

Mentoring in teacher education

William Louden

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Introduction

There is a large and frequently reviewed body of research on mentoring, in general and in the particular case of teacher education. In this literature mentoring has variously been characterised as having ‘no single definition’ (Ambrosetti, 2010, p 43); ‘weakly theorised’ (Coley, 2003, p 13); or having ‘a plurality of theories’ (Kemmis et al, 2014, p 154).

In this paper, five aspects of the mentoring literature are canvassed. These are

- theories of mentoring;
- the formation of beginning teachers’ professional identity;
- frameworks for quality teaching;
- models of collaborative mentoring; and
- assessment strategies.

Preparing teachers to mentor teacher education students

Mentoring and clinical education in teaching

The problems with clinical education for aspiring teachers have been well rehearsed. The House of Representatives Select Committee’s comprehensive review of teacher education, *Top of the Class* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007), identified inadequate funding of the practicum, lack of investment in school–university partnerships and poor induction as persistent problems in teacher education. Beginning teachers continue to report that their teacher education is more helpful in preparing them to develop and teach a unit of work than it is in managing the complexities of classrooms, such as teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, supporting students with disabilities, or dealing with difficult student behaviour (McKenzie et al, 2014, p 93).

It is often said that there is little evidence about what works in teacher education, and that the literature suffers from too many small-scale case studies of individual programs and too few large-scale quantitative longitudinal studies of program effects (Aspland, 2014; Commonwealth of Australia, 2007; Commonwealth of Australia, TEMAG, 2014; Loudon, 2008). However, robust research that does exist has concluded that program structure is not a key determinant of effectiveness.

Content and process, rather than structure, determine effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The best programs have a common vision of effective teaching, well-defined standards, and an academic curriculum grounded in

- practice;
- extended clinical experiences;
- extensive connections to practice (through case methods, portfolios and performance assessments);
- explicit strategies to help students confront their own deep-seated preconceptions about teaching; and
- shared beliefs among school-based and university-based teachers

(Darling-Hammond, 2006).

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More specifically, Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005) have identified six key characteristics of successful clinical education in teaching. These are

1. clarity of goals, including the use of standards guiding the performances and practices to be developed;
2. modelling of good practices by more-expert teachers, in which teachers make their thinking visible;

3. frequent opportunities for practice with continuous formative feedback and coaching;
4. multiple opportunities to relate classroom work to university course work;
5. graduated responsibility for all aspects of classroom teaching; and
6. structured opportunities to reflect on practice with an eye to improving it.

(Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden, 2005, p 43)

Of these, Australian student teachers can only be assured of the first – clarity of goals – as teacher education programs have integrated the Australian Professional Teaching Standards (AITSL, 2014a) into their clinical teaching and assessment. The remaining five characteristics represent an overarching framework for planning successful practicum experiences:

- modelling;
- practice and feedback;
- links between the classroom and the university program;
- graduated responsibility; and
- structured opportunities for reflection.

These should be the agreed goals of a mentoring program.

Theories of mentoring

In teacher education, mentoring is a means to an end. The end in view is successful transition from teacher education student to independent professional practitioner; mentoring is a means for improving the effectiveness of the clinical component of teacher education.

The concept of mentoring has its roots in Homer's *Odyssey*. As the story goes, when Homer left Ithaca for the Trojan War he left the old man Mentor to teach and guide his son, Telemachus. The contemporary meaning of mentor has more recent roots in Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Telemaque* (1699, quoted in Roberts, 1999), a book designed to illustrate the ways of an ideal monarch. The version of Mentor created in Fénelon's story is one

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About the Author

William Louden is Emeritus Professor of Education at the University of Western Australia. He was Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Western Australia from 2009 to 2013 and Dean of Education from 2006 to 2008. Professor Louden is a board member of Brightwater Care Group and a trustee of the Fogerty Foundation. He was Deputy Chair of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, chaired the Western Australian Government's Literacy and Numeracy Review Taskforce and was a member of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. He was Chair of the Curriculum Council of Western Australia and a foundation board member of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

Professor Louden is a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators and was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2014, for services to higher education in Western Australia and as a leader in teacher education and sector reform. His previous publication for CSE, in July 2014, was Seminar Series Paper 235, *Australia's national curriculum: A step in the right direction?*

The author can be contacted at:

williamlouden@gmail.com

<http://au.linkedin.com/pub/bill-louden/6b/b1a/5a9/>

www.uwa.edu.au/people/bill.louden

(+61) 0408 954 700

About the Paper

In this paper, originally prepared for the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales, Professor Louden discusses mentoring in teacher education, comments on theoretical models, including Hudson's five key components and Crasborn's four roles in mentoring, and discusses how research and theory have impacted on practice in Australian state systems. He also provides examples of international work in the field, relating to both 1:1 mentoring and collaborative strategies.

Professor Louden argues that further development of mentoring, contributing to a single, national authentic assessment at the end of students' clinical education, would be an important addition to the national professional system developed in Australia in recent years.

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