

## Book reviews

Wallace, Susan & Gravells, Jonathan (2005). *Professional Development. Lifelong Learning Sector: Mentoring*. Exeter: Learning Matters

### OVERALL,

the aim of this study is to set out, in both theoretical and practical terms, exactly what may favor an effective implementation of a mentoring program for supporting the professional development of teachers, who have become members of *Further Education*<sup>1</sup> (FE) institutions for the first time. The study of mentoring programs in a specific context is the first significant indicator of how these programs have been studied and their practice developed. Indeed, the promotion of new skills among particular groups of individuals by means of these intervention models is always referred to in a contextualized manner (Denisson, 2000; Healy, 1997; Pereira, 2005), given that it is a primarily relational process and, thus being, significantly determined by context.

### AS FOR STRUCTURE,

the work under study informs and stimulates reflection, alternating information with specific tasks aimed at the author, followed by a discussion which may be furthered through the consultation of bibliographical references indicated in each chapter. The term *mentoring* is the point of departure leading to progressive reflection, which is the aim of the authors.

### STARTING WITH DEFINITION

One of the challenges presented to studies in this area is to develop a clear understanding of how and why the term *mentoring* is used, since it can often be very similar to others, such as tutorial and advising (Denisson, 2000; Pereira, 2005), coaching and education (Healy, 1997), often giving rise to confusion.

The authors say that what distinguishes mentoring from other types of support and/or education relations is its purpose: first of all, it functions in transition processes — helping an individual to move from one state to another. In the case of FE, the new teacher is supported during the transition from one level of professional development to another.

From a European perspective (represented by the authors), mentoring is a process geared towards personal development and not merely towards the acquisition of new knowledge (*sponsorship model* — tradition in USA).

In other words, in addition to the assimilation of knowledge, skills and behaviors are also acquired. Furthermore, a third function, the teaching of learning through learning, is also acquired along with an understanding of the emotions and psychological challenges raised by the transition process.

The focus on transition provides the mentoring program with the potential for mutual learning, since the supporting agent has already been through a similar experience, thus, being in a position to increase his/her tolerance and involvement in work-related tasks.

In comparison with other support and/or educational relations, the authors defend that mentoring, in fact, includes many of them. They are defined on the basis of four distinct functions put forward in Clutterbuck's model (1985, quoted by Wallace & Gravells, 2005): coaching — to observe what the mentee does and to suggest ideas; looking after — to make the mentee understand that the mentor is close to hand and available to give help; establishing a communication network — to use information and communication technologies, such as email and blogs; advising — to listen and enquire about the mentee's transition process from time to time (the activation of one function over another stems from an intentional process of providing help).

In accordance with this model, the difficulty in defining the mentoring process is related to the inclusion of different roles which may be present to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the stage of the relationship between the mentor and mentee and the needs of the latter.

#### THE AGENTS OF THIS PROCESS

The examples presented in this study identify an interaction between two agents: the mentor and mentee. It is, therefore, a form of peer work, where each member has a very important role.

Let us begin with the mentor who may be distinguished from the mentee for being older and/or more experienced; for the amount of involvement in the relationship and for the way he/she guides and supports interaction.

It has been suggested that the mentor can increase his/her effectiveness if committed to learning more and developing further.

Conclusions suggest that the action of the mentor should be responsive and make use of the different types of help at his/her disposal: it depends on the relationship and depends on the mentee...

If we put ourselves in the context of adult learning (FE), the mentee has as much responsibility as the one who is teaching. In these circumstances, the characteristics of the mentee, such as having responsibility, respecting the role of the mentor, being receptive to help and being reflective, are crucial to the development of a more productive relationship.

#### HOW TO DEVELOP THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGENTS

More than the characteristics of each member, regulation of the relationship can determine the effectiveness of the process. Healy (1997), along the same lines, defends that mentoring differs from supervision in the sense that it involves reciprocity and heightens the qualitative transformation of both parties.

The authors view the relationship as being central to the mentoring process, comparing it with any other meaningful relationship established between individuals. We are referring to issues based on trust; confidentiality; honesty; coherence; genuineness and suitability of physical space. In an even more specific way, aspects such as taking support relations into consideration, the importance of developing active hearing, effective questioning, reflection, also on an emotional level and the handing back of clarifying summaries on the mentee's development are reinforced in order to stimulate self-awareness.

Picking up on the idea that mentoring is a process geared towards personal development, more differentiated support skills are implied in the relationship, such as requiring the mentee to reflect and question him/herself, thus, facilitating self-knowledge and self-questioning.

The motto is to help more than to guide: to challenge and look after; to bear emotions and thoughts in mind; to explore and establish commitments.

The same is requested of the mentor: to develop self-reflection so as to increase sufficient knowledge of his/her fears and projections, in order to prevent them from hindering the task.

The relationship, per se, can and should be reflected on by both, while taking into account issues regarding the limits of the relationship, through the discussion of expectations and permanent dialogue between peers.

#### STEP BY STEP MENTORING

While stressing the centrality of context and relationship in the developmental process of a mentoring program, the authors refer to the difficulty in structuring a step by step action guide. Indeed, the development/evolution issues of a program are determinant in an intentional process, such as mentoring, and it is on this level that the authors use two learning process analysis models which complement each other (Alred *et al.*, 1998; Honey & Mumford, 1992, quoted by Wallace & Gravells, 2005).

The mentee is regarded as going through a new experience in which he/she will be supported by the mentor in the exploration of his/her relationship with the new role, so as to move on to a new understanding of the process. At this stage, the mentor is presented as someone who stimulates the questioning of experiences and orientates plans of action (Alred *et al.*, 1998, quoted by Wallace & Gravells, 2005).

In view of the plan of action, it may be considered that a learning experience cycle is initiated, made up of action (having experience), applications (planning the following stages), reflections (reliving the experience) and theorizations (conclusions of experience) (Honey & Mumford, 1992, quoted by Wallace & Gravells, 2005).

In accordance with these models, the importance of planning is stressed. The authors mention that without planning, mentoring runs the risk of becoming a very therapeutic conversation but one which bears little impact on learning.

#### EVALUATION OF THE MENTORING PROCESS

Evaluating a program/process implies beginning with the identification of what is intended to be *produced/attained* so that the impact of such intervention may be evaluated at the end (Fernández-Ballesteros, 2001).

If mentoring is looked upon as a support process during a phase characterized by new learning experiences, the aims of such learning must be identified and, consequently, clear objectives must be defined. Both the mentor and mentee must know what these objectives are, evaluative feedback must be requested of both and a systematic monitoring system needs to be established.

The authors underline the importance of a cyclic evaluation process in which several evaluation methods should compete: interviews, comparison between plans and results; diaries and registers; discussion groups; statistical analysis of certain variables (drop-outs; successful promotions or accomplishments; complaints; positive feedback; mentees who become mentors, among others).

Even though there is mention of the fact that mentoring is also a process of development for the mentor and learning institution/organization, such aspects of the process have not been taken into consideration by the authors in the programs' evaluation indications.

#### MENTORING: SUCH AN IMPORTANT MATTER IN FE

According to the authors, in this context there is pressure for change, for dealing with unpredictability in order to deal with a professional career in a more independent and autonomous manner. This implies that the responsibility of professional development depends more on each individual than on his/her hierarchies.

Mentoring is particularly valuable as a source of professional development for those who work in FE, partly because it makes tacit knowledge explicit; it encourages people to look for their experiential knowledge and to use it to improve their learning as professionals.

Comparing the results of traditional training courses with mentoring experiences, better results and higher transference of learning have been found in mentoring in comparison with the afore-mentioned courses. Indeed, mentoring presents advantages in relation to traditional training in the following fields:

- better preparation for the ambiguity and complexity associated with the teaching activity; manager and team leaders in FE; mentoring may offer support in the development of strategies for managing demand conflicts;
- mentoring processes are also coherent with the importance attributed to soft skills and emotional intelligence: empathy and relationship with mutual respect.

#### IN SHORT

Reading *Professional Development. Lifelong Learning Sector: Mentoring* leads us to acknowledge the unequivocal value and credibility of mentoring programs as flexible practices, adjustable to transition processes in contexts characterized by change. These programs tend to stimulate autonomy and the personal/professional development of the "learner" of a new activity which demands frequent adjustments to new challenges. The benefits for the mentors and education establishments are yet to be explored, but are expected to be in abundance.

#### ENDNOTES

1. In Portuguese, the term *Further Education* is equivalent to adult education institutions based on alternative educational programs.

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