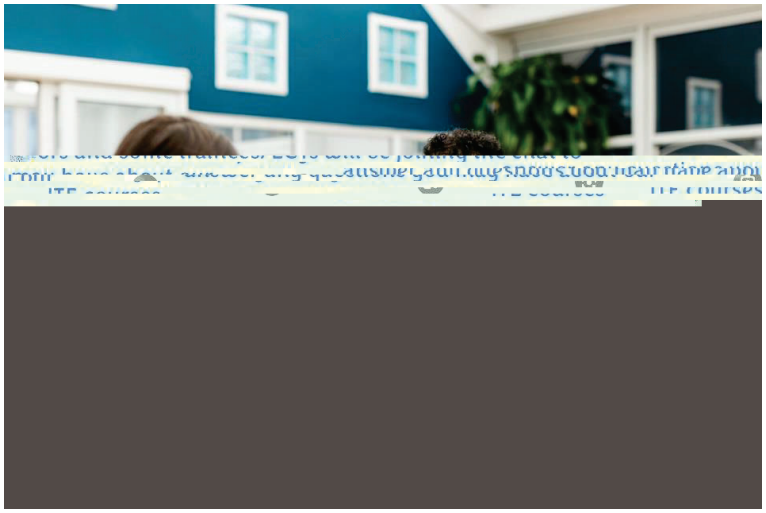
‘Mentor Mindlines’ - An investigation into the nature and mobilisation of tacit professional knowledge between secondary trainee teachers and school-based mentors in Initial Teacher Training and Education



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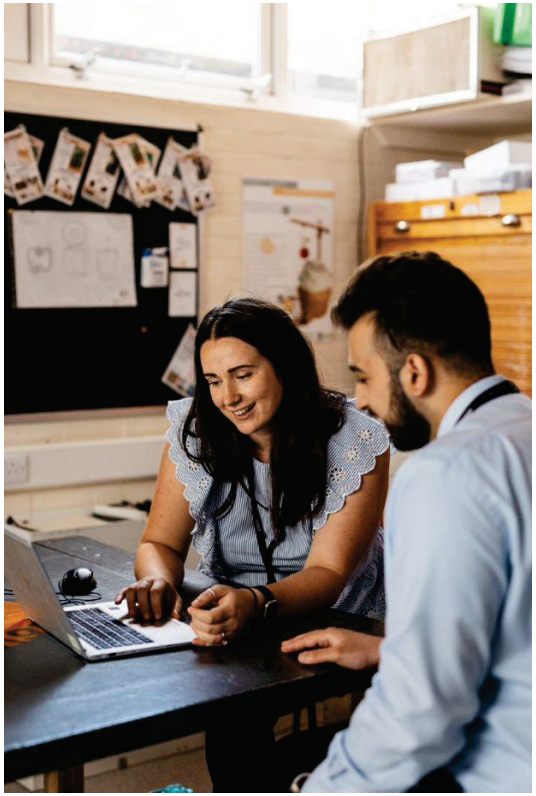
Moving on from the ‘Pilot Enquiry’ – recent challenges in ITE



“In England, reforms to the content of initial teacher education (ITE), teacher induction and early career professional development have served to restrict the space for identity building, deprofessionalizing teachers by dictating an increasingly narrow curriculum that negates critical thinking and limits professional autonomy” (Steadman, 2023: 164)

“The launch of the Early Career Framework (ECF) (DfE, 2019a) and the subsequent publication of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Core Content Framework (CCF) (DfE, 2019b) established a three-year training and induction package for those entering the profession in England. But these frameworks are rooted in a view of what teachers need to learn in order to ‘begin the journey towards becoming an expert’ (DfE, 2019a, p. 4), presenting a linear trajectory that fails to engage with the complex, contextual and invariably recursive process of teacher identity development.” (Steadman, 2023:165-166)

‘Clinical Mindlines’ (Gabbay and Le May, 2011)



- Introduced to Gabbay and LeMay’s ‘Clinical Mindlines’ (2011) following my Pilot Study.
- Gabbay and Le May’s research investigated the daily decision-making of clinicians in a healthcare setting and the ‘explicit-tacit-spectrum’ when working with trainee healthcare professionals.
- Gabbay and Le May (2011:44) define their term of ‘clinical mindlines’: “…clinicians were relying on what we came to call their ‘clinical mindlines’. We use this term to refer to internalized, collectively reinforced and often tacit guidelines that are informed by clinicians’ training, by their own and each other’s experience, by their interactions with their role sets, by their reading, by the way they have learnt to handle the conflicting demands, by their understanding of local circumstances and systems, and by a host of other sources.”

‘Clinical Mindlines’ (Gabbay and LeMay, 2011)



- Patel’s (2023) application of this research in a radiography education setting resonated with some of the initial conclusions of my pilot study. Patel (2023:579) states that “our ability to operationalise new explicit knowledge is determined by our capacity to tacitly comprehend it.” In linking this idea back to Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘hysteresis’ this could go some way to explain why some trainee teachers do not tacitly comprehend professional expectations. This could be due to a lack of experience in a professional setting with their ‘habitus’ being too far removed from the ‘field’ in which they are now training.
- Relating this back to teacher education - school-based mentors engage with supporting several types of knowledge that trainee teachers need to plan and deliver effectively and to function within their role as a professional in the school setting. Knight (2023:4) suggests that “the often tacit, unpredictable, indeterminate, and contingent nature of learning means that teachers cannot simply follow a script or duplicate rules or procedures.

A research focus begins to form…

- Recent reforms regarding the content of Initial Teacher Education programmes, notably the ITTECF (DfE, 2024) and the updating of Ofsted's Initial Teacher Education inspection framework (DfE, 2020) have led to "an even greater emphasis on mentoring during both ITT and the early career phase (Glazzard & Green, 2024:1). Given that a 'one-size-fits-all' model for mentoring in teacher education does not exist (Parker, et al. 2021) and "effective mentors need a variety of approaches to meet the needs to different mentees" (Glazzard & Green, 2024:19).
- The purpose of my research, achieved through the addressing of the research questions will be to establish what 'Mentor Mindlines' might be. The following quotation from Gabbay and Le May applying 'Clinical Mindlines' in the context of Health and Social Care is helpful to consider here in the resonance this has with school-based ITE mentors: "…practitioners need an efficient, elegant, and timely way of understanding what needs to be done across a whole range of predictably unpredictable situations. The guidance, which they use day to day, is not – and cannot be – mere theoretical knowledge….Rather it is what have called their 'knowledge-in-practice-in-context' (2023:10)

Research questions



- What tacit knowledge do secondary school-based ITE mentors impart to trainee teachers?
- How do experienced secondary school-based mentors mobilise tacit knowledge to support the trainee teachers that they work with?
- What can be learned from experienced school-based mentors and Gabbay and LeMay's (2011) 'Clinical Mindlines' approach to practitioner learning to support the mentoring of trainee teachers?

A shared definition of ‘tacit’ knowledge?



What is our shared definition of ‘tacit’ knowledge in relation to the mentoring of trainee teachers?

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Do we agree with these statements?

- “We take situated or tacit knowledge…to mean that element of ‘know-how’ which teachers clearly manifest in their practice but which cannot be rendered explicitly in discourse about it”. (Read and Hutchinson, 2011, in: Winch, Oancea & Orchard, 2015:3)
- “Teaching may look easy to an observer because it looks like telling; simply organising knowledge and imparting it to groups of pupils. However, the knowledge that underpins the actions and activities of teaching has often been regarded as too elusive to articulate” (Shire, 2023:12)

A shared definition of ‘tacit’ knowledge?



To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

Given that “tacit knowledge is a form of procedural knowledge” (Malamed, 2022) this would suggest that tacit knowledge, conceptualised by Polyani in 1966 (Elliot, et. Al, 2011:85) imparted by mentors to trainee teachers is most likely to centre around supporting their procedural knowledge. In thinking further about the types of knowledge that are involved in education, Quigley (2022) suggests that both procedural and disciplinary knowledge are involved: “procedural knowledge refers to “knowing how”: it is about the processes and steps required to perform tasks….disciplinary knowledge is the “how” of learning within a subject. It involves learning how experts in a field think, question, and build knowledge”.

Being explicit about a tacit concept?



What are the hidden, unseen and informal aspects of mentoring that are involved in the support of a trainee teacher?

How do the secondary school-based mentors that you work with mobilise tacit knowledge to support trainee teachers?

Research Methods

Baseline Surveys

- Sequential use of baseline surveys followed by interviews.
- The survey will aim to gather initial data about mentor experience and some initial thoughts about the hidden, unseen and informal aspects of mentoring from the perspective of a mentor.
- Online survey provided for approximately 50 mentors across the University's partnership in the Secondary phase. Expected return rate of 25% (i.e. 12-13 mentors).
- The survey will include some structured questions with a fixed response (e.g. number of trainees supported) along with some open questions in relation to their perception of the hidden, unseen and informal aspects of mentoring.
- Survey comes first so that some initial lines of enquiry about mentor perceptions can be analysed and then explored further in interviews.
- Validity of the survey to be assured by utilising service user engagement. Survey to be shared and discussed around design and content with two expert mentors.

Research Methods

Episodic Narrative Interviews

- 3-5 interviews to take place with mentor respondents.
- Data from the baseline survey will be used to generate questions for a semi-structured interview.
- Given that the perception of unseen and informal mentoring will likely be personal to each individual mentor, with some subjective evidence and reflection upon mentoring experiences, a semi-structured interview will enable planned questions to be asked (based on the baseline survey) but will also enable the further exploration of aspects and thoughts that the mentor brings to the interview, some perhaps not anticipated.
- The nature of the semi-structured interview in enabling space for the interviewee/mentor to explore subjective meanings or to divert into new pathways that might not have originally been considered, might come through the mentor retelling some of their experiences in a narrative inquiry manner.
- The focus of mentors exploring their own perceptions of the unseen and hidden aspects of mentoring could be a challenge when it comes to mentors being able to articulate this and storytelling will be a helpful way to elicit responses from the mentors. “Episodic narrative interview is a method that provides a targeted window into the experiential aspect of social concepts and issues; it helps us to uncover the layered reality of difficult-to-see social phenomena by way of storytelling ” (Mueller, 2019:3).

Literature Summary

- **Tacit knowledge and professional learning**

  Read and Hutchinson (2011)
  Shire, L. (2023)
  Malamed, C. (2022)
  Bourdieu (1977)
  Eraut, M. (2000)
  Glazzard, J. & Green, M. (2024)
  Quigley (2022)

- **Mentoring and cognitive modelling**

  National Institute of Teaching (2023)
  Collins, A., Brown, J.S. & Holum, A. (1991)
  Parker, A.K. Zenko, K. & Glaser, H. (2021)
  McIntyre, D., Hagger, H. & Wilkin, M. (1993)
  Mok, S.Y. & Staub, F.C. (2021)
  Bond, M. (2023)
  Knight, B. (2023)
  'Emma & Tom Talk Teaching' Podcast (2018-2025) Cardiff Metropolitan University

- **'Clinical Mindlines'**

  Gabbay & LeMay (2011 & 2023)
  Patel, K. (2023)

Contact details

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Please keep in touch if you would like to continue a conversation around this topic

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