
Guest editorial: Coaching and mentoring in teacher education

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333

It is a great pleasure to write this editorial in celebration of the contributions made by researchers in the field of coaching and mentoring in teacher education. This special issue of the *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* is associated with and extends a number of papers presented at the 64th World Assembly of the International Council on Education for Teaching, hosted at Bath Spa University in June 2022. The special issue presents readers with a diverse range of articles to continue to stimulate discussions and debates within the field, which are carefully peer reviewed and are of the highest quality and publishing standards. It was a great privilege to support its development.

The objective of this special issue is to enhance the understanding of the ways in which coaching and mentoring can support teacher learning, agency and well-being within teacher education contexts. Contributions explore how coaching and mentoring can be utilised to support and develop schoolteachers, from the initial teacher education phase, as early career teachers (ECTs), as specialist teachers and as professional learners.

Mentoring and coaching can make a profound contribution to teacher retention (Kelchtermans, 2019), providing a vibrant community of learning (Lofthouse, 2018) where collaborate professionalism can help others to flourish (Hargreaves and O' Connor, 2018). However, there is extensive evidence that new teachers feel vulnerable as they develop and shape their teacher identities (Shanks, 2014) and that mentoring and coaching can be susceptible to unethical agendas to address “deficit” conceptions of teachers (Hobson and Maxwell, 2020). Contributions to this special issue focus on international research into how coaching and mentoring can contribute to the learning and development of teachers across career phases, including by strengthening role satisfaction and teacher agency and enhancing well-being.

First, Benjamin Dreer provides a conceptual article, based on a synthesis of international literature, to explore the relationship between mentoring and the well-being of pre-service teachers. He points out that mentoring is an imperative tool for sharing knowledge and experience and that mentoring relationships have bidirectional benefits for the well-being of both mentees and mentors. Dreer argues, however, that mentoring is effective only “under certain conditions”. The study proposes a comprehensive framework of relationships between mentor and mentee well-being to inform future explorations in this area.

The recent introduction of the Early Career Framework (ECF) in England (Department for Education (DfE, 2019a, b) provides the context for the next two articles. These provide contrasting perspectives on the enactment of this policy initiative, which makes the mentoring of ECTs in schools a statutory requirement over a two-year period. In a study of 37 mentors, Caroline Daly, Polly Glegg, Beth Stiasny, Mark Hardman, Becky Taylor, Claire Pillinger and Haira Gandolfi examine the understandings and experiences of becoming instructional coaches as part of pilot support programmes for the ECF. Instructional coaching is a prevalent trend in the English system, and the findings raise topical questions regarding mentors’ conceptualisations and enactment of the role of instructional coach and the readiness of mentors to assume their key stakeholder roles in the professional education of ECTs.

In the following paper, Sue Cronin asks further thought-provoking questions regarding ECTs’ mentors as new policy actors. She examines how mentors’ professional judgement and discretion are used to navigate the ECF (DfE, 2019a, b) to meet the needs of mentees. Based on semi-structured interviews to explore their views of both mentors and school induction



tutors, findings suggest a disconnect between the policy directive and the enactment of policy on the front line in schools. Mentors play an active role in adapting the ECF to meet the bespoke needs of their mentees but do not sufficiently recognise their own professional learning needs. The study, like that of Daly and colleagues, calls for more time to be committed to mentors' professional development and crucially suggests that greater consideration needs to be given to the content of professional learning provision for mentors in this role.

Connor Mellon reflects on the lessons learned from "the road less travelled" by exploring student teachers' and newly qualified teachers' experiences of being mentored in the Irish further education (FE) and training sector. Mellon emphasises the importance of the mentoring process in relation to the initial phases of the teacher education continuum. The study adopted a narrative approach, and interviews were used to draw on participants' lived experiences of mentoring in the FE context. The contextualised narratives provide key insights into the wider sector in terms of what is expected of mentors and their preparedness for their role in teacher education. While the paper provides insights into how mentors are appreciated and respected, it also outlines how there can be a lack of understanding of the role of the mentor and what is required of them, which can lead to misalignment of expectations between those involved.

Gwen Nugent, James Houston, Ginz Kunz and Donna Chen's study, based in the USA, provides a relatively rare quantitative analysis of the elements of instructional coaching practices used in a teacher professional development context. Nugent and colleagues point out that there is little empirical evidence about the active ingredients of coaching and how it can impact and improve teachers' practices: often studies do not fully explore the "what", "why" and "how" of coaching. Analysis of video footage of coaching sessions unpacks the coaching process and explores how coaching processes might change within and across sessions. The outcomes indicate that establishing a positive relationship with the coachee and creating a safe professional learning environment is imperative. The authors point out that it is perhaps not the range of coaching strategies used that engages the mentee most but the quality of strategies deployed to facilitate the learning conversation.

In a study from Norway, school-based mentors and pre-service teachers apply newly developed digital and discursive tools to mentoring conversations within practicum contexts. Developing adaptive teaching by introducing technology-based tools and conversation templates is the ultimate goal of the research by Tove Hunskaar and Greta Björk Gudmundsdottir. The article provides analysis of the development of the tools and how they were integrated within the experience of pre-service teachers and mentoring conversations to enhance critically reflective analysis of teaching. Qualitative research with mentors and pre-service teachers indicates the promise of such tools to disrupt routinised mentoring conversations within formal mentoring contexts. There are benefits for both parties in developing adaptive expertise as a result of a changed agenda for discussion.

In our final article, informal coaching and mentoring and an "informal turn" in teacher professional learning is explored. In this conceptual paper, Rachel Shanks uses the lens of social practice to explore how informal learning conversations can impact teachers' professional learning, with particular reference to new teachers. Shanks argues that informal learning encounters are situated within a range of education contexts such as staffrooms. Given this, she asks how, then, "can we embrace, recognise and support informal coaching and mentoring?" so that the value of utilising these encounters as learning opportunities can be realised. The study provides insights into how professional learning opportunities can be facilitated in these informal spaces without compromising their informality.

The articles included in the special issue thus not only present investigation of the promise of coaching and mentoring to enrich teachers' professional learning across career phases but also warn of lost opportunities. Most importantly, they indicate the need for

deep understanding by coaches and mentors of the practices in which they engage and the need for policy initiatives to heed research that explains expertise in coaching and mentoring as highly complex, nuanced and contextualised. The special issue is timely given the considerable appetite among teacher educators, school leaders and policy-makers to engage with new evidence around this topic.

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About the authors

Dr Lizana Oberholzer is a PFHEA, FCMI and Founding Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching. She has worked in the HE since 2004 at a range of Universities in the UK as well as the University of East London and the University of Wolverhampton as a Programme Lead for the International MA in Education, National Professional Qualifications in school leadership and the Early Careers Framework. Prior to this, she worked as a School Centred Initial Teacher Trainee Programme Director. She is passionate about leadership development, governance and teacher development. Lizana is a BELMAS Council member, and she supports the BELMAS Research Interest Group for Governing and Governance as a convenor. Lizana is a BAMEd Trustee and supports WomenEd as a regional lead in the West Midlands. She is actively involved in IPDA and is currently the IPDA England Chair, as well as Vice Chair of the IPDA International committee. She is the Chair for UCET's CPD forum and Chairs the APPG SIG for Teacher Development for the APPG for the Teaching Profession. She is a proud trustee of a Multi-Academy Trust and is a committed educator, striving to provide learners with learning opportunities and life chances.

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