# Beyond prescription, rhetoric and routine: a single-site comparative case study of the conceptualisation, enactment and development of mentoring feedback practices in post-compulsory initial teacher education

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# DECLARATION

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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# ABSTRACT

In initial teacher education, mentors are generally purported to play an extensive and influential role in socialising trainee teachers into the workplace and shaping their professional development. One significant aspect of this support is the provision of regular, constructive and quality feedback on the mentee's teaching practices yet how to do this in a time-poor, assessment-driven context is rarely made explicit.

Situated within the theoretical framework of practice architectures, this single-site comparative case study compared how mentoring feedback practices were conceptualised and realised on two post-compulsory education initial teacher training programmes. It adopted a qualitative, ethnographic insider research methodology to examine the processes, arrangements and artefacts which enabled and constrained their performance. This site ontological approach also examined the dynamic unfolding of mentoring feedback practices in time and space in relation to these institutional conditions.

In the presentation, analysis and discussion of the data, participant vignettes were used to elucidate the various ways in which feedback from mentors was perceived, valued and enmeshed in a complex web of practice relations. The findings from the research illustrated how the participants' conceptualisations were influenced by prototypical assumptions and personal experiences of mentoring and feedback, and how these evolved during their professional development trajectories. The study also highlighted the practice architectures which facilitated and hindered the enactment of mentoring feedback practices, the development of which depended on the

"stickiness" of their relationship and congruence with other organisational practices and concerns.

Implications arising from the research include a need to reconceptualise mentoring feedback to shift the focus from assessment practices to those which cultivate greater collaboration, dialogue and self-reflection. In adopting a practice sensitivity, by critically surveying and negotiating existing institutional arrangements, mentoring stakeholders are better positioned to create the requisite conditions of possibility for feedback to flourish: beyond prescription, rhetoric and routine.

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCS          Comparative Case Study

CDA          Critical Discourse Analysis

CTLLS       Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector

DET          Diploma in Education and Training

DTLLS       Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector

ESOL        English for Speakers of Other Languages

FE            Further Education

FENTO       Further Education National Training Organisation

GCSE        General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE            Higher Education

HEI           Higher Education Institution

ITE           Initial Teacher Education

ITT           Initial Teacher Training

LLUK        Lifelong Learning UK

Ofsted      Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills

PCET        Post-Compulsory Education and Training

PGCE       Professional Graduate Certificate in Education

PTLLS       Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector

QTLS      Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills

SEND      Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

UK      United Kingdom

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# CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY: RESEARCH CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

## Overview

As trainee teachers embark on their journey to becoming fully qualified practitioners, their professional formation is constantly shaped through interaction with other people in their social lifeworlds and the ensemble of sociomaterial practices they "step into" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2012, p.34) along the way. To facilitate access into this complex, tangled, and often bewildering nexus of practices, a mentor is assigned. In initial teacher education (ITE), mentoring has undergone frequent revisions in response to policy changes, but in its current incarnation, is primarily concerned with the development and assessment of the mentee's teaching and learning practices.

This thesis is situated in the thorny practice landscape of ITE in the post-compulsory education sector in the UK, in which mentoring plays a pivotal role. The translation from mentoring policy to practice, however, has been far from smooth, replete with conflicts of purpose, inconsistencies, and neglect. The deficit metaphor of the "Cinderella sector" to describe further education (FE) still looms large in the lives of practitioners although a more positive narrative is on the rise, one which advocates a call for change of attitude and practice and the deployment of a different fairy tale reference:

> It is time for the sector of the dancing princesses to have its due, and for FE's cinders to be reignited (Petrie, 2015, p.10).

The impetus for this study on mentoring feedback emerged from my experiences as a teacher educator, mentor and mentee. Observing first-hand the "wicked" problems (Higgs and Cherry, 2009, p.4) faced by mentoring practitioners motivated me to illuminate the reality of the practice, to challenge its myths and misconceptions. I had witnessed the pressures placed on the mentoring dyad to make the relationship "work": for mentees to assimilate the feedback provided by the mentor and be transformed into practitioners versed in subject pedagogy and firmly socialised into their departmental community of practice. However, this directive to "make it so" neglects the historical, social-political, and institutional context in which mentoring operates (Colley, 2003). Much of the existing mentoring literature on the provision of feedback is concerned with prescription, drawing heavily on mentoring models which assume specific attributes and skills, particularly of mentors who are expected to regularly engage in professional dialogue with their trainee and promote reflective practice, all the while juggling their other professional responsibilities. The emphasis is on the internal mentoring dyadic relationship yet the influence of external discursive repertoires, policy mechanisms and institutional practices and arrangements on mentoring feedback cannot be ignored.

Instead of adhering to an idealised construct of mentoring, it was preferable to explore the practitioners' lived experiences: the social spaces in which they interacted; the language used in the relationship, and the influence of the past on present and future practices. The rationale for foregrounding feedback practices and the contextual conditions in which these were enacted was to consciously

shift from an individualistic perspective, laying the responsibility for the perceived success or failure of mentoring on the practitioners themselves, to exemplifying the institutional arrangements which prefigured, facilitated and hindered the development of mentoring feedback on two initial post-compulsory teacher training programmes. In this way, there was both a theoretical and practical focus to the research in its illumination of site-based conditions and arrangements and the gap between policy intentions and practice implementation. This served to broaden the knowledge of educational stakeholders involved in mentoring provision and prompt a process of evaluation of mentoring provision to enact changes for the better.

## Research aims and overview of the conceptual framework

Since the early 2000s, when mentoring featured more prominently in policy discourse, the growing literature in the field began to acknowledge the complexity of mentoring and the importance of contextualising the practice both locally, within its organisation and, more broadly, how it is shaped by socio-political developments in education (Cunningham, 2012; Duckworth and Maxwell, 2015), However, literature which focuses specifically on the feedback practice in mentoring remains scarce despite its espoused importance in recent ITE policy documentation (Ofsted, 2020, p.42), which outlines the purposes and principles of ITE, embedded within the role of the mentor:

> Trainees receive clear, consistent and effective training and mentoring across the placement settings….They receive regular, focused feedback and are supported through focused and challenging discussion.

Perhaps one of the reasons why literature on mentoring feedback is underdeveloped is because it is frequently conceptualised as a taken-for-granted practice embodied in social performance. Oversimplification of the function of feedback in the relationship, however, neglects the myriad purposes of mentoring as mentors struggle to reconcile the roles of assessment, professional development and emotional support, all enacted within an educational climate of increased performativity and accountability. Situated within an ethnographic framework, this study sought to examine the gap between rhetoric and reality, between prescription and practice, to offer a more pragmatic conceptualisation of mentoring feedback practices, contributing to the existing scholarly literature in the field, and with the additional purpose of initiating debate on the role and implementation of mentoring in PCET to ultimately becoming a significant part of the institutional discourse.

Through the lens of practice architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis *et al.*, 2014a; 2014b; Mahon *et al.*, 2017) and underpinned by both a site and critical realist ontological perspective of the social phenomena under investigation, this study aimed to uncover the institutional enabling and constraining factors which shaped the practices of mentoring feedback. This included examination of the impact of processes, arrangements, and artefacts as the practices unfolded amidst the institutional practice arrangements. It was also important to investigate beyond the

micropolitical dyadic interactions and explore the interconnectedness of mentoring feedback and other practices and their arrangements. Finally, as a longitudinal study, it was concerned with investigating change in feedback practices at different points during the mentoring process.

The following research questions were formulated to elucidate the conceptualisation, practice, and development of mentoring feedback in initial teacher development:

1. How do practitioners conceptualise their roles and relationships in the mentoring feedback process?

2. What processes, arrangements and artefacts enable and constrain mentoring feedback practices?

3. How do mentoring feedback practices unfold during the teacher development programmes?

4. What are the possible implications of the findings for the development of effective mentor provision on teacher development courses?


## Research design: methodology and methods

The study adopted a comparative case study approach (CCS) (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016) to investigate mentoring feedback practices on two ITE programmes in post-compulsory education, accredited by different awarding bodies, but enacted in the same institution. The CCS methodology aligned with the principles of a processual

and iterative research design (Maxwell, 2013) and attended to horizontal, vertical and transversal elements of comparison at regular stages of the sixteen-month study, entailing interaction with stakeholders at different hierarchical levels to capture the dynamics and complexity of mentoring feedback.

Consistent with a social practice ethnographical research methodology, the study entailed a multiple methods approach to the collection and analysis of data, acknowledging the need to represent practices from both "inside" and "outside" (Gherardi, 2012; Nicolini, 2013). A zoomed-in perspective enables the researcher to become immersed in the practitioners' sayings, doings and relatings and, therefore, attain a richer understanding of the embodiment of practices, including the contextual conditions; implicit and explicit "rules of the game" (Bourdieu, 1977); and the significance of material artefacts and arrangements. Projective techniques, including video stimulated recall, interviews "with the double" (Gherardi, 2012; Nicolini, 2009) and participatory mapping (Emmel, 2008) were used to bring the "performance" of the practice, including any tensions or contradictions, to the fore. Examining the practice from an "outside" perspective allows the researcher to see the bigger picture, to explore how constellations of practices and arrangements shape the practice through time and space and reveal "broader reservoirs of ways of thinking and practising which are being differently instantiated locally" (Trowler, 2014a, p.2). To complement the aforementioned projective techniques, in-depth participant interviews were conducted in addition to critical discourse strategies at the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis (Fairclough, 1992).

## Structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of the mentoring literature in ITE. The first section outlines the problematic conceptualisation of the mentoring role and the ever-changing inventory of mentoring functions embraced in rhetoric rather than grounded in practice. This is followed by a historical review of mentoring, focusing on the provision of feedback in the policy context of ITE in post-compulsory education. The final section is concerned with uncovering the different theoretical formulations of feedback and the tensions between directive and dialogic approaches.

Chapter three introduces the theoretical framework of the research: the theory of practice architectures and its site ontological perspective. The chapter highlights the affordances and possible limitations of the theory and includes a synthesis of other relevant approaches to the study of practices.

Chapter four presents the research design and the methodological approach which informed the study. The chapter also details the rationale behind a CCS methodology and an overview of the "cases": a pre-service and an in-service ITE programme.

Chapter five begins with a description of the sampling strategy deployed to select the research participants followed by an account of the multiple qualitative methods used in the study. The chapter continues with an explanation of the data collection and analytic methods employed to document the complexity of feedback practices.

Finally, validity and ethical dimensions are explored, outlining the measures taken to strengthen the credibility and robustness of the research.

Chapter six presents and discusses the key findings of the study in relation to the research questions and through a practice theoretical lens, to encapsulate the practitioners' evolving conceptualisations of mentoring feedback practices, and the interactions, artefacts and arrangements which shaped their trajectory. The influence of multiple and complex horizontal and vertical symbiotic relationships on the development of mentoring feedback is also compared and discussed.

Chapter seven summarises the key findings of the study in respect to the aims of the research. It discusses the implications of the conclusions for the conceptualisation and enactment of mentoring feedback in PCET (post-compulsory education and training) and the value and appropriateness of the theory of practice architectures as an analytical mechanism for site ontological institutional research. The practical and theoretical contributions of the research to the knowledge of mentoring and feedback in ITE in a broader sense are also highlighted. The chapter concludes with outlining the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research. A visual representation of the structure of the thesis is presented on the next page.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

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Figure 1.1: A visual representation of the structure of the thesis

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview

This chapter explores the research literature on mentoring and feedback practices. In the first instance, a broad scoping search for relevant articles was conducted in Google Scholar and the bibliographic database *British Education Index* (EBSCO platform) to search for publications pertaining to mentoring and feedback practices since 1990. This date was chosen as it reflected changes in the mentoring role in education in the UK. In the 1990s a shift in attention of ITE from university-based programmes to in-service school and college courses, involving teaching placements combined with higher education theoretical components, resulted in a more prominent role for the mentor, particularly in supporting trainee teachers with subject pedagogy.

The first part of the chapter provides a picture of the problematic construct of mentoring in teacher education. The second part provides an overview of the policy reforms in post-compulsory education to analyse their impact on mentoring. The last section concentrates on mentoring feedback, identifying paradigmatic shifts, the ethical dimensions of the practice and its interrelation with reflective practices.

## The problematic construct of the mentoring role in teacher education

Mentoring has gained prominence across the globe in a variety of fields (Strong and Baron, 2004), including nursing (Gray and Smith, 2000), social services (Kelly, 2001) and the business development of managers (Kram, 1988). In teacher education,

mentoring has increasingly been interwoven into policy initiatives, highlighting its perceived importance in the professional development of trainee teachers (Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Wallace and Gravells, 2005). A systematic review of the mentoring literature in teacher education revealed that conceptualising the role of the mentor was the dominant theme. However, despite attempts by researchers to provide a more precise, lexical definition of the mentoring construct (Roberts, 2000), it remains a slippery and "poorly conceptualized" (Colley, 2003, p.20) term.

The lack of clarity in defining the mentoring role is partly attributable to the variety of labels attached to mentors (Brondyk and Searby, 2013). The mentor has been described variously as a "trouble shooter" (Abell *et al.*, 1995), "critical friend" (Adey, 1997) and "agent of change" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a). However, as mentoring is a situated activity, how it is practised in its setting varies according to the needs and purposes of the programme or scheme and stakeholders. It will, therefore, be interpreted differently by those working in a business context from those in nursing or education, for example. Within teacher education, the roles of mentors will vary according to the contribution they are expected to play in the professional development of trainee teachers. Mentors on a pre-service teacher education programme will generally be supporting teachers who are new to the profession. They will have been allocated a mentor as a prerequisite of the course and, thus, the relationship is expected to be more formalised and intense than those pursuing an in-service teacher education route who, in theory, should have some experience and knowledge of the context in which they are working.

Colley (2003) contends that defining mentoring according to its various functions is reductive and unhelpful: the relationship between the mentor's different roles is frequently blurred and this adds confusion to the concept. The terms 'mentoring' and 'coaching', for example, are widely debated in the research literature. Both are concerned with support and knowledge transfer, but the degree of guidance expected of the practitioner is less certain. Some writers posit coaching as an activity distinct from mentoring. According to McDowall-Long (2004, p.522), for example, coaching is more tailored to the individual's needs yet "it is also an important activity engaged in by mentors." Here, it is unclear what specifically differentiates mentoring from coaching. Stewart and Kruegar (1996, p.316) acknowledge the conflation of the concepts in nursing but argue that coaching is specifically a "managerialist technique", focusing on short-term, explicit outcomes whereas mentoring is conceived as a more holistic developmental process. The role of the mentor, however, clearly depends on the agenda of the mentoring programme. A primarily top-down approach to mentoring, with an emphasis on raising attainment (Orland-Barak and Klein, 2005), will be more directive in nature than a collaborative and reciprocal model of mentoring, one in which both members of the dyad are encouraged to co-construct knowledge. It also depends on the dispositions of the mentors and their previous experiences of mentoring: some place a greater importance on fostering independence than others.

To avoid mentoring becoming an inventory of functions, an increased emphasis has been placed on its relational aspects, outlining the need for emotion and nurture in the process. Hargreaves and Fullan (2000), for example, posit that mentoring goes

beyond an instrumentalist model, the transmission of knowledge and skills in teacher education, and underline the need for continued emotional support: "teaching involves not only instructing students but also caring for and forming relationships with them"; this principle, they argue, should be replicated and applied to the mentorship of beginning teachers. The attention is on the affective aspects of mentoring, with little judgement or appraisal of the trainee's performance (Gay and Stephenson, 1998).

Reducing the mentoring role to a set of technicist skills and competences is also criticised by Adey (1997) who argues instead for an increased awareness of the professional socialisation role of mentors. As new teachers enter the workplace, they need to familiarise themselves with its protocols and norms, and procedural guidance from mentors in relation to institutional routines and polices may instil a greater sense of security and confidence in the trainee (Laker, Laker and Lea, 2008). Nevertheless, this altruistic mentoring role is underpinned by a tacit understanding of conformity and commitment to the organisation. As mentors "stand between the individual and the organisation" (Alred and Garvey, 2000, p.268), they are in an ideal position to endorse the beliefs and values of the institution.

Thus, the responsibility of the process of "individual socialisation" is seen as an important aspect of the mentor's role yet the impact it has on the mentee's professional identity and enculturation into the institution is unclear. Once the trainee teacher is learning "on the job" (Lave and Wenger, 1991), it is the departmental practices and discourses which largely influence the socialisation process (Knight and Trowler, 1999), not the sayings or doings of the mentor. The relationship is not,

therefore, restricted to the internal mentoring dyad but is affected by the experiences of trainee teachers as they engage in professional practices within their "communities", their workplace departments. Mentees are encouraged to actively participate in a process of "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) with the purpose of developing their pedagogical and subject knowledge from a more experienced and qualified other, usually a practising teacher in a more senior role. However, if mentoring is considered to be an isolated support mechanism and its messages and practices contradict those embedded in departmental cultures, they may be devalued or ignored by the mentee (Knight and Trowler, 1999).

In the literature on teacher education, what primarily drives the mentor-mentee relationship is transforming the dispositions and professional growth of the trainee teacher, extending the mentoring role beyond the aforementioned provision of emotional support and institutional enculturation:

> Mentors use their knowledge and expertise to assess the direction novices are heading and to create opportunities and conditions that support meaningful teacher learning in the service of student learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b, p.18).

In this model of "educative mentoring" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b), mentors use their experience and knowledge to promote critical inquiry and home in on specific areas for discussion. Trainee teachers are guided to reflect critically on their experiences and explore new practices to enhance their students' learning. Subsequently, they will gain in confidence and continually construct their individual professional identities

(Rajuan, Beijaard and Verloop, 2007). This approach implies a collaborative relationship, different from traditional apprenticeship models of mentoring (Maynard and Furlong, 1995), which foreground the expert status of the mentor and the role of mentee as passive partner. Rather than emulating their mentors, mentees need to exude agency and work collaboratively with them to develop the dispositions and skills required of effective practitioners (Feiman-Nemser, 1998). Educative mentoring, therefore, favours a more egalitarian mentoring relationship, with the assumption that both parties will benefit from the process. Without this balance of supportive and challenging mentoring interventions (Daloz, 1986; Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; Rajuan, Beijaard and Verloop, 2007), it is argued that surviving the teaching placement (Tillema, Smith and Lesham, 2011) will take precedence over risk-taking in the learning environment, thus limiting the mentee's professional growth.

**Summary**

Producing a clear and consistent definition of the role of the mentor is, therefore, highly problematic. Many of the prescriptive notions of mentoring are not borne out of observations of practice (Hawkey, 1998; McIntyre, 1997) and fail to sufficiently capture the complexity of the process. Mentoring is undertaken in a variety of contexts and is shaped by its aims or projects, other interrelated practices, and the stage of the mentee's professional development (Hobson *et al.*, 2009). Given the highly contextual nature of mentoring, it is futile to develop an all-encompassing definition and "impose it by means of political power or high powered staff

development" (Wildman *et al.*, 1992, p.212). It is more valuable to gather perspectives from those who experience the practice to understand how individual performances, wider social and political conditions, traditions, relationships and discourse all shape its meaning and action as it unfolds over time. The role of the mentor is, thus, constantly being redefined.

At best, perhaps, some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the literature regarding the role of the mentor in teacher education. The quote below is a useful baseline definition, describing mentoring as:

> the one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor) designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession (in this case, teaching) and into the specific local context (here, the school or college) (Hobson *et al.*, 2009, p.207).

From this, we can characterise mentoring in teacher education as the following:

- complex dyadic relations of power involving a more knowledgeable other and a beneficiary of this knowledge;
- a formalised, on-going process which involves an investment of time and commitment from both parties;
- focused on development, implying a positive change in the professional growth of the mentee;
- seen as primarily of value to the mentee although the mentor may also gain personally and professionally from the relationship;

- a practice which involves different activities, including providing pedagogical support, promoting reflection, and enculturating trainee teachers into professional communities of practice.

Drawing on the research literature, we can hypothesise that mentoring further entails:

- an affective aspect as mentees cope with the array of responsibilities expected of them;

- relationships external to the mentoring dyad, including colleagues and educational stakeholders;

- dimensions which challenge the romanticised view of mentoring (Colley, 2003; Feldman, 1999), mediated by social, cultural, and political forces.

Finally, a potential source of confusion is the inconsistent use of value-laden terminology in the literature on teaching and teacher education to describe mentors and their mentees. At one end of the spectrum, mentors are categorised as "supervisors" (Slick, 1998) or "supervising teachers" (Brooker *et al.*, 1998), emphasising the monitoring role of the mentor and implying a distinct hierarchical power-dependent relationship. Other terms such as "cooperating teacher" (Campbell and Brummett, 2007), "mentor teacher" (Helgevold *et al.*, 2015) and "teacher-mentor" (Gay and Stephenson,1998) underscore the educative role of a mentor with evocations of collaboration and reciprocity.

Mentees, too, are described in various ways and these conceptualisations facilitate and constrain the relational aspects of the mentoring process. Terms like "novice" (Achinstein and Athanases, 2005) stress the developmental needs of the mentee but

trainee teachers bring with them varying levels of practical experience and expertise. Similarly, the label, "protégé" (Feldman, 1999; Merriam, 1983) is misleading as it suggests that the trainee teacher receives support from someone who is more influential in the organisation and has a vested interest in the mentee's professional growth. However, this is not always the reality, with mentoring sometimes being "thrust upon" mentors (Cunningham, 2004) as they are thrown into the role to facilitate the placement requirements of teacher training programmes.

For consistency, I have used the terms "mentor", "mentee" and "trainee teacher" in this thesis. The latter is used to describe those participating in an initial teacher development programme irrespective of their teaching experiences. The terms "mentor" and "mentee" are commonly understood terms in ITE and strengthen the notion that at the heart of mentoring is a partnership which necessitates a connection between both parties (Thompson, 2016).

## Background to mentoring in the post-compulsory education sector: the political context from 1990 to the present day

To situate the study and facilitate an understanding of the processes, arrangements and artefacts which shape mentoring feedback practices, it is important to outline the broad political context of the research: initial teacher training (ITT) in PCET. The past, present and future enactments of practices co-exist (Boud, 2012) and examining pre-existing conditions facilitate a better understanding of how these are likely to shape future performances and show potential for change.

Post-compulsory education caters for a vast cohort of learners from the age of 14 upwards. It encompasses further education and sixth form colleges, higher education (HE), work-based provision and adult community settings, delivering academic but primarily vocational programmes of study. Its fragmented nature has made the sector difficult to regulate and implement a national framework of qualifications, affecting its professional values, ethos, and identity.

As highlighted by Tummons and Ingleby (2012), ITT is structured and administered differently in PCET from primary and secondary school teacher education programmes for three main reasons. Firstly, entry routes into PCET are more flexible given the focus on the vocational aspects of FE. Programmes are usually part-time and in-service, with "trainee" teachers already working in the sector, based on their vocational qualifications rather than a need for graduate status. Secondly, the content of ITT programmes in PCET is largely generic bar ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), mathematics and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) pathways. This has resulted in mentors playing an increasingly significant role in ITT in their communication of subject-specific pedagogy to trainee teachers. Thirdly, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), involved in the inspection of schools since 1992, was only given responsibility for inspecting FE initial teacher training provision in 2001. Since then, the sector has struggled to reconcile these auditable and accountability demands (Hamilton, 2009) with supporting teacher professionalism.

**Reforms in Initial Teacher Training in FE**

The origins of school-based mentoring in ITT in England and Wales lie in the Oxford University Internship scheme, introduced in 1987. This arose from research into existing practice to overcome the disjuncture between the theoretical studies of the higher education institution (HEI) and the reality of the classroom (McIntyre, 1997). Student teachers had limited opportunities to observe models of effective teaching strategies and to receive feedback on their teaching. Under this scheme, teachers in schools changed from being supervisors to adopting a mentoring role, primarily to facilitate access for trainee teachers to their elusive "craft knowledge", unconsciously embedded in their own practice but rarely shared (*ibid.*). Greater collaboration between the HEI and school was also foregrounded (Benton, 1990) and this partnership model has remained the cornerstone of school-based ITE provision (Bryan and Carpenter, 2008) and, later, PCET.

Until the 1990s, FE teacher training had been largely ignored, left to the discretion of employers, resulting in provision which was "mostly in-service, *ad hoc* and uneven" (Lucas, 2013, p.380). A new Labour government in 1997 heralded a change in focus for education policy in FE. Reforms were targeted at raising teaching standards (FENTO, 1999) to upskill the workforce and boost national economic competitiveness (Orr, 2009). New qualifications for teachers were introduced and teacher training in FE became subject to a new inspection regime, operated as a result of the Learning and Skills Act (DfEE, 2000). The first inspections of FE provision, using the *Common Inspection Framework* based on the FENTO (Further Education National Training Organisation) standards, were undertaken in 2003 to scathing criticism, concluding

that the current system of teacher training "does not provide a satisfactory foundation of professional development for FE teachers at the start of their career" (Ofsted, 2003, p.2). The report foregrounded a lack of teaching observations and feedback, systemic mentoring, and insufficient subject specialist support:

> Few colleges provide their trainees with sustained support from experienced practitioners who can assist them in developing good teaching skills in their own subject. There is an over-reliance on informal forms of support and the roles of mentors are often not defined in sufficient detail. Where mentoring support is provided, the standard is extremely variable, and, in most cases, not well resourced (Ofsted, 2003, pp.18-19).

This quote highlights the perceived importance of formalised systems of mentoring in place to support trainee teachers in addition to clear descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of mentors. However, what is neglected in the Ofsted report is the role of context, the different values and perceptions that practitioners bring to the process, and the social, material and political conditions which mediate the mentoring practice. All these aspects contribute to the many challenges encountered in mentoring and changing these is frequently beyond the control of the individual practitioner.

To resolve the issues outlined in the 2003 Ofsted report, new reforms to ITT were implemented (DfES, 2004). These included a revision of teacher training standards and a new qualifications framework for FE (LLUK, 2007), resulting in a shift in role for the mentor. Relaying subject-based pedagogy now appeared to be the primary

concern of the mentor to forge more explicit and effective links between the workplace and ITT. However, there are several caveats to accepting this recommendation. Firstly, as Thompson and Robinson (2009) argue, it is unclear how Ofsted arrived at this claim given the supposedly poor performance of the mentor in delivering subject pedagogy previously. In addition, the concept of a "subject specialist" is nebulous when we consider the range of academic and vocational curricula available in post-compulsory education. Allocating a mentor is problematic as there is a considerable overlap between the huge number of disciplines (Hankey, 2004). The purpose of a subject specialist is also poorly defined. Is the role of the mentor to ensure the mentee develops their subject knowledge or is it to impart distinctive content-subject pedagogy (Eliahoo, 2009)? Considering that up to this point, many teachers working in the post-compulsory sector had not gained a full teaching qualification and had not necessarily maintained their own subject currency, it is unclear why mentors would be best positioned to develop the subject specialist skills of trainee teachers. Additionally, this raises the question whether each subject area has its own unique pedagogy and how this would be communicated in mentoring feedback sessions.

This perception of the mentor as the bearer of subject skills pedagogy reflects an alignment of values with schools-based ITT in which subject mentors play an important role in supporting trainee teachers. However, it is unclear whether teachers working in the post-compulsory sector perceive themselves to be "dual professionals", in possession of both the vocational expertise and knowledge of pedagogical theories and techniques. Indeed, as Fisher and Webb (2006, p.32)

discovered, many practitioners working in the sector did not see themselves in this way: the reality of their setting meant they were more likely to rely on their craft knowledge and consider themselves as a "generalist" or a "Jack/Jill of all trades", teaching on a variety of courses.

By 2006, the role of the mentor in providing feedback began to gain prominence, embedded within mechanisms of increased accountability. In the Ofsted report of that year, it was commented that "the attention given to assessing the procedures for assuring the accuracy of the assessment of trainees' teaching performance still lack rigour" (Ofsted, 2006, p.2). Noticeable here is the use of language: the words "performance", "assessment" and "rigour" imply elements of appraisal and judgement in mentoring practices. Fear of assessment and remedial teacher education strategies may deter mentees from taking risks in their teaching practice, producing rehearsed lessons designed to meet the prescribed observation criteria.

Referring specifically to mentoring feedback, the 2006 report asserts that this:

> is of more variable quality, and sometimes lacks sharpness or fails to set clear targets. The effectiveness of feedback on teaching is often undermined by a tick-list approach with little use of more detailed professional comment (Ofsted, 2006, p.11).

The implied importance attached to constructive, qualitative feedback is interesting given the increasing assessment role of the mentor, highlighted in subsequent Ofsted reports (Ofsted, 2008 and 2009). As posited by Cullimore and Simmons (2010), the use of language becomes increasingly centred on setting targets, grading trainees'

lessons and examining the impact of teaching on learning. This discourse of "judgement", by this time characteristic in external and institutional policy documentation, contrasts markedly with the earlier 2003 Ofsted report which emphasised the development of the trainee's subject pedagogical skills through more formative means of assessment. With tighter prescriptive standards manifested in the Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)[1]teacher training reforms of 2007, exerting mentoring agency in feedback became more challenging. In a climate of increased accountability and performativity, there is a perceptible change in ideology from mentors encouraging trainees to critically evaluate the subject and pedagogy of their subject under the Oxford Internship scheme (McIntyre, 1997) to advocating prescribed pedagogical practices to meet the standards required to pass the ITT programme.

Under the LLUK reforms of 2007, all teachers employed in a "full" role in FE since 2001 had been required to gain a teaching qualification. However, the 2012 report into professionalism in FE, chaired by Lord Lingfield, (Lingfield, 2012), established that a mandatory suite of teaching qualifications was ineffectual in relation to teachers' professional development and a rethink of the national framework was necessary. It was more beneficial for FE and the growth of the national economy to

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[1] Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) replaced FENTO (Further Education National Training Organisation) in 2005 and was responsible for developing new qualifications and professional standards for those working in the post-compulsory education sector.

be autonomous in regulating the professionalism of the sector's workforce. With teaching qualifications now left to the commitment of employers in FE, a mentor was *de facto* no longer deemed strictly necessary. However, as reported by Thompson (2016), most FE institutions have continued to encourage teachers to gain teaching qualifications. The former cumbersome names of PTLLS, CTLLS and DTTLS[2] have been replaced with more palatable-sounding teaching qualifications: the Certificate in Education and Training (level 4), the Diploma in Education (level 5) and the Professional Graduate Certificate in Education and Training (level 6). A prerequisite for all these teaching programmes, generally delivered on an in-service basis, remains a mentor. Coinciding with these revised qualifications was the introduction in 2014 of twenty new Professional Standards, covering professional values and attributes, professional skills, and professional knowledge and understanding.

Currently, as part of the level 5 and 6 PCET programme requirements, underpinned by the 2014 standards, teaching observations by the mentors are required to be undertaken, generally on a minimum of four occasions. Mentors need to familiarise themselves with the standards to map their feedback and devise appropriate targets, ensuring consistency and clarity in recording the extent to which their mentee is

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[2] PTLLS stood for Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector, an introductory qualification at either level 3 or 4, a minimum threshold licence to teach for all in a teaching role; CTLLS stood for Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector at level 4 was aimed at "associate teachers" and the DTLLS or Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector was a level 5 teaching qualification, leading to QTLS.

meeting the minimum level of practice in the sector (Ofsted, 2014). However, how

mentors balance the formative aspects of the role, centred on the mentee's

professional growth, with the summative aspects of assessment remains a challenge.

If, at the heart of mentoring are the concepts of support, trust, and honesty (Knight

and Trowler, 1999), is the relationship threatened by mentors as "assessors of

performance" (Tillema *et al.*, 2011, p.140)? In their summative role, they are

effectively acting as "gatekeepers" to the trainee's professional development

(Standing, 1999, p.13) but are also placed in a vulnerable position as they are

subject to scrutiny in the form of the programme's moderation processes (Thompson,

2016). However, two points of caution should be noted here. Firstly, in the research

literature, assessment in the mentoring process is not necessarily seen to be a

negative aspect of the role. As documented by Manning and Hobson (2017), some

researchers have argued against this position, maintaining that finding a compromise

between the developmental and appraisal role can be reached. Secondly, the word

'assessment' signifies "judgement" or "evaluation" of some kind even if the purpose

of the assessment is to encourage self-regulated learning for the benefit of their

mentee's future practice. Perhaps, then, a more pragmatic view is to examine how

formative assessment can be embedded into a framework that encourages trust and

candidness whilst also acknowledging the complex social, political, and relational

dimensions of the mentoring practice.

**Summary**

The key political reforms relating to teacher education, as demonstrated in figure 2.1, highlight a shift in emphasis of the mentoring role: from one which was originally relatively informal to its current highly debated and contested incarnation, which encompasses judgemental and summative dimensions. The most recent proposed directives on mentoring, located in the 2020 ITE inspection framework and handbook (Ofsted, 2020), suggest that mentoring remains high on the agenda, with a particular emphasis on alignment with the partnership's ITE curriculum.

Historically, therefore, the purposes of mentoring have changed, influenced by the intentions of policy makers, which have, in turn, shaped the conceptualisations of the role. If, for example, mentoring is restricted to a supervisory role, this will affect the dispositions of both mentors and mentees (Kemmis *et al*., 2014a), with mentors self-identifying as "supervisors" or, possibly unconsciously, "mouthpieces" of the institution. Mentees may also adopt a more compliant stance to avoid disharmony in the relationship. The extent to which appraisal and accountability processes shape the way feedback is understood and delivered in mentoring practices, embedded in different conceptual models, is discussed in the next section.
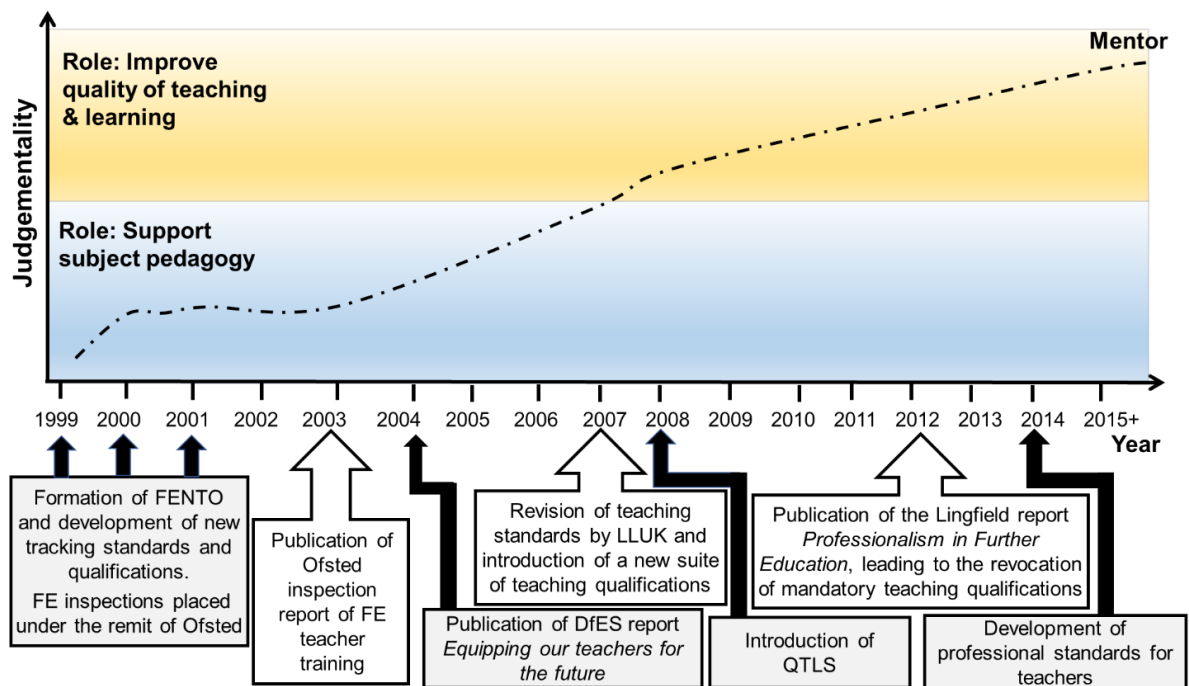
**Figure 2.1: A broad history of how the mentoring role has been shaped by the policy reforms of teacher training in further education**

## Perspectives and enactments of mentoring feedback practices in teacher education

### The nature of the feedback: model, prescription, and criticality

In teacher education, feedback provided by mentors is generally understood as being a significant and positive aspect of the mentoring process (Hudson and Hudson, 2014; Koster *et al.*,1998; Rippon and Martin, 2006) despite a reported variability in quality (Hudson and Hudson, 2014). Quality feedback is reported to be constructive (Hall *et al.,* 2008), relevant and supportive (Jones, 2000) and specific (Le Maistre *et al.*, 2006).

Based on accounts in the mentoring literature, different approaches to delivering feedback can be noticed. The quote below, for example, reveals some conceptual and theoretical insights into one approach:

> Feedback can be defined as offering a specific description of observed and demonstrable behaviour in the other person, one's own experience of that behaviour, and the effects it has on oneself, in such a way that the recipient is able to recognise and accept the information (Koster *et al.*, 1998).

This definition suggests that feedback entails the unidirectional transmission of knowledge from a more experienced practitioner (the mentor) to the trainee teacher. The mentor's feedback, based on "demonstrable" evidence in the learning environment, has the power to shape the mentee's behaviour. The mentee can interpret the messages in the same way as intended by the mentor and produce the desired change in performance. Feedback, thus, is conceptualised as an isolated and individualistic activity, centred on the mentee's capacity to change their behaviour, independent of social, institutional, and political conditions. Introspection is noted as a component of the feedback process although how best to promote engagement with the feedback and self-reflection is not evident from this quote.

A transmission model, in which mentors are cast as experts and mentees as passive recipients in the feedback process, has largely been criticised in the teacher education literature (Edwards, 1995; Harrison, Lawson and Wortley, 2005). As outlined previously, the invocation of a subject specialist in the post-compulsory education sector is complex. Aside from the challenge of locating suitable mentors,

there is no guarantee that mentors will be able to transfer this often tacit "pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman, 1986, p.6) to their mentee in a form which is easily comprehensible. There are also epistemological questions about learning and knowledge, whether knowledge is external and transferable, or whether meaning making arises from social interaction (Nicol, 2010) as trainee teachers build on their own understandings of pedagogical principles and practices. The assumption that the "'acquisition' of clearly defined knowledge and understanding" (Murray, 2012, p.20) is an automatic consequence of transmission shapes the content of mentoring feedback as pedagogical competences are prioritised over reflective discussions about values, theories and principles of teaching and learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b). Effective teaching, however, is more than acquiring a pre-defined toolkit of techniques, applicable to any learning context. It is a far messier, complex, and unpredictable process, involving an interplay of contextual variables (Korthagen, 2004), including managerialist discourses, collegial and departmental cultures, subject matter and individual learners' abilities, personalities, and needs.

Nevertheless, a directive approach to mentoring feedback remains the staple of teacher education feedback practices in many contexts, suggesting that its roots "are strong and resistant to change" (Farr, 2014, p.20). Historically, mentoring connotes wisdom and superiority (Little, 1990) and mentors are positioned within the institution as the best source of subject pedagogy. The transference of knowledge and understanding from the mentor to the mentee inevitably involves an interpersonal dimension of power (Garvey *et al.*, 2018). The cultural context in which mentoring occurs will also dictate the degree of control and prescription in the feedback. Lee

and Feng (2007) and Li (2009), in their studies in China and Hong Kong respectively, reported how mentors exerted hierarchical authority in their approach to feedback: discussions were rarely initiated, and mentees largely accepted guidance and criticism. This level of compliance was partly attributed to the mentoring culture in the country, in which the mentor is perceived as the expert in the relationship. In Western contexts, too, despite an increased prominence on reciprocity in teacher education (Harrison, Lawson and Wortley, 2005), in practice, trainee teachers are wary of rupturing the mentoring relationship, and potentially jeopardising their teaching placement, even if the feedback provided is incongruent with their pedagogical beliefs. The norms and conventions of the provision of feedback in teacher education also influence the content of the feedback. Lesson observations are usually followed by a "debriefing process" (Harrison, Lawson, and Wortley, 2005, p290), involving a routinised procedural pattern: oral followed by written feedback in accordance with prescribed assessment criteria. Compounded by institutional constraints such as mentor workload and, consequently, limited opportunities to meet, feedback is often directed towards the technicalities of teaching such as devising appropriate learning outcomes, behaviour management strategies and concepts *du jour* in education. Thus, the relationship between these interpersonal, political, and institutional factors will significantly influence the nature of the feedback in terms of its content, level of criticality and degree of prescription.

Although directive supervision remains the norm in many mentoring contexts, this is not reflected in current teacher education and mentoring discourse. Feedback is articulated as a social activity, signifying a shift from feedback *on* learning to

feedback *for* learning (Burke and Pieterick, 2010). The delivery of the feedback has been superseded in importance by dialogic and self-regulation feedback practices (Butler and Winne, 1995; Nicol and McFarlane-Dick, 2006). The formative nature of the feedback is foregrounded, centred on the trainee teacher's progress over time in relation to meeting negotiated professional developmental targets. Social-constructivist models of feedback underline the need for feedforward strategies so that trainee teachers recognise how to close the gap between their current performance and the desired goal (Sadler, 1989).

The tension between development and assessment in mentoring feedback has been widely documented in the research literature (Cullimore and Simmons, 2010; Gay and Stephenson, 1998; Tillema *et al.*, 2011). Cullimore and Simmons (2010) found that mentors were comfortable with providing constructive feedback on teaching practice, acting as "critical friends" in the assessment process, but were reluctant to formalise their judgements for fear of influencing the summative evaluation of the mentee. Extensive assessment in a variety of modes and from different educational stakeholders in ITT can create high levels of anxiety in teaching practice (Randall and Thornton, 2001). If the mentees have previous experience of negative feedback, they will be less receptive to any form of criticality; mentors may also resort to sugar-coating their comments to avoid jeopardising the relationship and causing any additional stress. Thus, whatever feedback approach is adopted – directive or facilitative – raises ethical dilemmas for both parties.

**Ethical dimensions in mentoring feedback practices**

> Mentoring ethics is a question of the relationship between moral responsibility and efficient mentoring (Atjonen, 2012, p.47).

This quote draws attention to the complex interplay of the personal and professional responsibilities of mentors as they attempt to balance the potentially irreconcilable demands of facilitation and institutional gatekeeping. To adhere to ethical mentoring principles, mentors are expected to value the trainee's voice, promote reflection, and not impose their own or the institution's beliefs on the mentee (Atjonen, 2012). Feedback dialogues should occur in a safe social space, with mentors mindful of the pedagogical and emotional impact of their feedback. Respecting confidentiality is also essential to maintaining a positive mentoring relationship (Cunningham, 2007).

To ensure the purpose of the mentoring process is clarified from the outset, "contracting" conversations about the expectations and boundaries of the relationship are considered a necessity (Wallace and Gravells, 2005). However, delineating these "borders" (Bradbury and Koballa, 2008) of what constitutes ethical behaviours is complex. Most of the literature on ethics on mentoring and coaching is related to career development in organisations (Garvey *et al.*, 2018) and is paid little attention in mentoring education. Indeed, practitioners are often unaware of the ethical consequences of their actions (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011) and may well underestimate the challenges involved with providing an honest, harmonious, and productive mentoring relationship. Respecting confidentiality, for example, is not straightforward. If a mentee is not performing to the expected standard, this will

inevitably involve some form of intervention with the inclusion of other stakeholders in the process. As Garvey (2004) argues, keeping conversations secret may arouse suspicion; there will inevitably be dialogue between teacher educators, mentors, and placement managers as they discuss the progress of the trainee teacher. Garvey adds that confidentiality in the relationship can amount to collusion and mutual dependency in the relationship. Furthermore, as trainee teachers become more confident and autonomous in their teaching, the mentor's interest in their mentee may wane. Mentees may feel less committed to the organisation and view their mentor in a more negative light, as a symbol of institutional authority, who may not have their best interests at heart (Mcauley, 2003).

In addition, tensions arise from conflicting expectations in terms of pedagogical beliefs and values, degree of support and mentors' personal attributes and behaviours (Rajuan *et al.*, 2007). In Timperley's (2001) study on mentoring feedback conversations, mentors were unaware that they often provided guidance without first stating what was wrong with the lesson. They were conscious of harming the relationship and preferred not to draw attention to any negative aspects of the lesson unless the mentee raised them. Mentees, too, may be reluctant to "open up" (Wildman *et al.,*1992,  p.210) in the relationship, conscious of their professional standing within the organisation and the need to keep their teaching placement to remain on the teacher education programme. They may opt instead for "strategic silence" (Hobson and McIntyre, 2013, p.352) in respect of their development needs, concerned how their individual performance is related to the wider institutional agenda. As mentors "smooth over blunders" (Wildman *et al.*, p.210) made by their

mentee, they are faced with difficult ethical decisions about control and confidentiality. When mentoring is driven by institutional and external goals, what Colley (2003) calls "triadic mentoring", the dynamic of the relationship is fundamentally altered.

**The relationship between feedback and reflective practices**

Reflection has become a normalised practice in ITT, championed as central to teachers' learning and professional development (Crasborn *et al.*, 2010; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Sempowicz and Hudson, 2011), and integrated into teacher education activities, artefacts and feedback practices. Social-constructivist models of feedback, in which the emphasis is on dialogue and co-construction of knowledge, align with reflective principles of self-direction, self-awareness and discovery (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985) and are the hallmark of the teaching practice cycle (Farr, 2014). Confusion over the meaning, purpose, and processes of reflection (Atkinson, 2012; Rogers, 2001), however, remain. Reflection is interpreted and enacted differently, and the impact it has on professional growth is hard to determine (Rogers, 2001). Nevertheless, the commonplace notion that an "effective teacher is a reflective teacher" (Brandt, 2008, p.42) has added an extra dimension to the mentor's role. Maynard and Furlong (1995), for example, argue that trainee teachers should be encouraged to develop their own understanding of teaching and learning principles, exploring alternative methods in the process. They add that as trainees lack the

confidence and experience to be skilled reflective practitioners, mentors will need to assist them on the trajectory to self-regulation.

Reflective thinking has been of interest to practitioners since the time of Dewey (1933) but it is perhaps the work of Schön (1983; 1987) which has received the most attention in teacher education. He argued for an alternative way of formulating knowledge, a shift from the dominant mode of technical rationality which views knowledge as "instrumental problem solving" (Schön, 1983, p.21), to how it is constructed in action as teachers contend with the unpredictable and messy world of practice in their professional sites of learning. Schön articulated two forms of reflection: reflection-*on*-action and reflection-*in*-action. Reflection-on-action is a retrospective process as teachers look back on their practice and develop intuitive understandings of the activities and principles which underpin it. This concept differs from observing teaching as a technical rational activity; trainee teachers will constantly revise their beliefs in relation to their experiences and learners' needs and, thus, develop new formulations of their practice for the future (Loughran, 1996). Assisting trainee teachers in this active construction of meaning are mentors who employ a variety of techniques. For example, in a study conducted by Harrison *et al.* (2005) on the quality of feedback conversations, it was concluded that "astute" questioning enabled mentors to move away from "controlling" the professional development of their mentees to positively challenging their actions and facilitating perceptible changes in practice. Oral feedback is generally the preferred method of promoting reflection-on-action (Mann and Walsh, 2013; Sempowicz and Hudson, 2011) as it is more immediate (Bunton *et al.*, 2002), collaborative (Akcan and Tatar,

2010) and honest (Wilkins-Canter, 1997). However, spoken and written modes of feedback are also viewed as complementary (Azure, 2015; Bunton *et al.*, 2002); the latter can clarify any misunderstandings and provide more critical feedback as the mentor and the mentee are less constrained by the social pressures of a face-to-face environment.

Schön's (1983; 1987) concept of reflection-in-action considers the mutual entanglement of thought and action. Practitioners act intuitively "in the midst of performance" (Schön, 1983, p.54), modifying their actions in response to unexpected events. The difficulty, however, is accessing this on-the-spot reflection. Hudson (2013) argues that mentors need to acquire strategies to communicate their pedagogical knowledge to their mentees, including making the implicit explicit. This includes being observed by their mentee prior to clarifying their own experiences of thinking and acting simultaneously in the lesson. This modelling strategy of reflection-in-action, he argues, facilitates greater conscious awareness of the "philosophies of teaching" and aids problem-solving, the latter often considered an important aspect of the mentor's role in promoting reflection (Crasborn *et al.*, 2010; Hall *et al.*, 2008).

Despite championing social-constructivist models of feedback, the discourse on reflection is underpinned by the principles of cognitivism: accessing the "black box" of the human mind (Brufee, 1986). Mentors are expected to "possess the capacity to function as entirely conscious and reflective beings" (Cushion, 2018, p.86) and can facilitate the reification of knowledge through reflection. This view prioritises individual agency over the social and institutional context and, conversely, although creating spaces for critical reflection are reported as empowering for trainee teachers

(Duckworth and Maxwell, 2015), mentees are still reliant on the wisdom and direction of their mentor to develop their reflective capabilities (Fendler, 2003).

Social-constructivist models of feedback claim to facilitate critical reflection through dialogue (Farr, 2014) but social interaction does not necessarily equate with meaningful discussions. Indeed, it may be that reflection is only at a superficial level, and the feedback does not examine issues beyond the status quo (Rogers, 2001, p.50). A lack of deep reflection is explained in two main ways, as summarised by Hatton and Smith (1995). Firstly, from an individual perspective, practitioners may not consider reflection essential to their learning. Although it is too simplistic to be labelled as "reflective" or "non-reflective", it is not a given that everyone can readily articulate the reasoning for their pedagogical beliefs, values, and activities. This necessitates thinking and talking in a different way and acquiring norms of reflection discourses which may appear alien to mentees (Copland, 2010). Mentors too who lack the experience and know-how to facilitate reflective dialogue during feedback may resort to a more directive approach (Copeland, 1982).

In addition, the "structure and ideology of the teacher education programme" (Hatton and Smith, p.38) shapes the development of reflection. Embedding reflection in teaching practice feedback is considered to be in conflict with a technical rational, standards-based model of teaching and learning where meeting pre-determined objectives is given primacy (Brandt, 2008). To satisfy meeting the teaching observation assessment criteria, the scope of reflective dialogue is automatically restricted and is hindered further by the structure of the written observation form. Although this artefact facilitates standardisation and, possibly, demystification of the

observation process, there are fewer opportunities for trainee teachers and their mentors to deviate off script (Bunton *et al.*, 2002). Potential tensions between controlling the direction of the feedback and encouraging mentees to deconstruct their practice (Harrison *et al.*, 2005) may, therefore, arise.

As documented earlier in this chapter, the monitoring of teacher education in PCET has been placed under new, different and increasing forms of pressure against a backdrop of neoliberal intervention imperatives, which advocate minimal state interventions and favour teaching, assessment and curricula which are quantifiable, measurable and align to market needs. An increased emphasis on "performance", "targets" and "best practice" (Ball, 2003) has resulted in teachers not wishing to "teach against the grain" (Cochran-Smith, 1991). However, steering trainee teachers towards prescriptive pedagogies raises questions about the impact a performative culture has on their professional growth, values and identities, and the role mentors play in fostering these.

**Summary**

Drawing loosely on Philpott's (2016) review of feedback in teacher education, broad themes in respect of mentoring feedback practices can be identified. These are summarised in table 2.1.

| Theme | Studies |
|---|---|
| Promoting reflection | Akcan and Tatar (2010); Ben-Peretz and Rumney, (1991); Copland (2012);  Crichton and Gil, (2015); Crasborn et al., (2010); Frick, Carl and Beets, (2010); Glenn, (2006); Löfstrom and Eisenschmidt, (2009); Orland-Barak and Klein, (2005); Sempowicz and Hudson, (2011); Spear, Lock and McCulloch, (1997); Wilkins-Canter, (1997). |
| Content of feedback (including classroom management skills, teaching strategies, progress of individual students, lesson planning, meeting targets) | Ben-Peretz and Rumney, (1991); Crasborn et al., (2010); Orland-Barak and Klein, (2005); Spear, Lock and McCulloch, (1997); Strong and Baron, (2004); Tang and Chow, (2007); Timperley, (2001); Vásquez, (2004). |
| Discourse of feedback (including non-verbal language, descriptive versus evaluative comments, asking questions, providing examples, politeness strategies, praise and summarising) | Ben-Peretz and Rumney, (1991); Crasborn et al., (2010); Le and Vásquez, (2011); Orland-Barak and Klein, (2005); Philpott, (2016); Spear, Lock and McCulloch, (1997); Strong and Baron, (2004); Timperley, (2001); Vásquez, (2004). |
| Critical issues in feedback (including criticality versus support; inconsistency; temporal and spatial aspects; power relations; agenda and ideology of the programme) | Ben-Peretz and Rumney, (1991); Copland, (2012); Cullimore and Simmons, (2010); Lee and Feng, (2007); Löfstrom and Eisenschmidt, (2009); Manning and Hobson (2017); Orland-Barak and Klein, (2005); Strong and Baron, (2004); Tang and Chow, (2007); Tillema et al., (2011); Vásquez, (2004); Wilkins-Canter, (1997). |
| Role of the mentor in the feedback process (directive, prescriptive, judgemental) | Cullimore and Simmons, (2010); Löfstrom and Eisenschmidt, (2009); Manning and Hobson (2017); Orland-Barak and Klein, (2005); Paris and Gespass, (2011); Rix and Gold (2000); Tang and Chow, (2007); Tillema et al., (2011); Vásquez, (2004). |

Table 2.1: Broad themes of mentoring feedback identified in the teacher education literature

Much of the research into mentoring feedback is related to the micro-interactions between mentor and mentee. Although power dimensions are acknowledged (Le and Vásquez, 2011; Vásquez, 2004), the emphasis is generally on issues internal to the mentoring dyad rather than how wider structural aspects of power impact on the relationship. These include the political environment: the prevailing discourses of neoliberal performativity (Ball, 2003) and educational policy initiatives which have shaped the actions and positioning of teachers (Kennedy, 2015). This does not mean

that practitioners are passive, subjugated objects, unable to exercise their agency for their own means (Sutton and Gill, 2010) but the social practice of feedback must be acknowledged to fully understand how it is interpreted and enacted.

# CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A SOCIAL PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

## Overview

In this chapter, the broad principles of practice theory are documented and the problematic concept of 'practice' is discussed, followed by an explanation of the theory of practice architectures, adopted as the primary theoretical framework in this thesis. Finally, the strengths and potential limitations of the theory are summarised.

## Overview of practice theories: convergence and divergence

> Phenomena such as knowledge, meaning, human activity, science power, language, social institutions and human transformation occur within and are aspects or components of the field of practices (Schatzki, 2001, p.2).

The quote above provides some insight into why practice theories have become a growing source of interest for researchers in disciplines as diverse as consumption and sustainability studies (Evans *et al.,* 2012; Gram-Hanssen, 2009), health (Maller, 2015) and education (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014a). Although not unified in their views of social and human phenomena, they represent a "broad family of theoretical approaches connected by a web of historical and conceptual similarities" (Nicolini, 2013, p.1), centred on the study of practices. Metaphors of entanglements, nets,

webs, knots, and bundles are widely used to capture the complex interconnectedness of the elements which constitute a practice. The practice itself is the primary focus of study, not individuals' behaviours, understandings or use of language, despite these being integral constituents.

In addition, the opening quote alludes to several aspects on which most practice-based approaches agree. The first commonality is that practices are social; it is only possible to examine social phenomena in the sites in which human interaction and activities co-exist (Schatzki, 2002). Practice theories offer an alternative to perspectives which situate the social in the minds of individuals, in discourse and interaction (Reckwitz, 2002). From a practice viewpoint, the social world materialises from the flow of practices, as they happen. Patterns of activity are understood and undertaken by multiple people (Schatzki, 2012) and sustain social structures, including institutions, organisations, and authority (Nicolini, 2013).

Secondly, routinised body performances are underpinned by language and knowledge of how to perform practices. Knowledge is not viewed as an internal process, in someone's head, but it is the social that shapes the normative aspects of a practice and the tacit: practitioners generally know how to proceed, acquired through interactions with others and from experience, even if they find it difficult to articulate this knowledge. Taking mentoring feedback as an example, as mentors and mentees acquire skills and experience the routinisation of the practice, they begin to establish a "feel for the game", a practical understanding of what is considered appropriate to say and do (Bourdieu, 1990) within a social field. Affective factors also shape the practice: feedback is recognised as an emotional process as

comments have the capacity to build or diminish self-esteem. Therefore, as summarised by Reckwitz (2002), it is not only human activities which are central to understanding practice theories:

> mental routines and their 'knowledge' are also the place of the social: the mental routines and their knowledge are integral parts and elements of practices. A 'practice' thus crosses the distinction between the allegedly inside and outside of mind and body (Reckwitz, 2002, p.252).

Discourse, too, is not seen as separate from or external to human activities (Nicolini, 2013); rather it is entwined in a dialectical relationship with practices. Dominant mentoring educational discourses such as the reflective practitioner, for example, emerge from internal and external forces and impact the enactment of mentors' feedback: the use of language, symbols, and signs; social relations, including power demarcations; and shared understandings. Over time, in human and social action, these discourses shape social relationships and serve to normalise, or transform, the practice. Indeed, by using the phrase, "human transformation" in the opening quote, Schatzki (2001) emphasises the dynamic nature of practices: people's understandings, actions and relationships are shaped by their performances. Some practices, however, are more resistant to change than others as they become embedded in our ways of doing things. Perhaps then the allure of practice theories is the idea that practices both generate stability through the enactment of routinised activities and point to the fluidity of the social world, "where social activities appear as the result of ongoing work and complex machinations" (Nicolini, 2013, p.2).

Rooted in different philosophical and research traditions, practice theories vary primarily in terms of which elements of the practice are foregrounded, including the relationship between structure and agency, epistemological and ontological tensions, the dynamics of practices and the significance of materiality. Giddens (1984), for example, is concerned with negating the dualism of the subjective and the objective, viewing social practices as the mediating force between structure and agency. The area of study is "neither the experience of the individual actor, not the existence of any form of societal totality, but social practices developed across space and time" (Giddens, 1984, p.2). As individuals participate in routinised activities at a level of "practical consciousness", acting without conscious thought, the rules and regulations, values and shared understandings of a practice are gradually acquired, resulting in an ongoing process of reproduction through human and social action.

According to Giddens, the centre of attention is the recurrent and collective nature of practice: this provides a form of "ontological security" (Giddens, 1984, p.23; 50) in the social world. However, proponents of critical realism such as Archer (2007) argue that this elision of the individual and the social context neglects the role of reflexivity in social action, defined as "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2007, p.4). She adds that although certain skills become embodied and automatic over time, such as driving a car, others rely on conscious deliberation; thus, the "establishment of a successful social practice is dependent upon the adaptive ingenuity of reflective subjects" (*ibid,* p.10). Reflexivity is a result of the dynamic relationship between individuals' own motivations and the context; one is

not considered more important than the other. The significance of individual, dynamic subjectivities in the trajectories of practices, which may remain irrespective of the social context, should, therefore, not be underestimated in the study of practices.

What is also largely ignored in Giddens' theory is the significance of materiality in social practices. Most practices entail interaction with human and non-human artefacts in their contexts of use; they are "intrinsically connected to and interwoven with objects" (Schatzki, 2002, p.106). In feedback practices, these artefacts include the physical design of the discussions between mentors and their mentees (the space and positioning of chairs, tables and the whiteboard); the use of physical objects (pens, paper, technologies, books and observation templates) and cultural artefacts such as the tick and cross symbols. Researchers who privilege the role of materiality in practice-based approaches (Fenwick *et al.*, 2011; Orlikowski, 2007; Sørensen, 2009) emphasise how the material and social world are bound together, a relationship "of recursion and mutual emergence" (Nicolini, 2013, p.174).

A further difference in the emphasis of practice-based approaches relates to the ontological and epistemological stance adopted by researchers. Although, as posited by Nicolini (2013), the ontological nature of practices is central to conceptualising social life and phenomena, distinct ontologies are exemplified. For Schatzki (2001; 2002; 2005), how practices are bundled together with material entities and organised activities in their formation of sites of the social is critical to understanding social reality. This notion of "site ontologies" signifies the being and becoming of practices at a particular moment, in social and geographical space. This view, therefore, does not focus on the knowledge which makes practices happen. Other practice-related

concepts such as Lave and Wenger's (1991) "legitimate peripheral participation" and "situated learning" are interested in the co-construction of knowledge, shaped by social interaction, in its social, historical, and cultural context. Sociomaterial practice-based approaches, on the other hand, strive to respond to both ontological and epistemological questions. Sørensen (2009), for example, argues that knowledge and learning are constituted through the relationship between sociomaterial arrangements and practices.

Finally, the dynamic aspects of practices are emphasised in some practice-based approaches, particularly those interested in exploring behaviour change. Practice theories acknowledge the recursive nature of practices and the role they play in the reproduction of social life. Given the diversity of the sites of performance in which practices are enacted, they evolve differently as practitioners "adapt, improvise and experiment" (Warde, 2005, p.41) in response to local understandings, behaviours, and conditions. Shove *et al.*, (2012), whilst mostly in agreement with Gidden's structuration theory (1984) which prioritises neither human agency nor social structures in theorising behaviour change, lament the lack of attention devoted to the dynamics of practices in Giddens' account. Their streamlined practice theory comprises the dialectic interplay of three elements: material, competence and meaning, and seeks to elucidate the stability, processes, and transformation of practices.

In summary, this section has outlined some of the basic features of practice-based approaches to pave the theoretical landscape of practice architectures, the principal theoretical lens used in this thesis. There is insufficient scope here to devote a more

detailed account of the history of practice theory and a discussion of the distinct philosophical influences and characteristics of each approach (see Nicolini, 2013, for a more in-depth explanation). Perhaps a more fitting term than 'practice theory' is 'practice sensibility' as used by Kemmis (2019) and Trowler (2019), which suggests a nuanced approach to the study of practices, being attuned to how practices are constitutive of the fabric of social life, and which necessitates investigation beneath the surface of the unconscious.

## The minefield of the conceptualisation of practice

Considering the diverse influences and orientation of practice "theories", it is unsurprising that locating a definitive definition of "practice" is problematic. The aim of this section, therefore, is to endeavour to exemplify the essence of a practice to inform the conceptual, theoretical, and analytical framework of this study. As this research study is informed by the work of Schatzki (1996; 2001; 2002; 2005; 2006; 2012), his account of practice will be awarded the most attention in this section. However, there are aspects of other influential practice theories which overlap in terms of their conceptualisation of practices.

Practices are generally perceived as being composed of elements although the nature of these constituents differs. Reckwitz (2002, pp.249-50) proposes the following core, interconnected elements which add to the social order of the world:

forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

In this definition, the discrete elements of a practice are collectively conceived as an entity. Practices as "entities" (Schatzki, 1996; Shove *et al.*, 2012), such as teaching and learning, have distinct histories and trajectories and are considered to be the "ideal" form of the practice (Reckwitz, 2002, p.249). At the same time, practices are enacted through their "performance" in specific settings in time and space. Performance and entity are, therefore, intricately connected as it is through the repeated performance of a practice that it endures.

Influenced by Reckwitz's categorisation, Shove *et al.* (2012) conflate these elements into three broad interdependencies: meaning, competence and material. Practices make use of these elements in different ways, but it is the linkage between these components which is central to understanding the nature and dynamics of a practice. In respect of mentoring feedback, for example, histories of feedback have clearly shaped how the practice is enacted, a shift from a behaviourist model, focusing on performance goals, to one which advocates dialogue and self-regulated learning. The histories of the practice are significant in determining how both oral and written feedback are structured, the norms, behaviours, and affections of the practice, with a focus on reflection and adherence to personal targets. This links to the embodied know-how of the mentors who tailor their feedback accordingly, adhering to the 'when', 'what' and 'how' of the practice, and to the material tools used in the process such as the content and format of observation forms and mentoring handbooks. As

new technologies come to the fore, including laptops and interactive whiteboards, others like overhead projectors disappear. Thus, it is this "block" (Reckwitz, 2002) of interrelated elements which constitute practices rather than the individuals who carry or perform them, although the agency and motivations of practitioners will inevitably influence their trajectory.

Turning to Schatzki (2012, p.14), practices are described in their simplest form as "open-ended spatially temporally dispersed nexus [es] of doings and sayings." These bodily and mental activities are organised around four aspects outlined below. They are also mapped to mentoring feedback practices [table 3.1] to consider the practical implications of Schatzki's perspective and areas for further exploration when conducting the study, where there appeared to be unanswered questions in his conceptualisation of practices.

- *Practical understandings*: these are the "know-how" of the practice as people acquire a knowledge of how to go on, which bodily actions to use, and how to behave in different social situations. Individuals develop and reproduce various dispositions, shaped by previous experiences, through the performance of the practice.

- *Rules: "explicit formulations"* which direct or inform people to "perform specific actions" (Schatzki, 2002, p.79). These rules are understood by practitioners, conscious of what they *ought* and *ought not* to say and do. Adherence to these rules serves to normalise the practice.

- *Teleoaffective structures:* "an array of ends, projects, uses (of things) and even emotions that are acceptable or prescribed for participants in the practice" (Schatzki, 2005, p.472). This means that practices are guided by expected aims or purposes, although not necessarily stated explicitly, which make sense to those involved.

Explicit reference is also made in this category to "things" or material entities. As outlined in the previous section, Schatzki (2012, p.16) sees the relationship between bundles of practices and material arrangements as "fundamental in analysing human life", emphasising a site ontological perspective on practices. One example to illustrate this, modified from Schatzki (2006) to relate it to PCET, is students taking an online literacy and numeracy assessment (= organised activity) which involves using a computer in a designated space and at a specified time (= material arrangement). This forms part of the performance of an initial assessment educational practice. If the computer systems malfunctions (=material arrangement), this will inevitably affect the enactment of the practice (=activity/event). Thus, material arrangements are not perceived as separate from the multiple practices which occur in educational departments; rather they are entangled in the *performance* of these activities.

- *General understandings*: these suggest that practices connote a sense of worth or value which is encapsulated in people's sayings and doings,

likened to Wenger's (1998) concept of "joint enterprise", as members of a community of practice share common concerns and beliefs.

Thus, a practice involves constellations of multiple, interrelated activities enacted in space and time, organised by the "evolving set" of these social phenomena (Schatzki, 2006, p.1864). Multiple practices are happening simultaneously in any one organisation, involving a variety of people in different locations. Each practice follows its own goals or projects but in alignment with the overall mission and values of the institution. The arrangements and embedded structures within organisations shape existing practices and their future durability. They endure because of the "practice memory" of an organisation, defined by Schatzki (2006, p.1867) as "the sum of the memories of its practices". This goes beyond the collective memories and understandings of individuals; it is manifested in the discourse of organisational documents, such as policies on safeguarding, recurrent bodily activities, material arrangements and flat or hierarchical power organisational structures which shape the relationships of the workforce. The enactment of organisational practices varies from site to site as practitioners' previous understandings of work practices become entwined with existing ones (Price *et al.,* 2009). Therefore, understanding the current practices of an organisation entails an awareness of practice traditions: the arrangements of the site which prefigure practices and the extent to which these practices will be carried forward or altered by practitioners. Practices are shaped and bound together by pre-existing arrangements, protocols, traditions, and processes, what Kemmis *et al.* (2014a) call "practice architectures", the principal theoretical framework used in this study.

| Feature of social practice | Examples in relation to mentoring feedback practices | Areas for further exploration in the process of conducting the study (where unanswered questions remain) |
|---|---|---|
| Practical understandings | ▪ A knowledge of how to mentor and how to deliver (and respond to) feedback (bodily and mental actions), e.g., writing observation forms, talking about the lesson observation, making notes on the feedback, etc. <br> ▪ Development of different mentoring dispositions with mentors adopting dispositions of supervisor, support or role model, and mentees possibly relegated to a position of professional compliance, or pragmatism (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014a). | ▪ The role of individual subjectivities in a practice (3.1). <br> ▪ Power relations inherent, for example, in the "sayings" of the practice, both on the professional stage and off it, the latter labelled by Scott (1990) as a "hidden transcript". |
| Rules of a practice | ▪ Adhering to the procedure of a lesson observation (e.g., mentor maintaining an unobtrusive presence in the social space, completing required documentation within a specified deadline) and delivering both oral and written feedback. | ▪ Exploring what is perceived as an explicit and an implicit rule. For example, do trainee teachers write up lesson objectives on the board because they have explicitly been told to or because this a tacit expectation? What happens if they flout the "rules"? Is this seen as a deliberate or an unconscious action? |
| Teleoaffective structures | ▪ An example of a desired end is for mentors to aid the trainee teacher to pass the ITT course successfully. This entails multi-layered tasks such as negotiating clear development targets, providing access to material entities (other members of staff, teaching resources, technologies), which form part of feedback practices, which are all nested in educational practices. <br> ▪ In terms of the 'affective' aspect, mentors recognise the emotional aspect of teaching, but a certain degree of resilience from the mentee is generally expected. Mentees expect a supportive mentor who will listen to their concerns. | ▪ The power relations between the practitioners. Mentors in a supervisory role may have a greater interest in steering their mentee through the programme. <br> ▪ (As above) – individual subjectivities: do all practitioners share the same common goal? Is this perceived as individual or collective? |
| General understandings | ▪ Mentoring is conceived as something which is of value and professional benefit to both mentor and mentee. Teaching is also seen as being good for humankind. <br> ▪ Appropriate interactions between mentor and mentee. | ▪ In whose interest does the feedback serve? (Kemmis, 2019) Is it for the benefit of the mentee to acquire pedagogical skills and knowledge or for the institution? Is there an aspect of "triadic mentoring" (Colley, 2003), determined by institutional and external aims? |

table 3.1 the sayings and doings of Schatzki's conceptualisation of practice, organised around four social phenomena in relation to mentoring feedback practices

## The theory of practice architectures

"We live our lives in practices" (Kemmis, 2019, p.31).

The opening quote, following Schatzki (2013), draws attention to the different aspects which affect our lives as individuals: the interconnected activities we undertake; the social and geographical spaces we occupy; the language and objects we use along the way; and the relationships we form, all "interwoven with the lives and lifespaces of others we encounter at different moments in time and different locations in space" (Kemmis, 2019, p.85). This notion of intersubjectivity, how our existence is enmeshed with other arrangements, pre-existing or brought to a site, is the basic premise of the theory of practice architectures, originally conceived by Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) and developed further by Kemmis *et al.*(2014a; 2014b) and Mahon *et al.*(2017). Drawing on other strands of practice theory, particularly the work of Schatzki, it resonates with the ontological positioning of this thesis, as it is primarily concerned with the way practices happen in their settings, how they unfold within our lifeworlds. This shifts the emphasis from examining a social phenomenon such as mentoring as an idealised entity to how in unfolds in real time. Thus, the situated enactment of practices, shaped by the different arrangements or architectures which enable and constrain these practices, is the object of enquiry.

A practice is defined by Kemmis (2018, pp.2-3) as the following:

> A form of human action in history, in which particular activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of people's ideas and talk (sayings), and when the people are distributed in particular kinds of relationships (relatings), and when

this combination of sayings, doings and relatings 'hang together' in the project
of the practice (the ends and purposes that motivate the practice).

According to Kemmis, this definition of practice applies to macro-practices, such as
education, right down to the micro-interactions of a feedback discussion, for
example. Its conceptualisation is faithful to Schatzki's (1996, p.89) original definition
of a practice, a composite of a spatially dispersed nexus of doings and sayings, but
added to this is explicit reference to its "relatings" or, perhaps less ambiguously, the
relational aspects of a practice. Distinctive relationships between people, involving
dimensions of power or solidarity, are characteristic of the social site in which
practices occur. Mentoring, for example, involves distinct ways of relatings, not only
the direct interactions between the mentor and mentee, but also with other
participants, including students, managers, teacher education tutors, colleagues, and
internal and external verifiers. Who is included and excluded from these webs of
relationships, and how this shapes the practice, is also pertinent to the study of
practices. Thus, direct reference to the relatings of a practice foregrounds its
sociality: a practice "realises and is realised in social interactions, in relations of
belonging or not belonging, inclusion and exclusion, differences of standing or role
among people, and relations of power" (Kemmis, 2009, p.23).

These "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" are amalgamated in the *project* of a
practice [figure 3.1], which bears a similarity to Schatzki's "teleoaffective structure". A
project answers the question "What are you doing?" and entails the following three
aspects: the intention or aim of the practice; the actions (combinations of sayings,
doing and relations) and the ends, which may or not be attainable (Kemmis *et al.*,
2014a, p.155). This notion of a project appears to be collective, whereby

practitioners work towards a common goal. However, there is no guarantee, for instance, that individuals will share the same concerns or interpret the aims of the project in the same way. Archer (2007, p.7) envisages the concept of a project from a more individualistic perspective, asserting that "we form 'projects' to advance or to protect what we care about most" and "even though we may share objective social positions, we may also seek very different ends from within them" (*ibid,* p.22). It is important, therefore, to consider how individuals exercise discretion at the local level, how they react to and undertake activities in their sites. For example, although mentors may have received guidance on how to conduct a lesson observation, they are likely to perceive the aim of this practice in different ways from the programme director, and the practice will, thus, be enacted, at least partly, in accordance with their self-interests and in maintaining social ties. Therefore, a practice encompasses both subjective and intersubjective forces: practices are instrumental in moulding individual identities, but practices are also driven by individual interests.
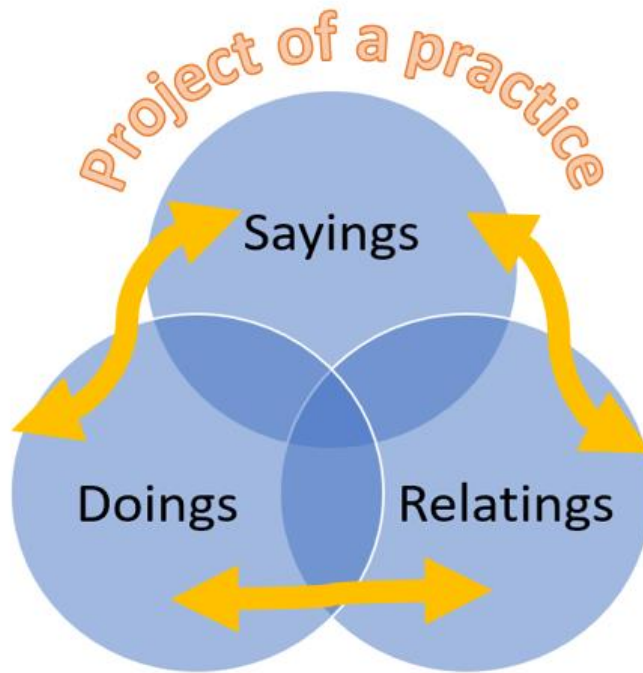
Figure 3.1:The sayings, doings and relatings of a practice, which hang together in the project of a practice (adapted from Kemmis *et al.*, 2014a)

The theory of practice architectures conceptualises these "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" of a practice as hanging together in three intersubjective domains, in which people encounter each other in different ways: *semantic space*, *physical space-time* and *social space*. Practices are also enabled and constrained by the *cultural-discursive, material-economic*, and *social-political* arrangements located in or brought to a site (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b). This concept is exemplified further, with examples of how it can be applied to the study of mentoring feedback practices:

- The *sayings* of the practice (what is said and understood; what is appropriate or relevant to say) are facilitated or hindered by *cultural-discursive* arrangements in the shared meaning of *language, signs and symbols*, and in *semantic space* in

which participants encounter each other as *interlocutors.* The discourse, culture and traditions which emerge over time and prefigure practices (Kemmis and Edwards-Groves, 2018) shape the "sayings" of feedback, but do not determine how practices unfold. Mentoring practitioners draw upon their contextual knowledge and linguistic repertoires, selecting words which best reflect what they want to say at that moment and appropriate to the setting. This language, including paralinguistic and prosodic features, is intended to be comprehensible to the recipient and, as interlocutors, co-participants (usually) adhere to conventions of socially-situated interactional language use, including turn-taking, and using anecdotes to provide personalised examples. These sayings are also shaped by professional and subject specialist discourses. One example is the mentor asking the mentee to reflect on the lesson that has been observed. This is generally considered a normalised and acceptable strategy, based on previous feedback practices and pertinent to the context of ITT. However, it may also be construed as paying lip-service to the dialogic nature of feedback rather than both parties truly engaging in critical discussion.

- The *doings* of the practice (what is done) are facilitated or hindered by the *material-economic* arrangements in the shared meaning of *activity* or *work,* and in *physical space-time* in which participants encounter each other as *embodied* beings. Embodied actions and material arrangements are entangled with the sayings and relatings of the practice. As the mentor delivers spoken feedback, the mentee might write notes in a notebook or on a laptop. A mentor may gesticulate to emphasise a point or smile to convey a supportive persona, and this sign is understood by the mentee. The physical set-up of the environment

(the positioning of the tables and chairs, room ventilation, access to a whiteboard), the artefacts used, and the time allocated to the discussion of feedback all shape how the practice is enacted, reproduced and, possibly, transformed. The practice is likely to be familiar, involving routinised activities, although its enactment will vary from moment to moment and from location to location according to which combination of arrangements in the site are in existence. Although these existing arrangements are shaped by the "doings" of the practice, the practice is also affected by what is brought to the site (like new laptops, designed to enable the work of the practitioners), new "sayings" (governmental or institutional policies, curricula, ideas) and who is present. If a line manager or tutor is in the same room as the mentoring meeting, this will inevitably impact on the degree of openness of feedback.

- The *relatings of the practice* (how people relate to each other and the world) are facilitated and hindered by the *social-political arrangements* in the shared medium of *solidarity* and *power*, and in *social space* in which participants encounter each other as *social beings*. The mentoring practice involves complex networks of relationships which are linked to the different roles undertaken by mentors and mentees. Line managers acting as mentors, for example, will involve dimensions of power and solidarity within the relationship, not necessarily in a negative way. It may be that a line manager has a greater vested interest in the progress of the mentee and is able to build rapport and allocate more time to the practice than an overworked colleague. Conversely, a mentee with a line manager as a mentor may be subject to greater surveillance. Social-political arrangements also entail the rules, structures and regulations which govern the

practice, including discussing mentoring expectations, negotiating professional

development targets and shared understandings of teaching and learning

strategies. Finally, the ways the practitioners position themselves in the

organisation: the extent to which they agree with its ethos and policies, can

exercise autonomy and feel valued, all shape and are shaped by the "relatings" of

practices.


*Practice traditions* that "encapsulate the history of the happenings of the practice"

(Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b, p.31) are also significant in the enactment and transformation

of practices. Practice traditions act as a reference point for practitioners and

gradually form part of their habitus, as a set of dispositions, defined as the

knowledge, skills, and values (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b, p.34) of practitioners. These

are not fixed but are continuously shaped by individuals' past experiences, social

interactions and present circumstances; they also influence the ways practices are

enacted and understood. Trainee teachers bring their previous knowledge, skills and

values of teaching and learning to mentoring practices. Similarly, mentors' previous

constructs of mentoring have a significant influence on how they make sense of and

undertake mentoring. Mentoring dispositions are also shaped by wider policy

initiatives and local adaptations of these. An example is knowledge of how to teach

and provide feedback congruent with a standards-based view of teacher education,

one in which performance and achievement targets are prioritised.

Thus, analysing the mentoring feedback practice through the theoretical lens of

practice architectures necessitates an understanding of the distinctive histories,

narratives and practice-arrangement bundles that condition and hold it in place within

its social site and form part of the *practice landscape* in which the practice occurs. Practices can be the sites of other practices (Schatzki, 2002): mentoring feedback practices are also the sites of reflection practices, for example. They are also found in multiple sites but unfold in different ways. Practices, therefore, need to be examined alongside the sites in which they occur in all their peculiarities and how they mutually shape each other. Thus, treating feedback practices as a uniform entity, divorced from the social context, is highly problematic as it presumes that all practitioners conceptualise and undertake feedback in the same way and practices are subject to the same local and external conditions. There will inevitably be some similarities in the ways that feedback practices are enacted and reproduced in institutions because of comparable enabling and constraining practice architectures, including infrastructures, rules, and processes. However, in order to strengthen our knowledge of how and why practices endure and evolve, it is necessary to examine how they are intertwined in their local sites. To make changes to a practice also requires attending to its practice architectures (Kemmis, 2019).

Finally, one marked characteristic of the theory of practice architectures is the attention paid to the relationship between practices: their co-existence and interdependency. The term 'architectures' is acknowledged by Kemmis and Mahon (2017) as a somewhat misleading term as it connotes something which is immovable and of human design; it does not fully capture the dynamic and highly connected nature of practices and how they can be shaped by non-human elements. The notion of "ecologies of practice" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b) endeavours to capture the interrelationships between practices. On a smaller scale, this can refer to how receiving feedback is inextricably linked to giving feedback: the feedback the mentor

provides unfolds depending on how it is received and acted upon. On a larger scale, the term "complexes of practice" (*ibid*) is used to highlight the different kinds of relationships between educational practices: between administration, research, professional learning practices and so on. Germane to this study is how mentoring is connected to other metapractices (Kemmis, 2012) and practice arrangements in institutions. As revealed in chapter two, the role of mentoring has gained in significance in ITT in the post-compulsory sector, partly as a result of educational research practices which have investigated its perceived effectiveness. This has resulted in national educational policies, which are adapted and reified in local administration practices, in the selection of mentors and site-based organisational arrangements. Metapractices of ITE also shape mentoring practices, for example, whether mentors have access to professional training opportunities. However, it is important to note that the extent to which these practices impact on each other is an empirical matter (Mahon *et al.*, 2017). It is only through examining the practices at the ground level that we can identify which practices connect with which other practices and with which practice architectures.

## The theory of practice architectures: its strengths and potential challenges as a conceptual framework

The theory of practice architectures has been used in various educational research settings to explore aspects of mentoring (Francisco, 2017; Kemmis *et al.*, 2014a; Pennanen *et al.*, 2015) and to investigate engagement with written feedback in higher education (Jørgensen, 2019). However, no studies focusing specifically on mentoring feedback practices which deploy this theoretical framework have yet come

to light. In this study, the purpose of using the theory of practice architectures was to highlight the contextual affordances and challenges faced by mentoring practitioners in ITT in the enactment of feedback and, in doing so, contribute to the scholarly literature on mentoring, feedback, and teacher education practices. Mahon *et al.* (2017) propose the theory of practice architectures offers the researcher the following three ways of understanding a practice: as a *theoretical*, *analytical,* and *transformative* resource, each of which will be discussed below.

Firstly, as a *theoretical resource*, it draws attention to the social, situated, and evolving nature of a practice: its "happening-ness" (Kemmis, 2019). The theory of practice architectures is valuable in providing a relatively straightforward way of examining a practice from a multi-dimensional and critical perspective, considering a range of potentially enabling and constraining factors which shape its development. To gain a rich, theoretical understanding of how feedback is undertaken in real-time mentoring discussions, it is necessary to acknowledge the messy, complex nature of mentoring provision, to look beyond rhetoric and espoused practices. This involves exploring the array of interconnected discursive, physical, social, and political arrangements that prefigure the practice and hold it in place, including institutional histories and narratives, and where there might be possibilities for change.

In addition, in a departure from most other practice-based approaches, a distinctive aspect of this conceptual framework is the attention paid to the role of agency in the accomplishment of practices. When human actors are described as "carriers" (Reckwitz, 2002) whose understandings, knowledge and values are conceived as "elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates" (*ibid*, p.250), the role of reflexivity, individual subjectivities and motivations are de-

emphasised. In the theory of practice architectures, reference is made to *praxis,* defined as "what an individual person does or can do" (Kemmis and Smith, 2008, p.9). This does not discount the role of practitioners working together, for example in the planning and enactment of mentoring provision, but highlights certain dispositions that individuals possess and draw upon as they make choices of how to act in the world, a kind of conscious sensitivity about how to be socially responsible. Praxis is, however, not only shaped by "practitioner capacities" (Mahon and Galloway, 2017, p.187); these values, knowledge and dispositions are also enmeshed with practices and practice architectures. This view of dispositions is close conceptually to Bourdieu's (1990) notion of *habitus*, referring mainly to pre-reflexive capabilities that underpin human activities.

As an *analytical resource*, the theory of practice architectures facilitates a better understanding of the site-based mechanisms, circumstances and arrangements which shape a practice at that moment in time and space. Observing and analysing a practice is always a challenge because much of what goes on is invisible and tacit (Gherardi, 2009, p.116). By analysing the different arrangements that prefigure, condition, and hold practices in place, the researcher is better positioned to investigate which aspects are supported and hindered by contextual conditions. In terms of mentoring, these include what Cunningham (2007, p.89) refers to as institutional "architectural features", which can be loosely mapped to Kemmis *et al.*'s (2014b) theoretical framework. For example, the development of a college-wide mentoring ethos links to the discursive aspects of the practice, the "sayings" and the cultural-discursive practice arrangements in place. Attending to the physical resources requires links to the "doings" of the practice and the material-economic

practice arrangements in place which, in turn, may result in more collaborative and egalitarian dyadic relationships. This links to the "relatings" of the practice and the social-political arrangements in place. Although these practice arrangements are treated as separate entities for ease of analysis, they continually overlap and interconnect, not only with each other but also with other practice bundles, arrangements, and sites. These intersubjective dimensions are significant in exploring how a practice evolves and the tensions which may arise as practitioners understand and carry out activities in different ways.

For Trowler (2019), although valuable in acknowledging the institutional arrangements which enable and limit possibilities for change in the enactment of practices at the ground level, the theory of practice architectures does not sufficiently consider the "learning architectures" (Dill, 1999) within an institution. These include organisational processes and systems, channels of communication and institutional cultures and values which are highly influential in shaping mentoring practices, particularly in communicating implicit institutional messages and in shaping the nature of relationships between practitioners. For the purposes of this thesis, it was important to pay close attention to the multiple architectural influences within an institution and how these directly and indirectly facilitate and hinder mentoring feedback practices.

Another potential analytical challenge with this theoretical framework emerges in deciding which aspects of the social phenomena cross which intersubjective space and what is included and excluded. Nicolini (2013, p.180) argues that demarcating such boundaries is not the role of practice theory as practices are not "bounded 'units.'" Instead, a "toolkit" approach to the study of practice needs to be adopted,

one which tackles the complexity of social phenomena. The broad categories of cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements are helpful in providing a holistic starting point for the researcher to recognise how and why certain sayings, modes of action and relationships have come about and shaped practices, for better or worse. However, to avoid falling into traps of abstraction requires delving deeper into practices at the local level, what Nicolini (2013) calls "zooming in", in conjunction with a panoramic perspective, "zooming out", to view how practices are continually intertwined in multiple practice bundles and constellations. Researchers can ponder a series of questions to guide them in the empirical study of practices and practice architectures, as outlined below in figure 3.2:

- What are people saying about the practice? How are these sayings manifested in the practice? What has influenced these sayings?
- What kind of activities and processes are going on? Which have become routinised? Which have been modified? What enables and constrains the enactment of these? How are these activities connected to other activities?
- Who is interacting with whom? What is the purpose of these interactions? How do these interactions shape the practice?
- When and why are these practices subject to contestation and agreement?
- How is power enacted in the practice?

Example questions to focus the analysis on mentoring feedback practices

Finally, the theory of practice architectures is a *transformational* resource, for the researcher to become acquainted with what is happening in the site and better positioned to influence educational and professional practices. This framework goes beyond examining what practitioners do to gaining a fuller, more insightful picture of the restraining site-based conditions which reduce and prevent possibilities for change. New, and potentially, illuminating knowledge about a practice may act as an "awakener" for practitioners and programme makers (Ledermann, 2012), possibly leading to a change in attitude, a call for alternative avenues to be investigated or concerns to be explored. Thus, the theory can be used to make "*practical judgements* about what ought to be done in the situations at hand" (Mahon *et al.*, 2017, p.20), to make recommendations rather than evaluate the impact of mentoring provision.

Adopting a praxeological approach to the study of practice necessitates a large degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher. In respect of this study, this requires not only reflecting critically on the participants' perspectives of mentoring feedback practices but also on one's own prejudices, in the manner of *critical hermeneutics* (Kinsella, 2006), explored in more depth in chapter four. With its explicit reference to "relatings", the theory of practice architectures foregrounds the notions of power and solidarity in the flow of practices. The theory of practice architectures provides the researcher with the tools to critically reflect on whose interests are best served by the enactment of specific practices. When mentors ask trainee teachers to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of a lesson at the beginning of a feedback session, for example, is this in the interest of mentees to enable them to engage in critical dialogue? Is it in the interests of mentors who want

to gauge whether the trainee teacher shares the same thinking as they do? Or is it in the interest of the organisation as trainee teachers should be encouraged to experiment with different approaches even though some, in an Orwellian sense, may be perceived as better than others? Through such processes of scrutiny, the researcher can investigate whether site-based practices and practice architectures fall into which of the following categories, as outlined by Kemmis (2019, pp.82-83), whether they are:

- reasonable or unreasonable;

- productive or unproductive, and sustainable or unsustainable; and

- just or unjust, and inclusive or exclusive.

Power relations in mentoring feedback practices are often likely to be a source of some tension and inconsistency, so it is crucial to investigate them to recognise "what shapes, sustains, and transforms our realities; and to respond appropriately, or 'speak back' to constraining and unsustainable conditions" (Mahon *et al.*, 2017, p.2).

## Summary

In this chapter, an overview of different perspectives relating to 'practice' and practice theory has been provided. The theory of practice architectures has been presented as the primary conceptual framework of this thesis as it offers a valuable lens through which to examine mentoring feedback practices, linked to the research questions reiterated here:

1. How do practitioners conceptualise their roles and relationships in the mentoring feedback process?

2. What processes, arrangements and artefacts enable and constrain mentoring feedback practices?

3. How do mentoring feedback practices unfold during the teacher development programmes?

4. What are the possible implications of the findings for the development of effective mentor provision on initial teacher training courses?

The difficulties of analysing the sayings, doings and relatings of the practice as discrete elements have been highlighted. Nevertheless, it was possible to loosely map the research questions to the respective intersubjective spaces of the theoretical framework in which mentoring feedback practices intertwine with practice arrangements and other practices, summarised in table 3.2. Furthermore, despite the benefits of the theory of practice architectures for empirical research, there remained dimensions of the mentoring feedback practice which required further exploration, in particular examining its trajectory during the teacher education programme: how change affected the different linkages between the elements. This entailed close observation of how and why feedback practices were adapted in their mentoring sites in response to local arrangements, circumstances, and processes.

| Intersubjective space | Practice architectures | Research question |
|---|---|---|
| Semantic (via the medium of language) | Through cultural-discursive arrangements | RQ1: As outlined in chapter 2, the concepts of mentoring and feedback are problematic and, thus, likely to be interpreted differently by practitioners based on their previous experiences, values, and institutional narratives. What specialist discourse relating to mentoring and feedback is used in their narratives and in the feedback sessions? What words are included? What words are excluded? How does the language used link to other practices such as teaching and learning?<br>RQ2: What mentoring and feedback discourse is found in mentoring artefacts such as handbooks and observation documents which informs the practitioners' views?<br>RQ3: Do the practitioners' conceptualisations of mentoring and feedback change during the teacher development programme and, if so, why?<br>RQ4: A synthesis of the above |
| Physical/space-time (via the medium of activity and work) | Through material-economic arrangements | RQ1: Practitioners describe their mentoring feedback practices: the distinct, habitual activities and processes which occur; there is, therefore, an overlap with the semantic space as the practitioners conceptualise their roles and relationships based on the activities they carry out. Do the stakeholders all have the same end project in mind?<br>RQ2:  The temporal-spatial aspects of the practice will be explored: the location, frequency, and duration of feedback. What is discussed in the feedback? What is not discussed? What artefacts are used in the process? What arrangements are in place to facilitate the practice? What constrains the practice? What concerns do the practitioners have?<br>RQ3: How do the processes, activities and use of artefacts change during the teacher education programme?<br>RQ4: Synthesis of the above. |
| Social (via the medium of power and solidarity) | Through socio-political arrangements | RQ1: How do the practitioners conceptualise their relationships in the mentoring practice? Which other relationships are relevant to the practice? How do these intertwine?<br>RQ2: What impact do the mentoring activities, processes and structures have on the mentoring relationship? How are power and solidarity exercised in the mentoring sites? What influence do internal and external bodies, e.g. Ofsted, play in the relationship?<br>RQ3: How does the mentoring relationship evolve during the teacher education programme? Is there a change in the power dynamics?<br>RQ4: Synthesis of the above |

Table 3.2: Mapping the research questions to the theory of practice architectures

# CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN: METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND APPROACH

## Overview

In this chapter, an overview of the research design and the methodological assumptions underpinning it are outlined. The ontological and epistemological implications of pursuing a practice-based study and how these orientations accord with a comparative case study methodology are also explicated. Finally, a description of the two cases is provided: a pre-service and an in-service teacher development programme, of which mentoring feedback practices were critical components.

## Methodological assumptions and focus

In a qualitative study, particularly one which adheres to ethnographic principles, the research design will be a non-prescriptive, reflexive process at all stages of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.21). The different elements of the process, including the design of the research questions, the aims of the project, the conceptual framework, methods, and potential threats to the research, all impact on each other and, thus, shape the trajectory of the study. Maxwell (2013) calls this approach, "interactive"; it does not mean that there is no structure to the research design, but the door to flexibility is always open in response to unexpected challenges and emergent insights.

Maxwell (*ibid,* p.5) likens the connections between the different research components to an elastic band:

> They can stretch and bend to some extent, but they exert a definite tension on different parts of the design, and beyond a particular point, or under certain stresses, they will break.

This metaphor of elasticity, in relation to being flexible but knowing your limits, chimes with the conceptual framework used in this research: the theory of practice architectures. It acknowledges the complexity and reality of the research process rather than an adherence to a sequence of discrete and prescribed steps. Both enabling and constraining factors, including access to research settings and participants, time, and relationships will impact on the design and enactment of a study, resulting in continual revisions to both. Based on Maxwell's interactive model of research design, a plan was devised [figure 4.1]. This had five interconnecting elements which focused on a different aspect of the social phenomena under investigation. The process-oriented methodology of the study was informed by the theoretical framework of practice architectures and, thus, was a key feature of the research design. However, it was also important to continually maintain a critical approach to the study, for me to scrutinise my own actions and role in the research process. This involved endeavouring to distance myself from the research object to challenge prior assumptions and avoid slotting data into neat theoretical categories. Finally, the approach to the research was underpinned by ontological and

epistemological positions in adjunct with social practice perspectives, outlined in the next section.

## Figure 4.1: A design map of the research project

**Goals:**

- Illuminate the experiences of mentoring feedback practitioners in initial teacher education in the post-compulsory sector
- Give voice to mentoring stakeholders
- Challenge the prescriptive elements of the practice

**Conceptual framework:**

- Own experience of mentoring as a teacher educator
- History of mentoring in PCET since 1990
- Literature on mentoring feedback and reflection
- Social practice theory, drawing specifically on the theory of practice architectures
- Critical hermeneutics
- Critical realism

**Research Questions:**

- How do practitioners conceptualise their roles and relationships in the mentoring feedback process?
- What processes, arrangements and artefacts enable and constrain mentoring feedback practices
- How do mentoring feedback practices unfold during the teacher development programmes?
- What are the possible implications of the findings for the development of effective mentor provision on teacher development courses?

**Methods:**

- Methodological approach: comparative case study, encompassing a variety of methods:
  - Interviews (to the double; semi-structured)
  - Projective techniques
  - Non-participant video elicitation observations
  - Programme artefacts
  - Critical discourse analysis
  - NVIVO coding (deductive, inductive and abductive strategies)

**Validity:**

- Transparency of theoretical, methodological, data collection and analysis choices and procedures
- Pilot study of video elicitation interviews
- Longitudinal study: repeated participant observations and interviews to collect rich data
- Linking of sources, methods, and theories
- Participant validation
- Continual researcher reflexivity, monitoring for insider bias

## Ontological and epistemological stance

As outlined in chapter three, practice theories are united in their belief that the social world is constituted of practices, conditioned by the complex interplay of both human and non-human elements. The theory of practice architectures draws upon Schatzki's (2001; 2002; 2005) distinctive site ontological perspective which foregrounds the social site in which practices happen, exemplified as:

> The site specific to human co-existence, the context, or wider expanse of phenomena, in and as part of which humans co-exist (Schatzki, 2002, pp.146-7).

This view aligns with the ontological stance of the study in that it accentuates the influence and conditioning of contextual factors in the enactment of practices. The day-to-day reality of our social existence is always bound up with embodied actions, material arrangements and understandings. Bundles of practices and arrangements also extend over time and space leaving traces of the past and shaping future incarnations. To understand practices, therefore, also requires a sense of what is *not* happening (Nicolini, 2017, p.167), an awareness of the broader practice landscape. The focus is on socio-material arrangements in existence or brought to a site which prefigure, enable, and restrict what happens in the locale (Kemmis, 2019). This theorising of the social is a commonality of practice theories, underlining both the social and situatedness of practices.

Where Schatzki differs in his ontological position from some other practice researchers and theorists is his conceptualisation of practices as ontologically flat. Schatzki (2016) is critical of differentiating social phenomena according to scale: into macro-, meso- and micro- levels. Instead, he uses the term "plenum" to posit the existence of practices on one plane of reality. This view accepts "no stratification of social reality when it comes to the workings and mechanisations of the social" (Spaargaren *et al.*, 2016, p.9); practices exist on a spectrum from smaller to larger phenomena but the distinction between them is relative (Schatzki, 2016). They are not ontologically distinct; rather "every social phenomenon consists of slice(s) or aspect(s) of the plenum of practice-arrangement bundles" (*ibid,* p.42). As an example, the quality assurance practices of an Ofsted inspection body and feedback interactions in a mentoring dyad carry the same ontological weight. It is more valuable, Schatzki (2015) argues, to depict differences between practices in terms of "thickets of relations". Mentoring feedback practices, for example, entail a direct relationship between the practitioners' "doings and sayings" and associated bundles of material arrangements, but are also clearly connected to teaching and learning and administrative practices, entangled in their constitutional arrangements.  Here, feedback practices are being shaped by horizontal forces, implicit in the terms, "bundles" (Trowler, 2019) and "ecologies" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b) which stress the interdependency of practices. The effects of these contextually-contingent influences on smaller-scale practices at the "micro" level are generally more transparent and observable.

What is less clear and convincing about Schatzki's practice ontology, however, is how practices are connected remotely and conditioned by vertical forces: underlying societal structures and mechanisms, including dominant discourses, relations of power, and political and educational ideologies. Trowler (2019) refers to these as "nested" practices, how the site of practice is susceptible to wider, structural influences. The existence of these is not often directly visible but the effects are real. As an illustration, performativity discourse in the form of policy texts in the UK have imbued quality assurance procedures at the national and institutional levels and seeped into pedagogical, assessment and audit practices of managers, teachers and teacher educators, simultaneously conditioning their understandings and behaviours. Policies are inevitably adapted in response to local concerns, but tacit assumptions about how to do things are influenced by these pervasive discourses and shape recurrent practices in the locale. Ignoring the influence of structural elements on local practices, therefore, is problematic.

The ontological stance adopted in this study is heavily influenced by Schatzki's site ontological perspective but is supplemented by drawing on principles of critical realism (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1989) to shed some theoretical light on these unobservable structures. Critical realism acknowledges that a real world "exists independently of our perceptions and theories" (Maxwell, 2013, p.43). There is more to the social world than can be detected empirically, and, from a methodological perspective, this necessitates investigation beneath the surface to illuminate these seemingly invisible phenomena. Agency and structure are not conflated; rather they are viewed as separate, emergent entities or strata, with distinct powers and

properties, which mutually interact (Danermark *et al.,* 2002). Archer (1995) calls this "analytical dualism": it is the dialectical interconnection between structure and agency over time which is significant and accounts for the production and reproduction of the social world. The 'analytical' signifies distinguishing between the two for scientific or theoretical purposes. A time distinction is also important: social structures precede agents' actions and "social elaboration", or transformation of structures, follows these actions. This theorising of reality, therefore, contends that social structures exist at the global, institutional, and local level, and have the power to facilitate and constrain practices.

Acknowledging the "existential independence" of objects of study does not mean that these objects do not shape our way of thinking, our own constructions of reality and knowledge (Sayer, 2000, p.41). Mentoring feedback practices, for example, exist irrespectively of my prior knowledge of them, but they still influence my conceptions and, thus, the enactment and trajectory of the research. My knowledge is fallible, emergent, and subject to modification (Bazeley, 2013, p,21), based on my ongoing experiences, investigations, and interactions with participants. The epistemological stance of this study, therefore, is most aptly described as relativist and social-constructivist, necessitating an interpretative lens through which to make sense of the "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" of mentoring feedback practices and the practice architectures in the site which enable and constrain them.

As exemplified in chapter three, "practice knowledge" is not a commodity which can be extracted from the heads of individuals. The theory of practice architectures is

concerned primarily with the ontological nature of practices: how individuals learn *to be* in a practice as opposed to epistemological questions of what they need to *know.* People are "stirred" or initiated into practices (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b; 2017). They learn how to go on by virtue of participation with others and non-human elements, in the activities they carry out and what they say and is said about the practice: simultaneous "happenings" among the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that facilitate or hinder possibilities for change (Kemmis *et al.*, 2017). Learning and knowledge, therefore, are social and situated processes, but the focus is on the practices themselves and how these are reproduced and transformed, not on the knowledge which is acquired. Being "stirred into" practices suggests a dynamic and evolving process as individuals learn the repertoires of a practice, adapting how they behave according to local conditions and circumstances. What is empirically observable in mentoring feedback practices may be the language or discourses used in dyadic interactions and written artefacts; the activities that are carried out; and the interactions between mentoring stakeholders. However, a critical interpretative perspective is also needed as the researcher endeavours to illuminate how the practice architectures existent in or brought to the site in addition to wider structural elements shape the practice to the benefit or disadvantage of the practitioners.

Additional methodological implications garnered by these ontological and epistemological positions include the influence of both structure and agency in the enactment of practices, not privileging one over another but acknowledging that practices occur within varying degrees of enabling and constraining conditions

(Archer, 2000). Practitioners are not passive beings who accept the *status quo*; their actions are conditioned by social structures and practices but individual subjectivities matter (Trowler, 2019). Actors have the capacity to shape and change practices by means of conscious and deliberate action (Danermark *et al.*, 2002, p.187). Finally, investigating mentoring feedback through a social practice lens warrants a plurality of approach so as to capture its "multi-faceted and complex nature" (Nicolini, 2009, p.196), investigating the historical aspects of the practice and their influence on the present, from the "inside" to assume the role of the practitioners, to understand the practice from their perspective, but also from "outside" to make sense of the interconnectivity and dynamism of practices and the impact of the wider educational and political landscape.

## Critical hermeneutics

As recounted in chapter two, mentoring and feedback are concepts which signify different things to people dependent on historical traditions, context, previous experiences, and motivations. All these factors shape interpretations and culminate in pre-judgements or "prejudice" (Gadamer, 1989). Researchers, too, are not immune from prejudicial ways of thinking and need to continually engage in critical reflections of their experiences, values and attitudes to analyse the impact of these on the research process and, in doing so, tentatively "close the illusory gap between researcher and researched and between the knower and what is known"

(Etherington, 2004, p.32). Acknowledging these prejudices is central to the practice of hermeneutics.

Interpretations of meaning are diverse, negotiated in shared practices and situated in time and space. Hermeneutics involves a recursive process of moving back and forth between the parts and the whole of the "text", the object of interest, until a coherent understanding is constructed (Kinsella, 2006; Kvale, 1987). Hermeneutics is also a dialogic process; it aims to include an array of voices in its attempt to understand the bigger picture: the biographies of the participants and the structural forces which shape their interpretations. This, therefore, involves a critical understanding of both the local and global context, acknowledging the process of power differentials, political and self-interests, and tacit assumptions and processes which form participants' perspectives. This study discerned the ambiguous nature of meaning (Kinsella, 2006). It adopted an iterative and flexible approach to the study of practices, complementing interviews with observations and critical discourse analysis of mentoring artefacts to move between emic and etic perspectives.

## Comparative Case Study methodology

Given this research was concerned with investigating how mentoring feedback practices are interpreted and enacted on two teacher education programmes within the same institution, an appropriate choice of methodology was a comparative case study approach. Multiple definitions of the term "case study" exist in the literature,

conceptualised, for example, by Yin (2018, p.15) as "an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real context" and by Thomas (2011, p.23) as an analysis "of persons, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods". Both these definitions are broadly consistent with the primary purposes of this research: to gain in-depth understandings of site ontologies and the practice architectures which facilitate and constrain the enactment and unfolding of mentoring feedback practices.

However, a limitation of a case study approach can be that such an intense focus on the social phenomenon under investigation to obtain rich data neglects the impact of macro-societal factors on local practices. Indeed, the boundedness of the case is frequently epitomised as a key principle of case study research, as highlighted below:

> The single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case (Merriam, 1998, p.27).

Bounding the case is problematic for researchers who are pursuing an iterative, process-oriented study as it fails to acknowledge the unpredictable trajectories of practices and movements of meanings, artefacts and processes across time and place (Marcus, 1995, p.96). Instead of specifying rigid spatial and temporal case boundaries from the outset, this study followed a comparative case study design, henceforth referred to as CCS, as advocated by Bartlett and Vavrus (2016). This methodology aligns closely with the ontological stance underpinning this research,

with its focus on tracing the object of study across space-time and scales and, in the process, attending to the connections between culture, context and comparison.

In relation to culture, the CCS approach highlights how interpretations of concepts, practices and policies are modified over time, shaped by sociocultural, political, and economic forces. This stance complements both hermeneutics and critical discourse analysis in exploring how historical circumstances and processes shape dominant ideologies which are reinforced through policy texts. Changes in conceptualisations and priorities of mentoring, for example, are influenced by the interests of different stakeholders, often resulting in the formation of normative guidelines and assumed practices. A CCS approach recognises that meanings evolve, are dependent on relations of power, and go beyond interactions in a closed circle of actors (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, pp.10-11). The concept of "context" also, therefore, extends beyond its physical setting and acknowledges the importance of relationships and practices external to micro-level mentoring interactions. In respect of this study, acknowledging this involved communication with stakeholders outside the immediate mentoring dyad, with practitioners and programme leaders of mentoring provision on both teacher education programmes but also in nearby institutions to attain a more balanced and rounded perspective of feedback practices.  It also entailed close attention to the different social spaces in which mentoring practitioners manoeuvred and how these relationships evolved during the ITT programmes, shaped by the social-political arrangements located in or brought to the site of practice.

Finally, the CCS approach espouses the value of comparing cases across time and space by addressing three axes: horizontal, vertical, and transversal comparison. In this study, the main scale of analysis was the horizontal axis of comparison which related to how "historically and contemporary processes have differentially influenced different 'cases'" (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016, p.53) and the development of mentoring feedback practices on the two teacher development programmes, held in place by a complex of institutional arrangements and sets of practices. Bartlett and Vavrus categorise this approach to horizontal comparison as "homologous" since the teacher education programmes have an analogous structural relationship and purpose: they are both designed to prepare trainee teachers to develop the skills needed to enhance the learning opportunities for students in a post-compulsory setting.

This research was interested in ascertaining whether mentoring practitioners on both programmes shared similar or different contextual "projects" and how these concerns and priorities manifested themselves in practices, relationships and language used to talk about mentoring feedback practices. It also involved zooming out of the immediate context to examine how the cases were affected by national level mentoring policies, thereby assimilating vertical elements of comparison into the study (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016). The transversal axis connects the horizontal and vertical elements of comparison across time and space, tracing the historical processes, discursive repertoires, and patterns of relationships which shape the trajectory of practices at different scales and locations. In this way, the researcher is better equipped to critique existing practices and assumptions of mentoring feedback

and propose innovations in response to enabling and constraining site processes and conditions (Mahon *et al.*, 2017).

In sum, the CCS approach provided a "multi-levelled analysis" (Bray and Thomas, 1995) of mentoring feedback practices on two teacher education programmes, embedding horizontal, vertical, and transversal elements of comparison in the study, and challenging traditional concepts of "boundedness", culture and context. One common criticism levelled at case studies is the 'generalisability issue" (Tight, 2017, p.310), whether the findings from an investigation of cases can be applied to other contexts. The aim of this study was not to form "statistical generalisations" (Yin, 2018, p.21), but to explore the connections between relationships, events, and processes, to enrich understandings of mentoring feedback practices. Nevertheless, the heuristic power of CCS, as argued by Bartlett and Vavrus (2016, p.34), offers significant analytical weight with the findings applicable to theory development: "cases generate rich theoretical insights that transfer to other times and places", extending the theoretical framework of practice architectures to the hitherto relatively unexplored area of mentoring feedback practices.

## The "cases": mentoring feedback practices on a pre-service and an in-service teacher development programme

This practice-based study adopted a "light touch" (Trowler, 2019) ethnographic approach to the investigation of mentoring feedback practices on two post-compulsory ITT programmes to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the

contextual conditions shaped their sustainability and development. Given constraints on time and the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak from March 2020, it was unfeasible to pursue a fully ethnographic study. Instead, the thesis adhered to ethnographic principles in that there was a strong focus on examining specific social phenomena close-up (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), namely mentoring feedback practices: how these were interpreted; the impact of discourses, materiality, power dimensions and practitioners' dispositions on their enactment; and how they unfolded across time and space. The Covid-19 pandemic and concomitant lockdown measures led to an additional tweak to the research design. From March to November 2020, a virtual ethnographic approach to the collection of qualitative data was adopted: conducting interviews with mentoring practitioners via online platforms.

The two teacher education programmes under analysis were a one-year full-time pre-service initial PCET course and a two-year part-time in-service ITT programme. The pre-service programme provided candidates, generally those who were new to teaching, with a teaching placement and mentor in a FE setting. A prerequisite for those on the in-service programme was to be employed as a teacher, paid or on a voluntary basis, with access to a mentor in the workplace. Mentors were supposed to teach the same subject as their mentees although, as outlined in chapter two, the complex nature of FE resulted in a blurring of subject boundaries.. Furthermore, the distinction between pre-service and in-service provision is nebulous, and, in this study, the challenges of securing teaching work in FE without any formal teaching qualifications meant that most of the trainees on the in-service programme were *de facto* pre-service.

The reasons for selecting these two programmes were partly pragmatic, because of accessibility and convenience. The academic components of the pre-service programme were delivered in the university which accredited the programme, but five trainee teachers were provided with placements and mentors at the FE college which delivered the in-service teacher training programme. The FE college was also my place of work which allowed me to don my "insider" hat, comparing institutional processes in the university to those in the college, a process which can gain valuable insights into what is happening in one's local context (Trowler, 2019). Like Mercer (2007), I view the relationship between the "researcher and the researched" to be in a constant state of flux, depending on my professional and identity positioning at the institution, and the participants' perceptions of my status. The terms "insiderness" and "outsiderness", therefore, are better conceptualised as points on a continuum (Labaree, 2002; Mercer, 2007). I was involved in the co-ordination of the in-service FE teacher development programme, but only had direct contact with the participants if there were issues with their placements. This meant I was known to the participants and had greater familiarity with the programme itself which brought both positive aspects and challenges. Researching within my institution granted me easier access to mentoring artefacts and participants. There was also a mutual understanding of the context, including shared repertoires of language, artefacts, and institutional processes. I was better placed to dig into the nooks and crannies of the institution (Labaree, 2002) and explore the dynamic ecological relationship between mentoring feedback and other constellations of practices, including sources of tension and contestation. In addition, I was probably not perceived as threatening

to the participants, especially the mentors and the mentees on the in-service programme, as most had already had contact with me. The trainee teachers on the pre-service programme who were new to the institution, however, may have been more suspicious of my motives and it was, thus, harder to build rapport and gain their trust. Another complexity of the insider-researcher relationship was trying to view both programmes as separate entities, and retain some sense of distance to capture tacit knowledge, values and beliefs about mentoring feedback practices: to "step outside in order to gain a new understanding of the "inside"" (Labaree, 2002, p.109).

An overview of the commonalities and differences of the two programmes is provided in table 4.1. Both programmes are highly structured, comprising six modules albeit with different scholarly or practical emphases. Both programmes are governed by national policies; they ultimately lead to QTLS (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills), a separate process of professional formation, and the 2014 Professional Standards are embedded in all aspects of the planning, delivery, and assessment of the programmes.

In terms of their differences, the pre-service programme was only recently validated, in 2019, after in-service post-compulsory provision had been terminated in 2014 for not generating sufficient income for the university. The appointment of a new Head of Teacher Education in 2018 led to a renewed interest in delivering PCET programmes; they were viewed as complementing other institutional phases of initial teacher training, well-established primary and secondary PGCE programmes, and

addressed the national issue of a shortage of quality post-16 teachers. In contrast,

the FE college, which hosts the in-service ITT course and, in this study, provided

placements for both cohorts of trainees, has a long history of delivering in-service

teacher education programmes, spanning over twenty years. The Diploma in

Education and Training (DET)/Professional Graduate Certificate in Education

(PGCE) programme is accredited by another university which works in partnership

with fifteen other colleges.

| Features | Pre-service PCET programme | In-service PCET programme |
|---|---|---|
| Length of programme | One year full-time | Two years part-time |
| Level of programme | Level six | Levels five/six depending on whether candidates have a degree |
| Number of candidates on the programme: | 20 | 27 (14 in year one; 13 in year two) |
| Number of modules: | 6 | 6 |
| Generic or subject specialist programme: | Generic | Generic, but opportunity for trainees to pursue ESOL, literacy, mathematics and SEND (Special Educational Needs and Development) pathways |
| Minimum number of independent teaching hours: | 100 | 100 |
| Mentoring observations: | 4 observations, one is a joint observation with the tutor which counts as 2 observations. Lessons not graded but comments written in alignment with the FE Professional Standards. Cause of concern raised if mentee was perceived to be struggling in the placement. | 4 observations (joint observations) Lessons marked as "satisfactory or unsatisfactory" and assessed against the FE Professional Standards. If lesson was assessed as "unsatisfactory", an additional observation needed to be carried out. |
| Mentoring training: | Initial briefings with PCET Programme Leader to inform mentors of procedural aspects of the role. All mentors had access to a mentoring Moodle site: opportunity to gain credits by completing stage 3 mentoring programme | Face-to-face mentoring meetings at the beginning of the year |
| Mentoring artefacts: | College-based training handbook | Mentoring handbook, online mentoring newsletter to inform mentors of procedural elements of the programme |

table 4.1: Comparison of the requirements of the pre-service and in-service PCET programmes

## Summary

This chapter has provided an in-depth exposition of the methodological approach to the study of mentoring feedback practices in ITE. It has detailed how the research design, underpinned by ontological and epistemological assumptions, shaped the orientation of the study whilst acknowledging it was subject to alteration contingent on contextual conditions and events at the global, national, and local level. In addition, time constraints, the high turnover of mentors and changes in teaching placements signified a more diluted ethnographic approach than was originally envisaged. Nevertheless, the design remained true to its principles of interaction with the research context and flexibility in response to emergent insights yet fully cognisant of the aims and motivations driving the research. The processual character of the research was also compatible with a CCS methodology with its focus on tracing the enactment of a practice across people, space, and time (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016).

# CHAPTER 5: DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND ANALYSIS

## Overview

> The qualitative researcher as bricoleur or makers of quilt uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. If new tools or techniques have to be invented or pieced together, then the researcher will do this (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p.4).

The quote above encapsulates the approach adopted in this study in relation to data collection and analysis. Concerned with analysis across different temporal and spatial scales, it was conceived as a heuristic (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016), involving multiple methods of research and drawing on different theoretical perspectives on the road to discovery. A "bricoleur" is conceptualised as someone who is open to new ways of thinking (Patton, 2002), able to merge elements from past discoveries with those of the present, and integrate different ontological and epistemological positions (Maxwell, 2013). This chapter is concerned with documenting this iterative, messy, and frequently challenging process of qualitative research, including the sampling approach, different data collection methods and analytical strategies used, and the approach to validity and ethical concerns to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

## Sampling strategy

Since one aim of this study was to gain rich insights into how and why particular individuals felt about mentoring feedback practices and the processes, arrangements and artefacts which shaped these attitudes, "purposive criterion sampling" (Palys, 2008) was considered an appropriate strategy. This involved a conscious selection of cases, activities, and individuals, pertinent to the research questions and aims of the research (Maxwell, 2013). Because the study was also concerned with tracking mentoring feedback practices over time, it was logical to follow the same group of participants during their respective pre- or in-service teacher development programme. However, the difficulties of specifying clear case demarcations were acknowledged, and the sampling process was, thus, subject to change in response to emergent findings. Unfortunately, it was not possible to conduct interviews and video elicitation interviews at regular intervals with all the participants because of institutional closures brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic and numerous changes in the mentoring relationship. Nevertheless, the data collected from each mentoring dyad was deemed sufficiently "information rich" (Patton, 2002, p.230) to inform the purposes of this thesis, and bias was mitigated by deliberately selecting participants likely to bring a diversity of perspectives to the research. Three criteria for the participants were selected:

1. Selecting mentors with varying levels of experience and seniority, for example line managers acting as mentors and those at a similar level professionally to their mentee. In the case of which mentees to select in terms of level of

teaching experience, there was less variability as most of the trainee teachers were new to teaching irrespective of whether they were on the pre- or in-service development programme.

2. Selecting participants from different academic and vocational disciplines.

3. Selecting participants who represented a diversity of ethnicity, age, gender, culture, and language to ensure no groups were deliberately excluded and to obtain a rounded picture of mentoring provision.

The study was conducted over a period of sixteen months, from November 2019 to March 2021, to devote a significant period of time to the investigation of mentoring feedback. It was, thus, a broadly longitudinal qualitative study (Saldaňa, 2003), focusing on sustained, evolving and emergent processes and practices, although the closure of the FE institution, the primary site of mentoring feedback practices, from March to September 2020 and then from December 2020 to March 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in fewer participant observations than was originally planned. However, this study met the purposes of longitudinal research as outlined by Compton-Lilly (2015) in the following ways:

- it provided "contextual depth" of the site of mentoring feedback practices, including historical influences;
- it explored "change over time" in the relationships between the mentoring participants and other practices and their practice architectures;

- it examined "trajectories", particularly in respect of the participants' conceptualisations of the role of feedback in the mentoring dyad;

- it considered the "construction of ways of being over time", focusing specifically on the modification of practices: "what is adopted, adapted, or rejected as people construct selves over time" (Compton-Lilly, 2015, p.227).

Table 5.1 outlines a list of the mentoring practitioners: five pre-service mentoring dyads and nine dyads from the in-service mentoring programme: five dyads from the part-time in-service programme finishing in September 2021 and four from year two who finished the programme in June 2020 to capture a significant proportion of the mentees' journey over the two-year course. Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity and the following information is provided for each participant: gender; discipline; role in the institution and level of experience of mentoring or teaching. A mentor who had more than three years' experience in the role is deemed an "experienced" mentor.

| Pre-service mentoring dyads: one-year programme | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Name | Gender | Discipline | Role | Level of experience |
| **Dyad 1** | | | | | |
| **Mentor:** | Usman | M | Mathematics | Line Manager | Two years' experience of mentoring |
| **Mentee:** | Albert | M | Mathematics | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| | | | | | |
| **Dyad 2** | | | | | |
| **Mentor:** | Ruksana | F | English | Lecturer | Recently completed PGCE course: new to mentoring and relatively new to teaching (two years' experience) |
| **Mentee:** | Laura | F | English | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| | | | | | |
| **Dyad 3** | | | | | |
| **Mentor:** | Abida | F | Law | Head of Access, not the mentee's line manager | Very experienced mentor, in a senior role in the institution |
| **Mentee:** | Fatima | F | Psychology | Trainee teacher | One year's experience of teaching elsewhere |
| | | | | | |
| **Dyad 4** | | | | | |
| **Mentor:** | Abida (same mentor as above) | F | Law | Head of Department, not the mentee's line manager | Very experienced mentor, in a senior role in the institution |
| **Mentee:** | David | M | Law | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| | | | | | |
| **Dyad 5** | | | | | |
| **Mentor:** (until January 2020) | Charlotte | F | Health and Social Care | Senior lecturer | One year's experience of mentoring |
| **Mentor (from February 2020 to June 2020)** | Antoinette | F | Health and Social Care | Curriculum Team Leader | New to mentoring |
| **Mentee:** | Samantha | F | Health and Social Care | Trainee teacher | One year's experience of teaching. |
| In-service mentoring dyads (Participants who began the programme in September 2019 and moved into year two of the programme in September 2020) | | | | | |
| | Name | Gender | Discipline | Role | Level of experience |
| **Dyad 6** | | | | | |
| **Mentor:** (from September 2019 to June 2020) | Joanne | F | Mathematics | Line Manager | Experienced teacher and mentor |
| **Mentor:** (from September 2020) | Zain | M | Mathematics | Curriculum Team Leader | One year's experience of mentoring |
| **Mentee:** | Alisha | F | Mathematics | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| | | | | | |
| **Dyad 7** | | | | | |

| | Name | Gender | Discipline | Role | Level of experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mentor: | Hana | F | Psychology and Counselling (HE faculty) | Head of department | New to mentoring |
| Mentee: | Moyin | F | Counselling (HE faculty); from January 2021, she worked in the Access department in Research Skills | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| **Dyad 8** | | | | | |
| Mentor 1 (until March 2020) | Gabriel | M | Business Studies | Hourly paid lecturer, not a permanent member of staff | Experienced mentor |
| Mentor 2 (from March 2020) | Imran | M | Business Studies | Curriculum Team Leader | Two years' experience of mentoring |
| Mentee: | Samina | F | Business Administration | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| **Dyad 9** | | | | | |
| Mentor 1 (until September 2020): | Katie | F | Health and Social Care | Curriculum Team Leader | One year's experience of mentoring |
| Mentor 2 (from September 2020): | Shazia | F | Health and Social Care | Head of Department | Experienced mentor |
| Mentee: | Ngozi | F | Health and Social Care | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| **Dyad 10** | | | | | |
| Mentor: | Mohammad | M | Education Studies | Senior Lecturer | Experienced mentor |
| Mentee: | Natasha | F | Education Studies | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |
| **In-service mentoring dyads (year two: the programme started in September 2018)** | | | | | |
| | Name | Gender | Discipline | Role | Level of experience |
| Dyad 11 | | | | | |
| Mentor 1 (until April 2019): | Shabbir | M | Sociology and Education Studies (HE faculty) | Senior Lecturer | New to mentoring |
| Mentor 2: (from April 2019 until March 2020) | Sadia | F | Psychology and Education Studies (HE faculty) | Lecturer | New to mentoring |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mentor 3: from March 2020 | Julia | F | Health and Social Care | Curriculum Team Leader | Experienced mentor |
| Mentee: | Hamida | F | Education Studies (first placement in HE faculty); Health and Social Care (second placement in a different FE college) | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |

**Dyad 12**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mentor: | Karen | F | Childcare Studies | Curriculum Team Leader | Experienced mentor |
| Mentee: | Claudette | F | Beauty Therapy | Trainee teacher | One year's experience of teaching prior to joining the programme |

**Dyad 13**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mentor 1 (until March 2020) | Maryam | F | Beauty Therapy | Curriculum Team Leader | Two years' experience of mentoring |
| Mentor 2 (from March 2020) | Lisa | F | Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy | Head of Department | Experienced mentor |
| Mentee: | Anna | F | Beauty Therapy | Trainee teacher | One year's experience of teaching prior to joining the programme |

**Dyad 14**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mentor 1 (until November 2019) | Petra | F | ESOL | Curriculum Team Leader | New to mentoring |
| Mentor 2 (until January 2020) | Helena | F | ESOL | Head of Department | Experienced mentor |
| Mentor 3 | Albena | F | ESOL | Curriculum Team Leader | One year's experience of mentoring |
| Mentee: | Marek | M | ESOL | Trainee teacher | New to teaching |

Table 5.1 Characteristics of the mentoring participants in their pre-service and in-service dyads

## Video stimulated recall

Given that the theory of practice architectures is concerned with the social situatedness of practices, it is essential to capture their dynamic elements, to access activities and interactions as they happen. By doing so, the researcher can acquire a

better understanding of the interconnectedness of practices: how they are linked to other practices and socio-material arrangements. This necessitates practice-focused ethnographic methods which do not only focus on individual perspectives (Trowler, 2014a). In this study, a form of participant observation known as stimulated recall (Bloom, 1953) was one way of capturing mentoring feedback interactions and, to an extent, the conditions and arrangements which enabled or constrained the process. Video recordings of the feedback conversations acted as a stimulus to facilitate participants' recall of the "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" of the practice and provided a "springboard" for further discussion in the form of semi-structured interviews (Rowe, 2009, p.426).

To gauge the feasibility of the tool, a pilot study was conducted, entailing the observation of two mentoring feedback conversations and subsequent video elicitation interviews. As the practitioners engaged with the approach and reported no discomfort or stress, it was considered an appropriate strategy to use. Twelve observations of mentoring feedback conversations of mentoring dyads on both ITE programmes were undertaken, followed by interviews with each mentoring participant. The feedback in question was directed towards a lesson delivered by the trainee teacher, observed by the mentor, in accordance with the requirements of the ITT programme. Feedback was held in the mentor's office or a classroom with only the mentor and mentee present and the duration of each feedback session was between 15 and 35 minutes. During the subsequent interviews with either the mentor or the mentee, specific instances of the video recording were played. The practitioners were asked to report whether the footage typified their mentoring

feedback interactions and to comment on anything of particular significance. Discussions focussed on the following aspects of mentoring feedback:

- the role of the mentoring practitioners in the feedback interactions;
- the structure of the feedback;
- the content of the feedback;
- the nature of the feedback: directive or facilitative, including opportunities for reflection;
- the material arrangements: layout of the room, space and use of artefacts.

Observing more than one feedback discussion of the same mentoring dyad enabled me to capture any shifts in behaviour and attitudes in the mentoring relationship.

Criticisms of video elicitation interviews emphasise the uneasiness and anxiety participants may feel, both by being recorded and then viewing themselves (Rowe, 2009). To try to alleviate any concerns, I was absent during the feedback conversations to avoid disrupting the participants' flow. They were also reassured that the recording was not a method of surveillance to judge their capabilities in providing and responding to feedback. Another criticism levelled at stimulated recall techniques is the difficulty of articulating thought processes and accessing "tacit knowledge" (Calderhead, 1981, p.213) of a practice. Lyle (2003, p.864) highlights the possibility of participants "sanitising" their retrospective accounts, possibly unknowingly or out of embarrassment, to promote an image of collegiality and co-operation in the mentoring relationship. Nevertheless, while acknowledging these potential limitations of stimulated recall approaches, the complementation of

observations and interviews proved valuable. The observations provided a "unique insider perspective" (Rowe, 2009, p.434) of the settings of the feedback practice, mentoring behaviours and processes involved, whereas the interviews provided access to the practitioners' interpretations and understandings of both mentoring and feedback.

## Projective and enabling techniques

### Interview with the double

Nicolini (2013, p.221) argues that to obtain a processual understanding of the enactment and re-enactment of a practice necessitates zooming in on its specifics, foregrounding the routinised activities which occur; the relational dimensions; the discursive repertoires employed by practitioners, and the material artefacts used to "accomplish their work". In adjunct with other ethnographic methods such as participant observations, he advocates a projective technique known as "interview with the double", a "methodology for articulating and re-presenting practice" (Nicolini, 2009, p.209) as a way of accessing tacit knowledge. The original task provided to the mentors in this study was the following:

> Imagine you have a double who tomorrow will assume your place in the institution and adopt your mentoring role, delivering feedback to your mentee on a lesson observation. Please provide instructions of how to do this so that your double is not exposed.

Projective techniques such as the interview with the double enable the researcher to see the practice in all its complexity from the participant's viewpoint. The mundanity of the practice and the competences required to carry it out are rendered visible through its articulation (Gherardi, p.212, p.164). It is a beneficial way of gaining access to the behaviours, deeply-rooted attitudes held by practitioners and norms of appropriateness: "prescriptions 'from outside' and 'from inside' the community…what is to be done, what is not to be done, what cannot be done and what need not be done" (*ibid*, p.165).

However, after conducting the first few interviews with the double, it became clear that the mentoring practitioners were struggling to recall the particularities of mentoring feedback practices and were not fully engaged with the projective technique. This may have been partly because of the strangeness of the task. The participants tended to resort to talking about their own experiences of the practices rather than providing instructions to an imagined other. Difficulties with verbalising everyday activities may also have been due to the ad-hoc nature of the mentoring provision as feedback sessions were often sporadic, arranged as and when the mentoring practitioners were able to fit them into their busy and frequently incompatible work schedules.

Consequently, in an attempt to uncover the tacit nature of the mentoring feedback practice, card prompts were used, including the following cues: "time, space and duration of feedback", "role of the mentor in providing feedback" and "content of the feedback" (appendix 1) to aid recall: for participants to be able to describe their

conceptualisations, values and beliefs of mentoring feedback over time, the temporal-spatial dimensions of the practice and the institutional conditions which facilitated and hindered its realisation, all framed within a broader social, economic and political context. Both interviewer and interviewee were involved in co-constructing meaning as it emerged during the narratives, and by adopting a reflexive stance to the practitioners' descriptions of practice, I recognised, like Schatzki (2012, p.24), the value of linguistic accounts as "understanding people's words for activities and practices", in granting me "access to the activities and practices that make up their practice-arrangement bundles." In addition, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the Programme Leaders of the pre- and in-service ITT programmes at different intervals during the study to gauge their understandings of the practice and to compare their more 'idealised' accounts with the mentoring practitioners' perspectives.

**Participatory maps**

Another means of exploring the participants' conceptualisations of the performance and accomplishment of mentoring feedback practices was through participatory mapping (Emmel, 2008), an interactive approach in which the participants produced visual representations of their understandings, clarifying their depictions in concomitant interviews. It was critical that the participants did not feel any stress or discomfort doing the drawing activity to adhere to ethical principles (Galman, 2009). They were given the option of only participating in the oral interview and, conscious of the difficulty of doing two actions simultaneously – drawing and speaking – no

time limit was set for the completion of the task. Participants were also reassured that they could approach the exercise in any way they wanted. In most cases, the participants voiced their thought processes and representation of concepts as they drew, but in a virtual environment, during the national lockdown, this proved challenging. Thus, between March and September 2020, and January and March 2021, any visual representations of the mentoring feedback practice were emailed prior to an online interview, thereby acting as a stimulus for discussion. The form of the diagrams varied from well-defined mind maps to rough sketches (appendix 2).

Overall, this technique proved valuable for a number of reasons. It was a way of obtaining in-depth and individualised accounts of the practitioners' past and present experiences of mentoring and feedback. Interestingly, new terms to conceptualise the role of the mentor and the mentee were suggested during the activity and meaning emerged through social interaction. Providing the interviewees with an opportunity to compare their localised understandings of mentoring with dominant discourses of mentoring and feedback, adopted by external bodies and found in much of the mentoring literature, drew attention to the "ambiguity of signification" (Roberge, 2011, p.16): how meaning is realised differently in sites of practice. From the researcher's point of view, the maps also provided a visual summary of dominant themes which were compared with those emerging from other sources of data collection.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

A modified version of Fairclough's (1992) critical discourse analysis (CDA) model was adopted to explore the reciprocal relationship between socially-situated spoken and written language, and the ideological dimensions of the social world. CDA aims to uncover taken-for-granted aspects of social reality and unveil the "hidden agenda" of practices such as mentoring. It is concerned with the normative aspects of language in use, highlighting how certain voices are privileged over others and, therefore, how texts are "imbued with authority" (Vavrus and Seghers, 2010, p. 77). The examination of feedback discourse in mentoring dyadic interactions and written texts, located in observation reports and handbooks, involved the following three levels of analysis (Fairclough, 1992):

- *Discourse-as-text*: this entailed the "micro" analysis of the linguistic features of mentoring feedback, namely recurrent lexical, syntactic, and cohesive patterns of use.
- *Discourse-as-discursive practice*: this level of analysis viewed discourse as a heuristic to explore how mentoring feedback discursive practices were enacted and interpreted at the institutional level. According to Fairclough (1989, p.120), this inferential process involves tending to aspects of "local coherence", including how the participants' background knowledge, their previous experience and assumptions all shaped the deployment of discursive repertoires in mentoring feedback practices.

- *Discourse-as-a-social practice*: this "macro" analysis of the institutional practice architectures and external political and societal factors, which both condition and are conditioned by discourses, entailed explanatory work and a critical theoretical stance to the relationship between language and society to "explore hidden power relations between a piece of discourse and wider social and cultural formations" (Corson, 2000, p.95). The analysis also involved examining historical constructs of mentoring and feedback, exploring how discourse has legitimised particular kinds of knowledge, norms, and belief systems, evident in policy documents and explicit in power relationships (Vavrus and Seghers, 2010).

CDA has been criticised as a method of data analysis in several ways, for example by Widdowson (1998) for a lack of theoretical and empirical rigour since researchers interpret the data in a way which fits their ideological agenda. Depending on the researcher's level of linguistic experience and expertise, the analysis between the micro and macro dimensions of discourse, may also be disproportionate (Rogers, 2004). Finally, the non and extra linguistic features of discourse, including gestures, emotional aspects, activity, tools, and technologies are generally overlooked in discourse analysis (Rogers, 2004; Rowe, 2004).

In respect of this study, the affective aspects of delivering and receiving feedback were significant as mentors often select specific language to soften criticism and build confidence, aware of the effect negative spoken and written comments can have on their mentee's well-being. In addition, a practice is, by definition, a "'bundle'

of activities" (Schatzki, 2002, p.71) and arrangements which constitute the "doings" of a practice as people encounter each other in space-time (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b). Therefore, it was important to capture the "activity" and emotion of the feedback practice, how the doings were entwined with what was said and what was deemed appropriate to say. Where appropriate, in the transcriptions of the mentoring feedback interactions, square brackets are used to denote activity and emotion as observed by the researcher. In response to the other critiques of CDA, my background is in Applied Linguistics and I was, therefore, relatively confident at analysing linguistic elements of discourse. Coupled with my prior ethnographic research experience, I was suitably equipped to examine the dialectical relationship between linguistic forms and the social and institutional context. Finally, as with all aspects of the study, I maintained a "coherent and vigilant reflexive stance" (Nicolini, 2009, p.197) to avoid imposing my own agenda on the data.

## Data analysis

Data analysis was embedded in all aspects of the study, an iterative and reflexive process which moved back and forth between the research questions, key literature, and data collection (Maxwell, 2013). No single means of data analysis was able to represent the complex nature of mentoring feedback practices and, thus, as with the collection of data, a pluralist and "bricolage" approach was adopted. Capturing the practitioners' "way of being" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b, p.131) was an essential part of making sense of the practice as was remaining faithful to conveying both the

mundane and idiosyncratic elements of activity, the mediational tools which both enabled and constrained action (Wertsch, 1998), and the entanglement of mentoring feedback with other practices, beyond space and time. The process of data analysis underwent a series of steps, outlined below.

### *Step one*

Throughout the study, I used NVivo 12 software to store, reflect on, and analyse themes emerging from the data. Consistent with a hermeneutical approach, the initial step was to make sense of "the whole" to "build a contextualised understanding of the people, events and ideas being investigated and the connections within and between them" (Bazeley, 2013, p.101). This involved reading and re-reading interview and observation transcripts, memos, participatory maps, and recording ideas, intuitions and "analytic insights" (Maxwell, 2013, p.105) in an electronic research journal within NVivo. These were subsequently coded and linked to literature and data sources within the software.

### *Step two*

The next step combined deductive and inductive approaches to the analysis of the data. Deploying the theory of practice architectures, broad analytic themes were mapped to the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements which shaped the "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" of mentoring feedback practices, which were then categorised into sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, it was critical that the analysed data did not just confirm

theory (Ashwin, 2012) or "create artificial models of reality rather than understanding how practitioners do it for real" (Nicolini, 2017, p.32). A summary of each mentoring meeting, feedback session, and interview transcript was documented in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Included in this were follow-up questions, supplementing those in chapter three [table 3.1], to investigate areas which were unsaid or remained hidden, to delve under the surface of the practitioners' experiences. This process necessitated continual collection of data in the form of additional interviews, email correspondence and participant observations.

Informed by a CCS methodology (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016), inductive reasoning was deployed alongside a deductive approach to data analysis. A conscious effort to move away from a reliance on a pre-existing theoretical framework was made to identify emergent themes across both ITT programmes, noting recurrent phrases used by the research participants; specific circumstances and events; sources of influence; and tensions and inconsistencies in the data. As a result of this interaction between deductive and interactive approaches, new classifications and concepts were developed and refined and distilled into new categories and sub-categories (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

***Step three***

Both the deductive and inductive coding process using qualitative analysis software brought challenges, however. It was difficult to adopt a fresh perspective to the data and avoid the formulation of superficial categories in an attempt to render the implicit explicit. Danermark *et al.* (2002, p.81) contend that deploying only deductive and

inductive approaches in the analysis of data is problematic because of what they say about reality. Deduction is seen as a "strictly analytical" process and, thus, does not offer any insights beyond what is empirically observable. Inductive inferences are also limited, they argue, in that there is "knowledge we will never reach, regardless of how well grounded the inductive premises are - conclusions we will never be able to draw by means of induction" (*ibid.*, p.86). Cognisant of the fallibility of knowledge, I believed another interpretative level of analysis was required to explain the "how" and "why" of mentoring feedback practices, both reading "between" and "beyond the lines" (Eriksson and Lindström, 1997, p.198) to illuminate underlying social structures and mechanisms, the role of individual subjectivities, and latent patterns (Reichertz, 2014) in the practitioners' interactions. This process of abduction involved posing questions to myself about the rules, rituals, and conditions constitutive of mentoring feedback practices, seeking new insights and meaningful conclusions. As an example, scrutinising spatial maps and the practitioners' visual representations of the practice using abductive analytic principles proved beneficial. It was valuable to explore the physical set-ups of mentoring meetings and feedback sessions such as the positioning of chairs and tables, windows, and whiteboards, to better understand the constitutive conditions, arrangements, and artefacts which shaped mentoring feedback practices. The design and content of the participatory maps also generated semiotic insights about the practitioners' discovery of self during the ITT programme, represented linguistically but also through visual icons such as capitalisation of letters, font size, borders, compositional arrangement of boxes, arrows, and drawings.

### Step four

Even with stringent data analysis, using categorisation strategies in the coding of data can result in dominant voices being prioritised over those who are less eloquent or vehement (Colley, 2010) in their "sayings" about a practice. In the semi-structured interviews, the mentees in this study were generally not as forthcoming about their experiences on their teacher education programme as the mentors were, possibly wary of my "insider" position within the institution, but also since most of the mentees were relatively new to teaching, they did not yet possess the language to always articulate their perspectives of teaching, learning and feedback with great confidence. I was conscious of pushing a unidimensional perspective of power, a dominant narrative in the mentoring literature (Colley, 2003; 2010), with the mentee relegated to a subservient role in the relationship, moulded by the more knowledgeable and authoritative mentor. Furthermore, with coding, there is a danger of losing the richness of the original data and creating "analytic blinders" which may impede the analyst from finding connecting relationships (Maxwell and Miller, 2008, p.466). It was important to look beyond what was being said to what was *not* being said, transcending the apparent truth (Eriksson and Lindström, 1997) to reach alternate perspectives of reality. This entailed framing the analysis within a wider contextual and ideological discussion of the structural and agentic forces which shaped mentoring feedback practices.

One way to "capture the context" (Maxwell and Miller, 2008) and immerse myself in the participants' social worlds was through narrative analysis, defined by

Polkinghorne (1995, p.5) as "a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action." According to Emerson and Frosh (2004, p.9), this methodology is appropriate to better understand the ongoing process of practitioners' professional identity formation as it is "particularly sensitive to subjective meaning-making, social processes and the interpenetration of those in the construction of personal narratives around 'breaches' between individuals and their social contexts." Each mentoring practitioner's narrative was constructed, interwoven with multiple data stories from emails, artefacts, interviews and observations, and plotted in time and geographical space to maintain a coherent thematic thread (Cortazzi, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1995). This involved both description and analysis using connecting strategies (Maxwell and Miller, 2008) as I endeavoured to represent the mentoring practitioners' voice through a double interpretative lens, tracing the significance of situated meanings, actions and relationships during their participation on the ITT programme. It was the dynamic processes of the mentoring practitioners' professional socialisation, their becoming, "the unfolding and transformation of the self over time" (Dall'Alba, 2009, p.43), which was of primary interest in the formulation of the participants' narratives.

## Establishing the validity and rigour of the study

Producing a coherent narrative from multiple sources of data in the write-up of the participants' accounts, however, proved difficult if perhaps unsurprising given the practitioners' fragmented experiences and the fluidity of their professional identities

during the mentoring process. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.184) caution that in deploying methodological triangulation in qualitative research as a way of enhancing rigour:

> one should not adopt a naively 'optimistic' view that the aggregation of data from different sources will unproblematically add up to produce a more complete picture.

Nevertheless, drawing on the respective purposes and merits of the different methods of data collection and analysis enabled me to view the participants' accounts from a more critical perspective and alert myself to any fuzzy areas of understanding that needed further investigation or verification. The video elicitation interviews, for example, were particularly useful in exploring the structural dimensions of the feedback practice such as the appropriation of particular discourse by the participants and displays of power and solidarity. The semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, best captured the situated vocabularies and understandings of the practitioners. This conceptualisation of "linking data" (Fielding and Fielding, 1986) in place of a more traditional view of triangulation, thus, acknowledges the multi-dimensionality of the social world.

An area of concern in documenting the participants' experiences was "researcher contamination" of the data, misrepresenting the practitioners' accounts and, therefore, distorting their realities (Mantzoukas, 2004, p.995) yet also acknowledging a realistic perspective of reality in which one correct "objective" account (Maxwell, 1992, p.283) does not exist. Mentors, particularly those who hold a managerial

position in an institution, and mentees may experience and conceptualise feedback in vastly different ways. For example, a mentor might perceive a supervisory approach to feedback to be instrumental in socialising the trainee teacher into the department or institution whereas the mentee might view this as a form of surveillance. Capturing the complexity of these different social realities of the practitioners was important in establishing the rigour and validity of the study.

According to Maxwell (2013, p.122), the concept of validity can be defined as "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account". He contends that the researcher may be confronted with a plurality of perspectives and the pertinence of validity "does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared" (Maxwell, 1992, p.283). However, researchers need to concern themselves with "validity threats" to recognise that their interpretations and representations of the data may be inaccurate or incomplete: there may be alternative perspectives out there which have been neglected or seemingly invisible. The following primary strategies were deployed in an attempt to eliminate potential threats to validity and, thus, enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

**Longitudinal in-depth description**

Tracking mentoring feedback practices over sixteen months by collecting rich data from multiple sources at different stages of the ITT programmes facilitated a deeper

understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon across time-space. By conducting stimulated recall observations, particularly when it was possible to observe the same mentoring dyad on more than one occasion, and interviews, I was better able to unravel the complex and diverse situated processes which shaped the practice, the different practices and relationships which emerged, developed or became less significant, and the contextual conditions, which helped the practice to thrive or hinder its development.

In undertaking insider research, I was best positioned to understand participants' accounts from an emic perspective (Maxwell, 1992). I transcribed the interview and observation data verbatim to connect with the data and be attuned to the paralinguistic and prosodic features of the verbal accounts, the latter including prominence, tone and intonation, which are crucial in detecting nuances of meaning. The participants and I shared a common language: institutional frames of reference, such as quality assurance processes, which contributed to my providing a more accurate representation of their views as voiced in the site of practice. Reference to institutional documentation and external texts such as Ofsted reports also helped to explain the participants' feelings and behaviours, thus acting as a valuable cross-checking strategy (Shenton, 2004) of meso and macro influences on the practice. Obtaining data from both members of the mentoring dyad was an additional means of verification as was corresponding with a range of people at different levels of hierarchy within the institution.

Any similarities of findings which arose from both programmes could be perceived as providing greater credibility for the reader (Shenton, 2004) and transferability to other teacher education contexts. However, although it is often possible to make generalisations from one FE setting to another in that some features of mentoring programmes are likely to be common to all, the focus of this study was to provide in-depth information about the localised nature and enactment of mentoring feedback practices, exploring the "particular" rather than making bold claims about the universal applicability of the data. As posited by Lincoln and Guba, (1985, p.298), the researcher must provide sufficiently detailed information about the site ontology, but ultimately, in terms of transferability:

> the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make the application elsewhere.

**Respondent validation**

Respondent validation, also known as member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), was an ongoing process during the study to grant the participants access to the data and verify the authenticity and accuracy of my findings and interpretations. Initially, transcripts of video observation interactions and interviews were returned in an unsanitised form, with the inclusion of false starts, hesitations, and pauses, to the participants, who were invited firstly to comment on the "descriptive validity" (Maxwell, 1992) of the accounts: to check how accurately specific behaviours, acts,

and the use of objects had been recorded. This was accompanied by written summaries of my interpretations of the narratives, for the practitioners to evaluate the extent to which these encapsulated their perspectives, and to comment on any discrepancies or omissions.

Although respondent validation enables the participants to have a greater voice in the research process, claims that it offers direct validation of findings are disputed (Fielding and Fielding, 1986; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Sandelowski, 2008; Silverman, 2014). Despite participants' vast tacit knowledge of a site ontology, the ability to tap into this, verbalise it, and recount their feelings, attitudes and meanings of these retrospective articulations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) is by no means a certainty. The researcher, therefore, cannot "assume that anyone is a privileged commentator on his or her actions, in that the truth of their account is guaranteed" (*ibid.,* p.182). Granting participants access to their narratives may also result in reconstruction of meanings as sections are modified or deleted (Birt *et al.*, 2016) or cause unnecessary stress or anxiety. At first, none of the mentoring practitioners wanted any revisions to be made to the content of their accounts, but this may have been because they were too busy to fully engage with the data, unclear of how to respond or were guided by their position in the institution (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Conscious of the participants' busy schedules and possible lack of involvement in member checking, I turned to a novel way of offering my interpretations of their narratives, via audiovisual feedback. This process involved recording what was

visible on the screen, namely the transcript, comment boxes and cursor, accompanied by an auditory narrative. It enabled me to home in on specific extracts of the transcripts, vocalise my thoughts and ask for confirmation or further clarification. As an example, one mentor in her interview had spoken about teacher education programmes not preparing teachers for the 'real' world. I realised that this point was something about which I wanted more clarity so I highlighted her comments in the text and summarised my interpretations of her "sayings", both in written form and, in more depth, through my voice commentary. She remarked that the synchronicity of visual and audio modes alerted her to any potential "fuzzy" interpretations, at least from the researcher's perspective, of her recollections of the mentoring experience. I was able to communicate my understandings in a more accessible form and, as a result, the participants were more inclined to interact and offer their feedback. Overall, alongside other verification strategies, this approach added another level of reflexivity and attention to the data and, consistent with a critical hermeneutical stance, brought sensitivity to possible prejudices and pre-judgements.

**Comparison**

One of the challenges of this multiple-case research was preserving the rich data of each case whilst also attending to emergent and elaboration of theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007) to investigate how mentoring feedback practices were enabled and constrained by local conditions and external factors. Exploring similarities and

differences of mentoring experiences across both ITT programmes proved essential to enhance, as Bazeley (2013, p.275) writes,

> understanding of the processes that shape each case and the hope of identifying more general patterns and processes that can then assist in understanding experience or explaining behaviour across a wider population.

To retain the complexity and narrative sequence of the experiences of the mentoring practitioners and address validity threats, I used a mixed strategies approach, combining case-oriented and variable-oriented analyses (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to trace patterns and themes within individual mentoring accounts, within the dyads themselves and then across the ITT programmes. This multi-layered approach to comparison, based on a model by Ayers *et al.* (2003), is depicted in table 5.2. Tentative findings were also presented at several stages of the research at ITT consortium conferences, comprising members of other institutions involved in mentoring provision, for further validation and comparison beyond the local context.

| Level of comparison | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Within the individual mentoring accounts | To discern salient aspects of the practitioners' experiences and inconsistencies in the data |
| Within the mentoring dyad | To identify differences in the mentor's and mentee's accounts |
| Within the pre-service ITT mentoring dyads | To identify recurrent processes, themes, and patterns, and variation of experiences across time and space |
| Within the in-service ITT mentoring dyads | To identify recurrent processes, themes and patterns, and variation of experiences across time and space |
| Across the mentoring dyads on the pre- and in-service ITT programme | To compare patterns, relationships, processes, artefacts, and consequences across time and space |

Table 5.2: Within- and Across-Case Multi-level Comparative Analytic Strategies for the study of mentoring feedback practices on the pre- and in-service initial teacher training programmes

Matrices were used, mapped to the first three research questions, to summarise findings and facilitate comparison (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). To document how mentoring feedback practices unfolded during the ITT programmes, time-sequenced displays were deployed (Miles and Huberman, 2007). Despite the small sample of mentoring practitioners, this approach to comparison proved useful in documenting changes, in particular, regarding the allocation of new mentors during the programme and how this affected the mentoring relationship; variation in protocols and procedures; and shifts in the practitioners' emotional states. This strategy was also consistent with a process-oriented approach to comparative case studies with its focus on the interrelationship between people, processes and events.

Finally, by conducting a synthesised approach to comparison, attending to similarities and differences across the two ITT programmes without "stripping away the individual context" (Ayres *et al.*, p.877), I was better able to discuss the implications for modifying FE-based mentoring provision locally and from a wider perspective.

**Ethical considerations**

The study was conducted in adherence to robust ethical review procedures, approved by Lancaster University. The process involved "procedural ethics" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), providing participants with sufficient detail about the research; attaining informal consent from the participants; and ensuring confidentiality and security of information. Because the research followed an iterative, emergent design, *process* ethical consent (Ramcharan and Cutcliffe, 2001) was obtained at different stages in the research. This process entailed continually building and sustaining trust in the relationship with the participants, obtaining consent at regular intervals and reassuring the respondents of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

In addition, ongoing researcher reflexivity was essential to attend to "ethics in practice" (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), concerned with any issues that arose in the messy world of micropolitical research practice (Halse and Honey, 2007) to protect the participants from harm and respect their rights. Acknowledging the effect that the

research might unwittingly have on people implicated in the study (*ibid.*) was important in addition to safeguarding participants directly involved in the study. Despite its aforementioned espoused flaws in guaranteeing data validity, respondent validation enabled the participants to scrutinise my summaries and interpretations of their narratives for any "traceability" (Trowler, 2014b, p.44) of professional identity. Minor changes, where appropriate, were also made in relation to the description of the participants' biographies to protect their identities.

In the dissemination of the findings, outlined in the subsequent chapter, individual mentoring practitioners' perceptions, beliefs, and doings are illustrated in the form of "moving vignettes" (Ely *et al.*, 1997) to capture site-based experiences and motion of events during the ITT programmes. These also enabled the site ontology to come to the fore, with an emphasis on the constellation of horizontal and vertical processes, relationships, and practice architectures which enabled and constrained feedback practices.

# CHAPTER 6: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

## Overview

This chapter is concerned with the presentation, analysis and discussion of the mentoring practitioners' vignettes, captured over the sixteen-month study. Vignettes are, according to Ely *et al.* (1997, p.70): "compact sketches that can be used to introduce characters, foreshadow events and analyses to come, highlight particular findings, or summarize a particular theme in analysis and interpretation." The vignettes in this study are composites of the data collected through the fieldwork – semi-structured interviews; participation observations and concomitant video elicitation interviews; and participatory maps – across the trajectories of the pre-service and in-service ITT programmes, to represent the participants' entanglements in the site ontology.

The first section responds to the research question: how the practitioners conceptualised their roles and relationships in the mentoring feedback process as they interacted with each other and those external to the dyad in semantic and social space. A selection of both the mentors' and mentees' perspectives from the two ITT programmes are provided, using direct quotes, with pseudonyms provided [table 5.1] to draw the reader into the participants' lives (Jacobsen, 2014, p.41). It was also important to capture the dynamics of meaning-meaning, how these assumed and idealised conceptions of the mentoring and feedback were questioned and

reconstructed in light of the practitioners' personal trajectories of participation, shaped by institutional practice architectures.

The processes, arrangements and artefacts and how these enable and constrain mentoring feedback practices are then discussed. The practitioners' experiences of mentoring feedback are presented through the lens of practice architectures to illuminate the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements which shaped the situated enactment of mentoring on the two ITT programmes. Excerpts of the post-observation mentoring feedback interactions are also presented to support the narratives and, thus, strengthen the robustness of the practice methodology. For ease of clarity, the transcriptions are punctuated, and other discourse features have been marked, including hesitations, interruptions, overlaps and paralinguistic features, such as nods, gestures and eye contact, to capture the embodied nature of feedback; a list of transcription symbols is provided in figure 6.1. The level of analysis delves deeper than grammatical and lexical choice to encapsulate an understanding of discursive practices at the meso- and macro-level aimed at uncovering hegemonic educational ideologies which shape social relations of power and are produced, reproduced, co-produced and renewed through participants' everyday practices (Kemmis, 2019, p.69).

figure 6.1 the list of symbols used in the transcription of the mentoring participants' feedback interactions

The final section relates to the trajectory of practices, responding to the research question: how feedback practices unfold during the teacher development programmes. This section underlines how particular practice conventions and routines contributed to the stability of certain practices. It also illuminates the impact of individual subjectivities as practitioners engaged in critical praxis to transform practice architectures which obstructed paths of teacher development, selecting alternative routes in their quest for professional advancement.

Each section is followed by a summary and discussion of the salient themes which emerged from the vignettes and surrounding data.

## Mentoring practitioners' conceptualisations of their roles and relationships in the feedback process

### Mentors' conceptualisations of their roles and relationships in the feedback process

**Katie: (mentor on the in-service ITT programme, dyad 9: Health and Social Care)**

Katie, as part of a Graduate Teaching Scheme previously offered at the FE institution, had completed the PGCE in 2016 and moved swiftly up the organisational ranks to become Curriculum Team Leader of Health and Social Care, situated in the Access department. She conceptualised the mentoring role in terms of her "sink or swim" experience of being mentored on the ITT programme, and one which was congruent with institutional expectations. She also acknowledged its complex multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature as mentoring was nested within other practices in the Access department: those concerned with administration, primarily student recruitment, assessment and quality assurance processes; teaching and learning; and leadership. The concept of mentoring was, thus, shaped by Katie's experiences of other practices and their practice arrangements in the site. In terms of the cultural-discursive arrangements, for example, there was an explicit understanding, enabled in departmental meetings and college emails, that things "needed to get done" to meet specific key performance indicators. This emphasis on productivity meant that Katie was caught in a double bind between an instrumental orientation towards mentoring and one which fostered professional growth:

> My main role was to make sure she [the mentee] was able to fulfil herself as a teacher but also pass the course. I had to think about my practice as a teacher and how I mentor her in that way but also that transition to the day-to-day life at the college which was difficult because I was line managing her.

Thus, for Katie, the relational boundaries of the mentoring practice were unclear: the categories of "mentor" and "supervisor" were conceptually indistinct as she engaged in overlapping practices: socialising the mentee into the culture of the department, providing pedagogical support and assessing her in the classroom. She recognised the unequal power dynamics in the mentoring relationship, both in terms of institutional status and her level of contextual knowledge.  However, the power of influence did not only flow from her interactions with the mentee: it was also channelled indirectly through external practices. Katie felt an acute sense of personal and professional accountability for her mentee's capabilities in the classroom, a fear of not meeting the implicit expectations of both the institution and the explicit requirements of the ITT programme:

> It feels like a heavy weight on your shoulders because you care…You feel accountable for how well they do like it's almost your fault that they don't pass but, in reality, we just need to be accountable for developing a new teacher.

Adhering to particular norms of behaviour and expected standards resulted in her unconsciously regulating her practices to meet covert institutional objectives, those concerned with efficiency, achievement and maintaining professional standards. In this vein, Katie likened her role as mentor to a "band aid", providing temporary solutions, particularly in the early stages of the relationship as her mentee tentatively navigated the complex organisational networks and systems of the institutional practice landscape, conscious of saying or doing anything which might reflect badly on her.

The socialisation role of the mentor took precedence over the provision of feedback on the mentee's performance in the classroom, at least until she had experienced and been "stirred into" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b, 2107) site-based practices. This was a dynamic and evolving process as the trainee teacher learned the repertoires of different practices connected with administration, marking, planning and teaching, adapting how to behave according to contextual conditions. The mentee simultaneously needed to familiarise herself with the challenges of working in FE, with the insecurity and precarity of the performative policy context as her teaching performance was subject to scrutiny not only by her mentor but by the ITT tutors and institutional quality assurance department. Katie was conscious of how daunting this practice landscape would appear to an "outsider", an environment which she described as "structural" and "hardcore", and which shaped the "strengths of solidarities" (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008, p.44) in the diverse horizontal and vertical social networks in which her mentee was entangled:

> You want to know how things work so you learn structures and processes
> before you give meaning to them, so that is only going to be your experience.
> Am I going to get trust from the top? Am I going to feel comfortable?

Katie added that her dual role as line manager and mentor accentuated these initial feelings of suspicion: the mentoring feedback conversations were not isolated from the departmental culture, what Roxå and Mårtensson (2009) call the "backstage of the teaching arena." It was, thus, difficult to guarantee confidentiality in the relationship. Any "sayings" or "doings" that did not conform to institutional practice

traditions were likely to be regarded with a certain degree of tacit uncertainty and were instrumental in shaping the pathway of practices such as the level of prescriptivism provided in the feedback on the mentee's observed lessons.

**Abida (mentor on the pre-service ITT programme: Law and Psychology, mentoring dyads 3 and 4).**

Abida was an experienced mentor and took on the role of mentoring two trainees on the pre-service ITT programme because she was the "only option" available. Her senior role as Head of Access meant that she was not her mentees' direct line manager. However, as with Katie, the "frontiers" (Schatzki, 2002, p.87) of Abida's mentoring practices were not clearly demarcated and, thus, attempts to negotiate the parameters of the mentoring relationship were problematic:

> As a mentor, I can give them support. I can coach them as a manager. That's
> slightly different but the boundaries are blurred so there isn't much point in
> saying: go to B for that: he's your manager if I can help with something.

In conceptualising her role in the mentoring process, Abida rejected the term, "mentor", a word rarely voiced in the institution and which, for her, suggested a unidirectional, transactional relationship. "Supervisor" had similarly officious connotations which negated her efforts to create a supportive and congenial social space. Instead, Abida preferred to position herself as a "professional friend" despite its rather oxymoronic label. She was conscious that her approach to mentoring encompassed elements of an apprenticeship model (Maynard and Furlong, 1995),

which foregrounds observation and imitation, but one still grounded in social-constructivist principles:

> I feel I have expertise to share with them in what it is that I do and I can impart some of that but it feels too transactional. It's more supportive so the way that you'd scaffold in the classroom if you were trying to stretch a student.

Abida's approach to mentoring feedback, as in Katie's account, was shaped by her experience of being mentored on the PGCE programme, where she had been largely "left to her own devices" by her mentor and had received limited and unconstructive feedback on her lessons:

> He'd come and observe me and I'd fill in the observation form for him to sign and he might add some comments. He'd go, "Could you remind me what happened in the lesson?"

In addition, working in FE for ten years at the same institution had produced specific dispositions of care and understanding as she empathised with newcomers to the FE sector, acknowledging its challenging and potentially inhospitable nature:

> It is a beast unto itself and it takes a particular kind of person to work here and I know we won't have good teachers from FE if there aren't people like me to help.

Pre-service trainee teachers, once in their placements, often have little control over their teaching schedules and administrative responsibilities and, consequently, are

likely to feel moments of isolation and disequilibrium (Orr, 2012). Abida's personal history of mentoring and receiving minimal support in her workplace was significant in enacting change processes in relation to departmental mentoring practices. Weekly mentoring meetings were opened up to the other trainee teachers on the in-service ITT programme, not only to discuss aspects related to teaching and learning, but also to participate in the planning of a lesson which Abida would subsequently teach, followed by collaborative feedback on the session. Carving these communicative spaces for the trainee teachers in their pre-service placements or in-service job roles was an example of how the institutional practice architectures were changed to reconceptualise the mentoring feedback practice as a more communal, collegial process. The new "tasks" that the amended project entailed signified notable changes in the material-economic and social-political arrangements, at least superficially creating a symbiotic relationship, built on collective knowledge-sharing and egalitarian principles. Thus, it was these revised practices which reshaped the institutional practice architectures.

**Mohammad (mentor on the in-service ITT programme: Education Studies, mentoring dyad 10)**

Mohammad taught in the HE faculty within the institution and had been his mentee's tutor on her university degree programme. The trainee teacher had been provided with a voluntary teaching placement after graduating and, with no previous teaching experience, required considerable support. Mohammad explained that he conceptualised his initial role in the feedback process as familiarising his mentee with the subject matter. This involved making explicit links to his pedagogical content

knowledge (Shulman, 1986) in the sessions that she had attended as a student. By doing this, it was hoped that she could then emulate his practices, at least to an extent, in her sessions:

> Being a student of mine previously helped a lot because I was able to home into my own practice. She was quite fortunate that she'd already seen I would say good practice. She's able to almost replicate that in her class.

This "good practice", according to Mohammad, aligned with the institutional teaching ethos and practices of FE whereas his mentee's style was better suited to lecturing larger numbers of students in a "typical HE setting". Part of his role, therefore, was to make explicit particular "conventions of appropriateness" (Trowler, 2019) to enable her to "fit into" the institution and, in the process, maintain her teaching placement. Like Katie and Abida, Mohammad was cognisant of being held implicitly accountable for his mentee's poor performance or any deviance from the norm:

> I think I would be quite nervous, maybe even a bit embarrassed if my mentee wasn't as good as I'd made out.

What is also interesting from this narrative are the tacit assumptions about the essence of good teaching in FE: the contested yet pervasive rhetoric of "good practice" (Coffield and Edward, 2009), the idea that there are certain strategies which "work" and can be easily replicated and transferred from one educational setting to another. However, as Coffield and Edward (*ibid.*) contend, the 'evidence' on which these best practice claims is based is largely circumstantial, contingent on

personal judgements which often emanate from power forces within and external to the institution. The notion that teaching can be neatly packaged into a set of techniques and delivered to learners is an attractive one for institutions in a neo-liberal political landscape as it implies both efficiency (Nicoll and Harrison, 2003) and conformity. Nevertheless, these normative discourses clearly constrain the way teachers, and *ipso facto* mentors, talk about teaching and learning and enact their practices, thus facilitating the production and reproduction of particular language ideologies. In the interview and participant observation data of this study, the term "good" or "best practice", often used synonymously (Coffield and Edward, 2009), appeared several times and was used in abundance in mentoring textual artefacts at the micro, meso and macro level, some examples of which are displayed in table 6.1.

| Examples from participant observations | Examples from mentoring observations reports | Examples from external textual artefacts |
|---|---|---|
| Abida: Because it's for the introduction to psychology unit<br>Fatima: So make that a bit clearer to the students so they know?<br>Abida: Yes and it's good practice for them<br>Fatima: Yes<br>Abida: Because you know when they get to Access they're going to need to have far more of a focus on assessment and where they are with things and a control over what it is they study<br>**(Mentoring dyad 3: pre-service)**<br><br>Abida: Not even at level two honestly it could just be a little website on the board we're just getting them used to references<br>David: [Pen to paper]<br>Abida: Now that's not because we're asking them to do it what we're doing is modelling which we're showing them what good practice is, aren't we?<br>David: Yes<br>**(Mentoring dyad 4: pre-service)** | The PowerPoint is structured and you make good use of technology to promote learning. However, it is a good practice to use visual colour coded information than text instructions (Discipline: ICT).<br><br>There were points where you did check the instructions given for example, "How many sentences should you write?" These instruction-checking questions are good practice (Discipline: Health and Social Care).<br><br>"It was good you went round the class to check on the progress of the activity, however, it is good practice to have recorded their individual performance and progress" (Discipline: Health and Social Care).<br><br>"The register was marked in the first ten minutes of the lesson, which is good practice" (Discipline: ESOL).<br><br>"Asking students to work in groups was good practice." (Discipline: Beauty Therapy).<br><br>"It is good practice for learners to look up the meaning of selected key words in their dictionaries and write them in their notebooks" (Discipline: ESOL). | "The sessions provided good opportunities for teachers to share good practice, to reflect on their own practice and to set targets for further improvement." (Ofsted, 2012)<br><br>"Arrange for the trainee's observation of good practice." (DET/PGCE mentoring handbook, in-service programme)<br><br>"We want to invest in developing and extending good practice on the part of employers in the sector." (DfES, 2004).<br><br>"Trainees demonstrate good practice in some of the standards and all related to their personal and professional conduct." (Ofsted, 2018).<br><br>"Write a critical evaluation of your micro-teach reflecting on good practice in teaching, learning and assessment." (DET/PGCE ITT programme handbook).<br><br>"Within the programme we provide a variety of approaches to teaching and learning with the aim of modelling best practice" (PCET, pre-service ITT programme handbook." |

Table 6.1: Examples of how the discourse of 'good practice' was evident in mentoring feedback practices and ITT textual artefacts

Modelling "good practice" in the feedback sessions, however, was acknowledged by Mohammad as a provisional strategy, a rapid process of familiarisation with the teaching practice landscape of the institution and wider practice traditions of FE. He did not conceptualise his mentoring feedback role in purely instrumental or technical rationalist terms. He also saw it as part of an ongoing process and, thus, needed to give his mentee space to "figure out her journey" in the formation of her professional identity as she engaged in multiple departmental practices. In doing so, she would gradually become socialised into particular ways of talking and thinking about teaching; particular activities and processes; and particular ways of relating with

members of staff at different hierarchical levels in the site of practice. Mohammad commented that over time he expected to relinquish control and provide his mentee with scope for experimentation:

> She's stepped into the realm of being a teacher, moving away from being a student….. I can show you the ropes but it is a journey that you need to do by yourself to find out what doesn't work and what works.

These comments highlight the situated and dynamic nature of the mentoring relationship: the process of learning to be with others in the complexities and messiness of the context. The nominalised form, "mentoring" suggests statis, an entity rather than a process, and perhaps masks the role of the practitioners who are not just "carriers" (Reckwitz, 2002) of the practice but who actively steer its trajectory, shaped by their personal histories, practice traditions and the architectures in the site. As Mohammad and his mentee inhabited the mentoring practice, they both had to learn how to "go on" despite some familiarity with each other's values and ways of working. Mohammad considered these shared histories as both an enabling and constraining factor in the realisation of the practice. They had already forged a professional relationship, built on dialogue, trust and mutual respect, but Mohammad's assumptions of his mentee's potential in the classroom brought a higher level of expectation:

> The mentee's journey has already been thrust ahead a lot more with someone you know as opposed to someone you don't know.

Thus, an important factor in the mentoring relationship was for both parties to learn how to position themselves at different stages of the practice. Mohammad believed that adopting an apprenticeship model was initially appropriate but as his mentee grew in confidence – feeling secure in the knowledge that she was becoming a better teacher through her practices – the relationship was likely to transition to one which was still asymmetrical but more collaborative (Penannen *et al.*, 2015) and reciprocal if not necessarily free from tensions.

**Mentees' conceptualisations of their roles and relationships in the feedback process**

**Hamida (mentee on the in-service ITT programme: Education Studies and Health and Social Care, mentoring dyad 11)**

As depicted on her mentoring map, Hamida perceived the ideal mentoring relationship to be "mentee-driven" and "ongoing". She stressed the importance of there being "no agenda", adding that she had already been victim to unfair practices at the organisation: she had been guaranteed a paid teaching placement which did not materialise. Consequently, she was forced to find voluntary work as a lecturer in the HE-faculty of the institution to meet the placement requirements of the ITT programme, securing a minimum of 100 teaching hours over the two years, and was dependent on the commitment of her former tutor to act as mentor. This perceived lack of support resulted in her forming an immediate, negative impression of teaching in the institution and, consequently, the significance of the mentoring role in

her professional development was allocated greater prominence than she had originally envisaged.

Hamida expected the mentor to adopt a variety of roles in the feedback process, including "coach", "guide" and "problem solver", but also somebody with a flexible disposition to accommodate her wants and needs, beyond pedagogical guidance:

> I wouldn't have to feel I need to plan what I'm going to say before I go and see my mentor. I should be able to approach my mentor whenever and wherever: whenever I need advice with my teaching or something else.

Owing to the haste in finding a placement and lack of explicit guidelines, there had been no attempts to negotiate the goals of the mentoring feedback practice or establish any formal protocols for meetings. Nevertheless, the mainly *ad hoc* arrangements, informal chance interactions in the corridor for example, were tacitly approved by both participants and were not perceived to be problematic by Hamida provided that she received mentoring support on her terms. This discourse of entitlement is widespread in mentoring programme documentation and policy legislation, as demonstrated in the most recent Ofsted ITE inspection framework. This underlines the need for appropriate institutional material-economic arrangements to be secured to construe mentoring as a supportive, albeit rather evaluative, practice:

> ensuring that trainees receive good-quality mentoring and regular mentoring time, and ensuring that routine target-setting and target reviews are detailed,

subject-specific where appropriate, and rooted in a thorough evaluation of

trainee's recent practice (Ofsted, 2020, p.49).

After Hamida's inauspicious beginnings at the institution, access to any form of

mentoring support resulted in some level of coherence and ontological security,

pivotal to the mentee's personal well-being and professional self. Her initial

experiences of struggling to secure a teaching placement and mentor highlight the

different levels of emotional investment involved in a project, part of the

"teleoaffective structures" (Schatzki, 2002) of a practice. As Hamida stepped into the

practice of teaching and learning and its pre-existing arrangements, she had to

develop certain dispositions to, in her words, "survive the placement": a high level of

resilience, self-sufficiency and "tactical compliance" (Orr, 2012, p.58): accepting the

*status quo* as a means of attaining the PGCE qualification.

**Moyin (mentee on the in-service ITT programme: Counselling and Research Skills, mentoring dyad 7)**

Moyin was initially allocated a mentor and teaching placement in the HE faculty of

the institution on the proviso that she would relieve her mentor, also her line

manager and head of department, of some of her teaching hours. She was one of

the few mentoring practitioners to directly reference the role of the mentor in the

feedback process:

> The mentor is somebody I could go to before the process of the observation
>
> happens…to check in with her and to ensure I'm on the right track. There are

set criteria and paperwork that need to be done and completed. I also know

that she is to give me constructive feedback after the observation.

These comments firstly highlight the procedural dimensions of the mentoring role, including the following sets of practices: validating the lesson plan; observing the mentee's lesson; completing an observation form with comments mapped to the FE Professional Standards; and providing spoken feedback for the benefit of the mentee's professional development. These practices have perhaps become so routinised that most of the participants in the study did not relay their significance. It may also have been the case that managerial practices at the departmental level, those involved with the tracking of student attendance and achievement, for example, were valued and prioritised over mentoring. Mentoring practices need to fit in with the broader existing set-up of the department, within its complex multiple and overlapping constellation of practices and arrangements.

In addition, these comments reveal Moyin's need for affirmation, to know she was "on the right track" with her teaching. They emphasise the monitoring and gatekeeping roles of mentors (Gay and Stephenson, 1998; Standing, 1999) as they assess whether the trainee teacher is meeting pre-determined mandatory competences in the form of the FE Professional Standards. The tacit assumption that there is a correct way to teach, a "best practice", as outlined previously, is also evident: to conform to normative expectations of good teaching in FE. Moyin, however, conceptualised the mentor's role in the feedback process as a "guide" or "scaffold" rather than a pedagogical impediment. By reviewing her lesson plan and

materials, there was less likelihood of divergence of opinion in the post-observation discussions and in a time-poor environment, replete with internal and external audit procedures and high-stakes assessment, any implicit moves toward productivity were welcomed. However, she did not expect there to be absolute agreement in the feedback sessions: she craved challenge and likened the "constructive" element of the feedback to the "meaty" filling of a sandwich. The affective aspects of the mentoring practice were also significant. Moyin's personal history of being a mature student and experiencing feelings of self-doubt on the ITT programme shaped her need for empathy and reassurance:

> I've had constraining factors in my life but I've been determined to carry on. I need to be able to say I'm whole, you know?

Thus, the social-political arrangements of the practice for her needed to provide these elements of solidarity with her mentor. In the second year of the ITT programme, a change in material-economic arrangements – the imminent closure of the HE faculty - meant that Moyin's place on the course was jeopardised. This resulted in her having to urgently find a new placement in a different department but it also led to the mentor's unspoken withdrawal from the relationship. In response to these unforeseen circumstances, Moyin reconceptualised the role of the mentor, foregrounding its temporal, spatial and relational dimensions: the importance of regular and timely flows of communication, ongoing commitment and social proximity, not necessarily co-location with the mentee, but involving some kind of "presence":

I think that if one is taking on the role of a mentor, you need to be fully

committed through the process. None of us knew that Covid would go on for

this long and effective communication is important rather than leaving people

guessing or thinking that if you don't talk about the issue, it vanishes.

Moyin's narrative highlights how her initial understandings of the mentoring role

evolved in the situated enactment of the practice. Both mentoring practitioners were

entwined in a web of relationships and practices and as the local conditions

changed, they had to negotiate their own paths which meandered in different

directions. The generic definition of mentoring from chapter one espoused as an

"ongoing process which involves an investment of time and commitment from both

parties" was, therefore, not considered applicable to this relationship. The terms

"mentor" and "mentee" also seem somewhat redundant given the realities of the

unfolding of the practice in physical space-time and social space.

**Samantha (pre-service PCET programme: Health and Social Care, mentoring dyad 5)**

Samantha was a trainee on the pre-service nine-month ITT programme and was

allocated two mentors. As the duration of the course was significantly shorter than its

in-service counterpart, the mentor was expected to take a more active and intense

role in the mentee's professional development.  There was a long history of

mentoring at the accrediting university on both primary and secondary PGCE

programmes. The cultural-discursive practice arrangements of the practice shaped

how it was talked about and understood by the mentoring stakeholders. There was no separate mentoring handbook as provided on the in-service ITT programme. Instead, the responsibilities of the mentor were embedded in the programme documentation. The interconnectedness between the mentor, tutors and trainee was emphasised, thus disseminating a discourse of solidarity, equity and collaboration. The PCET programme leader accentuated the triadic nature of the relationship:

> We don't want it to be a top-down approach. We want it to be a bottom-up approach to the mentees' development. The mentor comments on the trainee's progress, the trainee does a self-assessment and also the tutor makes a comment on the trainee's progress (PCET programme leader, personal correspondence, 2020).

The focus here is on cooperative engagement, negotiating the trainee's professional journey as a shared concern or project. However, these "sayings" appear to conflict with the multiple audit-driven mentoring practices during the programme: fortnightly target-setting; regular informal teaching observations; four formal observations and three tripartite meetings. Although the formal teaching observations were ungraded, mentors were required to grade the trainee's level of performance at regular points during the year, aligned with the Ofsted four-point scale, justified as a means of recording achievement and meeting internal and external targets:

> We have to be mindful that we want trainees to finish our programme as outstanding trainees or at least very good so we do try to capture that (PCET pre-service programme leader, personal correspondence, 2020).

Therefore, the cultural-discursive arrangements of the mentoring provision both enabled and constrained the way the programme was conceptualised by mentors and mentees: as efficient and tightly organised bundles of practices but also as a procedurally heavy process, involving high levels of bureaucracy and evaluation. Samantha made a distinction, as portrayed on her mentoring map, between the idealised view of the mentoring role in the feedback practice: "Constructive feedback to enable trainee to form their own path with their preferred style", drawing on social-constructivist principles of learning, and the "reality" of the mentorship. She recounted her own experience of both her mentors having a limited view of the Professional Standards and bemoaned their prescriptive and directive approach to the feedback process.

Samantha, as a recent student of her first mentor, commented how the social-political arrangements of the practice both facilitated and hindered interactions in the social space and prompted her to rethink the mentoring relationship. On the one hand, the familiarity of the relationship brought a certain level of stability but, conversely, it also meant that the practitioners carried assumptions about each other's abilities and the level of autonomy expected in the relationship.

> I see her role as guiding me but also to set goals and challenges. Obviously, my mentor knows me really well and she said to me she knows what I'm capable of but I'd like to be challenged more and given more independence.

Overall, for Samantha, both the administrative and developmental aspects of mentoring needed to work conjointly to enable the mentee's professional growth,

providing challenge and capacity for agency. In addition, as mentoring feedback entailed working towards instrumental and developmental outcomes, its practices and connected practice arrangements had to be orchestrated in a way that corresponded to this conception.

## Summary and discussion of the findings

The terms "mentoring" and "feedback", rooted in tradition, have become so entrenched in the sociocultural and political practices of teacher education that rendering "meaning reform" is problematic (Bieler, 2010, p.392). These concepts might be likened to a reverse Gordian knot: superficially straightforward, understood as an entity as a process of teacher professional development. However, pull tighter and tensions in conceptualisation emerge as practitioners engage in an ongoing hermeneutical process with others in the conduct and unfolding of the practices. In this study, the participants on both ITT programmes shared general understandings of mentoring feedback practices as an asymmetrical relationship, a dyadic process of constructive guidance, involving commitment from both parties, and in alignment with programmatic requirements. Nevertheless, there were distinct variations in the way the mentoring practitioners conceptualised their roles and relationships, foregrounding different aspects of  the multifaceted role of the mentor, dependent on their personal trajectories and enactments and institutional concerns.

The mentor as "bearer of subject specialist pedagogy" as emphasised in policy documentation (DfES, 2004; Ofsted, 2003) and promoter of reflection was allocated little attention to the overall responsibilities of the mentor. It was also noticeable that the role of feedback in the mentoring process was often articulated less frequently by participants than other elements, possibly because it was an assumed aspect of mentoring or was considered a less immediate concern. It had a different flavour from the tutors' feedback on the ITT programme and by members of the organisation's quality assurance team. Generally, the mentor's feedback was considered by mentees to be "less theoretical" (Fatima, mentee, dyad 3), "less detailed" (Marek, mentee, dyad 14) and "unrelated to the Professional Standards" (Samantha, mentee, dyad 5). Mentors too felt that their feedback was supposed to be different from other sources: "more contextualised" (Abida, mentor, dyads 3 and 4) or "more practical" and aimed at "breaking down misconceptions of the subject" (Usman, mentor, dyad 1). The feedback provided by mentors, therefore, evoked different meanings, attitudes and emotions for both parties, what Trowler (2019) calls "codes of signification". These "codes" are arguably an extension of the cultural-discursive dimension of the theory of practice architectures, although often difficult to isolate. They are embedded in sets of routinised practices and reinforced through participants' interactions at the ground level but also "under the stage" (*ibid,* p.76) in more informal contexts: "over coffee, in private, and in places where gossip is purveyed" (*ibid.*). In this study, there were few explicit directives of how to conduct spoken and written feedback other than it being espoused as a "reciprocal process" (in-service ITT online training) designed to "help the mentee improve" (PCET pre-

service ITT briefing) and, particularly on the pre-service ITT programme, emphatically mapped to the 2014 Professional Standards. Whether there was a real or perceived gap between the theoretical and practical components of the ITT programmes (Ketter and Stoffel, 2008) was difficult to determine. However, the participants in the study felt instinctively that there was a separation between mentoring and other forms of feedback and this idea was possibly difficult to dislodge once it had formed part of their tacit assumptions about the practice.

Overall, it was evident from these vignettes of the practitioners' lived experiences and personal and academic biographies that the cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements in the institution were significant in shaping how the roles of mentor and mentee were conceptualised and configured. Generally, within the institution, mentoring was viewed as a separate entity from other practices connected with professional development, primarily those associated with the role of "teacher and learning coach", positioned in the quality assurance department and underpinned by formalised institutional arrangements. Despite attempts to present this role to the teaching staff as a supportive mechanism, its previous incarnation as "advanced teaching practitioner" carried historical significations of hierarchy, deficit and performativity and, linked to capability measures. Although the title of the role had changed, the set of concomitant practices remained largely the same and, thus, the situated meanings of the practice did not significantly change. Mentoring, as a discursive construction within ITE, was viewed with less suspicion. However, a lack of institutional investment in the relationship was evidenced in the cultural-discursive and material-economic arrangements of the site, particularly regarding the in-service

ITT programme where the trainee teachers were expected to source their own mentors who enacted the practice on a voluntary basis, with no remission from their teaching timetable. Therefore, the selection of mentors was not situated within the organisational remit. There were also no expectations that mentoring would be embedded in departmental meetings or in discussions centred on the improvement of teaching and learning in the institution. Regarding the pre-service ITT programme, the social-political arrangements were prefigured: the selection of mentors was an institutional directive. There was a commitment, therefore, from the outset that mentees were guaranteed a mentor for the duration of the programme although the quality of support depended on the extent to which mentoring was integrated into departmental practices.

## Processes, arrangements and artefacts: how these enable and constrain mentoring feedback practices

**Sadia and Hamida (mentor and mentee, in-service ITT programme, Health and Social Care/Education Studies, mentoring dyad 11**)

Sadia was new to mentoring and thrown into the practice after Hamida's previous mentor left the institution. The one training session for the mentors organised by the accrediting university had focused on the procedural aspects of the feedback process - arranging meetings, completing the observation form and referencing the Professional Standards - rather than on highlighting its complex, relational dimension. Sadia, therefore, based the practice on her past and present experiences

of receiving feedback, both as a student teacher and in her current role as lecturer in Psychology and Education Studies within the HE faculty of the institution.

The cultural-discursive arrangements of the observation process were iteratively shaped by the language used in the mentoring handbook: the importance of establishing fluid and developmental mentoring feedback processes, illustrated below:

> a series of informal and formal observations, moving away from prescribed skills and models towards a freer interpretation of support. Mentors don't grade; they only pass or fail (in-service ITT programme leader, personal correspondence, 2020).

However, even though adjectives such as "constructive", "developmental" and "non-threatening" formed part of the lexicon of feedback in the programme documentation and were reiterated in the initial training session for mentors, there was still an evaluative element to the observation practice as the mentors were required to make a binary distinction between pass and fail in the summative judgement of the mentee's competencies. In fact, the grading of lessons had become such a normative practice, key to internal quality assurance processes, that Sadia automatically assumed that the mentor observation would be graded, as highlighted in the observation discourse below:

| | |
|---|---|
| Sadia: | So these are my feedbacks [looks at observation form] [I think it was a good lesson and |
| Hamida: | [smiles] Hey |
| Sadia: | Yes it was more than satisfactory |
| Hamida: | [laughs] |
| Sadia: | In terms of overall grading I think it was a good lesson |

[excerpt: participant observation, November 2019]

An observation awarded a grade three for institutional quality assurance purposes, perceived as 'satisfactory' on the ITT programme, equated to the qualitative judgement "needs improvement" and carried particular consequences. It entailed the entrustment of the aforementioned "teacher and learning coach" to raise the grade profiles of teachers, considered by most members of staff to be a punitive measure. Conscious of the anxiety that teaching staff felt being subjected to an institutional grading system, Sadia sought to provide reassurance and build solidarity in the social space. Since Sadia already had a professional relationship with her mentee as a colleague, she was rather uncomfortable in her assessment role as mentor and wanted to dilute the judgemental elements of the feedback. Nevertheless, consistent with the "public transcript" (Scott, 1990) of institutional talk, the power influence attached to the role of feedback-giver was evident here. Both parties tacitly acknowledged the hierarchical power relationship and their social positioning in the relationship, with the mentor, unconsciously perhaps, keeping the mentee "in the dark" (Phillips, 1999, p.80), only divulging the 'grade' at the end of the feedback session. Hamida's emotive responses and gestures, shown in the excerpt above, however, suggest that she welcomed confirmation of her performance in alignment

with institutional quality assurance procedures, the latter point highlighted in the video elicitation interview when talk of lesson grading was mentioned:

> I think she was trying to prepare me for other graded observations because I know that other people come into your class sometimes and observe you and that will be graded and put down.

The utterance "put down", the written documentation of teaching grades linked to staff appraisal, emphasises the impact of pre-determined practices and practice arrangements on the enactment of mentoring feedback, but also the structural elements which shaped these practice bundles. Here, it was the vertical flow of influence that was particularly significant: how local mentoring practices were situated within wider national discourses and policies. In this vignette, the influence of neoliberal education policies, and their auditing and accountability discourses and practices, were clearly manifested in the organisational quality assurance systems and processes which permeated departmental and interrelated mentoring practices.

The physical space-time dimension was also pertinent to the realisation of the observation practice. Given that mentors attached to the in-service ITT programme were not released from their teaching commitments, arranging regular informal observations with the mentee outside of their regular hours was challenging. In this case, therefore, only formal, mandatory mentor observations were organised. These carried greater salience because of the higher stakes involved: an "unsatisfactory" observation entailed a further observation to bring the mentee into line. In addition, as the mentoring practitioners shared a communal staffroom, for the purpose of

confidentiality an office had to be loaned for the feedback session. A lack of familiarity with the environment coupled with time pressures contributed to more unidirectional feedback practices than are often recommended (Edwards, 1995; Harrison, Lawson and Wortley, 2005) and perhaps originally envisaged by the participants.

In terms of the socio-material dimension of feedback, the observation pro-forma as a mediational tool (Wertsch, 1998) created and hindered possibilities for action. Its highly structured design, with headings and explicit reference to the Professional Standards, facilitated standardisation of the feedback but hampered its free-flowing nature and any opportunities to deviate off-topic. Constrained by time, Sadia wrote up her observations of Hamida's lesson prior to the spoken feedback session and these written comments largely determined the agenda of the discussion: the content of the feedback; the order of topics; the length of feedback and patterns of interaction. The locus of control was, therefore, with the mentor, intimated in this excerpt:

| | |
|---|---|
| Sadia: | That's fine [smiles, looks at form and turns over page] Okay so what I wrote I'm going to read it out kind of read it out for you |
| Hamida: | [nods and smiles] |
| Sadia: | And then you can make some comments if you want |
| Hamida: | That's fine [smiles] |
| Sadia: | [reads from notes] So planning there was evidence of planning |
| Hamida: | [nods] |
| Sadia: | You had selected relevant material qualitative research paper for the students to read and to analyse you had a clear structure of |
| Hamida: | [nods] |
| Sadia: | What you intended the students to achieve through this session [eye contact] even though you didn't have it on the board the objectives on the board you knew |
| Hamida: | [scratches nose] |
| Sadia: | What you wanted to teach the students |
| Hamida: | [nods] |
| Sadia: | And you had that structure in your head as to what the activities were going to be |

[excerpt: participant observation, November 2019]

From Hamida's "paralinguistic behaviour" (Phillips, 1999, p.164), nodding and smiling, it appears that she has accepted the asymmetrical turn-taking "rights", underpinned by the conventions of the feedback practice, or at least an acceptance of the mentor's authority, but this does not necessarily signify wilful compliance. Silence and brief responses to keep the conversation going can also be a form of tacit resistance and self-preservation. Hamida wanted to protect her already precarious situation within the organisation and, thus, chose to act in a way which best served her personal interests. Turning to a critical realist perspective, Hamida's situation highlights the impact of the systemic context on the feedback interactions at the micro-level, how the structural properties of the context enable or constrain

agentic action (Elder-Vass, 2010). In this feedback setting, structural properties such as language, communication, the respective roles of the participants and inherent power relations, rules and resources (Røpke, 2009, p.2491) predisposed the ways in which the practitioners acted. However, individuals are also involved in a delicate balancing act between their subjective and social concerns and can, and will, act intentionally to accomplish personal projects (Archer, 1995, p.198). Hamida, therefore, was not a "passive 'slave' of structural pressures" (Røpke, 2009, p.2491) and exercised her agency in relation to these constraining conditions and her personal concerns.

### Ruksana and Laura (mentor and mentee, pre-service ITT programme, English language, mentoring dyad 2)

Ruksana was a recent graduate of the in-service PGCE programme and was undergoing a probationary period in her employment as English language lecturer at the institution, primarily involved with GCSE resits. She had not voluntarily accepted the role of mentor but due to her tenuous employment status and nudging from her line manager, felt she had no choice but to comply. However, she believed strongly that she was insufficiently prepared for the job, partly because of her lack of teaching experience but also because she had been awarded a "grade three" in her last teaching observation as part of the institution's quality assurance systems. For her, receiving this was a badge of shame, affecting her professional identity and confidence as a mentor, as indicated below:

I feel a bit of a fake because I haven't got a very good grade so then what am I saying to her [the mentee]? The thing is I'm not hiding any of this. It's not like I said I want to do this because I'm so amazing.

In terms of material-economic practice arrangements, briefing visits were organised by the accrediting university at the eleven providers delivering the programme to familiarise the mentors with the "resource-heavy" processes and procedures demanded of them. These sessions were similar to the one-off mentoring preparation training offered by the in-service ITT team. However, support for mentors on the pre-service programme was ostensibly enhanced through access to a virtual learning platform, designed not only as a repository of resources but also as in-house professional development, for mentors to be able to gain formal accreditation by completing a series of assessed tasks. Ruksana, though, questioned how these material arrangements were compatible with the bureaucratic practices of the department and how they supported her with the delivery of feedback on observed lessons. As part of the institutional material-economic arrangements, mentors on the pre-service PCET programme, unlike those on the in-service course, received one hour's remission from their teaching timetable but, as with Sadia, an almost full teaching load constrained possibilities for informal observations of her mentee's teaching. Therefore, Ruksana focused on meeting the formalised programme requirements: undertaking four observations of Laura's teaching over nine months alongside spoken and written feedback.

Despite these sessions being squeezed into the priorities of the workplace, there were opportunities for Laura to obtain informal feedback and guidance through the affordances of the mentoring practitioners' communal space: the teachers' staffroom, as illustrated by Ruksana:

> There are always people to bounce ideas off so if you've got a problem or even if you have a good idea and you want to share it…people are interested.

As in Francisco's study on mentoring (2017), having access to a collaborative space was an enabling factor in the mentee's workplace learning. She had immediate access to resources and support and, from a social-political perspective, she was able to build relationships with other teachers by engaging in a departmental culture of practice, involving a joint enterprise and shared "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions and concepts" (Wenger, 1998, p.82). Over time, she developed a "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990), the "tacit understandings" that shaped particular departmental practices and cultures, as explained by Ruksana:

> The culture is set by the department…like walking out of the staffroom five minutes before the lesson… It's not that anybody says anything but if everybody's walking out at that time you feel like you need to walk out then.

This vignette, therefore, highlights the importance of the social aspects of mentoring feedback practices: how they were enmeshed in the practice arrangements of the institution. Opportunities for ad-hoc, informal feedback on teaching strategies were

perhaps, for Laura, equally as valuable as those formal sit-down feedback moments after a teaching observation. Like Sadia, Ruksana completed the observation form before delivering her spoken feedback and was unwilling to amend any of her comments because of time issues. Each feedback comment had to be mapped to the Professional Standards, resulting in the production of "mechanical" comments and leaving little time to delve into the mentees' "ideas and values about teaching". Therefore, being able to seize those opportunities to share and borrow ideas from staffroom interactions was for the mentee instrumental in promoting informal processes of reflection (Mann and Walsh, 2013). However, Ruksana acknowledged that the departmental community of practice was not quite as collegial and harmonious as it appeared. The collective practice of planning lessons, for example, was both an enabling and constraining factor. On the one hand, the mentee became acquainted with collaborative planning practices such as working from a syllabus, designing activities and selecting resources, but on the other hand, she was clearly on the periphery of the group as only an experienced member of the team would lead the process. Being a novice teacher and new to the institution reinforced the power asymmetries in the community of practice and possibly accentuated any feelings of isolation. Evident also in this dyadic relation was that both mentor and mentee were learning "to be" in their new roles. Whilst the mentee was learning how to engage with others, essential to her "professional lifeworld" (Dall'Alba, 2009), the mentor also had to learn how to manage her teaching and administrative responsibilities with the assessment and feedback elements of the mentoring role: how to provide space for reflection and espouse strategies that complied with the

needs of the learners retaking an exam and, as described by Ruksana, "the all singing and dancing" strategies espoused by the institution.

**Abida and Fatima (mentor and mentee, pre-service ITT programme, Law and Psychology, mentoring dyad 3**)

One material-economic arrangement that enabled the mentoring feedback practice for Fatima was related to its physical and temporal dimension: a continuous and informal process mediated by drop-in observations and immediate rather than delayed feedback:

> I got feedback every other day. It didn't need to be during a meeting or after a formal observation. If she thought I could improve on something, she'd help… If she came into my class, she'd be like: 'That instead of this," which was really helpful.

Fatima found these timely, interventionist strategies in her lessons– a gesture or short verbal interaction – to often be more digestible than focused debrief discussions after a formal lesson observation. She did not consider them to be distracting or a signifier of her mentor's authority; rather she saw them as confidence-boosting and reassuring. Gherardi (2012, p.169) raises an interesting point about *reassurance* not only being an individual expectation, but also a "macro-social" factor. In the FE context, an increasing emphasis on performativity and accountability has shaped the focus and enactment of "reassurance" practices aimed at measuring student outcomes and teacher competencies both in and outside the

classroom. In the following excerpt of a feedback discussion between mentor and mentee, it is clear that Abida is trying to reassure Fatima in relation to meeting external expectations:

| Abida: | It's not graded. It's a chance for you to get some feedback it's the same as we what you did yesterday when you came to observe me. I will take on board feedback you guys can come |
| --- | --- |
| Fatima: | But you're so great you're natural and you're like flowing everywhere I'm just like stiff |
| Abida: | No you weren't honestly. You looked really natural today. You're a natural teacher as well as far as I can tell. There's nothing that you need to be worried about. All we need to do is to hone things a little bit |
| Fatima: | Okay |
| Abida: | You are clearly a teacher already. You are used to this. All we're doing now is formalising it so you don't need to worry okay? So I want you to think about whether you want this to be one of your formal observations. It will mean we will have ticked one off and then we're done because this was a very strong lesson as far as I'm concerned. I think you're just overthinking it |

[excerpt: participant observation, November 2019]

What is noticeable here is the switch between pronoun use (Fairclough, 2003, pp.145-150), from "I" to "you" to "we". The use of the personal pronoun "I" indicates who exercises the most control in the relationship, the main social actor, although the transition to "you" in this utterance: "I want you to think about whether you want this to be one of our formal observations" is a move to include the mentee in the conversation and for her to take some responsibility for the administrative aspects of the role. Finally, the repeated use of the first personal plural pronoun, "we", in reference to the "insider" relationship of mentor and mentee, is a way of constructing

community (*ibid.*, p.149) and creating collusion: a sense of complying with the "tick box" requirements of the programme.

In addition, there is a tacit shared understanding as to why certain topics in the feedback have been prioritised over others. For example, in the following excerpt, the embedding of Equality and Diversity (E and D), and briefly the topic of "British values" is discussed.

| | |
|---|---|
| Abida: | But you used it as an opportunity. Now for next time <u>you</u> know when you do that graph of men and women that actually you need to write down that you're going to embed equality and diversity because you know that it's naturally-occurring which is why is there that difference and you can throw open that question and say is it because men do harder jobs? Just to question them yeah? |
| Fatima: | Okay so when I do things like that = |
| Abida: | = And of course the students'll be in uproar but it's good because we're trying to make them debate discussions |
| Fatima: | Yes so even it's about culture or different social backgrounds? |
| Abida: | Hundred percent |
| Fatima: | That would go under equality and diversity? |
| Abida: | Yes don't force it |
| Fatima: | [laughs] |
| Abida: | I would not inflict that on anybody. Do not shove E and D British values down the students' throats it's not necessary because it will naturally occur |

[excerpt: participant observation, November 2019]

Reflecting on this extract in the video elicitation interview, Abida alluded to an external "surveillance gaze" (Foucault, 1996):

I'm just mindful that when it comes to it, they're going to be asked about these [E and D and British values]…They're not really on any of the mentoring feedback forms and that's me putting my management hat on.

These comments coupled with Fatima's knowing laughter at Abida's utterance, "don't force it" in the excerpt above indicate an implicit reference to shoehorning certain pedagogical priorities into lessons for the benefit of internal and external stakeholders. Mentoring in a culture of performativity raised ethical dilemmas for Abida as she struggled with the conflict of roles: as mentor and ally but also as Head of Department. These tensions shaped the feedback interactions with "instrumental discourses" jostling for primacy with more exploratory ones (Segall, 2002, p.53). Focusing on specific topics to conform to both a programmatic and managerial tick-box agenda left few opportunities for the mentoring practitioners to engage in critical dialogue and explore epistemological questions, to discuss the "why" of pedagogical approaches (*ibid.*), not only the "what".

Nevertheless, despite these discursive and resource constraints, the latter in terms of time and managerial responsibilities, the localised practice architectures did not fully determine the unfolding of events. The practitioners created possibilities to enact feedback practices consistent with but also beyond the extraneous expectations of the mentoring role. Here, individual subjectivities and agency were significant as Abida made a conscious move to transform the practice arrangements in the site, offering an "open door" policy for her mentees and other trainee teachers

in the institution and tailoring her feedback aligned to the mentee's subject specialism and grounded in real-life examples:

> I don't want it to be that statement: 'You could have done more of this'. My question would be, 'Okay, now tell me how?' I have to contextualise things in order to make them real otherwise I don't feel like it's [the feedback] tangible in any way.

As outlined in the previous section, Abida also flipped the feedback narrative and practice, delivering a lesson each week on which the trainee teachers would, in theory, provide honest and constructive feedback. The physical arrangement of these regular meetings facilitated the feedback interactions. The oval table in the centre of Abida's office enabled a group configuration of approximately six people [figure 6.2]
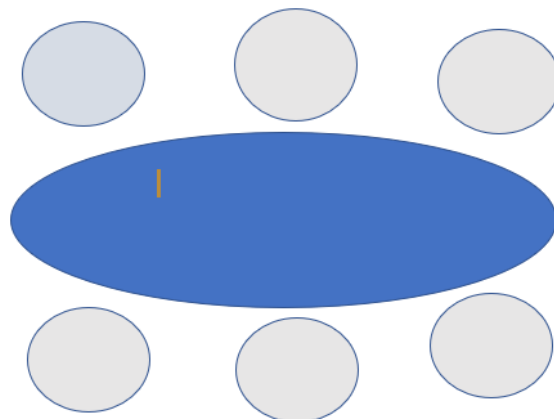
Figure 6.2: the configuration of the feedback space in Abida's office, with chairs placed around an oval table

There was no 'head' of table so mentor and mentees were positioned as equal participants in the debriefing meeting although Abida acknowledged that the space still "belonged" to her. Consciously moving from her desk to the communal table signalled a shift in relationship status: from a "manager" and "mentor" to "facilitator", still in charge of the feedback agenda, but creating a more collaborative pedagogic space for critique and discussion. Fatima perceived these new material-economic and social-political arrangements to be enabling factors in the mentoring relationship albeit more as a means of networking and emotional support than for the provision of critical feedback:

> It's like we're all going towards the same journey. We'd just look at each other and how we were feeling and that relationship, the connection with our mentor… and we could share whatever we wanted.

These practice arrangements did not result in the elimination of power inequalities, however. David, for example, as a mentee on the pre-service ITT programme and new to the institution [mentoring dyad 4], often had to be coaxed into contributing to discussions, particularly as he was perceived to be a "struggling" trainee. Nevertheless, in general, modifying the material-practice arrangements in the site shaped the social-political arrangements in a positive way, enabling discussion and fostering a greater sense of community.

**Katie and Ngozi (mentor and mentee, Health and Social Care, mentoring dyad 9)**

Like Abida, Katie would regularly drop into Ngozi's lessons as an informal means of providing support and an assuring presence. This practice was deliberately "materials-light"; Katie did not formally record anything during these observations to keep the process non-evaluative and non-intimidating. Mentoring discussions were mostly held at the end of the day when she knew the staffroom would be empty. The whiteboard artefact in the physical space afforded opportunities for discussion as Katie was able to model particular behaviours and demonstrate tangible examples to support her feedback. This highlights the interrelationship between the embodiment of the practice and materiality: how the whiteboard tool and human action were mutually entangled in the feedback practice, mediating discussion and creating a space for shared understandings.

Ngozi explained how the temporal-spatial practice arrangements had facilitated her professional growth:

> One-to-one: it was an enabling environment as there were no distractions. She [the mentor] was able to explain and I was able to ask questions. I really appreciated the feedback because it helped me to know where I was.. Everything I've learned has helped me to form my understanding of teaching and to form who I am.

These material-economic practice arrangements, therefore, created pathways for Ngozi's professional socialisation enmeshed within the broader practice architectures of the institution. Over time, with these opportunities for informal learning, unfamiliar pedagogic practices gradually became routinised and embedded

into her existing teaching repertoires. Ngozi's comments also highlight how the epistemological and ontological dimensions of a practice are inextricably connected. She learned to understand teaching and learning by being immersed in the practices of the site ontology with "things and others" (Dall'Alba and Barnacle, 2007, p.6), emphasising the dynamic process of professional growth.

Nevertheless, echoing comments from the previous vignettes, the localised material-economic arrangements, particularly the work pressures to which mentors were subject, considerably shaped the unfolding of mentoring feedback practices. Mentors are often torn between conforming to established rules of behaviour – in this case, the ritualistic nature of providing feedback with its pre-determined interactional procedures and power differentials – and providing mentees with opportunities to engage in genuine reflection processes and, in doing so, exercise their individual agencies. For example, in the following excerpt, Katie appears conflicted between initiating spaces for dialogue and pushing her, and possibly, indirectly, the institutional or programmatic agenda:

> Katie:  Did you think you modelled within the lesson this time?
>
> Ngozi:  Well, we did some of the modelling yesterday like getting them prepared for what they're going to talk [about
>
> Katies            [But within this lesson so not what you did yesterday. What did you do within this session? Did you feel that you modelled in this session or do you feel that maybe you can model a little bit more in your session?
>
> Ngozi:  Okay maybe I could model a little bit more.
>
> Katie:  So for example the reason why I say that is because you gave an introduction which is great. You gave an introduction. However, there was a point in time where they were like I didn't know I had to do that – what are we doing? And you had to go round and reorganise what was great which moves onto your one before – devise appropriate solutions so when you saw some people who aren't understanding, some people down here who are understanding and it's a big group and you said okay let me stop. I'm going to go back down to the front of the classroom and I'm going to reiterate my instructions again so I think you managed well-devised, appropriate solution there but to avoid that happening in the future, model what you want them to do so show them exactly how you want them to run the discussion even if you get three people and say this person will do this, this person will do this and this person will do this. That's in hindsight obviously so for the next session, we can think about where the elements that we can look at modelling yeah? So this one we can push this target point again for your next observation and try modelling again because I believe you worked really well on your top two targets for this observation.

[excerpt: participant observation, December 2020]

Katie's initial question, "Did you think you modelled within this lesson this time?" indicates a tentative move towards approaching a delicate topic. Ngozi's comment is interrupted and Katie fosters agreement through an essentially rhetorical question: "do you feel that maybe you can model a little bit more in your session?" albeit one replete with hedging devices: "do you think", "maybe", "could" and "a little bit" to diminish its level of impact. Ngozi's response, suggests mimetic compliance, superficially "playing the game". It is easier to fall in with Katie's way of thinking, knowing that a more detailed explanation is likely to follow. Katie continues to be uneasy with the authoritative role bestowed on her as she shifts between providing

praise and direction… "what was *great* which moves onto your one before" and "*devise* appropriate solutions", with this lengthy monologic turn culminating in reference to Ngozi's personal targets.

This snippet of the micro-interactions between mentor and mentee typified the relational dynamics observed in this study. Phatic talk was kept to a minimum, possibly because both parties were conscious of self- and external surveillance, of not doing what was expected: engaging in purposeful interactions about teaching and learning in a time pressurised environment. From a site ontological perspective, the excerpt also underlines the isolationist practice arrangements and conditions under which the mentors worked. Mentoring feedback practices, despite their interrelationship with other sets of practices in the institution, were hindered by a lack of arrangements designed to support their enactment: no training in the cultural-discursive dimensions of feedback to facilitate a shared understanding of their purpose and practice; no formalised provision of time and space; and the perpetuation of mentoring as a dyadic relationship. In tacitly promoting mentoring as a set of "discrete and disconnected events" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a, p.1049), it only exacerbated a broader discourse and culture of professional isolation (A'vila de Lima, 2003) within the institution.

**Summary and discussion of the findings**

As a theoretical and analytical resource, the theory of practice architectures helped to illuminate the site-based processes, arrangements and artefacts which enabled and constrained the enactment of mentoring feedback on the pre- and in-service ITT programmes. Building on the questions posed in table 3.2, a summary of the main findings which emerged from the data is presented in table 6.2.

| Intersubjective space | Practice architectures | Enabling and constraining processes, arrangements and artefacts on the pre-service ITT programme | Enabling and constraining processes, arrangements and artefacts on the in-service ITT programme |
|---|---|---|---|
| Semantic (via the medium of language: **language associated with feedback: "constructive", "developmental", "non-threatening"; numerical grading associated with the provision of feedback; language of the Professional Standards; "best practice" discourse; mentor feedback perceived differently from tutor feedback** | Through cultural-discursive arrangements | **Policy discourse:** mentor as subject specialist; conflict between developmental and assessment role<br>**Programme handbook:** embedding of mentoring role in documentation: espoused triadic relationship; discourse of support and collaboration<br>**Institutional discourse:** 'mentor' and 'mentee' rarely used term; overlapping institutional role<br>**Discourses of Professional Standards, neoliberal discourses (efficiency, performativity, accountability); Ofsted; best practice**<br>**Mentoring as an entitlement:** guaranteed mentor and placement for duration of the programme | **Policy discourse:** mentor as subject specialist; conflict between developmental and assessment role<br>**Mentoring handbook:** role and responsibilities of mentor provided in the handbook: mentoring role seen as separate from tutoring role<br>**Institutional discourse:** 'mentor' and 'mentee' rarely used term; overlapping institutional role<br>**Discourses of Professional Standards, neoliberal discourses (efficiency, performativity, accountability, targets) and Ofsted; best practice**<br>**Mentoring as an entitlement but voluntary** |
| Physical space-time/via the medium of activity and work:<br>**reading lesson plans and group profiles; observing lessons; mapping feedback comments to the Professional Standards; discussing the feedback; arranging tutorials and progress reviews; target setting; completion of portfolios (mentees)** | Through material-economic arrangements | **Mentoring training:** one briefing session and access to the accrediting institution's VLE; opportunity to obtain credits<br>**Temporal dimension:** one-hour remission from teaching responsibilities; primarily arrangement of formal observations (**four in a nine-month period**) but some ad-hoc observations and non-interventionist feedback; tripartite reviews<br>**Spatial dimension:** mentors' office as a site for feedback (dyads 3 and 4: mentor's office as a site for collaborative mentoring meetings); borrowing of other spaces if colleagues in a communal staffroom; positioning of chairs and tables for feedback interactions<br>**Security of placement:** guaranteed<br>**Artefacts:** observation pro-forma (each comment mapped to the Professional Standards); artefacts in the site (books, whiteboard, computers, etc.)<br>**Observation and feedback practices:** by mentors; ITT tutors and quality assurance practitioners (graded observations) | **Mentoring training:** one session (from March 2020- moved to online session)<br>**Temporal aspects:** no remission from teaching responsibilities; primarily arrangement of formal observations (**four over a two-year period**) but some ad-hoc observations and non-interventionist feedback<br>**Spatial dimension:** mentors' office as a site for feedback; borrowing of other spaces if colleagues in a communal staffroom; positioning of chairs and tables for feedback interactions<br>**Security of placement:** precarious unless permanent staff member<br>**Artefacts:** observaiton pro-forma; artefacts in the site (books, whiteboard, computers, etc.)<br>**Observation and feedback practices:** by mentors; ITT tutors and quality assurance practitioners (graded observations) |
| Social (via the medium of power and solidarity): **induction arrangements: opportunities for team teaching and peer observations; dyadic interactions** | Through social-political arrangements | **Mentors:** overlapping, sometimes conflict of roles; liaison with ITT staff<br>**Mentees:** generally novice teachers and new to the institution<br>**Relationships with others:** colleagues, students, other trainee teachers, teacher trainers and programme leaders; varying dimensions of power and solidarity | **Mentors:** overlapping, sometimes conflict of roles<br>**Mentees** generally new to teaching but experience of the institution in another role (e.g. as student: familiarity seen as enablng & constraining)<br>**Relationships with others:** colleagues, students, other trainee teachers, teaacher trainers and programme leaders; other practitioners in the institution: varying dimensions of power and solidarity |
| **Practice landscape:** | Mentoring largely not part of the insitutional discourse, enmeshed in departmental sets of practices; | | |
| **Practice traditions:** | Neoliberal intervention discourses and practices: overlapping roles of mentor as support, subject specialist and assessor | | |

Table 6.2: a summary of the practice architectures which enabled and constrained the mentoring feedback practice on the pre-service and in-service initial teacher training programmes

The table compares the influence of the practice architectures at primarily a horizontal level of analysis (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016), whether institutional arrangements similarly facilitated or impeded the "sayings", "doings" and "relatings" of feedback practices on both ITT programmes. Vertical and transversal elements of comparison are also included, evident in the impact of practice traditions, discursive repertoires and the local landscape. What was not possible to capture in the table, however, was the influence of agentic forces on the practice: how some mentoring practitioners maintained a semblance of unity to meet the programmatic requirements or how discretion was exercised at the local level.

Another challenge was categorising the findings from the data into three neat pillars for empirical analysis, into cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements which constitute particular practice architectures of a site. As is clear from the vignettes in this section, multiple sets of practices overlapped, opening up avenues of possibility and constraint and, thus, bundles of practice arrangements could conceivably fall into one or more of the three categories. As an example, the practice of graded observations in the institution was clearly entangled in initial teacher training processes. It had a powerful, and potentially anxiety-inducing, effect on the trainee teachers as they were, irrespective of their pre- or in-service and hourly-paid or permanent status in the organisation, eligible for observation by the Quality team. Is then the graded observation practice best categorised as a cultural-discursive arrangement as it influenced the language used in the feedback

conversations and on the written reports? Or is it more of a material-economic arrangement as mentors on the pre-service programme were required to undertake joint observations with members of the Quality team for standardisation purposes? Or, finally, is it a social-political arrangement since a feeling of omnipresent surveillance in the site shaped the way the participants positioned themselves in the dyadic relationship? Mahon and Galloway (2017, p.187) argue that, in reality, it is impossible to separate these "analytical categories" as "they are interpenetrating and exist simultaneously; we do not encounter them independently". However, whilst acknowledging the limitations of a table to display the findings, providing broader categorisations of predominant practice arrangements facilitated a holistic understanding of what sustainable conditions and orchestration of practice architectures are needed for mentoring to flourish. Ultimately, the pre-defined categories complemented the more dynamic narrative of the mentoring participants' lived experiences of the feedback process, provided by the vignettes. The most salient practice architectures which impacted on mentoring feedback are highlighted below.

Firstly, limited access to suitable training was one practice arrangement common to mentoring provision on both ITT programmes. The training sessions were concerned primarily with initiation into administrative mentoring practices and although the pre-service mentors were able to resource materials from an external virtual learning environment, there was little incentivisation and time in their busy schedules to do so. The complexities of

engaging in feedback with a trainee teacher and its associated practices: promoting reflection; negotiating targets and co-constructing meaning were only touched upon, perhaps because there was a given assumption that mentors already possessed the requisite dispositions to handle these challenges. Thus, both parties relied on discursive constructions and historically-constituted practices of feedback entangled in the practice traditions and architectures of the site. As found in other research studies on mentoring in ITT (Cunningham, 2007; Francisco, 2017; Hobson and Maxwell, 2020), a lack of time for the practice, with little or no remission provided from teaching timetables, was a dominant source of tension. This arrangement often resulted in formal mandatory observations and feedback being crammed into the participants' heavy workloads.

One enabling factor was the mentor's office as the site of practice as it provided a quieter, confidential space for feedback. Co-location in a communal staffroom, on the other hand, offered other affordances: continual guidance, collaboration and reciprocity, potentially building social cohesion and providing an insight and socialisation into localised cultures and practices. These enabling material-economic arrangements overlapped with the social-political dimension of mentoring. Only those in higher positions had their own office space and a line manager acting as mentor, as argued by Cullimore and Simmons (2010), is problematic if the developmental and supervisory aspects of the role are conflated. Mentees on the in-service ITT programme, those with only a few hours' teaching per week, often found it challenging to

form relationships with their mentor and colleagues. Trainee teachers on voluntary placements, provided with a lanyard denoting their "visitor" status and with often no access to office and classroom keys, library resources or a work email address, felt a greater sense of social and professional isolation, possibly colouring their perceptions of teaching, further education and the institution as a whole.

In terms of the interrelationship between the socio-material arrangements and the feedback practice, therefore, recurring themes emerged: the significance of geographical and social space; temporal dimensions including the regularity of observations and feedback opportunities and the time reserved for the spoken discussions; and access to suitable training. The dynamic interplay of practice arrangements and the materiality and enactment of artefacts in the feedback interactions was also significant, particularly regarding the observation pro-forma. Its design had been influenced by the historical policy context, with the 2014 Professional Standards interwoven into each labelled section of the form. This shaped the practitioners' mediated action - the focus, quantity and nature of their written comments - which was, in turn, shaped by the institutional practice arrangements: a lack of time allocated for the practice. In addition, the Professional Standards carried particular "codes of signification" (Trowler, 2019) for the mentors, representing a "sterile" tick-box exercise (Mohammad, mentor, dyad 10) or described as "prescriptive", "unhelpful" and "judgemental" (Ruksana, mentor, dyad 2) and "unmemorable" (Abida, mentor, dyads 3 and 4). For mentees, generally, they

engendered a less evocative image of professional practice as they were considered to be part and parcel of the ITT process. Whether the Professional Standards were discussed or circulated in the wider practice landscape of the institution was uncertain but unlikely, highlighting the often-vast disparity between policy rhetoric and the situated enactment of practices.

## How mentoring feedback practices unfold during the teacher development programmes

**Joanne, Zain and Alisha (Mathematics, mentoring dyad 6]**

In the face-to-face video observations, the social and discursive traditions of feedback practices were evident in how the participants positioned themselves in the relationship and in the structure of the spoken feedback, largely following a "script": a short bout of mentee reflection; "constructive" comments sandwiched between positive feedback; a summary of the feedback, followed by the setting of targets. Feedback was generally initiated by means of an opening question (Crasborn *et al.*, 2010; Korthagen, 2004), similar to "How did you feel the lesson went?" to tap into the mentee's reflective processes and make them visible. Whether these initial spoken reflections went beyond the superficial often depended on the practitioners' dispositions and time available. Joanne, for example, was an experienced mentor and committed to what she called an "eliciting approach" to feedback,

consciously holding back on her comments until the mentee had a chance to voice her opinions of the observed lesson.  In the following excerpt from a feedback discussion with her mentee, undertaken at the beginning of the mentoring relationship, Joanne displays strategies associated with developmental models of mentoring feedback (Manning and Hobson, 2017) through her body language, the use of "wait time" and probing questions to facilitate reflection:

| Joanne: | So first of all how do you think it went? What's your own reflection on the lesson? |
|---|---|
| Alisha: | Maybe it was fine |
| Joanne: | It was fine OK what was fine about it? |
| Alisha: | Like my objectives were clear |
| Joanne: | [nods} |
| Alisha: | They understood everything from the lesson |
| Joanne: | [nods] |
| Alisha: | But one thing I should have paid more tough questions to them |
| Joanne: | What do you mean by more tough questions? |
| Alisha: | I think they understood but next time it could be more tougher more deep |

[excerpt: participant observation, November 2019]

However, Alisha, the mentee, seems less sure of how to position herself in the discourse as she negotiates multiple teacher subjectivities in the communicative space and professional context, wrestling with asserting her confidence as an emerging teacher and respecting the boundaries of the inherent power relations in the site. In the feedback, Alisha responds to her mentor's paralinguistic response to elaborate on her reflections of the lesson,

but seeks assurance throughout, possibly reluctant to portray her teaching in a negative light for fear of losing her voluntary placement. This again highlights the existence of power dynamics beyond the mentoring dyad (Colley, 2003), how the requirements and expectations established by the programme, institution and department all have a bearing on the unfolding of practices.

Joanne attributed these initially reticent interactions in the feedback sessions to Alisha's dispositions: "She takes things on board but she's not very vociferous", but also acknowledged the impact of her mentee's personal responsibilities and the institutional practice arrangements. Alisha's planning practices, for example, were predominantly silo-based, as she only came into the college to teach one class per week, shared with her mentor. This resulted in a fragmented planning process as she was unsure what had been covered by her mentor previously and was, thus, often wrong-footed in her lessons. Opportunities to form strong ties with her mentor and colleagues were also minimal.

Alert to Alisha's possible feelings of professional isolation, Joanne actively sought to modify these arrangements to enable convergence of collective departmental practices to support Alisha's "initiation" into the institution. These entailed organising regular "catch-up" meetings to ensure more coherent planning processes; invitations to departmental meetings, previously a closed-off arrangement for student teachers on a voluntary placement; and access to

an online repository of subject-specific resources. Although these arrangements did not significantly alter the dynamics of the relationship, juxtaposed with Alisha's continual participation in a complex web of relationships and practices and a developing self-confidence and understanding of the practice landscape, they created possibilities for some changes in the sayings, doings and relatings of the practice. There was no challenge to the mentor's authority in the feedback sessions but Alisha was more inclined to talk about and justify her strategies in the lesson, as indicated in the excerpt below from the second participation observation, undertaken four months later:

| Alisha: | [nods] It was very much confident not not only with the Pythagoras theorem but with the solving of the squares. They know the difference between the squares |
| --- | --- |
| Joanne: | [nods] |
| Alisha: | Square roots everything |
| Joanne: | [nods] Yeah yeah |
| Alisha: | Not the [?] I thought maybe they'll get confused with the squares and the square roots |
| Joanne: | Okay yeah [beckons RA to continue] |
| Alisha: | But they were very confident of what to solve it |
| Joanne: | [hand in front of mouth] Yeah yeah |
| Alisha: | Because sometimes and especially [points fingers or right hand upwards] when the longest side is hypothenuse generally we calculate the hypothenuse |
| Joanne: | [nods] |
| Alisha: | But sometimes if the other side is given they'll be confused or the formula [fingers of right hand outstretched] is like this for we have to substitute but once I showed them they were able to [solve |
| Joanne: | [yes they were able to follow this yeah yeah= |
| Alisha: | =yeah yeah |

[excerpt: participation observation, March 2020]

Although Alisha still requires confirmation and speaks in short turns, she is more confident in her spoken delivery, difficult to capture via the written word, but evident in her gesticulation and prosodic features of speech. Solidarity is consolidated by Joanne's verbal and non-verbal ratification of Alisha's contributions and the use of repetition not only strengthens cohesive ties within the discourse (*"squares", "hypothenuse", "solve", "sometimes"*) but also between the participants themselves (*"yeah yeah"*) (Tannen, 2007).

Over time, therefore, the relationship evolved "*in* and *by* practices" (Kemmis and Grootenboer, 2008, p.55) and by Joanne's active engagement in critical praxis, her deliberate efforts to enact changes in the mentoring arrangements within the constraining conditions of the institution which, in turn, shaped the unfolding of feedback practices and Alisha's individual subjectivities. These processes were unlikely to be devoid of tension and power struggle, but they created different conditions of possibility (Mahon *et al.*, 2017) for the enactment of feedback practices, in this case, a nuanced shift towards a more dialogic process.

From March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic brought unprecedented changes and for Alisha, this resulted in no teaching for six months and no mentoring support. With the allocation of a new mentor in September 2020, both parties had to adjust to the simultaneous challenges of teaching and mentoring online, resulting in the creation of new practices and arrangements. Only informal virtual observations of Alisha's teaching were undertaken followed by

short bouts of feedback. Thus, feedback practices were reproduced in response to an unfamiliar and constantly shifting teaching and learning environment, entailing ontological changes in teaching and learning practices and in the relationships between teacher and students and mentor and mentee. These new practice architectures resulted in a merging of existing and new discourses such as managing "differentiation online", a recurring theme in Alisha's teaching, and reference to terminology such as "synchronous and asynchronous" ,"breakout rooms" and "digital literacy" with which Alisha gradually became familiar. New ways of monitoring learners' virtual presence, in a market-driven context, and the overlapping social-political dimensions were also discussed: how to build online learner communities and continue to promote "active learning" practices. For Alisha, a trainee teacher on a voluntary placement, participating in "virtual" communities of practice with other members of staff was minimal, however, and for a five-month period, Alisha felt as if she had reverted to square one, feeling an acute sense of isolation and a yearning for the pre-pandemic face-to-face teaching environment.

## Petra, Helena, Albena and Marek (ESOL, in-service ITT mentoring dyad 14)

Marek, an ESOL teacher, was assigned three mentors during the in-service ITT programme. All, like him, were of central European nationality and he

perceived this unintentional social-political arrangement to be a positive aspect in how the interlocutors encountered one another in the semantic space of feedback, not only in the language used but in *how* messages were relayed. Different mentors unsurprisingly resulted in some feedback inconsistencies but Marek commented on their reciprocal cultural empathy; he appreciated his mentors' straightforward approach to feedback:

> They were very direct which I like because we have the same kind of mental settings. In Britain, they tell you a lot of words in front [laughs]. It's a different approach but sometimes it's confusing because you don't know what that person really <u>meant</u> to say.

In respect of material-economic arrangements, Marek's paid placement entailed teaching two evenings per week. In juggling two jobs and the demands of the ITT programme, he had very little contact with his mentors other than through the arrangements of formalised observations and, therefore, occurrences of serendipitous, informal learning were scarce. Although he considered all his mentors to have supportive dispositions, orchestrating dyadic meetings was difficult and his focus in the placement became primarily one of survival: "I'm here for two days so I just try to do my best, not get kicked out." Disparate and time-consuming practices rendered support difficult and Marek doubted whether his professional development had been particularly "transformational":

II moved from my initial flaws to the next flaws, something more systemic, more fundamental to change.

What is interesting in the quote above is the deficit-based language, reinforcing the concept that mentoring feedback in ITT is often conceived as a quick fix strategy rather than as a long-term, developmental and iterative process. This view also shapes the consistently prescriptive and evaluative nature of feedback, particularly in its written form, as highlighted below in the language of imperatives (*Make sure; try to avoid; check*) in each of Marek's mentoring reports at different stages of the programme:

In the future, **make sure** that all students have somebody to work with. [mentoring report 1]

**Make sure** that the language of the objectives displayed to students is simplified, so students can understand what they are going to learn during the lesson and what they are going to achieve. [mentoring report 2]

**Try** to avoid using difficult grammatical definitions, especially with lower level students of English. [mentoring report 3]

**Always check** if students understand the instruction by asking concept questions and eliciting one or two examples from students. [mentoring report 4]

[examples of evaluative language in Marek's written mentoring reports]

Such direction in the feedback links to Schatzki's (2002, p.79) description of "rules" in a practice as "explicit formulations, principles, precepts, and instructions that enjoin, direct, or remonstrate people to perform certain actions". Although the mentoring feedback in terms of its structure and level of direction followed a similar trajectory over the ITT programme, Marek became more attuned to normative, institutional feedback discourses: not only explicit

forms of direction but implicit messages which, despite his perceived cultural connectivity with his mentors, he still had to learn how to decipher. On his mentoring map, he described these as "invisible messages", decoding them as:

> "missed opportunity" = "a good practice you should have done"; "if I were you" = "it's better to do it my [observer's] way" and "it was good, but…" = "it wasn't very good".

Over time, certain expressions and ideas about teaching and learning flowed into the mentoring practitioners' linguistic repertoires, shared with Marek in the semantic space of feedback, and then legitimised in departmental practices. This ongoing process of "linguistic acclimatisation" helped Marek to prepare for other observation practices in the institution, and, thus, enabled him to maintain his precarious employment status.

**Maryam, Lisa and Anna (Beauty Therapy, in-service ITT mentoring dyad 13)**

Anna was the only trainee teacher in this study to leave the institution because of the relationship with her first mentor. For her, the material-economic arrangements of the voluntary teaching placement constrained her professional growth. She did not have responsibility for her own class and commented how her mentor's co-presence in the site of teaching practice

caused her anxiety. She felt under constant scrutiny and evaluation, and, given the directness and prescriptivism of the feedback, was loath to engage in any risk-taking in her teaching, all of which affected her self-esteem:

> I think where she's been in a position for so many years, where she's had control of her lessons, to then pass them over to someone, I don't think she could relinquish control. I think that had quite a direct hit on my self-confidence as a teacher.

However, Maryam, the mentor, perceived the mentoring relationship differently, one which was based on "give and take" and an approach to feedback which centred on the mentee's learning:

> Instead of telling her from my side – "you could have done this better," I actually probed her so, "What do you think? Is there a better way of doing this?"

These contradictory interpretations and expectations of mentoring provision, particularly regarding the feedback role, are attributable to a number of possible interconnected factors: different professional and pedagogical expectations of the relationship, not formalised in induction processes; a lack of familiarity with each other's values, dispositions and working practices; and, more broadly, different ideas of how mentoring should be situated within the existing arrangements and practices of the organisation. As discussed previously, the construction of mentoring as a valued institutional resource

was not facilitated by organisational channels of communication or reified in institutional policies: there was no incentivisation scheme for mentors on the in-service ITT programme, and the realisation of mentoring was left largely to the discretion of individual departments and practitioners.

For Anna, mentoring in its institutional embodiment within the college was not a supportive mechanism and, therefore, she sourced a teaching placement at a different organisation. The practice arrangements at the new institution, which prefigured the teaching and mentoring practices, were seen as significantly more enabling than in the previous locale, particularly in terms of supporting her emotional well-being and opening doors to professional networks and development opportunities. In the feedback sessions, she was encouraged to reflect on her "mistakes" and explore new pedagogical approaches independently and with others. She felt buoyed by these new interlocking practices and arrangements: ongoing support from her mentor; access to other practitioners' knowledge and resources and socialisation into the department. Although her placement was still voluntary, the provision of a "staff badge" gave her greater credence in the eyes of her students and also helped to bolster her self-confidence. Her original conceptualisation of mentoring as a bilateral relationship expanded to include a "mosaic of mentors", providing vertical, horizontal, informal and formal means of support (Davis, 2016):

They're building my confidence and I'm learning from my colleagues, how they deal with things. I feel now that I don't have one mentor in the college. I feel like they're all hugging me.

Connected to these enabling social-political arrangements – a space of solidarity and a constellation of professional networks – were the material-economic arrangements relating to the temporal and spatial components of the feedback practice. Both formal and informal observations were undertaken on a regular basis; the mentor would often observe silently from the back of the classroom but Anna saw this as an additional means of support, not a monitoring mechanism. Feedback was also relatively informal, sometimes over coffee or in the mentor's office. Previously, Anna had felt the need to ask for feedback rather than it being embedded into the observation process.

In following Anna's mentoring journey across time and space, it was possible to see how feedback practices travelled from one site to another, how they intersected with existing practices and arrangements. As observation and feedback practices are shaped by education practice traditions, processes of enactment were likely to share some similarities. However, they unfolded differently amongst the existing site-based practice architectures and practices, involving variations in how they were understood and discussed, the activities involved and how people related to each other. In the second site of practice, collaboration was perceived as central to staff professional

development, embedded in a range of working practices, from departmental

meetings, peer observations and sharing of resources. Flatter hierarchical

relationships in the department also strengthened staff solidarity and, for

Anna, influenced her own relationships with students. Thus, it was the

dynamic interrelationship between the sayings, doings and relatings of

mentoring feedback practices, how these co-ordinated and converged with

other departmental practices and arrangements, which left a considerable

imprint on Anna's ongoing professional trajectory.


## Usman and Albert (Mathematics, pre-service ITT mentoring dyad 1)

The nine-month duration of the pre-service ITT programme resulted in a rapid

process of socialisation for trainee, Albert, into the teaching profession and

the norms, routines and discourses of the mathematics departmental culture,

primarily through shadowing and team-teaching. By participating in these

practices, it was hoped that any historical notions of "what teachers do"

(Eraut, 2000, p.122) would be superseded by new, contextual

understandings. Albert's personal constraints meant that all his classes were

timetabled on the same day and, combined with the increasing intensification

of academic work on the pre-service ITT programme, he struggled to adapt to

the complex, heterogeneous nature of FE. Usman, Albert's mentor, was Head

of Department, a role which entailed frequent meetings on both institutional

sites and these physical-space time constraints resulted in no regular, official

time slot reserved for mentoring. When Usman managed to catch up with Albert, the mentoring process was initially more competency-driven than developmental-focused, aimed at almost cleansing the mentee of his previous experiences and constructs of teaching mathematics, from a transmission approach to one centred on "mastery teaching and learning" and adopted universally within the mathematics department. Thus, when Albert "entered the project" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2017, p.52) of teaching mathematics in his pre-arranged placement, he was not only being exposed to generic teaching and learning principles but being directed to subject-specific language and activities such as "bar modelling" and different ways of relating to students, with the teacher positioned as facilitator rather than imparter of knowledge.

Although Albert had undergone an extensive period of shadowing experienced teachers, Usman believed there was a persistent disconnect between what his mentee had observed and what he was doing in his lessons. Compounded by the material-economic practice arrangements in the site and clashing personal and professional schedules, Albert struggled to adapt to the unfamiliar pedagogical approaches he was explicitly expected to adopt in his teaching. The feedback sessions became more directive as the mentee's accelerated initiation into the mathematical teaching practices did not produce the desired impact. Usman provided an example of when such interventions were necessary from his point of view:

There were times when I had to pull him aside and say, "Look. You're going to have to re-plan this entire lesson. The fact that you're showing me on a Tuesday and you're going to teach it on a Wednesday… that now becomes your issue.

Feedback practices unfolded alongside Albert's ongoing participation in new teaching practices. Although his "progress" was perceived as slow by the mentor and tutors on the ITT programme, Usman was conscious that this qualitative measurement of growth was a relative and subjective judgement: his mentee was new to teaching and had stepped into an alien and challenging environment which had necessitated substantial changes to his existing practices, values and dispositions. Although Albert had made tentative steps in the 'right' direction, Usman did not feel Albert was ready to take on the challenges of teaching in FE. Ultimately, he believed that the practice architectures of the pre-service ITT programme were instrumental in hindering Albert's progress, particularly its duration. A longer course would have provided him with more "top-down" direction rather than an accelerated situated apprenticeship of mentoring, in which the acquisition of implicit knowledge was primary, concluding:

You need a minimum of 18 months and you don't get that with the 9 to 10-month framework of a full-time programme. You need to see what the seasons look like as they vary. If you've only had one experience of what autumn is, you'll never know what to compare it to.

**Summary and discussion of the findings**

These short vignettes demonstrate how feedback practices do not operate in isolation from the conduct of other practices, not only those related to mentoring but also how they co-exist and are dependent on multiple practices operating simultaneously in the institution. Thus, the way feedback practices unfold in language in the dimension of semantic space; in activities and action in physical space-time; and between people and objects in the social space (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b) involves a dialectical relationship between organisational practices and mediating conditions. Take as an example, the co-ordination and scheduling of mentoring feedback, dependent on, what Shove *et al.,* (2012, p.86) call the "spatial and temporal aspects of inter-practice coordination." Securing a confidential classroom or office space for feedback depends on whether it is being used for teaching practices or staff activity. Arranging time to meet depends on the mentoring participants' teaching timetables, managerial and administrative responsibilities, tutorials with students, and co-location and/or co-presence depending on the medium of delivery. Bundles of feedback practices interlink and overlap with other bundles of practices, sometimes in alignment, sometimes in competition, dependent on power positions, values and contextual priorities.

In this study, mentoring feedback practices had to vie for position with teaching, leadership and administrative practices in the organisation. The main issue was not the quantity of time needed for feedback, on average a twenty-minute spoken discussion, but how this fitted into a bundle of interrelated time-consuming practices. The scheduling of feedback was dependent on the arrangement of a one-hour teaching observation, sometimes involving travel to a different site; time to read through the trainee's lesson plan and other mentoring documentation; and time to write up the observation report, in turn, dependent on material arrangements such as access to a laptop and practice "know-how" such as typing speed. Thus, how mentoring feedback practices evolved depended on their compatibility with a multiplicity of other factors, particularly regarding the stability of organisational routines, practices and arrangements. For the mentoring dyads who were hindered by rigid, institutional schedules, those with fixed timetables or subject to persistent managerial demands and expectations, the arrangement of teaching observations and, therefore feedback practices, were pushed to the back burner until the mandatory formal observations could be squeezed in. Mentees' individual overlapping social and temporal constraints also presented difficulties for the co-ordination of feedback practices. Southerton (2003, p.14) refers to these challenges as the "incompatibility between personal schedules within social networks" and, here, the "imposition of personal routines" (*ibid.*) considerably shaped the dynamics of mentoring feedback practices.

In addition, geographical proximity was a determining factor that affected the unfolding of feedback practices in the mentoring dyad. For mentees teaching in close proximity to their mentor, opportunities for informal feedback were common, with the mentor regularly looking in on the mentee to provide support and guidance and, implicitly, monitor performance. This also shaped the content, style and prescriptivism of the feedback: the more confidence the mentor, and indirectly the institution, had in the mentee's teaching ability, the "freer" the feedback. However, less direction in the feedback was a double-edged sword for some of the participants: an opportunity to move away from discussions centred on, for example, lesson planning and "Bloom's taxonomy" (Claudette, dyad 12) were welcomed but they felt that some aspects such as behaviour management were often taken as given only to be raised as areas for development in other post-observation feedback sessions. The direction of the feedback also depended on contextual concerns, the extent to how quickly mentees were required to assimilate into the departmental culture and its socially-constructed norms, assumptions and expectations, more significant perhaps for those on the shorter pre-service ITT programme. In addition, geographically proximity did not necessarily equate to social proximity. Mentees, particularly those on voluntary placements on the in-service programme, conscious of the mentors' workload, were often reluctant to approach them for support. Through their interactions with other practitioners, they formed different relationships in which they could receive informal guidance and feedback on their teaching, including from

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peers, work colleagues, senior management and former trainee teachers. Thus, formal feedback practices also connected with informal feedback practices in the "timespace of human activity" (Schatzki, 2010).

Finally, feedback practices unfolded in response to externalities, outside the immediate control of the mentoring practitioners in response to events in the socio-political context. The Covid-19 pandemic had a sizeable impact on the enactment of mentoring in the institution. Trainee teachers on the pre-service PGCE and second year in-service ITT programme were fast-tracked to success, thus negating the need for mentors. For those on the first year of the in-service ITT course, mentoring was implicitly suspended, deprioritised as the pandemic prompted new working practices in the institution. While the mentoring practitioners navigated this uncertain and turbulent landscape, new educational possibilities were created, not without conflict. For some mentees such as Moyin (dyad 7), communication with her mentor virtually ceased and she was forced to seek guidance on digital pedagogy and artefacts from elsewhere. For others, modifications to existing feedback practices resulted in revised "sayings, doings and relatings", including discursive shifts in online feedback conversations; a re-focusing of activities, with informal teaching observations prioritised over formal ones; and changed socio-political relationships, with possibly reduced power differentials as both mentor and mentee adjusted to the world of online teaching.

Mentoring feedback was, thus, not a static, decontextualised practice; rather it evolved amidst changes in social conditions and through a flow of institutional practices interlinked ecologically, with varying degrees of strength. Cognisant of how practices at the local level are closely connected, both horizontally in "ecologies of practices" and shaped vertically by macro-social structural factors, the researcher is better positioned to propose "appropriate critical action to take to avoid negative consequences and create alternative futures" (Mahon and Galloway, 2017, pp. 196-197) for mentoring provision in ITT. These suggestions are outlined in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

# CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS

## Overview

> I think in any kind of teacher training provision, mentoring is always
> going to be potentially the weakest link. You control lots of other
> elements and components of the programme but the quality of the
> mentoring is one of the trickiest things (pre-service ITT programme
> leader, personal correspondence 2020).

The opening quote consolidates the findings of this study, highlighting the oft-underestimated complexity of the realisation of mentoring - socially, spatially and temporally- within programmatic and institutional architectures and in the turbulent policy landscape of FE. Shaped by neoliberal policy agendas, meeting institutional and programme objectives is largely prioritised over the nature of the work involved (Davies, 2003) and mentoring is frequently left to flounder in relative isolation, dependent on the goodwill of practitioners and their manoeuvring and juggling of processes and events.

In this final chapter, the research questions are revisited and the implications of the findings from the study for mentoring feedback provision are provided. The theoretical and methodological contributions of the research are also discussed along with the limitations of the study and possible areas for future research.

## Revisiting the research questions

The first research question was concerned with how the mentoring practitioners conceptualised their roles and relationships as they participated in feedback practices in the actualities of the local, institutional context. These conceptualisations were shaped by practice traditions, personal biographies and prototypes of mentoring and feedback in ITT, and the participants' particular ways of relating with others in social space. These experiences developed their sense-making of the practice: of the institutional practice landscape and the wider policy context of FE; "of themselves" and "of others in it" (Dreier, 2009, p.197). The mentors' conceptualisations and enactments, in particular, were shaped by contextual necessities, for example for the mentee to "learn the ropes" in the department and institution as quickly as possible or to meet the rigorous assessment demands of the ITT programme, to produce trainees who were fit for purpose and, in the process, accentuate the reputation of the accrediting institution. There was a juxtaposition, overlapping, fluidity and sometimes conflict of roles as mentors positioned themselves as teacher, subject specialist, manager, observer, networker and assessor in the complex interplay of myriad social practices. Similarly, the mentee adopted different roles of student, trainee teacher, member of department and colleague. Thus, to acquire an understanding of mentoring feedback practices, the participants had to connect them with other horizontal

and vertical sets of practices, with their interconnected "doings and sayings" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014b, p.35), notably between professional learning, leadership and quality assurance practices. Indeed, the mentoring vernacular, including the singular terms, "mentor" and "mentee", seemed rather at odds with the experiences of the practitioners in the institution since in this study and arguably common to most workplace dynamics, mentees engaged in multiple webs of relations on the road to becoming more confident and proficient teachers, thus acknowledging a morass of influences on their teaching practice. From this, we can conclude that the roles of both mentor and mentee necessitate a more expansive definition than is often suggested in the mentoring literature and underscores the futility of reducing the mentoring function in feedback to a set of decontextualised competencies and traits.

Deploying the theory of practice architectures, the second research question enquired about the programmatic and organisational processes, arrangements and artefacts which enabled and constrained mentoring feedback practices on both ITT programmes; three key points linked to suggestions for future mentoring feedback provision are summarised below:

a) *Physical space-time dimensions:* In general, the mentoring practitioners struggled to find time and a physical location for feedback, hampered by organisational pressures and heavy workloads. Working in the same institutional site with access to an appropriate dialogic and confidential space

for feedback was important as was the physical configuration of the social space. Use of the room's resources and those brought to the site such as laptops and audio resources to record the feedback were also instrumental in facilitating the practice. In contrast, "borrowing" a room to conduct the feedback was a constraining factor, limiting possibilities for discussion since interruptions were more likely and the feedback itself was wedged into a restricted timeframe. However, regular opportunities for informal guidance such as chats in the corridor, in the staffroom and online were viewed as facilitative opportunities for discussion. The mentees generally perceived these regular, ongoing mentoring interactions, beyond the immediacies of the mentoring dyad, as more valuable than the formal, structured feedback sessions characteristic of the formal teaching observation process; they were signs of engagement and commitment which helped to foster positive, collegial relationships and contributed to the mentees' professional identify formation. Thus, the material-economic arrangements – the organisation of mentoring dyads – and the physical-space time dimensions of the practice had a considerable bearing on the development of the social-political dimensions of the practice.

b) *Mentoring feedback artefacts*

The main feedback artefact was the post-observation form, a highly structured document, which shaped the situatedness of the practice in how the mentoring interactions played out in real time but which was also influenced

by practice traditions such as the commonality of feedback approach: the "feedback sandwich", with critical comments compressed between two layers of positive reinforcement. This brought with it a certain familiarity and reassurance for both mentor and mentee but also a predictability of response and action. Thus, the material artefact offered both affordances and constrained opportunities for mentee engagement as it reproduced particular practices and power relations through its use. The mentor largely dictated the organisation and discursive content of the feedback which heightened the gap in status between the "giver" of feedback, the more knowledgeable mentor, and the "unfinished" trainee teacher (Bryan and Carpenter, 2008). In addition, the degree to which the mediational tool promoted mentee reflection was debatable. The form's headings potentially acted as a catalyst for discussion but this depended on a plurality of aspects: the time available for feedback; the stage of the ITT programme; the mentors' capabilities to listen and elicit information from their mentee; the practitioners' employment status; and the nature of the practitioners' relationship. These factors also impacted on the mentee's decision to "play the game" in the feedback process or to exert agency and risk possible cognitive dissonance.

c) *Mentoring training*

One practice architecture which facilitated the enactment of formal mentoring processes on both ITT programmes was the arrangement of preliminary training sessions. They were promoted primarily as "briefing" meetings,

designed to underline the significance of the subject-specific element of the mentoring role and to familiarise mentors with their responsibilities in terms of teaching observations, feedback and regular target-setting using the programmatic pro-forma. Mentors attached to the pre-service ITT programme had to grapple with complex bureaucratic processes, mapping each feedback comment to the FE Professional Standards, and engaging in termly progress reviews with the programme tutors and mentee. As part of the in-service induction, mentors observed a recorded trainee teacher's lesson to identity its strengths and propose areas for development. In respect of mentoring feedback, common to both one-off training sessions, was a focus on individual processes, an expectation that the transmission of subject-specific feedback would result in the acquisition of subject knowledge and pedagogy which would, in turn, lead to improved student outcomes.

Finally, the third research question asked how mentoring feedback practices unfolded during both teacher development programmes. Examining how these transpired at different stages of the ITT programmes brought to light the influence of external factors and the mentoring practices' ecological relationship with other practices in the institution. Some institutional practices carried more dominance than others such as those connected with quality assurance and departmental teaching and assessment processes. These, therefore, prefigured the practice architectures of mentoring feedback but did not necessarily determine its trajectory. Nevertheless, the realisation and sustainability of mentoring feedback practices in the institution depended

largely on their congruence with other institutional practices and concerns, which shaped, for example, the ease or difficulty of arranging lesson observations and subsequent feedback discussions, the deployment of resources and the level of prescription regarding pedagogical support.

In addition, the practitioners' previous histories, values, motivations and capabilities influenced the direction of mentoring feedback, in how practices and arrangements were sustained, modified, and occasionally transformed in response to individuals' needs and departmental and institutional priorities. The mentoring practitioners' dispositions and commitments were also shaped through practising feedback in the site. A key example of this was by participating in the outcomes-driven assessment of the mentee's teaching, mentors were obliged to prioritise compliance with programmatic processes and external standards over the developmental and self-regulatory aspects of feedback. Contrary to the projected aims of mentoring provision situated in much of the post-compulsory ITT discourse, these predominantly assessment practices perpetuate the hegemonic ideology of mentoring as "supervision" (Kemmis *et al.*, 2014a) rather than as collaborative professional development.

Overall, in responding to these research questions, the theory of practice architectures served as a theoretical, analytical and "transformational resource" (Mahon *et al.*, 2017) in highlighting the enabling and constraining institutional conditions in which mentoring feedback practices were situated. The points for consideration outlined in the subsequent section, respond to

research question four: what are the possible implications of the findings of the development of effective mentor provision on teacher development courses? They do not claim to be a panacea for institutional compliance initiatives or localised challenges resulting from wider educational policy initiatives, but propose three alternative ways of reframing mentoring and feedback, grounded in situated practices.

## Implications of the findings for the development of effective mentoring provision on initial teacher training programmes

### Reconceptualising mentoring and feedback

A lack of organisational recognition of the mentoring role was a dominant theme in this study. There were variations in ethos and enactments at the departmental level but, in general, the mentoring practice was considered to be disengaged from other institutional socio-professional practices and of lesser importance. In many respects, mentors were doing what was asked of them: undertaking formal observations of their mentees' teaching and providing spoken and written feedback, thus meeting the requirements of the pre- and in-service ITT programmes, but these additional tasks compressed into their already heavy workloads meant that the nature of the feedback and guidance was unlikely to enter the realm of criticality, veering instead towards the "routine and instrumental" (Alred and Garvey, 2000, p.268). For mentoring to flourish, it needs to be incorporated into institutional strategies, discourses and policies, not in empty rhetoric espousing collaborative teacher

development but by negotiating existing circumstances and conditions

(Mahon *et al.*, 2017).

A greater institutional commitment to mentoring is not new, raised by, among others, Cunningham (2007), Hankey (2004) and Hobson and Maxwell (2020), but is more relevant than ever given the increasing demands placed on mentors, evidenced in the most recent Ofsted ITE documentation. Hobson and Maxwell (2020) contend that a more dedicated institutional approach to mentoring necessitates not only changes to institutional architectures, what they call "substructures", including "sympathetic timetabling" (Cunningham, 2007, p.85) for mentoring practitioners, but also "superstructures", changes in the wider socio-political and economic context, including increased funding for institutions to facilitate more supportive means of mentoring.

Contemplation of the role of mentoring in teaching observation and feedback practices also warrants attention. If its main function is developmental, a departure from assessment-focused and target-driven models to approaches which foster a culture of risk-taking, dialogue and reflection is necessary. This could signify a complete reimagining of the mentoring relationship, from dyadic support to a wider constellation of "mentors" (Davis, 2016; Higgins and Kram, 2001) to encourage multiple perspectives and increased connectivity. Different configurations of mentoring could be considered, including peer group mentoring, in which a mentor facilitates a group of mentees to encourage discussion around collective concerns, possibly levelling the

unequal power dynamics in the process. To avoid placing the onus on a single mentor, however, a more collaborative professional socialisation process might be preferable, drawing on the expertise and experience of multiple practitioners in the organisation: former trainee teachers, colleagues and experienced members of staff, akin to the concept of "communicative learning spaces" (Sjølie *et al.,* 2019). This renewed collegial perspective requires changes to cultural-discursive arrangements in how "mentoring" is discussed. The etymology of mentoring connotes hierarchy and authority (Pennanen *et al.*, 2015) and replacing it with a less paternalistic term may be a more embracing signifier. Feedback, too, could be reconceptualised, breaking its semiotic associations with assessment, to something less judgemental such as "a post-observation discussion."


**Mentors' professional development: a renewed focus on feedback**

Constrained by the procedural conditions of mentoring– an emphasis on paperwork and meeting targets – it was difficult for mentors in this study to find an appropriate balance between a directive, instrumentalist approach to feedback and one which enabled mentees to have greater discursive agency. Trainee teachers traverse different boundaries as they move from formal "learning" contexts, to the workplace setting where they are exposed to departmental practices, norms and cultures. Over time these become normalised and, often, unconsciously prioritised over what is espoused in

mentoring conversations and the ITT programme (Knight and Trowler, 1999).

Thus, for mentoring feedback to be valued by the trainee, there need to be

open discussions about how it is situated in departmental and broader

institutional practices, within the organisational infrastructure. Such

conversations may result in some disharmony but dialogic feedback is, to an

extent, characterised by uncertainty and tension; it should not just be a

process of affirmation. Indeed, discussions centred on dealing with

challenging conversations could be integrated into group mentoring

professional development sessions, enabling mentors across disciplines to

share their experiences and suggest alternative approaches.

Feedback, in general, was not explicitly referenced in this study in either of

the mentoring induction training meetings, seemingly considered as a taken-

for-granted practice. However, it was evident that mentors struggled with

providing dialogic and non-judgemental feedback. With little in the way of

guidance, they frequently resorted to a default tick-box model, based on their

experience of receiving feedback and congruent with their situated

understandings of "good" and "outstanding" teaching practices. Copland

(2010, p.471) contends that "feedback processes" – the "phases, participatory

structures and discourse practices" should be built into introductory training

for novice teachers on ITT programmes so that they explicitly understand "the

rules of the game" (*ibid.*). However, mentors are also not necessarily

conscious of these rules and, even with the best intentions, are not

automatically skilled at providing developmental feedback. This is a complex

practice which involves knowing what kinds of questions might promote reflection and challenge, encouraging mentees to explain their choice of pedagogical approach and being cognisant of the power differentials in the relationship and how these are manifest in the language used in feedback, participant turn-taking patterns and agenda setting. Instead of mentors observing and commenting on a trainee's lesson, a more valuable approach, therefore, could be to watch a feedback conversation between mentor and mentee to stimulate discussion on the aforementioned points. However, the aim here should not be to provide an instructional, "how to" guide on how to provide feedback. Practices are always contextually contingent and mentoring feedback needs to be considered in relation to other practices and, at least, broadly compatible with organisational practice architectures. Nevertheless, were broader mentoring networks to become part of the institutional social-political arrangements, these participatory and dialogic spaces would engender possibilities for ongoing conversations among mentors about teaching, feedback and mentoring, linked to workplace learning. Mentoring would feel less of an afterthought but rather situated within an institutional culture that valued and respected the multi-dimensional nature of teacher professional development, and conceptualised as a legitimate support mechanism for trainee teachers.

**A change of feedback artefact**

If feedback is to be construed as an interactive, developmental process between mentor and mentee rather than as a product, a change of artefact deserves attention. On both ITT programmes in this study, the observation artefact, constitutive of the material-economic arrangements, scaffolded the mentoring feedback interactions, providing both structure and alignment with an external authority: the accrediting examining body. In the post-observation written feedback on their mentee's lessons, mentors were conscious of writing indirectly for different audiences, not only for the trainee teacher but for a range of mentoring stakeholders, including, possibly, managers, ITT programme leaders and external examiners. This factor shaped the focus and style of the feedback; the mentors were conscious of their written comments being potentially perceived as "too critical" (Karen, mentoring dyad 12) or, conversely, "too soft" (Sadia mentoring dyad 11). The feedback form facilitated the development of a shared language about teaching and learning practices and, particularly, on the pre-service ITT programme, a greater familiarisation with the discourse of the Professional Standards. However, a target-driven approach compromises the ability of a model to promote critical reflection and dialogue. The semi-structured observation instrument with pre-determined categories, in which the mentors could populate with their own comments, was considered to be both an enabling and constraining material-economic arrangement: providing structured guidance yet restricting the direction of the feedback.

However, if the material-economic arrangements were changed and more time for pre- and post-observation mentoring conversations were enabled, the focus of the observation and feedback could be negotiated between the practitioners in advance and, thus, such a rigid framework would be unnecessary. This idea chimes with the extensive research into formative observations of teaching and learning by O'Leary (2020), based on the notion of "lesson study": a shift from a performance-based model to a dialogic, inquiry-based approach, directed by the needs of the trainee teacher. Greater freedom of expression might enable both parties to veer away from discussions about generic, prescriptive pedagogical models of teaching to exploring alternative disciplinary approaches, encouraging the mentee to experiment with and reflect on different strategies in the classroom whilst still valuing the situated nature of teaching and learning practices.

A change of artefact would not necessarily entail a radical change in mentoring feedback practices, however. Some practices are firmly entrenched, rooted in tradition, and, thus, resistant to modification. Furthermore, a change in one component of a practice – the material object – necessitates changes to its other interconnected elements and practice arrangements, for example revised mentoring training on how to navigate the new feedback form, and a change in social-political arrangements, resulting in potentially less hierarchical and more symbiotic ways of relating. In these ways, the project of the practice would also be modified, still concerned with developmental feedback, but driven by formative assessment intentions. Any

visible, sustainable changes in practice would also not occur immediately and would require a "buy-in" across sites and stakeholders, notably from the partnership institutions involved in running the accredited higher education pre- and in-service ITT programmes, prompting changes in their observation and feedback practices and arrangements. This highlights the challenges of implementing changes to mentoring provision, not only at a local level, but across external social networks and communities, particularly if a certain stabilisation or orthodoxy of practices is sought. Nevertheless, to revisit the points made in chapter three, a "practice sensibility" (Kemmis, 2019; Trowler, 2019), a recognition of the complex, interrelated elements of practices and the conditions in which they happen, can facilitate moves to change practices and constraining practice architectures to better enable mentoring feedback practices.

## Contributions of the study: practical, theoretical and methodological insights

Although this project was concerned with the investigation of site-based practices and arrangements, the findings from the study resonate with similar research undertaken in mentoring in ITT. They, thus, have implications beyond the local, albeit with the caveats regarding transferability of findings outlined in chapter five. The focus on feedback, neglected in much of the literature on mentoring, extends the research base through its examination of

purposes, participatory processes and arrangements involved in its enactment: how it does not just 'happen' but is constitutive of a conglomeration of mutually dependent and overlapping practices. The key practical and theoretical contributions of this research are, therefore, the following:

- Broadening the debate on mentoring provision to include the role of feedback, a distinctly more complicated practice than how it might first appear;

- Unveiling some of the many site-based challenges involved in the mentoring feedback enactment, specifically how it is facilitated and hindered by institutional practice architectures but, as illustrated in the study's rich vignettes, conducted differently dependent on practitioners' dispositions and contextual motivations;

- Foregrounding the significance of the co-ordination, connection and flow of practices: how mentoring feedback practices should be considered in conjunction with a conglomeration of institutional practices and arrangements.

From a theoretical perspective, the practice architectures' framework proved valuable in illuminating the institutional conditions which supported and impeded the trajectory of mentoring feedback on both ITT programmes. As documented in chapter two, much of the mentoring research literature is concerned with seeking clarity on the responsibilities and skills required of the

practitioners, particularly of mentors, to ensure a sustainable and flourishing mentoring relationship. Appropriate matching of mentoring dyads and establishing clear protocols and expectations at the inception of the relationship are also argued as indicators of success. However, whilst these facets of mentoring are undeniably important, unless they are considered in relation to the impact of the practice site and wider socio-political context on provision, they remain nothing more than unattainable fantasies. In this study, examining the enactment of mentoring feedback through a practice lens drew attention to the complex interdependencies between practices and arrangements, how one dimension of the practice affected the orchestration of other arrangements and practices. Collating data over an extended period of time from multiple sources and comparing the realisation of the practice in both programmes across national and local scales (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016) built up a cumulative picture of these connected elements in mentoring feedback, including both its recursive and transformative nature. This exploration of change in practices, arrangements and conceptualisations of the mentoring relationship adds a new dimension to research into feedback, encapsulating its processual nature by way of a longitudinal research design rather than through capturing data from a single feedback episode or retrospective interview. This was, therefore, a key methodological contribution to the scholarly literature on mentoring feedback.

Finally, as outlined in the previous chapter, the categories of the theoretical framework – the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political

arrangements and the respective intersubjective spaces in which the "sayings, doings and relatings" of mentoring feedback took place served as broad analytical categories only (Mahon and Galloway, 2017) in this study. Determining in which category a specific aspect of the mentoring feedback should fall proved challenging either because it could be classified into multiple categories or because it did not fit neatly into one group. The latter point was particularly noticeable with the more "invisible" elements of the practice, for example, those connected with nuances of emotion and language associated with mentoring feedback which emerged from the practice narratives. Here, it was beneficial to extend the theory of practice architectures, to integrate elements from other conceptual frameworks such as Trowler's notion of "codes of signification" (2019), part of eight overlapping and dynamic "moments" of teaching and learning regimes, into the investigation of the mentoring feedback practice to provide greater visibility, depth and clarity.

## Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

To an extent, one limitation of the study was its small sample size and case study methodology, involving a "homologous horizontal comparison" (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016) of the enabling and constraining conditions for mentoring feedback practices on two separate ITT programmes but enacted primarily in one institution. This approach was advantageous in highlighting the influence

of "site ontologies" (Schatzki, 2005), the local institutional cultures, discourses, processes and arrangements, and in comparing how these shaped the development of the practice on the respective ITT programme. Although communication with educational stakeholders in partnership practices which were external to the institutional site, geographical and time limitations meant that a multi-site study was unfeasible. Therefore, a possible direction for future research would be an ontological investigation of how similar practices are realised in different contexts to enhance understanding of what is happening on home soil (Trowler, 2019). Furthermore, broadening the study to beyond the UK would bring an international comparison of mentoring feedback practices. Combined with a comparative case study "heuristic" (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016), a multiple international case study design could shed light on multi-level influences on mentoring feedback practices, tracing national and institutional policies across the sites down to the local institutional conditions and arrangements which make possible certain practices but also obstruct particular pathways and spaces.

A methodological limitation of the study was its loose form of ethnography in the investigation of mentoring feedback practices, compounded by time constraints and the realities of Covid-19. From a positive perspective, being an insider researcher enabled immersion in the field and I was able to capitalise on opportunistic moments in the setting, engaging with the mentoring participants at various points during the study and observing how feedback practices unfolded. Video observations were also a valuable means

of data collection in capturing interactions in real-time. The main ethnographic difficulty, however, was sustaining continuous access to the site of practice. Institutional closures brought about by the UK national lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic caused immense challenges in particular for fractional teaching staff and trainee teachers on voluntary placements. For some, teaching stopped altogether and the observation and analysis of synchronous mentoring feedback discussions were largely put on hold until face-to-face interactions resumed. Nevertheless, despite these ethnographic limitations, possibilities for "online" interviews emerged, facilitated by greater "workplace" flexibility, and the opportunity to discuss more sensitive aspects of mentoring in relative privacy. Talking *about* the practice, therefore, took precedence over observing the practice *in action* which inevitably diluted the ethnographic flavour of the research. Yet the use of a suite of methodological tools – especially participatory mapping and projective techniques – complemented these semi-structured virtual interviews: this was, therefore, an unavoidable ethnographic compromise amidst the socio-political upheaval of Covid-19.

Future research into mentoring feedback practices could adopt a critical participatory approach (Kemmis *et al.,* 2014c), involving a range of mentoring stakeholders. They could work in a collaborative space and with a shared language to discuss the conditions in which mentoring operates, with the ultimate aim of enacting systemic change if the practices in the site are deemed to be "irrational", "unsustainable" or "unjust" (*ibid.*, p.5). Critical participatory action research and the theory of practice architectures are

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natural bedfellows as they are concerned with transforming practices in the spirit of social justice. Effecting meaningful change in a large institution, however, takes time and, whilst I considered the deployment of a more collaborative, interventionist research methodology for this research, in practice, implementing such an approach would have proven difficult given my unequal "insider" status as teacher educator, the duration of the study and the intensified workload of the participants.

## Final thoughts

This study aimed to portray a more realistic and intricate portrayal of mentoring feedback practices in initial teacher education than what is often assumed in the mentoring literature and policy documentation. In the contemporary neoliberal climate, the onus is very much on the mentoring practitioners to make the relationship "work"; a dyadic support practice in which subject pedagogical knowledge is unproblematically passed from mentor to mentee, reflected upon and ultimately passively consumed. Using the theory of practice architectures in the research elucidated the kinds of practices, supported by appropriate institutional practice architectures, which are needed if feedback in mentoring is going to play a significant mediating role – both ontologically and epistemologically – in the trainees' development of teaching practices and professional selves. Instead of viewing mentoring feedback as a deficit, quick-fix solution for contextual exigencies, we need to

re-think the whole practice, how it can actively support and promote learning. We can only do this if we take a critical look at what is around us – what enhances and constrains the local enactment of mentoring provision – and how by changing inhospitable conditions, we can create new "conditions of possibility" within which new discourses, actions and ways of relating can become the norm.

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# Appendix One: Card prompts for the semi-structured interviews

## 1. Roles and relationships

- Conceptualisation of the mentoring role (mentor and mentee) in providing feedback
- Changes in conceptualisation during the programme
- Relationships with others

## 2. Temporal and spatial aspects

- Time, space and duration of the feedback

## 3. Physical set-ups

- Set-up of feedback: seating and table arrangements
- Access to feedback tools, e.g., whiteboard, laptop, etc.

## 4. Structure of the feedback

- Agenda setting
- Turn-taking
- Order of topics

## 5. Content of the feedback

- Prioritisation of topics
- Reference to Professional Standards
- Difference between spoken and written feedback

## 6. Feedback tools

- Use of the observation form

## 7. Development of the feedback process during the programme

- Changes in practice
- Changes in the mentoring relationship

## 8. Factors which supported the mentoring feedback process

## 9. Factors which hindered the mentoring feedback process
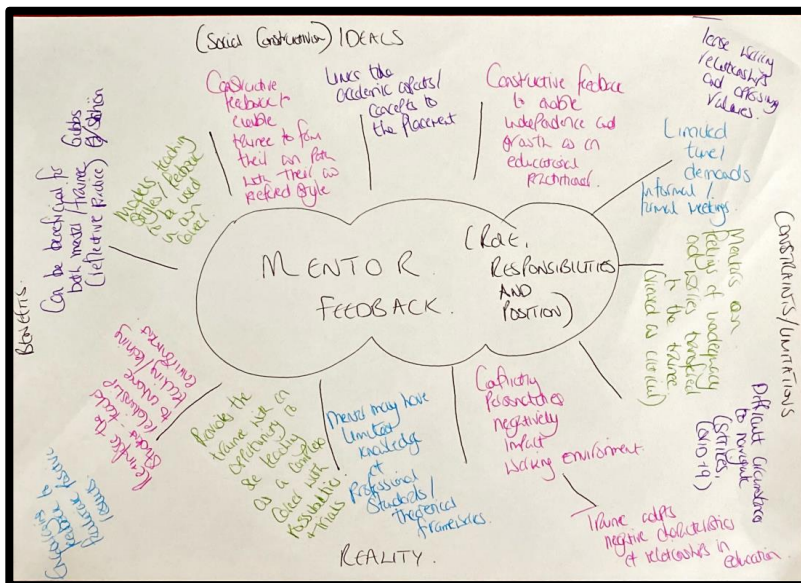
## 10. Suggestions of how mentoring feedback provision could be improved
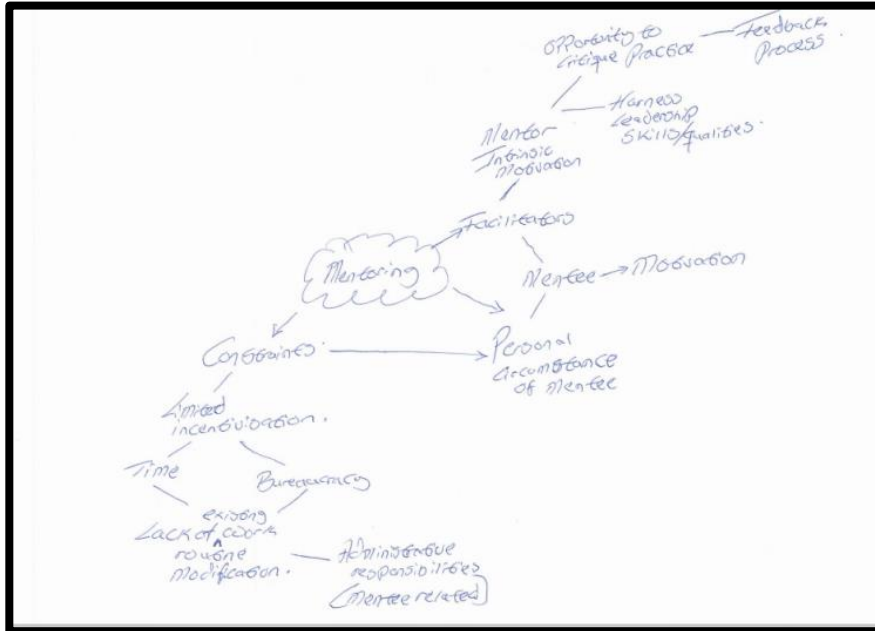
## Appendix Two: Mentoring maps

Here is a selection of some of the mentoring maps, drawn/created by the mentoring practitioners on both ITT programmes.
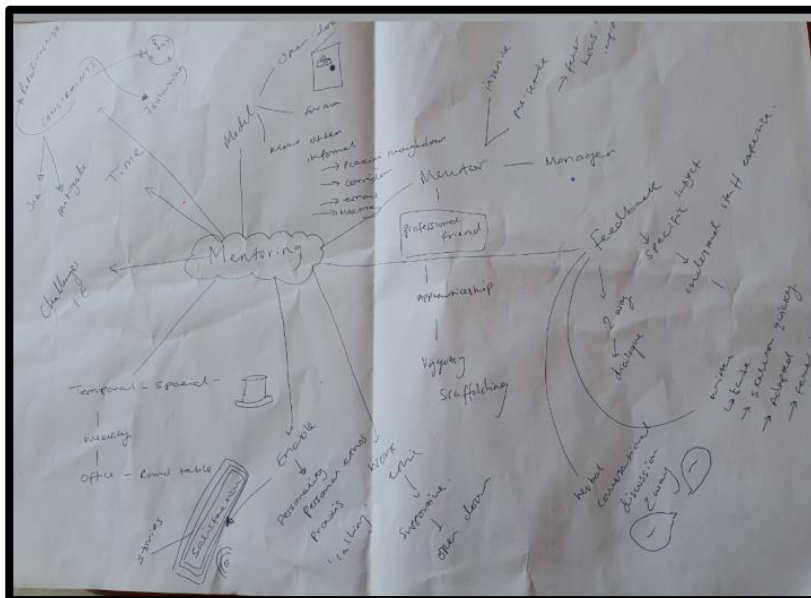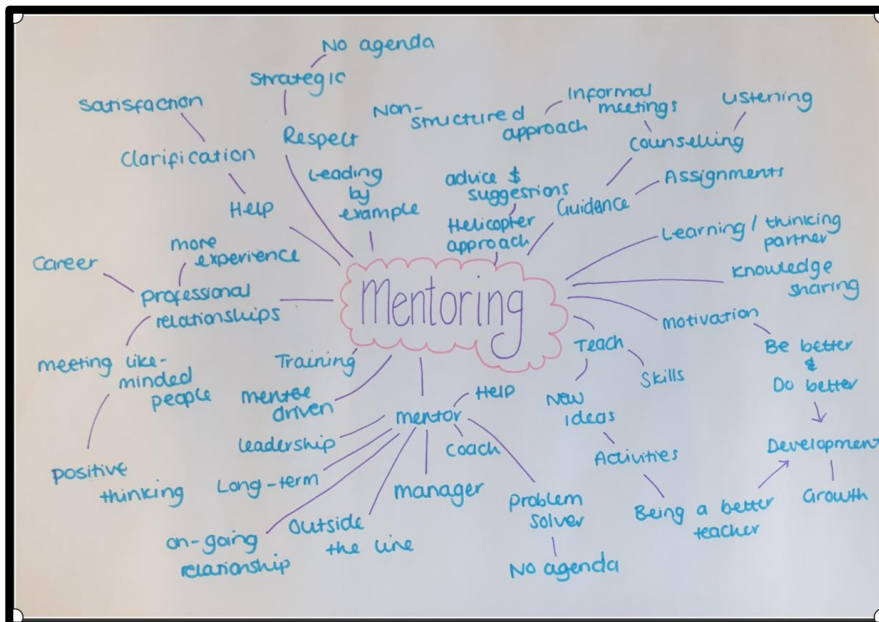


[Abida's mentoring map, mentor, pre-service ITT programme, dyads 3 and 4]
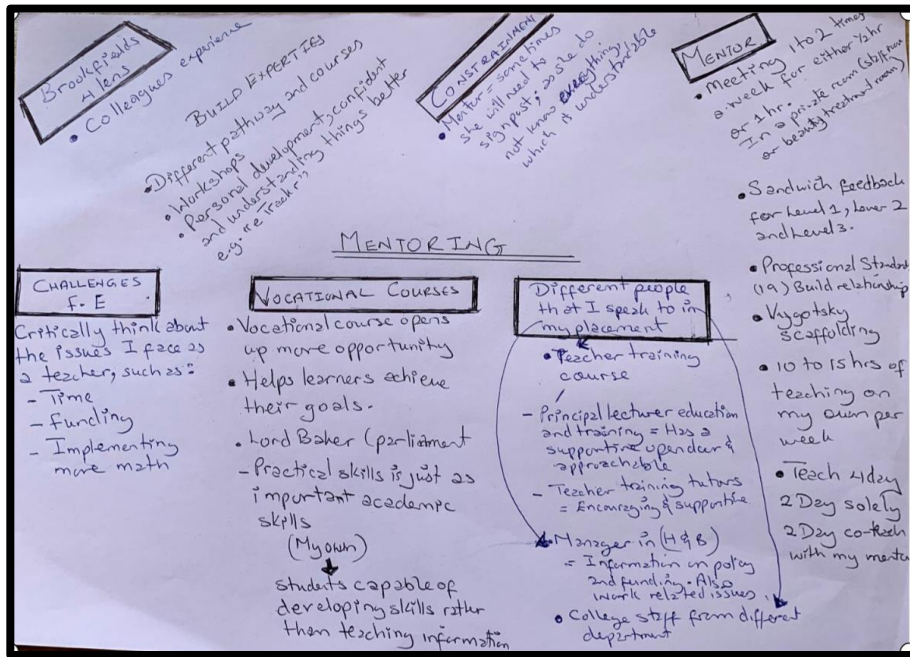


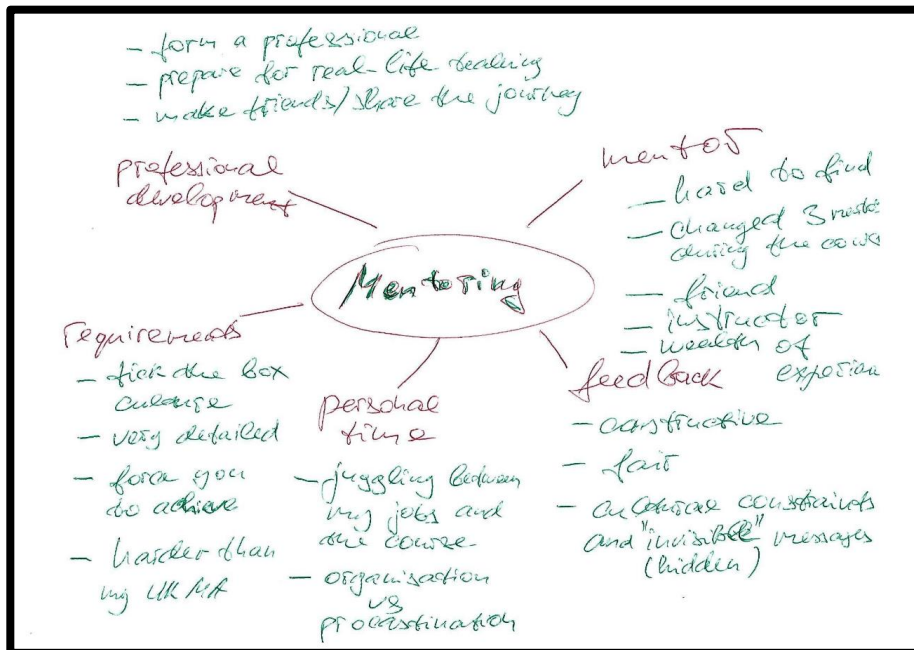[Samantha's mentoring map, mentee, pre-service ITT programme, dyad 5]

[Gabriel's mentoring map, mentor, in-service ITT programme, dyad 9]



[Hamida's mentoring map, mentee, in-service ITT programme, dyad 11]

[Claudette's mentoring map, mentee, in-service ITT programme, dyad 12]



[Marek's mentoring map, mentee, in-service ITT programme, dyad 14]