

The Theory and Practice of Mentoring in Initial Teacher Training: Is there a dichotomy in the role of learning theories?

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Abstract

This paper is a report on work in progress and focuses on the mentors' professional knowledge base, and the ways it enables mentors to assist student teachers in their initial teacher training in schools. The paper also considers the basis for mentoring, the role of the mentor and the mentor's use of learning theories. The paper also considers a potential dichotomy between mentoring theory and mentor's professional practice.

Key Words

Initial teacher training – mentor role – mentor training – instructional design – learning theories – practice.

1. Introduction

As part of my PhD I am currently carrying out research into the pedagogical practice of mentor teachers during the Teaching Practice element of student teachers' training within Initial Teacher Training ('ITT') provided by Higher Education Institution ('HEI') Partnerships.

My research has three components; a literature review, data collection, and analysis of the data collected. I have largely completed the first two components and I am currently analysing the data collected and, as a consequence this paper represents a report on work in progress rather than a completed project.

2. Focus of Research

'Teacher training for adult education is undoubtedly the element in the overall structure that is least adequately provided for. It would seem that the specific character of adult education is denied or given insufficient

prominence in the planning of teacher education. In any event, special training for those who are responsible for teaching adults is rarely to be found.' (OECD, 2003: 177-178)

It has been established (Elliott and Calderhead, 1994) that the mentor is the biggest influence on the student teacher's professional development. However, notwithstanding that the mentoring of student teachers in England and Wales started over 15 years ago literature (Pajares, 1992; Hawkey, 1998 Jones *et al.* 2004) suggests that the roles and responsibilities of the mentor are still poorly defined. In addition the use of learning theories by mentors as part of their pedagogical strategies is little understood (Glover and Mardle, 1995), and that research in this area is needed.

In considering the student teacher as a learner in the mentoring relationship on Teaching Practice, my research looks to the instructional design used by the mentor, in particular the learning theories that support their pedagogical strategies. Instructional design as a process is defined as:

'The systematic development of instructional specifications using learning and instructional theory to ensure the quality of instruction. It is the entire process of analysis of learning needs and goals and the development of a delivery system to meet those needs. It includes development of instructional materials and activities; and tryout and evaluation of all instruction and learner activities.' (Applied Research Laboratory, 2004)

As such the term encompasses the process through which an educator, such as a mentor, determines the most appropriate pedagogic methods for specific learners in a specific context, attempting to reach a specific objective.

Atherton (2003) suggests that instructional design is best built on a firm foundation of learning theory, with such theories allowing us further ways and possibilities to see the world, and states that *'Whether we realise it or not, the best design decisions are most certainly based on our knowledge of learning theories'* (Atherton, 2003: 81). However, what seems to work best for the student is instructional design based on a fusion of learning theories, with Schwier (1995) indicating that:

'We must allow circumstances surrounding the learning situation to help us decide which approach to learning is most appropriate. It is necessary to realise that some learning problems require highly prescriptive solutions, whereas others are more suited to learner control of the environment.' (Schwier, 1995: 119)

One aspect which has been noted in the literature on mentoring but seldom described is that mentoring is based upon a relationship between two adults. In addition, although adult learning theory is described by Hansford *et al.* (2003: 53) as the '*dominant conceptual framework*' underpinning mentoring in literature, little attention has been given as to whether this occurs in practice, and if so by what means.

My research is therefore focussed on mentors' professional knowledge base, and the ways it enables them to assist student teachers in their professional training in schools, and the extent of the correlation between this knowledge basis and the pedagogical strategies and learning theories employed by mentors. I am particularly interested in the use, in so far as it occurs, by mentors of adult learning theories, which are said form the dominant conceptual framework for mentoring.

3. The Landscape for ITT in England and Wales

3.1.1 Introduction of Mentoring

Whilst the introduction of mentoring is often associated with Circular 09/92 (DES, 1992a) the term '*mentor*' does not appear in this Circular; instead there was a requirement for '*experienced practitioners*' within schools to act as instructors for student teachers. This requirement was stipulated in the context that '*students should be given opportunities to ... participate with experienced practitioners*'. Rather than being instructors these experienced teachers were to play the part of co-enquirers, thinking critically about teaching and learning.

Notwithstanding that the term mentor was absent from the Circular the consequence was, according to Fletcher (2000: 67) that '*When Kenneth Clarke ... announced that schools were to assume the role of teacher training that was previously organized, assessed and validated almost exclusively by lecturing staff in higher education institutions, he effectively created a new workforce – school mentors.*'

However, no guidance was given within the circular as to how an '*experienced teacher*' was defined, or how skilled they had to be in order to mentor a student teacher. Indeed it was only in 2005 that a national framework for mentoring built on '*good practice within Initial Teacher Training*' (CUREE, 2004) was issued by the DfES (2005).

Given the increased role of classroom teachers working as mentors in ITT Circular 09/92 envisaged that this was to be underpinned by the development of knowledge, understanding and skills by teachers in order to take over some of

the functions previously carried out by the HEI tutor. However, since then no formal requirements for the training of mentors has been deemed necessary by government or its agencies.

The circular also stipulated that all courses for teacher training were to use competence statements in assessing, recording and developing the student teachers' abilities to teach. The progressive development of these competences was to be monitored regularly during initial training, and their attainment at a level appropriate to newly qualified teachers was to be the objective of every student taking a course of initial training.

As a consequence the significance of the changes of Circular 09/92, and the subsequent enactment of many of its provisions in the 1994 Education Act, cannot be underestimated. The practical-theoretical balance prevalent for almost fifty years was set aside, as the theoretical aspect was to be non-existent, thus allowing the student teacher to be trained under the competence-based model. This is reflected in the observation by Wilkin (1996) that:

'By the end of the decade, the government had introduced a training system which in both structure and content reflected its ideology: its orientation was 'practical', theory was disappearing, increased responsibility had been given to teachers, and tutors had been portrayed as inadequate professionals.' (Wilkin, 1996)

However, the lack of theoretical understanding by mentors was identified as a shortcoming by Glover and Mardle (1995) relatively soon after the introduction of the circular. They therefore recognised the need for mentors to receive *'training in ... demonstrating the theories of learning ... and in explaining the relevance of psychological and sociological background to education'* (Glover and Mardle, 1995: 75).

Significantly the DfES (2001) has now recognised the relevance of the use of educational theory by mentors within ITT in the paper entitled *'Study Support in Teacher Training and Professional Development.'* Within this paper some educational theories relevant to practice and teaching are considered to be a useful source design for course content. It is suggested study support offers *'valuable opportunities to relate theory to practice and to try out new ideas'* (DfES, 2001: 31). However, as *'study support'* is intended to describe those *'activities that schools do outside normal hours'* (Ibid: 5) and is by its nature voluntary the development of mentors, such as it is, is left to the HEI Partnerships and the mentors themselves. Therefore despite the acknowledgement by the DfES as to the importance of theory the training provided to mentors is often limited to familiarisation with TTA assessment

requirements, which are set out in Partnership handbooks, with no attention being given to relevant educational theories.

As a consequence this lack of focus on the development of the mentor teacher's knowledge, understanding and skills in Circular 09/92 and subsequent regulations on ITT sits uncomfortably with their key role in the training of student teachers. It also raises the question of how these mentor teachers, with their knowledge of theory often limited to that required in the school classroom, are equipped to mentor student teachers.

3.1.2 The Role of the Mentor

It can be seen that in issuing Circular 09/92 government gave extremely clear and specific directions as to how ITT was to develop into the 1990's, with ITT of student teachers being based in schools and HEI Partnerships involving schools set up to manage ITT. In addition, Gilroy (1994) presciently suggested that it indicated that teacher-education provision was to be centrally controlled.

By 1997 the limited autonomy of these partnership schemes was under threat from government control through *'continuing inspection against harder-edged criteria designed to move partnerships towards more exacting teacher competences. This raises a potential threat to the teaching profession as a whole since the idea of the teacher-as-technician,'* providing *'a pre-packaged National Curriculum, does not sit well with the status of a profession.'* (Arthur *et al.*, 1997)

These new criteria were subsequently introduced in 1998 by the new Labour Government when it issued Circular 04/98 (DfEE, 1998). The most significant aspects of the circular were that it contained a prescriptive ITT curricula and an exacting list of almost 100 competence-based assessment standards. The circular was subsequently supplemented by the implementation of a core curriculum for ITT trainees and the creation of career entry profile for teachers.

DfEE Circular 04/98 was itself replaced by the TTA document entitled *'Qualifying to teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training'* (TTA, 2002). These standards, as set out by the TTA, focus heavily upon content or subject knowledge and understanding; pedagogy is not addressed; indeed the document makes no suggestion that student teachers need to be aware of how to teach content knowledge. The role of pedagogy is left to the associated handbook (TTA, 2003), where it is indirectly addressed in the section entitled *'Commitment to professional development'*, in which the emphasis is on personal development by the student teacher.

Interestingly, the term ‘*assessor*’ and not mentor is used in this handbook to describe the function of the school based teacher working with the student teacher. This term is consistent with the requirements of the TTA 2002 that student teachers are required to focus on pedagogic knowledge, and are subject to assessment against specified standards under a competence-based model.

Such is the strength of these standards and the rigidity with which they are enforced that Hill (2001), in his neo-Marxist critique suggests that the individual mentor teacher’s flexibility is limited, and the ‘*potential of individual teachers to co-produce, to subvert the intentions of these circulars is less potent than the power of the TTA and Ofsted to insist on their implementation*’. He goes on to state that these bodies have progressively introduced changes deliberately designed to limit the degree of interpretation available to mentor teachers. Significantly this move to more exacting teacher competencies, with ‘*the idea of the teacher-as-technician*’, was identified by Arthur *et al.* (1997) as a threat to teachers as professionals and raises a question as to the balance between the professional and practitioner/technical aspects of the mentor’s role and their perception of their task, and what is informing their practice as mentors.

The current process for training the student teacher and the role of the mentor vis-à-vis the student teacher is set out in Figure 1 below.

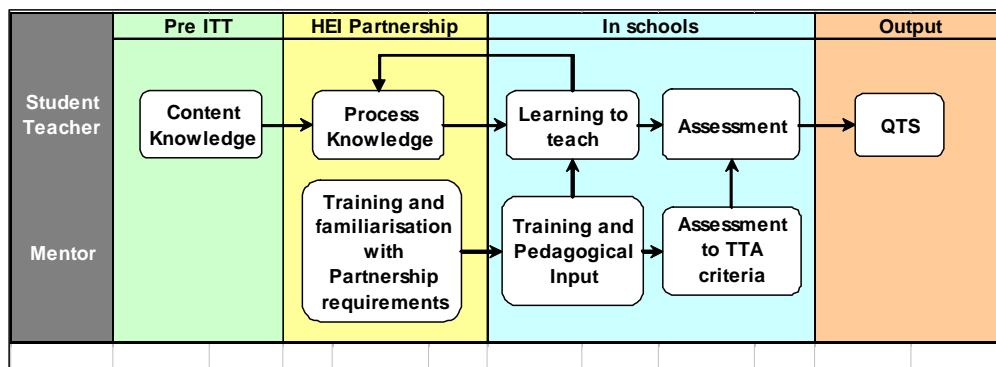


Figure 1 – Role of the Mentor vis-à-vis the Student Teacher

In this environment it is not surprising that there has been some disquiet over the role and effectiveness of the mentor. Bullough *et al.* (2003: 58) believe that there is a growing understanding of the shortcomings of the traditional patterns of teacher training in schools, and an awareness of how little is actually known and understood about teaching practice.

4. The Theoretical Basis for Mentoring

'Mentoring appears to have the essential attributes of: a process; a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-learning process; a reflective process; a career development process; a formalised process and a role constructed by or for a mentor.' (Roberts, 2000: 145)

In the context of education, however, the term '*mentoring*' is frequently used to describe '*a combination of coaching, counselling and assessment where a classroom teacher in a school is delegated responsibility for assisting a pre-service or newly qualified teacher in their development in their profession.*' (Fletcher, 2004)

Thus when looking at the mentoring relationship within the HEI Partnership arrangements of ITT it is not surprising that we see varying representations, some of which are exclusive, of what mentoring actually is. Indeed many interpretations of mentor roles, by researchers, teacher educators and mentors, have been described in the literature on mentoring. As a consequence, and despite the plethora of models in literature, the concept of mentoring remains elusive (Roberts, 2000).

Having accepted that there were many diverse views on mentors and mentoring my literature review initially focussed on the research of the first half of the 1990's into mentoring in England and Wales, and the models of mentoring developed as a consequence of this research. This literature represented the initial findings of research into what was then the new field of mentoring following the Oxford Internship scheme of the late 1980's and early 1990's and the introduction of mentoring into ITT in England and Wales following Circular 09/92 (DES, 1992b).

In terms of impact the most significant piece of work in this area was the qualitative research by Furlong and Maynard (1993). In their research Furlong and Maynard looked at the stages of development which a student teacher moves, in learning to teach. This work led to the development of reciprocal models of mentoring. Furlong and Maynard were not alone in taking this approach, Edwards and Collison (1996) also carried out work on phase specific mentoring as the focus in ITT shifted from generic mentoring skills.

However, an aspect which was common to much of the literature reviewed was the view that mentoring lacked a theoretical basis (Jacobi, 1991) and that it had definitional problems (Healy and Welchert, 1990). As a consequence mentoring has been criticised for its vagueness or lack of purpose.

Gibb (1999) put forward that *'a substantive theoretical analysis of mentoring has been absent, implicit, limited or underdeveloped'*, whilst Healy and Welchert (1990) believed that mentoring theory continues to have definitional problems due to the failure of researchers to ground it in appropriate theory. Hawkey (1997) supports these views and criticised the *'lack of conceptual framework or vagueness surrounding the educational literature where mentoring was concerned.'* She also suggests that many studies on mentoring show a lack of research focus on the details of mentoring interactions in practical settings. Entwistle *et al.* (2001) concur, and quote Pajares (1992) as stating that:

'previous research into school teachers' and student teachers' ideas about teaching has produced a confusing plethora of terms, with 'beliefs', 'implicit theories', and 'conceptions' all being commonly used, apparently interchangeably.' (Pajares, 1992)

The lack of unanimity in the literature as to the role of mentor was acknowledged by Elliott and Calderhead (1994), who noted that mentors had differing views as to their role. They reported that some saw the role as being a guide or leader, others saw it as being a good listener or friend, whilst a third role identified was that of an organiser of experiences for the student teacher. They also noted that most mentors adopted the latter approach, stating:

'On balance most mentors appeared to perceive the mentoring role more in terms of nurturing or supporting the novices so that they can learn by whatever works, in their school or their classroom.' (Elliott and Calderhead, 1994: 197)

A common thread between the work of Furlong and Maynard 1995 and the findings of Elliott and Calderhead (1994) is the earlier work of Daloz 1986 in the United States. Daloz, through his experience in adult education, focussed on support and challenge, and identified that developmental theory *'can help the Mentor guide, challenge, support and illuminate the way ahead'* (Daloz, 1986: xviii).

Daloz's model of mentoring, and its use of developmental theory, in turn follows from the work of Piaget (1970) and Dewey (1959)? and locates the student teacher within a context of support and challenge. This model is based upon the view that where support is low there is little opportunity for any challenge to occur and the student teacher may withdraw from the mentoring relationship. Conversely, if support is high new knowledge and images of teaching become possible for the student. Today the requirement for mentors to give support to student teachers, as advocated by Daloz, forms part of requirements for ITT, with the TTA guidelines (TTA, 2003: 73) specifically requiring student teachers be *'given the support they need to succeed'*.

One theoretical underpinning for challenge within Daloz's work is cognitive dissonance theory, as set out by Mills *et al.* (1959), in which conflict is seen as a means of ensuring continuous improvement. As applied in a mentoring relationship Daloz envisages the mentor questioning the student teacher's thinking and to critique their preconceptions and tacit assumptions. This is consistent with the belief that learners' preconceptions and expectations are a major influence on their subsequent learning (Ausubel, 1968; Feiman-Nemser *et al.*, 1987).

Despite the previously expressed view (Jacobi, 1991; Healy and Welchert, 1990) that mentoring lacked a theoretical basis Furlong and Maynard (1994) were able to identify three models of mentoring, namely the start apprenticeship, the middle competency and the end reflective. The use of the terms '*apprenticeship*', '*competency*' and '*reflective*' in the descriptions of the models are significant, and I believe relate directly to the prior theoretical work of Clutterbuck (1985) and Lave and Wenger (1991) on apprenticeship models of learning, of behaviourist theorists on competence models, and Schön (1987) on reflection.

Furlong and Maynard's view of the early phase of mentoring is supported by Lunt *et al.* (1992: 138), who consider that Clutterbuck's work locates the roots of mentoring firmly within the apprenticeship system and emphasise the '*power-dependency status*' of this model, if only because of the higher level of expertise that mentors' possess. However, Kwo (1994: 125) suggests that the apprenticeship model of teacher training has generally been discarded as outdated because of its simplistic assumptions about learning and its narrow adherence to the transmission mode of teaching. Tomlinson (1995) appears to implicitly support this view, stating that the two, rather than three, major roles of the mentor are firstly that of a reflective coach developing teaching and reflective skills, and secondly that of an effective facilitator with a counselling role.

The use of reflection by learners, as described by Schön (1987), and as identified in Furlong and Maynard's model and by Tomlinson, is expressly acknowledged within the current TTA guidelines for ITT (2003), which state:

"teachers need to have a capacity and commitment to analyse and reflect on their own practice' and 'trainee teachers to develop an ability to make judgements about the effectiveness of their teaching, and to identify ways of bringing about improvement.' (TTA, 2003: 12),

Another influence on the work of Daloz, as well as many other adult educators, was the model of adult learning developed by Knowles, which he described as andragogy. Knowles claimed that adults have to know why they need to learn something before they undertake to learn it; that they must move from a

dependent self-concept to a self directing-one; that they have accumulated more experience, and experience of a different quality, than children and their readiness to learn is linked to tasks associated with their social role and stage of life.

However, Knowles' work has been subject to criticism, and his model described as an '*ideal state*' (Tusting and Barton, 2003: 21). Rather, Tusting and Barton consider that:

'More recent work on adult learning argues against seeing adults as intrinsically special or different, and in favour of developing more complex understandings of the contextual and cultural assumptions this is based on. Adult learning takes place in specific social contexts, and is engaged in for specific purposes. The way learning develops is directly related to the combination of factors in these specific settings and purposes. Therefore there may not be a singular 'right' model of learning that can be applied (Tusting and Barton, 2003: 22)

Nonetheless I believe that through andragogy Knowles identifies, amongst other things, key differences in the role of the instructor and the purpose for learning between andragogy and pedagogy. In andragogy teachers guide the learners to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts; this approach contrasts with pedagogy where learners rely on the instructor to direct the learning (Green, 1998).

Zanting *et al.* (2001: 61) support Knowles' andragogical stance and note that '*policy makers and educators are increasingly striving for an increase of self-regulation by the learner and a decrease of external regulation by the teacher.*' This approach is now expressly advocated within the TTA guidelines (TTA, 2003: 72), which look for providers of ITT to encourage student teachers to '*take responsibility for their own development*'. It may therefore be suggested that mentors are now expected to take the role identified for them in andragogy, as opposed to that described in pedagogy.

More recently Hansford *et al.* (2003: 53), in their extensive literature review on mentoring, have been able to identify the conceptual framework behind mentoring described in literature as being provided by a range of adult learning theories. They identify the dominant theories as Brookfield's theory of adult learning, 1986: Daloz's theory of adult learning, 1986: Kolb's theory of experiential learning, 1984: Schön's theory of reflection on learning, 1987.

I believe that from the above examples a connection can be established between mentoring and learning theories.

5. Learning Theories

'Pedagogy is by definition the science that studies the way in which children are taught. In the case of adults, we speak of andragogy, even though this distinction is not always pertinent and may not be generally acknowledged. It seems more important simply to recognise that child learning and adult learning and adult learning are bound to have points in common.' (OECD, 2003: 162)

In terms of my research, in particular the development of the connection between mentoring and learning theories, especially those relating to adults, it is necessary to define what is meant by adult learning theories and to state why they may be both relevant and significant to mentoring. According to Tusting and Barton (2003):

'Theories of learning provide a starting point for principles of teaching. Any curriculum or training course has views of learning built into it and any teaching plan is based upon a view of how people learn.' (Tusting and Barton, 2003: 5)

I believe this view of learning theories is a key to the development of student teachers during their ITT. Having accepted that theories of learning are used by their *'teachers'*, who in the phase of ITT being studied in my research are mentors, it seemed logical at the start of my research to ask the question *'What theories of learning do mentors use?'* Given that mentors and student teachers are adults a further question arose, namely *'Do mentors use theories of learning developed out of the distinctiveness of adult learning?'*

It follows that an underlying assumption at this stage was that I was not looking for one theory of learning being used by mentors; rather I was looking to the range of theories, and possibly to the different orientations to learning such as behaviourism, cognitivism, humanism and social/situational orientation. Significantly these theories involve contrasting ideas as to the purpose and process of learning and education, not least in the role that educators may take. These four orientations to learning were summed up by Smith (1999) after Merriam and Caffarella (1991: 138) in Figure 2 below.

	Behaviourist	Social and situational	Cognitivist	Humanist
Learning theorists	Thorndike, Pavlov, Watson, Guthrie, Hull,	Bandura, Lave and Wenger, Salomon	Koffka, Kohler, Lewin, Piaget,	Maslow, Rogers

	Behaviourist	Social and situational	Cognitivist	Humanist
	Tolman, Skinner		Ausubel, Bruner, Gagne	
View of the learning process	Change in behaviour	Interaction /observation in social contexts. Movement from the periphery to the centre of a community of practice	Internal mental process (including insight, information processing, memory, perception)	A personal act to fulfil potential.
Locus of learning	Stimuli in external environment	Learning is in relationship between people and environment.	Internal cognitive structuring	Affective and cognitive needs
Purpose in education	Produce behavioural change in desired direction	Full participation in communities of practice and utilization of resources	Develop capacity and skills to learn better	Become self-actualized, autonomous
Educator's role	Arranges environment to elicit desired response	Works to establish communities of practice in which conversation and participation can occur.	Structures content of learning activity	Facilitates development of the whole person
Manifestations in adult learning	Behavioural objectives Competency - based education Skill development and training	Socialization Social participation Associationalism Conversation	Cognitive development Intelligence, learning and memory as function of age Learning how to learn	Andragogy Self-directed learning

Figure 2 - Four Orientations to Learning Smith (1999) after Merriam and Caffarella (1991: 138)

An understanding of the difference between the different learning theories in relation, as summed up in the above analysis by Smith (1999), after Merriam and

Caffarella 1991, was essential to my research, and thus to the design and development of my tools.

6. Research Design and Analysis

6.1. Research Questions

Whilst literature describes the dominant conceptual framework behind mentoring as being provided by adult learning theories, Hansford *et al.*, 2003 in practice mentors appear to have very little, if any, training in adult learning theory. Rather mentors in their training and role as teachers appear to have been strongly influenced by research developed in the context of children learning, with Smythe (1996) stating that:

'Teachers and student teachers work in schools within a contextual framework, which has been formed by their own unique life experiences and understandings of pedagogical issues.' (Smythe, 1996: 4)

Indeed the existence of a dichotomy between the theory behind mentoring described in literature and mentors' professional practice is reported by Jones *et al.* (2004), who acknowledge that *'the theory-practice gap is frequently cited as one of the main challenges to overcome in managing the transition from training to professional practice.'*

In order to summarise the focus of my research and identify my research questions I have contextualised these issues within Figure 3 below. The figure, which is to be read from top to bottom, has been split into three parts. These parts correspond to the elements of my research, firstly the identification of a potential dichotomy between theory and practice in mentoring, secondly my research questions and finally the analysis of my research data. The figure thus illustrates the phases within my research project.

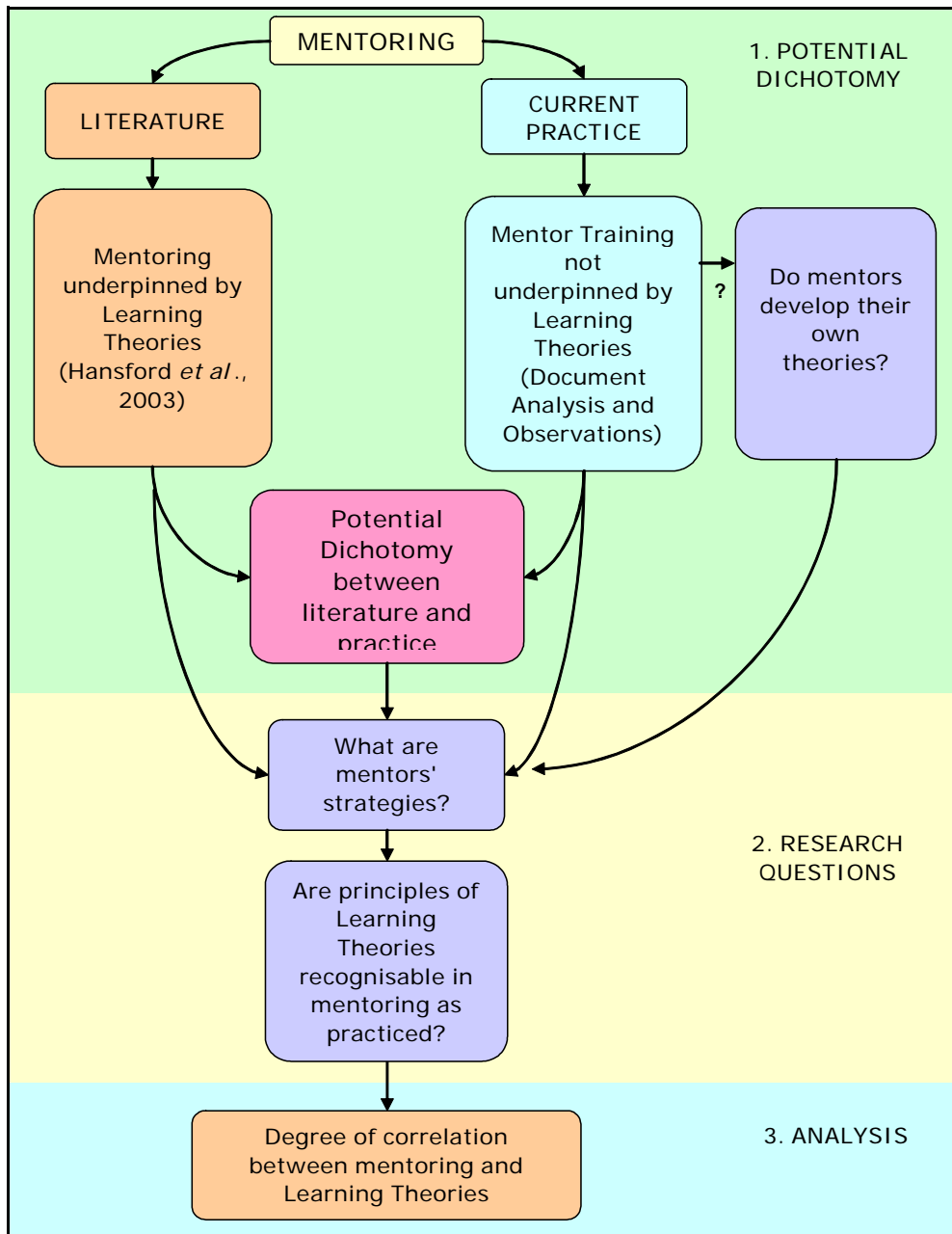


Figure 3 – Contextualised Research Question

I consider that this dichotomy is of particular significance given that many mentors have no reason to be familiar with adult learning theory, although it is supposed to form the basis for mentoring, which in turn, according to literature,

has been used as the key strategy to facilitate the transmission of practitioner knowledge to student teachers.

It is, however, also possible that mentors develop distinct strategies, perhaps through their independent *'professional development through systematic self-study'* (Stenhouse, 1975) when working with student teachers. In addition, as stated above it must also be remembered that the practice of the mentor is not a singly defined phenomenon but has to be considered within the context it exists. Therefore it has to be considered in the context of mentors' interactions with the training provided by the HEI Partnership, their knowledge and understanding of the role, portrayed in the pedagogic practices they employ whilst mentoring within schools, as well as their personal perceptions of the role.

Notwithstanding this potential dichotomy there is literature to suggest that mentors as practitioners may develop their own theories. In such cases mentors might have a significant role in introducing elements of learning theory into their pedagogical strategies, whether consciously or unconsciously.

6.2. Method Tools

The method tools used for my data collection are:

- documentary analysis.
- participant observations of mentors' weekly meetings with student teachers and mentors' training.
- semi-structured interviews of heads of ITT courses at HEIs, mentors and student teachers.

I believe that by using a number of tools it is possible to strengthen the grounding of theory by triangulation of evidence, as recommended by Eisenhardt (2002). The development of these method tools has been carried out in an iterative, rather than linear, manner. This is consistent with the development of grounded theory, and has been critical to my understanding of the area being researched.

In carrying out my research I went out to the participants, interviewed them, and analysed their responses. Where I found there were gaps or issues emerging that needed further exploration this dictated the need to revise an existing instrument or develop a new instrument. Having developed the new instrument, I then went out into the field to the same group of participants to try

to get a fuller picture. The purpose for this iteration was to unearth what was going on within the group being studied, and not to refine their practice

It is important to note that these tools are operating within a theory, and were chosen in order to illuminate my area of research. The evolution of my research tools has been assisted by continued reading of the literature on the areas being studied.

6.3. Documentary Analysis

The initial phase of my research was to review key documents, which set out the framework within which mentors and student teachers operate. These documents consist of '*Qualifying to teach: Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status and Requirements for Initial Teacher Training*' (TTA, 2002) and the associated handbook of guidance, and HEI Partnership handbooks.

Whilst the former generally informs the latter, the way in which different HEIs address its requirements vary in detail. Most mentors do not directly view or use the TTA requirements as they follow the appropriate partnership handbook, which in turn provides much of their instructional design.

I consider that these documents, together with other official documents such as Ofsted's 1999 Report, are vital to my research as they form an initial point of reference, i.e. the official view, from which a comparison with practice can be made.

The partnership handbooks come from quasi-official sources, and as such are authentic and have their own inherent meaning and are of interest to my research in their own right. However, their significance will depend upon the status attributed by mentors and the extent to which mentors work to their parameters. However, there is a question, identified by Abramson (1994), of bias.

6.4. Participant Observations

Observations have been undertaken of mentors working with student teachers teaching (2003/2004), mentors weekly meetings with student teachers (2003/2004) and mentor training (2004/2005). As such I derived my initial data from the observation of student teachers and mentors working together in a professional learning context. This data subsequently assisted in the design of the questions for my semi-structured interviews.

I chose observation of mentors in schools and in HEIs during mentor training as I wished to hear about the personal experiences of mentors as they conversed. My observations of mentors with other mentors, HEI staff and mentees, with their natural talk and in various contexts allowed me to remain neutral and reduce bias. This was assisted by most of the observations being located in the mentors own schools.

The criteria for my observations were informed by my prior analysis of the HEI partnership course documents and handbooks. These criteria were:

- How do mentors and student teachers elicit their personal educational goals and values, and how do they interact, and potentially conflict?
- How does the mentor/student teacher relationship help the participants to examine their pedagogy and professional practice?
- Do mentors teach the student teachers how to teach?
- What is the impact of the TTA standards on the role and strategies of mentors?
- To ascertain the role and significance of the Partnership Handbook, and whether it constitutes the instructional design for mentors.

These observations were recorded using field notes, and subsequently analysed looking for recurrent themes and exceptional features in individual cases. By overlapping the collection of the data and its analysis, the analysis was speeded up. In addition adjustments to the data collection required were facilitated.

The use of observations had a secondary benefit to my research, in particular the ability to make contact with mentors who were willing to take part in my research.

6.5. Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews covered biographical details, mentor training and understanding of mentoring theory. By using this tool I was able to clarify the stated aims of my work, as well as being able to compare mentors both across and within partnerships.

The framework for the interviews was flexible, not restricting me to one mode of questioning, such that I could use a mix of direct questions and open and more

flexible ones. Within the interviews I sought to minimise the extent that I influenced interviewees, thereby reducing the potential for bias within my research.

6.5.1 Interviews with heads of PGCE course at HEIs

Semi-structured interviews with heads of PGCE course from four HEI Partnerships were conducted in order to understand the views of the partnership as to their members' role and method of operating. These interviews were very important for contextualising the role of the HEIs and their view of the training and support provided to mentors. They also clarified the stated aims of my work, which enabled me to position the mentor strategies so that they are not judged unrealistically.

These interviews were held subsequent to the participant observations, but prior to the interviews with mentors. The reason for conducting these interviews after the participant observations was to make the most effective use of discussion time, as recommended by Cohen *et al.* (2002), as by then I was adequately informed on mentor preparation at each HEI before interviewing the heads of course.

The criteria for the interviews with heads of course were to explore the Partnership aims and procedures, the training requirements and provision for mentors and the instructional design provided by the partnership for mentors.

The interview schedule was piloted on a head of a PGCE course from which mentors were not being drawn.

In terms of output from the interviews the interviewees referred to accounts of their own practice very closely, as such the interviews were used for clarification purposes only. These interviews were very successful in achieving the intended purpose and facilitated the operationalisation of my questions and the design of the interview schedules for use with mentors.

6.5.2 Interviews with mentors

The mentor teachers used in my study were working in schools in the Midlands of England, which in turn were part of one of two HEI Partnerships. The mentors were all currently mentoring student teachers from one or other of the selected HEIs. Some of the schools were also concurrently part of other HEI Partnerships, and as such some mentors attend or have attended training organised by those Partnerships in addition to the Partnerships being studied.

I believe that these interviews were critical to the operationalised questions raised by my research, how they are going to be answered, and in assisting in illuminating the meanings of events in my chosen group, particularly through their own eyes. Approximately 20 mentors participated on a voluntary basis in my main study, having been recruited through contact being made at mentor training sessions at HEIs. Mentors from four chosen subject areas have been used. These areas are humanities (History / English), modern foreign languages (French / German / Spanish), maths and sciences (Biology / Physics / Chemistry).

The participants were interviewed during the spring and summer terms of the 2004/2005 academic year.

6.5.3 Criteria for Semi-structured Interviews with Mentors

Whilst the criteria for the interviews arose in part from my literature review they were also the product of prior research that I carried out, namely document analysis and observations. I consider that these tools contributed to the focus for the areas of interest identified from the literature review.

Two previous studies had a significant impact in focussing my questions. Firstly, Hansford *et al.* (2003) provided me with part of the conceptual framework, i.e. the underpinning of mentoring by learning theories. Secondly, Jones *et al.* (2004) identified from their research the strategies of experienced mentors, and how they related to the standards set by the TTA.

I believe that my interview questions on mentor strategies derived from Jones *et al.* (2004) are valid as I tested them out, along with the instrument, as part of the pilot study for the first interview schedule.

Given that I am adopting a qualitative research strategy I intend to adopt a hermeneutic, interpretive methodology (Cohen *et al.*, 2002) in order to understand the perceptions of mentors through their own '*voice*' (Gilligan, 1993), '*experiences*' (Connolly and Clandinin, 2000) and '*perspectives*' (Kvale, 1996). In seeking to understand and explain the role of the mentor, I have drawn on a range of different theorisations. The dominant theorisations, which inform this study, are mentoring, -learning theories, instructional design and reflection.

6.5.4 Interviews with Student Teachers

In order to give greater internal validity to my research a number of student teachers have also been interviewed.

6.6. Analysis of Data

As stated in the introduction to this paper data analysis has commenced but is not complete, therefore this section represents an explanation of future intentions.

I will use the orientations to learning described above as a prism for reviewing the literature and the actions of mentors. This process is set out in Figure 4 below and will use the aspects of the orientations to learning as the basis for coding the literature and data collected from observations and semi-structured interviews. The use of orientations to learning as the basis for coding will also assist in contextualising the findings.

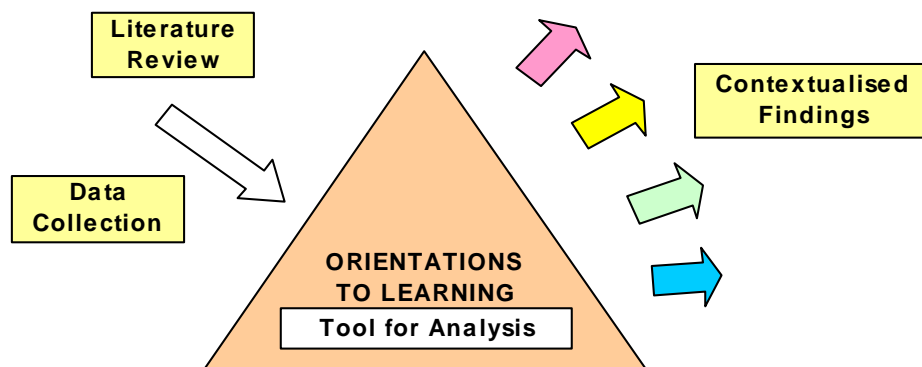


Figure 4 – Basis for reviewing literature and actions

7. Conclusion

From my research I have determined that there are five key features of the ITT environment which determine the context for my investigation:

- The first is that student teachers are situated in schools, with assumptions of situated and experiential learning. However, whilst schools are the centre of ITT they do not see the training student teachers as a primary objective for themselves.
- The second is the role for the classroom teacher in training and assessing student teachers. In this context mentors are also strongly influenced by the National Curriculum for ITT (Hill, 2001), and the prescriptive standards set by the TTA for the assessment of student teachers.

- The third feature is the *'de-professionalisation'* of teachers, who are viewed as technicians intended to deliver the National Curriculum within the compulsory education system, with concentration on content knowledge, with little or no place for theory, in the training of student teachers.
- The fourth is the relationship between the mentor and student teacher is one between two adults although the roots of mentoring are firmly within the apprenticeship system and emphasise the *'power-dependency status'* of this model, if only because of the higher level of expertise that mentors' possess. Mentors appear to be left very much to themselves, particularly if there is no mentoring framework within a whole school policy, with variable support from others, with the school co-ordinators seldom having a significant role in practice, as they appear to adopt the role of school managers.
- The final feature is that mentor training, such as it is, is within the remit of the HEI Partnership, and is principally aimed at familiarisation of the mentor with the Partnership requirements, in particular those relating to the assessment of student teachers.

As observed by Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993), different forms of mentoring emerge in different contexts, with expectations, working conditions, selection and preparation of mentors all creating constraints and opportunities that shape how mentors perceive and carry out their role. As a consequence there is no one model of mentoring that has superseded all others (Brooks and Sikes, 1997; Butcher, 2000), rather mentors are encouraged to select strategies that are appropriate to their circumstances. The OECD (2003: 176) agree with the use of a range strategies, and suggest that in considering a pedagogical method for use with adults one of the most important considerations is its *'ability to be adapted to the participants. It must be compatible with the participants' level, their personality, their motivation, their aptitudes and their expectations.'*

This corresponds with recent work on adult learning which looks to develop an understanding of the context and cultural assumptions of the learner rather than to any special attributes of the adult learner (Tusting and Barton, 2003). I therefore believe it necessary to consider the context and purpose of relationship between the HEI Partnership, the mentor and the student teacher in order to fully understand the mentor's pedagogical strategies and form of mentoring they adopt.

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