The lessons we learnt: the nature of early professional learning for beginning teachers in Victorian secondary schools through induction and mentoring relationships.

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Jane Kirkby

The University of Melbourne

Abstract

Attrition rates for beginning teachers are reported as high globally; with issues surrounding the acquisition of professional knowledge leading many countries to adopt a standards based approach to address the problem. The Victorian Institute of Teaching introduced this approach to full registration for beginning teachers in 2004, supported by school-based formal mentor program.

This phenomenological oriented case study examined the nature of the professional learning that resulted from the interactions that beginning teachers had with both their formal and informal mentors. Qualitative data were analysed using the works of Bourdieu and Wenger as theoretical frameworks to understand the nature of learning as a result of the reported formal and informal mentor relationships.

The results suggest further attention needs to be given to the quality and consistency of the learning experienced by beginning teachers. Time was shown to work as an operant in perpetuating norms of professional isolation, professional autonomy and particular views of knowledge. While some beginning teachers reported strong pedagogical discussions with their formal mentors, others were relying more on trying to access private knowledge through friendship based relationships or clandestine measures. These latter behaviours tend to reinforce the cultural norms of ‘learning to teach’ identified by Lortie (1975), Little (1991) and Moore-Johnson et al (2004, pp139-165).

Given the investment that the Victorian Institute of Teaching has made in the mentor program as an avenue for improving the retention and quality of teachers in their early years of practice, it is suggested that the findings of this study provide an impetus for further investigation into the school-based issues related to mentoring.

Correspondence email: janekirkby@bigpond.com
Introduction

Painting the background

This study has its roots in a highly personal experience and it is probably true to say that, as such, the methodology selected me rather than vice versa. At the time of my trompe l’oeil moment, the focus on formal mentoring was just beginning to gain greater attention and the introduction of Victorian Institute of Teaching, and the standards for registration, was imminent. Two beginning teachers departed our school stating, as they walked out the door, that they had felt unsupported. I was left to wonder what they had seen or heard that I had not. This event has underpinned the study and has been a contributing factor for decisions made regarding methodology, the structure of the study and nature of data analysis and representation. Although this experience occurred in a primary school context, the study focuses on secondary teachers, the reasons for which I will explain shortly.

The ensuing research questions were

1. How is induction experienced by beginning secondary teachers?
2. What do beginning secondary teachers understand through their mentor relationships?
3. What impact do induction and mentoring have on personal, professional knowledge?

Teaching Matters

Attrition in teaching has an historical context (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Predominantly attracting working groups such as women, who left teaching once they married, and minority male groups, who used teaching as a way to increase status, the stable nature of the teaching sector is relatively recent (Moore Johnson et al, 2004, p.28). The movement in and out of teaching, combined with schools’ ‘cellular’ physical structures (Lortie, 1975, p.14) meant that professional knowledge was often acquired independently through trial and error, setting up norms of professional autonomy, professional isolation and particular views of knowledge.

More recent recognition of teachers’ ability to influence a society’s future has meant that this traditional positioning of teachers has to be changed. Publications such as the ‘No Child Left Behind 2001’ initiative in the USA, the O.E.C.D. report ‘Teachers Matter’ and the 2008 MCEETYA ‘Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians’ clearly indicate the shift in how teaching is seen.
Because teachers matter, (Rowe & Rowe, 2002) then it becomes important that these teachers are not just experienced but also highly skilled (Hattie, 2003). Teaching knowledge takes years to accumulate (Cameron et al, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p.1027; Inman & Marlow, 2004), and the need to maintain the recent stability in the workforce becomes important to enable the transfer of professional knowledge from experienced to neophyte. Within this framework, the lens has sharpened on the impact of induction and mentoring as teachers prepare students for their place in a knowledge-based society (Darling-Hammond, 2001, 2003).

Diagram 1 illustrates the impact of changing social factors, such as increased employment options, greater movement across industries and increased expectation on formal education to skill future generations, on the human resource management strategies of induction and mentoring.

**Diagram 1. Positioning the current focus on induction and mentoring of beginning teachers**
In recognition of the demonstrated confluence of these factors, this study works from the following accepted premises:

1. Teachers can make a difference to the learning outcomes of their students;
2. Teaching knowledge is built over time and predominantly ‘on the job’ and
3. Experienced teachers hold a wealth of knowledge that can benefit beginning teachers.

**Workforce stability**

The need to recruit and retain new teachers is evident across the world (Malone & Caddell, 2000; Martinez, 2004; Wheaton Shorr, 2005), with attrition rates high at all stages of training and early career (Weller & Weller, 2000, 2007; Grieve & Hanafin, 2005; Shann, 1998; Martinez, 2004; Latham, 1998; Wong, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Reasons given include lack of career advancement, support, salary and work life balance; factors comparable to general industry retention issues (Nankervis et al, 2005, p.180; Wheaton Shorr, 2005). Concurrently, we have seen the rise of the ‘war for talent’ within teaching, similar to that experienced in other industries, as the traditional members of the teaching community find that they have numerous options from which to select, and that career change is becoming more acceptable and possible.

Early attrition results in a loss of generational exchange of professional knowledge. The impending retirement of the large cohort of older teachers forewarns the potential loss of a significant body of accumulated professional knowledge. With the need for lengthy engagement with more experienced colleagues considered as providing optimal opportunity for newly qualified teachers to attain this bank of knowledge, induction has been widely acknowledged as a key function in developing neophytes within schools (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Semeniuk & Worrall, 2000; Portner, 2005, p.xxii). As a subsidiary role, mentoring is the interpersonal function that is increasingly used to facilitate learning.

**Knowledge Transfer**

Teaching involves a highly complex body of knowledge far more intricate than that related to solely subject matter. Teacher education programs can only begin to prepare teachers for the demands of their role, and the expectation that much of what needs to be learnt will occur on the job reflects the
complexity of the craft (Odell, 1990, p.14; Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p.1026; Martinez, 2004), with expertise being built across the years. Further complicating the acquisition of craft knowledge for beginning teachers is its ambiguous and intangible nature (Lortie, 1975, p.135). During this period of limited professional knowledge, several situations are likely to arise that increase the urgency for beginning teachers to gain adequate knowledge; they often assume similar loads to their colleagues, teach outside their subject areas or find themselves in ‘hard to staff schools’ (Carter & Francis, 2001; Manuel, 2003; McCormack et al, 2006). The expectation that beginning teachers take loads similar to their more experienced counterparts is historically grounded (Lortie, 1975, p. 72) and has continued to be seen as a problem (Little, 1990; Kardos et al, 2001). Steps to address this have been taken in some countries such as Australia and Scotland where the face to face teaching load has been reduced for beginning teachers (Manuel, 2003; The Scottish Government, 2001). However, it is not uncommon for beginning teachers to carry similar administrative responsibilities as other members of staff (Manuel, 2003).

Therefore, the need for learning on the job, often escalated by the less than favourable conditions of employment for beginning teachers, focuses attention on the nature of organisational learning. Given that teaching is a craft (Burney, 2004; Lortie, 1975:135), with similar reliance on tacit knowledge as exhibited in other craft-based organizations (Levitt & March, 1998), there is a need to examine how this knowledge can be effectively shared across the profession. It is recognized that informal learning is the most effective way to transfer this tacit knowledge through interaction with colleagues (Boud & Middleton, 2003; Swap et al, 2001).

Mentoring has been identified as a strategy that can facilitate the transfer of professional knowledge from experts to novices (Swap et al, 2001). As such, an organisation that fosters the mentor-protégé relationship anticipates its ability to respond to changing conditions in its environment through continuous learning (Eddy et al, 2005). In teaching, this avenue opens up opportunity to transfer the large amounts of tacit knowledge for which it is noted so as to respond more effectively to economic demands (Carter & Francis, 2001).
The Victorian Institute of Teaching has explicitly addressed the role of mentors within the registration process for beginning teachers. In 2004, the Victorian Government introduced the Victorian Institute of Teaching, a body that serves to manage the registration of teachers in all schools sectors within the state. By monitoring the professional registration of teachers, emphasis can be given to on-going professional learning, in recognition that the quality of teaching does make a difference to student learning (Rowe & Rowe, 2002). As part of this approach, beginning teachers must demonstrate their competency against the Standards of Teaching. To assist them with this process, schools are expected to provide mentoring support to increase the professional growth and learning of beginning teachers.

What do we mean by induction and mentoring?

The terms mentoring and induction seem to be frequently interchangeable (Wong, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). It is acknowledged that in terms of social science induction is a long term socialisation process. However, the more common understanding of the term is one of explicit introduction into a workplace and this is recognised as an induction program when applied to this study.

Whilst modern day mentor relationships can exhibit elements of emotional support and patronage, suggestive of the mythical meaning of ‘mentor’, the focus on professional knowledge development requires the relationship to more explicitly ‘facilitate the sharing of skills, knowledge and experience’ (Hand & Ross, 2003, p. 7), with the ultimate goal to improve the quality of teaching.

In this study, I have chosen the three types of mentoring identified by Wang and Odell (2007) to view the relationships established by the beginning teachers. In this model, mentoring can be characterised by the humanistic perspective, the situated apprentice perspective or the critical constructivist perspective. Whilst there are benefits in all three approaches, it is the latter that entails a broader learning relationship conducive to the reform rich professional growth of both parties desirable in today’s educational climate.
Establishing parameters for this study

For the purpose of this study, the induction program was limited by time to include the interactions the participant had with the school community in the interval between the employment interview and our fourth meeting, which took place around the middle of the first term. This decision allowed early socialisation to be clearly identified. It was in accord with the views expressed by most participants that generally induction was the gaining of local knowledge in the early days of their new employment. This limitation to induction is consistent with the view identified in earlier research (White & Hildebrand, 2002), in which mentoring was considered the more encompassing activity.

The formal mentor was the person who had been identified to assist with the V.I.T. registration process. Informal mentors were those people with whom the participants developed relationships, and raised in conversation as significant providers of support.

Understanding the social context of learning

Whilst mentoring has been heralded as the strategy by which professional learning can be enhanced, it is necessary to continue to monitor the effects of mentoring. Little (1990) raised concerns about the ‘‘manic optimism’’ attached to the role of a mentor in a setting that had little evidence of such formal behaviour. Martinez (2004) also warns of the potential for the ‘acritical occupational perpetuation of existing practices and patterns of inequitable educational outcomes for children’ (p. 95).

In light of the Wang and Odell (2007) perspectives of mentoring, and the potentiality for limitations of positive outcomes, the work of Wenger becomes relevant as it looks at the establishment of ‘communities of practice’ to bring newcomers into an existing, but dynamic setting. Likewise, Bourdieu’s work on perpetuation of practice seems applicable to the humanistic and situated apprenticeship perspectives, and allows closer scrutiny of the influence of mentor relationships in sustaining existing cultures.

Bourdieu

Bourdieu’s work on social and cultural learning, a process which he suggests results in reproduction, gives significant attention to power relations and how these affect learning. His work seeks to provide
an explanation to bridge the philosophical divide between objectivity and subjectivity in social learning using the concept of habitus.

Primary habitus is the set of culturally grounded dispositions, which is established from birth in response to the influence of the dominant culture, and reflects the material and symbolic interests of the group. It is affected by the interplay of pedagogic work (PW), pedagogic action (PA) and pedagogic authority (PAu). To meet the group’s interests, symbolic violence is used

gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, all the virtues honoured by the ethic of honour, presents itself as the most economical mode of domination because it best corresponds to the economy of the system (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 127).

Through both implicit and explicit pedagogy, the habitus is shaped. Implicit pedagogy is how people absorb the ‘styles and knacks’ (1990, p. 47) of group members, the ‘how to be’ aspect of the group. Explicit pedagogy is the prerequisite knowledge on which to attach the implicit. The degree to which a primary habitus can be further shaped depends upon the nature of secondary PW and the distance between the secondary and primary habitus. The process of inculcation of a secondary habitus becomes more effective when ‘the addressees of the pedagogic message possess the code of the message’ (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 45). Measured in terms of how durable, transposable and exhaustive it is, the habitus then produces practice that is reflective of the dominant cultural norms.

**Wenger**

By contrast, Wenger has developed his earlier work to suggest that social learning provides a more optimistic arena for change in group and individual development. Wenger’s theory arises from an examination of workplace learning and has provided a starting point for understanding knowledge transfer and management. Wenger’s theory of ‘communities of practice’, a development of his earlier work with Lave, and how learning takes place within these, suggests far more egalitarian and mutually negotiated conditions of learning to those proposed by Bourdieu. In a complex interaction between reification and participation (Wenger, 1998, p.66), Wenger suggests that practice is developed as a deliberate function that is understood and managed to some degree by participants (1998, p. 95); an antithesis of Bourdieu’s position.
Outline of the Study

Choosing the canvas

I have taken the mantle of a bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4) in constructing this study and, working with Cresswell’s identification of foci, established a phenomenological oriented case study (Cresswell, 1998, p. 37). By drawing on the strengths of each methodology, and being cognisant of the limitations, I constructed a methodology that has both the need to honour the individual experiences and the ethical care of each of the participants as its prime drivers. Diagram 2 demonstrates how this study is placed within Cresswell’s identification of foci.

Diagram 2

Representation of Creswell’s identification of foci (1998, p. 37)
**Finding the subjects**

At times, pragmatic decisions help to define a sample. In the initial stages of this study I was working with post-graduate Diploma of Education students at a Victorian university. As secondary teachers report higher levels of dissatisfaction with their mentor relationship than their primary counterparts, this seemed an ideal opportunity to explore further. I conducted a preliminary individualised discussion with interested parties, thus enabling them to make a more informed decision regarding participation. From an initial group of twelve, eight began the study and seven continued to the end of the 2008 school year.

**Preparing the palette**

The study relied heavily on the in-depth interview following a phenomenological approach (Patton, 2002, p. 106; Merriam et al, 2002, p.166). A program of six interviews over twelve months was supplemented by participants’ diaries, which allowed access to moments and could be used as prompts for discussion (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 42). Diaries were kept by five of the eight participants and proved to be of mixed value. On the constructive side, the diaries made me privy to events that may not have come up in conversation and also enabled participants to temper or validate initial responses. Two participants did not keep diaries although they had agreed to do so. By the time this phase was entered, significant data had already been gathered and their contribution to the study as mid-career entrants was of interest.

**Initial sketches**

Initial data analyses followed each of the interviews using the three steps identified by van Manen (1990, p.92); the wholistic or sententious approach, the selective or highlighting approach and the detailed or line-by-line approach. Emergent themes for each interview were checked against a more focused reading of interview transcripts.

At this point, I chose not to engage in member-checking as outlined by Van Manen (1990, p.99). I felt that discussion of the emerging themes and important elements had the potential to influence how the
relationships under scrutiny would develop, given the long term nature of the study. In particular, I did
not want to reinforce the negative feelings of frustration and confusion that were present for many
participants early in the study. At times, I referred back to what I had identified as particularly telling
events and asked how these had developed, allowing participants to clarify, extend or dismiss these.
This built in an element of member checking.

Following an analysis of each individual interview transcript, common themes were identified across the
group. Common themes formed the basis for collating phrases from all participants. To provide a quick
reference to how judgments were made, supporting statements from the participants were noted.
These emergent themes were then clustered using a reductionist approach giving a final four main
themes, which were suggestive of characteristics of teaching: time, professional autonomy, professional
isolation and views of knowledge.

The Trompe l’oeil Exhibition

My journey through the dilemma of representation was littered with more questions than answers. Had
I really understood what the participants had said? Did their words really represent the experiences
they had? Had my eye been tricked? How would I know what I said was valid? MacLure (2003) writes of
this tension in the quest for ‘truth, certainty and authenticity’ (p. 149) and boldly suggest that rather
than try to reduce the threat, that we instead engage the ‘(ever present) risk of mischief and paradox’
(p.149). Forecasting the possibility of alternative interpretations alerts the reader to this potentiality
(MacLure, 2003, p. 153).

Trompe l’oeil provides an artistic example of the nature of this. Drawing on the notion that we
construct meaning of representations based on our own mores, then the art of the Trompe l’oeil is to
‘look back at the viewer’ and challenge the stance taken. It serves to introduce a shock value that
unsettles, encourages another look and makes us question our initial assumptions. I employed Trompe
l’oeil not only in questioning my own part in the analysis process but also to identify the theme for each
narrative and as a guide for the construction of the text.

After months of agonising over the need for being true to the participants’ voices and ensuring that I did
justice to their accounts, I realised that I could never attain that certainty and was better placed to be
mindful of the potential to be misled. The subsequent narratives provide a picture of the essence of the
experiences as they have been told to me, and as I have understood them. They cannot begin to reveal the complexity of the lived experience in so constrained a presentation, nor can they ever truly encapsulate how it was to be a beginning teacher. Therefore, these portraits can only grasp a moment and proffer to the reader a starting point, an invitation to look again and be prepared to question.

**The Portrait Gallery**

For the purpose of this paper, I am presenting the experiences of four participants: Steve, Emily, Anna and Erin. All four participants bring a shaped habitus; testament to Lortie’s ‘apprenticeship of observation (1975, p.61) to varying but not widely diverse degrees. The theme of the ‘work of time’ is used (Bourdieu, 1990, pp 121). The effect of ‘honour’ is not explicitly addressed in this paper; that remains for another day. However, it is evident as the two factors cannot be separated.

**Impact of Time – Case 1, Steve**

Time is the gift that serves to create a sense of obligation, gratitude and need for independent practice. It is socially embedded and is seen as the gift that most feeds our sense of worth. Consider ‘spending quality time’ as a saying that immediately conjures up a sense for the recipient that they are more important than other demands. We talk about prioritizing so that we ‘make time’ for those things that we consider important. Therefore, what we invest time in is what we know is culturally valued. Through Steve’s story we see that time plays a significant role in the perpetuation of certain practices and views of teaching.

Steve’s experience is dominated by the issue of time. Information is gathered on the run or through overhearing other conversations. The lack of time to sit and share planning sends a message of professional autonomy that is interpreted as trust in his ability. He relies heavily on his own judgment for much of what he does; using the students in his classes as gauges as there is no other measure for success that is as immediate, emotionally charged or visible. Knowing how important time is to him he is reluctant to waste people’s time, which results in his need to bring home the good story. It is only in his moment of vulnerability that time is taken by a senior teacher to work systematically with him, an experience that leaves him feeling grateful and humiliated in the same breath.
**Views of Knowledge – Case 2, Emily**

That which is hard won, developed in isolation and costing significant time becomes a highly valued commodity. And so it is with knowledge. Sharing of knowledge is either with those who you know will value it, appreciate and return the gift (friendship base) or it is limited to the superficial exchange of already existing artifacts as these do not take any more time, as seen in the ‘passing of the worksheet’ ritual. Early requests for knowledge are gently blocked, possibly with the intention of saving the beginning teacher from what is believed to be unnecessary complications. Comments such as “Wait until you have settled in” or “Don’t worry about that until Term 2” do little to stem the rising anxiety, and steer the beginning teacher into relying on herself for the answers.

Although one suspects that Emily would still value learning with others, there is a shift from being open to questioning and sharing to placing great store on what she has achieved by herself. This gradual valuing of her own work is progressed through her interaction with a senior colleague who limits her timely access to information early in the year when her need is greatest. This encourages Emily to develop her own approach so as to be able to manage the job. Her success with unit writing for another faculty is not enough to counteract her hesitation in giving a copy of her work to her colleagues; a result of the limited exchange of vital information and her own discomfort in having suggested to another teacher how she might handle a situation. Instead, she makes a submissive approach to the senior colleague and, when her offer is not taken up, seeks to nullify the experience by referring to the difficulties of presenting a comprehensible copy of her work. Further, her limited interaction with her formal mentor, and his own inability to provide quality feedback on her teaching practice, teamed with the reliance she develops on student response to her teaching as a measure of her ability, serve to feed her sense of professional autonomy and views of knowledge.

**Isolated Practice – Case 3, Erin**

The ‘egg crate’ nature of schools, along with the resultant timetabling, can be directly connected to the continuation of physically isolated practice. Beginning teachers often work in segmented spaces, driven by the pressing need to manage their loads. They quickly learn there is limited time to share knowledge
and, because immediate control of content and class management is required, time is not readily taken to discuss deeper pedagogical issues. Requests for time are made hesitantly. Conversation is limited to immediate needs and finding time to do even this is seen as difficult. Because time is highly valued, any overtures for help become impositions. Time is used as a reason why interclass visits cannot take place – “It’s the wrong time”, “I don’t have time” etc.

However, practice can also be isolated in terms of social, cognitive and cultural practices and it is here that the more subtle influence of time can be observed. Erin’s experience highlights the breadth of professional isolation that a beginning teacher can feel. Encompassing not only isolation from her colleagues, Erin also finds herself in a setting that does not align with her initial perceptions and one which culturally she struggles to embrace. Time plays its part on many levels. Given her late appointment, time influences Erin’s acceptance of the job despite her initial concerns. Her interview experience is rushed and she hastily agrees to accept the position offered. Her limited interactions with her formal mentor are impacted upon by time, forcing her to manage those early weeks of teaching on her own. Her tiredness, another effect of time, lessens her resilience to the demands of the classroom and sees her moving further away from her own pedagogical beliefs; yet another form of isolation. Erin’s fear of being judged as incompetent is enhanced when she overhears a disparaging conversation between two experienced colleagues about another beginning teacher at the school. Erin holds back from confiding in her colleagues, and finds herself on her own.

**Professional autonomy – Case 4, Anna**

The perceived lack of time gives rise to professional autonomy with teachers learning quickly to manage things on their own and create their own measures for success. Enmeshed in this is the hidden message of competence. Often interpreted as trust, beginning teachers feel both a sense of gratitude and pride in being seen as capable as well as fear of being exposed as inadequate and betraying that trust. Exposing concerns or shortcomings is more likely to occur with peers or friends; the impact of maintaining social capital. Largely left on their own, with classroom visits being rare occurrences and often too short to be of any value, they interpret documentation and ‘develop a style’ that works for their classes. In turn, this strengthens the ‘what works for me’ mindset; further feeding the view of knowledge.
Anna’s experience shows the most difference amongst the group. Early interactions with an established teacher saw time used as an operant to limit access to knowledge and resources. This set up conditions in which professional autonomy could flourish and Anna turned to a small group of beginning teachers for support. However, the later actions of two key senior staff members, and the school’s structure, ensured that Anna understood that even within a busy daily schedule, her professional learning was important. Time was given to dedicated team planning as well as in-class team teaching with her mentor. Anna’s impression of her mentor as someone who found time for her meant she felt comfortable identifying her own needs and approaching her mentor with concerns. She worked comfortably in view of her colleagues and learnt from them and with them as the year progressed, developing shared practice that she could measure against visible and understood examples.

Discussion

Whilst I have limited the presentation of data to four cases, they are representative of the nature of experiences for the group of eight. Their stories suggest to the reader that although formal approaches to induction and mentoring have been introduced quite explicitly in Victoria over the last few years, these practices are influenced by the work of time (Bourdieu, 1990, pp 98 -111) to perpetuate professional autonomy, professional isolation and particular views of knowledge.

In all stories, the informal relationships outweighed the formal mentor relationships with regard to the degree of support and acceptance these beginning teachers experienced. Informal relationships with other relatively inexperienced colleagues featured strongly in sharing of professional knowledge, team planning when it occurred and exposure of frustrations and insecurities. Predominantly, teaching support was evident in the exchange of documentation, with only one participant, Kym, reporting systematic constructive approaches to team planning with more experienced colleagues. For several, the need for additional support took them outside the immediate school environment.

Formal mentors frequently held responsibilities in other areas, which seemed to impact on the quality and frequency of interaction, suggesting that this role did not have the importance attached to it that the V.I.T. process would encourage. Where interaction did occur, mentors seemed to respond to crises raised by the beginning teacher. Beginning teachers were quick to recognise the implied expertise of the mentor, by virtue of their role and general status in the community, and several felt let down by the
lack of care and attention given to the role. Relationships tended to be at the humanistic or situated apprenticeship level.

**Conclusion**

Mentoring is a recognised form of knowledge transference. However, it needs to be open to continual scrutiny lest ingrained practices and values be unwittingly perpetuated. Wenger’s model of ‘communities of practice’ is relevant to addressing the need for knowledge transfer but can be affected in its application by the dominant organisational habitus. Bourdieu reminds us that we need to examine the supposed superficial interactions within groups to identify the inherent social values that influence the nature of practice. To this end, mentoring in schools can be improved and extended upon through more critical examination of the nature of the relationships developed. In doing so, it is then possible to challenge the nature of the dominant habitus within the culture. Bourdieu’s work does allow for change and that is most likely to occur when those with established pedagogic authority begin to recognise and question the position of the dominated and move to champion their cause.

The results of this study suggest the following recommendations:

1) The Victorian Institute of Teaching should maintain and extend the nature of research into the mentoring experiences of beginning teachers to include long-term qualitative data so as to inform the development and implementation of the mentor program.

2) Mentors should be cognisant of the differing levels of communication with mentees so as to provide elements of all types of support. The work of Wang and Odell (2007) provides a possible model for implementation.

3) Connections with tertiary providers of initial teacher training should be maintained and developed so as to promote reform-driven practice within a critical constructivist perspective of mentoring. This would enhance the transferability of early teaching knowledge and support beginning teachers in their roles as change agents.

4) An evaluation of who assumes mentor roles should be conducted. This should aim to increase the likelihood of time being available explicitly to the beginning teacher from the earliest of contacts to demonstrate the importance attached to the relationship. This should include investigation of varying approaches to mentoring currently in use in both schools and other industries.
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