Mentoring and coaching

Introduction

" Mentoring is a complex, interactive process, occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal psychosocial development, careerand / or educational development, and socialisation functions into the professional relationship… to the extent that parameters of mutuality and comparability exist in the relationship, the potential outcomes ofrespect, professionalism, collegiality, and role fulfilment will result." (p. 121).

This premise defines the role of the mentor in ITT. It is the timely sharing of experience and expertise in a climate that permits acceptance.

Assessment of student responses to educationalphilosophy, lectures, tutorials and general professional conduct enable the mentor to develop hypotheses relating to teaching potential. Observationallows the mentor to gain first-hand experience of skills and competencies by observing them in practice. Detailed planning is a requirement for effective teaching. However it is intention and cannot tell us about empathy, relationships, voice, delivery, organisation or outcomes. Observation enables greater understanding of the actions and nuances of teaching.

Students find observation a positivelearning experienceif it is underpinned by a developmental approach. In some professions trust is implicit in the role a person plays. For example if we are ill we see adoctorand often unquestioningly allow them to invade our body with drugs or cut us open with the belief that this will make us better. The mentor has to earn that trust and become a credible force for change if they are to be effective.

Klasen with Clutterbuck (2002) argue that mentors should be trained, and matched to mentees in areas such as ' compatibility of needs to experience' or in terms of ' age' and ' gender'. ITT mentors are selected through a default system of position. Matching does not take place. Relationships, swiftly built, are transitory. Yet, key to effectiveness is the development of a relationship based on openness, transparency and trust. Clutterbuck (2004) identifies nine competencies which he considers necessary attributes of a mentor. Carmin (1993) suggests, ' honesty, objectivity, active listening, openness, trust and the ability to be a reflective partner' as essential characteristics of mentorship. The skill set of ateachershould reflect Carmin's criteria. As ITT mentors have been teachers, training is implicit in prior experience. Key to building effective relationships and providingleadership, iscommunication. Kaser et al (2002) cited in Evans (2007) argue that the quality of communication by the leader has a direct impact on the quality of learning of those being led. However to communicate effectively there has to be frequency to build familiarity within that communication. As a lecturer in ITT I meet numerous students during seminars or lectures. It can be difficult to forge close personal relationships with all students at these times.

More intimate meetings occur during observations where we enjoy a shared experience and during feedback sessions. Rodger (2006) states that the most successful mentoring framework,

".... is the one underpinned by a secure personal relationship between mentor and trainee." (p. 37)

Clutterbuck (2004) stresses the need for the mentor to possess a range of communication skills in order to facilitate openness whilst observing, both in terms of the mentees feeling confident enough to express themselves and the mentor being open to what is being observed. I have found this to be the case. Therefore I have striven to be creative with the use oftechnologyto add to relationships. Students respond quickly and openly to modern communication facilities and become more relaxed as a result. Bibby (2009) suggests that the nuances of relationships forged between the mentor and the mentee will inevitably affect mentee learning and development. In my practice the positive relationships built up over a period of time through effective communication improve student development.

Classroom observations can be stressful and as a result alter behaviours. Therefore a valid assessment as a basis for constructive discourse can be adversely affected. Incumbent on the tutor is to put observations into context, thus allaying fears and allowing a professional dialogue to ensue. Empathy of and an understanding for each others' roles, needs to be explicit. In ITT, the roles are given. This serves to eradicate confusion within the mentor/student relationship forming a firm basis for honest dialogue. There has to be a tacit understanding that judgements will be made but used as a means to inform further development not for punitive action. Observations provide a critique from a critical but trusted colleague. If there is a perceived credibility gap advice will lack impact. Credibility is earned through a relationship that acknowledges expertise and operates within acultureof mutual trust and respect. The recipient must feel that their abilities and competence are enhanced as a result of observation.

The conduct of any observation and the climate of the classroom can support or detract from positive outcomes in terms of learning. Therefore, it is important that a shared protocol of behaviours and outcomes operates. I have found it useful to discuss with my students the time, focus and length of the observation. This promotes confidence and transparency in the observation. It is essential to establish that good teaching is measured by its impact on pupil learning. Similarly the observer must discard their pedagogy during the lesson and focus on outcomes. Therefore personal preference does not affect the judgments.

I have considered the importance of developing positive relationships, a climate that facilitates good observations and the importance of jointly agreed patterns of working. This enables judgments to be made within a positive culture. The crucial aspect promoting development is feedback.

Singleton and Linton (2006) refer to this as the ' courageous conversation' involving four essential elements based on honesty and openness. This can only be achieved if the relationship has been built on the same traits. Durgahee (1998) argues that,

" Mentoring can also assist with professional development by facilitating critical reflection on practice." (p. 159)

Freire (1998) is more assertive when he states,

" Critical reflection on practice is a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice." (p. 30)

Students who evaluate their practice are able make sense of what is happening. This is a constructivist approach which has its basis in a Piagetian description of learning. This enables development, whereas an ' instructionist' approach is primarily rooted in the transmission and conveyance of advice and knowledge rather than debate. Carnell, MacDonald and Askew (2006) argue that by adopting a constructivist approach it is possible to co-construct targets for development. This enables ownership, understanding and a belief in the efficacy of the targets. Downey M. (2003) would argue that the observation should bring reality to the situation from which targets evolve. Therefore the relationship between mentor and mentee becomes rooted in development.

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