Chapter 12

Zooming Into Mentor–Mentee Relationship to Explore Mentoring Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Motivated by the need to develop a clearer picture of mentoring, this chapter aims to zoom into the pivotal role of the “relationship” aspect in ensuring effective mentoring and what the good mentor attributes are. The chapter includes the short narrations of both the mentors and the mentees who were engaged in a pre-service teacher training course. Four mentors and four mentees have been asked to narrate their positive as well as any less positive experiences with their mentors/mentees during the course. As a result, both mentor and mentee “voices” were used as a stimulus for identifying effective mentoring strategies. The chapter ultimately aims to make noteworthy implications for enlarging our understanding of how mentoring might be most effectively used in teacher professional development ventures and how the relationship aspect might be useful in selecting the most effective mentors in different teacher education contexts.

1. NEED FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Before tackling the mentor-mentee relationships among language teachers and trainers, which this chapter is set to explore, the need for teacher professional development should be acknowledged. Clearly, teaching, as a profession, like many other disciplines, is considered to be inextricably intertwined with learning. As Wyatt (2016) suggests, teaching is a learning profession (p.3). It is, therefore, crucial to provide professional development (PD) opportunities for language teachers. These opportunities can range from activities designed both for teachers who are “knowledge consumers” and those who are “knowledge creators” (Borg, 2015). The former, the knowledge consumer, entails ensuring that newly learnt practice can be transferred to the teacher’s own context, and can be used at a later date when required, whereas the latter refers to the teachers who are involved in critically developing their own knowledge, rather

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than having knowledge imposed on them (Day, 1999). It is the latter form of teacher development that has been described as the process of *continual, intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth* (Richards, 1987); and obviously, this constitutes more effective professional development. Mentoring, as a professional development activity, undoubtedly falls into the “knowledge creators” end of the paradigm, and is at the heart of many professional teacher learning models, as it is a potentially valuable avenue to further professional development, for both the novices and the experienced.

As a firm believer in the key role of interpersonal relationships in successful teacher training, and in view of my own extensive experience in mentoring as a teacher educator in the ELT context, I am aware that mentor-mentee relationship is a highly complex one. In order to explore the practices of ‘effective mentoring’, we need to understand the contested nature of mentoring, and the conceptual differences that exist regarding its practices (Pennanen, M., Bristol, L., Wilkonson, J. & Heikkinen, H.L.T., 2016).

### 2. MENTORING AND THE NOTION OF “RELATIONSHIP”

As we all know, language teachers professional development can be done either alone or in collaboration (colleagues, teacher trainers, ELT managers), and it aims to develop the teacher’s knowledge, skills, and sense of identity. In their study, Kandiller and Özler (2015) confirmed that ‘counselling/mentoring/coaching skill’ was considered the most significant trainer skill, regardless of level of experience, and the qualities related to interpersonal relationships, such as ‘communication’ and ‘counselling’, were prioritized. Another finding was that the personal traits of a trainer were of great significance in any given teacher training program, which brings forth the importance of the notion of ‘relationship’.

In discussing development with ‘mentors’, we inevitably involve the ‘relationship’ between the teachers and the other parties they interact with for their professional development. Very often, teachers choose their more experienced colleagues, teacher trainers and/or managers as their mentors; and when the mentoring relationship starts, the personalities of all parties become rather important for the successful establishment and continuation of a mentor-mentee relationship.

Before discussing the importance of relationship, it is crucial to understand the concept of mentoring. Traditionally, it is described as a relationship between a protégé and a mentor (Anderson & Shannon in O’Dwyer & Atlı, 2015). Mentoring is also described as an interpersonal relationship that comprises a series of purposeful, social interactions (Bearman, S., Blake-Beard, S., Hunt, L., & Crosby, F. J., 2007). According to Richards and Farrell (2005), mentoring is,

> ... a process whereby an experienced teacher works with a novice teacher, giving guidance and feedback (pp.151-2).

Crookes (2003) introduces the terms *cooperating teacher or master teacher* (p.219) for the respective roles. More recently Farrell (2013) identifies *supervisory and mentoring skills* (p. 19) as one option for career advancement during a teacher’s career. As put forward by Angelique et al (Pennanen, M., Bristol, L., Wilkonson, J. & Heikkinen, H.L.T., 2016),

> ... the traditional understanding of mentoring is problematic in the modern world because it connotes a conservative view of learning, linear transmission of knowledge and asymmetrical power relations between participants (p.30).