might actually harm them, so the need to stress its non-maleficence (ibid, p246) was clear.

The analysis conducted of the data produced by this exercise was primarily quantitative, but where comments were of particularly striking significance these were extracted and are reproduced below. One immediate criticism it would, of

course, be possible to level at the design of the study is that there is an inherent distortion of the sample of college staff surveyed: one might speculate whether the members of the cohort who had withdrawn before the date of the survey might in fact have been being mentored by 'weaker' mentors, and were negatively influenced by this factor when deciding to abandon their training. It is therefore not beyond the bounds of possibility that the surveyed group, whose BTs had stayed the course, represents overall a 'better' standard of mentoring practice, and more positive attitudes, than were evident amongst mentors of withdrawn BTs. (It would, however, probably be erroneous to make too much of this reservation concerning the methodology employed, as from personal knowledge of a number of the individuals whose mentees did not ultimately gain their awards they were often professionals whose practice was of the very highest, even in some cases 'beacon', quality).

All the completed questionnaires were returned anonymously, in stamped, self-addressed envelopes. In line with often observed features of conducting postal – and email – surveys, it seemed sensible to start with the awareness that '[they] are likely to have lower response rates [than a face to face survey], and possibly poorer answers because the respondent has no one available to answer any queries; but they do allow a larger number of people to be surveyed' (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2001, p 179). While, therefore, allowing access to a relatively large number of respondents, the need for simplicity and clarity was as vital as ensuring the 'manageability' of the questionnaire in terms of the likely time

required to complete it. In a number of respects, the general design principles of the survey accorded with those valuably summarised by Hudson and Miller's (1997) paper on the 'The treasure hunt', a source to which the present writer would refer colleagues embarking on a similar venture.

Had the assurance of anonymity not had such a high priority in the context of this particular study then follow up interviews could have probably shed light on those interesting cases where mentors were not continuing an involvement – for the present at least – in the activity. To have interviewed those mentors either resigning their role, or not being asked to continue, might have illuminated areas such as mentor satisfaction, the support they – as opposed to the BTs – had received, and the ways in which the activity was perceived to carry the promise of professional enhancement (a theme returned to in the conclusions below). However, it is hoped that the data actually collected still forms a useful basis for discussion of the key element of choice, which forms the admittedly fairly narrow focus of what follows.

Findings and discussion

A number of significant issues appear to have been raised by the study, some of which may have a resonance for others involved in the delivery of PCET ITE programmes. On the basis of a 63% return rate from the survey (51 completed questionnaires) the findings can be said to have a fair degree of validity. This is, however, not to claim that we can assume that the characteristics (their attitudes, motives, roles) of the non-returning group mirrored those evidenced by respondents. It has to be acknowledged that some of the former group may

possibly, for example, have been left somewhat harassed or dissatisfied by mentoring a BT for a year and this could have influenced their decision not to participate in the study.

The most immediately striking thing to emerge from analysing the questionnaire material was that in virtually all cases (32 individuals) where mentors had not actively sought out an involvement with the PGCE, but had been asked or directed to take this on, they described their reaction to this situation as being 'broadly positive'. From additional comments supplied for this question it was clear that this description in fact did not fully communicate the degree to which mentors were positive. Several respondents added the word 'very' to their answer, and there were some interesting expansions such as:

- '... it helped to make me feel more valued.'
- '... and keen.
- ' I have always enjoyed this role.'
- 'Certainly positive.'
- '... but maybe as a result of having had successful BTs in previous years.'

And, in a slightly different vein:

- '... though also nervous.'

Not a single respondent reported having experienced a negative reaction to having been asked to become, or continue as, a mentor, and only one described their reaction as 'neutral'. This is, from certain perspectives, a remarkable state

of affairs: given the heavy teaching loads and sometimes course management, etc, responsibilities many full time college teachers juggle with one might have predicted a far greater incidence of reluctance to take on yet further duties (comprising seven discrete formal functions as specified in our mentor handbook, including requirements to conduct classroom observations, act as advocate in obtaining sufficient teaching experience for a BT, and so on).

Further evidence of the widespread positive sentiments amongst the respondent group was provided when explanations were given (for question 6) regarding non-continuance of the mentor function for the 2003/04 training year. A sense of what can legitimately be described as regret was conveyed by some of the statements here:

- ' College is out of London, not always readily accessible for students [however] I hope to have a student next year.'
- 'Due to managerial responsibilities I cannot continue with the role...'
- 'My college have not applied for a BT but I would like to have one.'

The most commonly cited reason for mentors not continuing was to do with having assumed other, typically management, responsibilities and one 'resigning' mentor at least drew attention to the fact that such commitments would mitigate against 'mentor[ing] effectively.'

Within the group of mentors who said that they had applied for the role (16 respondents), there were also a number of individuals who took the opportunity provided by the questionnaire to voice very heartening and pleasing views. One for instance, wrote:

‘... I volunteered back in 1994... I’ve always been positive about mentoring.’

while another pointed out:

‘I very much enjoy supporting new teachers/lecturers into the profession.’

A particularly clear endorsement of the positive professional and other benefits accruing to mentors as well as mentees from the relationship was evident from the statement (in response to question 4) that:

‘... it was a very valuable experience [and] I look forward to mentoring a student this academic year. I enjoyed the challenge, it helped me self-evaluate, as well as the BT’s valuable contribution to the department.’

From certain responses to question 6 there was, again, a discernible sense of regret where mentors were reporting that they would not be continuing in the role. For example:

- ‘Our [accepted for 2003/04] student was welcome but dropped out.’

There were two returned questionnaires from mentors who could not easily be categorised as having actively sought out the role nor, on the other hand, found themselves directed to take it on. One wrote that they had ‘... accepted this role for many years’ (probably, it is true, implying an initial request that they assume

it) and another that 'It was assumed I would do it as I had done the year before...'

In connection with the second part of question (3), probing which member of a college's staff had requested that a teacher take on the mentor role there was a fairly large range of responses. 'Curriculum Manager' (11 individuals) was most frequently cited, followed by 'Head of Department' (5) and 'Divisional Manager/Head' (4). Other designations mentioned included 'Head of Personnel' and 'Staff Development Manager' (1 each), and one mentor was apparently asked by the BT him/herself (indicating a direct approach to a college regarding teaching practice had been made by a PGCE applicant). In no cases did a respondent say that they had been anything other than asked to take on the mentoring role – although one did place the word asked in inverted commas! There was, therefore, no evidence whatsoever that direction or coercion had come into play with the respondent group; this is not to rule out this particular possibility, however, as far as non-respondents are concerned.

To reiterate, what had been attempted using this, perhaps unambitious, survey instrument was not in any sense a major study of current mentor practice in PCET. The results hardly amount to 'thick description', but may be seen to have a heuristic value. The last section of this short paper will now offer some of the reflections prompted by what emerged from the exercise.

Some conclusions and recommendations

It is sometimes easy to overlook the comparatively short space of time during which mentoring as the set of activities most trainers would now specify as such has been a strong element of ITE provision. Not all that long ago Les Tickle's important study of partnership in teacher education 'Learning Teaching, Teaching Teaching' (Tickle, 1987) was published without a single index entry against 'mentors'. The crucial importance of mentoring, especially the subject-specific support required by BTs on a generic training programme, is now, however, of unquestioned significance. In certain major ways, the quality of this support can be influential in changing the very attitudes to starting FE teaching held by new entrants to the profession. In McKelvey and Andrews' study it was found that 'those of [the trainee sample] who had been well supported by their personal mentors ... had strengthened their commitment to teaching in FE'. McKelvey and Andrews, *op cit*, p362). In the context of the present study, very similar themes have emerged.

It is therefore essential that strong attention be devoted to ways in which professionalism in mentoring be incentivised, enhanced and disseminated. The ambitious targets set out for the PCET sector (or more properly now the Learning and Skills sector) in 'Success for All' (and before then in 'Colleges for Excellence and Innovation') can only really be delivered effectively by a motivated, committed teaching force. Most of the current initiatives attached to the Government's widening participation and social inclusion agendas are dependent

on the quality and resilience of the new generation of teachers. The ways in which college-based mentors can contribute to the training of this group, vitally supplementing the work of HEIs, are many; they all, however, have the potential to add to the stress of busy professional lives and this must be recognised.

Some elements of a 'package' which might be put together in aid of such a recognition might well, it seems, include:

- enhancing the frequency and quality of mentor training, notwithstanding the evident difficulties which can arise where already pressured staff find it difficult to create the space in their lives to attend INSET of most types. As Woodd has observed, however, 'With a wider range of skills and a broader understanding of mentoring, mentors are more able to facilitate change with their mentees' (Woodd, 2001, p97).

- embedding the activity and status of mentoring more fully in institutional cultures. To cite Woodd again, 'Evidence from other research shows that for mentoring to be the agent for change, it must be part of a larger human resource strategy (Zagumny, 1993). So perhaps just training the mentors may not lead to more in-depth mentoring nor a greater desire to explore the more complex issues arising for the mentee' (ibid, p104)

- it is eminently feasible, it seems, for college managements to consider mentoring to be one of the qualifiers for professional enhancements – including financial ones – such as designation as Advanced Practitioners under fairly recently formalised procedures. In the post-Incorporation ‘de-layered’ college environment, with its strictly limited number of opportunities for career progression within any one institution, this kind of HR strategy could have at least a palliative effect.

– Some HEIs have begun, usually under the aegis of various work-based learning schemes, to offer accreditation for mentoring activity, with the possibility of APEL at the entry stage to advanced programmes at ‘M’ or even ‘D’ level. The older universities have been somewhat more resistant to this kind of development, but it seems to the present writer to have enormous potential. A particularly appropriate area for exploration might be the award of advanced standing in respect of the kind of Master of Teaching (MTcg) which this institution has been offering in recent years. This higher degree, with its distinctive emphasis on professional practice and reflection, could well hold a special interest for mentors – and there are surely many – who already possess a traditional, academic, Masters.

- Mentors may themselves feel the need of guidance and support from individuals more experienced in the role – ‘Everyone needs a mentor’, as

Clutterbuck famously put it (Clutterbuck, 2001). The notion is no more a strange one, perhaps, than was the case when personal tutors in the colleges began to have their work overseen – from the late 1980s - by senior tutors.

- It may be worthwhile to explore the scope for the application of the FENTO Standards (FENTO, 2000) to the training of mentors. If the utility of the Standards is now being seen not just within the context of generic ITE programmes but also that of a new tranche of subject-specific routes to teaching qualifications, then the process of extending their 'jurisdiction' may not yet have reached its limits. (Cunningham, 1999)

- This institution very actively encourages feedback from practising mentors working with us on the content and quality of the support materials we make available. Furthermore, when particularly valuable suggestions are made (or materials – e.g. exemplar observation reports – contributed for inclusion in their handbook) we identify the source of these and, in brief, take every opportunity to give credit where it is due. This practice, and the following one proposed, are not unique to our programme, of course (and the writer encountered both at first hand on a recent visit to a northern university offering a similar one) but they are probably not by any means universally applied.

- There would appear to be a serious case to be made for more actively promoting the prospects for professional development in the form of

secondments to HEIs for mentors whose practice has been highly commended by both BTs and university course teams. This not only further incentivises mentoring, and hopefully plays a part in levering up standards further, it benefits enormously the credibility and 'FE-awareness' of teams. With the pace of curricular and organisational change in the colleges speeding up, if anything, and the nature of learner groups becoming – if possible – even more diverse, the logistical and bureaucratic obstacles which can be met in endeavouring to establish rolling secondments seem well worth overcoming.

- more actively embracing the evident interest in mentor quality being taken by OFSTED in its new role in overseeing overall standards in PCET-related training. If the ongoing inspection programme throws up marked examples of good mentor practice the inspectors should be encouraged to celebrate and disseminate these, along with continuing to draw attention to situations where there are inconsistencies and deficiencies.

- The embryonic Institute for Learning in FE is potentially one of the most important change agents FE has seen for a number of years – perhaps since the 'golden age' of the FEU and FESC's cumulative strengthening of the sector through the many diverse, challenging, publications and initiatives for which these bodies could be given credit. The IfL ought to be able to play a pivotal role in the professionalisation project for FE by, inter alia, actively promoting best practice in mentoring BTs.

Clearly, however, in some regards it might be held, certainly from the present small scale survey, that the sheer personal rewards accruing from mentoring already represent in themselves a quite substantial incentive. It was overwhelmingly evident that even where mentors had not in any sense actively sought out an involvement with mentoring, their reactions to it were certainly positive at the outset; by the end of the academic year most were planning to continue into a further one. These facts would appear to be of real significance in a context where one of the widespread assumptions about college teachers is that they are so overworked and demoralised that, by implication, asking yet more of them is unlikely to have a positive outcome.

Admittedly a study very limited in its scope, there are, nevertheless, a number of respects in which it has provided some heartening messages both for those of us seeking, as trainers, to enhance the quality of the induction into college teaching BTs receive, and one for the new entrants themselves. One immediate professional benefit which has accrued to the writer has been being able to reassure members of a new group of BTs that their mentors may sometimes appear somewhat 'busy' or 'distant' (adjectives which tend to crop up in feedback on early college experiences), but it is erroneous to jump to the conclusion that this derives from dissatisfaction with the mentor role; mentors are simply frequently overburdened at the start of a new teaching year! It is hoped that such

mentors, especially those who kindly participated in the survey, would perhaps discern in some of its findings a pleasing endorsement of their much – valued, essential, contribution to the training of the new generation of college teachers.

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Item 2:

'All the right features: towards an architecture for mentoring in colleges'.

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**All the right features: towards an 'architecture' for mentoring trainee
teachers in UK further education colleges**

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Abstract:

This paper reviews the range of institutional strategies which it might be appropriate and desirable to have in place to support and enhance the effective mentoring of trainee teachers in UK colleges of further education. The high degree of importance being attached to mentoring by various government bodies, with reference to initial teacher education in particular, is emphasised, as is the rapidity with which this state of affairs has been arrived at. The notion of an *institutional architecture* for mentoring activity is proposed; this comprises features ranging from those structures necessary to allow certain basic mentoring activities, to those with a more strategic and longer term significance. In conclusion likely costs of failing to acknowledge the need to build *institutional capabilities* for mentoring alongside developing individual mentors' skills are observed.

Setting the scene

A number of the recent policy pronouncements of such UK government bodies as the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), all point to a much greater emphasis on enhancing initial teacher education for the further education (FE) sector[1]. A precursor of the most recent developments was found in the Department for Education and Skills' 'Colleges for Excellence and Innovation' (2000), especially the allusions to working towards a situation where all college teachers holding posts of any significant size have been teacher trained. The major document 'Equipping our Teachers for the Future' describes the necessity for 'a step change in the quality of teacher training' (DfES, 2004a, p.4). Just prior to this, in late 2003, a survey of the initial training of further education teachers began with the wholly unambiguous statement that 'the current system of FE teacher training does not provide a satisfactory foundation of professional development for FE teachers at the start of their careers' (OfSTED, 2003, p.5).

It is notable how rapidly such an accentuation of the importance of teacher training, and of the role of mentoring in particular, has come about. When Young et al set out in 1995 their views on *training the lecturer of the future*, the lack of teacher-trained staff in colleges was described by the authors as being a striking deficiency. (Since the mid 1970s, by contrast, employment in UK state schools had only been open to teacher trained applicants).

Furthermore, at this point in time mentoring did not feature at all as a proposed strategy in professionalizing a sector which had suffered, as Young put it, a long period of 'benign neglect'. Some years further on, and in the important preamble to the first ever set of national standards for teaching and supporting learning in FE (FENTO, 1999) mentoring is similarly still absent. Relatively suddenly, however, a paradigm in which training to teach in colleges was an almost entirely voluntaristic matter, the quality and quantity of which were hardly government priorities, now seems dated indeed. So, too, does the virtual invisibility in key documents of mentoring as a vital adjunct to the work of teacher trainers.

There are a great number and variety of proposals contained in such government papers as those referred to above, and some appear to confront the college sector, and those who are concerned with the training of new entrants to teaching within it, with special challenges. One such challenge, on which I will focus in this paper, is that of *providing a far more highly developed institutional framework for mentoring*, in particular subject-specific mentoring. As a strategy for 'help[ing] teachers develop teaching skills in their own specialist or subject area' (DfES, 2004a, p.5) mentoring is increasingly being viewed as an activity of the very highest importance. Its, arguably crucial, role in the transition which all beginning teachers undergo from 'novice' to competent – or better – practitioners is, worthy of investigation and comment. Here, I want to develop an argument that the role will not be optimally effective where a supportive institutional framework, or *architecture*, is lacking.

Surveying the UK's FE colleges, on the one hand, affirms the contributions which are already being made by subject-specific mentors working within various partnership schemes with teacher training institutions. On the other, however, certain problem areas are evident, for example:

'A culture has developed in some subject and vocational areas where narrow ways of teaching have become entrenched ... In some areas, subject knowledge resides in a teacher who could be seeking training themselves. In some other subject areas, existing expertise is so weak that finding good mentors will be problematic'. (Lucas, 2004, p.6).

It needs to be remembered, additionally, that a fully fledged mentoring system ought not to be exclusively concerned with the needs of *new entrants* to teaching – the several hundred individuals who each year pursue full time training courses, and the thousands who are at any one time following part time routes to a teaching qualification. Mentors in colleges may well be involved in the support of *newly qualified teachers* (although at the time of writing the government is shying away from the formal introduction of a probationary year in the sector, on the lines of the arrangement which has been long in place in the schools. (DfES, 2004a)). Mentors may also be part of a departmental or institutional strategy to support *underperforming teachers*, and of course – see below – they may even develop a role in mentoring *new mentors* (i.e. peer mentoring). In sum, the range of possible mentoring scenarios is an extensive and challenging one.

There may exist, however, certain barriers to realising the aspirations for creating a far more all-encompassing framework of mentoring within the FE colleges – a sector seeming to acquire more significance within UK education

as a whole with each passing month. Such potential barriers are in fact rather more numerous even than is suggested above by Lucas. The sector's investment of resources to build the capacity of individuals to effectively assume a mentoring role is likely to be in prospect. So, too, will be closer attention to the fundamental issue of selection for the mentoring role: perhaps 'everyone needs a mentor' (Clutterbuck, 2001), but it is problematic to claim that everyone – no matter how knowledgeable they are within their specialisms – can be a mentor. We may concede that the dispositions, or attributes, of many skilled teachers are usually such that they can indeed often form the basis for their mentoring as effectively as they carry out their teaching. However, such dispositions would best be conceived of within a broader set of notions, and practicalities, including:

- the ability of an institution adequately to motivate staff to undertake mentoring – to incentivise the activity
- the necessity to put in place effective induction and support systems for mentors
- mechanisms for evaluating the outcomes of mentoring, so that it can be ascertained where a system is succeeding and where it needs further refinement.

Of course, certain of these elements will indeed already be in place in some institutions, and many of them now have quite a long history within the context of mentoring within the school sector or in fields outside of education altogether. The work of Garvey and Langridge (2003), for example, can provide us with many pointers based on their extensive research into what

works in such settings. The lessons drawn by these authors, and an increasing number of other workers in the field, are there to be evaluated and their potential applicability to the college sector assessed. The perspectives and strategies which will have the greatest transferability will be, in all probability, those which can accommodate the 'spectrum of fragmented and largely isolated traditions of pedagogy' (Guile and Lucas, 1999, p. 206) encountered in our FE colleges. The sector is certainly not a 'tidy' one, as Ainley has very recently observed; the sector is like a house, with 'many mansions, from degrees to special needs'. (Ainley, 2006). Even more emphatically, it was described in a seminal government report focusing on widening participation in these terms: 'Defining further education exhaustively would be God's own challenge because it is such a large and fertile section of the education world.' (Kennedy, 1997, p. 1)

What I will be proposing here is that individual capabilities, and individual motivation for mentoring, need to be supported by the 'architecture' of an institution – its *design features* will need to be of an appropriate type for mentoring or it is unlikely to thrive. For mentors to be effective within an organisation, the individuals involved need to be working within a certain architecture that supports rather than constrains their role. Some of what follows may appear to be over-idealistic – Utopian even – depicting an ideal state. Evangelising mentoring is, however, avoided, as it cannot be a panacea for all the challenges currently faced across the highly diverse educational settings that are the UK's colleges.

It is plausible that, in much the same way that so-called sick (i.e. badly designed) buildings are sometimes held to be responsible for lack of productivity, poor staff morale, high levels of absenteeism and conflict, so too might an organisation lacking the appropriate architecture be prone to ineffective, undervalued, mentoring. Ultimately, of course, the real costs of such negative syndromes as poor staff morale are always borne by *learners*, and with present government aspirations for the colleges' ability to lift participation and achievement levels we have much to gain when looking to improved mentoring. It is seen as a crucial factor in improving *teaching quality* so that more learners remain in the system for longer, and succeed in reaching their goals. 'The quality of training a teacher receives affects their teaching throughout their career. *'It affects the achievements and life chances of their students* – some six million annually in the learning and skills sector' (DfES, 2004a, p.4, emphasis added). But mentoring can never take place as a wholly insular activity; it can no more stand unsupported than can a beautiful mediaeval cathedral without the solidity of its internal columns and its impressive buttresses.

A number of key factors can be considered to be involved in ensuring that mentoring takes place within a well designed environment – in an organisation where 'the architecture is right'. Although the colleges are extremely variegated, with many approaches to learning and teaching co-existing, it is still possible to identify *factors of generic, overarching significance* and it is these which I attempt to focus on now. Before doing so, it is important to stress that my analysis is not a data-laden one. The construct of an

institutional architecture is offered heuristically: my principal aim in doing so is to extend the scope of the recent debate on mentoring in colleges.

An institutional commitment to mentoring:

Firstly, and arguably most importantly, mentors ought to believe that their efforts are recognised and rewarded. This, at a pragmatic, level, would probably entail their being given a certain amount of remission from their own weekly classroom and/or management commitments. Clearly the prime responsibility of the majority of experienced practitioners must continue to be to their own learners. A slightly reduced teaching load leaves the experienced practitioner with the energies and time to continue to teach effectively as well as engage with mentoring responsibilities. More positively, an involvement in mentoring might be a criterion for consideration in connection with promotions, or – in a UK context – eligibility for awards such as ‘Advanced Skills Practitioner’. Jay Derrick, writing in the context of teachers/mentors delivering the highly important Skills for Life programmes[2], believes that ‘Mentoring must become a normal part of all experienced teachers’ job roles’. (Derrick, 2004, p. 25). If such a fundamental change in mindset were to be seen across the sector, mentoring ceases to be something merely ‘juggled with’ by already stretched practitioners. Additional funds may need to be bargained for, and/or existing resources diverted, to strengthen mentoring without at the same time lowering the priority being given to classroom learning.

Other ways in which institutions can express their commitment to the value of mentoring apply especially to new appointees/staff following in-service initial teacher education (ITE) programmes. They could be offered a named mentor for either their first year of service or for the duration of their ITE course, usually up to two years. (Such a notion is already extremely well established in the school sector, where the tradition of initial and continuing professional development goes back considerably further in time). Such individuals will need sympathetic timetabling and – ideally – a lower overall amount of teaching; again, this kind of general principle has long been established in the school sector.

A number of colleges are actively seeking to *embed* mentoring, but within the compass of this short paper it is only possible to provide limited illustration of this embedding process. West Kent College expresses the key goals of the activity as being to ensure that ‘new staff have a positive experience of their first weeks at the college, that we retain valuable staff and that students benefit’ (West Kent College, 2004). This particular institution’s commendable *mentoring policy* is perhaps a model of what can be devised where a collective decision is taken adequately to promote mentoring as a core activity; the college has engaged with the notion that what will be well served by it are ‘the needs of the individual learner/client/internal customer or other College support service’ (ibid).

An appropriate institutional ethos:

The term ‘collegiality’ has probably become somewhat overworked but the promotion of a collegial climate is certainly relevant to the concept of an

appropriate architecture for mentoring. As a notion, collegiality has the real merit of encompassing the potential *reciprocity* of mentoring relationships. Mentors make their knowledge and skills available to less experienced colleagues but in turn learn from them, too. Mentors' professional learning can be enhanced by the kinds of questions posed by trainees and by less skilled or more hesitant teachers ("Yes, but *why* do you think that would be a useful strategy to use with this group?") and by the kinds of scenarios they are likely to present to their mentors for discussion ("So what would *you* have done in that kind of a situation?"). Mentors' understanding of their own professional practices and the legitimacy of these can only be deepened by the kinds of interaction alluded to here.

In this context, perhaps the idea of *mentoring up* has a place. The term refers to the kind of 'upwards' mentoring witnessed in a large commercial organisation such as Procter and Gamble, where relatively junior staff are actively involved in certain ways in the mentoring of far more experienced and senior employees. There is a rationale for this particular interpretation of what is the far more usual arrangement. It is that the more senior staff will be more likely to retain a realistic and grounded view of the professional challenges being faced by members of the organisation much lower down the hierarchy when they are being routinely reminded of what exactly these are. Mentoring up thus provides an opportunity for an especially valid form of professional renewal and extension.

Institutions have available to them varied opportunities – e.g. in recruitment literature and staff handbooks – to make explicit any of the ways, including those touched on above, in which they are seeking to develop staff through mentoring. The ethos of the institution will thereby be underlined, and any claims it might be making for itself as a *learning organisation* validated, to adopt here the term in the sense in which it has been used by Guile and Lucas. As such it will display its ‘more systematic, and less insular, formulation of roles and responsibilities for all categories of staff’. (Guile and Lucas, 1996, p.50).

A second valuable construct which can be drawn on (even if only rather superficially) in our present context is that of ‘communities of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In the classic formulation of what is involved in such an entity, and using the term ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, Lave and Wenger describe how

learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and ... the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. “Legitimate peripheral participation” provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers ... It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 29).

Interpreting Lave and Wenger in our present context, we can conceive of ‘*learners*’ as being the individuals being mentored. An institution which therefore actively promotes a community of practice, and structured, purposeful, interaction between ‘newcomers’ and ‘old-timers’, is one highly

likely to achieve 'full participation' by the former group. One of the ways in which Lave and Wenger emphasise learning takes place – for our purposes *professional learning* – is the *social*. In doing so they open up a broad range of opportunities for institutions to develop communities of practice, as opposed to limiting their strategies exclusively to those bounded by classroom walls.

Using somewhat similar terminology to 'communities of practice', the Department for Education and Skills has recently described the advantages of 'creating "professional learning communities" in colleges and providers' (DfES 2004b). Here, too, we have an endorsement of the importance of a college's *ethos* in maintaining and enhancing its *effectiveness*. An institution such as West Kent College (WKC), already mentioned above, has so strongly taken on board the importance of mentoring within its overall set of procedures that it has produced its commendably practical mentoring policy. Moreover, the college has articulated in this the way in which the mentoring scheme which has been devised

'should be considered in conjunction with...

*Quality Assurance policy

*Induction procedure

*Recruitment policy

*Staff Development policy and procedures

*Staff Review policy and procedures

*Equal Opportunities policy' (WKC, 2004).

The advantages of thereby *integrating* mentoring within a wider set of 'architectural features' of the organisation are potentially considerable. Wallace and Gravells identify as one feature of a college which is ready to 'embrace' mentoring the positioning of the activity within its '*overall* people strategy'. (Wallace and Gravells, 2005, p.112, emphasis added). In such environments, staff acting as mentors are likely to perceive themselves as central, rather than in any way peripheral to a college's mission.

The physical resources for mentoring:

Basic minimum requirements here would include the availability of a – preferably dedicated – meeting room in which such confidential activities as post-observation debriefings can take place. Mentors might also use this room as a venue for periodic discussions or occasional 'case conferences'. It might also be the most appropriate location for the work of the kind of *action learning sets* whose functions have been examined by McGill and Beaty (2001). There exists plentiful scope for the use of such 'sets' in connection with mentors' problem-solving (Cunningham, 2005).

The kind of collaborative working amongst mentors which adequate physical resources, *inter alia*, can promote would seem, in passing, to offer even greater institutional benefits than improved problem solving. Such collaboration can be viewed as a component of the 'democratic'

professionalism described by Judith Sachs (Sachs, 2001) and as such assist in counterbalancing a tendency towards 'managerial' professionalism (ibid).

In some institutional settings, electronic networking by mentors might be more realistic than face to face meetings, so facilitating this (for example by recommending use of college intranets where these have been created) could be prioritised. The deployment of, and access to, ICT will also potentially benefit those trainees on pre-service courses, 'mak[ing] it even more possible for [them] to establish and sustain communication with their peers during a practicum experience and to provide personal and professional support to their colleagues.' (Le Cornu, 2005, p. 365).

Institutions' financial resources might allow for the purchase of a small collection of relevant texts which mentors could borrow, and/or subscriptions to worthwhile professional journals. This particular proposal, incidentally, simply recognises that college teachers' present salary levels are not so generous that the (surprisingly) high costs of such literature will lightly be borne out of individuals' personal funds. If we wish, on the one hand, to encourage the emergence of mentoring as an integral part of an institution's 'professional culture' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000) it is possibly counterproductive if we then fail to take account of such cost considerations.

Other resources which have high potential value include the necessary hardware for the video or audio recording of mentees' lessons (where this has been negotiated for specific reasons) and a bank of such recordings as are

available commercially, in the UK and USA at least, illustrating – often exemplary – proceedings in real-life classrooms. The latter can, as with texts and journals, strike one as being expensive acquisitions, but their use in triggering discussion of learning and teaching issues is worthwhile. In part, of course, this is because it is often logistically very difficult to organise for mentees the actual observation by them of experienced teachers' classes.

Lastly, one resource which entails no expenditure comprises the growing number of websites where material of interest and relevance to mentors can be found. A number of these originate in broader professional realms than teaching, but the cross-professional perspectives they offer are often useful and informative. All that is required of the colleges is to publicise such sites, and encourage mentors to visit them. (For UK-based mentors probably as good a starting point as any is the website of the Institute for Continuing Professional Development, at <http://cpdinstitute.org>).

Who mentors the mentors?: issues of induction, training and support:

The skills set needed by effective mentors should not be considered to be exactly the same as that displayed by *all* good teachers. There are certainly important overlaps between teaching skills and mentoring skills, but no institution should take for granted the preparedness to begin mentoring of even highly successful classroom practitioners. *Induction* of new mentors is essential (and of course is one further way in which institutional commitment to the endeavour can be signalled to staff). There is possibly a strong argument in favour of important aspects of such an induction being carried out

by experienced mentors, at least where a mentoring system has been in place for any length of time. The designation 'coordinating mentor' or one of 'senior mentor' might be appropriate in such circumstances.

The first dimension of induction, whether or not it is a function devolved to experienced mentors, should ideally comprise a clear articulation of the *rationale* for mentoring – how it accords with an institution's mission, its strategic plan, and how it should be viewed as fundamentally connected to 'the learner experience'. The centrality of the learner within the current UK inspection framework (OfSTED/ALI, 2001) makes it essential that the role of mentoring in, ultimately, *enhancing achievement* is given prominence in the induction of mentors.

The kind of training provided at the induction stage might be underpinned by such sound theoretical perspectives as are relevant to professional learning or mentoring, but could also benefit from the inclusion of *mentoring case studies* (Cunningham, 2005). These are best derived from recently qualified teachers' professional 'autobiographies', in which there is frequently discernible a strong measure of credit being given to their mentors.

Due prominence in an induction would need to be given to classroom observation, given the increasing significance of this aspect of mentors' roles. As with mentoring itself, observation is becoming more central in initial teacher education and also in 'internal review' and other quality-related college systems. For UK trainees, The DfES now seeks assurances that 'a

minimum of eight observations be conducted during a full training course [and that] some must be conducted by mentors or managers in the teacher's workplace.' (DfES, 2004a, p.8). Induction can only, however, be conceived of as the first stage in the support of mentors and it will need to be supplemented by proper ongoing support. Such support can take the form of providing opportunities to share not only issues and concerns, but also successes and best practice.

In the contexts of both induction/training and ongoing support, there may be an argument in favour of engaging external trainers/facilitators, rather than having experienced mentors or senior staff take responsibility for organising and delivering events. External contributors might be sought, some perhaps coming from other sectors of education, schools in particular, or even from business and commerce, in some sections of which mentoring has been embedded for many years. When outside contributors are involved there is clearly the risk that 'they just don't understand the realities of the colleges' – but on the other hand they may bring interesting and valuable perspectives on the nature of mentoring *per se*, and ideas which may indeed have an evident transferability. Such inputs frequently do not come that cheap, however, bringing us back to the issue of *resourcing* mentoring.

The selection and accreditation of mentors:

Inevitably we face the question 'who are the staff who will be inducted and trained as mentors?'. In some national contexts, where college teachers already have extremely demanding workloads, we might be inclined, perhaps,

to adopt a pessimistic stance and conclude that 'the conditions of service make mentoring impossible, even on a goodwill basis' (Clow, 2005, p.2).

A useful perspective here, coming from the context of the school sector, is that 'mentoring only flourishes when it's perceived by senior managers as an important aspect of staff development rather than a tiresome burden to be landed on unwilling and unprepared shoulders'. (Stephens, 1996, p.4). We can, I hope, see the equal validity of this proposition when translated to colleges. Firstly, therefore, mentors should ideally be selected, rather than 'landed with' the role, and here we arrive at a significant challenge to institutions in seeking to develop their 'architecture'.

The poor morale in many colleges (alluded to most recently in the UK in the important document 'Realising the Potential' (Foster, 2005)) may not, of course, be mirrored globally. Nevertheless, there is a perception by long serving staff that the pressures of teaching have been greatly added to by the growth of an intrusive 'audit culture', by the advent of the student entitlement era, and by the ever-increasing diversity of the learner cohort. Furthermore, a degree of 'innovation fatigue' appears to be experienced by staff as one proposal for curriculum or accreditation reform seems to follow another. If we accept this depiction of a teacher's life in our colleges (which is not a wholly idiosyncratic one, as a reading of 'Why do they do it?' by McKelvey and Andrews (1998) could confirm) what might entice often extremely pressured staff to commit themselves to becoming mentors? It is pure conjecture, but rather than institutions being in the position of being able to *select* appropriate

candidates for mentoring, might not the reality in fact be that some experienced staff may be subject to a measure of persuasion to take on the role?

This is not, however, to imply that all mentors who find themselves in the role without having actively sought it out are necessarily resentful of this fact. Research carried out with a group of mentors found that mentors reacted in a 'broadly positive' way to having been asked, or directed, to take on mentoring functions, sometimes expanding on their responses to include statements such as 'it helped to make me feel more valued'. (Cunningham, 2004, p.276). Even more significantly, once settled into the role, and experiencing the challenges and satisfactions of mentoring, the mentors in this particular study largely said that they would wish to be involved in the activity again.

One central challenge thus lies in portraying mentoring as a desirable, worthwhile activity with both personal and professional rewards attached to it. Constructing such a positive, attractive, profile for the role ought really to start with the drawing up of appropriate selection criteria, making it plain that status and kudos will accrue to individuals able to meet these criteria. Where additional remuneration is available, it could be that even relatively tokenistic sums may, when added to considerations of status, make a considerable difference.

Institutions also need to actively seek arrangements with training providers and/or awarding bodies so as to attain accreditation of mentoring as a high

level work-based professional activity. Already some UK universities with important interests in work-based learning (WBL) allow for the accreditation (typically at Masters level) of such professional learning as derives from mentoring, with registration fees sometimes being paid by employing organisations in the sector. Oxford Brookes University's programme in *Mentoring and Coaching Practice* allows for sub-Masters awards such as a Diploma, for candidates wishing to spend rather less time working towards their qualification, and this institution (in common with certain other universities) also allows candidates to be assessed against relevant Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) criteria.

By promoting such possibilities as these, the professional benefits of mentoring *for mentors themselves*, as well as those individuals they mentor, are heavily underscored. As with certain other aspects of institutions demonstrating their commitment to mentoring, these kinds of initiatives seem to depend as much on will, and priorities, as on financial resources.

Issues of clarity and consistency:

Clarity and consistency are two ideas most sensibly reviewed together, as they are strongly interconnected. Firstly, just as selection criteria for intending mentors are necessary, so too is a clear specification of the role; mentoring needs a job description, in other words. What are the principal functions mentors are expected to fulfil, with what kind of frequency, and what kinds of documentation (if any) will they have to deal with? Correspondingly, if

mentors' obligations – and their entitlements – are being spelled out, so too ought to be those of mentees.

The nature of mentors and mentees' responsibilities, and the divisions between these, may be embodied in a mentoring *contract* – which in its most formal guise would actually be signed by both parties. This kind of device allows for reference to the key dimensions of the mentoring relationship as constructed within an organisation, and it can elucidate the boundaries within which both parties agree to act. Whatever format is adopted for any such contract, it should ideally embody a set of ideas based on a *shared ownership* of guidelines and groundrules. In other words, a broad range of relevant college staff – including current mentees – can usefully contribute to its drafting.

While an overly rigid, managerial, approach to the structure of mentoring within an institution could in itself be a factor promoting antagonism to any scheme, clearly a high priority aim would be to ensure a measure of consistency across departmental/curricular areas. A model of an effective overarching framework, and contract, setting out responsibilities and entitlements for both mentor and mentored would be one in which there was some scope for flexibility and adjustments. But it would also have in-built *minimum* levels of contact, support, observation and so on, no matter what the curriculum specialism. This can help ensure that any sense of grievance that emerges (e.g. where a trainee perceives that they have not been provided with the same level of 'face to face' time as a colleague in another

curriculum area has had) can be discussed with reference to, and framed by, what has been approved as institutional policy. Guidelines for good mentoring practice, to be readily discerned by their readers as promoting consistency across subject areas, are best written in an accessible way, avoiding ambiguity, whilst retaining flexibility and being regularly revised and updated in the light of experience and evaluation.

The issue of subject specificity

Mentees may not always be well served by mentoring which is wholly *generic*. Such mentoring, it has sometimes been held, fails to recognise their needs for clear and expert guidance on the best ways in which to approach the particular challenges of teaching their own subject. According to the important survey carried out in the UK by OfSTED,

‘The content of the [training] courses rarely includes the development of subject-specific pedagogy to equip new teachers with the specific knowledge and skills necessary for teaching their specialist subject or vocational area’ (OfSTED, 2003, p.6).

The present, largely generic, nature of most training for college teaching derives from the difficulties in customising the delivery of training to meet the individual needs of a diverse range of specialists. One of the distinctive attributes of the UK college sector, as indicated in my introduction to this paper, is the great number of subjects, courses and pathways that attract both learners *and intending teachers of these*. It has traditionally only been viewed as feasible or desirable to create subject-specific training pathways (on something like the school teacher training model) in a very restricted range of

areas – i.e. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Adult Basic Skills (ABS). The special reasons which lie behind recent developments in these areas are to do with current government priorities (its strong desire to promote social inclusion and cohesion), a rapid growth in ESOL and ABS learner numbers creating almost unprecedented demand for appropriately trained specialists, and particular concerns having been expressed over a period of time by the relevant inspecting bodies regarding teaching quality and learners' achievements in these areas.

In principle, the aspiration of trainees to be mentored by someone whose area of expertise closely matches their own is not hard to accept. Wherever feasible, mentoring by a co-specialist (or at least by someone from a disciplinary background cognate with that of the trainee) should be engineered. However, it is probably unrealistic to establish absolutely rigid rules on the matter as far as many institutions are concerned. In addition to the reservations expressed by Lucas, (op cit) some colleges may have tiny specialist departments, where the 'newcomer' is perhaps the only full time member of staff. Elsewhere, no appropriately experienced staff within a department or section may be available to assume a mentoring role. (Cases may even exist in present UK conditions – the low morale I have referred to previously – where high staff turnover results in every single member of a team in a department being new in post for the start of an academic year).

However, it is worth reminding ourselves that all trainees will benefit from 'being introduced to wider professional issues' (Lucas, op. cit.): for this reason

if for no other we would probably be mistaken, therefore, to seek a *panacea* for all the present perceived deficiencies in colleges' mentoring arrangements in the shape of an undue emphasis on subject-specificity. While the ideal remains providing specialised mentoring, concordant with current OfSTED and DfES recommendations, we could also, however, facilitate (a) a *breadth* of awareness of possible pedagogic strategies, and (b) professional learning deriving from other, interlocking, communities of practice - including, for instance, those concerned with the learning support and pastoral care of our students.

Evaluating the impact of mentoring:

For convincing claims to be made at all about the effectiveness of any mentoring framework which has been put in place there needs to be some mechanism for researching this – for gathering data and making sense of it. This, then, is the last but by no means least important dimension of an 'architecture' for mentoring to which some thought needs to be given. A better understanding of the components of effective mentoring practice would derive from more actively researching it at the college level. Such research has special potential to inform the kind of 'remedial' mentoring to be conducted in response to instances of teacher underperformance (such as surface because of student complaints, typically). Evaluation and monitoring of mentoring can produce the kind of concrete 'continuous quality improvement' which is being promoted across UK colleges, but especially in cases where teaching standards and learner achievement are causing concern. (Kingston, 2004a).

'Whither mentoring?'

Wallace and Gravells reviewing institutional issues pertinent to mentoring, raise the question of whether the activity might be seen as 'a functional building block of continuing professional development for staff at all levels'. Further, they note that it is possible to argue for mentoring as 'a less costly form of professional development than many alternatives, such as in-service training courses ... It may be seen as constituting better value for money than some other development options'. (Wallace and Gravells, *op. cit.*, p. 109). Thus designing a sound mentoring system could be advocated on the grounds of economics alone; it might be, financially, an intelligent course of action. When some of our colleges are struggling to attract and retain staff, in particular those from the vocational specialisms, the offer of support and supervision by mentors can probably represent a marked enticement to prospective applicants.

Debates (see, e.g. Clow, *op.cit.*, p.205) over the lack of parity between school teachers' pay and that of college lecturers may do much harm to the image of college teaching as a profession. So too may the perception that the emerging 14-19 agenda within UK education implies a rise in the incidence of disruption in the sector, or at the least a kind of 'kiddification' (Lucas, cited in Kingston 2004b), where the adult ethos of colleges stands to be undermined by the incursion of larger numbers of teenaged learners. In these kinds of circumstances, the ability of colleges to recruit and retain staff is rendered more difficult; potential palliatives may include mentoring being on offer.

'Why do they do it?' once asked researchers trying to elucidate the motivations of trainees beginning their career in the sector (McKelvey and Andrews, 1998). Institutions might usefully apply this blunt question to those staff who have the potential to be mentors; perhaps the answer might be found to be that such staff perceive that they are working within an institution which does indeed possess all the 'architectural features' to which I have tried to draw attention. Where, by contrast, the general perception is that insufficient attention has been paid to these features we may very well find shortages of committed mentors. The negative implications of this for the UK government's present plans for professionalizing the UK college workforce, so that it may more effectively deliver higher levels of learner achievement, could be considerable.

Notes:

[1] The UK further education (FE) colleges cater for learner groups such as 16 year old school leavers, adult returners to study, migrant groups – often non native-speakers of English - and such relatively new contingents as 14+ learners who may have been excluded from state schools, e.g. on grounds of misbehaviour. It is sometimes called the 'second chance' sector by its proponents – and seen by critics of government underfunding of the colleges as often having been treated as 'second class'. The closest comparison internationally would probably be with the community colleges of the USA.

[2] The 'Skills for Life' policy is a major set of initiatives designed to expand educational provision for the worrying numbers of UK adults with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties.

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Item 3:

'So where do I go from here?: college mentors'
continuing professional development'

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So where do I go from here?: college mentors' continuing professional development

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Abstract

My aim in this short paper has been to draw attention to the potential for professional extension and advancement for which mentoring can provide a strong foundation. Examples provided include the improvement in one's own practice which evaluation and reflection can produce, the gaining of additional qualifications, and writing for publication on mentoring-related themes. The context in which I explore these issues is that of the college sector in the UK (variously termed 'further education [FE] 'post-compulsory education {and training}' [PCE{T}] or 'the learning and skills sector' [LSS]).

The mentoring of new entrants to teaching in this sector has assumed major significance consequent to two important policy developments. These have been, respectively, the introduction by the government of compulsory training for college teachers in 2000 and, in 2003, a strikingly critical report by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) of certain aspects of such training, following a survey inspection conducted during that year. In particular, OfSTED recorded very serious reservations regarding the adequacy and consistency of the mentoring being provided for trainees and recommended that this area be the subject of urgent attention on the part of both training institutions and workplaces. The deficiencies in subject specific mentoring were viewed especially critically.

However, for a number of reasons, which I review, the college sector has not presently been able to convincingly claim that a large enough pool of suitably qualified and motivated mentors has been coming forward to take up the challenges presented by the government and OfSTED. It may be, therefore, that a more active promotion of the further professional opportunities to which mentoring has the potential to open doors should be a new priority for the sector. I contend that such opportunities are in fact both numerous and interesting, and wider awareness of them may in itself provide the kind of incentive to engage with mentoring which seems thus far sometimes to be lacking amongst skilled and experienced practitioners with much to offer as mentors.

Introduction

A probably inescapable fact for anyone in the UK is that since it assumed office in 1997 the New Labour Government has been fundamentally concerned to convince the electorate that one of its very highest priorities is increasing participation rates in education, thus promoting social inclusion, and raising achievement levels in all phases of the education system: famously, Tony Blair summed this up as being an emphasis on 'education, education, education'. In practical terms, each phase (Primary, Secondary, Further and Higher Education) has been subjected to specific initiatives arising from this prioritisation. With regard to further education – or what I shall describe in this paper as the college sector – two parallel sets of developments concern us here, both of which relate crucially to the quality of training provided for new entrants to teaching; even more specifically they have notable implications for the scale and nature of the *mentoring* which will be required to meet the objectives which have been set.

Although a detailed review of the relevant policy shifts, statements and documents relating to the college sector would distract attention from my principal focus, that of mentors' professional development, it is necessary to at least summarise these, and provide one or two illustrations of what is being sought.

The first strand in recent developments to which attention needs to be drawn concerns teacher training for college teaching, available for some 50 or so years in the UK but taken up only on a purely voluntaristic basis until the introduction of compulsion in 2000. The college sector had long been the victim of what Michael Young described as a 'benign neglect' (Young et al, 1995) and the possession by intending teachers of vocational or academic qualifications was deemed sufficient for the job of 'lecturer' [1]. Building momentum through the 1990s was a case for drastically altering this state of affairs, and by the end of the decade the argument had been won. Clear confirmation that imminently all college teachers

were to hold recognised teaching qualifications was contained in the Government White Paper 'Learning to Succeed' (DfEE, 1999).

Accompanying compulsion we saw the introduction of the first set of 'Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning in England and Wales' (FENTO, 1999) and these have remained, to date, in place and unchanged [2]. FENTO Reviewers were appointed to ensure coverage of these standards by training providers, and where there were observable failings, accreditation to run programmes could be withheld or withdrawn. Furthermore, training programmes provided within university departments (i.e. as distinct from those offered by colleges themselves) were also subject to scrutiny by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the inspecting arm of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and Wales (HEFCE). The Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) also assumed a rigorous approach to monitoring the quality of training provision, and assertively setting out what the essential elements of effective programmes were to be. (And such programmes, incidentally, are currently estimated to need to accommodate some 20 000 new trainees each year. (DfES, 2004)).

It would be possible to provide very numerous exemplars of the kinds of guidelines and strictures produced by the last two of the bodies referred to above, but for my present purpose the following should suffice. The first arose from OfSTED's 2003 survey of training:

... few opportunities are provided for trainees to learn how to teach their specialist subjects, and there is a lack of systematic mentoring in the workplace.

(OfSTED, 2003, p.5).

In the following year we then read that:

Subject-specific skills must be acquired in the teachers' workplace and from vocational or academic experience. Mentoring, either by line managers, subject experts or experienced teachers in related curriculum areas, is essential.

(DfES, 2004, p.8)

What was, then, prominent in this first strand of the evolution of the present ethos and structure of training for new college teachers was an unambiguous expectation that mentors, most especially those able to 'connect' with trainees within the medium of a shared curriculum specialism, would move centre stage.

The second area of debate which I contend forms the other major essential aspect of any scene-setting for the work of mentors within a UK college is that of 'the quality of the learner experience'. In certain respects we would have to acknowledge that, in fact, some key developments falling under this heading predate the New Labour government coming to power. For example, the Conservative – John Major's in particular - predilection for 'charters' setting out 'customer' entitlements in various societal spheres produced one specifically for college students, in the form of the 'Charter for Further Education' (DFE, 1993). This set out what students could expect from their teachers, and what actions they might consider taking should they feel (as 'customers', as it were) that they were not getting value for money. Viewed positively, the Charter was empowering, and gave students a voice which they could use in levering up the quality of service being provided by colleges (each of which, in due course, was required to produce its own individual charter to complement the 'sector-wide' one of the Department for Education – as it was at that time). Somewhat more critically, a number of observers have claimed that actually the dawning of the charter era saw the beginnings of a 'culture of complaint' in which college teachers would become even more beleaguered and stressed than ever before.

The primacy of the college learner was effectively reiterated in other forms, for example the publication of a major speech by the Secretary of State for Education at the time, David Blunkett, as 'Colleges for Excellence and Innovation' (DfEE, 2000). As a notion it was formalised and writ large in the Common Inspection Framework used for the college sector (OfSTED/ALI, 2001).

The overwhelmingly obvious message for college managers in these turns of events was that the issue of teaching quality – in other words the calibre of the teachers who were being employed – was, in its importance, second to none. The penalty to be paid for poor teaching might even include (a threat made by one somewhat transient education minister) the same kind of 'naming and shaming' which certain underperforming – mostly inner-urban – schools had been on the receiving end of. Clearly, the question of teacher training and development was to now be at the very heart of strategies for institutional improvement.

Enter the Mentor, Slowly

Having briefly described above the policy environment, or 'stage', we should now turn to the professional situation of those practitioners in the college sector who might theoretically assume the parts of the principal actors. What were the defining features of the pool of staff from which would be drawn the mentors necessary to ensure the effective implementation of the drive to raise standards of teaching and learning?

It is firstly worth pointing out – or underlining, in the case of UK readers – just how demoralised in some respects were many college teachers. This fact had a number of origins, not all of which we can detail here, and was widely acknowledged in very diverse quarters. For example, in 'Colleges for Excellence and Innovation' (op.cit.) it was an expressed aim that somehow colleges be

transformed into places where people would once again wish to work. Not long before this, McKelvey and Andrews had produced a paper entitled 'Why Do They Do it?' having been stimulated to research what possible motivations new trainees might have for positively choosing to enter a sector so widely seen as poorly remunerated and engendering such high levels of occupational stress. (McKelvey and Andrews, 1998).

The main college lecturers' union, Natfhe, had been vocal in drawing attention to a sector producing high levels of work-related stress, absenteeism and unfilled vacancies. For some time there had been a growing salary gap with the school teachers - but signs, too, that for a number of practitioners in colleges they were having to contend with the same kinds of discipline issues amongst younger students that many schools were seen as being afflicted by. (The production by the Further Education Development Agency of a support pack for college staff entitled 'Ain't Misbehavin' (1998) appeared to accept that a measure of guidance would be needed with tackling this particular problem). Government initiatives stemming from the major 1997 report on strategies for widening participation in college education (Kennedy, 1997) were also beginning to have an impact in the colleges. And there were yet further reasons why, in general, the morale of many college teachers would not, on the face of it, seem to be conducive to large numbers of them actively seeking out an involvement with mentoring new entrants to the sector. A trainee with whom I worked shortly after the introduction of compulsion (a good Business Studies graduate) was greeted by his designated mentor in a placement college with the depressingly phrased question: "Why does a young man like you want to come into this?"

'Against all expectations'

It is, then, within what would seem to be the most unpromising circumstances, that the mentoring of new entrants to college teaching should be examined.

Issues of both quality and quantity are relevant here, because even if we were able to demonstrate that college-based mentors display high standards of professionalism, mentoring systems will be overstretched if these are based on unrealistic mentor : trainee ratios.

Drawing on direct knowledge of two significant initial teacher training programmes for the college sector [3], both accommodating an annual intake of approximately 100 trainees, certain initial observations might be made. Firstly, and to use a somewhat overworked phrase, 'at the end of the day' every trainee on the programmes concerned is somehow allocated a designated mentor for the practical teaching components of their courses; this apparently happy state of affairs has obtained for some years now.

While it seems that of this relatively large number of mentors no more than a minority of individuals initially *seek out* an involvement with initial teacher training, evidence from a recent study of the mentors to one of the two cohorts demonstrates quite unambiguously the fact that this does not equate to any negativity on the part of the majority. Certainly the experiences of trainees themselves pointed to their mentors having engaged with their responsibilities, with the support they had been given over their training year being described as either 'very useful' (53%) or 'fairly useful' (34%) (Cunningham, 2004, p.272).

Mentors participating in this particular study included some 32 individuals who had not actively sought out mentoring responsibilities, and these allowed a picture to be built up where the experience of most of them could be described as 'broadly positive', with such statements of special relevance to this paper as '... it helped to make me feel more valued' (ibid. p.276) being notable. As might be predicted, moreover, those in the sample group who had indeed volunteered their services, expressed such sentiments as '... I volunteered back in 1994 ... I've always been positive about mentoring'. And 'I very much enjoy supporting new teachers/lecturers into the profession'. (ibid., p.277).

Both from the small scale study referred to here and from a multitude of professional interactions with practising mentors, I would contend that it can be claimed with some confidence that once mentoring has been 'tasted', its rewards tend to entice college teachers into expressing an interest into a continuing involvement with the activity. Only very rarely indeed – and usually only following the experience of having had to try to support an especially weak and/or unreliable trainee – do mentors tend to view their contribution as a 'one-off' event. (Some do, however, move on to the kinds of extremely demanding middle or senior management posts that for most practical purposes preclude mentoring trainee teachers).

All this said, there is on the other hand little room for complacency with regard to either the size of the potential mentoring pool or the motivations of those within it. As mentioned, the numbers of trainees are anticipated to rise quite dramatically as compulsion really 'kicks in' (e.g. as many serving but hitherto untrained college teachers are released from duties to follow in-service programmes). The stresses and strains of college life show no signs of significantly reducing. In very many colleges – with honourable exceptions – there is but little evidence, even in embryonic form, of the kind of 'institutional architecture' which might be strongly conducive to effective mentoring: formal recognition of mentoring successes, for instance, are to date rarely built into the criteria for professional advancement, and in purely practical terms resourcing for mentoring is sometimes scant to say the least. It is in any number of ways understandable if mentors may have a tendency to ask themselves the question posed in my title – "So, where do I go from here?"

Building on the satisfactions

I would now like to explore some ways in which the effective, forward-looking, mentor can build on the kinds of sentiments and experiences alluded to above by

weaving them into their own personal 'professional projects'; their plans to progress. Such 'projects' are being formally promoted in some colleges through the vehicle of the *personal development plans* (PDPs) which staff may use as the basis for their appraisals (which I return to later in this paper) and in connection with other institutional processes relating to human resources.

It seems wholly appropriate that involvement in the role of mentor is seen as a part of mentors' own continuing professional development. This is not only meant to refer to the positive benefits accruing to currently held teaching skills from observing and engaging in debate with trainees. It relates more to the ways in which mentors may actively exploit their experiences when seeking professional advancement, either within their present institution or elsewhere. In a number of respects, especially as the profile of mentoring continues to be raised in professional life, the kinds of skills mentors will have used are extremely likely to be viewed as high level ones, of value in responsible positions. They are, therefore, eminently *transferable* ones.

From certain perspectives, it may even emerge that the ability and willingness to engage in mentoring becomes an *essential*, rather than merely *desirable*, criterion for the majority of substantial posts in the college sector – in other words, one of the basic minimum requirements for appointment as a full time, established teacher who has completed a post-qualifying year. Writing in the context of teachers/mentors delivering the UK's important Skills for Life programmes, Jay Derrick airs the view that 'Mentoring must become a normal part of all experienced teachers' job roles' (Derrick 2004, p.25). Incidentally, this writer adds the important observation that '*infrastructure* needs to exist in all regions for training, supporting and quality assuring mentors' (ibid, my emphasis). This would appear to further extend, regionally, the notion of an appropriate *institutional architecture* for mentoring, which I have proposed elsewhere (Cunningham, 2005, p.13).

As a starting point for the creation of an *inventory* of skills and attributes to which attention can be drawn in applications which are being made for posts it is, quite simply, perfectly legitimate to describe the degree of respect, and status, already accorded to an individual when they have been proposed or designated as a mentor. Although we can probably all think of instances where appointments to the mentor role have resulted from the 'no one else available' syndrome, these will be very rare. In general selectors will almost certainly work on the assumption that mentors will have been given the responsibilities attached to the work for a mixture of the following reasons:

- relative long service in an institution, or at the least a degree of 'loyalty' to it and a history of positive interaction with colleagues and superiors
- measurable skills in the area of self – organisation, and the management of course documentation
- high level classroom teaching skills, which are also in a number of ways susceptible to objective measures – for instance gradings awarded in internal or external inspection exercises, or evaluative comments supplied by college learners
- reliability, and perhaps the kind of willingness and flexibility attached to covering for absent colleagues – a track record of taking on more than has strictly speaking been required of one in a post
- somewhat less easily quantified, hard to pin down, attributes (or 'dispositions') – but vital ones – such as those FENTO/SVUK refer to as 'personal impact and presence' (FENTO, 1999).

A major college in Kent, England, is among those forward-looking institutions which have articulated very well both the benefits which mentoring brings to the

college and those accruing to individuals involved in the delivery of its *Mentoring Policy*. The relevant college document describes how, for instance, the status and professionalism of mentors is recognised by their being 'regarded by his or her peers with credibility and respect [and] regarded by his or her line manager as a good role model.' (West Kent College, 2004).

Many of us are naturally reticent about making too many claims regarding our strengths – blowing our own trumpets – but the kinds of people skills and organisational skills routinely deployed by practising mentors are clearly very sought-after ones. This applies not only in respect of posts in the broad areas of education and training (including teacher training, of course) but in related professional realms – if that is where our career aspirations happen to be leading us. It would, moreover, be feasible to supply evidence to substantiate the strengths to which one wishes to draw attention; for instance a record of the number of mentees successfully completing their training programmes over a period of time, with one's support.

Mentoring skills are, then, transferable ones, and in some ways are fairly clearly related to *management*, in its broadest sense – mentors may have managed individual mentees' timetables, effectively liaised with colleagues in compiling these, managed observations of classroom practice, structured debriefings following these, and taken on a 'troubleshooting' role when things have not all been as they should be. And *coaching*, an increasingly acknowledged and valued dimension of mentoring (or at least adjunct to it) is another function which could be listed here. It is probably self-evident that these kinds of tasks are not at all dissimilar to those performed regularly by curriculum managers, departmental heads and so on, and as such might in general be seen as constituting a useful preparation for such positions.

Furthermore, mentors will have written detailed formative and summative reports, been involved in target-setting, and very possibly counselled trainees regarding

possible career pathways in the colleges. All of these dimensions of being a mentor are well worth celebrating in applications - but obviously alongside the ways in which one's attributes and experience can be mapped against the person specification/selection criteria for whatever post may be on offer. Good mentors have invested a great deal of their time, thought and energy to the induction and ongoing support of trainees, and it is entirely legitimate that such an investment might have somewhat longer term professional rewards as well as those deriving from the day to contact with trainees.

Some of the above ideas are worked into an interesting statement comprising 'recommendations for mentors' to be found in the collaborative report 'Mentoring Towards Excellence' (FENTO/AoC, 2001). This describes the 'learning conversations about mentoring' held in 29 UK colleges with a view to informing this publication, and which generated the following list (*below and continues over*). Although some of the individual items read more like recommendations for college managers – or even policy makers – the list is notable for being an authoritative indication of recent thinking in at least some colleges.

Recommendations for mentors:

- Mentoring should be developed and promoted as a supportive and developmental process.
- The mentors should have job descriptions that clarify their role.
- Mentoring and observation should apply to all teachers: full time; part time; supply and agency teachers.
- Mentoring should be part of the management's commitment to improving quality and raising standards of teaching and learning.
- Mentors should be best-practice practitioners.
- Teaching observations should be used to identify 'grade 1' teachers who are strong role models to become mentors.
- Mentors should be formally trained.

- Mentors should be either paid for mentoring, or be given time to carry out the job.
- Mentoring should be used to increase the sharing of good practice.
- A mentor needs to be a successful practitioner with strong interpersonal skills.

{FENTO/AoC, 2001, p8}

If such a collation of points from the 'learning conversations' forming the research basis for the report were to gain a wide currency it could usefully serve to underscore the centrality of mentors' high standing in colleges, and thereby their suitability for further professional advancement.

Mentoring as a dimension of CPD, and its relevance within appraisal

It has become a commonplace that in any professional area there is now a need to demonstrate a readiness to continually refine and extend our skills. But in certain ways we may still have a somewhat blinkered view of what exactly can legitimately be described as 'professional development'. As Graham Guest has expressed it:

It is easy to assume that CPD is just a matter of attending training courses off the job. This is certainly one aspect, but there are many more. CPD activities can include on-the-job training, open learning, short courses, conferences, seminars, workshops, self-study, preparing and making presentations and *being a coach or mentor*.

(Guest, 2004, p22, emphasis added).

From what we have seen of the demands of effective mentoring, and the range of skills which mentors must display, there is clearly much more professional development attached to the successful practice of the activity than would result

from choosing, say, to remain 'purely' a classroom teacher (although this is, of course, not in any way diminish the value of professional accomplishments in the classroom). Alongside this fact, it is indisputable that mentoring in the college sector is to be accorded even greater value in the context of planned reforms to the training of new entrants to teaching within it. Therefore there is evidently much to be gained by mentors who can navigate and exploit the various possibilities for celebrating what they have achieved – for themselves as well as for the trainees with whom they have worked.

A highly appropriate forum in which just such a possibility is located is that of appraisal, incidentally. Colleges' appraisal systems will almost always facilitate discussion and recording, on an annual basis, of teachers' (and managers', of course) successes and their contributions to the professional life of the organisation. Appraisal often usefully allows staff to indicate where their professionalism has been hindered rather than helped; it may therefore present an opportunity for the kind of *activism* Judyth Sachs observes in some practitioners (Sachs, 2003) – in other words for some small scale campaigning for the structures and systems most conducive to effective mentoring.

One possible way in which mentoring activities might also be documented might well be as part of a Personal Development Plan (or Record) (PDP/R), referred to earlier. In fact, such a record 'may well soon become the norm, supplementing our online CVs and personal websites' (Guest, *op. cit.*). The PDR could be organised in such a way as to highlight the *transferability* of the professional learning that has accrued from mentoring, and, specifically, to indicate ways in which it has better equipped an individual for increased managerial responsibilities.

Not only mentoring itself, but participating in mentoring-related activities is worthy of recognition as CPD. To link together two of the several possibilities referred to by Guest (*viz* mentoring, and preparing a presentation) it might be feasible to

contribute to an organised event where the focus is best practice in mentoring; a number of practising mentors did so at a seminar organised at the writer's university in 2004, adding greatly to the credibility of the programme, it was felt.

However, if these kinds of considerations appear somewhat too instrumental, then it is probably necessary to reconnect this discussion to mentors' more immediate concerns, and focus on ways in which improvements to current practice can be sought. Arguably some of the principal professional satisfactions deriving from mentoring include the kind of reciprocity of professional extension which Healy and Welchert (1990) for example, draw attention to, and the truly fundamental process of

'looking at teaching differently, seeing it in a new light, coming to appreciate its complexity more than we have done as yet ... possib[ly] develop[ing] a more hesitant manner, a kind of *pedagogical stammer*, as a result of our reflection and newly won insight.'

(Jackson, 1992, p.67, my emphasis)

So, from such perspectives as these, mentors' own professional understandings develop alongside those of their mentees – a practising mentor expressed this succinctly to me as being to do with it not really being acceptable to '...just say "because I've always done it this way" but needing to explain *why*'. Some ideas of seeming relevance to these matters are presented below.

'Continuous Improvement' and the centrality of evaluation

The ability to mentor effectively is susceptible to a range of quantitative and qualitative measures, some of these being:

- in an institution having in place transparent mechanisms for identifying staff to join a mentoring team, the very fact of having been selected for the role;

- successful completion by trainees of their programmes;

- evaluations completed by such trainees

- comments supplied, informally or formally, by withdrawing (perhaps even complaining) trainees.

The evolution of one's mentoring skills will be occurring as a result of using them regularly – the 'practice makes perfect' effect. But other positive effects can be derived from such activities as attending events with a 'sharing of best practice' focus, and (even better) contributing to the design and delivery of these. Actively evaluating one's own practice is, however, to be commended even more highly; it is, then, worth giving some thought to how best to undertake this evaluation. Let us therefore try to expand on the third point in the FENTO/AoC listing shown earlier.

'Group' evaluation exercises might be conducted where a number of trainees in one institution are asked to respond anonymously to written questions posed regarding the quality of mentoring they have received over a period. Each member of a team of mentors can examine and discuss the picture of mentoring which emerges, and make educated guesses concerning which evaluative comments (positive or negative) might apply to their own efforts. This sort of strategy is liable to provide a useful overview, but is probably too blunt an instrument for most individual mentors' liking if they wish to glean a greater degree of insight into how their own performance has been perceived.

The use of focus groups is worth considering, where trainees can discuss their experiences with mentors. Ideally, such a forum would be one in which the distorting effects of power relations are minimised, and one way of tackling this issue is simply by making sure that neither 'side' feels itself to be outnumbered. The aim should, therefore, be to achieve as even a balance between mentors and mentees as can be engineered. Moreover, where a focus group can be

facilitated by a neutral third party, perhaps a more senior figure in the college, this might be advantageous.

The above devices have obvious, quite severe, limitations when it comes to eliciting evaluations of an individual mentor's performance. To obtain such an evaluation will be contingent on the trainees involved forfeiting their anonymity and it must therefore be acknowledged to be a process which will generally only produce any reliable results where the mentor: trainee relationship has been an overwhelmingly positive one. It probably takes a fairly assertive or courageous trainee to offer honest feedback if this is negative. On the other hand, actually posing the difficult questions in the first place probably also calls for a measure of courage. As with so many other aspects of mentoring practice, the well-judged and skilful *use of language* in posing appropriate questions is paramount.

It is virtually impossible to improve one's performance where the deficiencies are only being guessed at. But the evaluative devices touched on above, while they do not necessarily always positively contribute to *ongoing* mentoring relationships, can profoundly influence the nature and effectiveness of *future* ones; it is in this spirit that I so strongly advocate their use.

Accreditation for effective mentoring

In an age of 'credentialism', or 'qualifications inflation', we should also indicate ways in which opportunities do already exist at a number of universities to gain formal credit for the high level work-based professional learning for which mentoring provides evidence. Appropriate university Master's level programmes have come into being and, in my view, will almost certainly be augmented by new and varied ones. Successful completion of these is usually via a mix of portfolio assessment and extended writing (much of which allows for a close look at theoretical models of professional learning and of mentoring). Oxford Brookes University's MA in Coaching and Mentoring Practice is of interest, as are programmes run at a number of other UK institutions including Middlesex

University and Anglia Ruskin University. One of the most positive aspects of such possibilities is the option for the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). Registration and study for such high level awards is thus usually far from being a 'from square one' business; it is a combination of reflection on past practice with current and future endeavours which is seen as desirable and eminently worthy of credit. Other positive dimensions of some universities' programmes may include a measure of distance learning and electronic networking amongst programme participants – together promoting the benefits of discursive learning/problem solving, and somewhat minimising actual attendance requirements.

Some college employers – certainly in a UK context - may be amenable to helping with the costs attached to these sorts of studies. The key to successful applications for such assistance seems to be being able to make a credible claim for the ways in which mentors see that their own practice, and teaching quality within an institution, can be enhanced by following one of the programmes. Clearly, however, the source of most relevant advice in this connection will be the senior individuals within a college with staff development or human resources responsibilities. Even where individuals do end up meeting all their own costs it is, however, a situation in which the expenditure can – as with the majority of advanced qualifications – be seen as a well-judged investment.

Research and writing

In this particular realm of professional activity I would wish at the outset to acknowledge that a large number of practising mentors will already possess a pedigree as published authors, especially in the field of subject-specific texts. Here I will, however, focus on the research and writing that originates in the activity of mentoring itself. Here resides opportunities for mentors to document and analyse their own professional practice, and to share their ideas with others

– perhaps those newer to mentoring than themselves. It is, I would contend, all of: realistic, constructive and purposeful to research mentoring (one’s own and that of a wider community of practice) and to document this research. A great deal of professional learning is actually taking place during mentoring relationships – sometimes, it is true, often the same kind of trial and error learning (Hargreaves, 1999) which teaching itself might ordinarily be said to entail, but it is worthy of being accorded a high value.

While it is no doubt true that in general the PCET environment does not exert such explicit pressures on staff to research as are traditionally experienced in higher education, the activity is certainly both feasible and rewarding. In our present context it fundamentally relates to *praxis* – learning more about one’s own professional practice. Such learning can be viewed as leading to the kinds of ‘really useful knowledge’ it has become common to speak of; the ‘outcomes’ of the learning are fairly immediately used to inform one’s own professional practice, and/or perhaps that of colleagues. In this sense we are actually able to claim, of course, that we are in the realm of *action research*. Such an approach is a highly appropriate one where ‘the effects of a specific intervention are to be evaluated’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.73); the ‘intervention’ in the present context would be the activity of mentoring.

A range of academic and professional journals would be receptive to individual or collaboratively written articles that focus on mentoring. The UK journals which come to mind include for example:-

- ❖ Research in Post-Compulsory Education
- ❖ Journal of Vocational Education and Training
- ❖ Journal of Further and Higher Education
- ❖ Teacher Development
- ❖ Mentoring and Tutoring

Various aspects of writing for publication can perhaps be daunting – beginning with the prospect of trying to carve out in one’s professional life enough time for

the activity. However, more positively, many journals, such as those above, have a strong *practitioner* focus; they are more concerned with case studies and action research projects (especially where improvements in quality can be evidenced as a result of the project) than with highly theoretical work. In other words, they often actively seek articles based on, and arising from, 'own professional practice' rather than ones largely or entirely divorced from this. (However, there is certainly a 'pecking order' of journals within the academic world, and those publications deemed to be most prestigious are often highly scholarly ones, aiming to be at the leading edge of empirical and theoretical studies, and these will certainly reject material they do not judge to be 'weighty' enough).

Beyond giving the obvious advice that it is therefore a good starting point to research the nature of the 'typical' article being accepted by any given journal, and its place in the status hierarchy of published academic writing, there are probably certain other points to bear in mind, including the following:

- 'First-time' writers who are college-based might profitably seek out collaborative possibilities with mentors or teacher trainers who have already published in relevant academic journals.
- Collaborative work with more immediate colleagues is also possible, bringing with it the potential to enhance the collegial ethos of an institution.
- Personal satisfaction may stem from being involved with the dissemination to fellow mentors and others of best practice, and simply from seeing one's name in print (even, say, in an in-house publication such as a staff bulletin or newsletter as opposed to the kinds of journals described above).
- 'One thing might lead to another', as published work can stimulate the interest of academics, editors and other parties reading it and this can bring about approaches to further develop ideas, or to write on related themes.
- For the most strongly competed-for college posts, being able to provide even a fairly brief publications record could well be a distinctive feature.

'All other things being equal', such an addition to an application could positively mark out a candidate.

Lastly, a perhaps necessary caution is in order, with regard to writing about one's mentoring practice:

- When dealing with matters such as the professional development of trainees, ethical issues need to be accorded special importance. This applies with special force to the area of trainee *underperformance*, when inadvertently allowing individuals to be identified could be viewed very seriously – not just ethically but legally.

Some 'horizon-scanning'

As I observed early on in this paper, mentors are now at the very centre of current thinking with regard to initial teacher education. Consolidation of their role, and refinement of their approaches, will be witnessed over the coming years. I would anticipate that seeking a formal qualification will become far more of a majority pursuit amongst mentors – especially as almost certainly more universities and organisations will follow the lead of UK institutions such as Oxford Brookes University and the Chartered Institute of Professional Development in offering attractive routes to accreditation. Furthermore, we may increasingly find colleges placing successful mentoring far more prominently in their criteria for the award of 'advanced skills' status, or similar designations used in settings other than that of the UK. As the observation of classroom teaching becomes an even more important dimension of various quality systems, so there will be an expanded requirement for *observer training* and mentors will surely have much to offer here.

In the UK school sector, mentors have a stronger, formalised, involvement in judging trainees' eligibility for the award of their qualification to teach, and this kind of jurisdiction may well in the future be extended to mentors working in other phases. Amongst some politicians and even educationists there is a lingering

sentiment that schemes such as 'SCITT' (School-Centred Initial Teacher Training) offered the best – or at any rate least contaminated by 'barmy theory' – approach to preparing new entrants for the realities of classroom life. (Interestingly, in the designation of the schemes the use of 'training' as opposed to 'education' probably spoke volumes for their objectives). Should such views come to hold sway then the confidence and readiness of mentors to assume even greater responsibilities, within a significantly wider remit, will be all-important. So too, perhaps, will be the capacity of mentors to exercise their professional judgement even at the stage of selecting trainees with the potential to become effective teachers; a number of training providers – and employers – are in fact already involving practising mentors in this function, acknowledging the high value of their inputs to the process.

But the skills of mentoring are supremely transferable ones, to reiterate this key point yet again, and merely being involved in such an activity as, say, training those other staff who will need to conduct a large number of teaching observations by no means sets a limit to the developmental opportunities which may be taken advantage of. Alongside this kind of role – and the many intrinsic satisfactions and rewards of mentoring – there are other avenues to explore. Ever-widening participation in college education is likely to trigger the development of more all-encompassing *student mentoring* schemes, and there will be a job to be done in contributing to the design of these. *Peer mentoring*, in particular where a key objective is the support and retention of specific cultural groups which the teaching profession needs, will need strengthening.

Furthermore, 'even managers need mentors' and with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership currently expanding its role (CEL, 2004) there are developmental opportunities for UK-based mentors who also have – or will go on to have – management experience. On the other hand, for mentors opting, for whatever reason, to scale down their commitment to full-time college-based employment there are almost always, it seems, ways open to acquire consultancy work in

coaching and/or mentoring. More broadly, much training and development work, both within and outside of the college sector, will be far more confidently approached with a background in mentoring. While it would be to seriously overstate the case to claim 'only be a mentor and all things are achievable', the possibilities touched on in this paper are unlikely to prove exhaustive.

Not all college teachers will find that they are drawn to mentoring as a professional activity, and not everyone will wish to continue with it on a long-term basis. It would be dishonest not to acknowledge that for some practitioners the challenges of other endeavours – pastoral work with students, perhaps, or curriculum management, or acquiring important responsibilities for resourcing and developing web-based learning – will be more enticing ones. But for those choosing to further exploit the attributes and skills which led initially to their involvement in mentoring, I would say that these are interesting, even exciting, times.

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Notes:

[1] The designation is, of course, still the one principally used in advertisements for vacant college posts, person specifications, and for contractual purposes. Nevertheless, it ought to be acknowledged that lecturing in PCET settings is a somewhat rare pedagogic strategy, and that 'teacher' is in reality therefore probably more appropriate.

[2] The Standards are, however, at the time of writing being comprehensively reviewed by the successor body to FENTO, Standards Verification UK (SVUK).

[3] These are, respectively, the Institute of Education, University of London's full time PGCE Post Compulsory programme, for which I was course leader from 1998-2003, and a sister course offered by Cardiff University which I externally examined from 2001-2005.

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Item 4:

‘Mentoring and models of professional learning.

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CHAPTER 3: Mentoring and models of professional learning

Chapter Objective: to enable mentors to confidently underpin their practice by being able to draw on selected models of professional learning.

“How feasible are the aspirations of those who hope to codify teachers’ craft knowledge? It is not difficult to find maxims or practical tips to pass on to beginning teachers, but what do they all add up to? ... Can an amorphous collection of practical principles be said to constitute a grounded theory of practice, or is this mere wishful thinking?”

Michael Eraut, 1994

“Practice without a grounding of theory is likely to be sterile at best, and ineffective and damaging at worst. Being sent straight into the classroom for a large block of time without a chance of reflection is not the best way.”

From letter titled ‘Real teacher training’. Education Guardian, 22.03.05

It is hoped that at least some exposure to an albeit quite limited range of theory (in the form of selected models of professionalism and professional learning) will add both interest and insight to the activity of mentoring. As with all professional work worthy of the description, mentoring is not merely concerned with practicalities and a mechanistic, rule-bound, approach to tasks. Some cognisance of broader, conceptual, frameworks which might underpin the activity is very worthwhile, if not actually essential. To this end I will therefore select a small number of theoretical perspectives which it appears can profitably *be applied* to the process of understanding the contribution which effective

mentoring might make to the early professional development of PCET teachers; it needs to be stressed, however, that the models are only being presented in skeletal form, and that none are derived specifically from research in our sector.

In their 1995 paper on the training of college teachers, Michael Young et al (op cit) referred to the 'benign neglect' which they saw as having long afflicted the post compulsory sector.

One of the ways in which this was in fact evident was to be found in a real dearth of literature devoted to professional issues in the PCET sector. This observation is one contrasting strongly with what has long been available with a focus on school teaching. To a large extent, not a great deal has changed over the past decade or so: a high proportion of what is published on *professional* – as opposed to *policy* – issues is still originating in work focused on phases of education other than PCET. It is for this reason that the reader will find so little here based on researching college teachers. And certain of the perspectives apply more strongly to 'learning *teaching*' than 'learning *mentoring*' but, as I hope will be evident, trying to draw a border between these two types of professional learning may be neither straightforward nor productive.

'Artisanry' and the learning of a craft

The notion of teaching as a craft skill is an interesting one, which has been particularly thoughtfully examined by Michael Huberman. Although his exposition of the 'craft' model makes no explicit reference to mentoring, we can see without too much difficulty where a skilled mentor could play a crucial role:

Essentially, teachers are artisans working primarily alone, with a variety of new and cobbled together materials, in a personally designed work environment. They gradually develop a repertoire of instructional skills and strategies, corresponding to a progressively denser, more differentiated and well-integrated set of mental schemata: they come to read the instructional situation better and faster, and to respond to it with

a greater variety of tools. They develop this repertoire through a somewhat haphazard process of trial and error, usually when one or another segment of the repertoire does not work repeatedly. Somewhere in that cycle *they may reach out to peers or ... professional trainers* [and] transform those inputs into a more private, personally congenial form. (Huberman, 1992. P136, emphasis added).

For 'peers or ... professional trainers' I would claim it would now be entirely legitimate to substitute 'mentors'; after all, in the specific U.S. educational context Huberman had in mind (certainly at the time he was observing its key features) the role of formal mentors would have been minuscule. The point which can surely be emphasised is that mentoring allows for far more *active* interventions than are alluded to above, where inputs are obtained purely on the basis of a 'reaching out' by someone in the process of developing their craft skills. Effective mentors can potentially initiate an *acceleration* of trainees' professional learning in a context where they are not simply passive until such a time as they are reached out to. This is not to negate the significance of trial and error learning. The importance of this has been drawn attention by other writers, such as David Hargreaves, (Hargreaves, 1999); mentors' regular inputs will productively complement this, not replace it. They will, by encouraging open discussion of the 'errors' – the things which '[do] not work repeatedly' – deepen trainees' understanding of these, and can engage in reviewing possible alternative strategies – or 'tools' in Huberman's phrasing.

What will be an essential precondition for the above formulation to be a credible one will obviously be the degree to which a mentor (and/or a department) has explicitly allowed a trainee 'the freedom to fail'. This hinges on the key question of whether a trainee will be fearful of the consequences of owning up to mistakes – or will feel secure and comfortable in doing so. As one trainee put it: 'Making us feel that no mistake is disastrous would be great'. (FT, pre-service trainee, 2004). But such a consideration applies, of course, to many of the models relating to professional learning, and certainly to most of those which will comprise the rest of the present brief review.

Learning Through Reflection on Experience

Experiential Learning is probably the one single theoretical perspective likely to be of special utility to mentors. The term is perhaps most frequently associated with the work of Kolb (1984) although there are a number of other writers – both before and after Kolb – who examine the key dimensions of learning from experience. Dennison and Kirk (1990), for example, adopting the brilliantly succinct formula ‘Do, Review, Learn, Apply’ (and using this for the title of their important book) look at the process in a particularly accessible way.

Experiential learning, we might argue, forms the core of what teacher training is ‘all about’. Yes, trainees are inducted into a broad policy context for post compulsory education (what FENTO/LLUK describe as ‘the place of FE within the wider world’), they are taught how to draft lesson plans, prepare useful handouts and so on. But at the very heart of their professional learning, and their preparation for a career in teaching lie the realities of the classroom. Coping with these realities, responding to the challenges they pose, and effectively managing student learning within the constraints presented by them, can all be enhanced by *mentors’ skills in facilitating experiential learning*.

For a trainee, this type of learning will be highly appropriate to what is currently specified by FENTO as ‘key area of teaching g’:

‘Reflecting upon and evaluating one’s own performance and planning future practice,

[involving] being able to:

g1 evaluate one’s own practice

g2 plan for future practice

g3 engage in continuing professional development’. (FENTO 2000)

If there is one set of constructs which the great majority of mentors will already have encountered it is that concerned with *reflection*. The idea of 'the reflective practitioner' (Schon, 1983) permeates virtually all initial teacher training programmes, and has done for some time now – certainly since the early 1990s. This means that many mentors will themselves, therefore, have encountered it, in one version or another, in their own training. What my intention is now, however, is to look at ways of applying the ideas of reflective practice – and experiential learning as it is so strongly related as a model – to mentoring as a strategy for enhancing professional learning. Given the claims being made for the centrality of experiential learning, what then ought we to understand of its essentials?

A number of names are associated with what is now a very significant body of work examining the links between experience, learning and personal or professional development. The boundaries between the perspectives which these writers have, in turn, presented are sometimes rather blurred ones. It would be unprofessional to contend that any one model simply 'recycles' the contents of an earlier one, though, as each does have its own distinctive interpretation of the processes involved in reflecting on experience, learning from this and 'moving on'. The significance attached to a cyclical dimension of such a set of actions is far greater in certain models (especially, say, Kolb, 1984) than others (notably Schon's formulation). The similarities and overlapping territory are, however, evident.

Interestingly what it was which originally struck Donald Schon, and which led him to the focus of his seminal work (*The Reflective Practitioner. How Professionals Think in Action*), was that in his view universities' particular view of knowledge 'fosters selective inattention to practical competence and professional artisanry.' (Schon, 1983, vii). He examines a number of what he called 'vignettes of practice' drawn from fields such as architecture and engineering, concentrating in particular 'on episodes in which a senior practitioner tries to help a junior one learn to do something'. (ibid, viii). It is not that easy – or legitimate – to attempt to

encapsulate all of Schon's ideas which he illustrates by use of his 'vignettes' but it is certainly worth drawing attention to one of his most significant contentions. This is that many professionals, to paraphrase, are at risk of becoming locked into a mode of practice where their technical expertise and rationality is not interrogated. Their knowledge of why they act in certain ways (e.g. when dealing with a client) remains tacit, and they 'find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection'. (Schon, 1983, p. 69). This fact limits both their ability to deal with novel ('surprising' is the word Schon uses) situations, and to communicate with others what has been informing their approach to a particular 'case', beyond restating the relevant 'technical' principles.

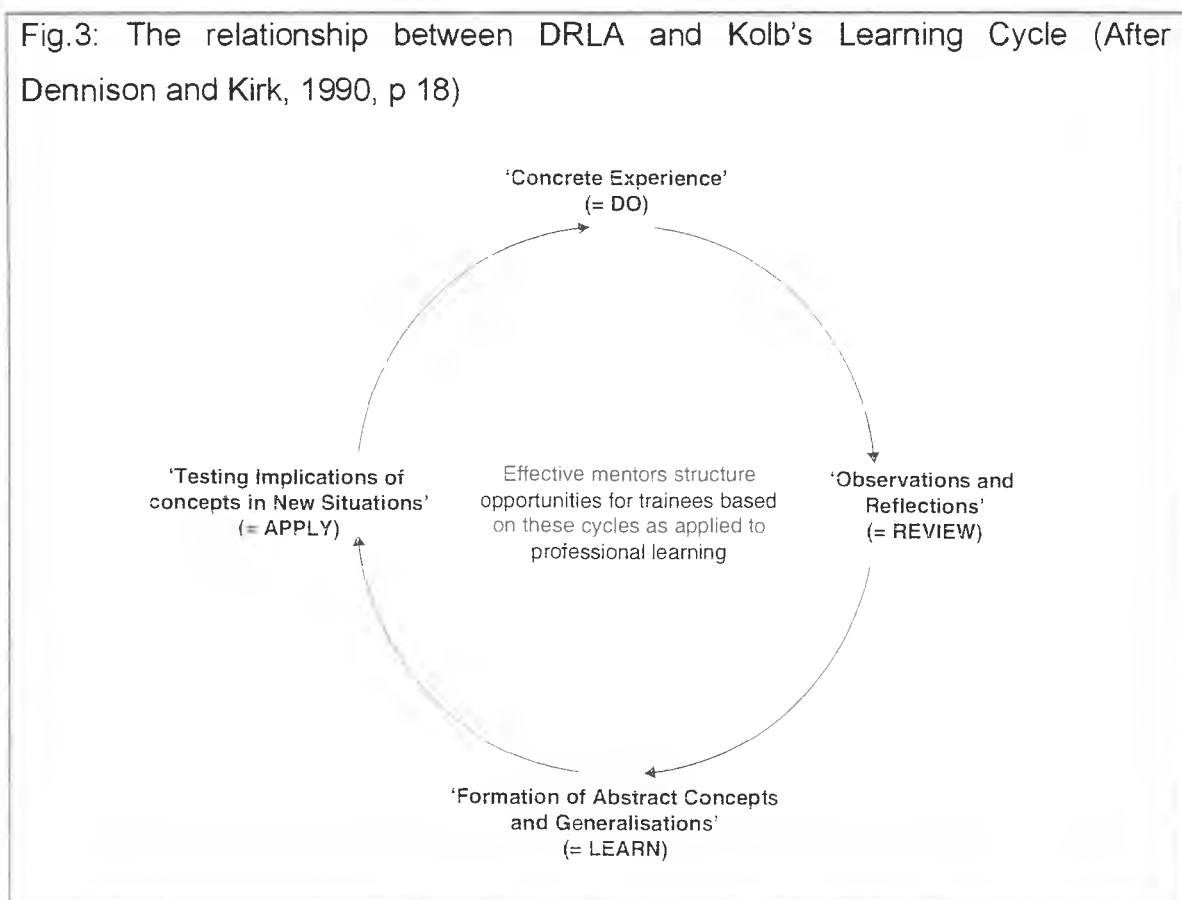
For practitioners such as Schon is alluding to here, 'uncertainty is a threat; its admission a sign of weakness'. (ibid). What is proposed in 'The Reflective Practitioner', one of its key elements, is that professional behaviour will become more insightful, responsive to the novelty of 'cases' *and* susceptible to clear articulation to other professionals if the merits of what the author described as *reflection-in-action* were to be acknowledged and its use to become 'broader, deeper, and more rigorous'. (ibid). Reflection-in-action promotes an open enquiry into the *why* of professional acts alongside the simple description of what form these acts have taken. It is true that some practitioners are acknowledged by Schon to already engage in reflection-in-action, but what he argues for is that it should become 'a dominant pattern of practice.' (ibid, p.354). In our present context, that of mentoring, the reciprocal benefits which are likely to accrue from this development are ones which are, I hope, quite evident.

An especially accessible version of the central tenets of experiential learning is to be found in Bill Dennison and Roger Kirk's 'Do, Review, Learn, Apply' (1990). These authors are primarily concerned with how teachers may create and manage opportunities for experiential learning in learner groups. It is therefore concerned with the teacher: student relationship. However, what is interesting about Dennison and Kirk's framework is that it is so eminently transferable from

this context to that of mentoring activities. For example, the authors try to steer teachers away from a didactic, transmissive style and towards one in which their principal strategy becomes *organising opportunities* for learners to move through the cycle of learning begun by *doing* (the 'concrete experience' of Kolb's formulation). They, furthermore, put forward a notion that it is possible to set up successive cycles, from each of which something of significance is learnt. The incremental nature of learning is thus neatly underscored, but more importantly the confidence building nature of the process is emphasised: 'Perceptions about success attract students towards more learning cycles ... there is no more effective means of boosting confidence and raising enthusiasm than the successful completion of a learning cycle.' (Dennison and Kirk, 1990, pp20/21).

The authors convincingly relate their 'Do, Review, Learn, Apply' (DRLA) model to Kolb's idea of a learning cycle, as shown in Figure 3, below:

Fig.3: The relationship between DRLA and Kolb's Learning Cycle (After Dennison and Kirk, 1990, p 18)



I do not believe it is at all tenuous to maintain that what was originally being proposed as a device for enhancing student learning also has much to offer mentors *planning how to structure the professional learning of their trainees*. The DRLA model can be successfully adopted as part of the mentoring repertoire by:

- organising experiences which will represent an appropriate level of challenge (e.g. a particular class to teach; a stipulation that a particular learning resource is incorporated into a session);
- providing ample opportunities to discuss the professional learning deriving from the experience (especially in the context of post-observation debriefing);
- encouraging trainees to record their reflections on the experience and, especially, to identify ways in which any generalisable principles seem to emerge from the experience (This stage can be worked through using the self-evaluation section of teaching observation proformas which is almost always now provided, and/or in trainees' reflective logs);
- negotiating with trainees how they will implement whatever refinements to their professional practice which, having been around the cycle, they now see as being worthwhile.

What is of real value here is the role of the mentor in using DRLA to assist a trainee to move out of their 'comfort zone'. Trainees, in being stimulated to review how things might be better/could be refined, will thus be focusing on what they will do differently; they will not have the safety and comfort of knowing for certain that a change in strategy will achieve better results, but at least they will try such a change rather than simply opting for a repetition of what they have done before.

As noted later on in this guide, reflective practice has not been without its detractors. One criticism it might be worth mentioning at this stage, given the claims I make for being able to link critical reflection with consequential action is that of Cornford, who believes a

weakness inherent in many reflective paradigms is the failure to take account of a long recognised problem in human learning – forgetting. Simply being critical is not enough to guarantee that those critical thoughts will be remembered or that those thoughts can be translated into effective procedural action. (Cornford, 2002, p228).

Perhaps the message for mentors embodied in this particular view is that they will need to *revisit* significant matters, over a period of time – in much the same way as we build reviews of student learning into our designs for covering any syllabus with a group. This is to advocate no more nor less than working to a ‘spiral syllabus’ model, rather than one where topics, once covered, are only encountered again at the summative assessment stage.

‘Stages’ and Mentoring

There is a fundamental connection between the stage of professional development a trainee is at and the nature (or stage) of the mentoring which will be most appropriate. One possibly useful theoretical construct which can be drawn on to illustrate this proposition is that of the ‘dichotomies’ which Dubin (1962) believed it was possible to identify, and which a number of other writers have subsequently elaborated on.

A summary version of the dichotomies is shown overleaf as Figure 4.

{1} Unconscious Incompetence {UI} → Conscious Incompetence {CI}

{2} Conscious Competence {CC} → Unconscious Competence {UC}

Fig. 4 : From unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence, after Dubin, 1962).

What is at the core of Dubin's model are contrasts relating to self-knowledge; no particular claims were made for the applicability of the ideas to the specifics of mentoring, but nevertheless such an application does seem entirely valid. Some diagrammatic representations of the dichotomies show them ascending a 'staircase', i.e. with UI on the lowest step and UC on the highest; this may in fact be the form in which the model is most accessible to mentors.

In the mentoring context, what we can conceive of is a scenario where, initially, a trainee makes mistakes (= is incompetent) *because they do not appreciate how or why they are such*. This, earliest, stage of their starting to teach is, then, when they are unconsciously incompetent, and – from the mentor's perspective – especially merit a tolerant and patient approach. More importantly, what they also need, to allow them to move to the stage of 'conscious incompetence', is an opportunity to discuss why whatever it is they have done is not good practice; the reasons will generally emerge through a skilfully managed discussion, although ultimately mentors may need to recourse to a measure of exposition to allow these to surface.

Once a trainee appreciates the need to refine their practice in a particular regard, the mentor will then suggest (and facilitate if need be) further

opportunities for them to experiment. The trainee at this stage will be, more often than not, highly self-conscious (especially if being observed) but – it is hoped – ‘getting it right’, rather than repeating their earlier mistakes. This stage would accord with Dubin’s notion of *conscious competence* – or a state which some observers of teaching have compared with the careful, ‘by the book’, road skills of many newly licensed drivers; they are (or so it is said) highly aware of all their actions in operating the controls of the car. Keeping to speed limits and responding to other road users and so on.

The mentor’s role at this conscious competence stage would be to comment on the infringement of any best practice guidelines which had been discussed with a trainee. Having raised the trainee’s consciousness concerning particular facets of flawed classroom practice they consequently need feel somewhat less hesitant in offering their criticism.

To pursue the analogy with learning to drive, for the teacher, as with the driver, a stage comes in their experience when, to a greater or lesser extent, they perform on the basis of ‘second nature’. Obviously we have now arrived at the *unconscious competence* stage, where we do not have to ‘stop to think’ about every single classroom action.

It is, though, only appropriate to point out here that a ‘dichotomies’ framework may have certain serious limitations within the kind of time span which we know teacher training occupies (see Introduction). It could well be that there is simply insufficient developmental time available to trainees for them to arrive at the ‘unconscious competence’ stage, and that this will only be a feature of their later professional development - perhaps of Huberman’s ‘stabilisation’ phase, which he felt dawned only after 4-6 years of classroom experience. (Huberman, 1992, p.127).

On the other hand, some mentors – and, more broadly, educationalists – may

feel that teachers should never become so unselfconscious that they stop fairly constant self-monitoring their performance. They may become *more conscious of their learner groups than of themselves*, using their 'antennae' to pick up how successfully a lesson is turning out (and modifying its pitch and pace in line with the 'signals' they are receiving). But they never totally lose a measure of self awareness, and a consciousness of why they are teaching using a certain strategy or mix of strategies.

The Dreyfus model of skills acquisition is an interesting, much – cited, one which also hinges on the notion of 'stages', a few aspects of each I indicate below, with professional skills developing through the following stages:

- ✚ Level 1 **Novice** (where, for example, there will be a 'rigid adherence to taught rules or plans')
- ✚ Level 2 **Advanced Beginner** (Here, 'situational perception' is still limited)
- ✚ Level 3 **Competent** (An interesting feature of this stage being 'coping with crowdedness')
- ✚ Level 4 **Proficient** (Where 'decision-making is less laboured')
- ✚ Level 5 **Expert** (By which stage there exists not only an 'intuitive grasp of situations based on tacit understanding' but a 'vision of what is possible').

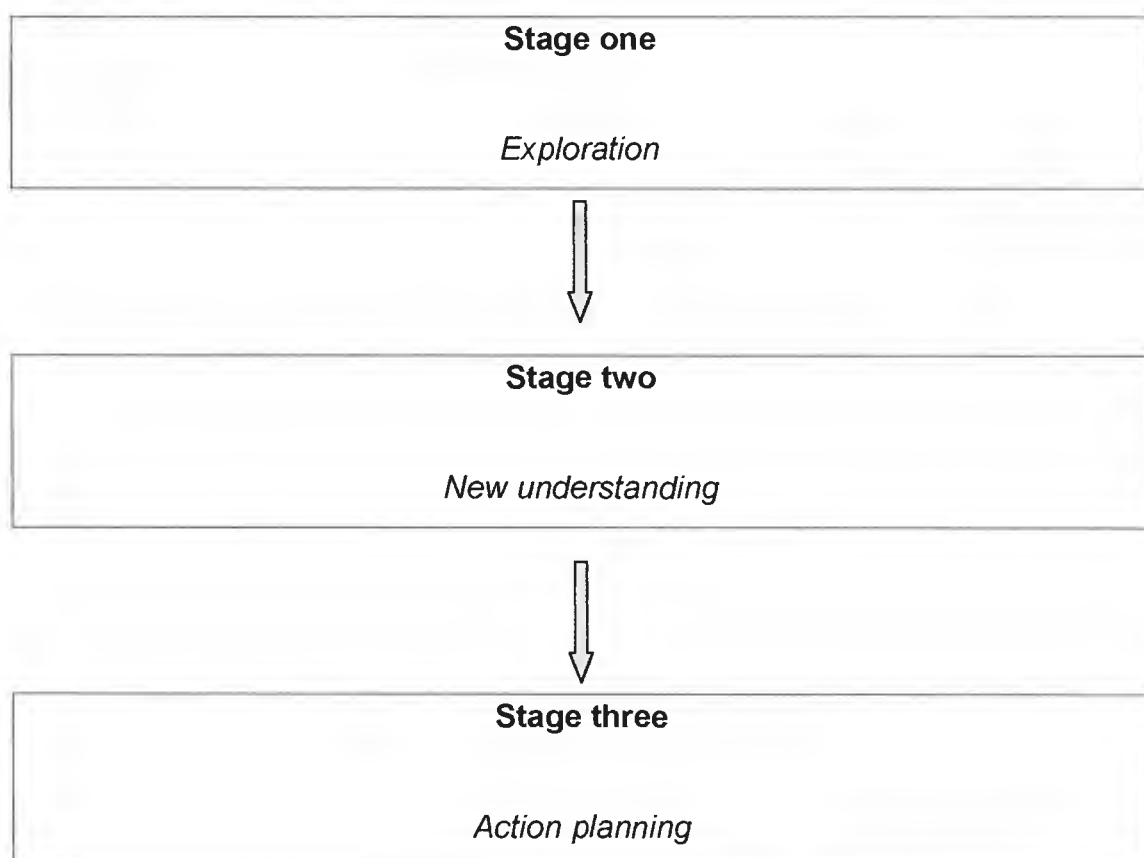
(Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986)

Mentors will, in general, be working with individuals progressing through levels 1 to 3, but some trainees may of course display skills development beyond these stages by the end of their programmes – while, out of modesty, some mentors might not claim to have arrived at the 'Expert' stage.

A number of authors have given special prominence to far more explicit notions of actual *mentoring* 'life cycles' or 'stages', seeing these as fundamental to our

knowledge of how mentoring works. Healy and Welchert touch on this idea, dealing, for example, with the issue of what may happen at 'the separation juncture' when both parties must 'either redefine their relationship based on collegiality or suffer a deteriorating alliance' (Healey and Welchert, 1990, p20): this question can be seen to have special resonance in situations where the trainee has also been a colleague training on an in-service basis.

However, fuller treatments of the ideas about the stages which mentoring relationships go through can probably be found in such forays into this area as those of Kram (1983) This is a more complex approach than can be readily summarised here, but a most succinct perspective on the concept of 'stages' which is worth mentioning is that promoted by the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL, 2004). This simple model (derived from Alred et al, 1998) sees the mentoring process which best facilitates learning and development as moving through only three stages, viz:



This may appear to oversimplify what is entailed in mentoring processes, discounting for example the possibility of the rejection by mentees {1} of ideas which they may have been encouraged to 'explore'. However, it seems to serve quite well as the kind of basic framework that could be presented to trainees as an accessible explanation of 'what mentoring is all about'.

{1} In this particular case, senior college managers who have themselves elected to be mentored.

Some concluding thoughts

Although some practitioners may well continue to have reservations concerning the utility of theory (and some may even have tended to decry it), I hope to have been able in this chapter to render accessible some theoretical work that I believe may helpfully inform mentoring practice. In a policy environment where post-compulsory education has in much the same way as schools been subject to what Hoyle (1982) termed a 'turn to the practical', theory may bestow on us, in Ball's (1995) phrasing, a tool for 'thinking otherwise': '...it offers a language for challenge and modes of thought, other than those articulated for us by dominant others.' (p.266). An engagement with theory can enhance our capacity to move beyond what Freidson (1994) called a 'commonsense' idea of professionalism.

The ability and confidence to employ theoretical perspectives in our work, and in our reflections on professional expertise, may thus be viewed as fundamentally empowering. Michael Eraut has written that 'the most important quality of the professional teacher [is] the disposition to theorise' and expressed the view that:

If our students acquire and sustain this disposition they will go on developing their theorising capacities throughout their teaching careers, they will be genuinely self-evaluative and they will continue to search for, invent and implement new ideas. Without it they will become prisoners of their early...experience, perhaps the competent teachers of today, almost certainly the ossified teachers of tomorrow.

(Eraut, 1994, p. 71).

Teachers according to Sachs (1997) are confronted by such a range of challenges that they 'need to be skilled practitioners who can work both collaboratively and independently; have the ability to solve complex practical *and theoretical* problems; are able to reflect on their practice in order to develop quality learning opportunities for their students and are professionals who are able to cope with rapid social and technological change ' (pp. 263-264, emphasis added).

If there does exist such an entity as a 'theory-practice gap', i.e. one between the academic approach and language of the university and the practical concerns and challenges being faced every day in post-compulsory education, then no one appears better placed to bridge this gap than a mentor with well-honed 'interpretive' skills.

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The book from which this chapter has been extracted is currently undergoing revision for a planned second edition. Essential updating will include references to the changed regulatory framework, post-FENTO, for the training of teachers in the post-compulsory sector.

Item 5:

‘Critical incidents in professional life and learning’.

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Critical Incidents in Professional Life and Learning.

Bryan Cunningham

'Experience is a brutal teacher, but you learn fast'

(spoken by the character of C.S. Lewis in the play 'Shadowlands', by William Nicholson)

Introduction

This chapter will explore some of the key dimensions of professional learning before turning to what will be my principal focus, a review of the nature of 'critical incidents' and their importance within educational contexts. The critical incident as a dimension of professional life which, while quite often highly stressful – even sometimes traumatic – has the potential to dramatically *accelerate* professional learning, is what makes it worth our attention, I would claim. The whole area of post-qualification professional learning – and indeed learning at work more broadly (Evans, 2002; Rainbird, 2004) – is currently already receiving such attention, but I wish to concern myself here with but one potential component of the process.

My awareness of the power of critical incidents to produce the kind of acceleration referred to above has grown and developed over a number of years, fundamentally assisted by course participants on various programmes including the EdD, who have been willing to share in workshop-style forums the nature of an enormous range of critical incidents. However, it should be strongly emphasized that none of the illustrative material in this chapter will allow the identification of any of the individuals concerned, or their employing organisations, whose confidentiality I have always taken great pains to respect.

The notion of a 'learning professional', as put forward by Guile and Lucas (1999), is one that can usefully underpin such aspects of professionalism as a positive approach to continuing professional learning, and professional development. The learning professional is one who seeks out opportunities, within whatever institutional constraints are in place, to *extend* their professional understandings and skills sets, rather than being concerned merely to reflect on those they already possess. In this sense, their attributes will tend to correspond more to those associated with *extended* rather than *restricted* professionalism, the opposition considered to exist by a number of authors (and given an interesting international dimension by Broadfoot et al, 1993) and to be a worthwhile construct in our analysis of professional life and learning.

However, the implicit emphasis of such a commitment to professional learning as is alluded to above is on *formalised* learning; under this heading we might include such activities as

attendance at courses, seminars and conferences, participation in organisational systems such as staff review and appraisal, being mentored by a more senior colleague (or, perhaps even a peer) and undertaking accredited programmes offered internally or externally – this being the kind of ‘appropriate combination of learning settings’ (Eraut, 1994, p. 13) typically available to individuals. What is not necessarily all that well accommodated by such structured approaches to enhancing professional learning are the kinds of opportunities for *informal*, unplanned, learning that can arise in professional life.

Given that a writer such as Eraut maintains there are ‘significant changes in capability or understanding’ (Eraut, 1997, p. 556) to be derived from non-formal learning at work, there does seem to be considerable justification for an examination of what may well constitute, for a number of individuals, an important component of this type of process. The critical incident as one particular manifestation of informal, unplanned or non-formal, learning and as a trigger for change in professional thinking and behaviours is, quite possibly, a major, if extremely infrequently experienced, facet of professional life.

Within education, the notion of critical incidents (not, in fact, that new a coinage, see e.g. Flanagan, 1954) has been gaining currency perhaps more slowly than it has in other professional realms. We have not, for example, adopted the kinds of approaches now being seen in the continuing professional development (CPD) of medical practitioners or social workers. In fields such as these, there is now an acknowledgement that critical incidents (though they are more usually termed significant events) can play a crucial part in the structured reflection that doctors and social workers are required to engage in – and to document – to provide evidence that they are continuing to learn on the job. As a dimension of CPD in these areas, significant event analysis (SEA) has the especially notable component of unearthing *what went wrong* in certain cases, and it is what can be learnt from this that will inform future practice. The relatively recently introduced procedures for the revalidation of medical practitioners (Dept. of Health, 1999; 2007) devote considerable attention to articulating why it is that the relevant documents to be compiled by such individuals must incorporate reference to SEA.

Further afield, there is a degree of evidence that in certain ways the notion of critical incidents is being to some extent ‘medicalised’. A section of the University of Virginia’s website devoted to ‘faculty and employee assistance’, for example, explains for users that attributes of critical incidents include their being ‘acute, stressful and exceed[ing] the normal coping capacities of individuals’, and offers information ‘*to aid recovery*’. (University of Virginia, 2006, my emphasis).

Although it might well be argued that education professionals are not so frequently involved in life or death decisions as colleagues in medicine or social work, there are on the other hand clearly ways in which the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of our practice can have very substantial effects on the life *chances* of those whose needs we serve – ultimately, learners in schools, colleges and universities. It is, therefore, a central contention of this chapter that we should not in education overlook the gains in our professional understandings that may accrue from analysing critical incidents we experience.

Defining ‘Critical Incident’

In the normal course of a busy, sometimes harassed or even beleaguered, professional life it is evident that very numerous interactions and events take place, day in, day out. These will usually include conversations, dialogue with others in the context of teaching or training events, confrontations of varying degrees of seriousness, the receipt of one form or other of directive or guidance note, etc. Many of these interactions and events are thus quite likely to be *undramatic* ones – to an observer, they may even appear wholly banal or trivial. No specific event is *inherently* critical; its criticality exists only in its perception as such by the individual experiencing it, and contextualising it.

At certain times, interaction will be with individuals or organisations beyond our immediate professional sphere; a government circular, for example, may require if not an immediate response then perhaps fairly speedy implementation of an initiative. Of these very many ‘happenings’, what is it that causes some to stand out – to embody a *criticality*?

Incidents happen, but critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation: a critical incident is an *interpretation* of the significance of an event. To take something as a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of that judgement is the significance we attach to the *meaning* of the incident. (Tripp, 1993, p.8, emphasis added).

To explore this notion, and before offering my own working definition of critical incident, I would propose that the following dimension of criticality is of special importance, and will be manifested. This for me most valuable construct in the analysis of what renders critical an event in professional life is its propensity to create a disturbance in our professional *equilibrium*. We are, in one regard or another, ‘unbalanced’ by what has taken place – a critical incident may be experienced emotionally in a roughly similar way to that in which the sudden braking of a bus or train affects the standing passenger physically. This notion of

one's equilibrium being disturbed is an important one, and is illustrated by Tripp in a number of interesting ways in his key text on critical incidents in teaching, fairly essential reading for anyone wishing to delve more deeply into the notion than this chapter is able to. Seeking for an underlying reason why a specific event may be viewed as critical, a general theme could probably be said to be that nothing in one's prior training or professional experience has offered adequate preparation for it and this is why we are unsettled. To pursue a little further the analogy with the physical effects of a sudden braking, what causes the discomfort – or actual injury of course, on occasion – is that none of our prior 'passenger experiences' were able to teach us how to effectively brace ourselves in a situation where no warning that it would be sensible to do so has been given.

This unpreparedness may possibly offer an overarching explanation for why some, infrequently experienced, events possess the criticality that many simply do not. However, it does not necessarily provide any insight into actual causation, the important area to which I will shortly turn my attention.

With all of the foregoing in mind, I would propose the following as a working definition of 'critical incident' in professional life:

A critical incident comprises an event in professional life that creates a significant disturbance of our understanding of important principles or of effective practice, and which following a period of focused reflection will be experienced as a turning point.

For some readers, in introducing the notion of 'turning point' I may possibly seem to be guilty of overdramatising matters. However, as I indicated near the start of the chapter, my engagement with critical incidents is by no means based purely on subjective conclusions arrived at by reference to significant events in my own professional life history. The kinds of 'recurring themes' and (highly disguised) specific events alluded to below, which it is hoped will convincingly convey a sense of criticality, are all ones derived from, and collated following, considerable experience working with often highly successful professionals in education; I would argue such terms as 'turning point – or 'disturbance' – in no way overstate the kinds of impacts, and changes consequent on critical incidents, that such individuals' professional biographies have included.

However, before attempting to review a range of possible causative events that may, over time, be definable as critical incidents, I would wish (besides acknowledging the fact that in no way will I be drawing on any data gathered by empirically sound means; my review is not

a data-laden one in the way that, for instance, David Tripp's work, cited above, is; only one passage, in a later section, approximates to a summarised case study) to include here three relatively extended preliminaries which in my view are essential for a full understanding of 'criticality'.

Firstly, it would appear to be the case – to perhaps risk stating the obvious – that an event that for *one* individual is a critical incident may well constitute, for *another*, nothing of the kind. It may be, for example, that the first individual may experience the event as critical because at the precise moment it occurred they were already experiencing a particularly susceptible emotional state. Significant events in our professional lives do on occasion have an unfortunate propensity to be coincident with major upheavals in the realm of the personal. When this happens it might well be the case that an event that ordinarily we might be able to confront with a degree of calm confidence possesses a far more disturbing, daunting character. The phrase "the straw that broke the camel's back" may possibly come to many readers' minds in this sort of context.

Secondly, I have included above in my definition the proposition that 'criticality' as a dimension of an event often emerges not instantaneously but 'following a period of focused reflection'. The reflection may be a wholly individual, insular, process, or it may be taking place as a dimension of formal or informal professional talk; in the former case, we could invoke the likelihood of the event featuring in a dialogue between mentor and mentee (where the person who has experienced the event in question happens to be in such a workplace relationship) for instance. A skilled mentor will be able to bring out, and insightfully review, the professional ramifications of what has been described by their mentee as having taken place; this elucidation may be a highly important part of the process of conceptualising an event as a critical incident.

Mentoring dialogues, and various other forms of professional talk, are not usually, of course, 'one-offs'. They are typically part of an ongoing interactive process. Wholly unsupported/unstructured, individual, reflection on an event that has been in one way or another unsettling is also generally something that takes place over a period of time. These are important considerations to bear in mind for anyone subscribing to the somewhat beguiling notion of the critical incident as being a revelation – a 'lightbulb' moment.

This particular descriptor of critical incidents is one encountered not infrequently in discussion with fellow professionals, but it is probably not all that helpful. Unless, that is, we put to one side our, up till now, most typical visualisation of what happens when we switch

on a light. For the present, at least, we almost certainly tend to think in terms of the immediate bringing of light into darkness that we obtain with a traditional (but, incidentally, perhaps imminently to be banned) tungsten filament bulb. However, I would promote an awareness, for comparative purposes, of what happens when one of the newer, energy efficient, bulbs receives electrical current when switched on: what takes place is a *gradual*, full illumination of a space, following a period during which the glow from this kind of light source – at least until available technology improves - is relatively dim. So, if we do wish to endow the concept of a 'lightbulb moment' with any validity in the specific context of critical incidents it is probably through engaging with the above comparison that we can legitimately do so.

Thirdly, it may also be illusory to conceive of the critical incident itself as being exclusively a single isolated event – such things as an 'out of the blue' classroom confrontation, for example. I would contend that the notion of critical incident is most profitably viewed as being a more flexible one, able to accommodate a *series* of events, connected in ways that are either chronological, structural or emotional – or by an amalgam of these.

Furthermore, on occasion there may perhaps have been what we could refer to as one or more precursors of a critical incident under study. An 'atmosphere', a sense of expectancy or of imminent change in a professional organisation, for instance, would not in themselves necessarily invalidate such constructs as 'unpreparedness' for an event. In certain ways, the kind of foreboding alluded to here may, over time, even be seen as a dimension of the actual incident itself. An example might perhaps be the appointment of a new senior manager, whose arrival in an organisation has been preceded by a degree of anxiety (say, based on what has been gleaned of their recent professional history) that they will wish to introduce certain radical, potentially worrying, changes. If such changes then do materialise, and they possess for one or more individuals a criticality, it seems quite artificial to separate them out in any analysis from the appointment that preceded them, and the sense of anxiety that this generated.

Series of events (taking place with or without any forewarning) could include such things as:

- a set of classroom exchanges with a learner over successive sessions that *builds* to an actual confrontation;
- a period of correspondence with a superior that *in total*, e.g. after three or four 'instalments' – memos, emails – is seen to represent a challenge;

- a structured observation of one's teaching or training practice, followed by a debriefing, this is then followed by the writing of a 'self-evaluation' statement (the *whole process* taking, say, a week or so);
- A particularly 'difficult' mentoring or appraisal meeting with a subordinate, with the individual concerned continuing to press certain points at intervals, and using various media, for a period afterwards.

Some recurrent themes in the nature of critical incidents.

The first dimension of critical incidents that recurs in a number of narratives describing them is their apparent *trivialness* when first experienced. However, over time they have begun to assume greater and greater salience for someone. The overheard, offhand, remark for example, in which some aspect of one's character or behaviour has been referred to, or an exchange of the utmost brevity with a student in a group, might fall under the heading, when first considered, of 'trivial'. However, as Tripp usefully points out, the very fact that an individual *recalls* what took place, and chooses to recount it, is in itself an indicator of the event's possible criticality. (Tripp, 1993, p.35).

On balance, however, it is probably true that the dimensions of many critical incidents were *never* in any subjective, or often objective, sense trivial to the individuals experiencing them. Some of the significant **elements** of criticality – identified either in isolation or, occasionally in combination – that have emerged for me in my facilitation practice over a period of years have included:

- a degree of conflict or confrontation (e.g. with peers, managers or learners in the case of teachers/lecturers)
- the impact(s) of major organisational change (e.g. restructuring, relocation, budgetary cuts – 'organisational stress')
- new, externally set, requirements applicable to employees (e.g. the introduction of tighter monitoring of performance, compulsory CPD)
- failure to achieve a specific professional goal such as a promotion
- the – often unsought-after - acquisition of new responsibilities such as a line management role, or a far broader remit than previously held.
- situations that are the opposite of the previous one, i.e. where actual or *de facto* demotions have affected someone
- professional dilemmas, anxiety about which caused a high degree of personal stress (how to respond to a challenging situation, for example, or far more positively,

whether to accept a post with greater responsibilities – but likely to hold more daunting challenges as well)

- receipt, in one form or another, of a directive that in one or more respect appears to require an individual to follow a course of action that is incongruent with their conception of what is appropriate professional behaviour; it may pose a dilemma of a specifically *ethical* type
- immediate emotional reactions stemming from events, including certain of the above, that summon up such descriptions as ‘undermined’, ‘devalued’, ‘challenged’, ‘humiliated’ or, simply, ‘hurt’.

Then, to turn more to the kinds of ‘**outcomes**’ that appear to have been ‘thematically’ represented, these as I have encountered them have quite often included such phenomena as:

- a period during which the degree of negative emotional sentiment, or ‘ego damage’, experienced was severe enough to effectively preclude any short-term positive and effective action on the part of the affected individual
- a drastic reorientation of professional practice, priorities or both of these
- ‘downshifting’ within a profession – often to seek the calmer waters of a less responsible position
- its opposite, viz a – perhaps quite unexpected – elevation to a position carrying significant additional responsibilities
- actual ‘flight’ from a profession, entailing either a career change or a period – where financially feasible – of further study¹ (offering the opportunity, sometimes, for structured reflection on developments within a professional sector, possibly even that an individual has just left)
- crucially important new professional learning that has laid a foundation for change, or endowed someone with the confidence to seek progression within or beyond the employing organisation.

From both of the above sets of illustrations, it will be clear that while many of the specific elements and outcomes have strikingly negative connotations, not all of them do. This seems to raise some interesting issues, and it is to these issues - of negativity and positivity - that I will thus now turn.

¹ A number of Doctor in Education enrolments have been cited by the individuals themselves as having come about because of this kind of situation.

The 'negative vs. positive' question

Quite possibly the most frequently posed question relating to critical incidents when introducing the idea to a group is "must they always have negative connotations?", or variants on this form of words. The answer would appear to be that while the causes of critical incidents are, on balance, often far more centred on negative, concerning, or actually disturbing, events than on positive ones, their outcomes may equally often be, especially in the longer term and viewed as *part of a process of formative learning*, positive. And a certain, particularly broad, conception of the critical incident would encompass such positive events as gaining, unexpectedly, a long-desired promotion or receiving a degree of praise for one's performance in the workplace hitherto totally absent. (In these kinds of eventualities, the 'disturbance of equilibrium' we have explored probably arises because an endemic sense of low self-esteem and failure to achieve is dramatically altered).

Extreme manifestations of highly negative critical incidents are represented by such life-changing occurrences as redundancy. Where this afflicts an individual for whom it has been a completely unimaginable possibility – their self-perception having been that they were so highly valued in an organisation that they would be indispensable and therefore invulnerable – then a situation of almost total disorientation may result. A package of sentiments extending from anxiety through anger, betrayal and even grief may be experienced. The immediate shock of redundancy may well indeed be one of life's major blows.

Yet we seem to encounter from time to time individuals for whom the *ultimate* outcome of even such a profoundly unsettling event as redundancy has been a highly positive one. Surveying one's options after losing what, certainly for most education professionals, has been the central occupation in one's life can reveal potential areas of endeavour (finances allowing) as retraining, going into business, or a return to studying. I am confident that I am far from alone in having encountered during a career in education individuals who have followed these kinds of paths 'post-redundancy', and who are able to speak of the aftermath of what was often a very painful event as having been, in fact, life-enhancing. Resourcefulness, even courageousness, has come to the fore as such individuals have confronted the necessity of reconstructing a life with professional meaning.

To write of such things is of course to focus on what lays at the extreme ends of a continuum of professional highs and lows, admittedly. Less shocking events than redundancy may also, though, similarly have *immediate* dimensions that are overwhelmingly negative but a longer

term criticality that derives from new opportunities having opened up. An academic relinquishing a managerial role such as head of department because its responsibilities had begun to induce stress-related illnesses will perhaps experience the act of 'stepping down' as something inadequate, or defeatist; therefore it may be felt as a kind of disempowerment. And yet, once new 'lower status' circumstances have been adjusted to, there can open up for such an individual vastly expanded amounts of time for the research and scholarship that they probably came into university teaching in the first place to devote themselves to.

Effective professional learning from critical incidents

If certain of the limitations of the 'reflective practitioner' model have been highlighted by Guile and Lucas (op. cit.) they include the fact that it does not necessarily require that reflection be turned into action. To rather oversimplify the case, it is that reflection may become mere 'navel-gazing' rather than a dimension of professional life that leads to change and improvement. We may deepen our understanding of our performance – its limitations and deficiencies in particular – but whether adopting developmental strategies for moving forward is going to happen is unclear.

In this vein, having stressed the value of professional dialogue – talk – in examining the values and practices that have been thrown into prominence by a particular critical incident, we should also review some ways in which such talk might eventually translate into change. As a character in one of Richard Yates' novels expressed this (when commenting on the implausibility of the plotline of a short story written by a co-student in a creative writing class):

“And even then – even then I'm not sure if talk alone is gonna do the job. I'm not sure if anybody's life ever got turned around by talk alone. Seems to me we need some kind of a thing in there too.”

(Yates, 2005, p. 190)

What might in fact be the nature of the 'thing' that we could envisage as being crucial to the process of facilitating any meaningful 'follow-up' to reflection on, and discursive exploration of, a critical incident? One possible, structural, element, of such follow-up may be located in the context of an organisation's review and appraisal mechanisms. Typically these incorporate guided questioning around areas such as:

- the past year's achievements;
- difficulties encountered and how these were, or are being, resolved;
- whether there are any perceived obstacles to an individual performing optimally;

- what supporting strategies a manager might usefully deploy with regard to the preceding point.

In a forum where these are not only legitimate strands of a discussion but are required as part of an organisation's human resources strategy, we have, it seems, fairly clear opportunities for appraisees to weave into proceedings any critical incidents they have experienced since the last review/appraisal 'cycle'. They may not do so formally, i.e. by prefacing their narrative by designating particular events as 'critical', but they can bring them to the appraiser's attention under the kinds of headings set out above. Stemming from this, practical outcomes could well be conceivable: the 'thing' may consist, for instance, of an undertaking by an appraiser to advocate or negotiate on behalf of their appraisee with a view to bringing about a situation where they are, say, given greater responsibility or autonomy, or greater access to administrative support.

Possibly an even more formal and structured - some might even add the word 'disciplined' - forum that could be profitably exploited to pursue the implications and potential outcomes of a critical incident is the action learning set. The workings of these, and their value within professional education, is particularly well reviewed by McGill and Beaty (2001). From my own past membership of such a 'set' it was notable how in reality a proportion of the issues, questions or concerns being presented by set members essentially had their genesis in recently experienced significant events in their professional lives. Where one has the luxury of the time necessary for full and effective participation in an action learning set, it can quite probably be an unparalleled opportunity to take forward discussion of a critical incident; indeed the use of the word '*action*' in the designation of such a forum says a great deal about their characteristics when operating optimally for participants.

And there are other conceivable practical outcomes of professional talk – of any kind – with critical incidents at their heart. I have an especially vivid recollection of a situation that arose in a particular further education (FE) college where I was teaching, when I was a 'witness', as a bystander, to the aftermath of a critical incident – and to the unfolding over a period of time of certain wholly practical outcomes. A colleague had experienced an especially stressful teaching session with what was described as being an extremely demotivated group, largely mismatched to the 'pre-vocational' course that they were following. A fairly public staffroom discussion was taking place – comprising a highly visible wetting of shoulders – with, at its core, a very prominent question: 'why aren't we offering these students something that *does* suit their needs?' For the colleague principally concerned, a terrible (their word) teaching session had brought to a head this simmering question, and in this sense had indeed been an event possessing a criticality.

What then happened was that another colleague, a highly experienced and greatly respected teacher, with strong presence and interpersonal skills, intervened in the discussion to offer his own view. He concurred that a significant change in the curricular offer to certain learner groups should indeed be set in motion. He offered immediate collaborative assistance in the writing of a new course proposal document, and his advocacy – as a relatively senior teacher in the college – in taking certain ideas forward. Both of these things did actually then happen; to the clear benefit of both teachers such as the first colleague mentioned here, and to the learner groups concerned, a significantly refined ‘pre-vocational’ pathway was introduced into the college’s offer in what was quite a surprisingly speedy and smooth fashion. There were ‘turning points’ for teachers, learners and an organization, all deriving from what had happened in one classroom and then been subsequently discussed within a small staffroom. (An interesting manifestation, incidentally, of the kinds of *participation* - engagement in actions and interactions - in a community of practice that Wenger (1998) persuasively drew attention to).

Constraints and other issues

Of course, the narrative above (though absolutely honest) may strike many readers as somewhat far-fetched in modern circumstances. The action consequent on the critical incident was in an important sense the result of the intervention of an individual with some gravitas, and whose position within a hierarchy endowed them with more potential than might otherwise have been the case to ‘take things forward’. Relatively small FE colleges during the period in question – the very early 1980s – had a degree of autonomy in how they were able to respond to local needs, and switch resourcing, that is probably quite hard to now envisage. This is not the same as saying that it would in present times be totally unfeasible that the events described could take place; a version of them is not, for me, completely out of the question, although constraints of funding, audit and quality assurance would probably entail a far longer time lag between the stimulus for change – the staffroom discussion – and the realisation of the change itself.

It is, then, only appropriate to turn now, briefly, to the kinds of factors that may operate as constraints to ‘turning points’, whether these be at the level of the individual or an organisation. Certainly the idea of ‘constraints’ does seem to be applicable at both the personal/professional level and at that of the organization – where this term encompasses such entities as faculties, departments, etc. as well as such ‘whole’ organizations as schools, colleges, universities or educational administrative areas.

With regard to the personal/professional level, the learning deriving from a critical incident may not always allow for consequent *action*. An individual's new self-realisation, following a critical incident, that they 'need to move on' will only be built on where the practical dimensions of their situation as well as the emotional ones are conducive to this. We may thus conceive of situations where a new understanding, or an 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1999) appears to point someone in a particular direction but they are unable to follow this for one or more reasons. For example, a specific incident (or linked series of events, in a certain case that comes to my mind) strongly signals that for a full-time lecturer the most sensible course of action is now to seek, within their employing organisation, a change in status, to a fractional appointment. This, the individual judges, is a transition that can allow them to continue to cope with the demands of a teaching career (which they emphatically do not wish to altogether abandon). The person is an expert practitioner, with student evaluations of their classroom, and tutorial, work over the years having been consistently highly positive. To continue to operate as a teacher and maintain such commendable standards of practice, they believe that they will simply need to arrange to have fewer teaching commitments in the organisation. However, the employer holds to the position that part-time staff have no significant role to play in this particular institution, and essentially requires that either the existing arrangement continues, or the lecturer resigns their post¹. This is what the individual concerned, with significant regret (and not a little anger), ultimately feels forced to do.

Similarly 'take it or leave it' attitudes and/or policies have also been of high relevance in a number of other narratives shared with me by individuals whose scope for action – whatever the professional learning from a critical incident would appear to dictate - has been severely curtailed by practical considerations. One further example of such a syndrome is very briefly outlined below.

This narrative revolved around the grading of teaching competence, as observed and judged by trainers on a 'licence to practise' programme of initial teacher education (ITE). In a UK context, ITE is very tightly monitored by bodies such as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), The Teacher Development Agency (TDA) and Standards Verification UK (SVUK). One aspect of such monitoring is that classroom performance during both ITE programmes and, subsequently, 'on the job' (either as part of schools and colleges' internal review processes or as a facet of external inspection) is required to be graded against a numerical

¹ The upshot was the latter option being taken by the individual concerned; however, employment legislation has subsequently been amended in such a way as would now notably

scale, although this has not always been the case; in the case of the college sector, for instance, the grading of classroom teaching began in 1993.

One particular individual, a teacher trainer, experienced the introduction of grading for trainees *on ITE programmes* as a wholly negative innovation. From their perspective, grading may well have had a utility as a management tool, for use by employers or inspectors, perhaps especially where underperformance appeared to be evident; grades, and their associated descriptors, could be relevant in explaining to teachers exactly in which domains of practice it was being held that their teaching was deficient.

However, at the vital *initial* training stage probably outweighing any ostensible benefits attached to grading would be the risks of either engendering a damaging complacency in those trainees being judged 'Grade 1' teachers, or, worse, severely denting the self-esteem of a trainee being awarded a low grade, and badly demotivating them. Yet, in a situation where national guidelines made it virtually impossible for any individual trainee to evade implementing a grading system, how were they to come to terms with this when it ran so significantly in opposition to their conception of the nature of an effective, supportive (and nurturing, even) training programme. The autonomy held to be such a crucial dimension of professional life (Ollsen, 2004) – the ability to act with discretion (Freidson, 2001) – was simply removed, by diktat. As with the previous example, the sense of powerlessness (an *actual* powerlessness, in fact) relatively speedily led the individual concerned to switch direction away from what had been a long-standing involvement in ITE, rather than compromise certain principles held dear to them. It was quite clearly the case that their *preferred* course of action would have been to remain engaged with ITE, but opt out of having to award grades to trainees in respect of the all-important process of assessing practical teaching. However, certain realities dictated that an 'exogenously generated, rule-following [procedure]' brought about a wholly unacceptable situation in which their professionalism was self-perceived as having been render[ed] into a form of performance, that what count[ed] as professional practice rest[ed] upon meeting fixed, externally imposed judgements'. (Ball, 2004, p.4).

We might of course conjecture that a 'middle way' could have been a possible course of action for the individual concerned. They could have chosen to remain in a field of practice they valued, and saw as highly worthy, adopting a kind of 'camouflage'; they had, it seems, available to them the possible strategy of actually awarding the grades required, while at the

strengthen the lecturer's case.

same time making absolutely explicit to trainees the fact that they did not support the policy, and supportively offering them the perspective that teaching performance overall was something they viewed as infinitely too complex to capture its quality numerically. Had they taken this third, somewhat subversive, approach to their professional dilemma, then such constructs as 'strategic compliance' (Shain and Gleeson, 1999, p. 456) or 'cynical compliance' (Ball, 2003, p. 222) can be seen as probably being appropriate to the case.

The foregoing two illustrations of the operation of 'constraints to action' represent but a very small sampling of the scenarios brought to the kinds of events to now be briefly described.

The nature, purpose and management of critical incident workshops.

An especially rich source of my own professional learning connected with critical incidents has lain in a relatively long-term involvement, as facilitator, of 'workshop' style events. It would be wholly inappropriate to explicitly make mention of specific critical incidents brought for discussion to any of these: as I indicate below, one of the prime necessities for their effectiveness is that participants are absolutely guaranteed strict confidentiality.

Nevertheless, for readers who may themselves, either presently or at some stage in the future, find themselves similarly involved, this section of the chapter offers some rationale, and guidelines, for the activity. It cannot, however, aim at the kinds of comprehensive treatment of issues as might be contained in a manual.

A critical incident workshop ('forum' might equally well be adopted as a description) ought to have as its underpinnings certain **core principles**:

- Attendance is understood to be *entirely optional*
- The issue of *confidentiality of proceedings* is given special prominence – colleagues of mine have often used the construct of 'Chatham House rules' as a device here, although in International contexts it would probably have considerably less meaning
- The *ethos* of the events is, above all, articulated and agreed as a collegial, supportive, one. (To illustrate how this might be manifested, workshop facilitators could cite the absolute inappropriateness of criticising, or appearing to criticise, a workshop member's response, as they have described it, to particular events)
- The *objectives* of a workshop need to be broadly viewed as {1} allowing participants to engage with even more fully – through the process of explaining it to others – the nature and outcomes of a critical incident they have experienced, and

{2} identifying any linking themes that may emerge from a review of the incidents brought to, and shared at, the event

- The *facilitator's* role, in accordance with general principles in effective facilitation, is very much built on such skills as active listening, confident but unobtrusive timekeeping, and monitoring the focus and cohesion of the group.

In terms of **cautions**, the following might be found to be of value:

- The *size* of a workshop group tends to become rather unwieldy once more than 6/7 participants are taking part and wishing to describe, and hear any responses to, 'their' incidents: the time needed to meaningfully review, say, 10 critical incidents can add up to an exhausting event, given the intensity of discussion and emotion typically generated; the basic issue of attention spans is also highly pertinent here.
- In terms of the *physical environment*, cramped or – possibly even worse – overly large spaces are rarely conducive to comfortable discussion. The potential hazards from extraneous noise or actual interruptions should also always be considered when judging the suitability of a physical space for a critical incident workshop
- The issue of *boundaries* – drawing to some extent from good practice in counselling – has to be out in the open: the purpose of the workshop cannot lay in the domain of problem-solving, and in as positive and supportive a manner as possible this ought to be communicated to participants
- A facilitator should be highly aware of the propensity of critical incident workshops to generate, on occasions, tension or even actual distress in individual participants, and should be prepared to assume a more prominent role at any such points to calm a situation.

In *very general terms* (no two critical incident workshops are ever replicas the one of the other), the actual proceedings within a workshop group over, say, a two- or three- hour period, with necessary breaks, might follow the sort of pattern I shall attempt to outline:

The facilitator welcomes the group (of no larger size than 6-8 members, ideally), provides (or revisits) the *rationale* for the workshop, and briefly outlines its anticipated *outcomes*; issues such as the possible identification of common themes arising from participants' critical incidents, the establishment of an ongoing support network, etc. are the types of specifics that are typically referred to. Important practicalities relating to timekeeping, eschewing

interrupting speakers, turn-taking and the all-important matter of confidentiality are also woven into the introduction - the scene-setting.

In turn, workshop participants are then invited to contribute:

- a succinct review of the context and nature of the incident itself – e.g. its timing, and the principal actors and ‘ingredients’.
- the process that led to its being perceived as critical – what type of reflection took place? Individual? Discussion with one other person? Discussion within a group?
- the most significant elements in the ensuing professional learning that took place
- the actions/developments that were consequent on this learning, or which are still in process.

Between each member’s contribution, proceedings can very usefully be ‘punctuated’ by segments in which other participants can, in a managed way – the facilitator acting as ‘chair’ at these points – take the opportunity to express their empathy, or actual solidarity, and to raise any questions that they may have been left with from the exposition. Sometimes, listeners may well also signpost the fact that in some regards, certain dimensions of a narrative are ones that they too will be touching on in their own.

By the end of the above process, a skilled facilitator having mentally noted any important recurring themes, or points of very special interest, will ask of the group whether they themselves had been aware of links or commonalities. (Two points of guidance may be valuable here: firstly that making mental notes, as referred to above, seems infinitely preferable in an environment where confidentiality has been emphasised – we are pre-empting individuals wondering “why is the facilitator writing down some of the things we are saying?”; secondly, it detracts somewhat from a group’s sense of ownership of the events they have experienced if the facilitator uses their position to summarise *what for him/her* was most revealing in the narratives).

The concluding segment of an effectively managed critical incidents workshop should be both brief, and reiterative of the considerations relating to confidentiality. It can also valuably indicate to the group the possibility, at least, of *participation in the workshop itself* as, on yet further reflection on the incidents that have been shared, coming to be viewed as one of the ways in which understanding of these incidents may have been deepened.

‘Some conclusions’

I have endeavoured in this chapter to approach the concept of 'critical incident' from a perspective that views professional learning as a multifaceted process accommodating both formal and 'accidental' learning. I have aimed to allow the reader to envisage the very wide range of significant events that may, over time, emerge as possessing a 'criticality'. My other principal tasks have revolved around exploring the *value* of critical incidents, and exemplifying their potential for bringing about positive changes in spite of their frequently unsettling, even distressing primary nature. Essentially, I believe that the processes of reviewing and deconstructing critical incidents encountered in their working lives offer professionals in education very significant increments to the quality of their understandings.

These understandings do not, of course, accrue only to individuals on the basis of whether they have experienced critical incidents. Further, although I have drawn attention to the notion of an *acceleration* of professional learning deriving from critical incidents, we should remind ourselves of the kinds of larger dimensions of reflective practice that Moore describes in an excellent exploration of constructs and discourses around 'the good teacher'¹:

... whereas some forms of reflection tend to focus on the immediate, to be self-referential, and to feed directly into plans, tactics and strategies (an essentially instrumentalist orientation), reflexivity focuses more on the broader picture... and hence is part of a 'slower', longer-term route to improved practice through developing self-understandings that may feed into teaching in ways that are often not planned in advance. (Moore, 2004, p.151)

It may prove to be the case, however, that, in what Barnett has termed elsewhere in this volume times of 'supercomplexity' (Barnett, 2001) for professionals, the critical incident takes on even greater significance within the overall nature of reflection. If we are indeed witnessing a growth in the number and variety of professional transactions and the emergence of such facets of this growth as 'multiple discourses' (ibid.) then we might logically conjecture that from out of all this burgeoning interaction a greater number of individual exchanges/conflicts than ever previously will contain the seeds of criticality.

A further piece of seemingly plausible horizon-gazing is prompted by another notion introduced in this volume, by Power, that of the relationship between *private troubles* and *public issues*. (Wright Mills, 1970).

¹ It appears entirely plausible that in other professional domains besides teaching the processes alluded to by Moore might be identified.

If these are indeed uncertain, supercomplex, times then quite possibly we may find that an even more pressured educational environment will be one in which an even larger number of events become critical. Many policy, and societal, trends presently impacting on educational professionals are from some angles militating against the calm and self-confidence of such workers. The growth in target-setting, audit cultures, learner entitlements, 'cost-recovery' and for-profit ventures, along with continuing public questioning of standards of probity and performance in education, will all probably tend to increase the susceptibility that I alluded to earlier on. In other words, disequilibrium in the wider world, as developed societies adjust to such phenomena as diminishing resources and more-or-less permanent challenges to their security, as well as to forces more to do with lack of respect for authority and so on, has seemingly strong potential to exacerbate disequilibrium at the scale of the professional workplace.

The individual experiencing a major, potentially life-changing, event within his or her educational institution is, if my tentative argument here is accepted as a valid one, yoked in any number of not necessarily immediately evident ways to changes taking place outside of that institution – perhaps even changes being witnessed on a global scale. Such a contention might well be proven to be a somewhat grandiose one, inflating the significance of critical incidents well beyond what is credible and convincing. Even if this is so, the attributes of the events as I have outlined them in this chapter, and the contributions they make to broadening and deepening our professional learning, already sufficiently merit our attention, I would claim.

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Section 3

List of Appendices

1 'Beginning close encounters: on starting to teach in colleges'
[Published paper, referenced in Integrative Statement as
Cunningham 2000].

2 Review of 'Mentoring in Education, an international perspective', as
provided for *London Review of Education*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp 197/198,
July 2007.

3. Publicity material for national conference on 'Exploring
Professionalism', University of Warwick, December 2009

4.(i) Specification for assessed assignment on critical incidents as
currently in use with IoE in- and pre-service participants on post-
compulsory teacher education programmes

(ii) Pre-task briefing as regularly provided by me, in connection with
the above assignment. [Gapped session outline facilitates
participants' note-taking during what always tends to be a very
interactive 'briefing']

5 Publicity material for free-standing CPD mentoring module offered
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6 Self-explanatory personal communication from doctoral candidate
(*anonymised; original available on request*).

Appendix 1

Beginning "close encounters" : on starting to teach in colleges

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Abstract

This brief article reviews the nature of the anxieties and expectations of beginning teachers on one particular course of initial teacher education for the post-compulsory sector. It attempts to contextualise the concerns of these new entrants to the college sector by providing an overview of some of the more striking transformations that have been witnessed within it since 1993. Some strategies which H.E. based trainers and college based mentors might consider as appropriate and helpful in the support of frequently relatively anxious beginning teachers are proposed.

Introduction

The closing years of the twentieth century are particularly challenging ones in which to be entering post-compulsory education as a new teacher. The college sector is clearly no longer what it once was, the "Cinderella" of the U.K. education system; thanks to a wide range of reports and publications, and press coverage of debates such as those on college mergers or the rapid pace of casualisation of the teaching force, it can at least be claimed that public awareness of the sector has grown dramatically. More importantly, there is the acknowledgement in government circles that widening participation and achievement levels will be developments that will inevitably impact very significantly on colleges. Both 'Learning Works' and the Green Paper on Lifelong Learning auger potential, quite unprecedented,

change. Many of the possible changes will be ones creating opportunities for especially rewarding work for classroom teachers. In some ways the college sector appears to be taking centre stage, with further upward movement in post-16 participation rates likely to disproportionately benefit FE institutions.

However, the present scene is clearly one in which certain of the realities are worrying or demotivating for new teachers. Casualisation has already been alluded to, and has in one or two colleges already resulted in quite large chunks of the curriculum being delivered by agency staff: at Uxbridge College, it is claimed, the proportion is a full third ('F.E. Now!', October, 1997). A number of experienced teachers in the sector are decidedly negative about their current working conditions. Under the headline 'Teachers in colleges are far worse off', the Times Educational Supplement recently featured a letter from a teacher drawing attention to such aspects of college life as that

“ [Lecturers] enjoy half the holidays of our school-based counterparts, 12 hour opening, a longer working hours contract and a five and a half day week. In addition, annual cost living pay rises are routinely frozen to enable underfunded corporations to balance the books and stretch shrinking resources to cope with ever-increasing student numbers”.

(TES, October 10 1997)

Even within what is perhaps the decade's most important, and positive, statement of the potential of the college sector to lift levels of participation and achievement in the U.K. we find an acknowledgement that 'Along with the rich choices within further education, there is also a fair amount of chaos

and confusion.' (Kennedy, 1997, 32). Elsewhere in the crucially important Kennedy Report there is a succinct review of certain fundamental attributes of large numbers of college students

"The college sector is already recruiting students with a wide range of prior attainment. Under half of the 16 year olds entering general further education and tertiary colleges have already achieved foundation target 1...Analysis of [FEFC] data confirms that there are many students in sector colleges who have some GCSEs but who have not yet reached [this target]"

(ibid.,61)

The post-1986 developments in competency based assessment, the dramatically expanded course and student documentation responsibilities of tutors, and the fact that in many ways the various 'charters' have engendered what might perhaps be termed a complaining culture-in colleges as elsewhere- all also need to be reckoned into the equation. As this writer has quoted in another context, colleges according to Gorringer are now very much in the business of having to '...attract, retain and delight paying customers.'(Gorringer,1994, in Cunningham,1997,365). Clearly, while there are many satisfactions and rewards to be gained from choosing to teach 16-plus learners, the option cannot be considered an easy one; there has never been such a range of challenges to the energy, efficiency and creativity of a beginning teacher in a college, and from so many different directions.

The case for training

The case for having to undergo a course of initial teacher education as preparation for work in the post compulsory sector is now - somewhat belatedly - accepted by government, and will, it appears, shortly be translated into policy. It can be no coincidence that this fact arises following a period in our educational history when all the above signs and symptoms of challenges in the sector have been manifesting themselves. But already, and indeed for some time, relatively large numbers of prospective college teachers have been applying for and following such PGCE and Cert.Ed. programmes as are offered at this writer's own institution. From a historical perspective, incidentally, what can be discerned is a clear trend during the last quarter of this century towards the introduction of compulsion regarding the preparation deemed necessary to work as a teacher at *any* post-primary level; the imminent introduction of accredited programmes of training in teaching skills for university lecturers will, in a sense, merely complete a process of extension begun in 1975. (The logic, if there ever was one, for believing that only those responsible for the education of our young people up until the age of 11 needed a formal induction into the nature of the task before them was flawed, to say the least).

Training (as it is virtually universally still described) is becoming a mainstream rather than a minority pursuit for those wishing to teach the 16-plus age groups. Although many applicants say at interview that they are making a pragmatic decision in trying for a place on a training course, i.e. they feel it will boost their job finding potential, many others concede that what they really want is to feel confident that they will be 'good' or 'better' teachers once they have trained. This is both commendable and heartening,

and much evidence could be cited to show that in fact many new entrants are not only 'good' teachers even whilst in training, they are excellent ones.

Even the most outstanding, however, frequently experience worries and anxieties about their practice as they begin the 'close encounters' with real learners that most modern PGCE or Cert.Ed. courses require of them from an early stage. It is with the nature of such anxieties that the bulk of the rest of this article will be concerned.

"A problem shared..."

According to Richard Pring, 'Teacher education in universities is notable for its lack of thinking about how teachers, especially new teachers, learn - even in some institutions most famous for educational research and most prolific in the production of teachers.' (Pring, 1996, 21). Not wishing to be accused of quoting out of context, it must be conceded that this was held to apply to the training of school teachers, rather than to preparation for the college sector. However, the view does seem to be worth citing. If it were indeed true of a course of training for intending, or new, college teachers, this would represent a lamentable state of affairs: it would negate the whole claimed emphasis on the notion that fostering reflective practice is a central concern of modern courses.

The truth of the matter is that engaging in a dialogue with beginning teachers about *what* they are learning and *how* they are learning from their contact with real classroom situations is a vitally important part of the day to day activity of the committed teacher trainer. Establishing a conducive environment in which the discussion of critical incidents (Tripp, 1993) which

beginning teachers have experienced becomes a normal (but 'high profile') part of such activity. The fruits of setting up situations wherein such dialogue can occur are extremely worthwhile ones.

Firstly, and of greatest importance, there are the very real benefits to the new teachers themselves of simply finding out that challenges and difficulties they have encountered are not, typically, unique ones. Time and again, formal and informal course evaluations reveal that sharing problems with a group of other beginning teachers in a supportive environment, has been of immense personal and professional benefit. Not only do group and individual 'sympathies' come into play here. There will be clearly be many occasions when any strategies proposed by a group tutor as relevant and potentially helpful in a 'difficult' situation that has been shared will be supplemented by other ideas from within the group itself.

Secondly, encouraging beginning teachers to share their thoughts and anxieties about their developing practice, and about specific encounters with classroom situations, *informs the trainer's own practice..* This writer is indebted to several successive cohorts of prospective and new college teachers who have very substantially supplemented his own direct experience of classroom realities by sharing some of those which have caused them anxiety. The sheer range of scenarios is huge, of course, but it seems indisputable that discussing and reflecting on as many of them as is possible within the constraints of an initial training course is a worthwhile endeavour. The exercise will not allow us to write some kind of definitive rule book for planning and managing learning, but it will enhance our understanding of the general areas which

present beginning teachers with challenges, and better prepare us for supporting them.

Some recurring themes

As a result of a mixture of normal classroom practice as a trainer, direct questioning of beginning teachers, observing a very large number of lessons in colleges and, lastly, adopting what could be described as an ethnographic perspective (i.e. engaging in extensive 'professional eavesdropping') when working with his own groups, this writer believes a fairly accurate picture can be discerned of the types of classroom events which are causing new teachers to feel challenged. (It would be well beyond the scope of this article to consider any of the challenges arising as a result of the 'wider duties' even beginning teachers are being increasingly called upon to engage in).

There are very interesting comparisons to be made between the kinds of anxieties beginning teachers confess to at the outset of their training and those they typically become preoccupied with once their course gets properly under way, and they have to begin to take a high degree of responsibility for teaching groups they have previously been observing. On beginning the H.E. component of their course, i.e. during the period of induction which prefaces their arrival in what will be their base colleges for the PGCE year, students in recent years have tended to articulate anxieties that are susceptible to the following 'categorisation':-

- "Will I know enough?"
- "Will I be able to interest students in my subject?"

- “Will I get support in my college with finding out about syllabuses, etc?”
- “Will the observation of my practical teaching go well?”

These, very interestingly, are anxieties clearly focused on the *subject expertise* of the new teacher (only the last item in the list is not). What will, it is hoped, become clear is the way in which these become superseded by a set of concerns far more connected to issues arising from *managing groups* and *managing individuals* within groups.

The transition from predominantly subject-focused concerns to those which are centred on the student(s) takes place fairly rapidly, often within mere weeks of starting to actually teach groups in colleges. What is attempted below is some illustration of the latter set of concerns, rather than a comprehensive review of the types of classroom challenges which beginning teachers themselves describe from their early ‘close encounters’ with the realities of modern FE groups.

To begin with, it seems necessary to be reminded of the fact that any relationship that is to develop with students is, for the beginning teacher undergoing supervised practical experience, fundamentally influenced by its temporary nature. ‘How to handle’ a group that is not your own, but one for which you have a set of relatively short term responsibilities, can perhaps be said to represent the lurking, more or less constraining, question or

consideration. The 'usual' (or 'normal'!) teacher is the figure whose presence is most often felt - sometimes literally - at the back of the classroom, and it is their way of working, and their rules on classroom interaction and behaviour against which 'the student' will therefore most often be compared. This writer has been party to a very large number of discussions with beginning teachers in which some variant on the statement "I would be (more/less) (flexible/firm) about the thing were it not for the fact the X takes the line that..." has been met with. In other words, there does seem to be some inevitability regarding not being able to entirely 'be yourself' in how you deal with issues and individuals. You are, as a beginning teacher, simply working within someone else's rules, some of which you might not have imposed yourself. This, while a possibly contentious statement, appears to accurately sum up the situation as it is perceived.

Whether or not we can accept that beginning teacher's performance in class, and his or her responses to classroom situations, is essentially constrained by being placed within the above context, let us proceed to illustrate which of the multitude of possibilities for anxiety manifest themselves most frequently.

Of particular significance appears to be the way in which an approach to teaching largely dependant on using didactic methods comes to be viewed as something to be at all costs avoided. Actually doing so, and adjusting to notions of fostering student centered learning (Rogers 1965) as the ultimate goal may cause certain beginning teachers to experience stress and even role conflict. Having been inducted into the rationale for involving students in the learning process, valuing their experiences and perspectives, and generally

fostering a high level of active student participation in lessons, an element of disorientation may manifest itself. The beginning teacher may then question whether their role as facilitator, and as resource, is really teaching: "I feel I should be teaching them something." To give students so much responsibility can be, in the same recent PGCE candidate's phrasing a "scary" thing. So, on the one hand we may succeed in our desire as trainers to engage beginning teachers with notions of student-centeredness, even andragogy (Knowles 1970), while on the other we can inadvertently set up anxieties in individuals who may feel *either* that they are not working in enough of a 'student centered' way *or* feel uncomfortable because they are so fully complying with advice from various quarters to avoid didacticism that they are never actually 'teaching'!

The strong impression gleaned from FEFC inspection reports is that, in general terms, the active involvement of students in learning, through such devices as pairwork, collaborative work in small groups etc, is the kind of classroom practice which is very positively endorsed. There are clearly sound educational arguments why this should be so, and why those involved in training and mentoring new teachers will second this view. What this means in practice is, however, that the onus for inducting them into the strategies for setting up such situations is clearly on us. We also need to give such an induction considerable priority in our work. This will include very strongly promoting the idea that simply setting up collaborative situations without fully sharing with learner groups the rationale for doing so will not motivate students to treat seriously the opportunities that are being provided for them to develop both their learning skills and their knowledge base. Failure to

emphasise the aims and objectives of groupwork - and other -tasks is frequently drawn attention to by the college inspectors. We need to be fully aware of the very negative effects on the self confidence of beginning teachers if their early attempts to create participative classroom environments do not succeed because they, too, have neglected this essential.

Besides the support we need to provide in the all-important area of incorporating into their teaching the various strategies for fostering collaborative work, there would appear to be a case for prioritising discussion of certain other key aspects of classroom realities in the college sector. Such realities as perceived by beginning teachers themselves include :

- the presence in a number of teaching groups of relatively less well motivated learners. This writer has encountered at least one new entrant to the sector describing such individuals as "retention students", meaning those whose lack of commitment and occasionally disruptive behaviour is such that a college only 'keeps' them because they represent funding units. In specific geographical areas, where employment prospects for poorly qualified school leavers are particularly bleak, it could perhaps even be the case that such young people come to represent a significant proportion of the intake to non-advanced programmes.
- difficulties posed for managing learning when individuals are able to attend classes only erratically. Kennedy (op cit) has drawn attention to the kinds of obstacles which exist for some students, and which serve to

prevent them from attending as regularly as would be ideal; these can include such basic items as travel costs to college.

- the kinds of constraints imposed on classroom activities by inadequate resourcing and/ or inappropriate rooming. Again, what we find cited surprisingly often are such basic matters as insufficient departmental allowances for photocopying, resulting in, for example, beginning teachers writing notes on a whiteboard when their first preference would have been to produce a summary handout, asking students to share copies of task sheets (and return them unblemished!) when "there's one for each of you and as you can keep them you can add points of your own" would work much better, etc.

This brief list of course merely illustrates the kinds of situations which can set up anxieties, and with which new teachers will need support from both their trainers and their mentors. What they each typify, to reiterate the point, is the predominance of questions relating far more to classroom management than to the quantity or appropriacy of the specialist knowledge possessed. It is this crucial consideration which ought, it can therefore be argued, most profoundly influence trainer and mentor relations with their beginning teachers.

Some supporting strategies

From a purely personal perspective, it has always seemed clear to this writer that it is essential that both trainers and mentors are honest and open in their

dealings with their 'charges' regarding their own capabilities. We are ever-ready with the advice that not knowing the answer to a question posed by a student in class should always be admitted, rather than concealed; it appears to be merely logical that we extend this general principle to include our own practice. *Beginning* teachers are, of course, precisely that. However, if they were to perceive that the gulf between their own performance in classrooms and that of their trainers and mentors was one which it would be immensely difficult to bridge this could be demotivating in the extreme. We are not, of course, 'superteachers' (though there may be exceptions!) and very often will find that our own practice is informed and enhanced by the new, often extremely creative, approaches to teaching which we witness in those we are training. As has been pointed out, in fact, though in connection with training for work in schools:

When teachers and students analyze their own and each other's teaching the dividing line between in-service and initial training becomes so thin as to be almost non-existent. Indeed, if student teachers did not exist, one very effective way of influencing the practice of experienced teachers... would be to invent them (Wragg, 1984, 199)

The simple message that needs to be conveyed to beginning teachers is, then, that while they are learning from their classroom experiences, and as a result of this learning are gaining insight into how to improve on current performance, this process is one which we, too, continue to benefit from. Getting this message across is helpful in diminishing distance in what is inherently an unequal relationship, but is also supportive and empathetic.

The PGCE year can be physically and emotionally draining "because of the frenetic activity and learning which is required in meeting the full demands of teaching for the first time.' (Tickle,L in Bridges, D and Kerry, T, 1993,79).

In addition to simply creating the accepting, empathetic environment in which beginning teachers can air anxieties without feeling deficient, a range of specific and relevant supporting strategies can usefully be incorporated into trainer and mentor practice. The following is an attempt to offer some indication of the kind of repertoire which can be drawn on; as with the list of beginning teachers' anxieties presented earlier, there is no claim made as to the comprehensiveness of the compilation. It is also appropriate to acknowledge that such activities as are referred to are ones which no doubt a number of trainers and mentors do already integrate into their day to day work.

Activities for small group tutorials/ meetings, or in some cases seminars might include:

- using case studies in classroom management 'donated anonymously' by individual members of a group as the basis for regular discussion of issues as they arise. The obvious reason for suggesting anonymity is that no one need feel in any way embarrassed by having failed to cope with a specific problem. As mutual trust developed within a group this consideration would lessen in significance, and group members would in all probability become comfortable with 'owning up to' having experienced difficulties of a particular kind, with a particular individual or group.

- the use of role play to illustrate situations involving confrontation, or less important but equally significant examples of students needing to be persuaded to keep on task. This kind of event is especially valuable in allowing group members to focus on the role of *language* in ameliorating- or sometimes worsening-the difficulties which are building up in an exchange between student and teacher.
- inviting, where feasible, beginning teachers to observe one's own practice (outside of the realm of initial teacher training) and then to use group meeting time to 'debrief' and question one. This is, of course, a situation entailing a very high degree of exposure indeed for trainers and mentors, where it is possible to set up. It does, however, have the important incidental advantage as an activity that it can provide a flavour for beginning teachers of what observation can feel like from a different perspective to that which they will ordinarily experience, and allow them some insight into the process of formulating critical, constructive comment.
- giving greater prominence to the use of microteaching as a device for experimentation within a supportive environment. The strategy is a very well established one, but possibly still under-used. Certainly it typically emerges in course evaluation exercises as being an activity deserving of extra time.

All of the above suggestions focus on developing reflection on classroom management, (and on communication in classrooms). They do not relate at all well to questions of subject-specific competence, or to the kinds of concerns arising from the vastly changed nature of the post-compulsory sector over the last five years. There are very many challenges and anxieties which new college teachers will encounter: 'demands on teachers are increasingly varied and complex' (Young,1998,59), for example 'to give advice to students and to make connections between schools, employers and other sections of the community of which they are a part.' (ibid.) .It is vital that we facilitate in them the ability 'to develop an understanding of the new and more diverse demands on them'. (ibid.). However, what has been suggested in this brief contribution to our own reflections and debate as trainers and mentors is that the clear sense that emanates from beginning teachers themselves, or at any rate those whom this writer has worked directly with in recent years, is that it is coping with their first encounters with real students in real classrooms that is their main preoccupation.

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Appendix 2

Review as published in London Review of Education, Vol 5, No 2, pp 197-198, July 2007

Mentoring in Education
An International Perspective
Cedric Cullingford,

pub. Ashgate, 2006

This useful addition to the rapidly growing literature on mentoring comprises ten distinctive studies, and examines a range of conceptualisations of mentoring.

The overall geographical sweep of the text is certainly impressive, with material being drawn from national contexts as diverse as the UK, USA, Jordan and – these all within one paper – China, New Zealand, France, Japan and Switzerland. Further, in Val Tarbitt's chapter focusing on mentoring on-line, although the emphasis is primarily on her experience with the UK's Open University, there are genuinely global dimensions to be discerned.

Cedric Cullingford's own, introductory, chapter on "Mentoring as Myth and Reality" skilfully identifies certain linking themes in the above disparate studies, and is a valuable, thought-provoking essay in its own right. Importantly, one of the aspects of the studies to which he draws strong attention is their basis in real world research; every one of the contributors has been involved in exploring 'what works' (and sometimes what does not) in mentoring, whether at the individual or systemic level.

The modern spread of mentoring as an activity across such diverse endeavours as supporting student learning, or enhancing professional practice, and in contexts such as induction, is well-illustrated by this set of papers; indeed in Cullingford's succinct afterword to the volume he notes that "the modern manifestation of mentoring is a curious mixture" [210]. The 'mixture' here is likely to stimulate and inform readers from mainstream educational backgrounds, teacher trainers, staff developers and human resources specialists. As a collection it will not delude anyone into thinking that mentoring is the panacea we on occasion may be tempted to hope it may be; none of the contributors evangelise over the activity in the way a few other authors have done recently.

Limited space precludes being able to detail here every single one of the studies in 'Mentoring in Education: An International Perspective' but to try to convey a sense of the range on offer the following examples are, it is hoped, interesting ones. They should illustrate both the different 'niches' of life in education in which mentoring has been adopted, and the multiple possibilities that now exist in terms of selecting a suitable lens with which to study the activity.

Sue Warren, for example, examines the professional evolution of groups of mentors supporting trainees working towards becoming primary teachers in the UK. She purposefully exploits the notion of learning communities in reviewing how the mentors *themselves* grew and developed as a result of their involvement in the process of supporting newcomers. Marion Jones explores somewhat similar territory, her realm being that of the NQT rather than the teacher trainee, but concentrates far more on the socialisation - or the 'rites of passage', as she expresses it - of the newcomers.

By way of a complete contrast (spatially and in terms of the status of mentees), a paper such as Ulla Lindgren's describes the scope and functioning of a programme organised from Umea University, Sweden, aimed at enhancing the performance in science, of female students in particular, at school and university level. A highly appropriate prominence is given here to the gender dimension of a mentoring relationship, where one of the specific concerns for mentees may well be that of a dearth of appropriate role models. The crucial issue of gender is even more fully explored in the paper by Val Tarbitt, referred to earlier, which draws to good effect on the author's 'on-line' work with mature women learners. As someone becoming more and more dependent on the use of email as a supporting strategy, most notably with International students, I found her contribution to the volume of special value.

Also probably worthy of particular mention is the chapter by Edward D. Britton, attempting as it does a review - within the scope of 13 pages! - of mentoring structures and strategies in five contrasting countries which have devoted attention to their teacher induction programmes. This ambitious paper succeeds on many levels, including in convincingly reminding all of us in education that, numerically, those with most to gain from mentoring, in terms of their life chances, are ultimately the learners in our schools.

As my colleague Barrie Joy has written for the back cover, the papers in this volume are all "richly informative studies that scholars of mentoring will welcome". This is a view I will happily concur with, having already found certain perspectives contained in at least two of the contributions of special relevance to my own continuing exploration of mentoring in teachers' professional lives. Selected principles and practices referred to in the collection are actually also ones I can envisage as extending and deepening the understanding of those in commerce or the wider community who are presently reflecting on, and striving to implement, effective mentoring frameworks. (There are many examples that could be cited of how those of us in education have borrowed mentoring-related ideas from elsewhere; it would be heartening to think of the process being reversed).

A somewhat less positive, concluding, observation sadly needs to be made with regard to the standard of proofreading in Cullingford's volume: he and his contributors are really quite badly let down at times by this aspect of the book's production. The errors would, in fact, be far too numerous to list; some no doubt derive from an over-reliance on 'spellchecking' (e.g. 'recourses' for resources [xiv] or 'teaching a learning' for teaching and learning [xiii]). Others have to be explained in other ways (e.g. 'Teacher Taining' [12] - as part of a sub-heading ...). All are distracting and ought to be remedied before any further editions of the text appear. With the growing availability of worthwhile (free) on-line resources, investing in a hard-cover academic book should ideally mean acquiring something not only particularly useful but also pleasurable to own.

*Bryan Cunningham, Institute of Education, University of London,
Nov. '06*

Appendix 3

Exploring professionalism: a national conference December 10th and 11th 2009

Day 1: across professions and disciplines

A symposium on the nature of professionalism, its development,
assessment and research agenda

Confirmed speakers include:

Bryan Cunningham Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in the Institute of Education, University of London's, Faculty of Policy and Society, and Senior Lecturer in Education. His responsibilities include leading the Doctor in Education module *Foundations of Professionalism*.

Professor Celia Davies – Professor of Health Care at the Open University

Professor Fred Hafferty - Professor in the Department of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Minnesota Medical School

Dr Helen O'Sullivan – Director for the Centre for Excellence in Developing Professionalism at the University of Liverpool

Professor Julian Webb University of Warwick and Director of the UK Centre for Legal Education

Professor Sue White - Professor of Social Work at the University of Lancaster. Her research has focused principally on the analysis of professional decision-making in child welfare.

Warwick
Medical School

beme

BEST EVIDENCE MEDICAL EDUCATION

Day 2: focus on the health professions and evidence – in collaboration with BEME

Key Speaker:

Professor Fred Hafferty

Fred Hafferty has been involved in the teaching and assessing of professionalism in relation to medical students for many years. He has conducted research into what medical students know about professionalism and the impact of the hidden curriculum and role modelling upon students' professional behaviour development. He argues that professionalism must not be reduced to 'a static thing' independent of its context and that thinking of professionalism as a set of observable behaviours during teaching and assessment may miss important elements of this difficult concept, demeaning its value.

Day registration for either day will also be available.

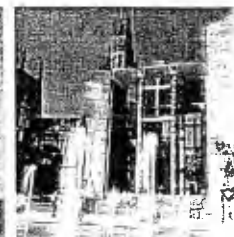
Please email your initial interest in attending this conference
to Liz Winborn at E.A.Winborn@warwick.ac.uk

Speakers

Bryan Cunningham – Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement in the Institute of Education, University of London's, Faculty of Policy and Society, and Senior Lecturer in Education. His responsibilities include leading the Doctor in Education module *Foundations of Professionalism*, a programme he has been involved with for over a decade. He makes significant contributions in the area of lecturer training and development, and has in the past been, in turn, Programme Leader for both the full time PGCE (Post Compulsory) and the Certificate, Diploma and MA in Teaching and Teaching and Learning in Higher and Professional Education. One of his areas of special interest is mentoring; he is a trained and practising mentor-coach. His text *Mentoring Teachers in Post-Compulsory Education* (2005, pub. David Fulton) was the first-available 'effective practice' guide for mentors in UK Further Education colleges, and he has also published a number of articles contextualised in this sector. His edited collection *Exploring Professionalism* with Foreword by Sir David Watson (2008, pub. Bedford Way Papers) contains contributions from some of the UK's foremost educationists and has been the subject of a number of highly praising reviews. In early 2008 Bryan was a Visiting Scholar at the European University Institute, Florence.

Professor Celia Davies – is a sociologist and Professor Emerita at The Open University. She held a series of research posts at the University of Warwick in the late 1970s and early 1980s, working with Margaret Stacey on the gender division of labour in health care. She held the first Chair in Women's Studies in the UK, based at the University of Ulster. This was followed by nine years as Professor of Health Care at The Open University. More recently she has been National Director of the Research for Patient Benefit Programme in the newly established National Institute for Health Research, and Visiting Professor at LSE. Hospital and health care organisation, and differences in power and organisation between the medical and nursing professions have been a lasting research interest. Her first published article, in 1972, was on the topic of professions in organisations. She followed this with research on the history and organisation of nursing in Britain and the USA. Her main contribution on professions has been to explore the contradictory relations between medicine and nursing (see 'The Gender of Profession and the Profession of Gender' *Sociology*, 30, (4), 1996 and *Gender and the Professional Predicament in Nursing*, Open University Press 1995). Recent publications highlight service user challenges, arguing, for example, that professional regulation is a field where social care has much to teach health, rather than vice versa. Celia Davies has a number of policy and practice involvements in the regulation of health professions at national level, in medicine, physiotherapy and pharmacy.

Dr Helen O'Sullivan – Director for the Centre for Excellence in Developing Professionalism at the University of Liverpool. Her research interests include: integrating professionalism skills and attributes into the curriculum, methods of assessing professionalism, emotional literacy in medical students, higher education management, and knowledge of and attitudes to human genetic technology. Her teaching interests include bioethics, particularly ethical issues related to advances in human genetic technology. The Centre for Excellence was developed in 2005. Its aims include: the development of graduates who can demonstrate improved levels of professionalism, and the development of a sector wide definition of professionalism and tools to assess it that are robust and transferable.



There will also be representatives from UNTRAP, the University of Warwick's user teaching and research action partnership to present the 'lay' perspective.

Professor Fred Hafferty – Professor in the Department of Behavioural Sciences at the University of Minnesota Medical School since 1994. Fred has a PhD in sociology from Yale University. His teaching and research interests include: medical sociology and social medicine, occupations and professions, medical education and socialization, and disability studies. He has written and presented widely on the nature of professionalism within the health professions. He is a member of the Council of Academic Societies (American Sociological Association) and on the Board of Directors of the Association of Behavioral Sciences and Medical Education. Fred has conducted research into what medical students know about professionalism and the impact of the hidden curriculum and role modelling upon students' professional behaviour development. He argues that professionalism must not be reduced to 'a static thing' independent of its context and that thinking of professionalism as a set of observable behaviours during teaching and assessment may miss important elements of this difficult concept, demeaning its value.

Professor Imogen Taylor – Professor of Social Work and Social Care at the University of Sussex. Imogen qualified as a social worker in Toronto and worked there for fifteen years as a social work practitioner and latterly as a lecturer at the University of Toronto before returning to England, initially to the University of Bristol in 1990 where she obtained a PhD and then to Sussex in 2001. Imogen was Co-Director of the Higher Education Subject Centre for Social Policy and Social Work from 2000-6. Her research interests are in pedagogic research in professional and interprofessional education, and learning for practice in social work and related professions. She has published extensively on aspects of professional education, most recently on issues of recruitment and selection (2008). She has led Knowledge Reviews for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), including a systematic review of Interprofessional Education (2007), and reviews of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment of Partnership Work (2006) and most recently of Carer Involvement in Social Work Education (2009). She led a review of learning for Integrated Children's Services for the Higher Education Academy in 2007-8. In July 2009 Imogen was appointed as Editor of *Social Work Education: the International Journal*. She was a member of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise Panel for Social Policy and Social Work.

Professor Julian Webb – University of Warwick and Director of the UK Centre for Legal Education. Julian has published widely on legal education, the legal profession and lawyers' ethics. He is a member of the advisory boards for four journals: the International Journal of the Legal Profession, Commonwealth Law and Legal Education, Revista Educación y Derecho, and Legal Ethics. From 1998 to 2008 he was a founding editor of the latter. With Dr John Paterson, University of Aberdeen, he also edits the "Law, Science and Society" book series published by Routledge-Cavendish. He has been an education adviser to the General Council of the Bar, and has undertaken research and consultancy for a number of professional bodies, including the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee for Legal Education and Conduct, the Dutch Council of the Judiciary, the Law Society of England and Wales and the New Zealand Council of Legal Education. Julian is currently a member of the Executive Committee of the Socio-Legal Studies Association and from 2004-2008 was chair of its Research Ethics Sub-Committee. His research interests include: legal education; the legal profession (especially ethics and professional regulation); civil justice and dispute resolution; social and legal theory (especially the phenomenology of law, autopoiesis and complexity theory); ethics of socio-legal research.



Appendix 4

Module 2: Theories and Principles of Teaching and Learning

Critical Incident Analysis

What is Critical Incident Analysis?

Critical Incident Analysis is a useful tool for reflecting on teaching and professional practice more generally. It is the identification of 'critical incidents' from your own professional experience. A critical incident may be a commonplace, everyday event or interaction, but it is 'critical' in that it stands out for you. Perhaps it was problematic, confusing, a great success, a terrible failure, or captures the essence of what you are trying to achieve in teaching and learning.

Critical incidents are considered as major turning points in professional life, but they may not always be discerned as such instantaneously. Their nature and significance may only become evident following a process of reflection and/or discussion with others.

Analysing critical incidents

1. Choose a critical episode: This would be something that stands out for you, e.g. a successful or unsuccessful teaching/learning incident, a problem presented to you by students (communication difficulties, low attendance, etc.).
2. Describe the incident to include:
 - when and where it happened (time of day, location and social context)
 - what actually happened (who said or did what)
 - what you were thinking and feeling at the time and just after the incident
3. Interrogate your description to include:
 - why did this incident stand out?
 - what was going on?
 - were there different levels of 'behaviour' or activity?
 - did I bring personal bias or a particular mindset to the event?
 - could I have interpreted this event differently from another point of view?
 - what can I learn from this episode?
 - what can I do to progress a resolution of the problem/s it suggests?
4. Find a friend or colleague to:
 - share your account of the episode
 - discuss your interpretation
 - modify your analysis, where necessary, in the light of peer suggestion, advice, perspective.
5. Where appropriate, you may want to compare your analysis with the views of other key people involved in the episode (students, colleagues, etc.).
6. Write up your report - the detail you chose to include depends on the purpose of the report. If you name colleagues and students, clarify issues of confidentiality.

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The Role of Critical Incidents in Professional Learning:

Some Perspectives for a Structured Discussion

Bryan Cunningham, 11/3/10

The notion of 'critical incident' [CI] may possess a beguiling simplicity but it is actually a complex, multi-faceted one. CIs form a distinctive component of the experiential professional learning that occurs 'on the job' (the kind of setting given more prominence recently by the work of authors such as Evans, and Fuller and Unwin, for example).

In parallel to a model such as Kirk and Dennison's 'Do, Review, Learn, Apply' [DRLA], I would see the role, and analysis, of CIs as fitting into a framework I call:

Encounter, Exploration, Action, Appraisal [EEAA].

What seems to be special about CIs is their potential to:

- (a) *accelerate* the normal process of professional learning;
- (b) trigger *radical* rather than gradual change in our professional understandings and behaviours.

It seems observable that certain other professional groups have, to-date at least, engaged rather more fully with the significance of CIs than has education. **Medicine, nursing and social work** all now include, at both initial training and continuing professional development stages, explicit, concrete use of the notion (but sometimes referring to it as Significant Event Analysis (SEA)).

So, some first questions for discussion might well simply be:

Why is this so? How might this state of affairs have arisen?

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Critical incidents are highly individual events: what possesses criticality for one person will be experienced by another as wholly mundane and unimportant – as ‘water off a duck’s back’... When we facilitate discussions of CIs we must always treat with total respect participants’ narratives – even though we may completely fail to see why an event could possibly have been critical for them.

This leads us to a useful second question:

What factors do you imagine can endow an event with criticality? {I list a few possibilities below, but others may occur to you – I have left some space following my three suggestions for you to add your own}

- **TIMING:** Possibly the event coincides with a private trouble we are experiencing, so occurs at a point in time when we are emotionally especially vulnerable.
- **IDENTITY:** An event may go to the very heart of our identity. For example, a teacher who takes a very special pride in seeing themselves as approachable and accessible could be particularly ‘dented’ by hearing a student say to a friend in

the college canteen *“Don’t waste your time going to see him for any help – he’s never got time for you, even if you can find him in the first place”*.

- **LACK OF EXPERIENCE or TRAINING:** On what is actually a short course of initial teacher education, only a fairly restricted range of contingencies and interactions can possibly be prepared for: newer teachers may be ‘unbalanced’ by events that with more experience they might be more confident in dealing with.



The nature of critical incidents (see pp 170/171 in chapter supplied):

Does the range of possible CIs seem fairly comprehensive or are there scenarios you feel ought to be added?



At the 'exploration' stage of 'EEA', talk seems to be of special value, to complement individual reflection:

Were you to experience a CI, in what kind of forum do you feel it would be most beneficial to explore what has occurred?

- ✓ *With a friend, or friends?*
- ✓ *With peer(s) e.g. from your own subject specialism?*
- ✓ *With a tutor?*
- ✓ *With a line manager?*
- ✓ *With a trained facilitator, previously unknown to you?*
- ✓ *With a mentor*
- ✓ *Other?*

What would be the reason(s) for your choice from the above?

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The *value* of CIs, and analysing them, appears (potentially at least) to include the following aspects of professional learning and development:

- Learning from CIs accords well with the notion of ‘the learning professional’ (Guile and Lucas). Learning professionals not only reflect on and explore the ‘*what*’ of events in their professional lives, they build on such events in a proactive, forward-looking way, and embrace change; they focus on the ‘*so what?*’ In a higher education context, one writer (Nicholls) found that a distinguishing characteristic of learning professionals was their *receptivity to ideas*: in opposition to this, we can probably identify the lecturer whose ‘closed’ professional identity precludes their being able to focus on the merits of changing and adapting their practice.
- CIs are instrumental in developing advanced reflective skills, including self-awareness and sensitivity to others (components of what has sometimes been called ‘emotional intelligence’ (Goleman)). CIs are therefore not exclusively ‘self-centred’: the changes that may result from analysing CIs can often benefit others as well as ourselves – our colleagues or our students, for instance. (We might illustrate this idea by the phrase “I will operate differently for *their* good, not merely for my own”).
- Because CIs aid us in becoming more reflective, we often at the same time avoid dogmatism; the value of *tentativeness* comes to the fore – acquiring, we might even say, a ‘professional stammer’. The world of learning and teaching is a complex one (even ‘supercomplex’, according to Barnett) –

there are rarely any 'obvious' answers to the challenges we face, so dogma is of virtually no value at all to us.

- The sharing of CIs in an appropriate, safe, forum can greatly enhance our sense of *membership of a learning community* – our professional identity, cohesiveness, even 'solidarity', can all be strengthened.
- Although CIs are often highly stressful – even sometimes traumatic – events, they may ultimately play a significant, and genuinely positive, part in moving us forwards in our understandings, our practices... even our careers.

Concluding Questions?

Appendix 5



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CPD for Post-Compulsory Education (PCE) 2009

MENTORING AND COACHING IN POST-COMPULSORY WORKPLACES

Course ref: **SC252-09C1**

Tuesday 12 May and Thursday 11 June 2009

13.30-16.00 (Register 30 minutes before)

Tutors:

Bryan Cunningham and Vera Hutchinson

Target Audience:

This programme is aimed at practitioners with current, or planned, responsibilities for such professional activities as:

- Mentoring trainee teachers;
- Mentoring or coaching colleagues, especially at times of change or tension in the workplace;
- Supporting colleagues perceived to be underperforming;
- Coaching staff who are assuming new work roles.

Fee:

£275

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E cpd@ioe.ac.uk

Course Director Contact:

Bryan Cunningham
E b.cunningham@ioe.ac.uk

Outline:

Over the course of the programme, participants will be both *exploring* and *extending* their understanding of the nature of mentoring and coaching, and developing new models and approaches to these important professional activities.

A range of activities and discussion topics will complement inputs from the tutors (both of whom have long experience of the post-compulsory sector, and of training teachers and mentors working within it).

Strategies for researching a mentoring/coaching case study within a participant's own employing institution will be introduced.

Content:

The programme aims to enhance the mentoring and coaching skills of relatively experienced practitioners working in a diverse range of post-compulsory settings (from general FE colleges, through adult education institutes, to prison education). It has a strongly practical emphasis, although selected theoretical perspectives on the nature of professional learning and the contribution mentoring and coaching may be able to make within this will be drawn on.

Participants will deepen their understanding of:

the individual and organisational attributes that enhance the effectiveness of mentoring and coaching

the range of professional issues and challenges where mentoring/coaching may be a worthwhile supportive intervention

the nature of effective mentoring and coaching, and the ways in which these may enhance or accelerate professional learning.

They will also:

develop advanced mentoring/coaching skills

become more confident in approaching the task of researching mentoring/coaching in the workplace.