Why teachers and education systems need mentoring

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Definitions

Mentoring
“... one to one relationship between a relatively inexperienced teacher (the mentee) and a relatively experienced one (the mentor) which aims to support the mentee’s learning and development as a teacher, and their integration into and acceptance by the cultures of the school and the profession”. (Hobson & Malderez 2013 p. 90)

Most definitions make reference to teacher learning/development.
A school-based mentor is someone who is willing and able to undertake each of five main roles with respect to the learning of another (student) teacher.
Mentor Roles

1 Model: modelling how to be, rather than how to do – and making this visible to the BT

2. Acculturator: ‘showing them the ropes’ (as a full member of the communities the BT is joining)

3. Sponsor: using any power (= ability to make things happen) in the service of the mentee
Mentor Roles (cont.)

4. **Support**: being a ‘shoulder to cry on’, a listening ear

5. **Educator**:
   i) scaffolding the learning of:
      - the skills of noticing,
      - of learning from their own and others’ experiences to develop an integrated knowledge-base;
   ii) responding contingently to a range of emerging needs.

(Malderez & Bodoczky 1999, Malderez & Wedell 2007):
Who can/can not mentor?

- A peer √
- A teacher who has received appropriate Initial Mentor Preparation √
- A line manager X
- An assessor X
- Someone who ‘reports on’ the mentee X

Someone who is called ‘a mentor’ may not, in fact, be supporting learning, and in the worst cases may be impeding a mentee’s learning.

(Hobson & Malderez 2013)
What mentors do/do not do ...

E.G.
Make their own professional learning process visible (M) ✓
Give advice about how/when/where to carry out school requirements (A) ✓
Encourage, do things FOR the mentee (Support) ✓

BUT IN EDUCATOR ROLE:
Create conditions for mentees’ learning ✓
Guide PLDs so that mentees make *their own* judgements & decisions ✓
Guide PLDs so that mentees develop noticing skills and take account of student feedback ✓

Give advice about how to teach X
Observe & give feedback (assess) X
Definitions cont.

Coaching

“facilitated reflective practice” (Cox 2013 p.2)

i.e. *part of* the educator role of a mentor
3 reasons why Teachers need Mentors

1. The nature of the experience of becoming/developing as a teacher;
2. Current views on the nature of teacher knowledge and learning;
3. Educational visions for a ‘professional’ workforce, or for teachers who are reflective practitioners
1. From the experience of Teacher learning

From the ‘Becoming a Teacher’ research project (2003 -2009)

4 Themes in experience of beginning teachers:

• (i) the importance of relationships
• (ii) a preoccupation with identity
• (iii) the affectively-charged nature of the process of becoming, being and learning as a teacher;
+ for those engaging in formal opportunities for learning (whether ‘pre-service’ or ‘in-service’)

• (iv) the perceived relevance (or not) of what they were asked to learn.

AND: the availability of ‘support’ = a key factor in whether or not a beginner teacher remained in the profession.

(Hobson, Malderez et al. 2009)
An effective mentor,
In ‘support’, ‘sponsor’ and ‘acculturator’ roles, can support teachers with issues related to emotions, relationships and identity.

In their ‘model’ and ‘educator’ roles can do much to enable teachers to see the practical, contextualised relevance (iv) to them of what they learn formally elsewhere.
2. Current views on teacher knowledge and learning

- Ineffectiveness of ‘theory-application’ models.
- Many perspectives on teacher learning emphasise the centrality of *experience*. E.g.
  - Constructivist views of learning - individual biographies and past experience influencing present meaning-making.
  - Socio-cultural views - participation in and experiences of communities of practice.
Teachers themselves (consistently reported in research over the last fifty years or so - from Lortie ’75 to the BaT research) cite the experience of being in schools and actually teaching as being the most valuable single source of their learning.
How mentors help in this ...

Mentors, in ‘educator ‘role, support the on-going learning from the experiences of teaching.

Mentors in ‘acculturator’ and ‘sponsor’ roles, support a teacher’s progress towards full participation in the communities (e.g. school, profession) they are joining - as only they are full practising members of such communities.(selection criterion?)
3 Types of teacher knowledge

Teachers need to have and use different types of knowledge.

1. *know about*, (HEAD)
2. *know how*, and (HAND)
3. *know* ‘intuitively’ *to* use that knowledge appropriately in action. (HEART)
Know about, know how can be (and may best be) learnt away from the school and the classroom. BUT

a) Know to can only be learnt via and from experiences in schools and classrooms +

b) it is only in the process of planning, teaching, reviewing and learning from actual teaching experiences that an integrated knowledge-base, a personal practical knowledge, develops.

(Malderez & Wedell 2007)
3. Professionalism

Professionals -

• are qualified (often after extensive periods of university-based education and internship),
• belong to a professional body,
• keep up with latest research in their fields and often contribute to this,
• make their own informed judgments,
• and have ‘learnacy’ (Claxton 2004)

Only a mentor (& no other type of ‘teacher of teachers’) in ‘model’, ‘sponsor’, ‘accultuator’ and ‘educator’ roles, can support the development of professionalism
Why education systems need mentors

It follows (I hope!) that in educational systems where:

- the educational vision includes preparing professional teachers, or reflective practitioners
- reforms are taking place;
- inservice development opportunities provided are not achieving the desired impact;
- teacher retention and/or morale in the profession is low and/or
- resources are limited or unevenly distributed:

The TEACHERS need/could benefit from mentors, and therefore the system NEEDS MENTORS too.