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## Are You Ready to be a Mentor? Preparing Teachers for Mentoring Pre-service Teachers

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## **Are You Ready to be a Mentor? Preparing Teachers for Mentoring Pre-service Teachers**

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*Abstract: The use of mentoring has nowadays become a predominant practice for the professional placement component of pre-service teacher education programs. Research however has identified that being an effective teacher does not make you an effective mentor. The present research investigated the role of professional development in the preparation of mentor teachers for their mentoring roles. Specifically, this paper presents the findings of a pilot mentoring preparation course that engaged mentor teachers in developing their knowledge about the nature and process of mentoring and the roles of mentors and mentees. Data about changed understandings of mentoring and changed mentoring practices of the mentor teachers who participated were gathered. The findings presented here are intended to inform the development of future professional development courses for mentor teachers who intend to mentor pre-service teachers.*

### **Introduction**

In many Australian pre-service teacher education programs, mentoring has become the predominant practice utilised during professional placements. Classroom-based teachers are relied upon to mentor pre-service teachers in practical aspects of learning to teach. Within the context of a mentoring scenario, the pre-service teacher's needs are catered for and learning opportunities are negotiated between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher. The classroom-based teacher who agrees to mentor a pre-service teacher needs to nurture, advise, guide, encourage and facilitate authentic learning experiences for developmental growth (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Le Cornu, 2005).

Despite the important role that mentor teachers play in the development of the future generation of teachers, research has demonstrated that few teachers receive training or preparation for mentoring (Hall, Draper, Smith & Bullough, 2008; Tang & Choi, 2007). In many instances, it is assumed that if a teacher is considered to be an effective practitioner, they can pass on their skills and knowledge to another as a mentor. Mentoring is not a natural ability that people inherently have, so an effective teacher may not necessarily make an effective mentor. Nevertheless, Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen and Bergen (2011) have shown that mentoring skills can be learnt and developed over time.

This paper investigates the effectiveness of preparation for mentoring in relation to the understandings that mentors have of the nature of mentoring in the pre-service teacher education context. Firstly, the paper examines the construct of mentoring and the differences between mentoring and the traditional supervisory approach within the pre-service teacher education context. It provides a synthesis of the literature that discusses the importance of preparation for mentoring. Following this, the methodology and research context will be

described, and then the findings from the research are presented. A discussion of the findings concludes the paper.

### **Mentoring in the Pre-service Teacher Education Context**

In Australia there has been a shift from the use of a supervisory model to a mentoring model over the past decade (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). Although not all pre-service teacher education programs use a mentoring model, most refer to the use of mentoring in one way or another. Accordingly, classroom teachers who mentor pre-service teachers are referred to as 'mentor teachers' rather than the more traditional term of 'supervisor'. Other terms such as 'cooperating teacher', 'school based teacher educator', 'school associates' and 'practicum supervisor' are also commonly used within the international literature to refer to a mentor teacher (Clarke et al., 2012). The shift in terminology has caused confusion amongst teacher educators in both higher education institutions (HEIs) and schools. However, the recent inclusion of mentoring as a professional role of a teacher in the Australian National Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011), provides a basis for investigating the understanding of what mentoring entails.

Mentoring is often described as an interpersonal relationship that comprises of a series of purposeful, social interactions (Bearman, Blake-Beard, Hunt & Crosby, 2007; Fairbanks, Freedman & Kahn, 2000; Kram, 1985). Supervision also has the same qualities: it is an interpersonal relationship that is built on purposeful social interactions (Ambrosetti, 2010; Walkington, 2005). Mentoring, however, concerns the development of the relationship between the mentor and mentee, which in turn provides the underpinning for the growth of the mentee's skills. Thus in mentoring, the relationship becomes central to the interactions that occur. Supervision, on the other hand, is centered solely on the developmental aspects of the pre-service teacher and interactions between the participants focus on developmental concerns. In this respect, supervision includes the assessment of the pre-service teacher's development.

Although both types of relationships can be hierarchical in nature, mentoring is more likely to be reciprocal (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010) in that both the mentor and mentee negotiate the journey together. Mentoring is said to provide mentees with the opportunity to develop their personal and professional selves through reflection (Walkington, 2005), so the context of the professional placement provides the setting for individual teacher identities to emerge. It can therefore be established that mentoring is a holistic process that includes three components: relationship, developmental needs and contextual elements (Ambrosetti, 2010; Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Lai, 2005). Supervision, conversely, means to mould the pre-service teacher to fit into the school or classroom environment through enculturation, feedback and assessment (Walkington, 2005). The supervisory approach generally aims to produce graduate teachers who are replicas of the context.

In the context of pre-service teacher education, mentor teachers assess the student teacher on both progress and required tasks using university-based criteria. Assessment is traditionally a role of a supervisor rather than a mentor (Walkington, 2005) and has the potential to create unwanted hierarchical difficulties. Assessment of the mentee by the mentor is not a component of mentoring. It can be argued though, that a strong reciprocal relationship between the mentor and mentee, whereby continual dialogue between the participants that discusses feedback about progress can avoid potential issues (Jones, 2000; Maynard, 2000). Consequently, in a mentoring circumstance, a shared understanding of assessment practices and tools needs to be formulated by the mentor and mentee in order to avoid potential role conflict. Considering that assessment of the pre-service teacher by the

mentor teacher is a requirement mandated by the HEIs, it can be deduced that in the provision of pre-service teacher education, mentor teachers need to draw on both mentoring and supervisory skills to perform their role (Cranborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2008).

### **Why Prepare for Mentoring?**

Many teachers choose to mentor in order to contribute to the profession or consider it as an opportunity for their own personal and professional growth (Campbell & Brummett, 2007; Walkington, 2005). It has been reported that mentoring offers classroom-based teachers opportunities to reflect critically on their own practices and revitalise them (Walkington, 2004). Other documented benefits for mentors include a renewed enthusiasm for the job, the opportunity to make a difference in another's professional and/or personal life, enhanced collegiality and a self-improved work ethic (Lai, 2005; McGee, 2001; Walkington, 2005). Mentoring a pre-service teacher can provide the mentor with opportunities for professional learning and development (AITSL, 2011; Hudson, 2013). Although the benefits from mentoring pre-service teachers are well documented, limitations associated with mentoring are also reported. Research has described limitations of mentoring such as increased workload, added responsibility and stress, uncertainty about how to mentor and having to assess the progress of the pre-service teacher (Walkington, 2005). Although the notion of partnerships between schools and HEIs are well documented, particularly in respect to the professional placement, they are reported to be one sided with the classroom teacher often bearing the brunt of the work (Lynch & Smith, 2012).

In Australia, HEIs often struggle to find quality placements for their pre-service teachers (Sinclair, Dowson & Thistleton-Martin, 2006), as not every teacher is suitable to be a mentor. This paper argues that preparation for mentoring can assist in developing effective mentors. Descriptions of what makes an effective mentor are well documented in the literature. It is agreed that a quality mentor is one who understands the specific goals of mentoring in the context in which they are working and is familiar with the tasks to be undertaken by the mentee (Valeni & Vogrinc, 2007). It has also been identified that a quality mentor in pre-service teacher education has both the knowledge and the competency to mentor (Graves, 2010). Tang and Choi (2007) argue that knowing how to mentor another involves the active construction and reconstruction of knowledge. In the context of pre-service teacher education, the mentor teacher needs the cognitive skills to not only pass on knowledge and skills, but also to use them in context and justify them accordingly. Skills that mentors need include communication, collaboration and evaluation, as well as problem solving and decision making skills (Gagen & Bowie, 2005; Graves, 2010).

It is well documented that classroom teachers play a vital role in the preparation of pre-service teachers (Clarke, et al., 2012). Furthermore, as mentioned previously, it is often assumed that the classroom teacher's experience will enable them to mentor a pre-service teacher effectively and provide a worthwhile experience for the latter (Gagen & Bowie, 2005). However, many classroom teachers are not well prepared for mentoring, particularly when difficulties arise with the pre-service teacher (Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002; Valeni & Vogrinc, 2007). A reason for this situation is that preparation for mentoring has not been a priority in many pre-service teacher education programs. Hudson (2013) has noted that if HEIs are to rely on classroom teachers to mentor pre-service teachers, then they need to provide specific training or preparation courses. In cases where preparation courses are available for those mentoring a pre-service teacher, it has been found that they are often program specific and provide limited information about the nature and role of mentoring

(Hall et al., 2008). Training or preparation for mentoring that focuses on mentoring itself appears to be limited.

In the absence of preparation or training, many classroom teachers revert to their own experiences as pre-service teachers and duplicate the methods used by their own supervising teachers (Clarke et al., 2012; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009; Wang & Odell, 2002). Mentoring practices, according to Wang and Odell (2002, p.525), can be formed by preparation for mentoring: 'research suggests that mentor preparation can substantially influence knowledge of particular mentoring techniques and skills to shape their mentoring practice'. Research that has specifically investigated the effects of mentoring on pre-service teachers suggests that mentor training increases the positive impacts that mentoring can have on the growth of both the skills and knowledge of the mentees (Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Giebelhaus & Bowman, 2002).

Courses that prepare participants for mentoring need to be structured and draw on both research and literature. According to Hunzicker (2010, p.3), adult learners 'prefer open ended learning opportunities and a voice in the direction and pace of the learning'. Therefore, preparation courses must also provide opportunities for substantive conversations between the participants in order to share experiences, solve problems and make decisions (Clark et al., 2012; Bullough & Draper, 2004). Previous research has found that classroom based teachers who mentor pre-service teachers have little, if any, knowledge of the process of mentoring and the specific roles mentors and mentees undertake (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010); thus, preparation would need to include these in its structure.

Preparing mentor teachers for their role in the professional experience can also provide classroom-based teachers with further opportunities for professional learning. Bloomfield (2009) suggests that the professional experience is viewed as a partnership between the school, its teachers and the HEI. Research has documented that a partnership between a school and a HEI has the potential to 'provide quality professional experience placements for pre-service teachers with suitably qualified and experienced classroom teachers' (Uusimake, 2013, p.45). Yet school-university partnerships are reported to be problematic and are often one sided (Lynch & Smith, 2012). Providing professional development opportunities for teachers in mentoring, as well as other areas of interest, is one way that universities can authentically contribute to the partnership (Bloomfield, 2009).

## **Methodology and Context**

Given that preparation for mentoring is limited, this research set out to investigate the changed understandings and practices of mentor teachers after participating in a mentoring course that was intended to prepare them for mentoring a pre-service teacher. The research was guided by the following question:

*What are the perceived changes in mentoring that occur as a result of preparation for mentoring?*

The research question was addressed using the following objectives:

1. To determine the perceived impact preparation for mentoring can have on the mentor teacher.
2. To explore changes in understandings of mentoring and mentoring practices.

The professional development course consisted of four weekly after-school sessions of two hours' duration that focused on mentoring practices. Each session was non-program specific. The topics in the course included the nature of mentoring, roles in mentoring and approaches to mentoring. Recent research literature was utilised when designing the course, and the topics included were those that emerged from the literature. The course employed a

delivery schedule that was flexible and allowed time for unscheduled topics to be included. The course utilised researched-based readings, a mentoring framework and a personal mentoring plan template. The course used a 'knowledge transmission model' to deliver the content. The knowledge transmission model allows the facilitator to present the information to the participants who then apply the knowledge in their own context (Wang & Odell, 2002). The course was designed and facilitated by the researcher. The structure of the course was organised so that participants had the opportunity to engage in professional conversations and reflective activities, as well as to develop knowledge of mentoring and apply the knowledge to their own context. The course also included reflective homework activities for the participants to complete between sessions so as to encourage the active application of learning.

The course was offered to schools in the surrounding area of the university campus. Eleven teachers chose to participate in the professional development course. Nine of the teachers were female and two were male. Nine of the participants were teaching in primary school classrooms and two were located in secondary school classrooms. Nine of the participants had been teaching for more than fifteen years and two less than five years. Each participant taught at a different school, however each teacher was currently mentoring a pre-service teacher from the researcher's university. The more experienced teachers had mentored several pre-service teachers in previous years and those with limited teaching experience had each mentored only one pre-service teacher previously.

A survey was used to gather data about the course and the learnings participants had achieved. The survey also contained questions that focused on the effectiveness of the teaching materials and strategies used in the course. Ethical clearance from the university ethics committee was gained before beginning the data collection. Figure 1 outlines the survey categories and their associated questions. The survey was paper based, anonymous and was mailed to participants at their school. Prepaid addressed envelopes were provided with the survey for ease of return and ensured anonymity. The survey contained no identifying data about the participants in that it did not ask respondents to provide any information about themselves. Participant information as described in the paper was recorded during the professional development course. The survey was administered three months after the completion of the course. All eleven participants who undertook the professional development course responded to the survey. This paper reports only on questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 as highlighted in Figure 1.

<b>Survey category</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Course Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What did you think of the structure of the course?</li> <li>2. Was there a topic/concept that should have been included in the course?</li> <li>3. A variety of learning activities and strategies were used throughout the course. Please rate their effectiveness by marking the continuum.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading activities/Professional conversations/Individual activities/Homework</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
Learning and Teaching Materials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. A variety of learning and teaching materials were used within the course. Please rate the usefulness of these materials.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research based readings/Mentoring framework/Personal mentoring plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>5. In order to gain a better understanding of the usefulness of</li> </ol>

the material used, please tick the most appropriate description of the materials.

- Research based readings/Mentoring framework/Personal mentoring plan

Changed understandings of mentoring	6. What have you achieved from the course? 7. How did the course promote change how you mentor pre-service teachers?
Changed practices of mentoring	8. Briefly describe some of the processes you use when mentoring a pre-service teacher 9. What were the changes in your mentoring practices?
Final comments	10. Please add any final comments about or suggestions for the mentoring course

**Figure 1: Survey Categories and Questions**

The four questions addressed in this paper were open ended and the responses were analysed qualitatively. The responses were firstly coded using words and descriptive phrases derived from the mentoring literature. The codes were then categorised into themes that originated from the objectives of the research. It is important to note that this research did not collect data on mentoring practices prior to the participants undertaking the course, so it did not compare mentoring practices before and after, nor did it measure changes in practices by way of a scale.

## Findings

The findings revealed both changed understandings of mentoring and changed practices in mentoring. Figure 2 shows the initial themes that were developed from the coding of data. The figure also shows the specific elements that emerged within each theme. Each of the themes and their specific elements are presented with excerpts from the data to support the points being made.

Question category	Themes	Theme elements
Changed understandings of mentoring	The complexity of mentoring	Individualised Holistic Reflective
	Roles in mentoring	Complex Self-efficacy Numerous and changing
Changed practices of mentoring	Structural aspects of mentoring	Organisation Cater to needs Immersion
	The mentoring relationship	Personal relationship Supportive relationship Shared journey

**Figure 2: Findings - question categories, themes and elements**

### Changed Understandings of Mentoring

There were two key themes that emerged from the responses provided by the participants regarding changed understandings of mentoring: its complexity and the roles involved in it. The changed understandings reflect a change in perceptions toward mentoring and the impact of the role mentor teachers play within the professional placement.

#### *The Complexity of Mentoring*

The professional development course provided the participants the opportunity to extend their knowledge of and understandings about the nature of mentoring through engagement with mentoring research and participation in professional conversations about mentoring experiences. It was identified by the participants that they realised that mentoring is a complex process. Specifically, many of the participants noted that mentoring is complex because it is an individualised process and factors such as the context and the people involved influences the success of the mentoring relationship:

*I have a greater insight into the complexity of mentoring. Mentoring depends on the situation, environment and individual person. You have to plan accordingly.* (Participant D)

Some of the participants highlighted that the complexity of mentoring was due to its holistic nature. In this respect, the participants indicated that mentoring included having to manage the emotive aspects of learning that came with the development of teaching skills. The responses given by some of the participants highlighted that the relationship between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher becomes a focal point of mentoring, and that the holistic underpinnings of the relationship provide a platform for important conversations to occur:

*I have realised that mentoring is shaping both 'hearts and minds'. You need to balance the supervision of required tasks with the affective domain and examine 'how you feel'.* (Participant A)

The complexity of mentoring was also linked to the understanding that mentoring was a reflective activity and this was connected to attitudes (and practice) towards mentoring. In particular, one of the participants noted that mentoring was a different process from supervision and was one that they needed to be aware of within the context of the circumstance:

*There was a greater understanding of the mentoring process and I realised that my attitude to what it means to mentor another needed to change. This then prompted me to reflect on my practice and how I handle certain situations.* (Participant C)

#### *Roles in Mentoring*

The second theme that emerged was that of a changed understanding of the roles in mentoring, in particular, those of the mentor teacher. The course included a session that focused on identifying the roles undertaken by a mentor teacher and the types of activities a mentor would perform in those roles. The roles of mentors are numerous in number and change throughout the relationship. Many of the participants indicated that having a greater awareness of the different types of roles that they need to undertake assisted them to become more effective in mentoring:

*I knew that there were many roles, but I guess I really wasn't aware of the types of roles I should be undertaking and when to use them. Role modelling, supporting, challenging,*



*facilitating, evaluating.....there are so many and each has a specific purpose that can be used to help my pre-service teacher grow and develop.* (Participant F)

Some of the participants however reported that the role of a mentor was multi-faceted and not so 'clear-cut':

*I have a much better understanding of the role of the mentor teacher and the mentee. I started the course thinking there was a clear 'role' and specific jobs covered by the mentor – the course certainly clarified my understanding that mentoring is not clear-cut.*  
(Participant E)

Several of the participants also highlighted the importance of the actual role that they play as mentor teachers. The link to the perceptions of the role was similar in many respects to the identification that mentoring was a reflective activity. The participants' self-efficacy about the nature of mentoring and the importance of the roles that they undertake was highlighted:

*It certainly changed my perceptions of the role of a mentor and made me realise that the specific role I play is more important than I had previously thought.*  
(Participant C)

### **Changed Mentoring Practices**

It was established earlier in this paper that mentoring skills can be learnt and developed over time. Previous research has reported that preparation for mentoring can help shape mentoring practices. Each of the mentor teachers in this study indicated that they had changed their mentoring practices, both implicitly and explicitly, as a result of participating in the mentoring course. For some mentor teachers their practices changed through a greater awareness of their perceptions of mentoring and for others an adjustment in actions occurred. In this respect, two themes emerged from the findings: changed practices within the structure of mentoring and changes in the mentoring relationships that they developed with pre-service teachers.

### *Structural Aspects of Mentoring*

Many of the participants identified that the professional development course provided them with information that enabled them to make changes in their own operational functions when working with pre-service teachers. They indicated that they realised the need to be more organised and structured. The participants' highlighted actions such as setting aside time for specific conversations, scheduling of tasks and preparation for teaching were changed practices:

*I find I am more structured and organized, not so ad hoc with mentoring any more. We are having formal discussions to cover set topics, but also discussing teaching moments as they occur. I am providing regular, but more specific feedback after each session, day, and week.*  
(Participant E)

As part of the structural organisation of mentoring, some of the participants indicated that they had changed how they worked with the pre-service teachers. This change related to a greater awareness of their perceptions of mentoring and how this influences their actions. The participants signalled that they were more aware of how and what they should involve the pre-service teachers in:

*I am more aware of the structure of the days and weeks when I have a pre-service teacher. I brief the pre-service teacher on the day's timetable and make sure the pre-service teacher is involved in every activity or lesson. We discuss his responsibilities and the types of tasks he*

*will do during each lesson – whether it be observing, working with a group or helping a specific child.*

(Participant B)

Immersion of the pre-service teacher in the experience was a further changed practice. Rather than limiting the pre-service teacher's experience to the classroom, three of the participants indicated that they realised that they needed to ensure that the pre-service teacher had engaged in wider experiences within the role of teacher.

The participants became more aware of their role as mentor and this included mentoring actions that occurred outside of the immediate classroom environment:

*I have been making more of an effort to broaden the mentee's practical experience by involving them in a variety of meetings and arranging for them to visit other classes. I am also ensuring that the mentee is experiencing the culture of the school.* (Participant C)

### ***The Mentoring Relationship***

A greater awareness of the relational component of mentoring resulted in changed practices towards the relationship that developed between the mentors and mentees. Some of the participants stated that they approached the relational side of mentoring differently. They indicated that they became cognisant of the link between the support provided to the pre-service teachers and the relationship developed with them, which in turn led to a shared understanding of the expectations and standards that the pre-service teachers needed to achieve:

*I am making a concerted effort to establish a more personal relationship than I had been doing previously. I am also encouraging the mentee to take risks without fear of being penalized in the assessment.*

(Participant C)

The relational aspect of mentoring tended to focus on the support aspect of the mentor teacher's role. This result correlates with the changed understandings of the roles of the mentor. Several of the mentor teachers became more conscious of the support they provided to pre-service teachers through the way they included them in the classroom:

*I am more explicit with my expectations, yet more understanding of where the mentee is at in his/her journey. I make sure he understands his role in class and is confident to ask questions. I have more compassion and understanding of the 'passions' of a pre-service teacher.*

(Participant B)

Many of the participants also indicated that mentoring was a learning journey that they shared with the pre-service teacher. They articulated the need for adjustment throughout a placement, both in the relationship and the mentoring that occurred. It was intimated by the participants that a relationship built on trust and openness ensured that the pre-service teacher's developmental needs would be met:

*I am sharing the journey and making sure that the journey changes as we meet the personal needs of the pre-service teacher, I encourage, laugh, listen and question. I am pushing the envelope, but making sure they are comfortable with that.*

(Participant A)

### **Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

The objectives of the study were to investigate changes that preparation for mentoring could have on mentoring practices and these were revealed within the findings. Changes in both understandings and practices were identified and there were links between the two aspects. The changed understandings the participants developed influenced the mentoring practices they employed with their pre-service teachers.

This research has highlighted that many of the classroom teachers who participated in the course did not typically consider mentoring as a complex activity. As shown in Figure 2, it was identified by the participants that the complexity of mentoring was attributable to the individualised, yet holistic and reflective nature of the process. Furthermore, the perceptions (and ultimately the attitude) the classroom teacher assumes towards the role of mentoring in the professional experience adds to the complexity. While it is assumed that classroom-based teachers who choose to mentor a pre-service teacher will have a positive attitude towards the mentoring circumstance, some of the teachers in this study have highlighted that having a greater understanding of what it means to mentor provided a stepping-stone for an adjustment in their actions. Mentoring is frequently described as a complex activity in the literature (Ambrosetti, 2010; Fairbanks et al., 2000; Hall et al., 2008; Tillema, Smith & Leshem, 2011) and the three elements identified by the participants provide some insight into this complexity. Although the notion of the holistic nature of mentoring was expressed by way of 'hearts and minds', links can be made to the three components of mentoring that were identified earlier: relationship, developmental needs and contextual elements.

The research has revealed that the role a mentor plays in the mentoring circumstance is connected to the complexity of the process. Previous research has identified that mentors usually understand that they have numerous roles to fill (Valeni & Vogrinc, 2007) yet many of the participants in this study were surprised to learn about the wide range of roles and how they could be utilised. According to Valeni and Vogrinc (2007), being familiar with the roles in mentoring, having an increased understanding of what is required within each role and how the roles can be used in differing situations, can assist in creating a quality mentoring experience for the mentor and mentee. In addition, some of the participants identified that the role of a mentor is not just about developing essential teaching knowledge and skills. They identified that the emotional support they provide works hand in hand with developmental aspects in the mentoring process (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Lai, 2005).

The application of knowledge from the mentoring course resulted in many of the participants making changes to the way they approached mentoring, particularly in a structural sense, as shown in Figure 2. Some of the participants specifically expressed that they were more organised for mentoring than they had been previously, and had determined a plan for mentoring either on a daily or weekly basis. It could be concluded that improved organisation in the mentoring circumstance is influenced by the mentor's attitude towards their role. Previous research has found that the desire to provide effective mentoring provides motivation for mentors to change their own organisational behaviours (Gagen & Bowie, 2005; Walkington, 2005). It could also be concluded that increased knowledge of the underpinnings of the role of a mentor enabled the participants to encompass the relational, developmental and contextual components of mentoring as a whole.

Many of the participants in this research intimated that the relationship underpins the mentoring that occurs and, therefore, provides guidance for the application of non-traditional mentoring roles, such as that of assessor. As highlighted earlier in this paper, the role of mentor as assessor is one that can create tension and stress, and has the potential to create an atmosphere of distrust between the mentor and mentee (Jones, 2000; Tillema et al., 2011; Walkington, 2005). The development of a supportive relationship that is both professional and personal, as reported in this research, provided the mentors with an avenue in which to share the journey with their pre-service teacher and ensure that their needs were met.

Accordingly, the results from the research support the notion that the relationship that develops between the mentor and mentee becomes central to the outcomes achieved through the professional experience (Ambrosetti, 2010). The notion of the practicum as a shared journey between the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher highlights that mentoring can be a reciprocal relationship in this context.

The study has provided evidence that explicit awareness of the nature and process of mentoring can give mentor teachers the knowledge to alter or change their mentoring practices. Therefore, it can be concluded from the results of this research that preparation for mentoring made a difference in both the understanding of mentoring and mentoring practices used. Although the research did not measure the changes or compare 'before' and 'after', the participants benefited from specific knowledge about the nature of mentoring and the process of mentoring. The results have identified that preparation for mentoring that focuses on developing specific knowledge of the nature of mentoring, mentoring roles and approaches to mentoring can assist in ensuring a quality experience for pre-service teachers during a professional placement. In an environment in which mentoring and supervision are intertwined, a lack of confidence on the part of the mentor teachers about how to provide worthwhile experiences for pre-service teachers will remain if preparation for mentoring is not provided.

However, this study is limited in a number of ways: data were gathered from a small number of participants and the data only reflected perceived changes in understandings and practices. Although the study is limited, it provides a starting point for further investigation. Importantly, the research has shown that further research into the role of preparation for mentoring in the pre-service teacher context is needed. It is recommended that research that examines the impact of mentoring preparation training on both the mentor teacher and the pre-service teacher could provide data about its worth.

The pilot-mentoring course investigated in this research was non-program specific and centered on the nature and process of mentoring. It is, however, acknowledged that in order to mentor effectively, teachers also need specific knowledge about the requirements of the pre-service teacher education course and may need to attend in-service that focuses on this. Finally it must be noted that there is no one recipe for success in mentoring. Mentoring is multi-faceted and is dependent upon the individuals in the relationship. Nevertheless understanding the nature of mentoring, the process of mentoring and the distinct components that are encompassed in mentoring, will provide an informed approach that can enable all participants to meet their goals.

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