



MENTORING STUDENT AND BEGINNING TEACHERS

J. HANS C. VONK

Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

AN ESSAY-REVIEW OF *ISSUES ON MENTORING*

T. Kerry and A. Shelton Mayes (1995) London: Routledge/The Open University Press (ISBN 0415 11681 3)

AND *UNDERSTANDING MENTORING*

P. Tomlinson (1995) Buckingham: The Open University Press (ISBN 0335 19306-4)

Mentoring teachers during initial training and induction is currently in the spotlight, on the practical as well as the theoretical level. A number of books on this issue have appeared during the last years, such as Wilkin (1992); DeBolt (1992); Vonk (1992); McIntyre, Haggard, and Wilkin (1993); Caldwell and Carter (1993). In addition to that a journal on mentoring has been recently established: *Mentoring: Partnership in Teacher Education*, and at the American Educational Research Association conferences during the last 2 years an increasing number of papers were presented on this topic. All in all, mentoring in initial teacher training and during the first year(s) of service is "en vogue" today, in particular in the U.K. and the U.S.A.

In the world of teacher education, however, the phenomenon of the mentor—that is, an experienced teacher, *well-trained* to guide student teachers during teaching practice—who is co-responsible for the education and training of student teachers is not new. In a number of European countries, a vast amount of expertise in the training of mentors is available. Experimentation with the participation of trained mentors in the initial education and training of

teachers started in the early seventies, in particular in northern Germany (e.g., the University of Oldenburg), in a number of Dutch universities (e.g., the universities of Utrecht and the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam with mentor training programmes and contracts with schools regarding school practice) and in some Nordic countries. The starting point for this development was the attempt to bring together theoretical knowledge about teaching (theory) on the one hand and teachers' practical knowledge (practice) on the other hand. Theory and practice were considered to be two sides of the same coin: There is no valuable theory which is not connected with good practice, because practitioners need that theory as a frame for reflection on their actions. During the seventies and early eighties this led to a more practice orientated curriculum for the education and training of teachers in a number of countries, based on intensive cooperation between universities and the schools involved. In the context of this cooperation, mentors—as representatives of the profession—had a considerable influence in defining the curriculum for teacher education.

The renewed interest in mentoring today has

in the first instance arisen in those countries where such cooperation was not established and the gap between teacher training institutes and the schools remained in tact. In these countries the main responsibility for the initial training of teachers has now shifted from the universities to the schools. In the U.K., for example, initial teacher training has become more school-based, that is, extensive attention is paid to practice-oriented professional development of teachers. In this context, the experienced practitioner has an important role to play as a mentor in the renewal of the initial education and training of teachers. Strongly related to this renewed interest in the role of the mentor is the reappraisal of teachers' professional knowledge or teachers' craft knowledge and the value of learning from experience in teacher education.

The books under review here: Tomlinson, *Understanding Mentoring* and Kerry and Shelton Mayes, *Issues in Mentoring*, are part of the Open University course on "Mentoring". They focus on the U.K. situation in which the school-based certification of adults is a key issue. This is why not all chapters are equally relevant for a wider audience, in particular those chapters that discuss specific issues in U.K. educational policies. This review will focus on chapters with general relevance.

Understanding Mentoring

Tomlinson's book is a monograph in which a coherent search for principals and practices in mentoring student teachers is presented. It is an attempt to outline a coherent knowledge basis for the mentoring of novice teachers. From all the recently published books in English, it is the only one written by a single author. The book comprises nine chapters. Chapter 1, *School-based teacher education*, explores the new context for teacher education in the U.K. and explains what the reader may expect from the book. The author takes a practical stance towards the phenomenon of mentoring rather than a theoretical one. He argues: "The book places a premium on practical relevance, but any ideas and perspectives offered must also be explained and justified as far as space will allow" (p. 4). The purpose of his book is "to promote awareness and critical understanding of practical ways of mentoring, . . . [i.e.] assisting student-teachers in learning to teach in

school-based settings" (p. 5). Critical in his view means: "to assess strategies open-mindedly but carefully, for their degree of coherence, relevance and well-groundedness" (p. 3). After the explanation that he takes an interactive point of view on learning, he comes to the kernel of the book in Chapter 2: *Learning to teach, a framework for understanding mentoring*. The author regards teaching as a complex, open skill which is knowledge-based and in which knowing-how and knowing-that are inextricably linked. Learning to teach is skill-learning, and therefore skill-learning and how mentors can support that learning are the central themes of this book. He distinguishes his perspective on skill-learning from that of traditional training procedures in that he recognises the importance of the cognitive aspect of skills. "The more open a skill is the more it tends to require factual awareness and understanding, as well as explicit problem-solving—using heuristics" (p. 16). Central in the process of skill-learning is the *teaching skill cycle*: plan—teach—reflect. There are two issues on which this part of the book is less elaborate. The first one concerns the loose description of the structure of the learning processes which are basic to acquiring new skills. For example, in this chapter I missed any reference to Russian learning psychology with respect to the various steps in the development of a repertoire of actions, the more so because the author discussed the coherence between action and cognition earlier in the book. Vygotsky provides a more elaborate scheme for "skill" learning. Especially his notions of "orientation base", building up a "repertoire of actions",¹ and "zone of nearest development" are very helpful in understanding, structuring and guiding the novice teachers' learning process.

The second issue regards the use of the concept of "reflection" in initial teacher education. The author does not describe precisely what the "act of reflecting" implies in his perception. One cannot take for granted that teachers are reflective-oriented persons by nature. Many teachers are not, for example, they are common-sense thinkers.² Apart from that, the following question can be raised "what do beginning teachers have to reflect on?" They lack both the knowledge and the experience they need as a framework for reflection. In particular, when reflection is defined as "systemic enquiry into one's own

practice to improve that practice and to deepen one's understanding of it" (McIntyre, 1993, p. 43), it becomes clear that a beginner needs external help to reflect (guided practice) on her or his experiences (reflection on action). Reflection in action, as it is introduced by Schön (1987), is in the first instance only a means for experienced teachers. Novice teachers experience their first year of teaching as very hectic and they are confused by the multitude of their experiences that they hardly find time for reflection, and if so, they are not able to structure their experiences. Here a mentor has an important role to play in helping novices

- to structure their experiences;
- to reconstruct the events concerned and to find an explanation for the course of events and to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions undertaken;
- to test the validity of that explanation against (valuable) theory and practice;
- to develop alternatives;

and so to assist the novice to develop a well-grounded and flexible repertoire of actions. However, this is easily said, but hard to practice for a mentor. This puts increasing emphasis on the fact that school-based teacher education can only be realized through well-trained mentors.

Chapters 3, *The reflective coach*, and 4, *The effective facilitator*, consecutively discuss the various parts of the mentor's role and provide a theoretical framework for mentor actions. This part of the book is well-written in that it offers a coherent set of strategies a mentor can use while guiding a novice teacher. In Chapter 4 counselling approaches and some basic skills for the interpersonal aspects are discussed. These basic skills for mentoring novices are represented by the acronym DAM: Defining/doing—Active awareness—Motivating. Each of the basic skills are clearly described.

Chapter 5, *Classroom strategies and their learning potential*, explores the nature of classroom teaching and learning with the aim to create a common vocabulary for discussions between student teachers and their mentors. For mentors this chapter offers a frame of reference that enables them to reflect on their own teaching and so to put the basic elements of their own craft knowledge into words. In this chapter the author introduces the principle of the functional analysis of teaching as a basic strategy for

mentoring novices. This strategy is labeled with a new acronym—DAL: doing/defining, active awareness, learning promotion. The objective of DAM and DAL functional analysis is to help novices and their mentors to identify essential purposes and/or functions that need to be achieved within teaching (p. 90). The author continues this chapter with an in-depth analysis of classroom strategies and their learning potential. Chapter 6, *Classroom strategies and their pupil management potential*, is devoted to the second important aspect of learning to teach, that is, classroom management. Although the chapter contains a valuable analysis of this phenomenon, it remains too distanced from my perception of novice teachers' actual experiences. Besides, the complex schemes in this chapter do not add much value to the written text. In this chapter, in particular, I missed concrete illustrations derived from novice teachers' practice.

Chapter 7 mainly deals with assessment and its approach is typical for the situation in the U.K. It gives you a good idea of the possible options when having to deal with competence rating and the like. Chapters 8 and 9, *Mentoring in practice*, are meant to implement the more general principles from the previous chapters in concrete mentoring activities and programmes. They contain a great number of practical suggestions. Everybody involved in mentoring may find issues here to suit her or him.

Despite my critical remarks, I am of the opinion that Tomlinson's book, taking his basic assumptions about skill-learning into account, is a highly valuable contribution to the knowledge base of those involved in the education and training of teachers.

Issues in Mentoring

The book edited by Kerry and Shelton Mayes, like most of the recent publications on this issue, consists of a selection of previously published articles and book chapters. The authors present their book as a reader in which they examine a number of key issues in the field of mentoring, such as: "What is the mentor's role? What are the skills and strategies mentors need to master? And most importantly, how does this relate to models of teacher learning and notions of the teacher's role—such as the development of the 'reflective teacher'?" (p. 2). The book falls into

five parts: (A) Concepts of mentoring—Chapters 1–3; (B) Mentoring in initial teacher training—Chapters 4–11; (C) Mentoring in induction training—Chapters 12–15; (D) Mentoring and assessment—Chapters 16–22, and finally part (E) Mentoring: professional development and institutional aspects—Chapters 23–24. It is impossible to review all the chapters of this book in detail. Because part (A) does to some extent supplement a number of aspects in Tomlinson's book, Chapters 1–3 will be reviewed separately, while the other parts of the book will be reviewed as one.

The first chapter by Maynard and Furlong examines how teachers acting as mentors can most effectively help protegees in learning to teach. They start with an analysis of teachers' professional knowledge and conclude that practical knowledge—being the province of teachers—should be used to interrogate more theoretically based knowledge and vice versa. This interrogation is the only basis for student teachers to reflect on their experiences in practice. This will help them to make the tacit explicit. A mentor has an important role to play in this process, because most student and beginning teachers do not know what to reflect on and how to bring together practice and valuable theory. This point of view largely coincides with that of Stones (1992) who perceives teachers as

inquirers attempting to solve pedagogical problems. Inquiring teachers will see teaching as an activity of great complexity which we hardly yet begin to understand. They will see it as open-ended exploration in which they express their pedagogical knowledge in action that will not only improve the conditions of learning for their pupils, but also enlarge their own theoretical understanding. This follows from the view of teaching as inquiry informed by a self-consciously held body of principles in which the principles are put to the acid test of practice. In fact, the theory and the practice are best conceived of as two aspects of the same process, so that it might equally be said that practice is also tested in the light of theory. The two are mutually refining. (pp. 14–15)

The next issue the authors discuss is the development of a teacher's practical knowledge base which they understand in terms of the four "Ss": knowledge of students, situation, subject matter, and strategies. I would like to add a fifth "S"—self. It is well documented in research that the process of learning to teach is sometimes accompanied by dramatic changes in the image of self,

in particular for the younger student and beginning teachers. Mentors are in the unique position to be able to help student and beginning teachers to (further) develop their images of self-as-teacher and their images of their work (Vonk, 1994, p. 93).

In the last part of this chapter three models of mentoring are presented: (i) the apprenticeship model, (ii) the competency model, and finally (iii) the reflective practitioner model. The authors argue that each model has its place in the process of learning to teach. The first approach belongs to the early stages of school experience: learning to see through collaborative teaching; the second approach is appropriate for developing classroom routines that work, while the last approach is well suited for the last stage of training. It is a pity that the authors have not critically reviewed the concept of reflection as it is introduced by Schön (1987).

The second chapter by Anderson and Lucasse Shannon focusses on the conceptualization of mentoring. On the basis of a historical analysis they develop their own definition of mentoring and related to that a conceptual framework which gives a good overview of the elements involved in "good" mentoring. The model they present (p. 32) gives a good picture of the various mentor roles. We fully agree with their conclusion that the existence of a clear conceptual foundation of mentoring is a prerequisite for the development of an effective mentor training programme.

The third chapter of this section is from Elliot and Calderhead. They look at mentoring in the context of teacher professional development. Their analysis of the nature of teacher professional growth leads to the conclusions that "(i) growth in teaching is a process that occurs across a considerable period of time, (ii) literature suggests that an invariant development pattern exists, (iii) learning to teach is idiosyncratic and personal, and finally (iv) there is a need for considerable individual support in both the emotional and cognitive spheres" (p. 41). As a consequence, to facilitate growth among their protegees, mentors need to have knowledge of and insight in the process of teacher professional development. In the second part of this chapter the authors report about their investigations on how mentors perceive their own role. Their most important conclusion is that mentors bring strong perceptions of mentoring to their training

which may override everything that is learned during that training, which means that the newly acquired knowledge and skills are not used in practice.

Section B focusses on mentoring in initial teacher training. It contains a wide variety of essays on this topic. Only three of these are research based. I found little coherence in this part of the book. As a consequence I became somewhat confused about the criteria that had been used for the selection of contributions, in particular with respect to Chapters 7, 10, and 11. Not that these chapters lack quality but their relation to the topic of this section is questionable.

Section (C) is focussed on mentoring during teacher induction, an issue I dearly missed in the first book. Even when a teacher has completed initial education and training, she or he still needs support from a mentor while continuing to develop professionally. From my own investigations on beginning teachers' professional development, I know that it takes a number of years to mature as a teacher. During initial education and training a mentor is primarily a counsellor, a coach, and a facilitator and the relation is more or less hierarchical in nature. The nature of this relation changes in the course of the "period of growing into the profession" into a collegial relationship characterized by peer-coaching activities. This part of the book consists of a number of chapters in essay-format, which offer some practice-based models of mentoring interventions during induction. What is lacking here is a chapter on the problems of beginning teachers during induction as a systemic bases for the interventions of mentors (see Vonk, 1994).

Section (D) concerns mentoring and assessment. This is an important issue, in particular in the U.K. and the U.S.A. In Chapter 16 the author, Pring, takes a critical stance towards current assessment practice and related to that towards the issue of quality management. In his view "quality" in education is currently seen in terms of fitness for purpose, and quality control refers to particular procedures ensuring that those purposes are established (p. 191). Whitty's comments on this stance in Chapter 17, in combination with the previous chapter, form excellent ingredients for a nice debate about the concept of "quality of education". In any discussion about assessment the issue of competen-

cies always pops up. Chapters 18, 19, and 20 discuss the ins and outs of competencies as the basis for an assessable teacher education programme.

The last section, (E), focusses on mentoring in the context of teacher professional development. The chapters in this section move away from the initial education and training of teachers to mentoring as a concept for teacher professional development. This part of the book dissatisfied me, I found it too superficial. This issue deserves a more elaborate approach and had better been left out in the context of this book.

Conclusions

These two books supplement each other quite well. While Tomlinson's book is based on a single theoretical concept—skill-learning, the book of Kerry and Shelton Mayes offers us several variations on this concept. The process of becoming a teacher or a teacher-mentor is a transition from one career stage to another. In all such transition processes both teachers' subject knowledge and skills, their repertoire of teaching methods, as well as their beliefs (in particular their ideas about "good teaching" and "good mentoring") are involved. A mentor's view on how novices learn best is more *varied* than Tomlinson presents to us. Related to this, however, I dearly missed the voice of the mentor in both books. I also missed the voice of the student and beginning teachers—the ultimate subjects of mentors actions—in both books, that is, a chapter which presents a well-grounded analysis of the problems of student and beginning teachers. From my own experience and research on problems of beginning teachers (since 1980) and on mentor training (since 1986), I know that most mentors have a rather undifferentiated idea about the process of becoming a teacher. This part of mentor's knowledge base—theory and practice about the process of becoming a teacher—has not been issue of discussion in either of the books. For most younger persons their first year of teaching is a period in which learning-to-teach is only one element, albeit an important one. For them this period might also mark their transition from adolescence to adulthood, a transition which is often accompanied by strong emotions, feelings of great stress, of uncertainty and sometimes of despair. In these

books I read hardly anything about what I label as the personal dimension in the process of becoming a teacher and the relation of this to the mentor's role. This omission makes Tomlinson's book for example a rather technical one, that is, the technique of teaching is the only key issue.

A second point of debate in this respect is connected with the tendency to promote school-based teacher education. Tomlinson formulates: "... teachers do have typically rich resources and insights from their own experience regarding the nature [of classroom strategies for the management of learning], but often at a largely intuitive level" (p. 6). This type of knowledge, however, is rather holistic in nature, difficult to verbalize and to explain. Any action of an experienced teacher always includes all of her or his experiences. Here lies one of the major difficulties for mentors. Because most student teachers' actions are rule governed, that is, they try to apply in practice what they learned before which is analytical in nature (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986).³ They lack the knowledge, experience, and flexibility to adapt to unexpected events. However, if they meet a problem they do not have the time to analyze these along analytic lines and therefore they can only fall back on previous actions, as a consequence, they tend to repeat the same pattern of actions. Too often I observed mentors give the kind of advice which did not work out afterwards. If a mentor wishes to help student teachers effectively they have to offer advice at the student teacher's or beginning teachers' level. Only then can mentors make the practical knowledge transferable. This means that mentors have to develop the attitude to analyze the basic elements in that pattern, while reflecting on their own pattern of actions, by stripping them of their strictly personal experiences. In doing so they bring back the pattern of actions in question to a more general level which makes them transferable. In this context I disagree with Tomlinson's statement: "... those who have any degree of teaching experience have considerable *resources* from which to help novice teachers get the most out of the important early parts of their learning careers" (p. 4). Making one's practical knowledge transferable puts high demands on a mentor, in particular with respect to her or his ability to relate her/his experience to "valuable theory".⁴ Therefore, a good selection and a

proper education and training of mentors is indispensable for successful school-based teacher education. Otherwise, we will only see a shift from professional education to merely craft apprenticeship training, that is, formalizing the status quo and no new input from outside. The latter will definitely be the *coupe de grâce* for the professional development of novice teachers and as a consequence for any renewal in education.

Conclusively, despite the critical remarks I made on Tomlinson's book, I do appreciate it because it contributes in a systematic way to the development of a knowledge and skills base for mentors. This is urgently needed in order to ensure the professional education and training of teachers in a school-based setting. With respect to the book of Kerry and Shelton Mayes, I found it contained a number of good chapters but the rationale for the selection of the articles to be included in this book was not always clear to me. I very much regret that most books on this topic are collections without great coherency. Although these collections tend to offer a broader scope, I still believe in the strength of a coherent monograph as input for the training of mentors. I would like to advise everybody who wishes to enhance her or his knowledge about mentoring, to start with Tomlinson's book.

Notes

¹ *Action* is defined as: A purposive change in the world of objects with which an individual is confronted. This is Vygotsky's original definition (Leont'ev, 1989, p. 27). In modern action-theory it is defined as: A special category of behaviour: it is intentional and controlled by thought processes. Actions are considered as interpreted patterns of behaviour which are hierarchical in nature (Hofer, 1986).

² See Kubler LaBoskey (1993, pp. 23–26).

³ On this issue I disagree with Tomlinson, whereas the theory of Dreyfus and Dreyfus offers me an appropriate framework for the interpretation of a wide range of problems of beginning teachers and of problems mentors experience in verbalizing their practical knowledge and skills.

⁴ Theory in my opinion does not prescribe practice but rather guides practice in that it offers a framework for reflection. In the development of theory there has to be a consequent interaction with practice. Practice is the acid test for theory.

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