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Educative mentoring: a way forward

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Abstract

Purpose – In recent years mentoring has been promoted as an essential, yet complex, new teacher induction dynamic. Mentors generally develop their knowledge of this role in isolation and in situ, and despite extensive research in the field few studies investigate how mentors learn. Therefore it is important to continue to examine the complex aspects of learning to mentor. The purpose of this paper is to focus on understanding the knowledge, attitudes and skills required by mentors to simultaneously focus on their own learning, new teachers' learning and student learning.

Design/methodology/approach – In this New Zealand study the authors examined a pilot programme aimed at shifting mentoring practices to an educative model. Through a two-year professional development intervention, 22 participant mentors inquired into, analysed and documented their practice. Data were gathered through learning conversations, action research documentation and reflections. They were analysed using qualitative methodology.

Findings – Evident was a shift in mentoring practice from a focus on the transmission of knowledge-*for*-practice to inquiry into knowledge-*of*-practice. Change was observed after sustained and serious engagement with evidence about mentoring practices. However the shifts did not come easy, nor were they assured.

Research limitations/implications – This study is not without limitations. Transferability is potentially problematic. The pilot study was well resourced, therefore expecting the implementation and outcomes to transfer to other contexts without similar resourcing maybe unrealistic.

Practical implications – The findings contributed to the development of a mentoring curriculum and national guidelines for mentoring new teachers.

Originality/value – While the findings emerged from a situated context, the theoretical and practice issues reported are matters for international attention, particularly the matter of transitioning from a well-practiced, efficient teacher mentor to an adaptive educative mentor.

Keywords Mentoring in education, Mentoring, Professional development and mentoring, Curriculum, Inquiry, Inquiry learning, Mentor curriculum, Professional learning

Paper type Research paper

In the twenty-first century there have been shifts in understandings of teacher knowledge (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999), teacher development and how teachers develop expertise (Langdon, 2011; Salm and Mulholland, 2015; Timperley, 2011). These shifts have, in turn, influenced the development of policy that guides the mentoring of newly qualified teachers during their induction phase (Langdon and Ward, 2014). There is now an increasing awareness of the importance of collaborative, co-constructivist approaches to mentoring to build teachers' knowledge-*of*-practice (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014). Through such approaches, mentors can help new teachers reframe their views about diverse students, diagnose classroom challenges and develop alternative practices to meet the needs of

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students (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004). Such mentoring is generally known as educative (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Feiman-Nemser (2012) conceptualises this form of mentoring as "a role, a relationship and a process" (p. 241). Interpreted through an educational lens, Feiman-Nemser (2012) argues that, "in helping novices learn to teach, mentors take on an educational role, form a pedagogical relationship [and] engage in an educational activity" (p. 241). By adopting such a stance mentors, instead of perpetuating the learning practices of the school culture, may "push back against institutional norms […] to focus on new possibilities for student (and teacher) engagement and learning" (Stanulis and Brondyk, 2013, p. 31).

Despite such educative expectations, there is little in the extant literature that addresses how teacher mentors might learn to implement this new mentoring stance (Bullough, 2012). Further, there is evidence that, even with an awareness of the importance of the new stance, mentoring for new teachers remains limited, largely focused on giving guidance about classroom management, resources and "how things are done around here" (Achinstein and Athanases, 2006). This paper addresses these concerns, presented are findings from a two-year research study of the mentoring of beginning teachers in New Zealand (NZ) primary and intermediate schools (years 0-8). The focus of this investigation was on how mentors developed understandings, knowledge, attitudes and skills required to simultaneously focus on their own learning, their own learning, new teachers' learning and student learning.

The study was part of a New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) pilot programme to examine and refine new draft national guidelines for induction and mentoring (Langdon *et al.*, 2011). In order to undertake the pilot and engage with the profession a professional development intervention was implemented in conjunction with the research. The purpose of this intervention was to support the participating mentors in moving away from limited notions of mentoring to educative mentoring. Action research was used as a method of inquiry to build knowledge of mentoring practice amongst the participating mentors. In order to position both this investigation and educative mentoring within a broader framework of teacher learning and development, we next discuss the evolving conceptual shifts from traditional mentoring to educative mentoring.

We now know that best practice in professional development involves moving beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills to a transformational focus, where teachers are supported to rethink their own practice, to construct new roles for themselves as teachers and to teach differently (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). The goal is that teachers will focus on learning and on changing practice, rather than maintaining the status quo. The rationale underpinning this shift to a transformational stance can be found in the rapidly changing twenty-first century educational environment and a growing understanding of the need to focus on developing adaptive expertise rather than relying on experience alone to build knowledge. Adaptive experts tend to work in communites of practice, to continually expand the breadth and depth of their knowledge and skills, in order to improve learning for all (Bransford *et al.*, 2005).

Learning communities

Learning communities provide a context in which teachers "can build knowledge, openly air problems and dilemmas, learn to collaborate with colleagues, ask for help, provide help and listen; link everyday practice with theory, gain greater self-confidence, and demonstrate greater commitment to changing practice and experimenting with alternative approaches" (Fresko and Nasser-Abu Alhija, 2014, p. 2). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) support this notion, arguing that questioning and inquiry are central to teaching, regardless of how

experienced a teacher is. In their view, an inquiry stance is the cornerstone of teaching and learning. A number of studies on professional learning indicate that inquiry is the position teachers must take towards knowledge and its relationship with practice (Langdon, 2011; Timperley, 2011). The reasons proffered are because inquiry communities tend to leverage transformational practice as everything is questioned, all assumptions are open to discussion and no knowledge is seen as permanent or fixed.

Professional learning

Another significant shift has taken place in our understanding of the professional life cycle of teachers. Stage theories of teacher development have informed induction and mentoring practices for many years (Langdon, 2011). They have driven the "curriculum" of professional development based on what teachers "need" to learn and be able to do across each year of their career. More recently, there has been a move away from the staged, experience-based approach to one that is focused on adaptive expertise, on what teachers know and can do to improve student learning, regardless of how long they have been teaching (Timperley, 2011).

Parallel to these in-service teacher professional development paradigm shifts, are changes to our understanding of the way in which practice knowledge is created. The foundational work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) caused professional developers to rethink the way teachers practice. They describe teacher learning as acquiring variously knowledge-*for*-practice, knowledge-*in*-practice and knowledge-*of*-practice. Each of these has a role to play in the professional growth of teachers. However, the role of a teacher mentor is different when any of these perspectives dominate. In the following paragraphs we make the distinction between these three theoretical approaches to building knowledge and practice.

The first concept, knowledge-*for*-practice is the formal knowledge and theory that teachers are taught. The acquisition of such knowledge is about helping teachers to know what is already known (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, 2009). It is closely akin to transmission notions of teaching and learning, where knowledge is simply passed onto others. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) contend that knowledge-*for*-practice is based on the assumption that "knowing more leads more or less directly to more effective practice" (p. 254). The importance of such knowledge as a foundation should not be devalued. However, it should not be viewed as fixed, or closed to critique, nor should its transmission dominate teacher learning.

Unlike knowledge-*for*-practice, the second concept presented, knowledge-*in*-practice, prioritises the practical knowledge teachers gain through experience. Such knowledge is manifested in the decisions teachers make and in their actions in the classroom. This type of knowledge is generated through inquiry that occurs within the classroom and school. It is generated by the individual teacher who "mediates ideas and constructs meaning and knowledge and acts upon them" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999, p. 267). Such knowledge is important for meeting the needs of students in the classroom. However, as with knowledge-*for*-practice, it is not enough on its own.

In contrast, the third concept, knowledge-*of*-practice, does not differentiate between theoretical and practical knowledge. Instead, it is based on the assumption that teachers will learn through the critique of both theoretical and practical knowledge. This critique most likely occurs in professional learning communities, where inquiry is a cultural norm and where all practice and knowledge is problematised (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). In such communities, knowledge is collectively constructed and mentors and teachers are agents of change. Members of the community create

new knowledge and learn by drawing on their own expertise and that of others. The focus of their learning goes beyond individual classrooms to the transformation of schools and societies.

The influence of these conceptual shifts in teacher education practice can be seen in our evolving understandings of the role and professional development of mentors who guide new teachers. Skilled mentors are increasingly moving from a limited notion of knowledge-*for*-practice towards a collaborative model of knowledge sharing and creation that is closely aligned with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999, 2009) portrait of knowledge-*of*-practice (Langdon, 2014). This new model of mentoring is generally described as educative (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). In the next section we discuss educative mentoring, the goal of the professional development intervention and the focus of the research study.

Educative mentoring in practice

Educative mentoring is mentoring that goes beyond quick-fix, "feel-good" support to incorporate a "vision of good teaching", teachers as learners and the classroom as a site of inquiry (Norman and Feiman-Nemser, 2005). It is based on constructivist principles that involve building compelling theoretical knowledge about teaching and learning (Richter *et al.*, 2011), facilitating the development of alternative beliefs and viewpoints (Flores and Day, 2006) and collecting and assessing high-quality evidence that is professionally relevant to the beginning teacher (Yusko and Feiman-Nemser, 2008).

Like knowledge-*of*-practice, the extant literature on educative mentoring prioritises inquiry (Feiman-Nemser, 2012), co-constructivist approaches to learning (Richter *et al.*, 2011) and a transformative stance (Gless, 2006). Central to educative mentoring is the provision of a climate where problematising, reflection and questioning are the norm (Achinstein and Barrett, 2004). As such, it is consistent with notions of inquiry as stance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009). Moreover, under an educative model, mentor teachers are expected to co-construct professional learning, where the learning is often reciprocal (Langdon, 2014). The mentor-mentee relationship is one of collaborative partnership rather than expert novice (Earl and Timperley, 2008). The purpose is for mentors to work with beginning teachers to develop knowledge-*of*-practice while they reconstruct practice, in ways that transform student learning.

Arguably, educative mentoring is not only more effective, but is also more difficult to implement (Orland-Barak and Hasin, 2010). Mentors are required to be skilled facilitators and expert teacher educators, rather than simply experienced teachers. Therefore, as many argue, mentor selection should be done carefully (e.g. Thornton, 2014). Further, mentors selected require professional development opportunities to act as "embodiments of the desired future of teaching and learning in the school" rather than to "further entrench current practice and heighten the resistance to serious reform of teaching and learning" (Sparks, 2005, p. 242).

Moving towards educative mentoring: a NZ pilot programme

The research and professional development intervention described in this paper was implemented during a NZTC national induction and mentoring pilot project, 2009-2011. The purpose of this national project was to develop further understanding of effective induction and mentoring, specifically, to trial newly developed *Draft Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring Programmes and for Mentor Teacher Development in Aotearoa New Zealand* (*The Draft Guidelines*) (New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC), 2008), and to inform national policy on teacher induction and mentoring. Four pilots were undertaken: an early childhood pilot (Podmore and Wells, 2011); a primary-intermediate

pilot (Langdon *et al.*, 2011); a secondary pilot (Sankar *et al.*, 2011) and a Māori school pilot (Jenkins *et al.*, 2012). Each of the pilot programmes included both a professional development intervention and a qualitative research study. This paper reports on the primary-intermediate pilot programme only, which was led by the University of Auckland.

Context

Beginning teachers in NZ are provisionally registered for the first two years of their career and are entitled to an induction and mentoring programme. This includes an assigned in-school mentor and resource support (e.g. the primary school is given the equivalent of one day staffing in the first year, and 0.5 in the second year to support new teacher induction; and mentors receive an annual allowance). At the end of two years, beginning teachers must meet national criteria to become fully registered (New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC), 2010). For over a decade, all NZ schools have been provided with policy, resources, funding, guidelines and time to provide comprehensive induction and mentoring to beginning teachers. Despite this, the quality of the induction and mentoring received has been found to be variable (Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Langdon *et al.*, 2014).

The professional development intervention

Through the professional development intervention, mentors were given the opportunity to inquire into, document and change their practice with the aim of building the knowledge and skills needed to be an educative mentor. To moderate their understanding and expectations, they worked collaboratively with other mentors. The university-led intervention programme focused on building knowledge of mentoring, based on seven themes: focusing on students; agency – a self-regulation approach to learning; knowledge and skills; theories of teaching and engaged learning; integration of theory and practice; joint deconstruction of practice and co-construction of new practice; and affective support and transmission.

The aim of the professional development was to provide rich learning opportunities that were predicated on well-founded frameworks for conceptual change and epistemological shifts whereby mentors viewed themselves as learners and mentoring as educative. This was achieved by:

- building compelling theoretical knowledge-*of*-practice;
- facilitating the development of alternative beliefs and viewpoints;
- collecting and analysing high-quality professionally relevant evidence to overcome resistance and provide direction for development; and
- providing a climate where reflection and questioning were the norm.

Action research was pivotal to understanding of the role of educative mentors, and to shifting the practice of the mentor teachers. The pilot programme required the completion of an action research project by each mentor. This action research consisted of several learning cycles. The precise number of cycles completed varied from two to 11. This variability was dependent, in part, on each mentor's time in the programme (1-2 years), the time each cycle consumed and mentors' overall commitment. For each cycle, mentors were required to report a mentoring goal intended to guide their interactions with their mentees; provide a rationale for the selection of that goal; observe mentees engaged in teaching or negotiate evidence (e.g. planning); engage in

professional learning conversations with their mentees regarding the observed lessons or evidence; and have the content of those learning conversations taped and transcribed. Mentors then analysed the evidence and set a follow-up goal for the next cycle. These activities also provided evidence for the research that was undertaken in parallel with the professional development intervention.

In addition to the action research cycles, mentors attended ten two-hour professional development sessions each year they were in the programme. These sessions covered a number of key topics including the nature of professional learning conversations and the purpose and structure of the inquiry learning cycles undertaken through the action research. The professional development sessions completed by the participants included:

- building knowledge and reviewing understandings of educative mentoring;
- building knowledge and developing understanding of beginning teachers' learning;
- cognitive interventions to develop teacher expertise through inquiry and learning conversations;
- goal setting and reflection;
- observation and feedback;
- acquiring assessment knowledge and the ability to use evidence-based learning;
- reviewing and understanding the *NZ Registered Teacher Criteria* (NZTC, 2010) and the *NZ Draft Guidelines* (NZTC, 2008); and
- building knowledge and understanding of the role and responsibilities of school leaders.

Method

Pilot participants

Participants in the primary-intermediate pilot were 22 mentor teachers from six schools in suburban ($n = 4$) and rural ($n = 2$) areas of NZ representing a range of socio-economic levels. The participating mentors had between three and 25 years of teaching experience ($\bar{x} = 7.7$ years) and were selected as mentors and assigned their mentee by their school principals on the basis of experience, perceived suitability and availability. The participant mentor teachers provided informed consent and were assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality.

Data collection

A qualitative approach to data collection were used for the research study. Action research learning cycles were critical to the collection of data related to the development of educative mentoring. Data were collected through taped learning conversations between mentors and mentees as well as documentation regarding mentor teacher goals and their reflections on the action research cycles undertaken.

The university staff also taped individual semi-structured interviews with each teacher mentor ($n = 22$) and two one-hour focus groups of 11 mentor teachers, held at the end of each school year. At the end of each year of the intervention, mentors were invited to assess themselves as educative mentors on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "not knowledgeable and competent" to "extremely knowledgeable and competent".

Data analysis

Mentor conversations: overall, 77 professional mentor-mentee conversations were taped and analysed by the participants and researchers. Eight mentor teachers engaged in two to five ($n = 26$) learning conversations with their beginning teachers over a one-year period, and five mentor teachers engaged in nine to 11 ($n = 51$) learning conversations over a two-year period. These learning conversations took place at the school site following classroom observations and were audio taped by the mentor teacher. University staff transcribed the audiotapes and made the transcriptions available to the mentor teachers for independent evaluation.

Each learning conversation was scored according to a model adapted from Earl and Timperley (2008) (Timperley, Personal Communication, 16 June 2010).

The conversations were analysed against the seven themes of the professional development intervention, outlined below:

- Knowledge and skills: did the mentor establish explicit criteria for effective practice for the beginning teachers? Did the mentor discuss how new strategies link to principles of effective practice?
- Existing theories: did the mentor teacher encourage the beginning teachers to articulate their theories and beliefs regarding teaching, learning and students and their learning?
- Integration of theory and practice: did the mentor encourage the beginning teachers to discuss how they had put their theories into practice (e.g. how they had integrated theory with assessment)?
- Focus on students: did the mentor encourage the beginning teachers to talk about their students (e.g. by discussing the beginning teachers' knowledge of their students and their students' needs and planning requirements for the next steps of learning)?
- Self-regulatory approach to learning: did the mentor encourage the beginning teachers to try their own ideas, to make decisions about what they are going to teach next and to justify their teaching?
- Joint deconstruction of existing practice and co-construction of new practice: did the mentor give the beginning teachers an opportunity to deconstruct their existing practice (e.g. by describing what happened and analysing and discussing evidence) and to co-construct their new practice (e.g. by designing next steps and setting new goals)?
- Affective support and transmission: did the mentor affirm practice and/or the person? Did the mentor listen, describe, tell and direct and/or ask open or closed questions?

Self-assessment: the evaluative aspect of the self-reports, including the Likert scale and those data compiled during the action research, were qualitatively analysed using the constant comparative method (Ryan and Bernard, 2000). Themes and patterns were coded to gain insight into the perceived changes in mentoring practices.

Interviews: led by the university staff, the purpose of the focus groups was to open up the conversation among mentors, to explore their learning and approaches to mentoring. The individual interviews and focus group meetings were recorded, transcribed and qualitatively analysed via content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1984).

Findings and discussion

The following section highlights the findings from the study as they pertain to the development of educative mentors through the professional development intervention. We present and discuss the findings under two emergent themes – shifting mentor practice and developing educative mentors.

Shifting mentor practice

During the individual interviews and focus groups, mentors reported substantial differences in their mentoring practices before and after the professional development provided through the intervention. Mentors who had completed both years of the mentoring courses rated themselves as "very knowledgeable and competent" (4 on the Likert scale). Of those who had completed one year of the course, seven rated themselves as "somewhat knowledgeable and competent" (3 on the scale) and five as "very knowledgeable and competent". The mentors clearly identified a shift from limited mentoring to educative mentoring practices. The mentor interviews confirmed that mentors developed:

- clarity about the expectations of their role;
- a more critical inquiry approach, using evidence to reflect on their own mentoring practice;
- greater confidence in their use of strategies such as goal setting, observations and professional learning conversations to support and assess beginning teacher learning and development; and
- the ability to effectively use evidence to support beginning teacher learning and development.

Prior to the programme, the mentors reported that their approach to mentoring had typically been informal. They had focused on providing emotional and practical support to their mentees, particularly when the mentee was stressed. This approach to mentoring generally reinforces the status quo rather than viewing teaching as an ongoing reflective process. As mentors said:

> [I was] mostly doing pastoral or limited mentoring, with no real "guts" behind it (CSM3).
>
> My role was more as a support person: one who provided practical resources and gave the answers to the beginning teacher (CSM2).
>
> I would beat around the bush – an element of wanting to support and not to hurt [the beginning teacher] (CSM8).

They also reported a lack of understanding of what was expected of them and that they had lacked the skills and knowledge required of an educative mentor. Areas of concern identified by mentors included:

- lack of knowledge about the tools and resources available to assist mentoring practice;
- lack of awareness of the need to focus on their own development whilst also focusing on the beginning teacher;
- privileging the "do as I do" style of mentoring;
- limited knowledge about how to conduct focused observations;

- lack of knowledge about learning conversations; and
- the need to improve communication skills, particularly listening and providing feedback during conversations with mentees.

The following quotations exemplify these concerns:

> I did not have much knowledge on how to mentor before coming to the course. One big thing I have learned is that it is not about my mentee, but about me as a mentor (CSM4).

> Before completing the mentor course I really had no direction in how I would mentor others. My beliefs were that my mentee had to do as I do and that was the best way for us both (CSM7).

> We need to know how to create relationships that allow for effective communication; that allow you to ask those hard questions (CSM9).

After the intervention, all mentors commented on the knowledge and skills they had acquired during the pilot programme. They noted, amongst other things, that they were setting more specific and focused goals, putting more emphasis on goal setting and negotiating goals with their mentee. As one mentor stated:

> […] we work on this goal to change or enhance practice until we are satisfied we have achieved our goal (CSM6).

They also reported more constructive evidence-based learning conversations with their mentees. The following quotation exemplifies this view:

> Now I act on evidence. Before, I used evidence as examples in her [the mentee's] observation notes or in an end-of-term report. Now we used evidence to build a new focus or goal (CSM6).

Mentors also noted that their focus changed from telling or questioning the beginning teacher, to examining their own practice and how it affected the beginning teacher. Following the professional development, some mentors reported being focused both on their mentoring and the effects of their mentoring practice. They also reported that this self-focus and reflection benefited their mentees, as illustrated by this mentor teacher:

> Because the focus was on my mentoring abilities, it really gave me the opportunity to focus on exactly the skills, requirements, and resources needed to assist my mentee to move forward (CSM3).

During the focus groups, mentors also discussed the challenge they had experienced in moving away from being an experienced teacher to a learner. This learning was described as a conceptual change from being a problem solver to developing autonomy and agency in the beginning teachers. Through this shift, they came to realise that mentoring was a two-way process that involved them working collaboratively with their mentee.

Importantly, the mentors agreed that refining their mentoring practice would be a continual process, related to the changing needs of individual beginning teachers:

> I will continue to reflect and refine my practice based on the needs of my beginning teacher (CSM10).

> I think it will be about refinement and embedding what I have learnt (CSM1).

Another outcome of the intervention programme was that mentors used what they had learned to benefit their schools by supporting new mentors and beginning teachers

within the induction programme. Mentors at one school reported becoming more involved with the planning and implementation of their school's induction programmes and appraisal programme:

> [We will be] working as part of the management team to support all the beginning teachers in the school and the mentors [as well]. And [we will] contribute ideas to the performance management folio as needed (CSM10).

Another mentor reported that she would continue with educative mentoring even though her mentee had become fully registered:

> [I am] continuing educative mentoring with colleagues in the school (CSM2).

Further evidence of the shifts in their practice could be found in the taped learning conversations. Also evident was the manner in which these shifts occurred. The shift in balance between the transmission of knowledge-*for*-practice and the collaborative development of knowledge-*of*-practice did not occur immediately. Rather it was incremental across the professional development intervention.

During their first taped learning conversations mentors did make attempts to encourage their beginning teachers to talk about their own beliefs. However, the mentors tended to dominate the conversation with "advice", to talk about what they did in their own classrooms and to ask a lot of closed questions. As such, knowledge-*for*-practice dominated; the focus was on sharing what was already known.

Shifts in practice were evident as early as the last taped conversation of the first year. While some mentors still tended to push their own views, others allowed their mentees more opportunity to contribute to the conversation and to discuss their own theories of teaching and learning. In the first taped interview of the second year, mentors demonstrated a greater shift in practice towards educative mentoring. While they still occasionally dominated the conversation, they also gave their mentees more opportunity to discuss their own beliefs and to make their own decisions regarding teaching. Both active listening and open-ended questioning were more obvious. The beginning teachers were encouraged to engage in self-reflection and to gain agency and power over their practice. For those who continued in the programme over two years, in their last taped conversations the mentors continued to develop this enhanced mentee contribution.

Developing educative mentors

The analysis of the taped conversations showed that a minimum of one year of action research, critical analysis and goal setting may enable a mentor to change their practice in ways that positively influence the ability of a beginning teacher to focus on student learning and to perceive themselves as learners. The comment below emphasises the importance of inquiry and reflection in mentoring practice and how it should be used to drive the next step of the beginning teacher's professional learning:

> The mentor needs to be an inquiring teacher really, because they are not going to be a very good mentor teacher if they are not inquiring enough. And reflective too: they need to have reflective skills and encourage that thinking in an outgoing way (CSM11).

To ensure that beginning teachers more consistently experience educative mentoring within a high-quality induction programme, pilot participants recommended a national approach to mentoring that recognises the importance of the mentor role and provides

professional development to all mentors. The following suggestions were made during mentor focus group discussions and individual interviews:

- raise the status of mentoring at a national level through the development of a mentoring career pathway;
- create a mentor qualification;
- give all mentors access to in-depth professional development in mentoring. A "one size fits all" programme is not the solution;
- provide ongoing on-site support for mentor teachers, in addition to formal training; and
- set up a "mentoring community" to address mentors' questions and provide access to a library of resources and research.

The following quotes exemplify mentors' suggestions in this area:

> There needs to be a recognised pathway and then mentoring will be respected. You could have a community of mentors within every school cluster. Strength could be developed through moderation with a community group of mentors (MF4).

> Mentors need up-to-date research in how beginning teachers learn and what's most effective for them. They also need up-to-date information about raising student outcomes and to have some of their mentoring beliefs challenged (CSM13).

> Maybe mentors need a "driver's license" to become a mentor teacher. If you have got the license, you can claim an allowance. I am suggesting something that gives mentors an incentive to do the professional development to get [their] mentoring certificate (CSP3).

It is commonly assumed by principals that good teachers make good mentors, something Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues against. Supporting this view, mentors in the focus group interviews acknowledged the need to critique and build on their existing practices and to gain new understanding and skills if they were to make the transition from limited notions of mentoring to educative mentoring. They suggested that knowledge that guides mentoring practice and the mentor role be made explicit by, for example, developing understandings of: context and leadership; authority and agency and self as learner; expectations and expertise in practice; and curriculum knowledge and assessment. Further identified was a possible mentor curriculum that could facilitate the development of an educative mentoring stance. It was suggested that this curriculum might include:

- developing clarity of expectations, purpose and role of mentors;
- the authority and agency to lead;
- critical inquiry into mentor and beginning teacher development;
- identifying and articulating teacher expertise;
- knowledge of strategies to focus novices on learners;
- evidence-based observational and professional conversational skills; and
- assessment of novice teachers against national criteria.

Evidence presented here indicates that mentors need the opportunity to reconceptualise themselves as learners if the intention is to shift mentoring practice from that of the

experienced mentor/teacher to that of skilled mentor. Unravelling well-established patterns of practice is not easy (Timperley, 2011). Experienced mentors may well be functionally fixed, replicating current norms rather than adapting their practice to improve learning for beginning teachers (Salm and Mulholland, 2015). Like Achinstein and Athanases (2006), we argue for new teachers to thrive in the profession mentoring needs to be cast as a deliberate act underpinned by knowledge of educative mentoring.

Conclusion

Many mentors currently lack the skills to provide educative mentoring to new teachers. Often mentors are selected for the role because of their years of experience as teachers or the length of their tenure at the school (Thornton, 2014). Teachers who acted as mentors in the pilot acknowledged the need to go beyond experience to recognise the distinctive role of the mentor. Further confirmed was the need for all mentors to question their existing practices and gain new understanding and skills specific to effective induction and educative mentoring.

The pilot programme provided sustained and rich learning opportunities that focused on conceptual change. The two-year process demonstrated that mentors may reconceptualise themselves as learners and come to see mentoring as educative. Such re-conceptualisation was achieved through supporting mentors to build their theoretical knowledge and to test their theories in cycles of evidence-based practice, in partnership with their mentees. However, caution is warranted. The shift in focus, from the limited notion of mentors transmitting knowledge-*for*-practice, to an educative approach that takes the stance of co-constructing knowledge-*of*-practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999), is not easy, nor is it assured.

This study confirms the need to ensure that beginning teachers more consistently experience high-quality mentoring. To achieve this goal of consistency, these pilot participants recommended a national policy approach to mentoring that recognises the importance of the mentors' role and provides professional development for all mentors. Policy initiatives and the development of a mentoring curriculum may contribute to positioning mentoring within schools as valued work. At the very least, such action is likely to give rise to discussion about the purpose of mentoring, what constitutes best practice and how it should be enacted and supported. Like the Singapore system (Ng, 2012), mentoring of novice teachers in NZ is resourced at in-service levels, yet there is a limited understanding of the impact of such mentoring within different contexts. Therefore further empirical evidence is required, preferably based on a robust theoretical framework and in the form of longitudinal studies. As Brondyk and Searby (2013) argue, the field is replete with suggestions about best mentoring practices in education, but many are unsubstantiated by empirical research.

Of course, the study is not without its limitations. For one, well-resourced pilot studies are likely to produce outcomes that cannot be similarly replicated in a sustained way in the wider educational community, without like resources. Further, central to the study was the professional development intervention, and while there was not a mandate to speak the language of the programme, this may have happened, for example in interviews.

Nevertheless, these limitations aside the study contributes to our understanding of mentoring beginning teachers in a number of ways. There is evidence that experience alone does not ensure that a teacher has the necessary attributes, skills and knowledge to be an educative mentor. In this study, we found that the educative mentor requires sustained time to inquire into and develop mentoring expertise. To work effectively

with mentees, these mentors need the language to: "deconstruct their own practice, explain it to others, and in the process learn how to facilitate learning for (and with) their peers" (Lieberman and Pointer Mace, 2009, p. 460). Such a learning-focused approach requires the mentor to take an educational inquiry stance. It appears that mentors require the attributes of an accomplished teacher educator and a highly skilled, knowledgeable practitioner – able and willing to test their own assumptions about practice and to enter into critical discussions with others (Langdon, 2014). In this sense, educative mentoring encapsulates knowledge-*of*-practice, a complex dynamic of transformational action whereby mentors become learners themselves, continuing to develop their own knowledge while acting as advocates for their students, mentees, school and the profession.

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