

Mentoring secondary English trainee teachers: a case study

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Mentoring secondary English trainee teachers: a case study.

Abstract:

This article explores the outcomes of a qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews to examine the role of the mentor in developing secondary English trainee teachers' knowledge, understanding and practice in England. It considers to what extent the development of trainees is supported by current mentor practices and the initial teacher education (ITE) Mentor Standards, as well as how mentoring can be strengthened to support both trainees' and mentors' own development.

The results highlight several areas of development for mentors and suggest, perhaps, that mentoring needs to be reconceptualised to allow both trainees and mentors to learn to reflect more deeply *together*, by shifting from the current individualistic, hierarchical, performance-based model to one that is more collaborative, dialogic and focused on deep learning.

Key words:

Mentoring; Mentor Standards; secondary English trainee teachers

Introduction

The context for this study is the secondary English cohort of a university-based initial teacher education (ITE) provider in the south of England that provides training for approximately thirty English trainees a year, who take the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) and the Schools Direct (SD) routes into teaching. The ITE

department works with school-based mentors from a range of partnership schools, including state comprehensives and academies across four counties.

In England in 2020, there are severe issues with the recruitment and retention of teachers: the most recent teacher-trainee census (Department for Education, DfE, 2019) shows a shortfall of 15% of the government target for the number of teachers needed to fill the gap. A report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2019) found that retention rates of early career teachers (between two and five years into their careers) have dropped significantly over the last few years. In response, the U.K. government (DfE, 2018), has proposed an 'Early Career Framework' (ECF) package for Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) of two years, rather than the current one-year programme. The package includes the extension of the ITE Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016) for NQT mentors in schools. This study explores the role of the mentor, along with the Mentor Standards, and examines what constitutes good practice in mentoring trainee - and subsequently early career-teachers.

A Review of the Literature

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2011), successful education systems across the world tend to follow an ITE model that includes a substantial amount of time in the classroom with a mentor. In fact, mentoring is widely recognised as one of, if not, *the* most important support systems for teachers entering the profession (Hobson et al, 2009; Shields and Murray, 2017). Worldwide, there are different models of mentoring trainee teachers but the majority follow the traditional, hierarchical dyadic practice, where the 'expert' or more experienced colleague advises, supports and assesses the trainee (Harrison et al, 2006; Geeraerts et al, 2015).

While the dyadic practice of mentoring trainee teachers in the U.K. is well established, some have argued that the mentoring relationship has 'failed to realise its full potential' (Hobson and Malderez, 2013, p.1). This possibly was the rationale behind the DfE's introduction of the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016, p.3) to 'help bring greater coherence and consistency to the school-based mentoring arrangements for trainee teachers.' The Mentor Standards cover many aspects of the mentoring role, including: offering support; challenging the trainee to reflect; modelling best practice; supporting the trainee to develop their teaching through giving feedback; providing or enabling development of subject and pedagogical knowledge; and enabling trainees to use educational research to inform their teaching. It is important to acknowledge that the Mentor Standards are non-statutory therefore are not intended to be used as a performative measure. However, this brings with it the potential for different settings to interpret their use in a multiple of ways, and the risk that, in the performative culture of schools in the U.K., they are not actually used for the supportive purpose intended. They may also be disregarded completely which could result in different trainees receiving very different or inconsistent experiences of mentoring, leading to a lack of parity and potentially, quality.

If mentoring within ITE is to be given the status it deserves, not only should the Mentor Standards be embedded into practice in schools, but mentors need to be trained and supported in how to meet these Standards effectively, including developing their own and the trainee's critical reflection skills, (Hobson et al, 2009; OECD, 2010).

Furthermore, the literature investigated confirms the need for mentors to have up-to-date subject specific knowledge, pedagogy and theory (Shulman, 1987; OECD, 2010; Moats, 2014). However, much more work needs to be done in training mentors

how to make their current tacit knowledge explicit to trainees (Brant, 2006), along with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to keep them up-to-date and in line with input from university-based ITE providers.

Moreover, policy-makers in England could further consider the benefits of learning to teach through collaboration and scaffolding (Lave and Wenger, 1991), along with the advantages of introducing a peer/coaching model of mentoring (Geeraerts et al, 2015). This could make the transition to mentoring NQTs more developmental, along with enriching the learning for the mentor. If the current Mentor Standards are to be extended to the first two years of a teacher's career, then they need to be re-examined in the light of the trainee's progression i.e. arguably it would be inappropriate for a mentor to adopt the same stance with a trainee teacher, as that with an NQT who has already had two years in the classroom. This notion of training teachers as a process links to Wenger's (1998, p. 215) concept of learning as 'an experience of identity... not just an accumulation of skills and information.' Both trainees and mentors need to continually reflect on, and possibly re-evaluate, their developing professional role and identity within the classroom and the school community.

Finally, the Mentor Standards do not currently consider the potential benefits to the mentor him/herself of being involved in mentoring. Some of the literature suggests that mentors appreciate the gains reaped from being a mentor for their own personal development, along with a relationship with their trainees which can generate joint knowledge-construction and mutual learning (Van Ginckel et al., 2016). This echoes Freire's (1972, pp.59-60) view that teachers should encourage 'true reflection and action' to promote learning. Freire also suggested that this approach transforms the

traditional power relationship between teacher and learner, or, in this case, mentor and trainee, as they both 'become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow' (1972, p 65).

Methods

For the last four years, I have been leading an ITE course responsible for training approximately thirty secondary English trainees a year, in addition to offering them continued support during their early career. The course includes two placements at local schools so I am also responsible for the training and ongoing support of approximately sixty English subject mentors a year. The main purpose of my research was to explore mentoring practice in order to improve the potential support that I can offer to both trainees and mentors during the placements. For this reason, I chose to use case study as a research method since it enabled me to examine mentoring in detail, from many different angles, to gain a richer, balanced understanding (Thomas, 2016). The flexible design also offered the opportunity to drill down by collecting a variety of evidence to create a three-dimensional picture of the 'case' of mentoring, allowing for 'the validation of data through triangulation' (Denscombe, 2014, p. 62), thus increasing trustworthiness, alongside addressing any questions of reliability through the use of multiple perspectives.

I used three main research methods to collect my data: firstly, semi-structured interviews which took place from January to April, 2019; secondly, course evaluations from 2017- 18 and, thirdly, a research journal which covered the period November 2018 to June 2019.

Since my study was framed in the interpretative paradigm, I chose to use semi-structured interviews due to their flexibility in allowing respondents to develop ideas and elaborate on their own personal interests and priorities (Denscombe, 2014).

My sample was a purposive one in order to achieve representativeness (Cohen et al, 2018) of firstly, four former trainees: I selected at least one male (a minority group in English trainees) and all had trained in a variety of different schools and were now teaching in four different schools. Secondly, I asked for volunteer mentors from the group of thirty who made up the 2018 – 19 first school placement mentor group and, from them, selected four, trying to include racially diverse, more or less experienced, and male and female. It was also essential that none of the participants had mentored the selected trainees previously, in order to be sensitive to ethics, due to my dual role as PGCE English course leader (which includes training mentors) and researcher (Boddy et al, 2010; Drake, 2010). Although a small sample, they were enough to be able to generate 'rich data' (Cohen et al, 2018, p.224).

I also used a research journal both as a reflective tool (Silverman, 2005) and a further source of data. Janesick (1999) highlights the critical use of research journals in qualitative research since as a researcher myself, I am, in fact, a research instrument. I saw the journal as a means of collecting a 'finite' [and] heterogeneous [...] set of tools and materials which [...] may always come in handy' (Levi-Strauss, 1974, p. 11).

As recommended by Thomas (2016), once I had drawn the themes from across my data set, I created a theme map to show the relationships between the themes

(Figure 1, below). I then organised my data-analysis into sections, corresponding to the three research questions, therefore enabling me to explore these themes.

Figure 1: Network analysis map based on Thomas (2014)

My role as researcher and ethical considerations

Since I had had overall responsibility for the training of both the trainees and mentors interviewed, I was clearly situated as an insider researcher. While this position gave me the advantage of access to my participants, rapport and an existing mutually respectful, professional relationship, it did present difficulties in terms of power dynamics. In order to attempt to reduce the power asymmetry, I sent indicative interview questions in advance as advised by Tripp (1983). I also gave careful thought to 'setting the interview stage' (Kvale and Brinkman, 2014, p. 149) by attempting to give the participants more agency by allowing them to choose the location for the interview (Dunne et al, 2005).

I obtained institutional ethics approval before collection of all data sources, including student evaluation documentation and my research journal. In terms of respecting the rights and dignity of individuals as well as ensuring participation was voluntary and appropriately informed (ESRC, 2019), I used continued informed consent for the

interviews and anyone quoted in my research journal, in addition to anonymising the names of teachers and schools in the presentation of all data (Boddy et al, 2010).

In order to ensure the research was conducted with integrity and transparency, I deliberately distanced myself from my current context by interviewing last year's trainees so that they could be completely open (Drake, 2010; ESRC, 2019). I do not pretend to claim that there was no 'interviewer effect' in terms of my own or my participants' responses, or, moreover, that I could remain completely objective in my data analysis. However, by acknowledging this attention to ethical values, I hope to achieve some 'methodological rigour' (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006, p.152) in my research.

Results

One of the aims of my study was to explore current practice in relation to the Mentor Standards so one of my interview questions to both the mentors and the trainees was to ask to what extent they were familiar with the Standards. Interestingly, they all acknowledged that they were either unaware of their existence, or, if they knew of them, they did not use the Standards or refer to them in any way. In fact, one mentor and one trainee both misinterpreted the question to be about the *Teachers'* Standards. Future studies might delve more deeply into the relationship between the two sets of Standards.

Research Question (RQ) 1) What is the role of the mentor in developing English trainees' knowledge, understanding and practice?

Support and Guidance

Emotional Support

All of the trainees and mentors interviewed emphasised the supportive and guiding role of the mentor and recognised that this support could take many forms: emotional, organisational, cultural and practical. This kind of support is recognised as being of 'crucial importance for teachers' meaningful and empowering work experience' (Väisänen et al., 2017, p. 41).

Interestingly, all four of the trainees emphasised the need for encouragement and positivity as a motivational tool, regardless of whether they were actually getting things 'right':

T2: what you do want is someone to be nice to you to smile to you and to be able to talk to you as a human being.

Meanwhile, this need for positive feedback was supported in the trainee evaluation data:

I felt like [my mentor] was constantly [...] giving me torrents of negative feedback without praising me at all. (English Evaluation, 2017 – 18).

It is significant that the trainee used the emotive metaphor 'torrents' here, which illustrates the impact this criticism was having on the trainee's state of mind. In fact, data from Shields and Murray (2017, p.325) 'indicated the emphasis that beginning teachers place on emotional support [...] seemed on par with their need for pedagogical support'.

Support/Assessment Dichotomy

The trainee's concern over the negative impact of excessive criticism reflects Hobson and Malderez's (2013, p. 576) research that 'the over-use of directive and evaluative approaches is likely to constrain a mentee's learning and development.'

On the other hand, mentors recognised that any support *has* to be balanced with being honest and frank, even if it means being critical:

M2: if they're [trainees] not pulling their weight, being able to step in and say, actually, I think you need to be.

This may be linked to the fact that in the U.K., the current mentoring model means that mentors *do* have to make judgments on the trainee's performance and are, ultimately, responsible for their progress. This finding highlights an issue with the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016, p.11) which *do* state that a mentor needs to 'establish trusting relationships, [...] and understand how to support a trainee [...] with integrity, honesty and respect' but do not actually recognise the assessor role of the mentor.

One of the trainees interviewed recognised the need for:

T3: making sure that balance is right because sometimes if you're just getting bombarded with everything you've done wrong.

Geeraerts et al's (2015) Finnish study of peer-group mentoring suggests that this potential conflict can be resolved by adopting a non-judgmental model of mentoring.

Theory/ Practice Divide

All of the trainees interviewed said they received very little research-based subject or pedagogical knowledge from their mentors and saw this as more of a university role. Asked how much English pedagogical knowledge mentors shared with them, one of the trainees saw the mentor's role as:

T3: being able to see something in action, rather than just the theory behind it.

This echoes Korthagen's (2010, p.104) view that, 'not every moment in the process of learning to teach is suitable for the presentation of theory'. However, two of the trainees explained that mentors often had this tacit knowledge but were not always able to consciously point out to them the theory it was based on:

T2: the sort of current pedagogical knowledge wasn't there [...] they were doing it, but they just weren't aware necessarily that they were doing it.

This is supported by the literature, which suggests that experienced teachers do, in fact, possess expert subject and pedagogical knowledge (Brant, 2006; Moats, 2014) but, as Philpott (2014, p12) suggests, perhaps there is a need to guide mentors in how to make this explicit, by using metacognition to integrate 'theory and practice, through [...] excavating the intuitive.'

Indeed, in contrast to the trainees' perception of the mentor's role, the mentors interviewed all recognised the importance of engaging with theory, and one even went so far as to suggest that she felt,

slightly embarrassed actually with these trainees talking so fluently about pedagogy and I thought it's a long time since I have done it. (M2)

Collaboration

All four of the trainees mentioned the role of *other* members of the school community in providing pedagogical or subject expertise. One of the trainees stated:

the Head of Department [...] said, [...] I've read this, this will really help. (T3)

This supports the view of Lave and Wenger (1991, p.109) that often the most effective way for novices to learn is from experienced practitioners through

'peripheral participation' in a 'community of practice'. However, the Standards do not emphasise this collaborative approach as being integral to trainees' development.

Interestingly, one of the trainees said she found initiation into school culture one of the most important roles of both mentor and department:

T1: the mentors who talked to me about [...] issues with the unions or small things... prepared me [...] the culture [...] the community.

Again, this fundamental role is not covered in the Mentor Standards, despite findings from the European Commission (2010) that effective teacher induction programmes worldwide all included a collaborative framework with a focus on a shared language exploring the teaching culture of a school community. In fact, the mentors that I interviewed also mentioned issues with trying to induct trainees into some of the professional aspects of being a teacher. Thus, for some younger trainees or trainees from marginalised groups, these hidden rules possibly need to be made more transparent and explicit by mentors, other teachers and professional tutors alike.

RQ 2) From the perspectives of mentors, to what extent does current mentor practice support the development of mentors themselves?

Reciprocity

Three out of the four mentors interviewed recognised that they also learn from trainees and thus benefit from the process.

M1: working alongside students who are enthusiastic [...] it helped my confidence [...] having people share the class, it's been a really positive experience.

This mutual relationship is supported by considerable literature (Hobson et al, 2009; Geeraerts et al, 2015; Heikkinen et al, 2018) and illustrated by the mentor who said:

M2: It's a two-way street [...] it's so lovely being able to bounce ideas off each other.

It is interesting that her metaphor reflected a sophisticated conceptualisation of mentoring as reciprocal, not hierarchical. In fact, another mentor went further with this and used the 'journey' metaphor several times in his interview to describe his own teaching career, as well as the trainee's training year:

M3: all of us are on a journey and all of us are learning and improving, making mistakes and having to reflect and learn [...] you've got to be walking the walk as well as talking the talk.

This 'walking the walk' metaphor illustrates the mentor's perception of himself and the trainee being equals, both committed to critically reflective practice, learning from their mistakes, in addition to demonstrating that a good mentor must inhabit the qualities, practices and values they expect their trainee to acquire, not simply 'talk the talk'. Moreover, the journey metaphor clearly demonstrates how being a mentor develops not only the trainee's trajectory but the *mentor's* own critical reflection on *their* journey, or as Freire (1972) mooted, both teacher and learner being *jointly* responsible for their progress.

Further benefits of mentoring to the mentor were supported by informal conversations with other mentors, noted in my research journal. One mentor said mentoring:

'makes you reflect on your own practice' (RJ, 29/4/19)

However, the transmissive/hierarchical relationship and role of the mentor promoted in the Mentor Standards does not seem to take this reciprocal relationship into consideration or, indeed, recognise the potentially dialogic nature of mentoring and the fact that *both* partners may develop and deepen their ability to critically reflect.

RQ3. How, if at all, could mentor practice be strengthened?

CPD

Subject Specific Pedagogy

All four of the mentors expressed an interest in being more informed about what the trainees were learning, in terms of up-to-date developments in English subject knowledge and pedagogy:

M3: the ... input that university students get [...] to have that shared with us as well ... to see where the students are going and what they've done [...] it's also keeping us fresh.

In fact, the mentor's rationale for this seems to be two-fold: firstly, in terms of being able to guide the trainee to put the theory into practice at school, but, also, secondly, to be able to experiment with new ideas themselves. Hobson and Malderez (2013) found that when mentors do *not* have this up-to-date knowledge, a trainee's progress can be impeded.

Time

One of the issues with providing teachers with quality CPD, is that in the current context of budget cuts in schools, there is very little funding or time to allow teachers out of the classroom, a theme that also emerged in my data:

M1: you never feel there's enough time.

This is supported by the European Commission (2010)'s recommendation that, rather than mentoring being seen as yet another part of a teacher's day to day responsibilities, mentors should be given reduced timetables. However, the reality is that very few schools in the U.K. are able to put this into practice. The consequence of this is reflected in the comments by trainees; two of those interviewed mentioned:

T2: not being made to feel like you're a burden or inconvenient.

This too was reflected in trainee written evaluations:

My mentor was kind and helpful but overstretched and rarely able to observe my lessons or provide feedback. (English Evaluation 2017 – 18).

Reflective Practitioner Approach

All of the trainees and mentors recognised the importance of the reflective practitioner approach to trainees' development. One trainee said that her mentor would ask her,

T3: What could you do to improve [...] it was good because it got to a point where I'd finish a lesson and I'd go, 'Right, I know what I did wrong there'.

This exemplifies Schön's (1995) 'reflection-on-action' as the trainee is demonstrating that she was initially being coached to help her reflect, but that, with practice, the process became internalised and she realised she could do it independently. One of the mentors effectively demonstrated that she knew when to remove the scaffolding to enable a trainee to become more independent:

*M1: we were able to [...] step back more quickly [than with a previous trainee].
And, that obviously as a mentor, you need to know whether someone's ready.*

This is seen in research by Harrison et al (2005, p.422) that identified that trainees need to be helped to 'apply the brakes in order to be self-critical ... and to bring about [...] deliberative habitual reflection.' While mentors commented that encouraging self-reflection is an important part of the mentor role, one of the trainees suggested that mentors need more training in how to effectively enable this:

T2: there's no training on coaching elements [...] you sit there you listen to what you're being told and you act on what you're being told, [...Mentors] need to be far more open to dialogue [...] and lead to those fruitful conversations.

Harrison et al (2005, p. 437) found, that by providing mentors with questions that 'encourage analysis, challenge thinking and help to scaffold learning', trainees were able to think critically about their teaching in a more independent way.

Limitations

This study draws on a small sample of trainees and mentors from one ITE institution in England, so it cannot claim generalisability (Flyvbjerg,2006; Denscombe, 2014). However, the context does share features which are typical of those found elsewhere in the U.K., such as trainees having two mentors in two different placements in their ITE year; mentors having overall responsibility for assessing the trainee against meeting the Teachers' Standards; mentors regularly observing the trainee teach, and giving feedback; and mentors meeting the trainee regularly to discuss planning, subject knowledge and pedagogy. For this reason, it may be possible for the reader to see the relevance and draw wider inferences from the case study (Thomas, 2016).

Finally, while my trainee sample included trainees who had experienced a range of mentoring experiences, both positive and negative, the fact that, for ethical reasons, I interviewed them during their NQT year, some time after their ITE, may have affected their reflections as memory is always reconstructive (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Insider research (Drake, 2010) raises particular ethical issues that must be balanced with conducting robust research, especially in a case such as mine, where my professional role involves assessing trainees for their ITE qualification and training mentors. In order to ensure the research was conducted with integrity and transparency, I deliberately distanced myself from my current context by interviewing last year's trainees so that they could be as open as possible (Drake, 2010; ESRC, 2019).

Conclusions and recommendations

While my case study into mentoring trainee English teachers is a small-scale, qualitative study in a very situated context, some interesting findings emerged that both build upon and challenge the existing literature base and could have some useful implications for my own practice, as well as others in similar contexts.

Much of the literature on mentoring acknowledges that the primary role of the ITE mentor is one of support and guidance, in particular providing emotional support (Hobson et al, 2009; Väisänen et al, 2017). This is alluded to in the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016) but, arguably, from the trainees' point of view, the importance of this is underestimated by some mentors. This study found that mentors need to be encouraging, consistently emphasising successes, particularly in the early days of the trainee's placement. However, mentors and trainees alike were well aware that the trainee needs to meet the Teachers' Standards, developing as an effective practitioner; and that sometimes this pressure can have

a negative impact on the trainee's well-being. Moreover, it is the mentor who is judged on the progress of the pupils in their care, and in the performative culture of schools in the U.K., mentors may find it hard to let a trainee take risks with their class.

Another key finding from my study was that mentors lack confidence in developing trainees' subject and pedagogical knowledge and that this may have different causes: some mentors may lack deep, evidence-based knowledge across all areas of English; some mentors articulated that they struggled to make explicit their tacit, embodied knowledge and available for trainees to comprehend and apply. This is an important finding because the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016) emphasise the importance of mentors sharing expert subject and pedagogical knowledge with their trainees. There is a strong evidence base to suggest that this is one of the ways through which trainees can make substantial progress (Cochran et al, 1993; Brant, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Moats, 2014). Significantly, my study also showed that subject and pedagogical knowledge is often provided for the trainee by other members of a department or within a school, all of whom are key to the mentoring process. Notably, this fundamental collaborative aspect of mentoring is not referred to at all in the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016). The collective community of practice model of mentoring (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Ellis, 2007; Korthagen, 2010) is clearly good practice and, from the point of view of both trainee and mentor, essential to the trainee's development. A recommendation for policy is that the Mentor Standards are reviewed in order to acknowledge this collective responsibility within departments and schools as a whole.

A surprising finding of this study was the extent to which mentors value and appreciate what they learn from trainees, in terms of creative ideas for teaching,

research-based innovations in their subject area and the opportunity provided to reflect on their own practice. Moreover, trainees may also bring resources and this, coupled with collaborative planning, can have a positive impact on teachers' workloads. This is an area that is acknowledged in much of the literature (Väisänen et al, 2017; Heikkinen, 2018) but not in the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016), which suggests a much more transmissive, hierarchical mentor relationship than that advocated by the literature. A recommendation is that more could be done in schools to emphasise the benefits of mentoring and subsequently providing mentors with more time, financial support, promotion or recognition, raising their status within the school. This is even more pertinent in the light of the new Early Careers Framework (DfE, 2018), which proposes that the Mentor Standards are extended to the NQT year.

The study also found that mentors would value more CPD, in terms of up-to-date pedagogy or developments in their subject area. Moreover, significantly, they would like to be more informed of the theory being shared with the trainees at the university.

My ultimate and, perhaps, most important, finding is that trainees benefit greatly from mentors guiding them to be reflective practitioners and that this is an important aspect of trainees becoming more independent and proficient (Harrison et al, 2006; Hobson and Malderez, 2013). However, trainees and mentors alike felt that mentors are perhaps in need of further guidance and development in how to enable trainees to be reflective. This may be linked to mentors not being particularly confident in practising deep critical reflection themselves, possibly because they are rarely given the opportunity to integrate theory and pedagogical subject knowledge through rich discussions with colleagues, as recommended by the literature (Moats, 2014). In

order to go beyond the superficial, micro level of the classroom, which is often the focus on lesson observations or 'learning walks' conducted by senior management, teachers need to be given the opportunity to discuss the macro, wider influences on learning on a deeper level, in a trusting, non-judgmental environment. This could be one way of teachers being given more agency (Biesta et al, 2015) into their own development. This fundamental role of the mentor is addressed in the Mentor Standards (DfE, 2016) but my study, albeit small-scale, has found that precisely *how* mentors initiate this, is an under-developed area, both in terms of literature and current practice.

In conclusion, mentoring practice in ITE in the U.K., indeed the way we view all teacher development, whatever the stage of their career, needs to be reconceptualised to be made far more dialogic and collaborative through providing mentors with the opportunity for deep, reflective conversations about their own practice. They need to be more trusted with a 'coaching' style model to experiment, take risks, link theory with their practice, think deeply about macro issues of education such as gender and social class, in dialogic conversations both with their trainees and with other teachers. Furthermore, mentors need to be provided with more time with trainees in order to provide them with the support they need. This fundamental shift into how we conceive mentoring could have a significant long-term impact on the ongoing teacher recruitment and retention problems in the U.K. This is even more pertinent in the light of the current model of teacher training and mentoring having to adjust to the social distancing rules created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Both ITE providers and schools are going to have to adapt a much more flexible, and, arguably, even more supportive approach to mentoring trainee

teachers so that they, in turn, can support pupils in these extremely changeable and challenging times.

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