"Mentoring Skills: Implications for Portfolio Development and Professional Learning."

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe the next stage in my research plan. An introduction and background to the research will be explained to provide a conceptual framework for the discussion. The paper will define the research problem and the questions to be considered. A plan of the research will be discussed. The literature will be discussed briefly and an analysis of the literature will be made to assess what research to date suggests mentoring can contribute to the development of a teacher portfolio.

WORK DONE SO FAR

i.   The study commenced with content analyses of research of teachers' work being conducted in the different states of Australia. Documents describing teachers' work were examined.
ii. A synthesis of common themes was completed from the content analyses.
iii. A schema was developed from the common themes to describe teachers' work.

A model has been developed (Clarke, 1997), utilising the domains identified in the content analysis on teachers' work to assist with explanations about the process of teacher portfolio development, including, particularly the role of mentoring

Essential within the model is the role of the mentor in assisting and supporting the person developing their portfolio. It is the major intention of study to examine the mentoring skills and the role of the mentor in assisting the preservice teacher in the development of a teacher portfolio.

In 1998 at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean a portfolio process was introduced into the Bachelor of Education first year undergraduate program, in a subject 'Children and

Teaching'. An initial paper reported on the developmental stages of this process. It is the intention of a future paper to review the skills of the mentor in the portfolio development process related to the ways in which mentoring can assist teachers in the development of a teacher portfolio and how this process can strengthen teacher quality and professional development.

WHAT THE LITERATURE SHOWS

The mentoring process has been born from the world of business. Its growth has been seen in many professions, none the least, teaching. Mentoring programs have been popular in the United States (Klung and Salzman, 1991) and Europe and the United Kingdom. Mentoring in Australian education fields is evident in preservice, induction programs and in professional development programs for teachers at all stages of their development.

The review did not detect any clear consensus as to an agreed or accurate definition of mentoring. Anderson and Shannon (in Kerry and Shelton Mayes, (Eds). 1995) believe that most definitions of mentoring are vague, broad and do not give enough direction to the mentor. Their view that " a) mentoring is fundamentally a nurturing process, b) that the mentor must serve as a role model to the protégé and c) that the mentor must exhibit certain dispositions that help define the process" (p.29) brings together many of the views expressed in the literature.

Cohen (1995), highlights identified mentor skills in adult learners. His list is an example of the kinds of skills necessary for a positive mentoring relationship. These include:

1. Practice responsive listening
2. Ask open-ended questions related to expressed immediate concerns about actual situations
3. Provide descriptive feedback based on observations rather than inferences of motives
4. Use perception checks to ensure comprehension of feelings.
5. Offer nonjudgmental sensitive responses to assist in clarification of emotional states and reactions" (p.29)

Some of these skills will be explored in the interviews to be conducted with student teachers as part of the research procedure.

At the commencement of this study Maynard and Furlong in a major, substantial publication, argue however, that mentors require a repertoire of skills dependent on the stage of development of the student teacher. Their argument is based on the notion that professional learning is a developmental process and changes over time. Their belief is that student teachers pass through different stage of learning to teach. They have identified a mentor's role and skills required of a mentor in the different stages of student teacher development (p.18). They assert that mentors require " special skills in order to help students in [the] systematic enquiry. It is only through such enquiry that students can establish themselves a rational basis for their professional action" (Furlong & Maynard, 1995, p.179).

ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERATURE

The view by Clarke that there is a link between mentoring and portfolio development is supported by a number of other writers. Wolf (1996) emphasises the need to develop a portfolio in collaboration with a mentor. He indicates that "ideally your mentor will have experience both in teaching and in portfolio construction" (p.34). Wolf (1194) identifies that mentoring and collaboration and feedback associated with the portfolio contributes to a

teacher's learning. Zeichner and Wray (2000) in an authoritative, recent paper state " that it has been argued that the value of teaching portfolios is greatly enhanced when teachers are given the opportunities to interact with others on a regular basis in their construction (p.10). Mentoring is of course, a significant aspect of interaction.

Furlong and Maynard (1995) attempting to characterise the nature of teaching have cited the work of Schon. Schon's view of how students should be supported by learning is through a coach involving reflection on action. In this role the mentor takes on the role of coach assisting the preservice teacher to reflect on teaching practice. This reflection on action attempts to describe the processes involved in the action of teaching. The model developed by Clarke (1997) strongly advocates reflection as a key component of the teacher portfolio process.

Riggs, Sandlin, Scott, Mitchell, Childress, Post and Edge (1997) in an action research study have documented 'The Inland Empire (California) Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project' illustrating the way a mentor relationship has been linked to the portfolio development process. The project involves three assessment strategies for beginning teachers, one of which is the development of a teacher portfolio. The portfolio provides a vehicle for dialogue between the mentor and the beginning teacher. In this program a mentor and a beginning teacher meet to collaboratively develop a 'Professional Growth Plan' based around a portfolio. The portfolio serves to facilitate dialogue about teaching practice and provides a basis for self-reflection on teaching.

To gain a background knowledge of the facets of the mentoring process, the role of the mentor and protégé, and the skills that mentors require a literature review has been completed. The review provides a framework for assisting in an understanding of the mentoring process and its capacity to be utilised in developing a teacher portfolio. The literature review was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, secondary sources were reviewed to gain a general understanding of the topic. General texts were reviewed providing a sound overall knowledge of the subject. These general texts assisted with the isolation of specific issues. They provided the background necessary for the researcher to isolate a tentative research problem. Once specific issues were highlighted, primary sources such as journal articles were reviewed. The primary sources guided and informed the identified study. This part of the review was more thorough and extensive in order to obtain a detailed knowledge of the specific topic. Undertaking both these stages enabled the researcher to define and limit the problem and develop a concise plan of action.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

This research is an investigation of one particular attempt to develop and use mentoring strategies in support of professionally salient teacher portfolios.

My current formulation of my central research question is to test the hypothesis that mentoring strategies and skills can make a significant contribution to the development of a teacher portfolio.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Arising directly from the research problem a set of questions has been developed, that is,

1. What impact does mentoring have in assisting with the development of a teacher portfolio?
2. What skills should mentors have to enable them to mentor effectively, in general terms, and specifically related to the field of teaching?

3. What generalisations can be made in regard to mentoring and its role in workplace learning in relation to the development of a teacher portfolio?

PLAN OF RESEARCH

1. **Review of Literature** (see above)
2. **Participants**

The participants are 11 Bachelor of Education third year students involved in the *'Student Mentoring'* subject and a group of Bachelor of Education second year students who self-selected themselves to act as mentees.

Mentees were advised of the study through a lecture organised for second year Bachelor of Education Students. The mentors were advised in a "Student Mentoring" lecture.

The students were asked to volunteer to be part of the study.

Methodology

a. *Student Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted on an individual basis with the researcher. Interviews will be approximately 30 minutes duration and will be framed around broad, key questions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a means to collect data, as they would enable the researcher to probe responses and solicit further details from the participants. Making reference to the skills identified by Cohen a set of semi-structured interview questions was developed. This enabled student interview responses to be framed around the identified skills.

The purposes of the interviews are:

i. To ascertain the perceptions of the B.Ed third year students about their role in assisting B.Ed second year students with the development of their teacher portfolio.
ii. To gain an understanding of the B.Ed second year students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the mentor is assisting them with the development of their portfolio.

b. *Data Analysis*

The researcher will utilise a database to categorise emerging themes identified in the interviews and these themes will be examined and discussed in relation to the literature. The literature reviewed will be revisited in the light of research findings. The review will also assist in providing a context for the analysis of the responses to the semi-structured interviews.

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