Quality Mentoring in Teach First: Identifying and Monitoring the Nature of School-Based Training within a Non-Traditional Initial Teacher Training Programme

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Introduction: Teacher Training Policy and Mentoring Provision

It has been argued that educational achievement is closely linked to the quality of teachers entering the profession, and in turn that teacher quality is dependent on an effective and appropriate initial teacher training system (McKinsey & Co., 2007; Freedman et al., 2008). Policy-makers and system leaders in education both in the UK and other territories have accepted this premise; recent reforms and proposals for reforms aimed at developing a high-quality teaching workforce focus on organisational changes to initial teacher training systems (DfE, 2010; EC, 2007; Seet, 1990).

In the majority of initial teacher training systems globally, higher education institutions (HEIs) retain responsibility for the provision and delivery of teacher training programmes. In those education systems considered ‘high-performing’, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Finland, teacher training is embedded in HEIs and patterns of higher-education learning (Cameron, 2011). In these systems, a school-based placement (practicum) is informed by the curriculum of the HEI.

By contrast, in the UK there has been a trend in education policy towards teacher training becoming increasingly school-based. This trend can be seen in the requirement, from 1992, for HEI providers of teacher training to form partnerships with schools; in the short-lived ‘Articled Teacher Scheme’ of the early 1990s; in ‘School-Centred Initial Teacher Training’ (SCITT) programmes since 1994; in the expansion of the Graduate and Registered Teacher Programmes (GRTP) since 1998; in the state funding and political support for the employment-based ‘Teach First’ programme since 2002; and in the proposals to expand employment-based training routes in the 2010 White Paper ‘The Importance of Teachers’. It should be noted, however, that in the majority of these routes, the HEI provider continues and will continue to play a vital role in the delivery of quality-assured and validated teacher training programmes.

This trend can be placed within the theoretical framework of professional learning taking place informally in the workplace, which has evolved since the early 1990s e.g., (Eraut, 1994). Perhaps at least of equal importance to the shaping of policy, though, is the advocacy of ‘free-market think tanks’ making the case for schools being the ‘default’ setting for teacher training (e.g., Lawlor, 1990 to Freedman et al., 2008). The influence of the (often undisclosed) private-sector corporations funding these groups is a separate but important issue relating to policy-making, and UK democracy in general (Monbiot, 2011).

Mentors – practicing teachers who are formally involved in teacher training in a school setting – have been identified as a significant factor in the outcome of any teacher training provision (Hobson et al., 2009). With teacher training, in the UK at least, becoming increasingly focused in schools, the role of the mentor and the nature of the mentoring they provide becomes a central element of the teacher training experience. The correlation between the quality of mentoring and the quality of the new teachers has been reiterated by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted): ‘Trainee’s competence depends very much on their experience in partnership schools... even the best [HEI] providers could not compensate fully for weaker input from schools’ (House of Commons, 2010b, p.243).

1 Email: david.cameron@iop.org
2 Based on international comparisons of pupil achievement, such as PISA and TIMMS.
Studies of initial teacher training in England often show that mentoring is the most variable element in the quality of teacher training programmes (Hutchings et al., 2006a). A recent report into teacher training by the Select Committee of Children, Schools and Families made recommendations to address the ‘variable quality’ of mentoring: ‘There is a need to raise the status of school teachers who are involved in delivering initial teacher training in schools’ (House of Commons, 2010a, p.33). Recent Ofsted inspections of HEI teacher training providers, even those subsequently graded as ‘Outstanding’, nearly all observe that the mentoring, and the school-based elements of the programmes, could be improved3, and generally that there is ‘more outstanding initial teacher education delivered by higher education-led partnerships than by school-centred initial teacher training partnerships and employment-based routes’ (Ofsted, 2010).

Teach First

Teach First is a two-year programme for high-achieving university graduates, focused on leadership development in an educational context. It is a values-based programme, with a stated mission to ‘address educational disadvantage by transforming exceptional graduates into effective, inspirational teachers and leaders in all fields’ (Teach First, 2010a). The programme operates exclusively in ‘urban complex’ schools which meet specific benchmarks for socio-economic deprivation and pupil underachievement.

The programme began in 2002-3, with a first cohort of 186, and expanded rapidly whilst remaining a ‘niche’ teacher training route; in 2011, 772 participants entered the programme (Teach First, 2011). The programme allows participants to achieve Qualified Teacher Status at the end of the first year of the programme, following an employment-based training programme.

Despite its relatively small size as a training route, the Teach First organization prides itself on its disproportionate political influence, engaging directly with the main UK political parties (e.g., ePolitix.com, 2011) and publishing policy documents (e.g., Teach First, 2010d) in a way that other teacher training providers do not. The Teach First charity ‘relies on vital monetary and non-financial contributions’; the most prominent ‘Platinum’ donors are large private-sector corporations such as Deloitte, Goldman Sachs, PwC, and Procter and Gamble (Teach First, 2010c).

Variants of the Teach First programme, which is itself a derivation of the original ‘Teach for America’ programme, can be found in many parts of the world, including Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Germany, Spain, Israel and Pakistan, all with a unifying mission to ‘address educational need’ through specialized programmes of teacher recruitment and initial training (Teach for All, 2011).

Teach First is defined as a programme which allows graduates who would not otherwise consider teaching in schools to work as a teacher for two years, before reconsidering their career options. This ‘short-termist’ approach to teacher recruitment has drawn criticism (Leaton Gray & Whitty, 2010); figures reported by Teach First indicate that, of the 1162 participants who graduated from the programme between 2005 and 2010, 53% remained in teaching in 2010-11 – this includes 34% of those who graduated in 2005 (Teach First, 2010b). This compares to evidence which suggests that 67% of those completing all teacher training courses in England are still in teaching after five years (House of Commons, 2010b, p.52). These rates vary, and it has been suggested that recruitment and retention in teaching is inversely related to the general economic climate (ibid., p.181).

The Teach First teacher training programme is essentially a variant of the employment-based GRTP, with some unique elements including an intensive six-week summer training school before the participants begin working and training in schools, and increased support mechanisms for the participants from partner HEIs and Teach

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3 See, for example, the ITT inspections of: the University of Warwick (May 2010); Canterbury Christ Church University (May 2010); the Institute of Education, London (May 2010); Kings College, London (March 2010); Birmingham City University (March 2010); Northumbria University (April 2009), all available at ofsted.gov.uk
First itself. The cost of the training programme to the UK taxpayer has been calculated as £38,623 per head; this compares to a per capita cost of £24,977 for the GRTP (ibid., p.359).

Historically, Teach First has encountered the same issues relating to the quality and consistency of mentoring provision as other teacher training routes. In 2005, a report to the Teacher Training Agency stated that ‘The main issue that the [Teach First] project needs to address is the lack of consistency between the provisions made in individual schools’ (Fitzgerald, 2005, p.2). In 2006, an evaluation of Teach First noted that ‘Participants... have received very variable support from staff in their placement schools. The greatest variability related to subject mentors’ (Hutchings et al., 2006a, p.46). An initial Ofsted review of the programme found that ‘the employment-based nature of the scheme relies heavily on the quality of training provided by schools... There were wide variations between and within schools in the quality of subject training. Not all the subject mentors had the understanding or skills to fulfil their training role to a high standard; others lacked the time they needed to carry out their role effectively. This meant that some trainees did not reach the level of competence of which they were capable’ (Ofsted, 2008). An independent study found that ‘mentoring arrangements... were not in all cases strong, and appear inconsistent across Teach First schools, hindering the possible impact Teach First participants can make’ (Muijs et al., 2009, p.6).

The Intervention: The Mentor Recognition Framework

In 2010-11, Teach First introduced a pilot ‘Mentor Recognition Framework’ in a number of schools, with the aim of improving the quality and consistency of mentoring received by Teach First participants. The key mechanism within this project was the introduction of a ‘learning journal’ for mentors, which allowed mentors to provide evidence of mentoring skills and activities, against a set of performance criteria. The framework ‘recognised’ mentoring practice at one of three levels: Developing; Effective; and Advanced.

The idea of a structured recognition framework for mentoring practice is not a new one. In the mid-2000s the state-supported National Partnership Project led to the development of several different frameworks, each with its own number and set of performance criteria, developed by individual HEI providers. The Teach First Mentor Recognition Framework itself was built on the model of a successful framework for mentoring practice that was being used by a HEI provider in the North West region; the Teach First framework, however, is unique in that it was developed, piloted and (in 2011-12) will be implemented in HEI providers and schools on a national scale.

The partner HEIs working with Teach First in different regions of England used local knowledge and contacts to invite and select a number of Teach First schools to participate in the pilot. About ten schools were selected for the pilot in each of the five regions where Teach First operates, with the exception of the larger London region, where about twenty schools were recruited. In total, 84 mentors engaged with the framework; 45 were ‘subject mentors’ and 39 were more senior ‘professional mentors’, who manage the subject mentors in a school.

Although the matching of evidence to performance criteria was the key mechanism to the process of recognition, the project sought through the process of its introduction and implementation to have a deeper impact on the practice of both Teach First mentors, and the HEI tutors who worked with them. Both tutors and those mentors involved in the pilot were brought together to introduce the purpose and operation of the framework, and regional plans were shaped which allowed local ownership of the process. Mentors were encouraged to take a reflective approach to their practice as a mentor of trainee teachers whilst completing the framework. Mentors were supported by the HEI tutor, who would reflect upon their role in mentoring and coaching the mentor.

Conceptual Framework: Models of Mentoring and Teacher Competence

Various models have been proposed for the mentor in initial teacher training, and it remains clear that ‘there is no one model of mentoring... [because] the role of the mentor carries a variety of definitions within different contexts’ (Yau, 1995); any model proposed here most therefore take account of the particular context described above. I take the position that the full richness and potential for mutuality within mentoring is best represented
by seeing the mentor as a ‘reflective practitioner’, a ‘critical friend’, and a ‘co-enquirer’ (e.g., CUREE, 2005; Clutterbuck, 2004; Brooks & Sikes, 1997; Shaw, 1992; Anderson & Shannon, 1995; Alleman, 1986). From these assumptions follow decisions concerning the methodological approach.

Analysis of the mentoring process sits within the same debate. One possible approach to assessing mentoring would be to match mentors’ observable actions against generic definitions of the role or performance criteria. This is similar to the approach currently taken in assessing trainee teacher competence: observing behaviour against some predefined ‘Standards’ required for qualification. When inspecting teacher training providers, Ofsted advises inspectors to observe the actions of the mentoring process; suggesting, for example, that inspectors observe whether ‘feedback to the trainee... [is] sharp and precise’ (Ofsted, 2008a).

However, restricting assessments of mentoring to external, observable actions limits the awareness of what is happening in the mentoring process; its assumes that mentor and trainee teacher act as ‘master’ and ‘apprentice’, where knowledge of the ‘craft’ of teaching is passed hierarchically from one to the other (Brooks & Sikes, 1997); this approach also makes reductive assumptions about the nature of learning.

Studies seeking to penetrate the process of mentoring tend to take a naturalistic approach, whether interpretative, symbolic interactionist or phenomenological, to ‘assist in the understanding of the mentors’ personal interpretations’, to ‘gain access to how mentors made sense of their work as mentors’, or to ‘provide insights into mentors’ thinking’ (Rice, 2008; Young et al., 2005; Jones & Straker, 2006). This approach is more useful than simple observation for understanding what is happening within the mentoring process; however, conclusions which rely on individuals’ interpretations of reality risk becoming relativistic and lacking generalisability, since ‘no specific person can possess detailed knowledge of anything more than the particular sector of society in which he participates’ (Giddens, 1976).

Recent work on mentoring in the Further Education (post-16) sector suggests any analysis of the mentoring process should take account of the ‘architecture’ surrounding that process; that is, the support provided to the mentor by school management, HEI training providers and associated individuals. This support can have a positive effect on the sense of value perceived by the mentor as they undertake the mentoring process (Cunningham, 2007).

More generally, it has been argued that traditional approaches to the assessment of teacher competence should be re-examined. Assumptions behind ‘competence’ and the forms it can take should be challenged. An ‘interpretative model of teacher competence’ is proposed, where assessment considers not only the observable actions of the teacher and the learning which is observed to take place, but also the teachers’ decision-making and cognition processes, the base of professional knowledge and skills upon which these processes rest, and the personal characteristics, attitudes and conceptions of the individual within the role of ‘teacher’; thus providing a more comprehensive, or holistic perception of the competence of the teacher (Roelefs & Sanders, 2007). This model is summarised in Figure 1.
This model combines the generalisability of objectivist approaches to monitoring practice, with naturalistic approaches which ‘get under the skin’ of practice, attempting to understand the process at a deeper level.

Modifying the Models

The Roelefs-Sanders model is based around the process of teaching, and the learning of pupils. The mentoring process, whilst similar, has many key differences; for example, an effective mentoring process has been shown to be based upon theories of adult learning, or ‘andragogy’, in which the role of the trainee teacher as ‘professional learner’ is different to that of school-age pupils (Knowles et al., 1998). Also, the knowledge- and skills-base of the mentor is related to, but distinct from that of the classroom teacher (Jones & Straker, 2006; Rice, 2008). The conceptions and self-perception of the individual as ‘mentor’ may relate to, and overlap with; yet remains different to that of oneself as ‘teacher’.

To take account of the variation between the roles of teacher and mentor, I have drawn upon models which explore the process of mentoring as a ‘co-construction’ of professional identity within a perceived ‘community of practice’, through ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Whilst the majority of attention in this conceptual framework has focused on the construction of the trainee teacher’s professional identity, the ‘Wengerian matrix framework’ has been used to understand the construction of the teacher’s identity as mentor within the mentoring process (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2010).

The Lave-Wenger model of mentor identity construction therefore fits within the Roelefs-Sanders interpretative model of professional competence; it can be considered to nest within the ‘Knowledge- and Skill-Base’. Wenger argues that the construction of role-identity is based upon various ‘modes of belonging’ (or, conversely, of marginalization) within a community of shared practice and identity (Wenger, 2002). Therefore, whilst the trainee teacher constructs their identity through a process of belonging and participation within the community of practice of school-teachers, the mentor simultaneously constructs an identity through modes of belonging within an overlapping ‘mentoring’ community of practice – a community which might include trainee teachers, training programme managers, HEI tutors, and other mentors within and beyond their school. As the identity of the trainee teacher develops, it influences the interactions within the mentoring process; the interactions in turn influence identity formation; and the same reciprocal process is underway with the mentor. The complexity of this combined model, incorporating Cunningham’s ‘architectural support’ features, can be seen in Figure 2.
Methodology

Using the conceptual frameworks above as a starting point, I tried to identify something of the nature of the mentoring process in the Teach First programme. To do this, I explored the perceptions of the three groups most closely involved with mentoring: the participants, the HEI tutors, and the mentors themselves. These three groups evolved into three strands of data collection, which ran concurrently; preliminary results from each strand influenced the others, in a process of ‘cross-fertilisation’; an inductive-deductive process.

First, I explored the nature of mentoring in the Teach First programme before the intervention of the Mentor Recognition Framework. I called this the ‘ex-ante’ phase of the research. Following the introduction and implementation of the framework, I investigated the perceptions of those mentors and tutors who had been involved in the pilot: this was the ‘ex-post’ phase of the research.

I used a combination of structured and open-ended surveys and interviews, and where more practicable a series of discussion or focus groups, to explore individuals’ and groups’ perceptions. The data collection strategy is...
summarised in Figure 3. It should be noted that, at the time of writing, this data collection is ongoing; consequently, any analysis or conclusions drawn here must be seen as tentative and preliminary.

**Figure 3: Data Collection Strategy**

In addition, a literature review relating to the policy and quality of school-based mentoring in England was conducted, a review of reports and inspections into the Teach First programme, and an analysis of the content and pedagogy used in HEI-led training events for Teach First mentors.

There were two main questions I sought to address through these investigations. Did any, or a combination of any, of the conceptual frameworks described above reflect a viable approach to identifying and monitoring the nature of mentoring within an initial teacher training programme? Secondly, did the Mentor Recognition Framework, and the manner of its introduction into the programme, have an impact on the nature of mentoring within the Teach First programme?
Summary of Findings

1. Ex-Ante: Findings prior to the Intervention

Perceptions of Mentoring within the Teach First Programme: Tutors and Trainees

In the first stage of the research, HEI tutors were asked to rate, on a five-point Likert scale, the overall quality of mentoring that participants receive in each of the schools they visit as part of their role in supporting participants. With a response from 67 tutors relating to 259 individual schools, 59.8% of schools were perceived to be providing ‘Good’ or ‘Excellent’ quality mentoring for Teach First participants. The mean response was between ‘Good’ and ‘Satisfactory’, and a small but significant minority, 13.9% of schools, were perceived to provide ‘Inconsistent’ or ‘Poor’ mentoring.

Of the 72 comments expanding on this question, 19 made positive comments about the quality of mentoring, 19 were negative, 17 indicated a mixed picture and 17 were not directly commenting on quality.

The tutors suggested that the factors which have the most significant positive influence on the quality of mentoring are: institutional familiarity with and knowledge of the Teach First programme (usually derived from the length of experience the school has of Teach First); and the degree of confluence between the values of the Teach First programme and those of individual mentors.

Less effective mentoring provision in schools was perceived by the tutors to be a consequence of: insufficient time provided by the school for the mentor to undertake sufficient mentoring activities; a lack of specialist subject knowledge in the department where the participant was training; and low staff retention leading to a high turnover of mentors, and consequent loss of experience of mentoring practice and of Teach First.

Tutors highlighted the variability of the mentoring in Teach First schools: several commented on a disparity between the support provided by the professional mentors and subject mentors; others, on the difference between subject mentors, and the capacity of different departments to support trainees, within a school.

These findings resonate with those of numerous other studies relating to effective mentoring in school-based teacher training; a lack of sufficient time – one of Cunningham’s ‘architectural supports’ – is generally agreed to be the most critical limiting factor on the quality of mentoring provision (e.g. Hobson et al., 2009; Lord et al., 2008; Hansford et al., 2003). What is defined as a ‘sufficiency’ of time is, of course, a matter of opinion: the Teach First programme, in common with many other ITT programmes of this type, require an commitment from the school for one hour per week for trainee and mentor to meet, in order to review the trainee’s progress, resolve any issues, set targets for further development, and so on. My research found, however, that 69.9% of Teach First subject mentors felt that one hour a week was insufficient. Statistical analyses found that subject mentors were more likely than professional mentors to feel that mentoring needs more than one hour per week.

68% of Teach First participants felt that their subject mentors delivered focused and supportive meetings; 70% felt the targets and feedback they received were appropriate. However, 56% of Teach First participants could not agree with the statement, ‘My subject mentor is well informed about the programme requirements’; 32 participants made additional comments suggesting that their mentors had little or no knowledge of the programme, or what was expected of them as a mentor.

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4 Taking account of the fact that some schools may be referenced twice by different tutors, as each school is visited by two HEI tutors.
5 Both in the structured survey and the later focus group discussions
6 1-tailed difference-of-means test, 99% confidence interval.
7 July 2010 Survey, 2009 Cohort, Total response = 270
When invited to discuss mentoring in the Teach First programme, a representative group of current participants repeatedly identified the variability in quality experienced by themselves and their peers. Words such as ‘massive discrepancy’ and ‘disparity’ were recurrent, and participants wanted to see a more systematic approach to mentoring quality, through greater ‘accountability’, clearer ‘expectations’ on all sides, and methods of ‘quality assuring’ the mentoring provision.

During a series of focus groups which involved all of the HEI tutors associated with the programme, a number of issues with mentoring provision were highlighted. Tutors perceived that participants and mentors often did not spend enough structured time on the mentoring process, repeatedly commenting on there being ‘no time given’. There were cases where mentors ‘aren’t allocated any time to be with their participants’, and one tutor spoke of the ‘battle for time’ with the school hierarchy during their visits.

The lack of time was a symptom of a wider concern with some schools, such as departments where there was ‘not a great deal of commitment to the subject’, or schools which ‘didn’t recognize the value of mentoring’ generally. One tutor spoke of a ‘stubborn resistance to change in some schools’. Other tutors, though, took account of what they called the ‘unique nature’ of the schools involved with Teach First, and one felt that ‘even when the heart and mind are willing’, it didn’t take ‘a very large piece of grit in the mechanism to set [the process] out of sequence’.

As mentioned, the variability in mentoring provision across schools has been a persistently reported feature of the Teach First programme. These findings suggest that, before this intervention, the quality of mentoring experienced by a Teach First participant remained context-dependent, unique, and dependent on circumstances. The implication is that Teach First, for all its accolades, failed to provide equity of experience for the participants in its teacher training programme.

Support Mechanisms for Mentoring within Teach First

- **Mentor Training**

A similar pattern of variation was observed in terms of the level and nature of support that was provided by HEIs for mentors and mentoring across the programme.

Due to the nature of its mission to address educational disadvantage, Teach First operates in schools which are defined as challenging, or ‘urban complex’ (Hall et al., 2006). A characteristic feature of some of these schools is a relatively high turnover of teaching staff and therefore of Teach First mentors. The regular loss of mentoring experience and of programme knowledge due to this ‘staff turbulence’ was identified as a key factor by the HEI tutors, and one pointed out that ‘on more traditional routes that’s always an issue every two or three years… [but] we’re finding some schools where participants are on their fourth mentor this year’. This phenomenon obviously places a particular importance on the provision of mentor induction and training events.

At the time of this research (2010-11), Teach First operated in five government office regions of England and was delivered through ten different HEIs. Each region delivered a programme of training for the mentors in their area, through one or more HEIs. Therefore a number of different mentor training programmes were delivered, depending on the region.

It has been suggested that mentor training programmes can take either an ‘informational’ or ‘educational’ focus (Garvey & Alred, 2000; Kajs, 2002; Ingleby, 2010). Resources for HEI-led Teach First mentor training events were collected and analysed. Those elements which were focused on providing information about the programme, its procedures and protocols were defined as ‘informational’; those elements which implicitly or explicitly aimed to

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8 From the programme’s ‘Staff-Participant Liaison Committee’ (SPLiC)
develop an understanding of mentoring and coaching concepts and practice, of early teacher development or of the mentor’s role were defined as ‘educational’.

Resources from four of the five Teach First regions indicated a mentor training programme heavily focused on informational content. Examples included: a presentation on the history of the Teach First programme; procedural information relating to ‘the termly review, the second school placement, and action plans’; and an introduction to key documentation. The exception was the mentor training provided in the Yorkshire and Humber region, where mentor training included: ‘the attributes, actions and knowledge of a good mentor/trainee – prioritise and discuss’; and a presentation on the benefits of mentoring, models of mentoring, stages of professional development, professional expertise and professional knowledge, and reflection and the reflective practitioner.

- **The HEI Tutor**

A distinct feature of the Teach First programme, compared to other employment-based teacher training routes, is the relatively high frequency of visits to the school by a tutor employed by the partner HEI (Ofsted, 2011, p.5). The main purpose of these visits is to support the participant’s professional development and learning, but they can also be used to support the practice of the mentor who works with the participant on a day-to-day basis – and thus support the participant indirectly.

HEI tutors were asked about the nature of the activities they undertook, or aimed to undertake, during these visits, particularly with regard to monitoring and supporting the quality of mentoring provision.

43.3% of tutors indicated that they did not feel that ‘working with the subject mentor to develop their skills and practice’ was a part of their role during school visits; this suggests a near 50:50 split in the nature of support being received by Teach First mentors from HEI tutors.

There were a number of indications that the nature of the support was dependent on geography. For example: 82% of tutors overall would ‘discuss the content of the school-based training programme with the professional mentor’, but only 56% of tutors in one region would consider this part of their role – a difference unlikely to be a result of chance and sampling\(^\text{10}\).

**The Identity Construction of Teach First Mentors**

My research also explored Teach First mentors’ perceptions of: the mentoring role relative to their teaching role; the process by which they became an ITT mentor; and the factors contributing to their mentoring skills. By this, I hoped to explore the mentors’ professional identity construction.

90.2% of responding mentors\(^\text{11}\) indicated that the practice of mentoring trainee teachers was, relative to their role as teacher, ‘equally’ or ‘very’ important. The importance of mentoring was explained in terms of the impact on pupil learning, developing the professional profile of the mentor, and the wider context of the teaching profession.

However, when asked how they became an ITT mentor, few (22/184 responses) indicated that they had proactively sought the role of mentor. 48% of responses indicated that mentoring was an integral part of their role in school (such as Head of Department), and 48.7% that they were a mentor because a line manager had either asked or told them to take on the role.

In focus group discussions, several tutors also commented on this, one making a distinction between Teach First and HEI-based routes like the PGCE: ‘on university-based programmes, we work with subject people who want

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\(^{10}\) 2-tail difference-of-mean test; \(p=0.002\)

\(^{11}\) Structured Mentor Survey, Total response = 154
to be mentors... here I think we’re in a different thing where it’s very often the school’s decided to take the participant, and then this role has been dumped on somebody’.

The process behind the selection of teachers to work as mentors has been described as either ‘ad-hoc’ or ‘systematic’. A ‘systematic’ approach to mentor selection might involve: a committee of school managers and HEI-based programme managers; a pool of prospective mentors; a set of defined criteria of skills and attributes; and a job description of roles and responsibilities for selected mentors (Kajs, 2002, pp.60-61). Such an approach, based on clear selection criteria, has been implemented in a US State Education Department (Maine Dept of Education, 2007, pp.31,41). My findings follows that of others’ (Kajs, 2002; Cunningham, 2004) in suggesting that mentor selection in Teach First generally occurs on an ad-hoc basis, involving teachers becoming mentors either through designation by their managers or as part of their wider role. The process by which teachers become mentors can be indicative not only of the mentor’s self-efficacy in the role, but also of the regard given to mentoring by the school in which they work.

Teach First mentors were presented with seven possible influences on their skills and practice as an ITT mentor (including a user-defined ‘Other’ option) and asked to select those that they felt had had any influence on their practice, and rate that influence on a five-point Likert scale (1=highest). The results are shown in Table 1, organized in rank order.

**Table 1:** Summary of responses to the question: ‘Which of the following do you consider were most important in the development of your mentoring skills and practice? Please choose as many as apply and rank in order 1-5 with 1 = most important’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Transferable skills as classroom teacher’</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>1.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Cumulative experience of mentoring trainees or NQTs’</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Staff management skills as HoD or school manager’</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>2.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Own experience of being mentored as a trainee’</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>2.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘School-led mentor training events’</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>2.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Further study (e.g. at M-level) into mentoring, staff development or adult learning’</td>
<td>81.8%</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘University-led mentor training events’</td>
<td>86.4%</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Other’</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>3.30</td>
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This shows that Teach First mentors perceive that their knowledge and skills for teaching contribute more to their mentoring than any distinct knowledge and skills for mentoring; this, in turn, is indicative of the limitations to their identity construction as a mentor, and follows the findings of other research (Jones & Straker, 2006; Rice, 2008). The low level of importance given to HEI-led mentor training reinforces the suggestion above that, in the majority of Teach First regions, mentor training is largely informational and not focused on the specific development of knowledge and skills for mentoring.
2. Ex-Post: Findings after the Intervention

Several months after the introduction of the Mentor Recognition Framework, those Teach First mentors whose schools had participated in the pilot were invited to contribute some feedback on working with the Recognition Framework. From a total number of 84 who were engaged with the pilot, 33 responded to the invitation: 14 subject mentors and 19 professional mentors, representing all five Teach First regions.

Questions were open, and mentors were asked to comment as fully as possible on a number of issues related to the implementation and impact of the pilot. In particular, mentors were asked to comment on how they felt engaging with the Recognition Framework had supported their role as a Teach First mentor (Q2), and what impact engaging with the Framework had had on their mentoring practice (Q3). A preliminary thematic analysis of the responses is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Thematic analysis of responses to questions 2 and 3 (Open Mentor Survey)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responses by theme</th>
<th>Q2: How has the RF supported your role as a mentor?</th>
<th>Q3: The impact of the RF on your practice as a mentor.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SM</td>
<td>PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Encouraged reflection, re-examination of my role as a mentor; re-evaluated my practice; set targets for improvement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provided reassurance, confidence, motivation; recognition of existing practice</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Improved specific mentoring practice/technique/skill(s)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater knowledge/awareness of principles and concepts of mentoring and coaching</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Encouraged liaison and contact with mentors in other schools</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raised the profile of mentoring within the school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Allows the QA of mentoring within the school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Negative response; minimal impact (yet)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aside from the overwhelmingly positive impact felt by Teach First mentors (1-4), the responses to both Q2 and Q3 were dominated by themes relating to the encouragement of reflection and the provision of reassurance and confidence in one’s own practice (1). This suggests an implicit recognition of a developing self-awareness and identity construction as a ‘mentor’. Some examples of responses were: ‘it made me consider what I was doing and what else I could be doing’; ‘it has made me reflect on the successes of the year and also where my contributions as a mentor could be improved’; ‘it… has empowered me to set personal targets on what aspects of my provision could be improved’. As mentioned, the Mentor Recognition Framework was introduced in such a way as to explicitly encourage this sort of reflective practice, which was often referenced in mentors’ responses: ‘working through [the Framework] gave me an opportunity to think about my practice both as a subject and professional mentor. I have progressed a great deal as a result of this’.

A key part of the implementation of the pilot Recognition Framework was the involvement of the HEI tutors associated with the pilot schools, encouraging the tutors to support the mentors’ practice as they engaged with the Framework. Mentors were asked if and how the framework had impacted upon their relationship with the HEI tutor. Responses were more balanced, with nine of the 33 mentors stating that there had been no or minimal impact on the nature of the relationship (however some of these commented that the relationship was already...
positive and effective). Ten mentors, mostly professional mentors, felt the introduction of the Recognition Framework in their school had improved the quality of the communication between university- and school-based colleagues; several mentioned improved ‘professional’ or ‘academic’ dialogue, with ‘a sharper focus on the craft of a mentor’. Other changes to the relationship were mentioned: a greater awareness by the mentor of the tutor’s role, the Teach First programme and the participant’s experience; a sense of reassurance from increased contact with the tutor; and an opportunity to share good practice and standardise tutor- and mentor-led assessments of the participant’s teaching.

**Preliminary Conclusions**

It should be reiterated that this paper reports on research that is still ongoing; at the time of writing, interviews with Teach First mentors involved in the pilot are in progress, and the outcomes of these interviews have not been included here; also, further interviews to explore the perceptions of other mentors and tutors involved in the Teach First programme, and possibly other ITT programmes, are planned. Therefore any conclusions drawn from the data so far collected must be considered preliminary and tentative.

It should also be noted that the selection process for this pilot, in which schools responded to invitations to engage with this initiative, will not have led to a fully representative sample from the cohort of schools within the Teach First programme; schools which in the ‘ex-ante’ phase of the research were shown to lack institutional support for the practice of mentoring are unlikely to have engaged with this pilot opportunity, and instead the pilot schools are likely to represent those schools most supportive of, and ‘engaged’ in the process of ITT, CPD and mentoring generally.

I was considering two questions in my research: firstly, did the various conceptual frameworks surrounding the mentoring process and professional competence offer a viable approach to identifying and monitoring the nature of mentoring within an initial teacher training programme? Secondly, did the Mentor Recognition Framework, and the manner of its introduction into the programme, have an impact on the nature of mentoring within the Teach First programme? The first might be considered more a theoretical question, and the second more pragmatic and functional, but it is also apparent that the two are interdependent: the first needs to be answered before the second can be effectively addressed.

My research found that the process of mentoring is dependent on the ‘architectural’ support surrounding it, particularly the resources (especially time) and value that the school in which a mentor is working places on the process of mentoring as a professional activity. I also found evidence suggesting that the support provided by a partner HEI, through the nature and content of any mentor training events and the actions of the HEI tutor when visiting trainee and mentors in schools, can influence the mentoring process.

My research supported the notion that the nature and quality of the mentoring process derives from the mentor’s actions and decisions. The mentor’s actions and decisions, however, are based upon a professional knowledge- and skills-base. Where a school teacher is also acting as a mentor, my findings suggested that different mentors develop and draw on their knowledge and skills from teaching, and specific knowledge and skills for mentoring, to different extents. The extent to which a mentor develops and draws upon a specific knowledge-base for mentoring is based upon the nature of that individual’s identity construction of themselves as a mentor, in relation to their identity construction as a teacher. Others have spoken of this differentiated identity, distinguishing between the role of ‘co-operating teacher’ and ‘what we would consider to be a mentor’ (Hall et al., 2008, p.340). Therefore at the root of the mentoring process (in terms of the mentors’ role within it) is the identity construction of the mentor, as a ‘teacher-mentor’. When this is developed, the nature and quality of the mentoring process will be developed and improved.
The introduction of the Mentor Recognition Framework with a pilot group of schools certainly seemed to have this effect. The nature of the Framework, the design for its operation, and the manner in which it was introduced to schools, mentors and HEI tutors led to the majority of mentors commenting, implicitly or explicitly, on how it had developed their identity construction as a mentor. There is a possibility that the impact of the framework has already extended beyond the schools in which it was piloted. The 2011 Ofsted inspection of the Teach First programme took place while the Mentor Recognition process was still in a pilot phase, nevertheless inspectors felt that overall ‘school-based subject and professional mentoring is often of very high quality’, and noted the ‘effectiveness of the Teach First ‘mentor recognition framework’ in raising the quality of mentoring’ (Ofsted, 2011, pp.17,7).

The current policy context in England indicates that teacher training will become increasingly focused in schools; schools and mentors in schools will play an increasingly central role in the training and induction of the next generation of teachers. HEI providers of teacher training, however, will continue to play an important supporting role in this process, for example as ‘strategic partners’ within new Teaching School alliances. Both HEIs and schools, therefore, will need to consider – together – how they can effectively support the provision of high-quality mentoring for trainee teachers, in ways which draws upon the strengths and resources of both school and HEI. This research provides some suggestions for conceptual and functional approaches to addressing this challenge.
References


Teach First, 2010d. *Ethos and Culture in Schools in Challenging Circumstances: A Policy First Publication*, London: Teach First


