
Mentors, Not Models: supporting teachers to be empowered in an Irish context

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ABSTRACT This article explores the values and perceptions of Irish mentor teachers who have been involved in mentoring novice teachers. While situating this research within the historical context of the teaching profession in the Republic of Ireland, the article chronicles the establishment of the National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction and reports on a survey of the perceived needs of Irish mentors. The article illustrates that respondents gained personally from the mentoring process and recognised its potential to be a transformative agent within Irish schools, creating a framework for professional dialogue and supporting extended learning communities within staffs. The article concludes by examining the potential implications of these findings for policy and practice in new mentoring programmes.

Introduction

Beginning in the 1990s, the Republic of Ireland (ROI) experienced a period of rapid economic growth, driven largely by free market capitalism, and duly proclaimed itself the 'Celtic Tiger,' analogous to the 'East Asian Tigers' in South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (O'Hearn, 1998; Sweeney, 1999; MacSharry & White, 2000). One of the contributing factors to 'The Tiger's' success, alternatively described as 'The Boom' or 'Ireland's Economic Miracle', was decades of generous government spending in domestic higher education, most notably in the biomedical sciences, engineering and technology, side by side with a policy of restraint in government spending in other sectors, most notably primary teaching and teacher education. The key policy and funding lever for sustaining the knowledge society – the creation of social, cultural and economic capital – only gradually and incrementally insinuated itself into the primary education sector. One of the key indices of growth in recent years in the primary education sector has been the drive to increase teacher supply. This increase reached a record highpoint in 2008 when there were 2000 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in Irish primary schools.

The context for the present study is best described in Hargreaves' (2003) conceptual framework on teaching culturally and emotionally as a 'professional learning community' – where teachers have the opportunity to develop meaningful, enduring professional and community networks. Hargreaves' professional learning communities are rooted in three key themes: 1. the students' learning is of the utmost importance, 2. the institutional structure must be able to learn collectively as an organisation, and 3. attention must be given to emotional and cultural understandings and well-being as well as learning. How, and in what ways, mentors and mentees understand their roles and relationships in a professional learning community and how these understandings build thinking and actions towards social capital is the focus of this article. It is organised in four sections. First, it provides a historical aspect on the teaching profession in the ROI. Next, it overviews the establishment of teacher induction in the ROI, with particular reference to the primary sector. Then, it reports on a national mentoring pilot project focusing on

mentors' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in contemporary induction contexts. The article concludes with implications for policy and practice in new mentoring programmes.

Teaching in Ireland

Teaching has deep, traditional roots in Irish society, and enjoys high social status: 'Traditionally the role of teachers has been respected by the Irish public and this regard is deeply rooted in historical circumstances. Even when teachers did not benefit from a high salary there was still regard for their scholarship, the nature of their work and their roles in communities' (Coolahan, 2003, p. 7).

Teachers retain the confidence of the public and entry to teacher education programmes is extremely competitive from highly qualified candidates. In policy documents the government periodically pays tribute to the work of teachers, affirming their role in the development of a knowledge society. Within this context teacher retention is not a cause for concern, as most teachers remain in the system, indeed in the same schools, for the duration of their professional careers. While the government has increased investment in teachers' continuing professional development, this expenditure predominantly focuses on requirements of curriculum implementation (Gleeson, 2004).

The *OECD Review of National Policies for Education* (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1991) was a watershed in that it heralded a period when the Irish government identified education as a strategic force for social, economic and cultural development of the state (Coolahan, 2003, p. vi) resulting in a raft of educational legislation including the Universities Act (1997), the Education Act (1998), the Education (Welfare) Act (2000), the National Qualifications Authority Act (2001), the Teaching Council Act (2001) and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (2003). In addition the Department of Education and Science in Ireland became involved in a number of EU projects and reports which have also created an impetus for change, most recently *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* (Commission of the European Communities 2007).

The Establishment of Teacher Induction in Ireland

Unlike other countries, such as the United Kingdom, where up to 50% of those who begin teacher education programmes have left teaching within a 5-year period, the impetus to establish an induction programme has not come from the concern for teacher retention, nor indeed from poor pupil performance in international standardised tests, such as PISA. But rather, it has developed in response to the demands of teacher educators and teacher unions that the transition between initial teacher education (ITE) and immersion in the teaching career needs to be bridged and supported, thereby laying the foundation for long-term and sustained professional and personal growth (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, p. 1).

The *OECD Review of National Policies for Education* (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1991, p. 98) suggested 'the best returns from further investment in teacher education will come from a careful planning and construction of a nation-wide induction and in-service system using the concept of the teaching career as its foundation'. The review was critical of Ireland's approach to induction which it deemed 'ad hoc and incomplete' and stressed that induction should form part of a 'coherent pattern of the professional career and regarded as an essential component of a policy for maintaining the quality of schools and of teachers' (p. 101).

Representations were made in the late 1990s by the Standing Committee of Teacher Unions and University Education Departments to the Department of Education and Science in relation to the establishment of a pilot project on induction. Meetings were subsequently held with the In-Career Development Unit of the Department. The Standing Committee itself organised a conference on induction in 1996. During the 1990s many of the colleges involved in ITE provided some support to NQTs, but the provision of induction programmes to Irish teachers 'remained inconsistent, and in many cases non-existent' (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, p. 20).

The National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction (NPPTI) commenced in the autumn of 2002 and is a partnership initiative between the Department of Education and Science, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, the colleges of education, and the schools participating in the project. The

pilot project comprises two strands – primary and post-primary. The central thrust of the project is towards supporting the professional development of NQTs by way of appropriate systematic support in their probationary year and laying the foundations for subsequent professional development and renewal. Key dimensions of the pilot project include a whole-school approach to supporting NQTs, briefings for principal teachers, and a training and professional development programme for mentor teachers who offer support at school level to the NQTs during their first year of teaching. The teachers undertake 3 days of professional training for their role as mentors and have been allocated release time to engage in the school-based mentoring activities with the NQT. In the period 2002 to 2006, Phases 1-5 of the primary pillar, 183 primary schools, 147 mentors and 550 NQTs participated in the project (Fullam, 2008, p. 3). The system is now in Phase 7 and continues to extend the number of mentors and NQTs involved in the project. It is now recognised that it is a responsibility of the system as a whole to respond to the personal, professional and pedagogical needs of NQTs by providing a support system that is flexible but based on partnership (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, p. 107). The principle of partnership within the NPPTI, as exemplified by the presence of all partners on the Steering Committee, has been firmly established and serves to provide highly informed support for the further development of the project across a range of agencies.

Mentoring within the Induction Programme

Induction programmes typically include several support structures; however, it would seem that an over-riding determinant of an effective induction system is that it is based on collegiality and collaboration, on the principle of partnership. 'Mentoring' is the term now widely used within many professions to reflect the potential of a one-to-one professional relationship that can simultaneously empower and enhance practice (Fletcher, 2000, p. 1). It is a complex, interactive and dynamic process, occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise, and which incorporates interpersonal or psycho-social development, career and/or educational development, and socialisation (McIntyre & Hagger, 1996, p. 121). There are a number of varying models of mentoring. Kerry & Shelton Mayes (1995, p. 17) identify three distinct models of mentoring: the apprenticeship model, the competency model, and the reflective practitioner model. In the establishment of the NPPTI, the task force surveyed the international research available on mentoring and the models of induction being implemented in an international context. While much of the relevant literature still tends to provide a technical/manual approach that reduces mentoring to strategies and tips, the project wished to interpret mentoring as a more complex activity where issues compete and tensions exist. Consequently the NPPTI promotes a style of mentoring based on reflective practice and a commitment to action research. Within such a context the role of the mentor should be buttressed by whole-school support and involvement and the induction programme should be considered part of the wider school policy of continuing professional development (Killeavy & Murphy, 2006, pp. 13, 14).

Aims of the Study

Within an Irish context the Killeavy & Murphy report (2006, p. 111) contained a number of recommendations in relation to the training and continuing professional development of mentors. It was therefore timely that an opportunity to participate in the research of the international project Teacher Induction: Supporting the Supporters of Novice Teachers (TISSNTE) was provided to the authors. The TISSNTE project has been guided throughout by the research question: How can we support the teachers who support novice teachers? The desire to shift the emphasis from the NQTs to the teachers who mentor, their needs, beliefs and concerns, is particularly important within the Irish experience, where partners in the project are at the design stage of mentor professional development programmes. Using the needs analysis instrument generated by the TISSNTE group, and while subscribing to the larger aims of the project, the localised objectives of the questionnaire were to:

- develop an understanding of Irish mentors' perceptions of their role of the mentor;

- identify the aspects of a mentor professional development programme that were most valued by Irish mentors;
- investigate areas of specific concern to Irish mentors.

Methodology

Permission was sought from the NPPTI steering group (primary pillar) to undertake this research. The background information relating to TISSNTE, covering letter and information leaflet for participants, and a copy of the questionnaire were all submitted for approval. Following this process the questionnaire was piloted by six Irish mentors. In light of their comments some amendments were made to the explanatory materials accompanying the questionnaire. Subsequently, the questionnaire was posted to 100 randomly selected mentors within the NPPTI (primary pillar). All mentors were informed that participation was on a voluntary basis and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. The response rate was 42%.

The questionnaire included closed questions, and a number of questions based on Likert scales, which asked participants to rate aspects of their role from 'very important' to 'not important'. Most interestingly from an Irish perspective, there were open-ended questions where qualitative responses were sought. Participants commented generously to these prompts and their qualitative responses have enriched the findings.

Findings of the Study

The returned questionnaires provide a profile of the participants within the project. Over 90% of respondents were female. More than three quarters of the respondents had more than 10 years' teaching experience, while three fifths had in excess of 20 years' experience. Again, almost 70% of the respondents held a position of responsibility within their schools, in that they were principals, deputy principals, or held special duties posts.

The majority of those who responded had between 1 and 5 years' mentoring experience, while 86% of the respondents had participated in a professional development programme in mentoring within the last year. The formality, duration and intensity of the programmes ranged from 4 hours for one respondent to an average of 5 days for the majority of respondents. Of those who responded to the question in relation to accreditation of these programmes, some 73% of mentors indicated that the professional programme was not accredited while a further 21% were unsure if the programme was accredited.

Mentors' Perceptions of their Role and Responsibilities

When asked about their perceptions of their role and responsibilities there was a high level of agreement among participants as to the aspects of their roles they most valued. All 42 respondents identified *providing professional support and guidance* as being very important; equally, 100% of respondents also considered *facilitating learning opportunities for novice teachers* which involved helping them gain access to training/collaborative activities with colleagues as being important or very important; while the full cohort also rated *acting as a 'critical friend'*, providing novice teachers with constructive feedback and promoting self-awareness, as being important or very important. All but one respondent rated *providing pastoral care*, which included recognising novice teachers' individual needs and responding to them appropriately, as being important or very important; while 95% of respondents asserted that *acting as a role model*, which involved 'promoting professional values and good practice', was either important or very important. While 95% of the mentors rated *monitoring the novice teachers' progress*, thereby identifying areas of achievement/further development, as important or very important, fewer than half of the respondents felt that *evaluating and assessing the novice teachers' professional competence* was of importance.

This series of options on the Likert scale was followed by an open-ended question which asked, 'Are there any other activities which you consider important or very important?' Given the opportunity to identify issues from their own experience which they perceived to be important,

respondents identified a number of areas – one of the dominant aspects was provision of adequate time to meet with the novice teachers. Where many respondents valued 'listening to the NQT', others saw meetings as important to 'support the NQT', 'helping her to find answers to her questions', 'being available formally and informally to the novice teacher', and 'providing moral support'.

Another dominant theme in these responses was the importance of whole-school involvement in the mentoring process. Some respondents perceived that they had a role in 'the whole-school programme of mentoring'; 'working with a team of colleagues to scaffold the novice teacher's learning in school'; 'coordinating induction plans in school'; 'encouraging the wider staff in mentoring'; 'organising collaborative planning events' and 'providing a forum for mentors to meet with each other, to share experiences'. Mentors were aware of the importance of a whole-school approach not just for the novice teacher, but also to support them in their role: 'I find staff meetings really useful ... any issues that get a professional airing among a group of interested teachers really support my role'. Respondents also felt that their role was to support the NQT in developing relationships with other members of staff, the principal, the inspectorate and perhaps parents; respondents identified 'integrating the novice teacher into the school'; 'acting as an intermediary between NQT/principal/inspector'; 'helping the novice teacher to prepare for the probationary process' as being important.

The importance of professional development for both the mentor and novice teacher was a further theme explored by the respondents who stated: 'professional development days are really important'; 'I know I need further support in assessing and analysing my own teaching'; 'I have begun to assess my own standards'. Some mentors perceived their role as 'developing [novice] teacher self-identity and confidence'; 'enhance self-esteem' and 'facilitating discussion among NQTs'.

Mentors' Confidence Levels

When asked to evaluate their own confidence levels in relation to the activities associated with the mentoring function, Irish mentors were positive in their responses. All respondents were confident in their ability to *provide professional support and guidance*, 98% were confident in their ability to *act as a role model*, 93% reported feeling confident in *providing pastoral care*, 91% stated they felt confident in *facilitating learning opportunities for novice teachers* and *monitoring the novice teachers' progress*, while 86% of respondents felt confident *acting as a 'critical friend'*. The only area where respondents did not report confidence was in *evaluating and assessing the novice teachers' professional competence*. More than 60% of the respondents declined to respond to this part of the question and, of those who did respond, only two mentors expressed confidence in this area. This result is not unexpected as within the Irish context mentors are not expected to evaluate novice teachers; the competence of novice teachers is assessed within the probationary period by the inspectorate.

When asked to identify other areas where they felt confident, respondents highlighted their ability to establish and maintain positive professional relationships within schools:

I think I have very good skills to empathise [with] and support teachers who are facing challenges in their classroom.

I have an ability to listen to what the teacher wants without judging him/her.

I know when to 'back-off' with help, providing unbiased support even where it is difficult.

I am good at involving other members of staff.

I can act as a liaison with the inspector, principal.

I feel confident promoting awareness of the induction process among my peers.

Participants, most of whom were mature teachers with extended teaching experience, readily expressed high levels of confidence in each of the core areas and skills identified. Other areas where they expressed confidence included classroom management and organisational skills such as

helping the novice teacher to understand the school's policies and to prepare for teacher-parent meetings.

Challenges in the Role

Mentors identified time constraints as the greatest challenge within their roles. Irish mentors are given the opportunity within school hours to meet with their novice teachers and to observe them teach. Finance to provide substitute cover for mentor absences has been provided. However, substitutes are not always available. In such circumstances mentors generally undertake to mentor the novice teachers outside their normal working day. Even when substitute teachers are available mentors repeatedly stated along the lines of, 'the main challenge has been leaving my own class – the guilt associated with this is huge'. A further complication within the Irish system is the fact that almost half of all primary schools are small, with fewer than four teachers. To support novice teachers in these schools, the project has piloted a cluster arrangement where the mentor supports novice teachers in a number of local schools. In this situation, in addition to the time being invested in the process and the guilt of leaving one's classroom, the concept of leaving one's own school to mentor a novice teacher in another school posed a difficulty for some mentors. As identified in the earlier section, almost 70% of respondents already have other duties and responsibilities in their home school; for them the lack of time is intensified: 'As a teaching principal I am aware that I am not always available during school hours – sometime the mentee needs immediate support and it is difficult to provide that'.

The other greatest challenge identified by mentors was in the area of interpersonal relations: 'the mentor does not want to overpower the new teacher, yet the new teacher needs to know you are available to him/her. Striking the balance is a challenge in the first few weeks especially'; 'often it is hard to draw the line between professionalism and friendliness', while other participants referred to the challenge of being a critical friend: 'it can be difficult to gain the trust of the teacher and become "critical" of their work'. In one or two instances respondents felt that the novice teachers were not aware of the project and were resistant to being involved. Breaking down that resistance and carving out a role separate to that of the inspector and the principal was a challenge for these mentors.

Aspects that Should Be Included in Mentor Professional Development Programmes

Despite high levels of confidence in each of the areas outlined, respondents to the questionnaire were eager to further develop their skills in the *observation of novice teacher's classroom practice* (57% stated this was a high priority) and *giving constructive feedback* (55% of respondents felt this was a high priority), and half of the respondents identified *critical analysis of practice*, which included critical dialogue and discussion of the novice teacher's and their own teaching practices, as a high priority. Respondents were less interested in furthering their interpersonal, communication or organisational skills.

In the open-ended question which invited respondents to prioritise the content to be included in mentor development programmes, the responses were varied. One of the themes emerging was the importance of creating a network of mentors who could support each other and provide opportunities for reflection. Respondents stated:

mentoring can be an isolating role, viewed with suspicion by the staff. Having a network of like-minded individuals would be a great support.

giving us opportunities to reflect on the nature of our own teaching and how teaching has changed.

opportunity to meet face-to-face with other mentors.

sharing and discussing problems.

foster our willingness to constantly change and adapt.

provide a broad understanding of teaching and learning and of new developments in education.

One respondent stated, 'we need an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue with other mentors' while another requested 'input on all new methodologies and philosophies of education so that we are up-to-date'.

A second emerging theme in the data volunteered by participants revolved around mentors' ability to critically analyse and discuss pedagogy and critical events in the classroom: 'I know what to do myself in the classroom but it is sometimes difficult to verbalise the action and to give the rationale behind my actions to the novice teacher'; 'sometimes we need to put into words rather than demonstrate what makes a good teacher'. Other respondents identified the importance of 'using professional and appropriate language and terms with novice teachers'; '[giving] fair and focused feedback to the novice teacher'. While verbal skills were emphasised, mentors also identified support for 'written feedback' as an area that should be included in mentor professional development programmes: 'keeping written accounts is also important'.

Many of the responses referred to the importance of including in the professional development programme opportunities for 'building mentor confidence', and for discussion of the 'needs of the NQT'. Some respondents stated: 'I'd like advice on background reading'; 'up-to-date research from an Irish context'; while some prioritised 'understanding the role of the mentor better', whereas others wanted a programme that would help in 'understanding the stages of teacher development'. Respondents were aware of the responsibility attached to being a mentor and while requests for 'time management support' were frequent, one respondent requested 'stress management' strategies.

Format and Content of Programmes

Three-quarters of the respondents stated they preferred face-to-face professional development programmes while fewer than a quarter preferred blended programmes. Only 2% stated a preference for an e-learning approach. When asked what kinds of materials they would like included, responses identified practical tools for beginning mentors such as sample timetables and planning templates. Others referred to contact details for other mentors for ease of networking, details on mentoring in other countries – what works for others. Case studies of critical incidences and reference to relevant books and articles were also included.

Are Good Teachers Always Good Mentors?

When asked about the relationship between being a good teacher and a good mentor, 14% of respondents agreed that a 'good teacher' always makes a 'good mentor', while 81% disagreed with the statement. A further 5% declined to answer this question.

Of those who rejected the statement, many felt that the communication skills demonstrated by good teachers might not adequately transfer when the teacher is working with peers; for example mentors wrote:

A 'good teacher' may have a great relationship with pupils but not be 'good' at dealing with adults and peers/colleagues.

A 'good teacher' might not always make a good mentor as I think they might not be able to empathise with an NQT who is struggling in their teaching and they would not always have good interpersonal skills.

A good teacher may not have the interpersonal skills – empathy, openness, availability, interest, willingness to give time.

Equally important was the ability of the teacher to be open to other ways of teaching:

A 'good teacher' may be critical/unsympathetic to a learner-teacher, may be rigid/closed to styles of teaching other than his/her own may add to the pressure on an NQT rather than offer support/help.

May be too critical of NQT rather than helpful.

In addition to the communication and interpersonal skills required, some respondents commented, 'Some teachers/mentors may find it difficult to get involved in critical analysis/give feedback'. Being a good communicator was not sufficient; being able to reflect critically was identified as an important component of the mentoring role.

The perception that the 'good teacher' was someone who had reached the pinnacle of his/her profession was evident in some responses. One mentor, who clearly did not view herself as having achieved the status of being a 'good teacher', stated: 'A "good teacher" has arrived at the point where the rest of us strive to get to – we're always learning and need to be flexible – I've learnt a lot from the mentees – new ideas etc.'

In contrast another respondent realised that the 'good teacher' was still a 'learner' and, for this respondent, good teaching did not imply perfection:

'Good Teacher' is aware he/she is not perfect – do your best: be able to encourage NQTs that everything doesn't have to be perfect all the time – encouragement is the key!

Other respondents who felt that good teachers were not always good mentors also expressed the view that a 'bad teacher' would not be a good mentor either:

A 'good teacher' can intimidate novice teacher, can be territorial about practice/materials etc. – Too busy being a good teacher! However, I do think strongly that 'bad' teachers will never be good mentors.

Some excellent teachers prefer to stay in their own classrooms and just get on with their own jobs. So while good teachers don't necessarily make good mentors, a good mentor must be a good teacher!

The credibility of the mentor among his/her peers and with novice teachers was highlighted by one respondent:

You have a potential good mentor in a good teacher certainly; a poor teacher would be a disaster and would lack credibility. One can learn a lot from observing a poor teacher, but mentoring is for the competent.

Respondents clearly interpreted the term 'a good teacher' in a variety of ways, which indicated their struggle with the concept. For example one respondent who rejected the statement that a 'good teacher is always a good mentor' added the following comments:

'Good teacher' – is up to date on educational developments and best practice in the profession, is involved and interested in all aspects of education and continues to learn from pupils and colleagues. A 'good teacher' passes on what he/she has learned while continuing to develop himself/herself.

Another respondent clearly had conflicting interpretations of the 'good teacher':

It very much depends on the definition of a 'good teacher'. If one defines a good teacher as one who can develop a good relationship with people, who has good communication skills and can provide feedback in a constructive way then a good teacher would make a good mentor. But 'good teachers' can often be controlling perfectionists and very demanding, and may want NQT to be models of themselves rather than helping them to reach their own potential.

This quote which inspired the title of the article clearly indicates the role of the mentor is to enable, empower and facilitate the novice teacher, rather than be a model to be imitated. The openness of the mentor to appreciate the otherness of the novice teacher was also emphasised: 'A "good teacher" must be open to the NQT's style, otherwise expectations may be arguable'. Another respondent stated, 'For me a good teacher is someone who is prepared to offer his/her advice and experience to newly qualified teachers, and is also ready to listen'.

The reciprocal nature of learning is emphasised by these teachers who recognise that mentoring has mutual benefits:

The role of mentor is to assist and guide the NQT, not to impose one's own views, teaching styles or experiences. Both parties must work hand in hand and be open to suggestions, new ideas etc. It is not just the NQT who is learning!

The mentor, however, also needs to have a deep understanding of the nature of the role and be confident in his/her own practice to allow for the independent growth and development of the novice teacher:

Good mentoring is based on relationships between mentor and NQT. Mentor needs to believe in the philosophy of mentoring, the importance of the process for both individuals, the role being a supportive one allowing teacher to be empowered.

A good mentor needs to be well-rounded person with good communication skills, confident, experienced but not domineering or too set in their personal opinions etc. Above all mentoring should be based on friendship.

The importance of mentors engaging in professional development and being current in their philosophies, understanding of curriculum and pedagogical approaches was iterated:

A good teacher may not have kept up to date with changing curriculum and might be struggling to come to terms with it him/herself, new methodologies might be embraced and not all teachers are interested in attending courses and professional development days. A mentor needs to be in touch with present-day teaching and computer work to be in a position to help and support NQT.

Many of the respondents concentrated on the personal qualities and skills of the 'good mentor':

A good mentor needs to be calm, empathic, realistic and very well organised. There are many very good teachers who do not necessarily 'tick' all of the boxes.

Mentor needs to be approachable and trustworthy ... have an interest in nurturing young teachers. You have to be generous.

Very necessary to have good listening skills, facilitate personal, professional development. Have the ability to empathise.

To model good practice and give ideas on organisational teaching skills is what NQTs want. Also an ear to listen when they want to thrash a problem out.

The mentor needs to be flexible, discreet, and up-to-date on curriculum... She also needs to be able to hold professional discussions on a wide number of topics e.g. reading/new thinking on round robin reading etc. Interpersonal skills need to be excellent.

The responses to this question provided rich data for this study, illuminating the core values held by mentors within an Irish context.

Outcomes

The section in the questionnaire which was designed to elicit mentors' perceptions of their role and responsibilities focused almost exclusively on the service provided by the mentor to the novice teacher. While the positive nature of the responses was not unexpected, the levels of intensity with which the mentors agreed with all, except one, of the roles identified were impressive. The open-ended questions which followed this section allowed the mentors to reveal other aspects of the role which they valued; these responses were both insightful and perceptive. Mentors identified the importance of being available to listen to novice teachers, but also of making the process of mentoring one that is shared by the whole staff. The findings of this research complement those of Odell & Huling (2000, p. 20) who state that mentors should:

- be committed to studying and developing their own practice;
- be able to model the standards-based teaching the programme was attempting to foster;
- be able to work with adults from diverse backgrounds;
- be sensitive to the view points of others;

- be informed about mentor responsibility including a substantial time commitment;
- be committed to ethical practice;
- be committed to providing both professional and emotional support and challenge;
- have completed the previously agreed-upon required number of years of teaching.

While Irish mentors valued the nurturing aspects of their role, it was evident that they were open to the opportunities within mentoring that exceeded the benefits of technical and affective short-term support for NQTs (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006, p. 9). They understood their role to encompass the socialisation of the teacher within a staff, but also viewed staff involvement in the mentoring process as important. On one level this involvement reduced their potential isolation as mentors, while on another level it created an environment where the whole staff could embrace its collective responsibility for the support of the novice teacher and contribute to wider reflective conversations.

From the outset respondents to this questionnaire indicated that their involvement in mentoring was not just about providing a service to novice teachers but that it required them to participate in a process of self-evaluation and reflection. This theme was developed at a later stage when addressing the components of an effective professional development programme for mentors. Irish respondents prioritised the establishment of a mentors' network, where mentors' learning would be supported and scaffolded by perhaps the organisers of the project, but also by their peers. Repeatedly throughout the qualitative responses to open-ended questions, Irish respondents returned to the underlying concept that participation in this project was a positive learning experience for them and that, while generosity of time was essential when working with the novice teacher, a generosity of spirit and openness to learning with and from the novice teacher were also important. While mentors recognised that there were specific skills they would like to develop further, their desired learning outcomes exceeded the practical and functional aspects of their roles. Mentors identified the importance of enhancing their ability to reflect critically on their own practice, to acquiring the language of reflection, and to engage in the literature surrounding curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher development. It is clear that Irish mentors were 'looking through new lenses and reconsidering their own practices and assumptions' (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004, cited in Achinstein & Athanases, 2006, p. 9). Within such a context mentoring has the potential to move from traditional knowledge *transmission* to knowledge *transformation*, where mentors work with new teachers to challenge current arrangements in classrooms and schools and to foster reform (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995).

Evidence from this study suggests that, from the perspective of the mentors, the 'educative mentoring' as proposed by the NPPTI has the potential to be a transformative agent within Irish schools; it has the capacity to create a framework for professional dialogue in schools, to support extended learning communities within staffs, and to transform classroom practice and school cultures. This survey illustrates that we can be ambitious in our goals for mentoring and realistically view mentoring as an avenue for on-going growth and development which can enrich individuals, the school and the system.

Conclusion

In the study reported in this article, the mentors indicated that social capital could potentially be generated through goal-driven and patterned associations between mentors and mentees. The goals and patterns evidenced were primarily 'relational' in terms of mutually agreed agendas, interpersonal openness, and confidence and trust variables (Fukuyama, 1995), as opposed to 'positional' in terms of linear, hierarchical and status-driven variables. These relational dynamics are indicative of the enduring 'closeness/distance' couplet in the discourse on the 'cultures in teaching' which dates as far back as Waller's (1932) 'classic' writings on closeness/distance in the 1930s, through Lortie's (1975) sociological writings on teaching in the 1970s and forward to Hargreaves' (2003) more recent postmodern writings on the 'emotional geographies of teaching' in the early twenty-first century. The mentors indicated a desire to move away from the shortcomings of 'distance' in novice/master roles and relationships towards 'closeness' in mutually agreed learning opportunities and collective actions but they noted that only tentative steps towards this desired move had been realised to date.

The mentors indicated the significance of open and democratic conversation-building between mentors and mentees across time, contexts, and attitudes and how these social and educational processes could potentially improve the quality of mentoring. In contrast to a model orientation with its closed and insulated dynamics, the new mentoring roles and relationships in the present study encouraged mentors and mentees to challenge and confront each other in the context of a professional learning community. These alternative roles and relationships were essentially anthropological in that they encouraged mentors and mentees to question why routines, rituals, values and activities were the way they were and not different for themselves, for each other and for the broader professional learning community.

Arising from the particular mentoring roles and relationships in the present study, mentors in consultation with mentees formed new kinds of roles and relationships committed to changing how agency in professional learning communities is mediated in the induction phase of the teacher career continuum. Specifically, these roles and relationships shed fresh and revealing light on whom and in what ways mentors and mentees could potentially mediate professional learning in the induction phase of the teacher career continuum, and how professional learning is structured in policies and practices in schools and classrooms. Inherent in the present study is the latent significance of open and democratic mentoring roles and relationships in professional learning communities for those inside and beyond classrooms and schools with responsibility for primary teaching induction policy, planning, and implementation at local and national levels.

Note

Statistical data were sourced from <http://www.cso.ie>

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