International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education

An analysis of beginning mentors' critical incidents in English post-compulsory education: navigating stormy waters

Rebecca Eliahoo

Article information:

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

For Authors

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

An analysis of beginning mentors' critical incidents in English post-compulsory education: navigating stormy waters

1. Introduction

Mentoring can be a potent and transformative professional relationship (Ragins and Kram, 2007), which is one of the reasons why it is used for the support and induction of beginning teachers and lecturers, whether they work in colleges, for private providers or in further or higher education. This paper aims to explore and categorise the problems and dilemmas faced by novice and beginning mentors in post-compulsory education.

This study analysed case studies written by 21 English novice mentors who were supporting teachers and lecturers who, in turn, were providing education, training and professional development opportunities for a range of different learners in the southeast of England. All the mentors had participated in a master's-level module whose assessment focused, in part, on two critical incidents taken from their everyday mentoring practice. Their mentees were either new to teaching, had been selected to be mentored by their institutions, or had asked to be mentored.

Critical incidents were chosen as part of the mentors' assessment for the module for several reasons: the identification and analysis of critical incidents can help mentors to understand themselves and their motivation for investing in mentoring relationships, and critical incidents form a grassroots tool to research mentors' own practice and can help them to decide when and why to retain practice. Where mentors have positive mentoring experiences, they can develop a sense of self-worth. In contrast, analysing critical incidents can give mentors a sense of control over negative experiences (Tripp, 2012). Thus, they can help towards raising mentors' professional status, whilst including practitioner voices in institutional discourse.

For their first assignment, mentors were asked to identify and explore two critical incidents (Tripp, 2012) from their own practice that aimed to justify the strategies that they used to support their mentee's range of complex needs. By identifying and discussing their critical incidents in class and through tutorials, mentors could investigate in depth two case studies which they constructed out of naturally occurring mentoring situations (Gomm *et al.,* 2000).

Case studies were chosen as a flexible strategy (Yin, 1989) to capture the views and voices of novice mentors in different settings, in post-compulsory educational contexts, including higher education institutions, further education and adult education, and private providers. The rationale for constructing case studies was partly to engender a deeper understanding of the

challenges and dilemmas that novice mentors face, and partly to harvest metaphor and imagery from their mentoring encounters (Stake, 2000).

During 2012–13, two of the mentors were working in secondary schools, supporting teachers in post-16 classes. These mentors' critical incidents were included as they were vocational teachers in what could arguably be considered a post-compulsory context, as this was before the changes were made to the school-leaving age (which was raised to 17 years from September 2013 and to 18 years from September 2015).

Thematic analysis was used to categorise the critical incidents by topic, sector, gender and mentoring strategy. The critical incidents demonstrated the complexity of mentoring in practice and its potential for professional learning, as well as the range of approaches implemented and how these were influenced by mentors' own values, beliefs and life experiences. For example, two mentors identified their own religious values relating to honesty, understanding and a need 'to be at peace with others' as influences over the mentoring strategies they employed to resolve issues linked to challenging behaviour and judgemental attitudes.

For the purpose of this paper, mentoring is defined firstly, as psychosocial and career support (Kram, 1985), and secondly, as a 'one to one relationship between a relatively inexperienced teacher (the mentee) and a relatively experienced teacher (the mentor), which aims to support the mentee's: (a) learning and development as a teacher; (b) wellbeing; and (c) integration into and acceptance by the cultures of both the organisation in which they are employed and the wider profession' (Hobson *et al.,* 2015, p. 1).

2. Rationale

2.1 Mentoring in an English post-compulsory context

Although mentoring teacher trainees was recommended within English post-compulsory Initial Teacher Education (ITE), (McKelvey & Andrews, 1998; Cunningham, 1999; Clutterbuck, 2001; Woodd, 2001), it only became mandatory in 2003 (Ofsted, 2003). The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) had judged mentoring quality inconsistent and had noted that mentors were often untrained and underfunded (Ofsted, 2003). Mentoring was also seen as a useful tool for organisations that needed change management methodologies. In English post-compulsory ITE, there were pressures from changing models of pedagogy, new technology, rapid and continuous government changes to policy and funding, and the growth of diverse student cohorts (Lucas, 2004; Lucas *et al.,* 2012; Robson and Bailey, 2009).

Drawing on the methodology of critical incidents (Tripp, 2012), this study set out to examine and categorise novice mentors' narratives, written between 2010 and 2015, to see what they revealed about mentoring in English post-compulsory education. The study asked:

1. What kinds of critical incidents did mentors come across in their everyday practice in education?
2. What strategies did they use to support mentees, mentees' learners and colleagues, and what was the rationale for these strategies?
3. What dilemmas and challenges did these critical incidents pose for mentors?
4. How did mentors' own values, beliefs and life experiences affect their mentoring practice?

Following the expansion of a university teacher education consortium, a master's-level module was designed in order to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of mentors (Dawson, 2014). During nine face-to-face sessions, as well as through online activities, the module covered aspects such as contracting and boundaries, theoretical and ethical dimensions of mentoring, the development of mentoring and coaching skills, how to foster a mentoring 'architecture' (Cunningham, 2005) and how to end the mentoring relationship positively. The author of this study was the course leader and acted as tutor to each of the participants.

2.2 The use of critical incidents and case studies in mentoring

Critical incidents have transformational potential, as they allow practitioners to focus on the point at which actions or events alter our perceptions (Cunningham, 2005). Such transformative learning can be generated by events in our professional lives that challenge the assumptions that form the basis for our interpretations of experience (Mezirow, 1992).

Although critics of reflection in professional development consider it to be both limited and fruitlessly introspective (Cunningham, 2005), critical incidents mark the points at which events or actions mutate and take on special significance. The transformational potential of critical incidents allows a focus on the 'before and after' of events or actions, acknowledging the developmental nature of reflection in general and critical incidents in particular (Cunningham, 2005).

Critical incidents often form part of the dialogue that teacher trainees have with their mentors. For example, a qualitative examination of mentors' interpretations of their practice within the Israeli school system (Orland-Barak, 2002) revealed that mentors had their own 'language of

practice' which reflected their concerns over issues of accountability and the boundaries of mentors' roles. Their mentoring discourse showed that a university teacher education course, based on case-method pedagogy, constituted a safe and challenging context for mentors to voice dilemmas inherent in their experiences (2002, p. 451).

Such dilemmas can uncover hidden values, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions that are involved in mentoring interactions (Orland-Barak *et al.,* 2013). In multicultural and politically conflictive contexts, mentors need an awareness of their own culture and that of their mentees in order to implement culturally responsive practices. However, mentors also need to cultivate awareness of their own learners and the communities they teach and to introduce their mentees to communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This forms part of the psychosocial and career support that mentors provide (Kram, 1985) and might include engagement with technologies, social relations and other activities within their communities of practice.

Mentoring has been identified as a valuable tool to help new teachers integrate into a community of practice (Maguire, 2001). However, Ponte and Twomey (2014) examined the ways in which a school-university mentorship programme promoted a range of both positive and negative experiences for mentors. Their study explored the experiences of five mentor-teachers in order to deepen understanding about mentoring as a complex and challenging form of professional growth and leadership for teachers. They found that the motivation for becoming a mentor was not always driven by a selfless desire to improve the profession, but was influenced by administrators and colleagues and other imperatives inherent within institutional structures (Ponte and Twomey, 2014, p. 32). Research also shows that mentees, as much as mentors, can contribute to the interpersonal dynamics that result in dysfunctional outcomes, and that both mentor and mentee can be affected by such destructive relationships (Feldman, 1999).

Drawing on the above, even where mentoring relationships are broadly harmonious, they can cause distress. Orland-Barak and Yinon analysed critical incidents written by 20 experienced in-service female mentors who were mentoring new teachers in Israeli schools (2005). Their analysis yielded two main themes: stories about mentees in distress, and stories about mentors in distress. The latter said that they felt, at times, like incompetent, insecure and distressed novices. Yet the researchers judged that their rationales for mentoring actions were those of expert teachers — thus highlighting the complex nature of mentoring expertise.

Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) found that mentors' professional expertise was non-linear, dynamic and context-bound, and therefore they supported the design of mentor preparation

programmes that took less linear and more dialectical perspectives on adult learning (2005, p. 575).

3. Method

Formal written consent from mentors was sought and obtained in each case, after giving each of the mentors an information leaflet and consent form that explained the purpose of the research, who was being asked to take part, what would be done with the research, research questions, confidentiality, anonymity and safe-keeping of the data. The research proposal successfully negotiated the institutional ethical review process.

3.1 Use of critical incident technique

The critical incident technique consists of procedures to critically reflect on direct experience of human behaviour, in order to solve practical problems and develop broad psychological principles (Flanagan, 1954, p. 327). It is not a rigid set of rules governing data collection, but should be a flexible set of principles to be modified to meet specific situations.

Tripp (2012) stated that critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation and how we interpret its significance. The mentors in this study all followed the same assignment brief. They recorded incidents that were still fresh in their minds, calling upon written observations of their mentees' teaching practice, observation feedback notes to mentees and notes of initial reviews and progress reports. Before they wrote up the incidents formally, they were asked to do an individual free writing exercise in class about either a colleague or mentee's dilemma in which the mentor had intervened, or an ethical dilemma the mentor had faced in an educational context. This often formed the basis of their critical incident. To prepare for the first assignment, each mentor was given an individual tutorial by the course tutor and current author, during which the nature of the critical incident was explored and mentors were asked to identify what they had learnt about themselves and their mentoring practice.

The critical incident technique was applied to gather information on specific actions by the mentors and their mentees, involving decision-making and choices as well as reflections on the impact of values, beliefs and experiences on mentoring practice. For this study, the mentors' critical incidents were categorised by the researcher into a number of themes.

Category formulation can be more subjective than objective (Flanagan, 1954) so an interpretive stance to the research was taken and the critical incidents were coded and categorised by the

researcher with reference to mentoring literature and within headings that were modified in an iterative process. Larger categories were sub-divided into small groups and incidents of a similar type were placed together. The degree of credibility seemed high because these were incidents that mentors had spoken about in-class discussions and free writing, as well as during tutorials.

The critical incident technique was applied to gather information on specific actions by the mentors and their mentees, involving decision-making and choices, as well as reflections on the impact of values, beliefs and experiences on mentoring practice.

3.2 Critical incidents as components of professional learning

Critical incidents are used as components of professional learning in fields such as medicine and social work (Cunningham, 2005). In education, teachers and mentors take crucial decisions about the learning and development of their mentees and students, which may have long-lasting effects on all concerned. The mentors in this study were able to draw on insights into their practice, as well as extending their own and their mentees' repertoire of pedagogical and mentoring skills. Each critical incident focused on everyday examples of working relationships with learners and colleagues, considering the impact of mentors' values on their practice (Clutterbuck and Lane, 2004) and questioning the success of their efforts to bring mentees into the teaching community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

In all, 21 mentors took part in the study and 42 critical incidents were analysed. Categories of incidents were coded using some of Tripp's categories (2012) and analysed thematically. The majority of the mentors (81%) were women and most worked in colleges (57.14%); nearly 15 per cent worked in universities; nearly 15 per cent worked in adult and community learning; 9.52 per cent worked in schools; and one mentor worked for a private provider (4.76%). Over 71 per cent were White and 28.5 per cent were Black Minority Ethnic (BME). Thematic analysis was used to explore the content of the critical incidents rather the manner in which they were expressed. Thematic analysis can both reflect 'reality' and unravel the surface of 'reality', seeking themes or patterns across an entire data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 9). Thematic analysis thus provided a flexible tool that encouraged rich and detailed accounts to emerge from the data.

4. Findings

My first research question asked: 'What kinds of critical incidents do mentors come across in their everyday practice in education?' The highest percentage of critical incidents (23.8%) related to the observation of teaching, which had become highly contentious in English education (see Table 1).

4.1 The controversial nature of teaching observations

By the time that British academic Matt O'Leary was asked by the University and College Union (UCU) to investigate the role of lesson observation in the further education sector (2013), graded observations in colleges and schools had evolved into high-stakes assessments of teacher proficiency. His survey was completed by 3,976 UCU members, many commenting on the generally negative impact that they felt observations had on their working lives.

The 21 mentors who took part in the current study gave four different examples of the use of observation as 'performance management'. For example, two lecturers from different institutions were given mentors following poor observation grades; another mentee's grade was said to have been lowered from a grade 2 ('good') to grade 3 ('needs improvement') due to student absences — despite clear and sensible explanations for these given in advance; and one college had moved from a developmental model of observation to an inspection model.

The mentors found the use of observation of teaching primarily as a tool of performance management problematic, as it clashed with their values of fairness, impartiality and professional integrity.

One strand of a systematic longitudinal project in the United States measuring teacher effectiveness focused on the observation of teaching. The *Measures of Effective Teaching Project* (MET) (2013), funded by the Gates Foundation in the United States, involved 3,000 teachers in six different US school districts, as well as dozens of researchers. MET used five different subject-focused observation protocols and entailed significant training for observers. Durham University's Professor Robert Coe called the MET project a 'gold standard in observation', concluding from the data that if two observers watched the same lesson using Ofsted's categories, where that lesson was judged 'Outstanding' by one observer, the probability that a second observer would give a different judgement was between 51 per cent and 78 per cent (Coe 2014).

Although there is a place for observation of teaching as a developmental tool, especially within ITE, its widespread use for performance management purposes has been damaging (O'Leary, 2013). Some mentors' critical incidents demonstrated, however, that through reflection and tutorial discussions, some mentors were able to avoid judgemental approaches to observation feedback — what Hobson and Malderez (2013) call 'judgementoring' — towards more discursive and participatory models of observation practice, arguing that this was important for the growth of mutual trust and effective quality improvement.

4.2 The importance of managing behaviour for new teachers

Another significant theme that emerged related to concerns over behaviour management. In October 2015, a National Union of Teachers/YouGov poll said that 53 per cent of teachers in England were thinking of leaving the profession within the next two years. The volume of their workload was a primary reason for 61 per cent of respondents around 44 per cent of teachers cited 'unreasonable demands from managers', and 22 per cent cited 'student behaviour' as a negative factor.

In the current study, 19 per cent of critical incidents related to managing students' behaviour, often seen as a crisis point for mentees who felt distressed by such occurrences (Tripp, 2012, Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005). One mentor analysed the reasons why one mentee was profoundly affected by one learner's complaint, two mentees wanted to leave teaching altogether following students' challenging behaviour, and other mentees had difficulties with class management.

The mentors wrote about their use of questioning, listening, observation and reflection to pinpoint the problems and to prompt potential solutions: in one case, described as 'a war story' by the mentor, a mentee's student had been told to leave her parental home following an argument, which may have partially explained why she had thrown her handbag at hair salon clients and students. In another, the mentee habitually asked the whole class questions that were lengthy and unnecessary; yet another mentee found it difficult to praise students, constantly using a sarcastic tone. These issues appeared to have been successfully mediated by mentors, who recommended practical strategies, thus boosting the self-confidence of their mentees.

4.3 Mentors 'walking the tightrope'

A third theme explored the mentors' role in 'walking the tightrope' (Wallace and Gravells, 2007) between institutional demands, mentee and learners' needs and the mentors' own beliefs and life experiences. Wallace and Gravells' expression captured the conflicting impulses that mentors might experience, claiming that mentors' greater awareness of potential conflicts might help in managing them successfully (2007).

Just over 14 per cent of critical incidents explored the role of being a peace-keeper between the institution and the mentee. For example, mentors described in-class clashes between colleagues, which had tested their loyalty (Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005). In one case, a mentee refused point-blank to use suggested alternative teaching methods. Another mentee refused to teach English as a Second Language classes, as she was trained only as an English teacher. These complex and challenging aspects of mentoring (Ponte and Twomey, 2014) had the potential to destabilise the mentoring relationship (Feldman, 1999).

Without the mentors' interventions, occasionally trivial occurrences could escalate quickly, with negative consequences for both mentee and institution. Mentors' accounts suggested that they demonstrated skills in listening, questioning and re-framing problems, so that mutually satisfactory solutions could generally be found. These approaches chimed with their values and beliefs around the need for mutual trust, professionalism, mediation and confidentiality.

In five of the 42 cases, mentees found challenges overwhelming and questioned their own efficacy as teachers. For example, two mentees felt that their childcare difficulties presented an insuperable barrier to remaining as a teacher; two mentees were afraid that if they revealed their respective specific learning difficulty and obsessive compulsive disorder, this would end their careers; another felt frightened of class teaching. Through mentoring support and advice, mentees were shown options that transformed what they had considered to be hopeless situations (Cunningham, 2005).

Other critical incidents focused on professionalism (9.2%) relating to, for instance, the importance of fair assessment for students or seeing colleagues' questionable behaviour from another perspective. Crucial skills for mentors included acting as a sounding board for those new to teaching and the need to explain how and why protocols should be followed. Mentors also wrote about the need to feel empathy for their mentees, to foster a sense of belonging within the institution, and the need for collegiate collaboration to improve teaching and learning overall.

4.4 The emotional labour of mentoring

Another theme identified the emotional labour of mentoring, as the management and regulation of feelings has become an important workplace skill. Employees are judged, not just by their expertise or intelligence, but also by the exercise of their interpersonal skills (Goleman, 1998). In several cases, mentoring came across as 'emotional labour' (Hochschield, 1983), with just over seven per cent of mentors describing their emotional involvement with their mentees.

In one case, a mentor felt both angry and rejected when her mentee decided to choose a new mentor who was a subject specialist; another mentor felt frustrated by his own lack of empathy for his mentee, as the latter pronounced that he was 'too good a teacher to be on a teacher training course'. Another mentor felt out of her depth when allocated a mentee whom she felt was 'emotional and negative and struggling with workload and managing student behaviour'.

Not all dilemmas were solved. But discussing them confidentially, as well as writing about them had been helpful, according to most mentors.

4.5 Mentoring dyad as career capital

Finally, in some cases mentoring can be seen as a form of career capital (Singh *et al.,* 2009) where professional and personal efficacy can be derived from the interactions of mentees and mentors (Clayton, 2015). Mentoring relationships 'have the capacity to transform individuals, groups, organisations and communities' (Ragins and Kram, 2007 p. 3). Within mentoring dyads, it is possible for both mentor and mentee to learn from one another (Rekha and Ganesh, 2012). Mentors used their own experiences and reflexivity to extract significance from each critical incident. One mentor realised that the mentoring relationship she had with a colleague needed to be put on a more formal footing because her mentee had no compunction about interrupting her work at any time. Another mentor highlighted the reciprocal benefits of mentoring, especially where she used professional dialogue following peer observation, rather than simply giving feedback.

Table 1: Categories and themes			
Category	Themes	Number of CIs	Percentage of CIs
Observations	Performance management	10	23.8%

	Underlying internal conflict in institution		
	Turning point		
	War story		
Walking the tightrope	Peace-keeping	6	14.4%
	Benefit of mentoring to organisation		
	Keeping up standards		
	Seeing things from different perspectives		
	Importance of good rapport		
	Dilemma identification		
Professionalism	Keeping up standards	4	9.2%
	Mediation		
	Importance of good rapport		
	Dilemma identification		
Managing behaviour	Crisis	8	19%
	Dilemma identification		
Importance of institutional support for mentoring	Underlying internal conflict in organisation	2	4.8%
	Self-reflection		
Mentee felt challenge was overwhelming	Crisis	5	12%
	Turning point for individual		
Mentors' own emotional involvement	Self-reflection	3	7.2%
	Crisis		

Equality vs diversity	Underlying internal conflict in organisation	1	2.4%
Reflexivity	Self-reflection	3	7.2%
	Total	42	100.00%

5. Mentors' values and strategies

Core values represent deeply held beliefs, reflecting what people consider to be important and what motivates them (Williams and Whybrow, 2013). In the study, mentors had been asked to identify their own values within each critical incident and these were analysed and categorised (see Table 2). Just over 85 per cent of the mentors in the research wrote about the mutual benefits of mentoring in terms of improved skills and practice for the mentee, and professional growth for the mentor. However, mentors also identified their own values in cases where they thought these were in danger of being compromised. Self-awareness and vigilance were required of mentors in 'walking the line between supportive, positive regard and collusion and complicity' (Wallace and Gravells, 2012, p. 61).

Mentoring was also influenced by changes in institutional culture, following leadership attempts to drive up performance (Gibb, 2004). Mentors identified honesty, impartiality and fairness as important values for mentors who might play a role in providing 'a bulwark against the erosion of moral identity and the encroachment of a moral gap' (Gibb, 2004, p. 24). Such aspects of mentoring practice demonstrate that it cannot be reduced to lists of competences (Gibb, 2004).

Table 2: Values and beliefs identified by the mentors		
Values and beliefs	**Number of mentors who identified these**	**Percentage**
Psychosocial support	9	42.85
Honesty	7	33.33
Impartiality and fairness	6	28.57
Reflexivity	6	28.57
Collaboration to improve T&L	6	28.57
Mutual trust	6	28.57

Professionalism	6	28.57
Mediation	5	23.8
Church values to be at peace with others	4	19.05
Confidentiality	4	19.05
Empathy	4	19.05
Sense of belonging	3	14.29
Two-way growth	2	9.52
Openness	2	9.52
Pragmatism	2	9.52
Humour	1	4.76
Professional ethics	1	4.76

These values and beliefs are explored further in the following case studies. Some mentors wrote about moral dilemmas, describing ways of avoiding becoming complicit in behaviour that undermined their moral code. The following case studies include anonymised extracts in italics from different critical incidents and can be related to two of Tripp's methods of analysis of critical incidents (2012): dilemma identification, and personal theory analysis.

These case studies also address the third question: 'What dilemmas and challenges did these critical incidents pose for mentors?'

Case Study 1: Dilemma identification when equality clashes with diversity

Teacher stress arises in part from the number of decisions teachers have to make and from the nature of the decisions they have to take — often choosing between mutually exclusive options — in this case, the clash between equality and diversity in an educational setting. What teachers choose is a matter of professional judgement (Tripp, 2012) as shown in the following case study where a mentee was teaching an Afghan couple with differing levels of English competence. The mentee arranged for the husband to receive extra tuition from a white British female teaching assistant. When his wife was informed, she objected to the intervention on the grounds that it was 'against their culture' for a man to be taught, especially on a one-to-one basis by a woman.

The mentee requested from her mentor an organisational stance on the matter. She personally felt immigrants ought to conform and embrace British culture, especially if they were to become economically active and responsible citizens. On the other hand, she feared being branded a 'racist' by the learner's wife or members of her class. With limited resources, the organisation was unable to engage the services of a male tutor immediately.

[The mentee] *had a valid point. She had identified an urgent need and had attempted to meet it. She had acted on behalf of the department in the name of equality. The learner's wife's voice, however, was a claim for diversity. Emotions were also intertwined. Was there a hint of jealousy or fear of losing her husband to another woman?*

The mentor was a BME male teacher who, whilst he believed strongly in the need for immigrant communities to integrate into wider society, wanted to achieve this without alienating the parties involved. He and his mentee apologised for 'their lack of respect for their culture' and offered them time to return with any ideas they might have, given that all parties were keen to see the learner develop. A meeting was scheduled.

Our learner and his wife conceded that it was also against their culture to see women (like his wife) being so dedicated to her study. They explained that the husband had been a victim of constant abuse and ridicule within their local community and yet could see the advantages of education, and the need to make trade-offs to achieve this. They both agreed to proceed with the original plan and expressed appreciation for the support.

It is debatable whether an apology was needed as the mentee was working for the benefit of the learner, but the mentor believed that this would provide a more equable working relationship, rather than forcing the issue against the will of the learners.

Case study 2: Personal theory analysis of different perspectives

Personal theory is an articulated set of beliefs that informs our professional judgement and our actions (Tripp, 2012). The choice of one resolution, rather than another, depends upon often unstated values, how a set of values might act as a theory, and why it is important to analyse an incident in more than one way.

The female university mentor examined an incident from a number of different perspectives, trying to avoid making value judgements about an experienced teacher's lack of timely lesson preparation and the impact that this might have on junior colleagues. Her mentee was due to

deliver a laboratory demonstration following a science lecture, but the lecturer had asked him to come along only 15 minutes before the demonstration as she was not ready to brief him or give him the requisite resources. Between seeing the module leader and meeting his mentor, the mentee had been to the library and borrowed an appropriate textbook.

The ensuing satisfactory conversation was, I believe, conducted between 'two adult ego states' (Berne, 1964, p24). We constructively discussed several relevant aspects of professional behaviours, for example, the need to understand why the teaching session was not better prepared at this point (including the adage 'do as I say and not as I do') and to avoid using this lack of preparation as an excuse, but instead to continue to work with the module leader to ensure that the next morning's session was a success.

The conversation involved a combination of mentoring strategies: initially I asked my mentee to suggest why the module leader was not prepared, then I challenged my mentee to identify a positive from the incident, and finally directed him to re-frame the incident (Johns, 1995). For me, my most important objective was to ensure that the relationship between my mentee and the module leader was not damaged, as the module leader also has an important role in enabling my mentee's PhD research project. My mentee left, sure that he was being proactive in his preparation and with continued trust in the module leader. The teaching session was a success.

Whilst it could be argued that the module leader had not, in this instance, been a good teaching role model, the mentor felt that her mentee had learnt important lessons from the incident. She felt that mentees could create 'composite' role models and develop a more realistic appreciation of the workplace and their mentors' role within it.

6. Conclusion

Whilst this study was limited in scope, as only 21 mentors were involved from a post-compulsory teaching context in the southeast of England, it has applicability to the broader field. The case studies represented examples of the dilemmas that mentors faced in post-compulsory education and demonstrated that mentoring is complex, non-linear and mediated by mentors' motivation and values (Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2005).

Solutions needed to be explored, discussed and mulled over. This takes time and energy, as well as skill, experience and judgement. Although it is difficult to measure mentoring impact

overall (Eliahoo 2011), mentors' values, attitudes, beliefs and life experiences did influence the strategies, solutions or advice they offered.

This study contributes to our understanding of the mentoring role in teacher education and helps to identify ways in which mentors' professional development needs can be met through reflection on critical incidents. Mentors possess a discrete and important role within their institutions, often improving staff retention and relieving the stresses and strains of working life for new teachers. Mentors could be encouraged to join collaborative networks in order firstly, to support their own professional development, and secondly, to mitigate the effects of challenging work environments.

In order to improve teacher education overall, institutions could ensure that those who mentor teacher trainees or more experienced lecturers have access to timetabled remission and professional development. Institutions could recognise the value of the work that mentors do, especially when they deal with the kinds of critical incidents described in the research. Institutions need to provide a mentoring 'architecture' (Cunningham, 2005) so that mentors' professional status is ensured and that they are given adequate time and training to fulfil this important role.

Additional research into critical incidents in mentoring might further enhance our understanding of the work of mentors and usefully inform mentor education and training.

References

Berne, E. (1964). *Games People Play – The Basic Hand Book of Transactional Analysis*. New York: Ballantine Books

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). 'Using thematic analysis in psychology'. *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* Vol. 3 No. 2 pp.77-101

Clayton, J.K. (2015) "Mentor capital", *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, Vol: 23, No. 1, pp. 1-5

Clutterbuck, D. (2001), *Everyone Needs a Mentor: fostering talent at work*, 3rd edn. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Clutterbuck, D., Lane, G. (2004), *The Situational Mentor: An International Review of Competences and Capabilities in Mentoring,* Gower Publishing Ltd.

Coe, R. (2014) "Classroom observation: it's harder than you think", available at: http://www.cem.org/blog/414/) Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring blog (accessed on 22 December 2015)

Cunningham, B. (2005), *Mentoring Teachers in Post-Compulsory Education: A Guide to Effective Practice* London: David Fulton Publishers.

Cunningham, J. (1999), "FENTO Implementation Project: development of the mentor role using the new standards in (i) supporting BTs on PGCE schemes (ii) in the support of newly appointed teaching staff", FEDA Report, July 1999.

Dawson, P. (2014), "Beyond a Definition: Toward a Framework for designing and specifying mentoring models". *Educational Researcher*. Vol: 43, No. 3, pp. 37-145.

Eliahoo, R. (2011), "Dilemmas in measuring the impact of subject-specific mentoring on mentees learners in the Lifelong Learning Sector", *Practitioner Research in HE,* July 2011.

Feldman, D.C. (1999), "Toxic mentors or toxic protégés? A critical re-examination of dysfunctional mentoring", Human Resource Management Review Vol 9 No. 3 pp. 247-278

Flanagan, J.C. (1954) "The Critical Incident Technique", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol: 51, No. 4, pp. 327-358

Gibb, S. (2004) "The moral dimension of mentoring". In: Clutterbuck, D., and Lane, G. *The Situational Mentor: An International Review of Competences and Capabilities in Mentoring,* Gower Publishing Ltd, pp. 16-28

Goleman, D. (1998), *Emotional Intelligence: why it can matter more than I.Q.* London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Gomm, R., Hammersley, M. and Foster, P. (2000). *Case Study Method*. London: Sage Publications.

Hobson, A.J., Maxwell, B., Stevens, A., Doyle, K. & Malderez, A. (2015) *Mentoring and coaching for teachers in the Further Education and Skills Sector in England: full report.* London: Gatsby Charitable Foundation. Available at: http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/mentoring-full-report.pdf (accessed 28 July 2016)

Hobson, A., and Malderez, A. (2013), "Judgementoring and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 89-108.

Hochschield, A. (1983)*, The Managed Heart: commercialization of human feelings*, Berkeley: UCLA Press.

Johns, C. (1995) Framing learning through reflection within Carper's fundamental ways of knowing in nursing, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 22, pp. 226-234

Kram, K. E. (1985), *Mentoring at work,* Glenview: Scott Foresman.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991), *Situated Learning – Legitimate Peripheral Participation,* Cambridge University Press.

Lucas, N. (2004), "The 'FENTO Fandango': national standards, compulsory teaching qualifications and the growing regulation of FE teachers". *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol: 28 No. 1, pp. 35-51.

Lucas, N., Nasta, T. and Rogers, L. (2012), "From fragmentation to chaos? The regulation of initial teacher training in further education". *British Educational Research Journal* Vol: 38 No. 4, pp. 677-695.

McKelvey, C. & Andrews, J. (1998), "Why Do They Do it? A Study into the Perceptions and Motivations of Trainee Further Education Lecturers", *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, Vol: 3, pp. 357-367.

Maguire, M. (2001), Bullying and the Post-Graduate Secondary school trainee teacher: an English case study, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 95-109

MET (2013), *Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching: Culminating Findings from the MET Project's three-year study,* Gates Foundation.

Mezirow, J. (1992) 'Transformation theory: critique and confusion'*, Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 42 No. 4, pp. 250-253

Ofsted (2003), The initial training of Further Education teachers: a survey, London: Ofsted

O'Leary, M. (2013), *Developing a National Framework for the Effective Use of Lesson Observation in Further Education*, University and College Union.

Orland-Barak, L. (2002), "What's in a case: What mentors' cases reveal about the practice of mentoring", *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 451-468

Orland-Barak, L., Kheir-Farraj, R., Becher, A. (2013) 'Mentoring in contexts of cultural and political friction: moral dilemmas of mentors and their management in practice', *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 76-95

Orland-Barak, L. and Yinon, H. (2005), "Sometimes a novice and sometimes an expert: mentors' professional expertise as revealed through their stories of critical incidents", *Oxford Review of Education*. Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 557-578.

Ponte, E., Twomey, S. (2014) 'Veteran teachers mentoring in training: negotiating issues of power, vulnerability and professional development', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol. 40 No.1, pp. 20-33.

Ragins, B.R. and Kram, K.E., (2007), "The Roots and Meaning of Mentoring", In *The Handbook of Mentoring at Work* edited by Ragins, B.R. and Kram, K.E., London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Rekha, K. and Ganesh, M. P., (2012), "Do mentors learn by mentoring others?", *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 205–217.

Robson, J. and Bailey, B. (2009), "Bowing from the heart: an investigation into discourses of professionalism and the work of caring for students in further education". *British Educational Research Journal* Vol: 35 No. 1, pp. 99-117

Singh, R., Ragins, B., and Tharenou, P. (2009) "What matters most? The relative role of mentoring and career capital in career success, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, Vol: 75, pp. 56-67

Stake, R. (2000), 'The case study method in social inquiry'. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley and P. Foster (Eds), *Case Study Method* (pp. 19-26). London: Sage Publications.

Tripp, D. (2012), *Critical Incidents in Teaching: developing professional judgement*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Wallace, S. and Gravells, J. (2007), *Mentoring in the Lifelong Learning Sector,* Exeter: Learning Matters Ltd.

Wallace, S. and Gravells, J. (2012), *Dial M for Mentoring*, St. Albans: Critical Publishing

Williams, A., Whybrow, A. (2013) *The 31 Practices: release the power of your organization's values every day*, London: LID Publishing

Woodd, M (2001), "Learning to Leap from a Peer: a research study on mentoring in a further and higher education institution", *Research in Post-Compulsory Education,* Vol: 6, pp. 97-104.

Yin, R. (1989), 'The case study as a serious research strategy'. *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, Utilisation,* Vol: 3*, pp. 97-114.

Biography: Dr Rebecca Eliahoo is Principal Lecturer (Lifelong Learning) in the Leadership and Professional Development department within the Westminster Business School at the University of Westminster in London. Rebecca is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and her professional interests lie in the field of teacher education, staff development and mentoring. She completed an investigation into mentors' experiences supporting trainees during initial teacher training for her master's dissertation and an exploration of the professional development needs of teacher educators for her PhD thesis.