

Mentoring new teachers: Promise and problems in times of teacher shortage

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Currently enthusiasm for mentoring of new teachers has re-emerged among teacher employing authorities in Australia and the United States. The literature on mentoring provides strong support for the importance of mentoring in retaining good teachers and in invigorating the teaching workforce; it also abounds in practical strategies and processes for developing and managing mentoring programs. This paper examines several contextual aspects affecting mentoring in the current educational landscape: the differentiated impact of teacher supply, appointment and retention; changing teacher entry and career pathways; an expanded knowledge base for teaching, accompanied by increased accountability; systemic preparation and reward of mentors; and improved communication technology. Based on the premise that all learners in all schools are entitled to high quality teachers, the paper explores the potential of mentoring as both promising and risky, and calls for research to monitor the impact of mentoring on both teacher retention and learning outcomes for all children.

Introduction

At a time of acute and rising teacher shortages in Australia and the United States, teacher employing authorities appear to be embarking on mentoring of new teachers with parallel rising trajectories of fervour. This paper examines several contemporary contextual features affecting mentoring of new teachers: the differentiated impact of teacher supply, appointment and retention; changing teacher entry and career pathways; an expanded knowledge base for teaching, accompanied by increased accountability; systemic preparation and reward of mentors; and improved communication technology. The paper does not recommend specific processes and practices for mentoring, nor does it set out to argue the case for mentoring—these aspects are canvassed comprehensively in the education literature and on the web. I seek here to underscore that mentoring, like other educational practices, is not neutral. In papers from almost a decade ago (Martinez, 1993, 1994a), I argued that mentoring of novices by experienced teachers has contradictory potential: as a system of positive, assisted professional entry and renewal; and as acritical occupational perpetuation of existing practices and patterns of inequitable educational outcomes for children. My assumed value continues to be

that all learners in all schools are entitled to highly competent teachers; and I argue here that mentoring persists as both promising and risky in the pursuit of this goal within contemporary contexts. The discussion relates primarily to mentoring newly graduated teachers, although many aspects are equally applicable to preservice teachers, especially during internships. The focus is principally on Australia, with some inclusion of data and research from the United States where mentoring has a longer and stronger history in many states.

Differentiated impact of teacher supply, appointment and retention

A major imperative for renewed enthusiasm for mentoring is current and projected teacher shortages. Throughout the world, large numbers of new teachers will be employed over the next decade, creating many more demands and opportunities for mentoring. In Australia, some dispute exists about the actual means for calculating both supply and demand of teachers. The national Ministerial Committee for Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2001) cautiously suggests that supply and demand are overall about equivalent for the near future, but predicts that, by 2010, certain sections of teacher supply will be under 'severe pressure', in particular, teachers of science and mathematics, and teachers prepared to work in rural and remote locations. Preston (2001) reports on her long-term studies of teacher supply and demand on behalf of the Australian Council of Deans of Education, and offers a more finely-grained analysis of the Australian scene. She projects major shortages in almost all states by 2005, with figures as low as around 60 per cent of demand for secondary teachers being met. Of even greater concern, however, are Preston's projections as to which Australian children are likely to be most affected by projected shortfalls in teacher supply:

Teacher shortages are never evenly spread—they affect most severely those schools that are generally hard-to-staff, and they usually occur most severely in those subject specialisations that are tight at the best of times. Some schools will never feel the damaging effects of a shortage, however severe—in fact such schools may benefit in the competition for status, teachers and students if other schools are experiencing the disruption and inadequate teaching that results from shortages of competent, qualified teachers. Students in hard-to-staff schools are usually already disadvantaged—by the very factors that make the school unattractive to teachers and thus hard-to-staff.

In the United States, it is projected that over two million teachers will enter schools before 2010 (Gerald & Hussar, 1998). Providing qualified mentors for these new teachers is obviously a major challenge; but again the challenge is not just in terms of quantity. Echoing Preston's projections for Australia, Zeichner (2001) offers a timely analysis of the differentiated impact of teacher supply and demand in the United States, and provides evidence that 'students already exhibiting low academic performance, those most in need of investment and effective intervention, have a high probability of being taught by an underprepared teacher' (p.5). Zeichner argues that these combined issues of quality as well as quantity of new

teachers create new demands on all aspects of teacher education and professional development, and cannot be separated out from broader patterns of social and economic inequity in our efforts to build and sustain decent democratic societies. Zeichner's work underscores the contrast between the rhetoric that all children can learn, and the realities of inequalities in provision of opportunities to learn under the guidance of well-qualified teachers. In school systems with such differentiated patterns of appointment of highly qualified beginning teachers, mentors' work is also widely differentiated, and similarly caught up in those complex webs of social and economic inequity.

Consideration of teacher attrition rates provides a similarly disturbing picture of differentiated impact. In Queensland, recent data from the state department of education (Education Queensland, 1999) confirm that the public sector is losing at the highest rate the very groups of teachers it has most difficulty attracting—namely, teachers who are very highly rated at point of entry to the profession, teachers of secondary science and mathematics, teachers of children with special needs, and teachers who are willing to work in rural and remote locations. Of particular relevance to mentoring is that many teachers who left Queensland public schools cited lack of support as a major reason for leaving.

Gordon and Maxey (2000) report similar attrition data for the United States: 'The attrition rate for each of the first two years of teaching is about 15 per cent, compared to a normal turnover rate of 6 per cent within the teaching profession' (p.2). These authors present an alarming summary of the impact on the entire teaching profession of these high attrition rates for new graduate entrants, with graphic descriptions of nightmares, insomnia and vomiting among novices who become loud, boring authoritarian teachers, and then depart to leave behind a stagnant pool of uninspiring teachers:

Studies show that it is the most promising teachers who leave teaching in the early years . . . and many teachers who survive the induction period and remain in teaching develop a survival mentality, a set of restricted teaching methods, and a resistance to curricular and instructional change that may last throughout their teaching careers. (p.2)

Tye and O'Brien (2002, p.31) indicate that not only new teachers, but also talented experienced teachers are leaving the profession. The picture they paint of the United States teaching workforce affected by these new patterns of attrition and retention is similarly bleak for mentoring: 'The situation has serious implications for the nation, as talented teachers leave the classroom in greater numbers and many of those who remain feel increasingly worn out and discouraged—even trapped'.

These combined data indicate shifting patterns of recruitment, appointment and retention in both the United States and Australia. Mentoring in these changed times will be confronted with a number of challenges, such as: the high proportion of newly appointed teachers in staffing profiles; inequitable distribution of appropriately qualified teachers for children whose educational needs are greatest; retaining teachers in difficult-to-staff locations where beginning teachers are likely to be

appointed; and the availability of appropriate mentors in all sites. The composition of the resultant teacher workforce is likely to raise serious issues relating to quality and equity in education for a just society, and present a compelling argument for systemic interruption of existing patterns, structures and practices. As is argued later in this paper, mentoring is unlikely to interrupt these patterns; in fact, mentoring may risk reinforcing and maintaining the patterns of inequity. Therefore it is crucial that mentoring be seen as embedded within patterns of teacher demand and recruitment. However information about teacher supply and demand cannot be limited to blunt generalised statistics about quantity; it must take into consideration the sorts of analysis offered by Zeichner (2001) and Preston (2001) that consider differentiated outcomes for those children already disadvantaged by existing wider patterns of educational, social and economic inequities.

Changing profiles of new teachers and career pathways

A second contextual issue affecting mentoring is the changing profile of entrants to teacher education. In both the United States and Australia, entry into teaching is now marked by multiple pathways. Cochran-Smith (2001) provides a summary of the debate between the professionalisation and deregulation agendas, which has characterised much of the recent American literature on career entry. Entrants to the profession—the pool of potential mentees—are likely to include those who have completed accredited programs of formal teacher education preparation as well as those who have none at all. The National Education Association (NEA) (2002) in America, in its guide for affiliates to establish new teacher support, acknowledges the changed profile of new teachers: ‘Many are hardly new to the world of work. Some come from successful careers in business, law, or the military. Others are former stay-at-home moms whose kids are now older’ (p. 6). The NEA guide also documents the fact that many teachers enter the profession with no teacher preparation at all, with only one quarter of teachers hired in Los Angeles in 2001 having certification.

In Australia, most states now have some form of teacher registration and all teachers are required to have undertaken some teacher education preparation in accredited programs. For example in Queensland, all teachers must be registered, and will have undertaken the equivalent of four years of undergraduate preparation or two years at postgraduate level in accredited programs of teacher education. None the less, within these regulations, the most recent report from the national Department of Science, Education and Training (2002) indicates a varied set of pathways:

There are traditional and alternative pathways into the teaching profession. Traditional pathways for intending teachers may involve a direct transition from school to undergraduate teacher education, or a postgraduate teacher education award following a first degree. In Victoria, for instance, 48 per cent of new enrolments in preservice teacher education courses are into postgraduate programs.

The report goes on to mention other pathways such as ‘up-skilling, re-training and fast-tracking programs that are used as means to attract new teachers,’ with increasing percentages of mature age entrants with prior work experience and success. Some evidence suggests that teaching itself has emerged to take a new status in the Australian community. It appears that an increasing number of teacher applicants have already been successful in other careers and choose teaching as a worthwhile profession, one where they can make a difference. A recent editorial in a national newspaper, *The Weekend Australian* (‘Teaching the government’, 2001), claimed that the teaching profession is in fact emerging from the doldrums—moving from ‘a career of default’ to reclaim ‘its proper place . . . as a third force in keeping society together’. The editor went so far as to assert that ‘society has gained a greater appreciation of teaching as a rewarding and altruistic pursuit’ (p. 16). Such shifts in public perception of the teaching profession will have direct impact on the profile of teacher mentees.

Related to these shifting patterns of career status and entry for teaching, are changes in broader patterns of work generally, with an increase in part-time work, and with most adults facing a number of career changes, rather than pursuing just one career path. Ellyard (1998) argued that, in Australia and globally, success in the future will depend on having many job and even career changes. Kalantzis and Harvey (2002) describe lifelong and lifewide learning as features of great mobility in contemporary workforce patterns. Research conducted in Massachusetts suggests such markedly changed career paths for teachers, with some groups continuing to see themselves as life-cycle career teachers, and with many others regarding teaching as a short-term career option as part of a portfolio of careers (Peske, Liu, Johnson, & Kardos, 2001). Mentoring in this changed workforce context must be responsive to the prior work experiences of newly appointed teachers, as well as to their chosen future career trajectories.

Teaching as highly complex, with increasing accountability

A third issue affecting mentoring is that the knowledge base for teaching has become increasingly diverse and complex. Earlier iterations of mentoring have owed much to clinical supervision, where novices were coached to develop clearly identified teaching behaviours that were derived in large part from process-product research of the 1960s and 1970s. Since that time, when psychological theories of child development and learning theories dominated, bodies of knowledge from sociology, discourse analysis, feminism, practitioner research, cultural studies and poststructuralism have added to the professional knowledge base for teaching. Hargreaves (1997) is one of many commentators to point out that teaching is now difficult, complex, demanding, emotional work with teachers taking on many roles previously fulfilled by other social agents such as family and church. Teachers are also faced with increased diversity of student resources and needs in schools, and with hugely expanded curricula. With such complex knowledge bases and such diversity of contexts for teaching, the very best of teacher education programs will only ever be able to prepare graduates to begin to teach. Workplace

mentoring of newly appointed teachers will be of even greater importance and complexity within such diverse and demanding settings.

In addition, this new wave of mentoring is occurring at a time when teacher and student standards abound—standards which are often themselves extremely complex and demanding, reflecting the expanded knowledge bases about teaching. For example, in Queensland, the state department of education has embraced ‘productive pedagogies’ as a statewide framework. This framework, developed from a longitudinal study of classrooms throughout the state (Education Queensland, 2001), draws on findings from process-product research, constructivism, critical sociology and classroom language discourse analysis, and builds on the work on school reform and ‘authentic pedagogy’ developed by Newmann and Associates (1996) in the United States. Education Queensland is also currently introducing a trial set of teacher standards which incorporate many of the dimensions of productive pedagogy, and is also establishing web-based materials, to support beginning teachers and mentors, which use this standards framework as a rubric for mentoring. The proliferation of standards for both teachers and students is even more dramatic and extensive in the United States, and the standards are used for purposes ranging from school funding and teacher salaries through to school closures. It seems inevitable that demonstrated achievement of standards by teachers and students is likely to be the benchmark by which mentoring will be measured in this new wave, if only in efforts to mute the deafening shouts of politicians about accountability in education spending.

As teaching itself has become extremely complex, and external standards and demands have increased, the work of mentoring newcomers in their on-the-job learning must now be seen as equally demanding and complex, and additionally must be seen to be economically prudent investment of public money.

Preparation, recognition and reward for mentors

It appears in the education literature and on the web that, along with a new enthusiasm for mentoring, is a renewed effort to prepare experienced teachers for their work as mentors, and to recognise and reward them for this work. In the United States, the recently established Recruiting New Teachers (RNT) (2002) organisation, in their guide to developing teacher induction programs, cites as a key requirement adequate funding for mentoring. The RNT recommends that teacher mentors should be rewarded by release time, course vouchers in partnered universities, cash, and recognition as ‘master’ teachers. The document proceeds to list various American states’ measures of recognition and reward for mentors ranging from California’s cash bonus of \$4000 through to Milwaukee Public Schools’ provision of office space, and additional secretarial support and facilities. The RNT document, along with almost every other set of guidelines in the United States, takes as given that mentors should be trained for their work with new teachers. According to Oliva and Pawlas (2001), Florida is prepared to meet this challenge and, under its Excellent Teaching Program Act of 1998, is paying a 10 per cent bonus to teachers who mentor a newly hired teacher.

In Australia, only the state of New South Wales has systematised such preparation and reward of mentoring. Its public education authority, the Department of Education and Training (DET), is in the process of introducing a program of preparation and reward for mentor teachers throughout the state (Department of Education and Training, 2001). DET has developed innovative partnerships with ten universities throughout the state to offer a Certificate in Mentoring Teacher Development. Prospective mentors are offered up to \$2000 yearly for up to two years to undertake study in a university subject in mentoring, and a DET online subject in beginning teacher development, which together provide credit transfer to a university Masters degree. This certainly represents the most comprehensive systemic initiative in Australia to match practice to rhetoric around mentoring of beginning teachers, and is also a highly significant bridge between sections of the educational community, with its formalised collaboration between universities and the public education authority. Education Queensland has begun to recognise the challenges involved in systematic training of mentors and is currently preparing electronic learning materials to be accessed in all state schools.

However these laudatory initiatives to prepare and recognise mentor teachers appear as isolated lighthouses in a persistently bleak scene, with Weiss and Weiss (1999) reporting that less than one quarter of mentor programs in the United States actually include training of mentors. Kalantzis and Harvey (2002, p.9) lament that the provision of ongoing professional development of teachers, including as mentors, remains 'largely neglected' in Australia. The authors conclude: 'We are unlikely to keep the finest teachers in the profession without more commitment to programs of reskilling and professional development'. Funding and developing structures and practices to implement rhetoric about the desirability of trained mentors clearly persists as a major pressing demand, especially given the numbers of new teachers about to be employed.

Improved communication technology

In addition to rethinking the context, content and purposes of mentoring programs, the profiles and career paths of mentors and mentees, and preparation and reward of mentors, those responsible for managing contemporary mentoring must also rethink delivery modes for mentoring programs. Improvements in information technology offer opportunities to provide new teachers with the substantive information they may need—about students, policies and procedures in particular sites, and about general issues of pedagogy, curriculum and assessment. Earlier forms of mentoring have traditionally used folders of print materials and regular meetings to impart such information. Web-based information now affords great flexibility with information provision, allowing mentees to take a far more active role in seeking information when they are ready for it. A wealth of teaching resources such as unit plans and assessment task sheets are readily available to new teachers, who are also likely to be more comfortable and more skilled in accessing these resources than the more experienced teachers who have traditionally been mentors. In addition, communication by email and chat board can offer new teachers intra- and inter-school networking support to counteract the isolation that many new teachers

experience. These facilities may be of special value for teachers who enter their career in rural and remote communities.

Further an abundance of electronic materials exist for establishing and maintaining mentoring programs, for preparation of mentors, and for networking among mentors. Flexibility of access is clearly a distinct advantage of electronic information for busy practitioners who work tight schedules. Again these resources may be of particular benefit for those working in rural and remote locations, for new mentors, and for sites with only one beginning teacher.

A quick web search makes it very clear that materials for mentoring are available electronically in over-abundance, and that opportunities exist for electronic communications for beginning teachers, mentors and mentor program managers. Such electronic materials and networking do not replace the need for mentoring; rather they call for new roles and professional relationships to be negotiated. New mentoring programs can maintain a focus on professional collegial welcome, exchange and growth, while capitalising on new technologies to provide the flexibility and multiplicity for customising mentoring to suit the needs and resources of all new teachers in all contexts. New technologies afford the possibility of effective mentoring to be experienced as professional learning relationships that take place within a rich mix of system- and school-wide structures, using well-developed materials and practices.

Mentoring: Much potential, but no magic

This final section of the paper explores ways in which mentoring, within the current educational context, might advance or obstruct the provision of quality teachers for all learners. In summary, I support the general enthusiasm for mentoring as well justified and welcomed; mentoring new teachers is an educational practice with enormous potential. However it is a little disturbing that, throughout much of the literature, this enthusiasm for mentoring reaches manic peaks. Mentors are frequently described in hallowed tones as sage counsellors who have successfully trod the profession's highways and who now await the novice journeyer with beacons to guide the way to a guaranteed successful career path. Etymological considerations have tended to elevate further the status of mentor to the realms of the ancient gods. The literature abounds in claims of the benefits of mentoring for all participants—mentors, mentees, and school systems (e.g. Halford, 1998; Holloway, 2001; Odell & Huling, 2000; Stevens, 1995). Throughout the plethora of diverse, practical models for mentoring, the literature presents a singularly glowing picture of the wonders of mentoring.

I would not want to deny the profound importance of friendly professional welcoming support for novice teachers, offered by teachers more experienced in the particular site, and the research confirms that novices appreciate such personal, emotional support (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). However I wish here to raise again questions about possible flaws in such an acritical approach to mentoring, by examining ways in which mentoring may be taken up and implemented. Some caution seems advisable, given the contextual features described above, particularly the anticipated large increase in the number of new teachers to be appointed during

the next decade. Indeed it is difficult to suppress just a little cynicism, that perhaps mentoring will be invoked as a quick cheap fix which potentially alleviates national and state authorities of direct responsibility for the looming problem of managing occupational entry for large numbers of beginning teachers. This seems particularly relevant with the current governance model, in most Australian states, of devolution to individual schools of control over distribution of funding, including for professional development. In such contexts, it is unlikely that support for beginning teachers will emerge as a priority, as the novices (who are at the bottom of the school power hierarchy) are unlikely to be represented on those allocation committees. Establishment of structured support for beginning teachers is therefore likely to be even more serendipitous. This is not to suggest that principals are malevolently disposed to neophytes. Research has consistently revealed that principals are concerned for the difficulties faced by beginning teachers (e.g. Martinez, 1994b; Queensland Board of Teacher Registration, 1991; Tisher, Fyfield, & Taylor, 1979). However this research also makes it clear that those concerns and good intentions have only about a 50 per cent chance of eventuating in structured support for the beginning teachers. In a devolved system with reduced funding, faced with burgeoning numbers of new teachers entering schools, busy principals are likely to be tempted to see assignment of a mentor as a simple, low-maintenance solution. Meanwhile state and national politicians and system administrators, with all responsibility devolved to local site managers, can continue to offer reduced budgets and withdraw any system support, while blaming universities for poor teacher education and schools for poor teacher retention. If we are to break these cycles, and produce more equitable distribution of quality teachers, then support of newly appointed teachers and preparation and reward of mentors must be seen as system-wide challenges. For these reasons, it is particularly heartening to see at least one state in Australia and several in the United States now taking such systemic responsibility.

In our enthusiasm for the potential of mentoring, it is also wise to consider its limitations; and again this seems particularly important at this time when schools will need to respond to large numbers of new teachers. In Australia, in previous times of teacher shortages, a tempting direction to pursue has been the reduction of formal teacher education to short 'up-skilling' or retraining programs. Within such pragmatic approaches to supplying warm-bodied teachers to fill timetable slots, school-based induction is an obvious corollary. Experiments with school-based teacher training in the United Kingdom over the past decade do not inspire confidence. In a country characterised by rich cultural diversity and intense inter-racial tensions, complex issues such as multicultural education risk being reduced to short printed handouts issued to preservice teachers to work through with their school mentors. Such simplistic approaches make a mockery of the complex knowledge base for teaching and learning discussed earlier in this paper. Teacher educators know that it is difficult to develop appropriately comprehensive curricula within the four-year framework of teacher education programs, and acknowledge that the best teacher preparation programs can only prepare teachers to begin to teach. It would be absurd to expect that school-based teacher mentors

(who themselves are extremely busy with their core classroom work) could adequately compensate formal preservice teacher education. Despite rumours in the literature to the contrary, there is no magic in mentoring: the most highly skilled mentors cannot replace teacher education.

Similarly mentors have no magic wands to transform the impossible teaching contexts that many teachers encounter on entry to the profession. The best mentoring cannot compensate for inappropriate allocation of tasks to beginning teachers. Gordon and Maxey (2000) identify 'difficult work assignments' as one of six environmental difficulties faced by beginning teachers, who are frequently allocated the most difficult classes in the worst classrooms with the poorest facilities. The Queensland Board of Teacher Registration (1991) had expressed a further concern that a large number of beginning secondary teachers in their survey reported teaching at least one class outside the teaching areas for which they had been prepared. Even without such mismatching, the Board argued that all initial teaching was demanding, and recommended: 'a reduction of up to 20% for first year teachers would be desirable . . . and such a reduction was not unreasonable in terms of the differential between the salary levels of beginning teachers and teachers with a number of years of teaching experience' (p. 98). Clearly placement in difficult contexts with maximum loads contributes enormously to a beginning teacher's career entry and subsequent career path decisions. No amount of mentoring can overcome such difficulties of heavy and inappropriate workload. One can but hope that shifting school timetabling practices will be an obvious response as we employ the next generation of teachers. However the obdurate obstacle to reform in this direction might be a prevailing culture among some senior staff who wish to have bad history repeated and have newcomers suffer and be thrown into 'reality'. No wonder Halford (1998, p.33) referred to teaching as 'the profession that eats its young'!

The impact on the beginning teachers themselves of unsupported entry into inappropriate initial teaching context is deplorable and evident: they leave! Additionally, wider consequences follow, and again it is Zeichner (2001, p.5) who alerts us to the differentiated impact on students of these inappropriate allocations. His analysis indicates that 'students in high poverty secondary schools . . . are more than twice as likely as students in low poverty schools . . . to be taught by teachers not certified in their fields'. Such differentiated analysis does not appear to be available for the Australian setting, although several state education providers have been expressing concern for some time that the state-funded public school sector could become a residualised second-rate sector compared with the non-state, fee-paying private sector. Preston's (2001) report foreshadows such a two-class system. Analysis of appropriate teacher qualification across state and non-state sectors and across urban and rural and indigenous community schools is needed to compare educational opportunities for all Australian children.

Finally I wish to restate my concerns for the potential harm that mentoring can bring about, especially for those children for whom schooling is already not working. Many mentoring programs have been premised on a deficit view of teacher education and of beginning teachers. Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1992)

described mentors in such programs as local guides and educational companions, whereas Cochran-Smith and Paris (1995) referred to this conceptualisation of mentoring as the knowledge-transmission model. In such models, the major purpose of mentoring has been to ensure that the new teacher to a particular site fits in quickly, with least disturbance to the ways that 'business as normal' is conducted. Some recent mentoring programs, such as the New South Wales Teacher Mentor scheme, have moved beyond that deficit model, by acknowledging the worth of teacher education and the positive contributions that beginning teachers make to school communities in their ongoing efforts to enhance learning and life outcomes for all children. However the mentoring literature suggests that the former deficit 'quick-fix' model remains the dominant practice.

Eddy (1969), in her study three decades ago, signalled the potential risks in heavy or exclusive reliance on mentors to assist beginning teachers—the risk of accelerated socialisation, of acritical occupational perpetuation, and the attendant maintenance of bureaucratic power relations within schools and society. Eddy worked with beginning teachers in American ghetto schools, and drew social and institutional implications about 'the constant guides and guardians' and the helpful remedies they offered the beginners:

The solutions offered by the oldtimers stress the importance of keeping pupils quietly occupied and forcing them to respond to the activities of teachers, even if several days, weeks, or months are required to drill them in routines of acting out their subordinate role in the classroom. (p. 18)

Accordingly, Eddy argued that the natural extension of this process was:

To provide an ideology which allows teachers in the slum school to maintain a professional identity even when they fail to teach pupils in ways that enabled them to achieve in the educational system. (p. 118)

Eddy argued that, in the face of the difficulties of the early months of teaching, young teachers sought comfort in ascribing their difficulties to the traits of pupils and parents, or to administrators. New teachers received support for these views from older colleagues. Eddy maintained that more experienced teachers socialised their younger colleagues into behaviours, values and attitudes which they had already defined as appropriate for teachers in the schooling bureaucracy, and which contributed to poor achievement by children already disadvantaged.

Similar practices of socialisation of new teachers appeared in Australian settings, where beginning teachers were revealed to adapt quickly to the established standards and expectations of experienced teachers (Martinez, 1994a). Such perpetuation of practices created major problems, especially in the case of Brian, a young teacher who took up a position in an indigenous community school. As senior teachers are the people who have been successful within the hierarchy of teaching, they are placed powerfully as system maintainers. To the new recruit, they offer advice for strategies and approaches that work. Brian's story suggests that 'what works' is interpreted as keeping students quiet or

accepting very limited classroom-bound views of the roles of teaching, but has little connection with learning outcomes or life chances for students. It must also be made clear that the experienced teachers' motives may indeed be honourable with respect to their junior colleagues. It is most likely that they act in ways that they believe will best assist the beginning teacher to survive the early months of teaching. None the less, the consequences for children, and for society, are not so honourable.

However there are also very encouraging signs for mentoring in contemporary school settings. Moves over the past decade to construct schools as learning organisations and to build collaborative communities of professional exchange may have interrupted traditional power hierarchies, thus setting a climate more conducive to mentoring that can make a positive difference. New communication technologies provide wonderful promise of flexibility and deprivatisation, even for beginning teachers in the most remote locations. Best of all, several states in the United States and New South Wales have now begun matching practice to rhetoric in their structured systemic processes of preparation of mentors and reward and recognition of their work.

Providing the empirical warrant

In this paper, I have not tried to explore or advocate specific mentoring practices. Rather, I have identified relevant features of the context within which mentoring will occur in the near future, and the likely impact of those complex and inter-related features on the outcomes of mentoring. I have argued that mentoring has potential to result in both positive and negative effects on teacher retention and learning outcomes for particular groups of children. Hence mentoring cannot be constructed as neutral practice. With predictions of large numbers of new teachers and new mentoring programs in the near future, the task remains to examine systematically and critically the assumptions, practices and outcomes of mentoring, so that judgements about and investments in mentoring are based on convincing evidence rather than a fad or an easy option. Over a decade ago, Little (1990), in her major review of 'the mentor phenomenon', alerted us to the 'manic optimism' that has characterised much of the writing about mentors and their potential. She raised key issues and set an agenda for future action relating to mentoring: 'Rhetoric and action have . . . outpaced both conceptual development and empirical warrant' (pp. 297–298). I believe we are now facing the major challenge of providing that empirical warrant for mentoring. Such research may remove the magical status of mentors and so reveal their real powers within prevailing contexts. We need the research to show what sort of mentoring influences which teachers to stay in which schools doing what to which children, with what consequences for all children.

Keywords

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