

Debra Johnson, djohnson@ndevon.ac.uk, Lecturer
and tutor, teacher education 27 March 2008



**Small Scale Development Project at North Devon College
CETT Objective 1 Broadening Support in the Workplace
October 2007 – March 2008**

Project Aims

To improve support in the workplace for trainee teachers on part-time teaching placements

To investigate better systems for inducting, training and supporting mentors in a way that contributes to their continuing professional development

To integrate mentor support with other aspects of initial teacher training

Synopsis

This project aimed to broaden workplace support for trainee teachers in part-time teaching placements at North Devon College and to investigate ways in which a sustainable model might be established. It explains existing good practice for full and part time teachers employed at the college and explores the varied experiences of other teachers in training for whom entitlement to workplace support is less explicit. A particular feature of this project was the appointment of newly qualified teachers as mentors for student teachers who would otherwise have been mentorless and this proved to be successful from student, mentor and tutor perspectives. Cert Ed/PGCE tutors have worked more closely with mentors and carried out paired observations. Student and mentor perceptions have been sought through questionnaire and focus group meetings. These reveal a high level of satisfaction on both sides as well as recommendations for further developments.

Method/Project as undertaken

The project appointed 2 newly qualified teachers to act as mentors for those students who would not otherwise have had mentors.

The mentor's role was defined. Copies of the Cert Ed/PGCE course handbooks, Professional Development Plan templates (PDP), observation report forms and guidance notes were circulated to all mentors and placed on-line. Teacher education tutors met with all mentors individually to discuss and clarify concerns and expectations. Dual or paired observations of students' teaching practice, with tutor and mentor, were planned and carried out.

The process was reviewed through key documents such as the PDP and written observation reports. All students completed a questionnaire at the end of each term and participated in focus group meetings which sought to gather their views on the effectiveness of workplace and taught elements of teacher training and how the two were complementary. Suggestions for improvement were invited. Feedback from mentors informed the final report.

Findings

At North Devon College the policy for support for newly appointed teachers includes the appointment of a mentor from the Advanced Practitioner team (AP) to each full-time teacher and each part-time teacher on contract.

APs are selected on the basis of consistently high grades for their teaching practice, high retention and achievement results. An allocation of time, is allowed for the role, 20 hours per year for each full time and 6 for each part time teacher. The job description and schedule of work are clear. APs are trained through regular meetings and through dual observations of one another's teaching practice. Feedback on the observations leads to informed dialogue regarding the nature of best practice for learning and teaching. The process also acts to standardise results and feedback. APs meet regularly and are supervised by a member of the senior management team, the Quality Assurance manager. Their feedback on mentees' teaching practice is graded and informs the mentee's appraisal. However, a significant number of teachers in training do not qualify for a mentor under this policy.

In October 2007, 25 student teachers enrolled on the new Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector. Four of these were full time teachers and were allocated mentors from the AP team (2 were subject specialists, 2 were not). Twelve students worked for NDC; 7 part time teachers and 5 full time members of non teaching staff who were being supported by the College to develop their roles. Three graduates had negotiated teaching placements at the College. The table below shows the situation at the start of the project.

Students enrolled on ITT at North Devon College - Oct 2007	No of students	AP mentor	Volunteer mentor	Mentor from outside organisation	No mentor
1 Full-time teacher at NDC	4	4			
2 Part- time at NDC inc outreach centres	7		7		
3 Full time staff at NDC but not on teacher contract	5		5		
5 External candidate on placement at NDC	3		3		
6 Working for and outside organisation	6			4	2
Total	25	4	15	4	2

Mentors were identified for all first year teachers in training. All were qualified teachers with subject specific expertise, they worked in close proximity to the student teacher and were willing to support a new colleague. The mentors' job role was defined and agreed (appendix 1). No dedicated time was allocated to the role. There was no consistency to the selection process. In some cases students selected the person they thought would help them most, in others line managers made the appointment. Of the six students working for outside organisations, 4 were able to identify mentors from their workplace, but 2 could not, they were the only practising teachers in their workplaces therefore had no mentors at all. 9 mentors had achieved a teaching qualification in the previous 3 years.

As part of the CETT project, 2 mentors were given paid time to mentor and to participate in training. This provided mentors for the 2 student teachers who were employed by outside organisations, not NDC, so would not otherwise have had mentors.

A third student was supported in this way too, an established member of staff, a workplace assessor, therefore outside the existing NDC framework for mentor support for new teachers. These mentors had recently qualified as teachers in the lifelong learning sector so their training was up-to-date, though they were familiar with the old programme not the new. They were both experts in their field and had an enabling approach to colleagues.

Initially, mentor training was provided on a one to one basis, teacher education tutors met with all mentors to discuss the mentor's role, explain the requirements of the new teacher training programmes and to check the mentor's understanding of the process. Key documents were placed on the College's VLE.

Paired observations (with tutor and mentor) of the mentees' teaching practice began in November. These provided training in the observation requirements for the new Diploma. They also enabled Cert Ed/PGCE tutors to learn about more about the specialist subject tradition and ethos. They facilitated the sharing of good practice through discussion about the observed lesson, strengths and areas for development and how feedback can be given effectively.

These discussions also informed this project. Quite frequently mentors queried the purpose of the observation, was it a summative assessment or formative? Some mentors drew on their recent experience of being observed, usually as part of their appraisal and saw the exercise as one of reporting. Newly qualified mentors were more likely to focus on sharing expertise, and framing questions to foster reflection and self evaluation.

In February, all mentors were invited to a meeting about new on-line mentor observation training available through the CETT website.

Student teachers perceptions

At the end of each of the two terms that made up the duration of the project, tutors invited feedback from students about their experience of workplace support, via questionnaire (appendix 3) and focus group meetings

By December, only 9% had not yet met with their mentor. 52% of trainees had met with their mentor on 1-3 occasions and 40% had met more than this.

Most thought that they were getting enough help from both tutors and mentors on lesson plans, schemes of work, learning resources and classroom management but, there was some concern over assessment processes, marking and moderation.

Where the mentor was part of the same team and shared the same workroom, the arrangements worked best. Students wanted to be able to access mentor guidance easily and regularly as well as when problems arose. Getting feedback on classroom practice and being able to observe the mentor teaching, were most valued by students. In cases where students had chosen their mentor, satisfaction with the arrangement was high. There was general agreement that mentor support is most important in the first term and more time should be available in these early stages.

Students' concerns surrounded inconsistency in the selection, training and support that mentors had; some students felt that the mentor was uncertain of their role, others were concerned that the mentor was too busy. Students preferred a mentor whom they regarded as being on a similar level in the organisation. Mentors with recent experience in teacher training helped the student teacher to reflect on how workplace experience linked to the taught elements of the course. In some cases, where a Section Manager acted as mentor, students felt uneasy about revealing weakness or admitting problems.

In February, students gave feedback on their experience to date at a focus meeting. The notion of working with a mentor who had recently graduated was generally regarded as helpful. These mentors were good at anticipating the problems ahead and giving a timely warning. They were regarded as supportive and understanding, not judgemental, so that mentees felt able to discuss their concerns without problems perceived as weaknesses. Most students expressed the view that they would like to take on a mentor role themselves in the future.

An unexpected outcome from this meeting was a list of suggestions for the improvement of induction of new teachers. These included the need for more guidance on what will be expected from them during the year. Duties such as carrying out student reviews, attendance at Open Evenings, assessment deadlines, moderation dates frequently came at short notice and while students were keen to be fully involved in these processes they felt they would have managed them more effectively if informed well in advance.

Mentors perceptions

Individual meetings with 4 newly qualified, volunteer mentors took place during the second term. They were asked to reflect on how the mentoring experience had, if at all, contributed to their own professional development, and what had been of most support to the mentee.

These mentors expressed high levels of satisfaction about their appointment to the role, their training and their ability to give practical advice and guidance to a new colleague. In 3 cases, mentors saw it as a step towards other planned career development. One thought it supported their application to train as a Subject Learning Coach. Others saw it as progression from newly qualified teacher to experienced practitioner. For all it was a welcome addition to their CPD record and gave opportunities to reflect on how they had progressed since completing initial teacher training.

Induction into the traditions and expectations of the subject and institution, sharing learning resources, and providing accessible guidance on day to day problems were regarded as most important. All 4 mentors were clear about how to give feedback to support development and identified that posing questions to facilitate reflection, was key in this process. They were less confident about standards and details such as timing on lesson plans, minimum core expectations and writing up observation reports.

Problems were identified regarding having enough time to attend training and to carry out and write up the observation, but these mentors were prepared to prioritise the work because they felt it helped them to develop their job role and career in teaching.

Conclusions

The project has been successful in improving support in the workplace for trainee teachers on part-time teaching placements. Better systems for inducting, training and supporting mentors in ways that contribute to their continuing professional development, have been introduced and this goes some way towards integrating workplace support with other elements of initial teacher training. The policy document and training materials from the Faculty of Education at University of Plymouth make processes explicit and will support continuing improvement.

Newly qualified teachers make good mentors and take satisfaction from the role because it contributes to their professional development. It gives status and enhances their career plans. Guiding and giving feedback fosters reflection on their own learning during their time as a student and how they have developed since graduation. Students value their advice because it is appropriate to their level of experience.

Questions remain about the criteria for selection of mentors, and who should choose them. There are differences in opinion about the nature and purpose of the subject specialist observation in the new Diploma. Is it formative and developmental or, are mentors being asked to make pass/fail judgements? When should it take place? Should it be attached to the particular module or is it more generic?

There is concern about students' entitlement to mentor support. Although there is much good practice there is still inconsistency particularly for part time teachers and those on placement. How much time should be allocated and how can this be sustained?

From a Cert Ed/PGCE tutor perspective, support to weave together the taught and workplace elements of initial teacher training was timely and welcome. Working with mentors through training and in particular the paired observations, helped to build meaningful working relationships. Discussion about observations of teaching practice reports illuminated the context in which the student teacher was working and the ethos of the subject specialism. Negotiation about action points and feedback, particularly how to give effective feedback, was helpful. Working together to frame questions for the feedback session was regarded as a particularly positive outcome. However, time to spend on mentor training was difficult to find.

A number of mentors sought regular contact and guidance which the tutor team were keen to give, but this was sometimes difficult due to the pressure of the existing workload.

The timing of these paired observations was tricky; as a key part of mentor training they should happen as early as possible, but only a few student teachers welcomed it in the first term. This is understandable because it can seem intimidating to be observed by both tutor and mentor together very early in a new job. Students felt a particular need for additional advice and guidance in the first term of teaching.

Developments at North Devon College

It is pleasing to report that from now until June 2008 additional funds have been deployed so that all mentors at North Devon College have dedicated time for the role. Two ILT mentors have been appointed, students following a Foundation Degree in IT who will be available to support teachers in training to extend the use of new learning technology. These additional support strategies are timely and will have an impact on workplace support for teachers in training this year. However, this is short term funding only and the question remains about how support, coordination and collaboration between tutors and mentors, can be sustained. The role takes time from mentor and tutor, how this can be effectively be built into hectic work schedules remains a question.

Recommendations

Continue to support the paired observations, with tutor and mentor. They enhance mentors' training and the integration of workplace learning with other aspects of ITT

Continue to build and develop the framework and methods for mentor training. Add more about the Minimum Core within the subject specialism.

Clarify the details about process and purpose of subject specialist observation; developmental or summative?

Recognise that newly qualified teachers make good mentors and that the role contributes to their continuing professional development.

Plan to address issues of equity for part-time teachers and those working in education but not employed in the full teaching role

Plan for a sustainable future that will allow tutors and mentors release from teaching to give subject specialist

The literature

North Devon College policy documents regarding support and induction for new teachers gave an initial model of good practice. Their commissioned report on mentoring for students (Done 2007) explained the characteristics of effective mentoring for learners. Recent studies about workplace support for initial teacher training, from City of Bristol and Liverpool Community colleges provided useful background material (Dfes 2006). Atkinson and Lazarus (2000) provided a starting point for discussion of how mentoring supports beginner teachers and the value of placing newly qualified teachers in the mentor role, the Journal of Mentoring and Tutoring gave more discussion on this theme

References

Atkinson T & Claxton G (2000) The Intuitive Practitioner
Open University Press, Maidenhead

Done P (2007) Barriers to Learning
unpublished report North Devon College

Dfes (2005) [Ittpilotresources.org.uk/mentoring](http://resources.org.uk/mentoring)

Gilles C & Wilson J (2004) Receiving as well as Giving; mentors' perceptions of their professional development in one teacher induction programme In Journal of Mentoring and Tutoring vol 12 no 1 Carfax Publishing

Preedy M (2001) Curriculum Evaluation: measuring what we value.
In Managing the Curriculum Sage Publications London

Wallace S & Gravells J (2005) Mentoring in Further Education
Learning Matters Exeter