Mentoring beginning teachers in Catholic schools in Western Australia: An exploratory study

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Overview

The primary purpose of this study is to identify and explore the mentoring experiences in the transition from graduate to Beginning Teacher in Catholic primary schools in Perth, Western Australia. This is the field of education that reflects my vocation and own experience as a primary teacher in Catholic schools for 27 years, an administrator for 21 years and as a practice supervisor of The University of Notre Dame (UNDA) students for 22 years. The author has found in daily dealings that Pre-Service Teachers and Early Career Teachers may find the responsibility of teaching a class solo, intimidating. When one considers, the social interaction between student, family and other class members coupled together with Curriculum demands, reporting and maintaining discipline, some ECTs may perceive a demanding task on their first teaching appointment. At times the author has also found when mentoring these ECTs they can feel overwhelmed. It is hoped the development of a new mentoring framework will assist both leaders and mentors in settling into daily professional life. It should be acknowledged that the life of Catholic Saint, scholar and mentor, Charles Borromeo (1538-1584), who demonstrated the values of knowledge, humility, eagerness, teaching and prayer (Atwood, 2012; Guissano, 2015) has had significant impact on the author of the study in proposing a name for a new Mentoring Framework for Catholic Schools identified in the final Chapter.

Specifically, this study will examine the mentoring experiences in Catholic schools of final year, Primary Education students from the Catholic University of Western Australia (CUWA) during the completion of their final “Internship”. This study will also explore the initial six month mentoring experiences and aspirations of beginning primary and secondary teachers embarking on their careers in Catholic schools in Western Australia. It will also
investigate the perceptions of current Catholic primary principals on the perceived benefits of implementing a mentoring framework.

For the purpose of maintaining conceptual clarity the nomenclature CUWA, Pre-Service teacher, Intern, Post-Internship teachers refers to those participants who are close to completing their university teacher education course. The terms Early Career Teacher (ECT), Beginning Teacher, novice and mentee are used to refer to those who are in their first year of teaching.

The Origins of Mentoring in Contemporary Education

Mentoring can trace its modern origins in education back to the 1800’s, when at the height of the Industrial Revolution in England, apprenticed teachers were trained on the job to follow the teaching methods of a more senior and experienced teacher (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2009). This apprenticeship is what would eventually be known as mentoring. Mentoring is a relationship between a more experienced employee, commonly referred to as the mentor, and an inexperienced new employee, called the mentee or protégé. The role of the mentor has been described as one involving counseling, coaching, educating, inspiring, enriching, leading and advising the less experienced person (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2009; Fulton, 1990; Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Nakamura, Shernoff & Hooker, 2009).

Passmore, Peterson and Freire (2012) stated, “We would share the view that Coaching and Mentoring share many qualities” (p. 6). Australia’s official teaching oversight body, The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) agrees, defining mentoring as having a direct relationship with coaching, “The term ‘coaching’ is used in a wide variety of contexts to describe an array of relationships. Consequently, there is no universal practice when it comes to coaching. Coaching relationships can and often do cross over with mentoring, teaching by instruction and counseling” (AITSL, 2013, p. 4). For the purposes of
this study, the definition of mentoring and coaching encompasses the AITSL definition and
the one provided by Passmore, Peterson and Freire (2012).

Present-day teacher education involves attending university programs where an
internship or mentor model is adopted which links classroom practice with latest educational
theory (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2009). Furlong and Maynard (1995, as cited in
Boreen et al., 2009) suggested a positive change in the way mentoring of Beginning Teachers
is conceptualised. They stated, “... a Beginning Teacher is encouraged to be an active
participant, inquirer and critical thinker. The mentor’s role has also changed from advice-
giver and problem-solver to questioner, listener and model for reflective thinker” (p. 9).
Similarly, Bouffard (2013) noted a conceptual change in current mentoring practices from
one where induction involved a simple orientation process for Beginning Teachers to one
where mentors are trained to assist Beginning Teachers to be more effective from the outset.
She stated:

The ultimate goal is to make new teachers more effective with students more
quickly. And that goal say experts, requires an approach that is more targeted
to instruction than past efforts, using rigorously selected, trained mentors
who observe new teachers in their classrooms, provide instructional guidance
and model effective practice (p. 1).

Currently there is clear indication in the literature (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts,
2009; Bouffard 2013; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Riley, 2010) of the conceptual change that
has occurred in the mentoring of Beginning Teachers. Such an observation was elaborated in
the Finnish research of Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjala (2012) who observed how mentoring
had undergone several changes from the apprentice-trainer model to one which is presently
seen as “…being associated with collaboration, collegiality, and interaction” (p. 13). Their
definition of mentoring was expanded to include lifelong learning where,

The applications of mentoring do not only support new teachers' induction
periods but also the professional dialogue between teachers of different ages,
in which both the novices and the experienced teachers learn something new (p. 14).

Teaching can therefore be seen to encompass all developmental stages from Pre-Service to Beginning Teacher to that of a more experienced teacher (AITSL, 2012; Dinham, 2008). In describing teaching as an ever-learning process, Ambrose, Bridges, De Pietro, Lovett and Norman (2010) also stated, “Thinking of teaching as a progressive refinement raises the notion of development, which happens in the context of a given climate” (p. 224). They then suggested that apart from students, instructors also need to engage with intellectual development. Such engagement might take the form of refining personal competence, integrity, educational purpose and dealing with emotions. The thrust of the argument proffered by Ambrose et al. is that the mentor-mentee relationship is best developed in an environment that is mutually beneficial in terms of professional development.

Mentoring involves both cognitive and emotional processes. From a cognitive perspective, mentees are encouraged to be active learners, be more aware of the learning needs of their children and be able to reflect with their mentor about how they can improve their teaching practices (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2009). A benefit of conceptualising mentoring from the cognitive perspective is the sharing of good work practices that not only benefit the mentee and mentor, but also the organisation and the wider profession (Nakamura, Shernoff & Hooker, 2009). Emotional processes, on the other hand, are required to enhance the mentor-mentee relationship in which the cognitive activity is being undertaken.

There has been a growth in research that recognises the increasing role that emotional development plays, especially in the key formative stages of a Beginning Teacher’s career (McNally & Blake, 2008; Watt & Richardson, 2011). McNally and Blake realised that, in addition to the cognitive processes, the emotional processes of teaching are important, especially for Beginning Teachers in their first months of teaching. The possession of emotional processes are necessary for reflecting on teaching practice. Although cognitive
processes are significant, they appear to be more relevant to a Beginning Teacher later in their first and second years of teaching rather than too early in the process. Moir, Barlin, Gless and Miles (2010) devised a model that demonstrated how Beginning Teachers go through a range of attitudes in their first year in the classroom. The model demonstrated how Beginning Teachers’ attitudes vary from anticipation, to survival, to rejuvenation to reflection and back to anticipation. The recognition of the key emotional and cognitive processes in attitudinal development is seen as being necessary in establishing an effective mentoring framework.

**Beginning Teachers and Emotions**

Assisting a Beginning Teacher in their development of new skills can energise them as a key member of a professional learning team. The longitudinal research of Watt and Richardson (2011) in their Influence Teacher Choice (FIT-Choice) study in Victoria, has studied the main concerns of teachers since 2002 of over 1,652 commencing pre-service teachers. It is the only study in the world to have followed the development of this number of Beginning Teachers over time and across several continents. Their results showed that, “Main concerns clustered around issues, which interact, to impact job satisfaction, leadership support, time pressure, relations with parents, and autonomy” (p. 29).

Of importance to this study is gaining an understanding of the emotional complexities faced by Beginning Teachers during mentoring. Hargreaves (1998) provided a link between emotions and the professional growth of Beginning Teachers, stating that, “For some this sense of growing confidence and competence was especially accented in their early years of becoming a teacher” (p. 848). He also suggested that emotions, particularly positive emotions, play a strong role in schools and lead to good teaching. Perry, Ball and Stacey (2004) have highlighted the relationship between expressed emotions and what Salovey and Mayer (1989) termed “emotional intelligence”, stating that,
...interest in emotional intelligence has begun to emerge in the field of education. Change in current educational paradigms has encouraged a focus beyond that of the gaining of content knowledge and facts to now include learning as the core business of schools, the 'glue' of schools (Retrieved from http://www.iier.org.au/iier14/perry.html).

The fundamental importance of establishing a mentoring framework can be seen in establishing initial support for new teachers early in their careers, when emotionally they are at their most vulnerable (McNally & Blake, 2008). The need for such a supportive approach is evident in the literature (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Jensen, Hunter, Sonnemann, Burns, 2012; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Watt & Richardson, 2011) and from this researcher’s observations and experience as an administrator in six Catholic schools, of the urgent need to establish a mentoring framework for Beginning Teachers in each Catholic school community in Western Australia. The introduction of a mentoring framework would provide Beginning Teachers with ongoing support and guide them through their critical early stages of teaching.

Conversely if they are not assisted in the early stages of teaching, this deficit can demoralize a new teacher, forcing them to reach out to other colleagues for support or even leave the profession (Ambrose, Bridges, De Pietro, Lovett & Norman, 2010). Change can positively or negatively influence a teachers' own intellectual, social and emotional learning, regardless of where they are in their career. For Beginning Teachers, this ongoing emotional support, professional development and learning could be developed through the assistance of a mentor.

Research conducted by Corcoran and Tormey (2012) using Mayer and Salovey’s emotional intelligence (EI) model with 352 Irish teaching undergraduates, lead them to conclude that, “there should be a strong case for Teacher training to insist on emotional skill development...stress and poor emotion management continually rank as the primary reasons why teachers become dissatisfied with the profession and end up leaving” (p. 750).
Accordingly, it was further suggested that, “teacher education programs might need to place a particular emphasis on the skills of perceiving emotions in self and others, and of understanding emotional changes and progressions” (p. 757). Perry and Ball (2007) concurred, stating, “Teachers are encouraged to provide for their students, a supportive and productive learning environment. To do this relies very much on the teacher’s emotional intelligence” (p. 9).

In terms of both cognitive and emotional processes, Read, Colgate, Corwin and Tax (2012) cited Dweck’s ongoing psychological research to highlight the importance of growth mindsets to both mentoring and coaching in the workforce. They stated,

> People with a growth mindset tend to set learning goals, in which individuals seek to increase their competence, to understand or master something new. In contrast, those with fixed mindsets tend to have performance goals, where they seek to gain favourable judgments of their competence or avoid negative assessments (p. 28).

Such an insight caused them to conclude that,

> From a coaching perspective, both the coach and the coachee need to have a growth mindset for coaching programs to succeed. Entering into the coaching partnership without such a mindset destines any coaching activity for failure and a waste of company resources (p. 28).

Dweck’s growth mindset is an important concept in examining the emotional aspect of the mentor and mentee relationship. This aspect of mentoring is important as it is related to the judgements that are made personally and professionally from the mentoring experience. The ability of both mentor and mentee to react to positive and/or negative feedback, for example, potentially affects the direction of the mentoring relationship in the school.

Riley (2010; 2013) similarly applied lessons from attachment theory in psychology to educational mentoring. In 2010 he stated that, “to ignore or deny teachers’ emotions is to ignore or deny their humanity and therefore their authentic selves in the classroom context” (p. 41). His research made key points in relation to growing the emotional identity of
Beginning Teachers and their ongoing awareness of their own teaching model when considering the needs of their students. He (2010) emphasized that, “a teacher’s introduction to the profession, during pre-service education, induction, mentoring and support, is crucial in the construction and reconstruction of the professional internal working model and for the initial professional construction of a professional identity” (pp. 35-6).

Riley also highlighted the importance for all teachers, including Beginning Teachers, to learn strategies like meditation to avoid burnout and stress, thus so helping them with detachment from certain stressful classroom situations (Riley, 2013). His findings have implications for how teachers are trained at the university in terms of placing greater emphasis on the emotional processes of pre-service and Beginning Teachers. Such training might be provided through systemic mentoring training programs, the establishment of one-on-one mentoring training opportunities in a school, or through a team of teachers in a professional learning environment. In summary, it might be concluded that the training and selection of mentors is of global importance to the future of teacher improvement and professional development through engagement with effective mentoring protocols (Feiman-Nemser, 1996; Fantili and McDougall, 2009; McNally & Blake, 2008; McNally & Orberski, 2003; Rippon & Martin 2003, Reilly, 2010).

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the research questions to be investigated follow. These will be elaborated upon in chapter three of the thesis.

**PRIMARY OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION:**
To what extent is early career mentoring operating effectively in Catholic school environments in Western Australia?

**SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS:**
1) Does participation in a mentoring program for Early Career Teachers affect their career aspirations?
2) What perceptions do CUWA Post-Internship (Pre-Service) teachers hold regarding mentoring prior to the commencement of their teaching career?

3) How have graduate teacher perceptions of mentoring changed as a result of having been teaching for three school terms?

4) What perceptions regarding mentoring do new graduates hold at the commencement of their teaching career?

5) What perceptions do principals have of how mentoring is conceived of in a Catholic School?

INTEGRATIVE QUESTION:

On the basis of Questions 1-5, what are considered to be the key principles that underpin the development of a Pre-Service and Beginning Teacher mentoring framework?

The next chapter presents a review of the literature relating to the research questions and does so within the context of an international, a national and state perspective. The literature review includes a previously little known aspect of the dynamic past history of mentoring Beginning Teachers in Western Australia. It also explores mentoring options for those currently teaching in Western Australian Catholic schools.