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Finding the joy: effective mentoring in Teacher Education

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Finding the joy: effective mentoring in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Effective support of student teachers is critical to the teaching profession. This research involved student teachers and those who support student teachers on a new two-year Postgraduate teaching course. Using a range of data collection, including creative methods such as the use of artefacts, participants' interpretations of effective mentoring were explored. It is reported that it is important that mentors volunteer for, and proactively engage in their mentoring role. Also, that sufficient time is allocated to undertake mentoring responsibilities, which include frequent mentor meetings and professional learning. Key aspects identified for effective mentoring include the importance of a trusting relationship between the student teacher and mentor; nurturing student teacher self-reflection and ensuring that student teachers observe a range of teaching styles. The implications of the findings include the improvement and development of support materials for the programme's mentors along with sharing effective mentoring practice case studies, that showcase effective approaches in different school contexts.

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Artefacts; Mentoring;
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This paper presents the findings of a research study that explored the effectiveness of the mentoring approaches used to support student teachers undertaking a two-year Postgraduate teaching qualification. The research took place in an education system in the midst of reform, where the approach to Teacher Education is moving away from a traditional university-led teacher education system to one of joint responsibility and partnership between the university and school. Therefore the purpose of this research was to discover effective approaches to mentoring – what works and why? In drawing out the findings and sharing effective practice it is intended that the study will support schools and universities to deliver impactful mentoring for student teachers. This study also adopted a creative participatory approach for elements of the data

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collection, and the lessons learnt from adopting such an approach are also discussed. Participants used artefacts to support the discussion of their reflections on effective mentoring approaches and insight is offered for Teacher Educators to draw on to enhance their practice.

The context

Even though Wales is part of the United Kingdom, since 1999 the nation has exercised its own law-making powers and held devolved responsibility for particular issues, of which education is one. However, poor PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results in 2009 triggered a prioritisation of education policy in Wales (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2014). Several key policy initiatives contribute to the ongoing education reform underway across the country (Welsh Government, 2017). In September 2022, a new school curriculum began to be implemented (Welsh Government, 2020). Initial Teacher Education (ITE) reforms in Wales have also been realised to address some of the challenges experienced by the sector regarding recruitment and the quality of both candidates and ITE programmes (Furlong, 2015; Welsh Government, 2019a). A significant characteristic of the changes to Teacher Education is the shift from a 'university-led' experience to universities and schools working in partnership with 'joint ownership of the ITE programme' (Welsh Government, 2018, p. 2). As a result more importance is now placed on the role of the school-based mentor for student teachers. This followed on from some significant criticisms of ITE mentoring in Wales (Estyn, 2018). The Welsh Government also introduced new professional standards for the teaching profession and these provide the structure for those supporting student teachers too (Welsh Government, 2019b). It is in this landscape of education reform that a new two-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education was launched. This aimed to tackle the challenges caused by living at a distance from university and/or being unable to undertake the more traditional one-year qualification (Welsh Government, 2019a).

Mentoring in Teacher Education

A range of theoretical frameworks have been applied to the much-contested concept of mentoring. This focus has changed over time; as mentoring models have evolved from 'transmission orientation' to 'professional responsibility' (Parker et al., 2021, p. 67). Others introduced the importance of a range of aspects including an institution's commitment, ethos, physical resources, appropriate mentor selection among others, all providing an underpinning architecture for mentoring (Cunningham, 2007). Hobson and Maxwell (2020) refined Cunningham's mentoring architecture, and also emphasised the significance of a supportive school environment for the mentoring process. The mentoring

process is also referred to as either supervisory, supportive or a collaborative process that is determined by local conditions and can result in very different experiences for both mentor and mentee (Kemmis et al., 2014). Whereas Orland-Barak and Wang (2021) classify the mentoring approaches in ITE as personal growth, situated learning, core practice and critical transformative; and conclude that it is not possible to limit the mentoring experience to a single approach, but that a much more multi-dimensional experience exists. This is a common theme, in that there is no 'one size fits all' model for mentoring in Teacher Education (Parker et al., 2021).

Regardless of any particular approach adopted for mentoring, it is apparent that an accurate and clear understanding of roles and terminology is important. This is apparent for both mentors and student teachers (Aderibigbe et al., 2018). A shared understanding of the key roles and concepts is critical to ensure there is no unconscious bias influencing mentoring judgements (Fletcher et al., 2021; Kourieos, 2019). Some propose that differences between Initial Teacher Education and Initial Teacher Training provide impetus for a more appropriate collective term that would encompass practicality and criticality (Forster et al., 2021); particularly as mentors appear to find it difficult to recognise themselves as teacher educators (Estyn, 2018; Parker et al., 2021). In support of this, Lofthouse (2018) concludes that mentoring development should be at the centre of ITE transformation. The professional standards outline the values and dispositions teachers are expected to have (Welsh Government, 2019b), and mentors' values will impact on a student teacher's experience. Therefore, careful matching of mentors and mentees, and appropriate mentor training are important (Mackie, 2020; Wilson & Huynh, 2019). Personal attributes such as kindness, empathy, openness and patience are often listed as critical for an effective mentor (Parker et al., 2021). A comparative study across three countries also identified strong motivation to support others, effective mentor selection and appropriate training and time as important requirements for effective mentoring processes in Teacher Education (Aderibigbe et al., 2022).

A positive relationship underpins any mentoring partnership, with such a relationship allowing the student teacher to feel safe to reflect and engage in critical dialogue to support their professional development and independence (Ellis et al., 2020; Ewing, 2021; Izadinia, 2016). This collaborative approach has benefits for the mentor's professional learning as well (Aderibigbe et al., 2018; Trevethan, 2017). However, the mentoring partnership requires time to develop, and awareness of any power imbalances within the relationship must be considered (Jones et al., 2021; Lejonberg & Hatlevik, 2022; Wilson & Huynh, 2019). To mitigate this, the supportive nature of the relationship and the inclusion of listening and offering constructive feedback within a more balanced and less hierarchical format is of significance (Jones et al., 2021; Mackie, 2020). As noted, collaboration is an important factor in a mentoring partnership, and exists on different levels (Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021). The different levels of

collaboration are between the university and school (Badia & Clarke, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020; Furlong, 2015); within the placement school, and between the mentor and mentee (Aderibigbe et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2021). Others emphasise the critical impact of successful collaboration, particularly with the significance of the school as the learning organisation (Estyn, 2018; Milton et al., 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2016). And even though collaboration is one of the professional standards underpinning teaching and leadership in Wales (Welsh Government, 2019b), such a mutual approach takes time and any power tensions need to be avoided (Mackie, 2020; Milton et al., 2020).

A few of the critical factors required for a mentoring partnership to be effective have been discussed, yet professional learning opportunities to support the mentoring role are also valuable (Kourieos, 2019; Merket, 2022). A lack of such training can often mean that mentors use their own experience of being a mentee to inform their approach (Clarke & Mena, 2020; Lofthouse, 2018; Trevethan, 2017). The lack of the availability of high-quality training materials for mentoring has also been raised as a concern, along with the lack of time available to engage with the training materials and resources (Forster et al., 2021; Milton et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2021). Linked to this aspect is the need for mentors to model the links between theory and practice for their mentee, with the mentor's deeper understanding and knowledge important (Ellis et al., 2020; Hobson & Maxwell, 2020; Kourieos, 2019). However, this aspect of mentoring has received criticism (Parker et al., 2021; Pinnick, 2020), and this is apparent in Wales, with the pedagogical knowledge divide between the placement setting and university noted (Estyn, 2018).

Communities of practice have the potential to demonstrate effective collaboration and provide a safe yet challenging environment for research and personal development for all participants; student teachers, teacher educators and school-based staff (Banks et al., 2005; McLean Davies et al., 2013; Patton & Parker, 2017). Such a collaborative approach to student teachers' development is particularly beneficial (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; DeLuca et al., 2015). For the student teacher each of the actors is engaged in a landscape of practice (Wenger & Wenger-Traynor, 2015). All provide different perspectives on the knowledge that contribute to a teacher's personal teaching construct (Furlong, 2020; Furlong et al., 2006). It is also proposed that informal support between other colleagues and peers can also have positive impact on the mentoring process (Sikma, 2019).

A range of mentoring activities such as modelling teaching, planning and evaluation contribute to the effective mentoring process (Ellis et al., 2020; Izadinia, 2016; Mena et al., 2017). Such activities provide an appropriate means to critically reflect on practice for the student teacher (Badia & Clarke, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2021). It is suggested that forward planning of mentor activities and areas for discussion is also important for the

mentoring process (Forster et al., 2021). Team teaching with a mentor can be beneficial for student teachers and can also contribute to a mentor's professional development (Doherty, 2021; Guise et al., 2017; Smith & Nadelson, 2016). Feedback on formal lesson observations offer student teachers vital information to inform their future practice, this is viewed as a core function of a mentor's role (Nielsen et al., 2022). However, some have commented that as emotions can be heightened detailed written feedback is more beneficial than verbal feedback (Puttick & Wynn, 2021). Whereas others discuss that the conversations between mentors and mentees that are spontaneous can have a strong impact on student teacher learning and progress (Burger et al., 2023; Du & Wang, 2017; Jones et al., 2019). However, this can be an area of weakness for some mentors and the power struggles referred to earlier can influence the effectiveness of these conversations (Chan, 2020; Jones et al., 2021).

As a consequence this research sought to examine what mentors and mentees viewed as being effective approaches for mentoring. The study identified both the challenges and opportunities of the multi-faceted mentoring partnership that are important if an effective mentoring experience for student teachers is to be assured (Aderibigbe et al., 2018).

These research questions structured this study:

- (1) What do student teachers deem to be effective approaches to mentoring? And why?
- (2) How well do mentors understand their role of supporting students?
- (3) What do mentors consider to be effective strategies to mentoring student teachers? And why?

The research study – background

This research study focused on the mentoring process of a new two-year blended learning postgraduate teaching qualification. The programme offers candidates either a part-time or salaried route into teaching; the qualification can also be studied in English, Welsh, or a combination of both languages according to the student teacher's preference. Distance learning is combined with school placements. The part-time route offers candidates the opportunity to train to teach alongside other commitments, whereas the salaried route is for candidates who are employed in schools but as yet not qualified as teachers, for example laboratory technicians, learning support assistants. As noted earlier this new Teacher Education offer was designed to address some of the recruitment challenges experienced by the Welsh education sector (Glover & Hutchinson, 2022).

Methods

A qualitative research design that included the use of artefacts was adopted. The adoption of a qualitative approach can offer a deeper understanding of people's beliefs and experiences, including offering sensitivity to the range in meaning that people are able to express (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Trustworthiness

Four criteria are cited as important for trustworthiness in qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cross checking of data can contribute to credibility, and in this instance there is triangulation, as effective mentoring is discussed by the range of actors, student teacher, mentor, practice tutor and school co-ordinator, involved in the process (Stahl & King, 2020). The narrative developed about effective mentoring provides transferability (Schwandt et al., 2007), and the audit trail offered by the coding framework and measures taken to ensure consistency, as discussed later, provide positive impact on the dependability and confirmability of this study. Participant debrief offers further evidence of trustworthiness and credibility for the study; participants had a crucial role in approving the case studies developed.

The qualitative research design allows for exploring the meaning of the mentoring process as experienced by people, with the perspectives of these participants represented – this gives meaning to the events experienced, all of which incorporate the context in which the mentoring is taking place (Yin, 2016). Participants were able to use artefacts to support the conceptualisation of their thoughts. This provided them with a level of ownership to the research, giving them a direct influence as to the focus for the interview/discussion (Edwards & l'Anson, 2020; Mannay, 2020).

The data and research participants

This research study's data were collected during the spring and summer of 2022. Interviews or discussion groups were conducted with some participants, with some audio or written reflections submitted. All interviews and discussions took place online. The study received full ethics approval from the Open University Human Research Ethics Committee (ref: 4199), with written consent received prior to all research activities. Table 1 provides detail of the participants' different roles in Teacher Education.

The research participants, along with a few others form the community of practice for the student teachers; the mentors are based in schools where the student teachers complete their placements; the Practice Tutors are also based

Table 1. The role of research participants.

Role	Number of volunteers*	Number who participated
Student teacher	18	13
School-based mentor	13	10
Practice Tutor	5	2
School Co-ordinator	4	2
Total	36*	27

*A small number of participants undertake more than one role.

in schools and carry out a role similar to the traditional ITE university tutor, as they support the student to link the theory and practice learning; and the School Co-ordinators provide oversight of ITE provision within each school. Others who contribute to the community of practice that support the student teachers include their university-based Curriculum Tutor, their peer tutor group, other teachers in their placement school and their school pupils.

As the two-year Postgraduate teaching qualification is delivered via a distance blended approach student teachers studying the programme and the schools they are placed in for the practical element of the course are located across the whole of Wales. The sample of research participants also reflected this, and included those teaching in primary and secondary schools, including Welsh-medium schools. All those engaged with the programme were invited to contribute to the research study, a thank you voucher was offered to compensate people for their time. At the time of the study there were 279 student teachers enrolled on the programme. Thirteen student teachers participated in four separate online group discussions, mentors were interviewed individually and Practice Tutors and School Co-ordinators submitted reflective accounts of their mentoring experiences. Ethical approval for the research was given by the university's ethics committee, and each interview and discussion was recorded and transcribed. Student teachers and mentors were invited to bring an artefact of their choice to their discussion that they saw as representative of effective mentoring. Suggestions were offered to participants in that the artefact could be an object, photograph or maybe a song title.

Analysis of data

Qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) was used to support data coding and analysis. The tools of this software support the analysis of similarities, differences and relationships between data (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). All members of the research team were involved in the development of the codes used for analysis. This included early familiarisation of all interview data and team discussion to create the coding framework. The framework was refined and extended during the coding process, regular team meetings to discuss accuracy of existing codes and agreement for the inclusion of emerging codes ensured this was

successful. This approach also supported coding consistency, as different team members coded the same interview data ensuring accuracy and coding reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Initially the coding framework was based on the literature and included themes such as qualities of a mentor; role of the mentor. During the modification of the coding frame sub-categories for mentoring approaches emerged from the data such as modelling and questioning. This supported a systematic and flexible approach to the coding (Krippendorff, 2019). Therefore, the project followed the stages suggested by Schreier (2013): 1). Research question decided; 2). Material selected; 3). Coding frame created; 4). Segmentation; 5). Trial coding; 6). Coding frame modified; 7). Main analysis; 8). Findings presented and interpreted.

Discussion of findings

Mentor selection and motivation

In parallel to the literature, a variety of mentoring models and how mentors are selected for the role were reported. Almost all mentors reported that more experienced members of staff are selected for the mentoring role. However, one commented that even if these teachers have a particular level of expertise it may be that it is some time since they had been a student teacher themselves, and that teachers who had qualified more recently could possibly have more empathy for the student teacher's experience. Some of the student teachers agreed with this line of thought; this was based on a couple of arguments; firstly, more experienced teachers have additional responsibilities and demands on their time and mentoring would be an extra to this, and they reported that some 'good' mentors who had worked with them had been in the profession for only three or four years. Student teachers also suggested that all mentors must volunteer for the mentoring role, as opposed to being directed to undertake it. This position is supported by others, who comment that allocating people to the mentoring role can result in a lack of passion for the role (Fletcher et al., 2021). As one student teacher commented 'I think they should really volunteer for that role and it [mentoring] shouldn't be forced upon them, because then you just feel awkward as a student'; in directing someone who is not enthusiastic for the role there can be a negative impact on the student teacher's relationship with their mentor.

During the mentor interviews a range of reasons were offered regarding what motivates teachers to be a mentor. One overriding motivation, which is particularly relevant as Wales implements a new curriculum, is that mentors reported that mentoring kept them up to date, and some also noted that supporting student teachers contributed to their own reflective practice. The enjoyment mentors experience as they observe student teachers progress was likened to

the pleasure experienced when pupils succeed. Several mentors recognised the 'long-lasting' impact that a mentor has on a student teacher's career, and commented that they viewed the mentoring opportunity as a 'privilege' and 'honour'.

The use of artefacts

As discussed, the creative approach of using artefacts to stimulate discussion was employed during this research and throughout the data collection process it became apparent that this approach was enabling participants to engage on a different level in articulating their perceptions of mentoring. Without exception all participants spoke openly of their experiences and views of mentoring. Each participant brought something to the discussion and explained their choice referring to their own experiences. Of the 10 mentors and 13 student teachers, there was only one duplicate artefact (the song 'The Climb' by Miley Cyrus). In fact, five selected song titles; three selected quotes; two chose plants; other items selected included a bar of chocolate, a tea bag, a light bulb, reading glasses, and a spring among other items. Participants presented many of the items as metaphors for aspects of the mentoring role, responsibilities, qualities and effective mentoring processes. Several will be explained in more detail throughout the following discussion of some of the findings.

Mentor's role and responsibilities

During the mentor interviews it was apparent that all interviewees acknowledged the varied and challenging role of the mentor. An appreciation of the level of responsibility that mentors felt was reflected as some explained this using their artefact. For example, one used a popular toy – a poppet – where a series of bubbles are pushed up; the mentor noted that:

Each little bubble is part of their [the student teacher's] potential and your job as a mentor is to unlock their full potential so that you can pop up as many of the little domes as you possibly can. I feel that is one of the main roles unlocking their full potential.

This reflects not only the mentor's responsibility of 'unlocking potential', but it is also an expression of the mentoring process being a 'step-by-step approach'. One student teacher's artefact supported this thought; they discussed that the spring they had brought represented the role of the mentor to 'stretch you'. However, this student teacher also commented that there was also opportunity to pause and reflect when needed during this process, as it was important not to be 'overstretched'.

The significance of the positive impact of a mentor was emphasised by several student teachers; one used a light bulb to symbolise this aspect, this

light bulb had a dimmer and 'disco lights' that signified the 'spark and enthusiasm' the mentor kept alive for them. One mentor used the song 'The future's so bright (I gotta wear shades)' (Timbuk3) to convey a similar reflection; that they felt that mentoring is 'identifying the next people to carry that flame on and making sure what you've learnt can be passed on. You also nurture their own spark because everyone brings something'. This comment also indicates the reciprocal nature of mentoring, already noted by some mentors as a motivation for their involvement (Aderibigbe et al., 2018).

Qualities of an effective mentor

The qualities required in a mentor highlighted by interviewees included personal qualities, with one comparing the patience and kindness qualities of Atticus Finch from 'To Kill a Mocking Bird' alongside advocating for equality and having time for everyone as being particularly significant for effective mentoring. One mentor's explanation of their choice of artefact being a 'teabag' also illustrated this position; as it is a reflection of the 'kindness, support and time' from the mentor. They expanded this further in that as a metaphor for a trainee teacher and mentor it reflected that 'it just takes time to reach the optimum perfect spot'. Alongside this, empathy and relatability were also noted; for one student teacher it is the ability of the mentor to 'scaffold' the student while they master their improving teaching skills. Whereas another student teacher discussed the quality of the mentor to 'fight their [the student teacher's] corner'. This was reiterated by a mentor's song title selection of 'With a little help from my friends' (The Beatles), as there is a 'support network' for student teachers and that student teachers must not be 'afraid to reach out'; in doing so this was viewed as a strength as it would allow the student teacher to draw on the expertise of others. Being able to communicate successfully and working collaboratively in the mentoring partnership was important for student teachers to be able to not only draw on the mentor's knowledge but also how this is shaped into effective teaching practice.

Effective approaches to mentoring

Although there was an overall agreement that there are many aspects to the mentoring process, this was viewed as needing to be holistic to be effective. Discussion on the most effective mentoring approaches used by mentors and experienced by student teachers drew out a range of specific activities. Providing emotional support to student teachers was referred to by nine out of the 10 school-based mentors during their interviews, and raised by half of the student teachers. Ensuring such emotional support was also viewed as significant by others, which recognises the importance of the development of a trusting working relationship between the mentor and mentee;

I think that the most effective mentoring is when a relationship is established and then the student has a respect for their mentor but equally the mentor has respect for that student and values that that student is just starting out. (School Co-ordinator reflection)

As far as specific approaches used during mentoring; target setting, supporting self-reflection, lesson observation and feedback dominated discussions; with questioning, modelling, support with lesson planning, observing a range of teaching styles, ensuring activities are mentee-led, and that there is frequent contact were all significant to participants. Participants used their choice of artefact to explain their thoughts more clearly, particularly when expressing the 'holistic approach' required, in that they used a range of tools to support their student teacher. For example, one mentor used a bar of chocolate to reflect both the enjoyable experience of being a mentor and that like the different pieces of chocolate there are many different elements that go together when mentoring. They also commented that the bar of chocolate reflected that the mentor is required to break things down into manageable pieces for the student teacher to progress. Similarly, another mentor used a bicycle tool to support their comment that 'there are different ways of doing things/different approaches that can be used to support a mentor session or the discussion following a lesson'. The importance of applying different approaches during the mentoring process, such as modelling and reflection is confirmed by others (Badia & Clarke, 2021; Estyn, 2018; Mena et al., 2017).

A couple of mentors focused on specific approaches. For instance, one emphasised the importance of student teachers being allowed to make mistakes; their artefact – 'Let it be' (by the Beatles), asking for advice is in the lyrics and they strongly felt that it does not matter if student teachers make mistakes, as it is important to learn from the experience.

One key element of the mentoring process is the expected weekly mentor meetings between the mentor and student teacher. However, it emerged that as with the different approaches mentors apply to their mentoring, no common approach and focus existed regarding these. Key differences between participants' experiences revolved around whether these meetings adopted a specific agenda and format. For instance, although all student teachers and their mentors meet regularly, half of the mentors commented that they are responsible for the objectives for the meetings; whereas others reported the discussion being specifically mentee-led. Three mentors stressed the importance of informal discussions throughout the week. Student teachers also noted that they submitted to their mentor in advance what they wanted to discuss during their mentor meetings. The importance of the developing working relationship between the mentor and mentee strongly influenced the format of such communications, as mentors recognised the most effective approach to suit their student teacher.

Barriers to mentoring

Although regular meetings and communication between mentors and mentees has been highlighted above, challenges in delivering this consistently were raised by participants. The key factor in this instance is sufficient time available to complete the role. However, other challenges were also identified by mentors and student teachers including the lack of effective mentor training, and a weak working relationship between the mentor and student teacher. The time factor has wider implications for effective mentoring because this impacts any depth of engagement with training materials, the frequency of feedback, discussion opportunities and collaborative planning with the student teacher. However, it is not only the time that mentors require to undertake training, but the quality of training materials can also be a challenge (Aderibigbe et al., 2018; Forster et al., 2021; Milton et al., 2020).

Strengths and limitations of the study

A major strength for this project was the extensive engagement across the ITE Partnership's schools, student teachers and staff supporting ITE. This resulted in a broad base of experience from across Wales, which included both primary and secondary schools, including Welsh-medium schools. The use of a participatory creative approach for this research in requesting participants bring an artefact to their interview or discussion also proved particularly successful. Without exception all participants contributed with enthusiasm; there was a definite confidence apparent as participants explained their choice of artefact and how it reflected effective mentoring. Others report similar positive outcomes when using artefacts in this way; in that artefacts allow individuals more time to reflect on their views in preparation for interviews, resulting in deeper discussions (Grant et al., 2018; Hannan et al., 2019). This approach also allows for the participant to lead the direction of the discussion (Mannay, 2020). Although engagement in the research study was pleasing, it is still only a small-scale study, in comparison to the size of the ITE partnership (300+ schools across Wales) and the wider ITE community. Also, only two participants were based in the same school; this offers potential for future studies, which could aim to ensure more involvement of mentors, mentees and others from the same setting that would contribute to a deeper examination of mentoring processes.

Conclusion

Although this research study has contributed much to a new ITE Programme's knowledge and understanding of the mentoring processes across its partnership, insights are of benefit to the wider mentoring and ITE community. Drawing on the data 10 case studies have been developed showcasing effective mentoring in practice, adopting this type of approach is beneficial to others (Gurley &

Anast-May, 2016). These case studies reflect the range of contexts and approaches that currently support student teachers across the Welsh ITE Partnership (Wales-PGCE, 2022).

It is apparent from this study that student teachers believed that a critical aspect of effective mentoring was ensuring a mentor has sufficient time and wants to undertake the mentoring role. Being able to encourage, enthuse and make sure student teachers have time for reflection; along with providing emotional support for the student teacher throughout the experience were important for student teachers. This reflects the multi-faceted role of a mentoring partnership (Aderibigbe et al., 2018; Aderibigbe et al., 2022; Orland-Barak & Wang, 2021; Parker et al., 2021). It was important for some student teachers that they lead the content of meetings with their mentor (Forster et al., 2021). As reflected in the literature it was reported for this to be effective it is apparent that the mentor and mentee understand their role and responsibility (Fletcher et al., 2021; Kourieos, 2019). However, some note that school-based mentors can find it difficult to recognise themselves as teacher educators (Estyn, 2018; Parker et al., 2021).

Frequent contact between the student teacher and mentor, opportunities for self-reflection, being observed, target setting, support with lesson planning and having opportunity to observe other teachers were all reported to be effective by student teachers. All of these aspects support the findings of others (Guise et al., 2017; Nielsen et al., 2022; Smith & Nadelson, 2016). It was also clear that mentors understood their role of supporting students well, as they reiterated the significance of ensuring emotional support for their mentee, and considered a similar range of approaches to those highlighted by student teachers, as being effective to support the mentoring of their student teacher.

Even though it is apparent that mentoring is a broad term and can be a demanding role that requires time and space (Jones et al., 2021; Wilson & Huynh, 2019), this research has emphasised that the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the mentor and mentee can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the mentoring process (Aderibigbe et al., 2018; Ellis et al., 2020; Ewing, 2021; Izadinia, 2016). Also, as noted above there is agreement that a holistic approach is required that utilises many different activities.

Implications for practice as a result of this study have highlighted that going forward it is important that the significance of mentors volunteering for the role, and being proactively engaged in all aspects must not be overlooked. Assurance that there will be sufficient time awarded to conduct mentoring responsibilities is also vital in contributing to successful mentoring processes. Time and resource are also required for professional learning opportunities to support the mentoring role. In addition, time is needed to nurture successful collaboration in the broader context between the university and school, with particular attention paid to avoiding power tensions that may emerge within this partnership working.

Alongside these important features the sharing of effective mentoring activities with mentors and frequent meetings between the mentor and student teacher, including informal opportunities to communicate can underpin a positive mentoring partnership.

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