Lead mentors and the subversive habit of enquiry: creating space for wider conversations in ITE

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The University of Manchester

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What was this about and how did we approach it?

Introducing lead mentors

The UK Department for Education's (DfE) recent reforms to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), particularly the introduction of new Quality Requirements from 2024, have foregrounded the importance of high-quality mentoring and led to the formal establishment of the *lead mentor* role. According to DfE guidance, lead mentors are responsible for overseeing mentor development, assuring the quality of mentoring, and supporting trainee teachers' progress in line with the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019; DfE, 2024).

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Lead mentor development programme

- We used a significant part of the funding to bring together university tutors and school partners as lead mentors in e2024, from PGCE Primary and Secondary together
- ~ 25 university staff, 25 school partners (professional mentors and subject mentors)
- A partnership process
- Three days (November, Feb, June) following a pattern: engaging together with relevant scholarly work; interrogating experience of mentoring, working with trainees and working with mentors; planning next steps
- An iterative process
- An asset-based approach

Subversive enquiry? No mention of training

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Asset based approach: university and school-based lead mentors, mentors **and** beginning teachers as holders of valuable, diverse expertise and knowledge

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What it looked like

Benefits of mentoring - to the mentor

We began the morning by inviting participants to draw on their experience in identifying an elaborating the benefits of mentoring to the mentor. This was done on post-its but below i text version of the contributions under each heading.









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November 2024

- Mentoring and the value of mentoring
- Four models of mentoring – Orland-Barak and Wang 2021
- Target setting and feedback – critical discussion of examples
- Language of ITE (education? training? trainees? beginning teachers? trainee teachers)

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Activity - approaches to mentoring – 6th Feb 2025

Orland-Barak, L. and Wang, J., 2021. Teacher mentoring in service of preservice teachers' learning to teach: Conceptual bases, characteristics, and challenges for teacher education reform. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *72*(1), pp.86-99.

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Mentor teachers are bestowed with multiple yet often competing responsibilities to support preservice teachers to learn to teach effectively… (p.87).

They are expected to help preservice teachers learn how to connect what they learn from their program courses with what they do in their classrooms … assist preservice teachers to develop situated understandings of theoretical ideas acquired in their program courses … and integrate their content and pedagogical knowledge and classroom management strategies acquired from the program coursework into teaching practices … while managing the complex and dynamic character, norms, and demands of the workplace to sustain and create an optimal learning environment for their own students (p.87)

… they need to help preservice teachers cope with the constant tensions between the beliefs and images of teaching that preservice teachers bring into student teaching, the program expectations for learning to teach in the field, and the values and norms of their own teaching practices in their school contexts (p.87)

Questions for discussion:

1. Would you agree that mentoring of trainees is inherently challenging? Why is that? Examples might help.

2. Do you recognise the four approaches to mentoring identified in the article? (see next page)? Do any of them help to make sense of your own experience?

3. Part of the lead mentor role is to help other mentors to develop. How might considering these four approaches help you to do that?

Four approaches to mentoring.

Personal growth mentoring approach: This stresses the role of the mentor teacher as a counsellor who is empathetic to the personal needs of preservice teachers (Israel et al., 2014), while assisting them in solving personal problems and becoming comfortable about teaching (Ganser, 1998). Mentors.. strive to create opportunities for preservice teachers to test their own ideas of teaching through trial and error while keeping a low profile in imposing their own ideas as expert teachers on preservice teachers (Harrison et al., 2005a). They also endeavour to establish positive and friendly relationships with preservice teachers, listen to their needs and feelings, and help them identify their own problems in learning to teach and develop their own solutions to these problems (Wang & Odell, 2002).	**Situated learning mentoring approach:** mentor teachers rely on their own experiences and expertise as teachers to socialize preservice teachers into the cultures and practices of teaching in the school contexts where preservice teachers learn to teach (Hoffman et al., 2015). To this end, mentor teachers need to engage preservice teachers in observing and modelling after their teaching with a focus on having them reproduce it in their classrooms (Clarke et al., 2014). Their interactions with preservice teachers are directive and evaluative and focus mostly on technical and procedural feedback (Hoffman et al., 2015).
Core practices mentoring approach: Mentor teachers following this approach to mentoring focus on modelling core teaching practices for preservice teachers and actively engage them in observation and systematic rehearsal of such practices (Feiman-Nemser, 2001b). They also support preservice teachers to decompose core teaching practices with a focus on how different components of such practices deliver its intended functions and play out differently in diverse teaching contexts (Grossman et al., 2009). In addition, they co-plan and co-teach with preservice teachers around core teaching practices while attending to the principles and pedagogical reasoning underlying such practices (Harrison et al., 2005b). They also generate opportunities for preservice teachers to develop such core practices in different teaching contexts (Feiman-Nemser & Carver, 2012).	**Critical transformative mentoring approach**: Mentor teachers need to be committed to and competent in engaging preservice teachers in learning to teach against the grain (Cochran-Smith, 1991). They actively assist preservice teachers in raising problems for teaching practices of their own and others (Wang & Odell, 2002) and work as co-thinkers and co-learners with preservice teachers in learning to teach in their classroom contexts to address their students' needs. In addition, they expose preservice teachers to alternative visions of teaching and use them as a base to describe, interpret, and enact teaching practices normally not consistent with existing cultures of teaching, their own schooling experiences, or those developed from their university courses (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Stanulis & Brondyk, 2013).

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February 2025

- Agency and planning (Mutton, Hagger & Burn 2011)
- Trainee planning - vignettes on promoting trainee agency
- Building an agenda for lead mentors
- Managing difficult conversations

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Agency and planning – 6th Feb 2025

Have you worked with trainees who saw planning as a chore?

Have you worked with trainees who saw planning as an opportunity for them to develop their agency?

Trevor Mutton, Hazel Hagger & Katharine Burn (2011) Learning to plan, planning to learn: the developing expertise of beginning teachers, Teachers and Teaching, 17:4, 399-416

Organisation and preparation of lessons in accordance with the requirements of pupils for whom teachers are responsible

(Eurydice, 2002, p. 82)

Transforming and adapting the curriculum through a complex process of decision-making

(Clark & Lampert, 1986)

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June 2025

mentors and trainee teachers: **developing robust, diverse teacher identities.**

Boylan and Woolsey (2014) – James, Jas, Paul and Julie - case studies for discussion

Severiens and Daly (2024) - Preparing teachers for diverse classrooms in England

Developing principles for our partnership

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19th June - Activity 2. Engaging literature

Boylan and Woolsey (2014)

Teacher education for social justice: Mapping identity spaces

Social justice: Who gets what? Who is acknowledged? Who gets to decide?

Pedagogies of inquiry and discomfort

But also pedagogies of compassion and respect

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Boylan and Woolsey (2014)
How smoothly adaptable is teacher identity?

7.1. James

James described his background as relatively privileged and evidenced self-awareness and reflexivity. His motivation to teach was informed by a concern with wider social issues

7.2. Jas

Jas is a British Asian who self-identified as dyslexic and who had been placed in what he describes as a bottom set (track) for mathematics in school.

7.3. Paul

I think probably before I came on the course I would have said that the fundamental purpose of maths education is to get students the grades to open the doors for them

7.4. Julie

Julie is a mature entrant to teaching. Her advocated teaching style is what she describes as “old school”, which she experienced as bringing her success when she was at school.

What is our role as teacher educators, with James, Jas, Paul and Julie?

"The four teachers were thinking deeply about these issues and their reflections were rooted in their personal histories. So, for example, the issue of being placed in sets was not only an issue of educational policy but was part of the lived biographies of these teachers. For two of these, Jas and Julie, these painful experiences had been important in shaping their identities both as teachers and more generally. For James the module entailed becoming more aware of his relatively privileged schooling. Paul tried to find a position that could embrace recognition of the importance of the social dimensions of mathematics education with a pedagogy that had worked for him when he was at school. **Inquiring into issues of social justice and so struggling with the gap between espoused and enacted beliefs can be discomforting for beginning teachers. This calls for a pedagogy of compassion, not least for the challenge of the identity work that is entailed.**

" 'Compassion' here signifies empathy and an orientation of kindness rather than judgement. A pedagogy of compassion entails informing teacher education for social justice with the same principles and ethics of care and informed empathy that we would want teachers to enact in their classrooms. **One step towards such a pedagogy, would be give space to consider the ethically ambivalent (Bauman, 1993) nature of pedagogical actions."**

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What we have noticed

A community of lead mentors cultivating habits of enquiry can underpin adaptive, responsive, and inclusive mentoring and teacher development.

Response to Boylan and Woolsey, 2014

Our role as mentors: providing time and opportunities to reflect on prior experiences, understand the impact they have had on you as an individual, how it impacts your view on teaching and how this can be a driver defining you with your own teaching. Learning from prior experiences can be transformative to a trainee's identity.

Response to Boylan and Woolsey, 2014

Asking questions

Exposing each of them to other perspectives and voices. Not diminishing their own experiences but allowing them to grasp a deeper understanding using the practice and motivations of others.

Response to Severiens and Daly (2024)

Longevity of teaching as a career

We spoke about burnout and how to help trainees equip themselves for a long term teaching career

Response to Boylan and Woolsey, 2014

- Encourage continuous reflection, exposure to different teaching styles. Ask them to consider how the students learnt, what the purpose of each activity was, did the outcome meet the objective? Encourage assessment of the students engagement, enjoyment, self confidence. Not just focusing on a specific activity. A more holistic overview. This will hopefully encourage student teachers to really think about what the role of a teacher is.

Response to Boylan and Woolsey, 2014

Help them find their blind spots

critical reflective professionals… adaptive and flexible practitioners. Provide contrasting placements that provide developmental lived experiences…

some urgently need to learn self advocacy (particularly those with disabilities).

Response to Severiens and Daly (2024)

"People are at their best when they feel safe. Ask ourselves, 'how we know if trainees are feeling safe?'

Adaptive mentoring: Understand that trainees have different starting points and acknowledge challenges and opportunities.

It is not a level playing field for trainees, economically, and gender."

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Changing practice

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Revising mentor 'training'

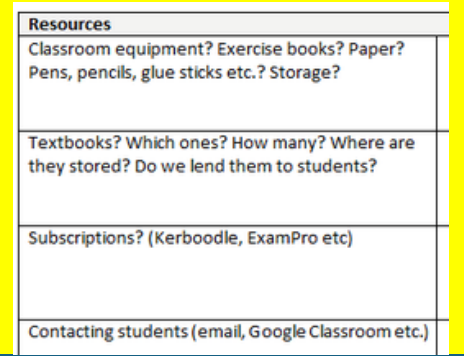
- Recording of key information to be played during mentor's own time. This will be followed by a scheduled online 'workshop' where mentors will form breakout rooms and look at scenarios, opportunity for discussion and problem solving.
- Termly hybrid meetings for partnership mentors; focus on specific CPD

History Subject Mentor Development

Developing a framework to support History subject mentors in how they observe lessons and give effective feedback to trainees. This can then be used in subject mentor training and within schools (particularly where there are several colleagues in a department providing feedback to trainees).

Induction document

Induction quiz to give to trainees to support induction.



Resources
Classroom equipment? Exercise books? Paper? Pens, pencils, glue sticks etc.? Storage?
Textbooks? Which ones? How many? Where are they stored? Do we lend them to students?
Subscriptions? (Kerboodle, ExamPro etc)
Contacting students (email, Google Classroom etc.)

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Developing principles

Educating critical, reflective, professional teachers and colleagues – including ourselves.

- We are working with adults, not children.
- So we need to speak together as adults.
- It is *not* our job to tell trainee teachers (or mentors, or university colleagues) what to think, or how to behave.
- It *is* our job to ask good questions that keep trainee teachers thinking critically.
- We develop (we *all* develop) through dialogue and conversation. Listening is vital.
- Respect, compassion, kindness in our pedagogy, towards each other
- Commitment to social justice doesn't mean the same thing to everyone.

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Developing principles for educating critical, reflective, professional teachers and colleagues

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Open-mindedness, adaptability, creativity

- **Developing reflective and critical professionals.**
- Encouraging independent thought and discussion
- Sense of agency
- Self-motivated
- Self- aware
- Pro-active

Responses by groups of uni and school partners

Principles

Many of these key ideas relate to being

- Collaborative
- Ambitious
- Kind

Adaptive mentoring

Understand that trainees have different starting points and acknowledge challenges and opportunities.

It is not our job to be a model of a 'teacher' to our trainees, but it is our job to model the reflective, critical approach that we want our teachers to adopt

Modelling forming a relationship with the trainee to show them how to form a relationship with the pupils. If we can get to know them in 8 weeks, they can start to do that with classes. Showing how we are developing them and getting them to improve and how can they overlay that onto their classroom practice.

Freedom for trainees to find their own persona. How they behave in the classroom has a direct effect on the children in front of them, be that negative or positive.

Modelling learning as a joy, something to be cherished and enjoyed, not to be endured. Modelling it as an active thing, not passive.

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Embedding enquiry

Enquiry – a stance (*with thanks to Anne Phelan*)

- *By ethic I want to emphasize "the reasoned, epistemic and sociomoral dimensions of the choice to question, to wonder and to not know…*
- *By 'inquiry' I want to emphasize a form of conduct that one adopts, has or does… an embrace of not only reality but also "a hope for difference"* (Renzi, 2019 p.242)

How can lead mentor models embed **enquiry** as a core teacher disposition?

This experience suggests:

- Meeting with colleagues across partnerships in-person on sustained and repeated occasions
- In a scholarly process - using key literature purposefully as a reference for discussion
- Through a dialogic, open and iterative process of development – building ideas together within an asset-based approach

It has been extremely supportive to discuss ITT and ITE development with colleagues and our school partners**, including analysing and reflecting on the role of as mentor and how we can best support our trainees in various placement contexts.** *(uni staff)*

Extremely valuable training days. I have taken many takeaways and ideas to implement into our mentor training, improving their coaching methods and ensuring consistency across the different subjects. *(school partner)*

I have really valued the online training on the Mentor Hub, but the in-person Lead Mentor training has been invaluable**. It was excellent to network with both primary and secondary colleagues as well as school based mentors.** *(uni staff)*

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I have found the University of Manchester's Lead Mentor development programme really beneficial this year. **It has been great to have the opportunity to spend a meaningful amount of time** with colleagues from the university and other local schools who face similar challenges *(school partner)*

It has been invaluable to have been included in the training alongside UoM staff.

The research papers (e.g. on the different types of mentoring) have been thought-provoking and the cross-phase discussion informative. *(school partner)*

It has been very helpful to think through the relationship between university tutors and school mentors, and between school mentors. **It has helped us all think through how to further develop those relationships and mathematics mentoring in schools** *(uni staff)*

It's been great to make new connections with other mentors and develop my skills as a mentor, particularly during observations and whilst dealing with other mentors and how best to advise them when there are issues with their trainees, etc. *(school partner)*

In a personal sense I have gained confidence and a renewed energy for staying in the teaching profession and a desire to continue to develop and grow in my existing roles.

Professionally I have been privileged to be able to draw from the wealth of diverse knowledge and experience of all the other participants in order to improve my teaching practice and become a more effective mentor. *(school partner)*

It has been a breath of fresh air to work with colleagues from partnership schools in the University to discuss key ideas and work on practical ways to make our provision for trainee teachers even stronger. **To see things from each other's perspective has clearly made the process of collaboration between Schools and University a much stronger bond.** *(uni staff)*

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I have thoroughly enjoyed the Lead Mentor development programme as it has allowed me to forensically think about mentoring and how to improve outcomes for ITTs and therefore students. Within Maths, I have been able to offer extra support to the University via visits, mentor support meetings and work with ITTs. I would love to continue with this in the future. *(school partner)*

The experience has been a fantastic opportunity to network with other professional and subject mentors as well as the university itself. **Much of the content delivered in sessions and the reading sent in advance of the sessions has been very thought provoking and discussions ,on this in subsequent sessions has been of great value** *(school partner)*

I have found the 3 days at Manchester University very helpful in discussing with colleagues further ideas on supporting mentors at our school. I have introduced new procedures as a result of these sessions. **The reading material we were given was also useful and informative. I have also valued the opportunity to network not just with other mentors and lead mentors but also with the university staff.** *(school partner)*

I found the three training days incredibly thought provoking, it was so nice to be able to meet and collaborate with so many interesting and intelligent people and **being able to bounce ideas off each-other and network for the future was invaluable.** *(school partner)*

Participating in Lead Mentor Training over the course of this academic year has had a significant professional impact, broadening my understanding of mentoring beyond practical (and valuable!) strategies such as feedback and target setting. Through the training, I've come to view mentoring as a central force in shaping inclusive and empowering school cultures. **It prompted a shift in how I consider the role of power and relationships within schools, encouraging me to support trainees in ways that not only build their confidence and competence but also foster a sense of belonging and equity.** *(school partner)*

The training has also helped me reflect more deeply on my own values and the ways these are communicated in mentoring conversations. Engaging with peers across phases and contexts allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in mentoring. **On a personal level, this has strengthened my belief in the importance of creating space for open, honest dialogue and modelling professional behaviours that promote fairness and mutual respect, both in my work with trainees and within the wider school environment.** *(school partner)*

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How do we extend opportunities to develop enquiry in ITE partnerships?

What kind of contexts can we create for enquiry?

What use can we make of published research?

What are the risks and downsides?