

Critical reflection on experiences as a mentor



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Throughout this report I will critically reflect on my mentoring skills as a student mentor to students at Post 16 Education and clarify how learning theories can be employed in conjunction with mentoring/coaching models and stress the significance of adhering to boundaries and ethics. A selected journal article will also be critically analysed, with the promotion of professional development through mentoring.

Section 1

‘ A mentor (in mentoring) is a dignified procedure whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced individual stimulates a accommodating position of control and promoting reflection and learning within a less experienced and conversant individual, so as to assist that individuals profession and personal development’. (Roberts, 2000: 162)

With the experiences as a mentor, to students in Post 16 Education it has been a very gratifying experience. The learning route between myself as a mentor and my mentees’ has been a two fold learning process (Brockbank 2006) in the sense that I have been able to expand on my abilities and also on those of my mentees’, through assistance and support and giving them the confidence to identify and enhance on their individual abilities and personal provenances (Wisker et al. 2008). Furlongs, Maynard (1995) observe mentoring as a resource of authorization to another individual In order for them to be able to achieve something proficiently. Egan (1990) states that communicating visibly, keenly paying attention and simplifying issues are all indispensable virtues if mentoring is to be effective. Boreen et al (2000) asserts that a mentor is someone who is competent in being able to confidentially assign concerns and practices and have the courage to

compose learning at a more personal level and someone who is able to facilitate and develop the mentees' understanding.

From my perspective I believe that selecting the right mentor is the answer to a flourishing working relationship this helps you connect as a mentor and mentee.

Mentors require the need to be sensitively and mentally equipped to devote time and effort to constructively assist another individual (Shea 1995).

Boreen, Niday, Johnson (2003) consider the importance of the mentor being supported by its organisation through peer mentoring, networking and training.

Cunningham (2007) believes that structuring and nourishing communal respect and a good relationship has, from my understanding, verified to be fundamental in order to endorse open dialogue (Megginson, Clutterbuck 2005). In reflection to myself I have found it indispensable to situate my personal issues and feelings to a side before being competent to passively sustain and direct an individual. In opposition, this can be very complex to achieve in an intense and challenging atmosphere of teaching. I have come to that it is not always possible to enclose all the responses, being able to consign on with approval, (Boreen, Niday, Johnson 2003) as this is an imperative act, in order to circumvent uncomfortable situations as disturbing situations require the need of vigilant and receptive handling if ones position of reliance is to be preserved.

Productive responses from previous mentees' have verified to be central, as it has allowed me to reflect on myself using the double loop learning (Brockbank 2006). One of the disparagements made were that on some occasions I appeared to be too busy which resulted to my mentee feeling uncomfortable and feeling as though I had not provided him/her with the support and assistance which they required. This was an cataleptic behaviour which I failed to recognise, however through the feedback I received from my mentees' alterations were made in order in order to prevent this from happening again. I modified the situation by meeting with my mentees' in a more quiet and private area. These were planned and carried out on a one to one basis, with no barriers (Boreen, Niday, Johnson 2003). Rogers (2004) argued that by generating a more relaxed environment, this allows the sharing and reflection of such experiences, stimulating a double loop learning situation, allowing the mentee to form action plans and take ownership of them.

After the completion of every planned session with my mentees' I encouraged them to reflect on their own experiences as this was a ' tool' which I used in order to identify any weaknesses and strengths within myself and the learning which I had undergone (Brockbank, 2006). However another method which was utilised by my mentees', the SWOT analysis techniques had proven to be insignificant for some (Turner 2002).

Dewey (1933, cited in Reece & Walker, 2006, p. 85) alleged that learners require time and space in order to be able to reflect prior to entering an open discussion; this precipitates the prioritising of problems and aids the invention of practical resolutions (Bolton 2005). According to Rogers (2004)

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he believed, that in order for learning to be efficient, mentees' ought to feel positive and content in regards to taking ownership of their problems and objectives as this is vital. Conner, Pokora (2007) went on to add that promoting ownership stimulates an optimistic approach and a more meaningful and valued outcome and being positive was seen as an indispensable factor in order to resolve complicated situations (Boreen, Niday, Johnson 2003).

Employing 'reflection on action' is essential in order for individuals to prepare and progress (Schon 1983). In regards to 'reflection on action' I encouraged my mentees to observe my mentoring skills so that through my demonstrations they would be able to equip themselves with what has been presented to them. On some occasions I have invited small groups of individuals to mini mentor sessions, where individuals could reflect on each others actions, as Schon (1983) calls 'in action' reflection, with me directing them in an extremely accommodating atmosphere (Furlong, Maynard 1995). Honey and Mumford alleged that learning styles vary and we ought to become accustomed to situations in order to develop individuals learning (1982, cited in Reece, Walker 2006, p 94). All of my mentees' are treated as individuals with great respect (Boreen, Niday, Johnson 2003) and I make use of the Howard Gardiner's' Multiple Intelligence model (1983) and the V. A. K. learning style diagnostics so that I am able to recover appropriate learning techniques so that I may increase my learning and that of my mentee's (2006 Reece & Walker).

Section 2

Over many last century there have been various theories of learning published, to which some are directly linked to mentoring (Jarvis 2006). Rice (2007) explains that,

‘ Mentors use adult learning theories although the extent varies within the case being studied, with such variability the needs of individual student teachers, the context in which the mentors are working in, and their own knowledge of professional practice and of espoused theories.’

However, during the mentoring process, adult learning theories are employed, in regards to the requirements of the individual (Brookfield 1994). It is essential that mentors have acquaintance and understanding of learning theories to assist the learning and to make it relevant to individuals (Boreen, Niday, Johnson 2003). The DFES declares that mentoring is a ‘ valuable opportunities to relate theory to practice and to try out new ideas’ (DFES 2005). Throughout my studies and experience as a mentor, it is evident that many theories can be employed in the mentoring and coaching process.

The behaviourism school of thought developed classic conditioning which is learning by association, scientifically proven by Pavlov (1849-1936) and likewise as Thorndike (1874-1949). Their theories recognized the significance of ‘ positive experience’ and hence can be pertained to mentoring. In that they stress the significance of acting in response with constructive support and commend to prompt mentees’ to progress. Watson’s’ (1876-1958) promoted the stage by stage deductive approach, in which previous learning was replicated in order to strengthen learning and assist succession. Gagne’s (1916-2002) scientific study of ‘ mental events’ signified that learning was

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progressive and that learners were able to build on previously learned skills. By relating these theories to mentoring, they can sustain mentees' as learning through repetitive experiences and by relating actions to endorse perfections, building on learning can enable individuals to accomplish their objectives (Reece, Walker 2006).

Cognitivists deem that learners should to be encouraged to 'reflect for themselves', in the sense that they should actively hunt out knowledge in a more inductive manner, and represent their knowledge and understanding and be able to reflect on what they have learnt. Dewey (1859-1952) identified learning as 'learning to think' using reflection. Bruner (1915) claimed that learners should be educated how to evaluate problems themselves and develop into independent learners. Kolb's (1939) andragogy model, provided a structure to learning, in which it promoted the use of all four learning styles, in the same way as Honey and Mumford (1982). These theories are essential when trying to understand the importance of reflection (Bolton 2005) and double loop learning in the mentoring process (Brockbank 2006).

Humanists perceive learners as 'individuals' empathising the significance of emotional causes, individual growth and meeting individual learner's needs (Wallace 2005). Their focal point is on the andragogical school of learning, being learner centred, promoting individuals to practise their individual interests and increase their personal strengths and skills, as does Maslow (1908-1970). These theories are paramount to presenting a advantageous environment for both the mentor and the mentee, a view which is supported by Roger's (2004).

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All these learning theories outline the foundation of successful mentoring, as well as teaching, using andragogy as a form of learning, as identified by Knowles (1983 cited in Reece, Walker, 2006, p. 95). It is crucial to be able to identify that all mentees are different, and may require different learning approaches if they are to be supported efficiently (Brockbank 2006). Mentors need to be flexible, decisive friends, observing and measuring their proficient progress in order to propose different approaches and actions to assist their development. Elliot and Calderhead imply that 'the mentor is the prevalent control on a student teacher's professional development' (1994 cited in Rice, 2007, p. 2).

Section 3

The distinctions between coaching and mentoring are frequently argued upon, according to Fletcher (2004 cited in Rice, 2007, p. 5) despite the fact that there are some overlaps, many mentors have contradictory outlooks on their positions, literature scrutinises this, so we are unclear of its' actual purpose (Jarvis 2006).

Conway (1997: 54) distinguishes between coaching and mentoring in organisations. He refers to 'coaching as a more directive and focused on job'. On the other hand he expresses 'mentoring as a 'non-directive relationship and more broadly focused. As the mentor takes a longer perspective for the individual and the organization'. In reflection to Conway's (1997) views on coaching and mentoring, he states that coaching is 'directly related to performance issues'. On the other hand coaching is described as 'Improving the performance of somebody who is already competent rather

than establishing competence in the first place' (Torrington, Hall, Taylor 2008 p. 432).

Three phases of mentoring were classified by Furlong and Maynard (1995), these included apprenticeship, competency and reflection, based on Clutterbuck's (1985) theoretical work. This model is frequently made use of by mentors. Tomlinson viewed mentors as 'reflective coaches' and 'effective facilitator' with a counselling role (1995 cited in Rice 2007). Again this model has grounding, even though many mentors view counselling as a separate responsibility for qualified professionals. However Anderson and Shannon (1995 cited in Jarvis 2006, p. 160) defined the mentoring role as 'a carer, nurturing the mentee', this could be viewed as a more pertinent description in my view.

Action Learning is the approach that links the world of learning with the world of action through a reflective process within small cooperative learning groups known as 'action learning sets' (McGill & Beaty 1995). The 'sets' meet regularly to work on individual members' real-life issues with the aim of learning with and from each other. The 'father' of Action Learning, Reg Revans, has said that there can be no learning without action and no (sober and deliberate) action without learning.

Revans argued that learning can be shown by the following equation, where L is learning; P is programmed knowledge (e. g. traditional instruction) and Q is questioning insight.

$$L = P + Q$$

Revans, along with many others who have used, researched and taught about this approach, argued that Action Learning is ideal for finding solutions to problems that do not have a 'right' answer because the necessary questioning insight can be facilitated by people learning with and from each other in action learning 'sets'.

'Action Learning' is an example of a coaching model, consisting of six critical mechanisms which encompass the features of all the five learning theory schools. This model directs the mentee, allowing them to work out challenging problems hastily and develop upon their personal virtues (Marquardt, Waddill 2004). Egan (1990) also used multiple learning schools in his 'Three Stage model' which gave confidence to client problem solving and progression in the course of action.

There are many coaching models that can be personalized (Brockbank 2006), together with the frequently used GROW model (goals, realities, options and will) GROW is utilized to formulate coaching or mentor sessions, through asking open questions, providing the mentee with the point in time to reflect and take control and impede their own progression and understanding (Whitmore 2002). This appears to be extremely creative and an optimistic form of mentoring.

The 'Six Principals of Coaching' (Rogers 2004) is additionally centered on the GROW model and assimilates SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound) goals and actions. In order for this to work the mentee must want to adjust themselves, however this not always the case.

One of the impenetrability's of mentoring educational experts is the assessment and the examining of the outcomes. In order to be able to quantify these proceedings, the DFES (2005) draws onto the SMART objectives as an element of the CPD procedure. High levels of magnitude are on the mentee to decide on objectives with assistance and participation from the management.

The model which seems appropriate for mentoring in Post 16 Education is the ' Apprenticeship model', with its genesis in Aristotle (Jarvis 2007). In this model the learner works in conjunction with the mentor taking responsibility for a minute fraction of the work, gaining self-assurance and experience, with the purpose of reducing the dependency on the mentor as the mentee becomes competent (Jarvis 2007).

Furlong and Maynard suggest,

' In the early stages of learning the mentee needs to work alongside a mentor who can explain the significance of what is happening'. (1995 cited in Jarvis 2007, p. 163).

Constructive written and oral feedback from mentees' has acknowledged this model as being the most successful and useful model throughout the stages of learning (Rhodes 2004).

Section 4

The journal article which I have selected to critique, is by Mullen PHD, M&T. Editor, Carol, A. (2009) entitles ' Editors overview: mentoring models that promote development, socialization and skills-building' I have selected this

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article as I feel it is relevant to me, as after completing my degree, I am hoping to pursue a career in higher education, in the mentoring sector. The article itself is directly aimed at teachers in Higher Education.

The aim of the journal article is to address the issue of 'mentoring models that promote development and socialization, within the higher education context.' The authors explore a wide range of researches which have been carried out in reflection to the aim of the article.

The article has been organised according to the two related themes which it addresses, (1) mentoring models that promote development and socialization and (2) mentoring and tutoring models that build a range of skills, within higher education. In a sense the content of the article addresses what the title aims to illustrate.

In reflection to the 'mentoring models' the authors provide the reader with narrative accounts of various individuals of their experiences. The article refers to the narrative accounts as 'enriching the learning experiences of other doctoral students and instructors'. The use of autoethnographic analysis has been utilised by the author when consigning to various individuals in the article, as a means of 'capturing an honest portrayal of challenge and growth....'

The article acknowledges the reader by stating that, 'the reader will probably feel affinity as they learn about the 'insiders' account of struggle and transformation.....' this could be viewed as a positive thing, as the article is communicating with its audience. Another positive point about the article is that after each section of the discussion, the section is concluded. This

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enables me to understand the content of the sections which have been discussed.

In the article the author refers to mentoring and socialization among the Law faculty' and explains that through research findings it could be concluded that ' law schools and their faculties will need to alter how mentoring occurs within their schools, largely in response to the increasing diversity on faculty ranks. The research focuses on the urgent need for organizational mentoring for females who are ' of colour' in the law faculty. In relation to this suggestion, it could be argued that the article is being biased against males and also the issue on racial discrimination can come into play. The authors do have a very clear focus in this article; however the article itself fails to provide references of the researches which have been included in the article. This making it difficult for the reader, as if they wanted to do an in-depth research on the article it would be very difficult as no references have been provided. Although the article is quite thorough, the author does rely heavily on the findings of the various researches which have been carried out in reflection to the discussion of the article.

I have concluded that I agree with the author's use of the narrative accounts and research findings in order to support their discussion on mentoring models that promote development and socialization, within the higher education context, however, these sources of information may not be enough to support their discussion.

Section 5

It has been argued that although mentoring can be viewed as being very 'helpful', it is also considered as having the 'potential to do harm'. (Cited in Wallace & Gravells, 2005: 58) It is therefore considered as fundamental for the organisation and for both parties to lay down boundaries and concur on ethics before mentoring can begin. Ethics has been considered as a very multifaceted concept which many individuals find difficult to understand. According to Trevino and Nelson, (1999) they have defined ethics as a "moral perspective that asks you to judge your conduct on the principles of what is correct and what is incorrect, what's decent, what's good, what's honest, what's honourable. The reason behind being ethical is very simple as it's seen as the correct thing to do." Ethics is an essential factor in all areas of life, as it is a segment of the foundation on which a civilised society is build upon.

Every mentoring counterpart has its own unique features which may have an effect on relationships in both positive and negative ways. Mentors are often in the position to exert considerable influence over their mentees. (Cited in Wallace & Gravells, 2005: 58) it is due to this that common misinterpretations or misapprehensions can without doubt effect mentoring situations, for this reason being both parties ought to be equipped to set out approved boundaries in order to facilitate the formation of the sessions and to furthermore protect themselves against any sort of abuse or mistreatment, discrimination claims and other ethical issues that might arise (Barnet 2008).

For beginner teachers, being assigned as a mentor can be a discouraging prospect. Assumptions might be made right from the start about generation gaps in knowledge and attitudes as well as possible gender, sexual and personal differences. It is critical to avoid prejudices, being open minded and flexible is fundamental to a successful relationship (Furlong, Maynard 1995). Mentors need to question themselves as to whether they are allowing their own sense of 'self-importance' take priority over a legitimate concern for helping the mentee find their own way'. (Cited in Wallace & Gravells, 2005: 59).

Mentors and mentees' ought to be apparent about what they anticipate to achieve from the relationship in order to verify appropriateness through good rapport and the recognition of ethical practices (Megginson, Clutterbuck 2005). Mentoring is described as a voluntary affiliation, both parties contribute equally to discussions, and work mutually based upon communal respect. There are a range of models which consider the moral dynamics when making a decision on the appropriateness of multiple relationships, Sonne (2005) and Younggren and Gottlieb (2004) situated questions which could be taken into consideration; however they fail to provide the ultimate responses.

Trust is considered as an additional and an essential element which develops at some point during a successful working relationship (Gormley 2008). A method of promoting this is to employ the technique called the 'circles of disclosure' which allocates both parties to identify what can be discussed or addressed during a mentoring session and making key judgments on what can be exposed to the mentee (Megginson, Clutterbuck 2005) hence

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promoting mentee comfort, control and ownership of the mentoring situation. A more formal approach could also be utilised via devising a 'learning and mentoring contract' drawn up by the two parties, which can be successful in some relationships, even though it is not necessary.

In the same way it is imperative to recognize matters surrounding accountability, as advocated by Page & Wosket in their Cyclical Model of Mentoring (1994). The mentor has the 'duty of care' to report some behaviours to the authorities if they are considered to be in controversy with the organisations policies or if there is a concern for the health and well being of the mentee. In the model of Ethical Decision Making, Sonne (2005) delineates some motives as to why mentors should refer undesirable or disturbing behaviours. Sonne (2005) also declares that mentors have the right to cease a working relationship if the mentor feels they are out of their depth as Rogers (2004) adds by stating that mentors are not trained counsellors.

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