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What makes an effective mentor within the HE sector

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the characteristics of effective mentors, from the viewpoint of the mentees, in an educational environment.

There is some research from a mentee's perspective, in areas of mentee characteristics and how their personality and attitudes contribute to the success of the mentoring relationship (Aryee et al 1999), but there is little research on what attributes make for an effective mentor, from a mentees viewpoint. 'A comprehensive understanding of the role of mentor characteristics in mentoring relationships would be of tremendous practical value, enabling protégés to seek out effective mentors, permitting seasoned employees to assess their capacity to serve as mentors, and informing organizations how to select and train mentors.' (Wanberg et al 2003: 70.)

Also, recognising that the quality of the supporting mentor relationship is one that can 'make or break new teachers' (Bleach 1999:35) and that most mentoring research is based on positivist approaches, this research takes an interpretivist, small case study approach with new Lecturers as mentees. Through 2 small (total of 6 mentees) and 1 large focus group discussion (total of 10 mentees), this research investigates what mentees in an HE environment consider to be the characteristics of an effective mentor.

The case study organisation is a large UK University where 8 new members of lecturing staff were recruited in September 2007 and another 6 joined in January/February 2008. In the sample group of 10, 6 mentees had a formal mentor, 3 had an informal mentor and 1 had no mentor at all. Therefore, the opinions gained were expressed from mentees with a variety of mentoring experiences within the HE environment. Picking a small homogeneous sample allowed the data gained to be much more informative, detailed and richer and thus allowed some logical generalisations to be made (Stake 2000 as cited in Silverman 2005:127.)

In summary, the mentees agreed that the most effective mentors are experienced and have a mixture of professional and personal skills (Bleach 1999) and that support should be provided for the mentee at the right level, depending on their needs. All the information gathered from the mentees has helped the University to gain a better understanding of mentor characteristics and this information has since been used as criteria to select and train future mentors for a more formal mentoring scheme (Wanberg et al 2003.)

Key words:

Mentees, mentors, effective characteristics, HE sector

Introduction To Theory

Much research in the educational context (Jacobi 1991; Hunt 1992; Earley and Kinder 1994; Bleach 1999; Villani 2002) suggests that mentoring can be the making of new teachers, by helping them to become able teachers and so is key to their survival! According to Bleach (1999:7) mentoring in education 'exists in an organisational context, is an adult relationship, invariably involves an element

of power dependency, is concerned with 'on the job' practice, is a means of promoting the new teachers involvement in professional learning (and) emphasises progression from guided to independent practice.'

Building on these quotations in the educational context, Daloz (1986) describes the mentor initially as a teacher. As the mentee develops confidence and independence, the role of mentor changes from one of authority to a more guiding and coaching type role, then a colleague and eventually a friend. Anderson (1987 as cited in Brooks and Sikes 1997:28) defines mentoring as 'a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's professional and/or personal development.'

Fish (1995) builds on this idea of 'nurturing' and describes the mentor as a facilitator who empowers practitioners and draws them to learn for themselves by reflecting on their professional educational practice. 'Quality mentoring, then, is mentoring practice which is based upon an understanding of educational principles.' (Fish, 1995: 109)

From a Higher Education perspective, Bennion (2004) agrees and suggests that mentors face many competing pressures; to advise, to teach and to conduct research and also declares that getting access to mentors is a common problem within University settings, particularly for women and minority faculty and this is compounded by the fact that there are few same background traditional mentors available.

Effective Mentors

An overview

Cohen (1995:3) explains that 'mentors make a difference primarily because their competent mentoring behaviours enable them to transmit the essential quality of trust.' Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995:30) agree that mentors 'act as friends, willing to play the part of adversary in challenging assumptions, they listen and question to encourage the learner to widen their own view: they are happy for the ownership and direction of the relationship to lie with the learner and they accept ambiguity as an exciting part of life, providing the learner with the opening for change and autonomy.' Clutterbuck and Wynne (1994) agree with these authors and describe similar developmental behaviours which lead to their 4 key roles of an effective mentor; coach, counsellor, networker and facilitator.

From a study by Allen and Poteet (1999) where 27 mentors from 5 different organisations were interviewed about their effective mentor characteristics, the most frequent comments involved the importance of the mentor's listening and communication skills, patience, knowledge of the organisation and industry, ability to read and understand others, being honest/trustworthy, having genuine interest/self motivation and being people orientated. Clutterbuck (2000 & 2004) developed his 10 mentor competencies and has carried out similar research, but from a mentees perspective, on what makes mentors effective, and suggests that key elements are; rapport building, holding back from giving their own experience, summarising, challenging and encouraging, actively listening, using good penetrating questions and giving considered advice/share knowledge when asked for. According to Gray and Smith 2000 (as cited in McDowall-Long 2004) mentees report that mentors who are friendly, approachable, understanding and patient make good mentors and, in addition, those who are perceived as honest, respectful, dedicated, compassionate and as acting with integrity are considered to be the most effective. Aldred et al (1998) discuss the knowledge that could be useful for a mentor to share and suggests this should include functional expertise, knowledge of the organisation and its strategies and culture, knowledge of the people and access to networking and knowledge of the context within which the business operates.

This has been developed further by later studies by Aldred et al (2006) where they suggest that you will know when you are ready to be a mentor, as you will have the interpersonal skills already discussed, together with a range of experience and a variety of workplace skills, a good understanding of the organisational context and a sense of commitment to the organisation. Cranwell Ward et al (2004:160) agree with the early stages of Aldred's models where it is suggested that mentors need business acumen. 'In addition to strong interpersonal skills, effective mentors also demonstrate a high

level of expertise including teaching skills, professional skills, organisation, communication skills and self confidence' (Gray and Smith 2000 as cited in McDowall-Long 2004:524). 'The wise coach or mentor is competent, but continuously strives to increase the capacity to learn: about themselves; about their clients; and about the organisations and contexts in which clients live and work' (Connor and Pokora 2007:21.) Both these quotations support Cranwell Ward et al (2004) and Aldred's views (1998 & 2006), that a mixture of interpersonal and business/professional skills are needed.

After extensive consultation with coaching and mentoring practitioners and clients, the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) have developed a set of mentor and coach competencies in order to create professional standards and benchmarks within the mentoring and coaching profession. Their core competencies include; self awareness, beliefs and attitudes, self management, contracting, managing the process, goal setting and action planning, evaluating, questioning, listening and feedback.

In summary, it seems clear that these various authors, (mostly from a business orientation) are trying to distinguish between the behaviours, knowledge and skills expected of the mentors, and that there is much agreement and consistency between these. Table 1 shows a summary of key points made by the authors discussed in this section, under these 3 headings. Key areas suggested in the educational literature have been highlighted in bold on Table 1. The detail underpinning the bold areas is discussed in the next section.

Effective mentors in an educational context

As part of the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) project, new teachers/mentees and mentors were asked which mentor qualities and skills they valued the most and the most consistently mentioned attribute between both parties were listening skills, as well as other qualities such as giving time, showing genuine interest, being supportive, honest and approachable too (Earley & Kinder 1994.) In this study, as well as some similarities between expectations of mentor and mentee, there are also some differences. Interestingly, the mentors cite experience as being key but the mentees don't mention this explicitly, except to say that empathy is key together with the mentor putting themselves in their position; but is it possible to empathise with others without having had similar experiences? The importance of the mentor having experience is discussed later in this section.

Table 1. A summary of what makes an effective mentor (from key authors discussed)

Behaviours of an effective mentor	Skills expected of an effective mentor
• Challenge assumptions • Encourage learner to widen own view • Happy for ownership & direction to be with the learner • Accept ambiguity • Patient • Honest/trustworthy • Genuine interest in developing others • Self motivated • People orientated • Committed to own learning • Time & willingness to devote to relationship • Talk less than 20% of the time • Good sense of humour • Offer mutual respect • Ability to relate well to others who want to learn • An open mind • Flexible attitude • Recognition of own need for support • Enthusiastic/Positive in outlook • Drive and energy • Committed to the process • Having values, trust and integrity/honest • Approachability • Willingness to share • Be prepared to give the learner space • Sounding board • Open & transparent • Creative • Visible • Strategic • Friendly & kind • Understanding & empathetic • Dedicated • Compassionate	• Communication skills/reinforce rapport • Listening/use of silence • Information seeking/questioning • Guiding/suggesting • Encouraging • Stimulating • Confidence building • Challenging (non-judgemental & supportive) • Sharing • Encouraging • Goal clarity/goal setting/action planning • Motivating • Nurturing • Teaching • Good organisational skills • Coaching/Counselling • Facilitating • Ability to read and understand others • Summarising • Well developed interpersonal skills • Supportive • Evaluating/Reflecting • Feedback • Knowledge expected of an effective mentor • Knowledge of organisation and industry • Conceptual modelling/mentoring theory • Business/professional savvy • Relationship management • Give considered advice/share knowledge • Functional expertise • Knowledge of organisations strategies/culture • Knowledge of the people & access to networks/influence

• Confident/assertive • Hold back from giving own experience • Self awareness/understanding others	• Knowledge of context in which business operates/organisational context • Range of experience and variety of workplace skills • High levels of expertise including teaching skills and professional skills
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Kram (1985) discusses role modelling as part of the psychosocial support function of a mentoring relationship but later research (Scandura 1992) has identified role modelling as a distinct function. Either way it is clear that mentors need to role model behaviour. Devlin (1995) agrees that mentors must possess role model qualities; a suitable, adaptable, sympathetic and understanding personality, to be reliable, conscientious, articulate and interested in their own evolution.

Devlin (1995) goes on to say mentors need to possess good guidance and counselling skills, good interpersonal skills, to be supportive and accessible and possess knowledge and experience too; teaching and academic ability, have a philosophical grasp on mentoring, experience of teaching, experience of working with new teachers and an interest in IT. Qualities of good mentors, according to DeBolt (1989 as cited in Villani 2002) from his study of mentors rating their most helpful characteristics include; approachability, integrity, ability to listen, sincerity, willingness to spend time, enthusiasm, teaching competence, trustworthiness, receptivity, willingness to work hard, positive outlook, confidence, commitment to the profession, openness, experience in teaching, tactfulness, cooperativeness and flexibility.

Glover et al (1994) agree that a supportive teacher-mentor should be a good role model with good knowledge of the subject area, have good pupil to staff relationships, be sympathetic but firm, is willing to give commitment in time and effort and among other areas sees the mentee as their personal responsibility. With this in mind, a poor mentor would have limited knowledge of the subject area, a pedestrian teaching style, has little time for others and has little contact with mentee unless required by crisis or formal procedures. There is some emerging literature on identifying negative aspects of mentoring relationships (Scandura 1998; Eby et al 2000; Eby and Allen 2002) and Clutterbuck (2004:57) refers to these ineffective mentors as 'mentors from hell' or even 'toxic mentors' and their behaviours include abusing their power, having an alternative agenda, being forceful with solutions and who are not switched on to their own learning or that of others.

Interestingly, the key areas discussed in educational mentoring effectiveness do mirror that of mentoring effectiveness within a business context except that tactfulness and co-operativeness are not mentioned in the original table nor are the importance of reassurance and being non-judgemental/neutral. However some of these words may be implicit in other terms such as supportive, encouraging, confidence building etc. Interestingly, an interest in IT and having experience of working with new teachers is not explicit in Table 1 (perhaps this is obvious in a non-educational context?) but conversely also teaching is not mentioned as an effective mentor skill by the educationalists.

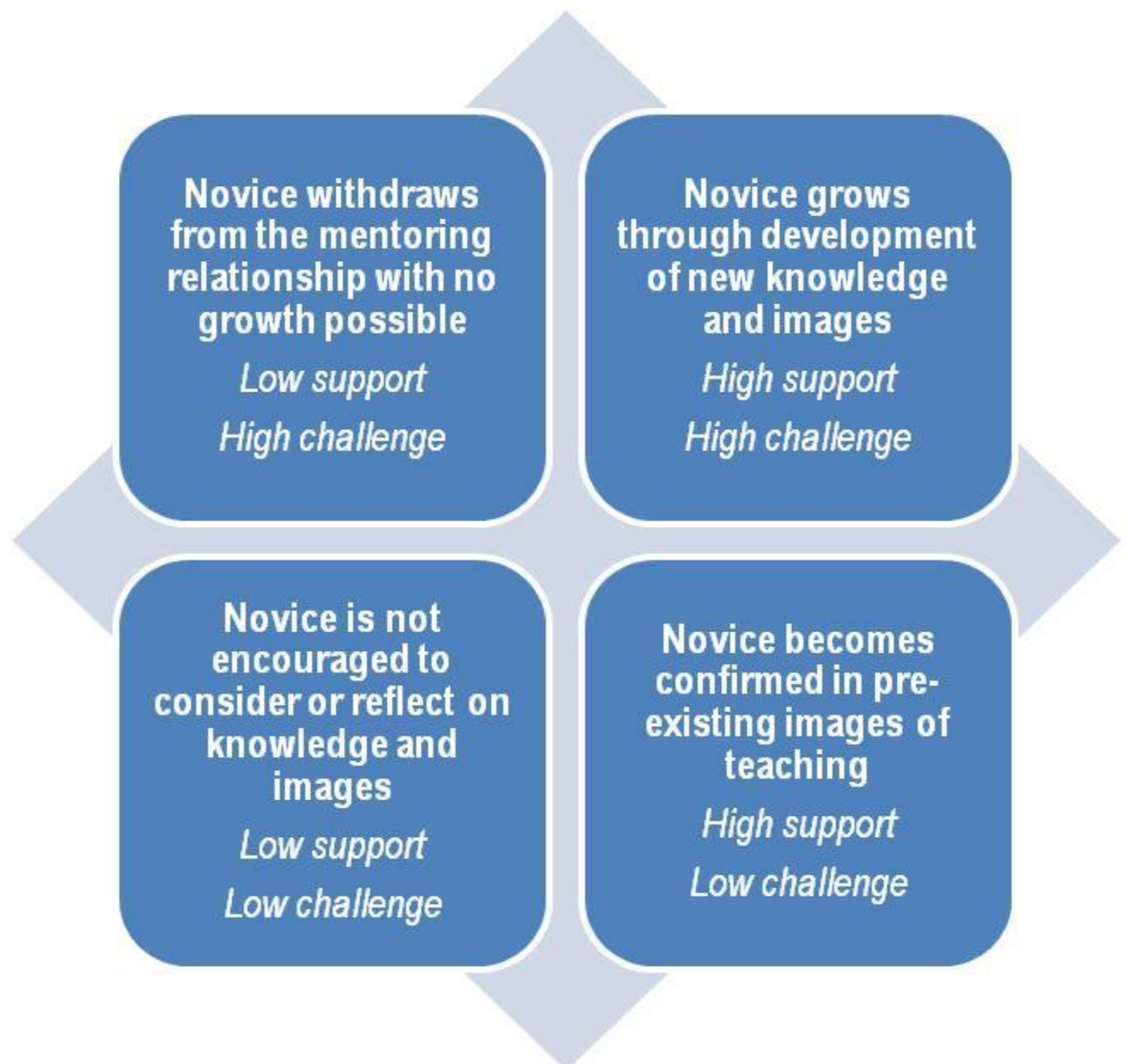
Also, there does seem to be some debate in the educational context about the importance of having recent experience of being a new teacher and/or experience of working with new teachers too. According to Bleach (1999) 'it can be beneficial for NQT's (Newly Qualified Teachers) to have a buddy-type mentor who is recently qualified and thus well-placed to understand queries and concerns that might not appear so pressing to more experienced staff.' (Bleach 1999.) This advocates capitalising on the 'recency effect' and is recommended too by Corbett and Wright (1993:225) who purport that 'the common belief that a mentor should be an experienced teacher was not a view that our experience confirmed. It seemed that mentors who had only recently completed their own training might be well placed to become part of a partnership of learning.' Brooks and Sikes (1997) would disagree and suggest that effective mentors should have experience and expertise in enabling individuals to learn and have established ways of managing and organising classrooms, planning and developing curricula and a range of marking and assessment techniques.

Support and challenge

Also, challenging and the ability to be critical in a constructive manner is only mentioned by one set of educational authors (Brooks and Sikes, 1997) yet this is seen as important by other authors from outside the educational context too. John and Gilchrist's (1999) study on understanding the post-lesson dialogue between student teacher and mentor helps to demonstrate that the interplay between tutor and student is a complex one and that 'an effective mentor is one who recognises and reacts in an appropriate way to the students state of mind... (where) dialogue is truly two-way and becomes a partnership where challenge and support are mixed with great skill.' (John and Gilchrist 1999:110).

Elliott and Calderhead (1994) go on to expand this notion of 'challenge and support' with their two-dimensional model of mentoring relationships. This shows the importance of recognising the need to challenge pre-existing ideas but this must be done supportively, to ensure personal learning and growth occurs. Please see Fig. 1 for further information.

Fig. 1. The 2 Dimensional model of mentoring relationships



Taken from Elliott and Calderhead 1994:172

It seems clear from this matrix that for an effective mentoring relationship to take place, there needs to be high support and high challenge. It seems unusual that much of the educational literature discusses the need for practical support but less emphasis is made on the need for challenge. This suggests that new Teachers/Lecturers would fit best into the high support and low challenge quadrant of the matrix, implying that the novice becoming confirmed in pre-existing images of teaching is acceptable or acceptable at least in the early stages of their personal development? Interestingly, Bouquillon et al (2005:252) and their extensive study across high-tech industry and the education sector discovered that 'organizational context (was) an important situational moderator in mentoring processes...specifically, protégés trust and identification with their mentor showed significant increases between the core and redefinition phases (after some time in the mentoring relationship) in educational contexts.' This quotation suggests that in the early stages of the mentoring relationship in the educational context, trust is not well established and therefore challenge could be limited.

Agreeing with this, Cohen (1995) warns about the readiness of the mentee to benefit from the challenge of a constructive critique and suggests this may be less risky at later phases within the mentoring relationship when more meaningful trust has developed. However, Elliott and Calderhead (1994) disagree and highlight the need for mentoring to strike a healthy balance early between supporting student teachers and challenging them too, to promote professional growth. Rajuan et al (2007:239) agrees that cooperating teachers/mentors 'should be encouraged to provide student teachers with learning opportunities of challenge and exploration of personal teaching identities in a safe environment of personal support.'

In conclusion as part of the NFER (1994) project, criteria was recommended when selecting a mentor for new teachers and these included; recent experience of being an NQT/probationer, nearness or proximity (the study showed lack of proximity was seen to prohibit the level of mentor support both asked for and received), direct linkage/overlap with teaching commitments i.e. similar classes, modules, same year groups etc, a non-connection with a line manager/assessment type role and the mentor being a source of accurate information about the school/department procedures, a valuable role model sharing good practice, ensured commitment to/investment in the role and capacity to effect change/act as intermediary on mentees behalf and ensured commitment to/investment in the role. This second to last point, suggests 'that mentoring requires, if not status, at least some means to access senior staff as well as diplomacy or political negotiating skills.' (Earley and Kinder 1994:65)

In short this research showed that new teachers would prefer experienced, official mentors to support them in their first year. Also, although there are many similarities and only a few differences between the effective skills of a mentor from a business viewpoint and an educational one, in either context it can be seen that a mentor needs to have a mix of personal and professional skills and so confirms that 'mentoring is certainly a complex role!' (Bleach 1999:96.)

Analysis And Discussion Of Data Collected

Table 2 shows the information gathered from the focus groups in terms of how the new Lecturers/mentees expected a mentor to behave, what they expected them to know and to do.

It is clear from this table that the mentees expected the mentors to be caring, approachable and understanding, willing to take the time to be with the mentees and that "sensitivity is key in the relationship" too. Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) would share this view that mentors 'act as friends' together with Gray and Smith 2000 (as cited in McDowall-long 2004) who report that the best mentors are friendly, approachable and understanding. Interestingly, using Clutterbuck's (2004) 10 mentor competencies as a framework, it is clear that most mentor behaviours are covered in this table except communication competence and sense of proportion/good humour. Perhaps these behaviours are seen as given or are implicit in some of the other words used i.e. bouncing ideas off each other could suggest 2 way communication skills etc. Or perhaps the mentees are suggesting that communication skills and a sense of humour are secondary to knowledge and other key skills required by the mentor, in the early stages of mentoring?

Table 2. A summary showing what the mentees expected from a mentor

How Mentors need to be/behave;	What Mentors need to do/skills;
Close to you geographically/someone you share an office with Not in a hurry Someone who gives a sh*t/someone who cares External looking Experienced in the Institution, systems and people Willing to be in the process/a volunteer Sympathetic/empathetic Sensitivity is key to the relationship Reassuring – when you want to know you are on the right track and that you don't need to worry Approachable Reasonably unafraid of having head chopped off What Mentors need to know; Know and understand the (local) systems, local frameworks and bureaucracy Know and understand the people Know what you do and don't do in the department/clues to customs and practice Know the subject you are teaching in Know content type stuff i.e. levels Know how to approach things, as been through something similar before Recognise transitions people going through Understanding others assessment criteria Help with relocation issues Can help with career options outside the University (exit mentoring?)	Sharing disciplines Guiding you around the subject Raising awareness of expectations of self and others Pointing you in the right direction Advising who you need to talk to Advising when you need to talk to Dom/Dean Helping with problems in the classroom Helping with using 3 hours with students Helping with issues on work itself – when you get stuck Helping with writing an assessment Helping with marking – knowing how in-depth you need to go in advance (save time later). Unofficial moderation Helping with IT, Public Folders & IT in classrooms Helping with anything in terms of the organisation Making you think/asking you questions Bouncing ideas off each other Encouraging you to deal with your own feedback Asking if you are alright Telling you not to worry Suggesting a different approach Offering practical support Supporting with teaching or identify needs and then referring you to others (not expected to resolve problems) Providing support at the right level Interceding on your behalf?

It is clear from this table, that they also expect mentors to be experienced in the University and have a full understanding of the processes, the people and the systems as well as some related teaching knowledge. This fits with Allen and Poteet's (1999) research that knowledge of the organisation and the industry is key for a mentor, with Cranwell-Ward et al's (2004) suggestion that mentors need business acumen and Aldred's (1998 & 2006) suggestion that it is important for mentors to have a knowledge of the organisational context too. However, this contradicts with the NFER study where although mentors were clear that experience was key, mentees did not cite this explicitly (Earley and Kinder 1994.)

There was some debate in the focus groups on whether a mentor should help on the "technical side of things" and indeed someone said "personal qualities are more important than anything technical" and

another said "it is not the subject matter expertise" but it seemed clear (from Table 2) that the majority of areas under what mentors are expected to know, seemed to be related to teaching, assessment and marking. This suggests that mentors should at least have an understanding of the subject and these areas. Other comments suggested that mentors should have knowledge of relocation issues and career options outside of the University, to help mentees with other 'settling in' matters too. Aldred et al (1998 & 2006) suggest that mentors should have functional expertise and workplace skills but Clutterbuck (2004) warns that a mentors knowledge and experience should only be shared when asked for by the mentee and that knowledge of the right people to access is just as important.

Mentors acting as role models (Kram 1985; Scandura 1992; Glover et al; Devlin 1995) was not mentioned explicitly by these mentees but role model qualities were referred to in terms of experience and knowledge of the profession mentioned earlier, sharing good practice, having an external outlook, being sympathetic and understanding etc. In terms of what mentors are expected to do, lots of adjectives are used and repeated throughout Table 2 and so the key themes are; helping (repeated 7 times), advising (repeated twice) and then sharing, guiding, understanding, encouraging, supporting and providing. These terms are used by many authors when describing mentoring skills and behaviours, many of which have been summarised into Table 1. Interestingly, if this Table 2 from the mentees was placed on top of the summary table from the key authors, it is clear that there are many similarities; guiding, encouraging, supporting etc (see Table 3). However, there are a few gaps too, namely; communication skills and sense of proportion/good humour (as mentioned earlier) but also challenging.

Table 3. Similarities between Table 1 and Table 2

Mentor needs to be/behaviours	Mentor needs to do/skills
Willing	Guiding
Committed	Sounding Board
Open minded	Encouraging
Approachable	Nurturing
Empathetic	Facilitating
	Supporting
Mentor needs to know about...	
Organisation & industry	
Functional expertise	
People & processes	

Support and challenge

From a mentees perspective, challenge seems to be missing and/or not key to an effective mentoring relationship. Many key authors (Clutterbuck and Wynne 1994, Cohen 1995, Brooks and Sikes 1997; John and Gilchrist 1999; Clutterbuck 2004, Cranwell-Ward et al 2004, Connor and Pokora 2007) cite challenging as being key to an effective mentor, although some authors (Aldred et al 1998 & 2006, Gray and Smith 2000 and the EMCC competencies) do not explicitly mention the importance of mentors needing to challenge the assumptions of others.

Perhaps the new Lecturers did not list this as key criteria for their mentors at the moment as they are in the early mentoring stage of needing more practical, hands-on support than challenge at the

moment? Perhaps they see their new role as challenging enough and so look to the mentor for help and advice instead of challenge; this links to the 'novice becomes confirmed in pre-existing images of teaching' part of Elliott and Calderhead's (1994) matrix, which is not ideal for the development of new knowledge. There is an assumption that this may change over time, as trust within the mentoring relationship develops over time and the mentee feels more comfortable within their role (Bouquillon et al 2005.) This suggests a more reactive role for the mentors and not a proactive, wider personal development type role. Perhaps again this is linked to the early stages of development for the new mentee, concentrating on surviving the first few days, months and year leaving time for personal development of their professional practice and any personal challenge for a later date. Perhaps for now the psychosocial support is more important than the career development support? (Kram 1985.)

Also, the need for mentors to intercede on behalf of the mentee was discussed in one of the focus groups but was only mentioned within the NFER research (and not by other key authors as an activity of effective mentors), where it is suggested that mentors should have the capacity to effect change/act as an intermediary on the mentees behalf. Perhaps the mention of it by some of the mentees in this study links to feeling unable to confront or challenge others, as they are new to their role?

Interestingly, all mentees mentioned that what they expected from mentors and mentoring will depend on where they have come from and their experiences beforehand and that an effective mentor would "provide support at the right level." The suggestion being that if they were new to teaching, they would expect more support with their teaching and if they were new to teaching and new to HE too, they would need more mentoring support. This suggests that the mentor would be expected to be an expert in teaching within HE. However, this was further debated in the focus groups, where it was mentioned that your mentor may help you identify a need for some special training or assistance, in terms of teaching but they are not necessarily expected to resolve the problem for you i.e. they may be able to put you in contact with those that can. This is supported by Clutterbuck and Wynne (1994) who describe one of the key mentor roles being 'networker' and Aldred (1998) and Clutterbuck (2004) describing mentors as having their own network of contacts and influence to pass on.

Ultimately though, it was agreed by the mentees that mentors should provide support at the right level, depending on the needs of the mentee. Perhaps this links to the discussion on the missing word 'challenge' earlier? Suggesting mentees may need support before challenge but that challenge may come later when inter-dependences change. As a result of the final focus group discussion, the mentees created Fig. 2 to illustrate the changing emphasis on support needed over time. This diagram shows the importance of having a mentor as soon as you join the University but that your dependence on that mentoring relationship will reduce over time, as your ability to manage on your own increases.

Fig. 2. A graph showing the need for mentoring support for new Lecturers, in the early stages (created by the mentees)



This is a very powerful model as it was created by the mentees themselves and demonstrates their need for support in the early stages of mentoring and joining the organisation. It is interesting to note that they do not mention challenge increasing over time (just their ability to cope!)

In short, as 'occupational life savers' (Bey 1995 as cited in Villani 2002:7) according to the new Lecturers/mentees, effective mentors are expected to have a mixture of professional and personal skills i.e. to be experienced within the University, the systems, the processes and the people but also be willing to help, advise, share, guide them in all areas of teaching, assessment and marking. Practical and emotional support is key in the relationship, however challenge has not been mentioned but the suggestion is that this may change as the mentees experience increases and the trust in their mentoring relationship develops over time. The helpful model drawn up by the mentees shows that support should be provided at the right level for the mentee, depending on the needs of the mentee and that dependence on the mentor would decrease over time too, as a mentees confidence and ability to manage on their own increases. A summary of the key data collected and discussed is below (see Fig. 3).

Fig 3: Summary of the key data collected from the mentees

So in summary, according to the new Lecturers/mentees, what are the characteristics of an effective mentor?

The new Lecturers/mentees expect the mentors to be sensitive, caring, approachable and understanding and willing to take the time to be with the mentees

Mentors need to be experienced in the University, the systems, processes and the people

Key things that mentees expect mentors to do include; helping, advising, sharing, guiding, understanding, encouraging, supporting and providing

Communication competence and sense of proportion/good humour are not mentioned explicitly as key to being an effective mentor

Mentors are expected to have an understanding of teaching, assessment and marking (or be able to direct the mentee to others, who have this knowledge)

Mentors need to act as role models for the mentee, using a mix of personal and professional skills

What is expected from mentors, will depend on where the mentee has come from and their experiences beforehand

Mentees do not cite challenge as a key activity of their mentors (although, theory suggests that getting the right balance of support and challenge is crucial to mentoring relationships)

Mentees agree that mentors should provide support at the right level, depending on the needs of the mentee (initial support seems to be more geared towards reactive, practical support than proactive professional development and growth)

Mentees dependence on their mentor will decrease over time, as the ability of the mentee to manage on their own, increases

Although this study was felt to produce valid and reliable data, further investigation into the mentoring relationships for further new Lecturers could help to test and reinforce key themes. It would also be interesting to revisit the mentees/focus group volunteers and see how they are progressing within their mentoring relationships, with a view to getting a better understanding of how mentoring support changes over time. It may be by now that some of the mentoring relationships have been less successful or have been terminated, or mentors changed and so these 'deviant cases' could be pursued too. All these ideas for further study would help to gain a better understanding of effective and less effective mentor behaviours.

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