Mentoring trainee teachers in the Voluntary and Community Sector; a case study in Initial Teacher Training

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study of a small number of Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) education providers in the East of England. It focuses on their response to the introduction of mentoring for Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and aims to describe existing interpretations and practice, highlight confusion and concerns and offer insights into the next steps for both the VCS and providers of ITT courses in the wider sector.

From 2007, all new teachers in the Post Compulsory Education and Training sector are required to undergo ITT which includes mandatory mentoring support. This research was undertaken in the period immediately following the introduction of this requirement. Data was collected through a focus group and individual interviews with managers and teachers from diverse VCS organisations. This allowed for a range of opinions to be heard, analysed and interpreted and some comparisons to be drawn across and within organisations. The choice of a thematic analysis using the tools of grounded research ensured that the data could emerge and be constantly questioned as part of the research process, to avoid researcher influence wherever possible. Links have then been drawn between existing theories of mentoring and the research findings leading to conclusions to inform users and providers of mentoring and suggestions for further research.

The findings can be summarised into six key points -

- the definition and purpose of mentoring and the role of mentor leading to a **continuum of confusion**

- **support** is identified by VCS providers as the key element in a mentoring relationship

- activity is taking place in the VCS that could be described as mentoring but is **unvalued and undervalued**

- VCS providers feel that other providers offering mentoring for ITT need to be aware of the **specificity of setting** and the ethos of individual organisations

- there is little resistance to the introduction of mentoring for ITT into the VCS with an **implicit acceptance that it is a good thing**

- the models of mentoring currently in use are based on **inadequate pragmatism** as they are a compromise

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Chapter 1

Introduction to and overview of research

Background to the research

Mentoring is taking on a new importance within Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET). Changes to the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requirements heralded in *Success for All* (DfES, 2002) and introduced in September 2007 mean that all trainee teachers working in PCET will need 'professional support' in the form of a mentor as soon as they begin work (DIUS, 2007, Section 4, Paragraph 2). More than this, the legislation could be interpreted to mean that mentors need to be subject-specific, providing expert support in the subject being taught. Yet the definition of mentor is not universally accepted, the benefit of mentoring is not rigorously tested and the legislation does not provide a clear definition for the implementation of mentors in PCET. The schools sector has already implemented mentoring schemes in response to government targets, as have other parts of the public sector such as health and social care, and results appear impressive. This research will focus on the introduction of mentoring as a requirement for trainee teachers working specifically with adults in Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) settings (sometimes referred to as VCO or Third Sector) and will examine potential advantages and disadvantages of existing models. I will draw on the literature associated with other settings to inform this analysis as there is a limited range of

literature about mentoring in PCET. The aim of the research will be to explore the current understanding within the VCS of the role of mentors for trainee teachers, to problematise some of the assumptions about mentoring as a 'good thing' for all sectors and to establish preliminary models of mentoring to support VCS providers.

The following parts of this introduction aim to:

- establish the theoretical positioning of the research;

- set out a provisional definition of mentoring;

- locate it within the current political climate;

- explain the situation of education providers in the VCS;

- make clear my interest and background in the research area;

- outline the research questions; and

- provide an overview of the thesis.

Theoretical positioning of the research

Like Daloz (1999:xv) I believe that 'growth and development of students [should] take its place as the proper aim of education' and his approach to writing is that it is 'constructed as a voyage of discovery'. I feel that these are the intrinsic elements of mentoring; it is a holistic process of development and discovery for both the mentor and mentee where reflection is the tool to enable a profound learning experience. Whilst this is my conceptual framework as well as my practical application of mentoring it must be acknowledged that mentoring and mentor are contested terms, both intellectually and in practice, and I will explore this as part of this research.

Also, in the role of teacher I believe that 'the provision of *care* rather than the use of teaching skills or transmission of knowledge' is the key to being a successful mentor (Daloz, 1999:xix). It is through being a 'reflective mentor' (Wallace and Gravells: 2007) that mentors are able to facilitate the learning process of trainee-teachers and to role model the use of reflective practice which in turn leads to changes in practice. Such an approach encourages transparency and reflexivity in the mentoring relationship so that both parties can learn from each other. It also helps to expose unspoken assumptions, taken-for-granted practices and uncomfortable issues which can be challenged within the supportive learning environment of a mentoring relationship. As such, I use the approach of reflective practitioner in my practice as a teacher and mentor and this influences the way in which I have undertaken my research. This is a familiar approach both in the theories associated with and the practice of mentoring whereby reflection and learning are an intrinsic part of both mentoring and research on mentoring (Furlong and Maynard, 1995; Hankey, 2004; Cunningham, 2005; Wallace and Gravells, 2007). Placing this within the context of a piece of research, I will also use reflexivity to acknowledge and analyse how I influence and am influenced by the research process. Within this framework, I will begin by examining issues of definition as this will establish the parameters and complexities of the research.

What is mentoring? Issues of definition

Reading through much of the literature it would be difficult to identify problems with mentoring as a tool for teacher development. It is seen as a generally 'good thing'. However, in 2003 Ofsted recommended that:

- greater standardisation is necessary in the quality of mentoring received by student teachers

- greater emphasis and clearer structure should be given to providing support for the student teacher's subject knowledge

(Wallace and Gravells, 2007:2)

Although this does not question the validity of mentoring per se it does raise concerns about quality linked to issues of definition. Should there be a set definition of mentoring and for the role of mentor when planning mentoring systems? Should there be national standards and/or qualifications required by mentors who are working with trainee-teachers? Should all mentors working in PCET work to a shared definition of mentor and mentoring? Should all mentors be subject-specific or is there a role for generic mentors? Should mentoring focus on imparting knowledge, assessing performance or facilitating developmental reflection? Would shared definitions lead to improvements in mentoring and how would these be judged? These questions are inherent in my research as the lack of agreed definitions provides an unstable platform for developing theory and practice. Beyond these initial questions, the specific nature of the VCS and the timing of this research serve to raise further issues of definition, linked to fitness for purpose and the newness of mentoring for ITT.

In particular, questions of definition are important in exposing tacit knowledge as we often have more knowledge of a subject than our external interpretations of it show (Polyani, 1967). Thus, without agreed definitions and parameters it is difficult to interpret behaviour that is generated by unspoken or taken-for-granted ideas. An awareness that the culture of an organisation and the cultural background that individuals bring to that organisation will influence interpretations is important when exploring mentoring systems and mentoring relationships. It is also important within a piece of research to ensure that analysis of data makes clear how knowledge is constructed and transmitted as this affects the available definitions and interpretations of mentoring (Foucault, 1974). As organisations and the people within them are affected by the social and cultural reproduction of knowledge, highlighting instances of tacit knowledge also serves to identify any significant differences between and within organisations. As (Cox, 2003:10) notes, the elucidation of such tacit knowledge will be beneficial for both mentors and mentees and, I would suggest, organisations. In terms of this research, the inclusion of participants from different positions and roles within organisations as well as from more than one organisation is a way of exposing tacit knowledge

In order to provide a working definition of mentoring for the purpose of this research, I have looked at existing definitions and models of mentoring (Jackson, 2004; Megginson et al., 2005: Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995; Woodd, 1997; Cohen, 1995; Kram 1985), examined the importance of reflective practice (Schön, 1983; Kullman, 1998; Brookfield, 1986) and linked into concerns about role conflict (Cunningham, 2005). As such, I offer

provisional definitions of mentoring, mentor and mentee within the context of teacher-training as I believe these terms need to be defined and analysed separately in my research. A provisional definition of **mentoring** is a dynamic and holistic learning relationship which encourages reflection, growth and problem solving. A provisional definition of **mentor** is someone who provides support, guidance and stimulation to reflect on and improve skills, knowledge and performance. A provisional definition of **mentee** is someone who is developing skills of reflection in order to examine their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, the impact of these and how to change if necessary. These definitions frame my interpretations within this specific setting and may not be the same in other settings. Mentoring may be a flexible tool but one size cannot fit all.

In arriving at these provisional definitions, it is also important to identify the definitions which have been rejected, wholly or partially. For instance, I do not agree with Cunningham's (2005:3) definition that 'fundamentally mentoring is a professional transaction that can assume an almost infinite variety of forms'. I believe that mentoring can be much more than just a professional relationship. It has the potential to transform lives, both personally and professionally. Whilst I agree that it can have a multitude of forms I think this is due to the fluidity of mentoring relationships and that the final form is decided by the context in which the mentoring relationship takes place as well as the motivations of the mentor and mentee. Like Cox (2003) I will argue that it is essential to examine the context or environment in which mentoring takes place rather than placing all the emphasis on analysis of the mentoring

relationship. In order to respond to the environment in which they are working, mentors need to have chameleon-like qualities, constantly adjusting to the influences of their surroundings rather than attempting to make the context fit them. Also, the latter part of Cunningham's statement is too idealistic to be useful in my research as I need to make clear any constraints, real or perceived, that impinge on mentoring activities. Therefore, my own definition would be closer to that of Daloz (1999:xi) who felt that 'The mentor of adult learners is not so much interested in fixing the road as in helping the protégée become a competent traveller'. In this sense, the mentor can empower the mentee to gain skills which support their work in any setting and which can operate within organisational constraints regardless of the 'form' of the mentoring relationship but also has the potential to transfer to other settings. By seeking to define the mentoring relationship, I will take commonly used learning concepts, such as reflective practice and double-loop learning, to problematise the relationship between mentors/mentees as well as the organisational context in which they are working.

I also use the term **VCS** to refer to the specific part of the PCET sector included in this research rather than the term 'Third Sector' which is used in other research (Turner, Thomas and Rose; 2008). This is an issue of semantics as the term 'Third Sector' implies a pecking order with the providers in this sector occupying a lesser position than those in the first and second sectors. Rather, I use the term VCS to remind us of the foci of these organisations; voluntary and community. Also, it is important to note that VCS organisations range in size, structure and purpose much more than Further

Education (FE) colleges. They can be as small as one person raising money for a specific cause through to an international organisation such as Oxfam.

The literature

There is a wealth of literature emanating from North America on mentoring, particularly for businesses. This literature ranges from upbeat 'how to' books through to philosophical explorations of metacognition as tools for mentoring. There is also a growing literature in the UK focusing on mentoring within schools and the health sector. There is much less written about mentoring of trainee teachers in PCET (Wallace and Gravells, 2007; Cunningham, 2005) and even less that focuses on the specific needs of the VCS sector (Turner, Thomas and Rose, 2008). This may indicate that mentoring is not taking place, is defined as something else (such as coaching), is subsumed into other roles (such as line management support), is naturally occurring due to the VCS approach to teaching and learning, is not seen as appropriate for the VCS or is not seen as worthy of specific analysis. This research will aim to uncover some of the reasons for the paucity of literature to support activity in the VCS. Whatever the reasons, the implications of the new ITT legislation are such that VCS education providers will find that they need to address the planning and implementation of appropriate mentoring systems as a matter of urgency. It is this imperative that drives my own contribution to the literature.

There are several common themes running through the literature which I will examine in Chapter 2, the Review of Literature. As already highlighted, issues around **definitions** (including the difference between 'mentor' and

'mentoring') are prevalent in the literature but this will be expanded to examine the impact of context on what definitions are available and how they are used. In addition to this debate, I will examine other key themes around the **characteristics** associated with mentors and mentees (Kahler, 1993; Smith et al., 2005; Mumford, 1995), **models** of mentoring, (Woodd, 2001; Britnor-Guest, 2001; Clutterbuck, 2002; Shea, 2002; Allen and Eby, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Maynard and Furlong, 1995; Hankey, 2004; Wallace and Gravells, 2007) the **roles and functions** associated with mentoring (Kram, 1983; Daloz; 1986; Shea, 2002; Hankey, 2004; Smith et al., 2005; Cunningham, 2005) and **reflective practice** (Furlong and Maynard, 1995; Kulman, 1998; Cornford, 2002; Turner and Harkin, 2003; Hankey, 2004; Cunningham, 2005) and the associated discussions around emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2005), the **benefits** of mentoring (Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988; Britnor-Guest, 2001; Allen and Eby, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Ofsted, 2003; Ingersoll and Kralik, 2004; Cunningham, 2005) and the **criticisms** of mentoring (Kullman, 1998; Clutterbuck, 2003; Allen and Eby, 2003; Hankey, 2004; Smith, Harvard and Harrington, 2005; Rogers, 2007; Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008). As well as exploring these in Chapter 2, I will further analyse the themes in Chapter 4 during the examination of the data. In particular, I will explore whether there is something **specific** about mentoring in the VCS sector or whether the data reflects experiences and activities generally associated with mentoring.

To support this examination of the specific nature of mentoring in the VCS, I will look at the literature associated with mentoring in the public sector as this

offers a useful background to the approaches to mentoring being used in PCET. In particular, I will refer to work with trainee-teachers in schools and health sector professionals (Glaze, 2002; Turner and Harkin, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Kraft, 2000,). There is currently very limited research available which refers specifically to mentoring in the VCS (Turner, Thomas and Rose, 2008). Using available literature from the wider PCET sector and related public sector bodies will offer a context of existing models and research currently available to managers in the VCS. I will further contextualise this in terms of the legislative requirements for mentoring in relation to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the PCET sector.

There is often an implicit assumption in much literature that mentoring is 'a good thing'. Research that identifies potential difficulties with or negative impacts of mentoring is limited. Criticisms focus on the time needed to undertake mentoring, the possible influences of gender and race, qualitative not quantitative performance improvement, the 'therapeutic turn' acting as a crutch rather than an enabler and the personal skills of the mentor. I will look at these criticisms in more detail in Chapter 2 and then, in Chapter 4, relate them to issues emerging from the data, such as perceived barriers, lack of clear purpose, human resource implications and specificity of sector.

The current political climate

No research takes place in isolation. It is always subject to external influences, not least the political imperatives driving change. Undertaking this research now is important because both the role of mentors in education

settings is coming under increasing scrutiny (Wallace and Gravells, 2007) and the 'benign neglect' of teacher training in PCET as identified by Young et al. (1995) seem to be a thing of the past. Education is becoming increasingly politicised (Wallace, 2003; Field, 2000), not least because of a forthcoming election, and government intervention appears more directed at creating a teaching workforce that meets the needs of industry and the challenges of a global economic downturn. The government intention to change the way in which the teaching profession operates was made clear by David Lammy, MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (QIA 2007) when describing the ITT reforms:

> All learners deserve teachers and trainers who are both expert in their subjects and skilled at teaching. We are committed to improve the learning experience for student as well as to increase the numbers of learners. To ensure this happens and to support the ongoing professionalisation of the workforce, new regulations came into effect on 1 September 2007 concerning initial teacher training, continuing professional development and principals' qualifications in the FE sector. These will be supported by new professional teacher standards and qualifications, and the introduction of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS) status for those in a full teaching role.

This statement makes it clear that both subject knowledge and teaching skills are important, a departure from some of the earliest attempts to control teacher training which were focused on imparting knowledge (Furlong and Maynard, 1995). It also appears to target learners rather than teachers as the beneficiaries of this professionalisation, indicating that the underlying interests

being served by the introduction of QTLS are not those of the professionals themselves. This sets up an immediate conflict within mentoring relationships; if the interests of learners are the primary driver to establishing teaching standards how is a mentoring relationship to be structured? Is it to be target driven, with an emphasis on demonstrating an improved learner experience and how will this be measured or as Seddon (2005) would note, treating the symptom (in this case, poor educational achievement) rather than identifying the cause (which could be any range of factors from familial influence to under funding). Lammy goes on to say that, as part of the Skills for Life Improvement Programme, there is a 'comprehensive range of activities to support teacher educators and mentors in extending their expertise and responding to new requirements resulting from current teacher education reforms' (QIA, 2007:1). The role of mentor receives formal acknowledgement, in a way that is rarely seen in literature relating to teacher-training in PCET. It also appears to have a pivotal role in achieving improved outcomes for learners, although it is not clear how this causal link will be made.

The position for VCS providers

The VCS is a small part of a very large educational sector commonly described as FE. The FE sector encompasses all PCET providers working outside schools settings (this distinction is currently changing due to the introduction of diplomas). For clarity, I will use FE to refer to large colleges of Further Education and PCET to refer to all the organisations providing education and training opportunities to learners over the age of 16. This is an important distinction as using FE to describe all PCET educational providers

fails to recognise the diversity and complexity of the current situation. It also highlights the problems of context in a 'fractured' sector which does not have common outcomes and has not been subject to consistent teacher-training standards or equal levels of funding.

The VCS consists of predominantly part-time staff and volunteers working with some of the hardest-to-reach learners in the UK and funded through a combination of charitable donations and public money. Many organisations are very small, situated within deprived communities and reliant on a mixture of goodwill and good luck to survive. Although there are some very large voluntary sector education providers, most are not supported by the type of infrastructure available to a Local Education Authority (LEA) or FE providers. I would suggest this combination of a challenging client group, fragmented staff base and constrained resources will impact in very particular ways on the planning and implementation of mentoring systems for trainee tutors. Recognition of a unique mix of factors does not necessarily mean that the appropriate mentoring systems are different from those of other PCET providers, but it is important to identify and acknowledge the impact that the structure of the VCS sector will have on the introduction of mentoring.

Researcher's interest and background

My interest in this research has emerged from my work as a Specialist Adviser for Workforce Development in the East of England Region and my developing role as a Mentor for trainee teachers in PCET. I have been

working with the VCS in the East of England to prepare them for the new ITT and CPD requirements. This work has been in the form of:

- regional events to introduce the ITT and CPD reforms

- Training Needs Analyses for individual organisations

- awareness raising sessions about the new legislation and CPD requirements

- one-to-one interviews for individual teachers to guide them towards achieving the qualifications required to gain Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills (QTLS) status

- support for organisations to develop an appropriate Professional Development Plan for their teaching teams

The work with individuals and organisations has highlighted the level of need in the sector. As a Specialist Adviser, I have worked in depth with seven VCS organisations, none of whom have any mentoring systems in place. The VCS providers (approximately 20) who attended regional awareness sessions all identified mentoring as an area of concern. This alerted me to a potential problem for the VCS. Also, I act as a mentor for teachers undertaking generic and subject specific teacher-training qualifications. In this role, I have realised that VCS organisations have very few formal mentoring systems for staff yet they appear to recognise mentoring in terms of the work they do with learners. I will use this research to examine whether or not this is an issue of definition or whether it is related to the structure and ethos of the VCS providers. The aim is to provide recommendations for the VCS to support the effective introduction of mentoring for ITT. As legislation and funding become tighter it

will be important for the VCS to implement appropriate ITT mentoring strategies to remain compliant and, in turn, continue to be publicly funded.

Overview - The edges of the research

Both the subject and my chosen approach to the research will, by their very nature, generate a lot of data and potential avenues of analysis. As such, I am mindful of creating a clear analytical framework in which to undertake this work. This means that some potential areas for analysis may need to remain outside this particular piece of research and will be offered as suggestions for future research. In order to provide a structure for the research, I will set out the thesis in six chapters followed by a set of appendices. These chapters will be grouped into three sections. Section I gives the background to the research including a review of the literature and the research methodology. Section II presents the data and Section III offers conclusions and recommendations.

In Section I, Chapter 1 provides an introduction. This positions the research, sets out a provisional definition of mentoring, locates it in the current political climate, explains the situation of the VCS within the wider PCET sector, makes clear my interest and background in the research area and provides an overview of the thesis. Chapter 2 then forms the review of literature. Here I examine issues of definition, the traits associated with mentors, the existing models of mentoring, the benefits and criticisms of mentoring and the role of reflective practice. Chapter 3 then details the research methodology.

Section II contains Chapter 4 which presents, discusses and analyses the data emerging from a focus group and a series of one-to-one interviews.

Section III provides a summary of the research. Chapter 5 offers conclusions based on the findings using my research questions to structure the discussion. The final Chapter then sets out the relevance of the work to academic and PCET communities, acknowledges some weaknesses in the research, suggesting areas which could have been improved, and proposes routes for further research based upon this thesis.

A set of appendices contains an example permission form, prompt questions for the focus group and a sample interview transcript.

In order to provide a consistent structure for the collection, collation and presentation of data, I have chosen to use the following four research questions:

- what does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS?

- what activities are taking place in the VCS that could be defined as mentoring?

- what mentoring models are already in use in the VCS?

- what aspects of the VCS sector influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?

These questions will also provide a framework for the analysis of the data and to offer insights into the present position as well as the aspirations of those

working within the VCS. The research questions are chosen to support my theoretical position that research is needed into the specific nature of ITT mentoring for the VCS rather than assuming it is or should be the same as the wider PCET sector. It also means that the data collected is specific to the needs and interests of the VCS and will be interpreted within this context.

Summary

I hope that the review of literature, research into perceptions of mentoring and an analysis of mentoring activity will highlight any specific needs for mentoring trainee teachers in the VCS and provide an understanding of the issues facing VCS providers. The data will aim to illuminate the current position in order to offer suggestions for future mentoring activity. This should then support VCS providers to engage with discourses and make informed decisions about appropriate mentoring systems for their organisations.

Before describing and analysing the data collected, I will use the next chapter to provide a review of the literature as this will form a framework in which to situate my research questions and analysis.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Background

This chapter provides a review of the literature associated with the process of mentoring and the role of mentor. It sets out the continuum of research and writing, acknowledging the shortcomings associated with the newness of mentoring as an area of research, both for PCET and more generally. Through this mapping of theories and writing related to mentoring, I will identify and problematise recurrent themes as well as examining gaps which appear to exclude or ignore the position of VCS providers. In particular, I will examine the specific meaning of mentor, mentoring and models of mentoring in the context of initial teacher-training for VCS providers. This will be the focus of this literature review and will inform the research questions and data analysis (Chapter 4). It is important to remember that mentoring is interpreted in many ways across the sector, not least because it is used with learners, volunteers, teachers and managers. As such, Foucault's (1972) notion of discourses is important to acknowledge the process by which meanings become constructed. Also, the literature related to the specific VCS context is almost non-existent and the literature aimed at the wider PCET sector is also limited. Therefore, I will use literature from other contexts, particularly public sector and management, to provide a framework in which to position the research.

Mentoring is a subject which appears to have come of age in the UK education sector although it has been a familiar part of much work in the American public sector for some time. As Smith, Howard and Harrington (2005:31) note, 'over one third of the major corporations in the United States as well as all the branches of the United States armed forces have established formal mentoring programs'. This proliferation of mentoring systems seems to be rapidly expanding through the UK. There has been a large increase in the literature on mentoring (and coaching) in health care and school-based education over the past 30 years. However, the influence of mentoring is spreading. It is now becoming familiar as a compulsory element in PCET teacher-training programmes as well as commanding its own qualifications aimed at training mentors to support trainee teachers (for example, the Level 7 qualification 'The Mentor as Critical Friend', University of Wolverhampton). The increasing interest in mentoring has led to more research and writing about the specific nature of mentoring in PCET yet this literature is limited to FE colleges (Cunningham, 2005; Wallace and Gravells, 2007) with very little recognition that teachers in other settings may benefit from research and theories specific to their setting. This is not surprising as FE is the largest part of the PCET sector and often attracts most interest from researchers and policy makers. As such, the models and research on offer to VCS providers are situated within a related but fundamentally different part of PCET and must be acknowledged as having limitations; they are not necessarily transferable or generalisable. As Clutterbuck (2003:1) notes, mentoring is extensively researched but this 'isn't the same as well researched' and Wallace and Gravells (2007:1) warn that 'the test of a good

theory is that it works in practice'. These are useful reminders that a discipline as 'new' as mentoring has not had a long history thus academic and professional challenges are still emerging and the apparently positive nature of all things mentoring may need to be examined carefully.

As the current legislation, which has been the catalyst for this research, is focused on the FE college model, little thought has been given to how mentoring for trainee-teachers will be implemented in the VCS. This can be seen in the focus of the current literature as well as the rhetoric surrounding the introduction of mandatory mentoring. From the perspective of VCS providers there is a need to:

- define mentor, mentee and mentoring to reflect the needs of their organisation, staff, volunteers and learners
- identify the characteristics required of a mentor working in this specific sector
- identify an appropriate existing mentoring model or design a model tailored to the needs and activities of the sector

This chapter will address these three elements, drawing on the current literature and linking this to the particular needs of the VCS.

Political Context

Before examining the detail of mentoring for teacher-trainees, it will be useful to position the research within the wider political context and legislation which surrounds it. The next couple of years will be crucial to the formation and formalisation of mentoring systems across PCET as interpretations and

decisions made now will influence the experience of mentoring for all new teachers. The ITT legislation is aimed at raising the quality of teaching and learning in government funded provision, focusing on FE colleges in the first instance. In order to continue receiving public funds for the delivery of courses, all providers will be required to have appropriately qualified staff as specified in the legislation. This is being phased in from 2007 to 2010 which means that all providers should have sufficient time to meet the requirements. As all providers are in competition for dwindling resources they will need to have suitably qualified and skilled staff to respond on an equal basis to the demands of the funding and inspection bodies. Some VCS providers may be disadvantaged as their traditional recruitment routes for staff do not traditionally have professionally qualified teaching staff; volunteers may come from their client base and professionals may have worked in other spheres (nurses, social workers, subject specialists). It will be challenging for many VCS providers to ensure they have appropriately qualified teaching staff and a suitable mentoring programme to support them.

Government interest in the regulation of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) first began with the neo-liberal agenda of the early 1980s and the introduction of DES Circular 3/84 (Furlong and Maynard, 1995:16) relating to school teachers. This circular had statutory authority and moved the award of Qualified Teacher Status closer to government control as it was no longer awarded to graduates who simply completed a teacher training course. This course now had to conform to criteria laid down in the circular. The circular also introduced a new government inspection body – the Council for the

Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE) – which inspected all teacher training courses. This led to a series of research and reports about ITT in the schools sector but did not query the subject expertise of teacher-trainers. This approach was challenged in the late 1980s by a neo-conservative agenda (Furlong and Maynard, 1995:19) focusing on what to teach rather than how to teach. The practical experience of teaching became seen as more important than the theory of teaching (Lawlor, 1990). The continuing move away from autonomy for teacher trainers was made clear in DFE Circular 14/93 which stated that ITT courses must be explicitly designed to serve 'the Government's policy objectives for schools' (DFE, 1993). Whilst all of these circulars are directed at the training of school teachers, their impact on teacher training in other sectors of education cannot be over-estimated and has culminated in the desire of government to bring PCET teachers into line with school teachers. This drive for parity is reflected in the FE Act (2007a), the inspection of teacher training courses through the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and Ofsted and the introduction of LLUK and IfL to monitor the professional qualifications and continuing professional development of all PCET teachers.

As well as a focus on the training of teachers, there are several other agendas which impact on the activities of the VCS. Government initiatives and targets, particularly the current focus on the Skills Agenda (Leitch Review, 2006), mean that there is an increasing number of providers competing for a limited amount of funding. Many of these providers are new and have not been subject to the regulations imposed on FE corporations over a long period of

time. Therefore, the standards for qualified teachers that have become common within FE may well be new to many PCET providers. Although the new legislation again focuses on FE, and so is not applied equally to many of these smaller providers, it does open the door for guidance and expectations that all providers accessing public funds will adhere to the standards being imposed on FE colleges. Key professional bodies such as the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS – formerly the Quality Improvement Agency (QIA)), the Institute for Learning (IfL), Standards Verification UK (SVUK) and Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK - formerly FENTO) are all exerting influence on providers to upskill staff and professionalize the workforce in line with expectations placed on school teachers.

Definitions

Within the legislation and guidance there is some attempt at definition. However, it does not appear to have taken into consideration the range of providers who will need to use the definition. As definitions are already contested within the mentoring literature, the legislation and guidance does little to provide a consistent, workable definition for all providers. It is important to examine definitions as a general principle because, as Govier (2001) notes, there will be practical and theoretical implications attached to definitions. In the case of the term mentor and mentoring, definitions are directly related to the purpose of any mentoring activity. It should also be noted that definitions of mentee are no less important although they do not receive much attention in the literature.

There are two main reasons for the difficulties surrounding definitions. First, there is considerable blurring across the concepts of coaching, teaching and counselling and, second, mentoring is malleable to suit different settings. Further confusion arises as definitions vary depending on whether the writer is focusing on mentor or mentoring. This is because definitions of mentor tend to examine characteristics, behaviours and traits whereas definitions of mentoring focus more on systems, functions and processes. Aligned to this is the lack of examination of the role of mentee. Rather than attracting separate examination, the role of mentee is often assumed or ignored in the literature. As with any definitions, transparency will aid a better understanding of the associated research. Rogers (2007:3), in her work on coaching, notes that 'many of the influences which have gone into writing this [book] have probably disappeared into an internalized set of assumptions about human behaviour'. This openness is a useful reminder that we all adopt an ontological stance which influences our interpretations and interactions. In contrast, Ferrar (2004) writes about the impossibility of defining coaching and mentoring, particularly the competencies associated with the field, without acknowledging his position as a director in a private sector company offering executive mentoring.

What is a mentor?

The name Mentor first appears in Homer's Odyssey as a trusted friend who agrees to care for Telemachus, Odysseus' son. But, as with much Greek mythology, Mentor also takes on the form of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, adding an interesting dimension of the importance of both male and female

attributes in the role of mentor as well as the need for age and wisdom. This hints at the complexity of the mentor role as well as the range of attributes and characteristics needed. This will be discussed in more detail later.

As the role of mentor has become more familiar in literature associated with management and staff development, competing definitions have emerged. Dodgson (1986:29) argues that the definition of a mentor is 'elusive and varies according to the view of the author' and this is certainly borne out in the lack of any agreed definition. As well as the position of academic writers, there is also the perspective of the mentor and mentee as their experience of the mentoring relationship will serve to define how the role of a mentor is perceived. Several pieces of research show a strong link between perceived quality and mentoring productivity in such a way that the mentor and mentee 'construct' their understanding of what it is to be a mentor which then becomes a key part of being a mentor (Smith et al., 2005; Nielson and Eisenbach, 2003; Allen and Eby, 2003; Roberts, 2000). The research by Smith et al. (2005) and Cox's (2003) research also show how the organisational setting influences the way in which mentors and their characteristics are defined. The contested nature of the definition, the influence of organisational culture and the experiences of both mentor and mentee indicate that not only does the definition of mentor vary as an academic paradigm but as a construct for mentors and mentees. Therefore, it is likely that mentors working in different sectors of PCET will have context-specific experiences, knowledge and skills which will form their understanding of their role. Similarly, staff managing mentor systems will have their own

understanding of what they need from a mentor in terms of organisational and professional requirements. The situated nature of all professional activities needs to be acknowledged and made explicit in order to gain a full understanding of how definitions are reached and how this frames the interpretations and actions of mentors and mentees. An example of this is offered by Wallace and Gravells (2007:2) who remind us that some of the mentoring arrangements used in FE colleges 'would not be recognised as such by the world of industry and commerce, which tends on the whole to attach to the term mentor a very specialised and specific meaning'. It seems that the role of mentor is context-specific, possibly requiring different skills and ways of working depending upon the setting.

Although Wallace and Gravells (2007) would argue against standardisation in mentoring of trainee teachers on the grounds that mentoring is a relationship, subject to an infinite number of human variables, this debate serves to raise concerns about the types of mentoring and mentors available and the impact of different experiences on trainee teachers. This exposes an inherent assumption in the legislation and associated guidance; all mentors and mentees will be appropriately and equally skilled to undertake their roles. Also, the practicalities of training sufficient mentors with subject expertise in every area would be too onerous to be workable. However, Wallace and Gravells, like many other theorists, do not consider alternative models of mentoring, beyond the boundaries of the FE institution. It may be necessary to open up definitions of mentoring to allow for new models to emerge as these may be required for the less traditional settings of the VCS providers.

Some writers have attempted to review the breadth of definitions on offer in order to provide a picture of the complexity in the field (Matthews, 2003; Woodd, 2001). Acknowledging the lack of a single definition, Matthews (2003:314) provides the following list of sample definitions;

Scholar	*Definition of a mentor*
Phillips-Jones (1982)	Mentors are influential people who significantly help you reach your major life goals.
Kram (1985)	A mentor is an experienced, productive manager who relates well to a less experienced employee and facilitates his or her development for the benefit of the individual as well as that of the organization.
Ragins (1989)	Mentors are higher ranking, influential, senior organizational members with advanced experience and knowledge who are committed to providing upward mobility and support to a protégé's professional career.
Reece and Brandt (1993)	Mentors are people who have been where you want to go in your career and who are willing to act as your guide and friend.
Garrick and Alexander (1994)	A mentor is now defined as a person who takes on, or is given responsibility for another's learning and general development.

Beardwell and Holden (1994)	Mentors are more experienced employees (and often managers) who guide, encourage and support younger or less experienced employees or protégés.
Smith (1998)	A mentor is an older, more experienced person in the organization who takes on a younger member of the organization as a protégé, and through the relationship developed, helps the protégé to advance his or her career.
Lacey (1999)	A mentor is a trusted and significant leader who works with a partner (a mentee) to help them learn things more quickly or earlier, or to learn things they otherwise might not have learnt.
Walton (1999)	A mentor is an experienced and often senior employee who supports and advises less experienced and often younger colleagues through their personal and career development.

More recent definitions include:

Shea (2002:8)	A mentor is one who offers knowledge, insight, perspective, or wisdom that is especially useful to the other person.
	The mentor serves as an effective tutor, counsellor, friend, and foil who enables the mentee to sharpen skills and hone her or his thinking.

Rogers (2007)   A mentor is 'a colleague in the same or a parallel organization who is not in a line management relationship with a mentee'.

Matthews (2003:316) states that there are a number of common elements in all the definitions she offers:

> (1) a mentor is usually a high ranking, influential, senior member of the organization with significant experience and knowledge, and (2) the individual is also willing to share their experience with younger employees (Beardwell and Holden, 1994: 317; Ragins, 1989:2)

This observation appears to be made within the context of a hierarchical organisation and draws a link between being a mentor and age. Thus, like Ragins (1989) and Smith (1998) Matthews implies that a mentor is older than a mentee. She also identifies a common theme that the role of mentoring is to assist 'the protégé to learn, to develop and to make career plans' (2003:316). This definition describes a mentoring relationships defined by age and power, whereby a 'senior' member of staff passes on their wisdom to a 'junior'. This seems to be a mentoring arrangement designed to perpetuate existing practices in order to reproduce the organisational culture and develop new staff in a way which does not challenge the status quo. It also creates mentees in the 'image' of the mentor which will make it more likely that a particular type of mentor will be established as the role model for all future mentors. This may be suited to organisations where it is important to pass on

a culture but for many teachers in PCET they will work across a range of organisations and they may be mentored as part of a course that is not delivered by their employing organisation.

Cunningham (2005:25) also explores the themes of experience and culture without making the power relationship or issues of hegemony so obvious when he proposes the following definition:

> Mentors in PCET are skilled, experienced teachers who are involved in guiding, counselling and supporting trainees in practical ways. They are able to offer both a role model and essential information on a college's learners, its curriculum, its organisational structure and its policies, at least those relating to learning and teaching.

Again, there are inherent assumptions in this definition as to the background and skills set the mentor will bring with them to the role.

Woodd (2001:101) proposes three distinct types of mentor with different functions and responsibilities; the Induction Guide or Mentor, The Subject Mentor and the Career Mentor. The Induction Guide could be 'any teacher with communication skills and an ability to deliver information in acceptable stages'. They act like a 'buddy' and Woodd links her definition to Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss' (1986) level 1 and to Boydell's (1994) prime type of 'learning to implement'. In this sense it is a fairly practical and mechanistic role and does not appear to need reflective skills. The Subject Mentor type moves onto the development of the new teacher in terms of their professional practice and Woodd links it to Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss' (1986) levels 2 and 3 as well as

noting that it implies some form of role modelling on being 'an organiser'. The final type, the Career Mentor, recognises the importance of peer support, reflective practice and the value of the mentoring relationship to both mentor and mentee. This Subject Mentor seems to offer the type of support envisaged in the Ofsted (2006) comments whereas the Career Mentor contains the skill of reflection which would lead to transferable learning. By breaking down the role of the mentor, Woodd is alerting us to different functions and, potentially, different outcomes for mentoring relationships.

What are the characteristics of a Mentor?

Much of the literature examines the characteristics associated with being a mentor in order to define what a mentor is or should be. Some theorists feel that mentors just 'emerge' because of their personal characteristics or the setting in which they work and other writers feel that being a mentor is something you can learn. For instance, Woodd (2001:99) acknowledges that certain skills (such as communication) may have different resonances in different professions (and therefore the related vocational subjects that are taught) but that the mentoring styles and skills needed to help a mentee to learn when first entering the teaching profession may be the same across the subjects. However, she also believes that mentors are 'trainable' which indicates that personality and inherent traits are not necessarily important when identifying appropriate mentors. Smith et al. (2005) undertook research in specific industry settings to identify the characteristics that were perceived as important by formal mentors. They found that there were two core traits of integrity and empathy. This reflected Kram's (1983) original research. They

also found that mentor wisdom was seen as important as it may 'enhance the protégés' organizational learning, especially tacit knowledge within the organization's culture'. These writers seem to be looking for an 'essence of mentor' – the one thing which defines what makes a good mentor. Often 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman, 1995 and 2005) is seen as the underpinning characteristic for a good mentor and all other characteristics (such as empathy) stem from this. For instance, Cunningham (2005:26) summarises this as being self-aware, sensitive and considerate and he considers this to be an important trait in a mentor. He goes on to identify more tangible skills he feels a mentor supporting trainee teachers should have:

- proven effectiveness in the classroom (he notes exam results as an important consideration here yet this may not be a priority for VCS tutors)

- management skills (including course design, paperwork and audit)

- the ability to form and maintain effective professional relationships as this will be fundamental to the success of the mentoring relationship

- high-level communication skills (the ability to translate their knowledge in an accessible way)

- an ability to counsel (in terms of basic humanistic approaches)

- strong subject knowledge (as this was recognised by DfES and subsequent Government Departments as more important than generic mentoring knowledge and skills)

Cunningham (2005:36) picks up on work by Anderson and Lucasse Shannon (1995:29) when they describe the essential attributes of effective mentoring as:

(a) the process of nurturing, (b) the act of serving as a role model, (c) the five mentoring functions (teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counselling and befriending, (d) the focus on professional and personal development and (e) the ongoing caring relationship.

Both of these sets of characteristics seem like a challenging and long-term commitment for both parties and require a mixture of emotional intelligence and practical skills. This is indicative of the importance of the role of mentor and the demands likely to be placed on them.

However, the reliance on emotional intelligence and the propensity for using therapy based approaches, such as mentoring, is attacked by Ecclestone and Hayes (2007). They describe the 'therapeutic turn' as dismissing the cognitive and rational skills needed for learning in favour of a diminished view of learners (Haynes, 2009) as vulnerable and unable to deal with criticism. Whilst this may be true if mentoring is used purely as a 'talking forum', it is not the case if it is used as a vehicle for change. As such, a mentoring relationship which develops transferable skills, grounded in emotional intelligence, will better enable a mentee to be reflective during the mentoring experience as well as beyond it. Although this may seem less outcome or solution focused - something which is of great importance in a target-driven public sector (Seddon, 2003; Wind-Cowie and Olliff-Cooper, 2009) - it is actually much more so. This is because an approach to mentoring which uses the tools of reflection and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2005) is more likely to open up opportunities for a profound understanding of personal,

professional and organisational issues. This does not mean cognitive skills are missing. Far from it, they are part of the toolkit that we all need to effect change in our lives. As Argyris (1991) acknowledges, professionals (such as teachers) need to gain the reflective skills of 'double-loop learning' in order to move beyond a defensive approach to feedback. This takes place through questioning of underlying assumptions (or 'master programs' as described by Argyris, 2007) which can then lead to change on a personal and organisational level. Without the ability to engage in positive questioning of self, mentees will not benefit fully from the mentoring relationship. Inclusion of concepts such as reflection in any analysis further supports a definition and exploration which takes into account the importance of the environment. This is because the skills of both the mentor and mentee become 'transferable' and can adjust to accommodate the specificity of individual organisations.

By moving towards profound learning experiences, a tension may emerge in mentoring systems as effective questioning of personal and professional behaviour can lead mentors and mentees to challenge the efficacy of the organisation in which the mentoring is taking place. Similarly, there is a risk in applying the concept of 'double-loop learning' to mentoring as there will be an assumption that the mentor and the mentee are equally reflective and willing to learn. Unless both parties have the skills of reflection and the ability to give and receive feedback in a way which facilitates a profound learning experience, then there will be an imbalance in the relationship which will affect the outcomes. Again, the context may have a part to play in this, whether it is the cultural ethos, the hierarchy or the wider environment in which the

organisation operates. As Seddon (2005) notes, it is perhaps not surprising that approaches such as coaching have become popular but they are only 'treating' a symptom rather than questioning the underlying cause of problems. Such complexities and tensions run through mentoring and will, necessarily, run through this research.

Whilst it may be a useful challenge to popular psychology as a quick fix for many perceived ills, particularly if the aim is to hit targets (Seddon, 2005), it does not explain the continued popularity of talking therapies across a range of settings. Nor does it see a place for therapies as part of a range of tools available to professionals. Similarly, it does not acknowledge how emotional intelligence and double loop learning (Argyris, 2007) can serve to break down defensive behaviour in trainee teachers who are being challenged to examine their practice. The difference with mentoring as a tool within the therapeutic range is that there is more likely to be an active role for the mentee as they need to engage in reflection, develop self-awareness and strategies for change which can be used beyond the mentoring relationship. This in itself is transformative and uses profound learning experiences within mentoring as a vehicle for improved practice and solutions-based outcomes. The mentee as learner is not seen as vulnerable or diminished, rather as ready to develop new skills with the guidance of a teacher who has empathy with their position. It may be this empathy that is the foundation of a good mentoring relationship. This leads to the first of several questions about the characteristics needed of a mentor, namely do mentors of teacher trainers need to be good teachers themselves?

Do mentors need to be good teachers?

In any definition of mentor it is necessary to consider whether the mentor is a teacher. In the context of this research this has a particular resonance as the context for mentors is to support trainees to develop effective teaching skills. FENTO states that a mentor should be 'an excellent teacher… [who] can encourage others towards excellence' (FENTO 2001:1) and Wallace and Gravells (2007:4) are clear that mentors should 'model good classroom practice'. Mentors in this setting, then, require good teaching skills themselves as they need to share these with their mentees. Cunningham (2005:56) uses Michael Huberman's model of teaching as 'artisanry' which acknowledges the level of skill and experience required by a mentor as a craftsperson passing on their trade. Yet Cunningham does not acknowledge that a craft tends to be largely free from external regulation, has a certain status and respect within society and often has little in terms of interaction with 'customers'. He also considers the importance of allowing the trainee 'the freedom to fail' yet this would be seen as unacceptable in an education system which is target laden, audit focused and funding driven (Wind-Cowie and Olliff-Cooper, 2009). Cunningham's analysis is useful in that it points up the tension between being a good teacher and sharing this through formal mentoring. This is because some of the things 'good teachers' would do to support learning may not be possible within the constraints of ITT mentoring. It also highlights the tension between what may be seen as the 'soft outcomes' associated with personal development as a mentee and the need for organisations to achieve retention and success targets (Seddon, 2005). The definition of good teacher and good

mentor become difficult to quantify when the underlying purpose of the relationship is unclear. Being a 'good' teacher may mean ensuring all learners attend regularly or it may mean encouraging a learner to build self-esteem. Being a 'good' mentor may mean achieving an organisational target (such as improved grades in teaching observations) or it may mean facilitating reflective practice, something which is much less quantifiable. Whether or not a mentor needs to be a good teacher, whether or not the term 'good' is helpful, the discourses of mentoring often refer to the ability to teach and this contributes to the lack of clarity when defining a mentor.

Do mentors need to engage in reflective practice?

Mentoring literature is full of references to reflection and reflective practice to the point where it becomes almost implicit that this is a part of being a mentor. Reflective practice, like mentoring, rarely seems to be challenged as being a 'good thing' for teachers. Cunningham (2005:26) believes that 'The mentor who is a reflective practitioner will be most able to empathise with trainees' anxieties … because they remain far from complacent or blasé about their own performance in the classroom'. Whilst this would seem hard to argue with as a desirable attribute for a teacher and mentor, the underpinning rationale is not explored and the framework for reflection is one founded on a negative or deficit model. Reflective practice is based on Dewey's (1933:12) assertion that:

> Reflective thinking, in distinction to other operations where we apply the name of thought, involves (1) a state of doubt, hesitation, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching,

hunting, enquiring to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the complexity.

This deficit model of understanding was further developed by Schön (1987) to explain the way in which we alter our behaviour as a result of 'reflection-in-action' (an immediate awareness that some change is needed) and 'reflection-on-action' (a longer process of consideration and change after the event). Schön's theories and models of reflection underpin much of the teacher-training available in the UK and are increasingly an integral part of the work of a mentor (Hankey, 2004; Cunningham, 2005). Argyris's (1977) original work on double loop learning develops the notion of reflection as a tool for profound learning, particularly within organisations. His ideas take the purpose of reflection beyond simple problem solving and error correction to questioning the very way in which people resolve their problems as this may be part of the problem. Clearly this can be an uncomfortable process if it challenges deeply held beliefs or ways of working. It is also likely to be time consuming and destabilising at times which may have unintended short-term consequences. If double loop learning is to be used effectively, if may need a mentor to mediate the actions of the mentee to ensure that both the mentee and the work are not adversely affected by a process of critical reflection. Criticisms of reflective practice are limited, with little recognition that our situated perspectives will influence the ways in which we interpret and remember actions and that reflection is time consuming and potentially damaging to an individual's self-esteem.

The centrality of reflective practice as the philosophy underpinning mentoring for trainee tutors is seen by Hankey (2004:391) as a 'bridge between professional practice and academic theory'. Similarly, Kullman (1998) identifies the overriding message in the literature as 'the mentor needs to help the student teacher to develop 'reflective practice''. Yet reflective practice is not the only model of teacher-training available. As Furlong and Maynard (1995:27) point out, there is a competency model rooted in a 'technical rationalist' approach to training, not based on research but linked to a political agenda to define the purpose of teaching. This model is split into a performance model (can they do the job) and a cognitive model (do they understand how to do a good job). In the current climate of NVQs and the move towards vocational courses, it would seem that a competency based teacher-training model that echoes the expected delivery and assessment of learning would be an appropriate approach. Yet this does not appear to be the case as reflective practice persists in the new suite of teacher-training courses (Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS), Certificate to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS) and Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS)). As Furlong and Maynard (1995:37) note 'the notion of reflectivity has become incorporated into many teachers' own view of what it means to be professional'. Hankey (2004) explains the centrality of reflection as based in Kolb's experiential learning cycle whereby reflecting on the experience of teaching practice is the process by which mentors support trainee teachers to better understand their role in teaching and learning. She goes on to say that there is not a consistent understanding of reflective practice across education and that the way in which it is

conceptualised in PCET means that personal reflection on professional knowledge is seen as inadequate and requires the integration of the critical study of practice linked to a theoretical framework. The tripartite approach to reflection is seen as generating a body of professional knowledge (Joyce et al.,1997) and the process is one which lends itself to being facilitated by a mentor (Calderhead, 1989).

Cunningham (2005:57) believes that experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) is fundamental to the work of mentors and that it is essential to meeting FENTO standards (now SVUK). He summarises the importance of Schön's work (1983) as highlighting that professionals 'are at risk of becoming locked into a mode of practice where their technical expertise and rationality is not interrogated' thus leaving them less likely to be able to respond to 'novel' situations (2005:58). This is what Argyris (1991) refers to when he says that professionals rarely experience failure and so do not learn from it; they are stuck in single loop learning which does not challenge their practice or expand their repertoire of skills to be applicable in other situations. Cunningham goes on to discuss Dennison and Kirk's *Do, Review, Learn, Apply* (1990) strategy and to extrapolate its use from teaching to mentoring. Whilst I would agree that this offers a framework for a mentoring session, I feel that there is a stage missing between Learn and Apply as there should be progression from the 'Formation of Abstract Concepts and Generalisations' (Learn) before 'Testing Implications of concepts in New Situations' (Apply). There needs to be some sort of coaching or linking of reflection to theory and practice in order to identify workable solutions to be tested out.

Although reflective practice seems deeply ingrained in the professions of both teaching and mentoring there are some critics. One of the practical constraints is that thorough and ongoing reflective practice is very time consuming (Imel, 1992). Also, as Cornford, (2002) points out, we simply forget things so our reflections may be flawed. In this case, a mentor observing a teacher can help to remind the teacher of what happened in class. Kullman (1998:481) warns against acceptance of literature on mentoring and teacher development where 'the behaviour of both mentor and student teacher is seen as having to fit into a particular pattern if reflection and subsequent self-development is to occur'. This links into what may be perceived as a benefit for organisations – a form of 'standardisation' of process and product in terms of mentoring outcomes perpetuating the hegemony of the organisation and the wider discourses around teacher development.

Another criticism of reflective practice is that teachers find it difficult to identify and describe good practice or to articulate tacit knowledge in order to share it with others (Kullman, 1998; Imel, 1992). The process of reflection is seen as the way of analysing and making transparent classroom interactions. However, for some writers, intense self analysis and reflective practice can be damaging to the individual if it is the focus for negativity (Imel, 1992). At the worst extreme it becomes the therapeutic turn (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008) by making the mentee focus on their weaknesses and making them dependent on their mentor for affirmation. This is where the skills of the mentor are fundamental in supporting the mentee through a reflective process

which leads to empowerment and positive change but it is less clear who supports a mentor through the same process. In some instances the mentoring relationship itself will support this but, if there are problems with the relationship, the mentor will need help with their own reflections. The assumption inherent in much of the discussion of reflective practice for trainee teachers is that mentors are proficient at both reflecting and facilitating reflection but it is difficult to see how this can be judged and quantified.

Although many writers include reflection, implicitly or explicitly, in their work some do not, which indicates that it is not a pre-requisite for mentoring. For example, Clutterbuck (2004:36) describes a good mentor as having the ability to: **M**anage the mentoring relationship: **E**ncourage, **N**urture and **T**each the protégé; **O**ffer mutual respect: and **R**espond to the protégé's needs. He does not include reflection or even self-awareness in his list. However, the vast majority of writers do refer to mentors as engaging in reflection and it may be the lack of analysis and explicit reference to the role of reflective practice that leads to its acceptance as just part of the way mentors work. Linked to this, is the failure to examine how reflection shapes and moulds a mentee's experience in terms of the organisation or wider profession. Ghaye and Lillyman (1997:38), whilst supporting the need for reflective practice (in the health care sector), point out that 'some models of reflection appear to be value-neutral or value-blind in that they do not talk about professional values'. As the ITT is imposing a mentor onto a trainee-teacher in a way which supports a particular model of reflective practice, it will be promoting a particular discourse of teaching. If this is based on a hegemonic assumption

that FE provision is the sole delivery model then it is unlikely to meet the needs of the VCS providers.

Do mentors need to be 'like' their mentees?

Like all relationships, the level of success is dictated by the way in which the participants interact. A positive relationship may well be built on some similarities, be these personality or interest based. Some writers posit the theory that identification is stronger in homogeneous relationships where differences such as learning style and gender are removed because this leads to interpersonal comfort as a result of shared experience (Allen and Eby, 2003; Mumford, 1995; Ragins, 1997). Empirical evidence to support this within an educational setting is weak and, in fact, Allen and Eby's research indicates that it is the perceived quality of the relationship rather than differences, such as gender, which impact on the outcomes. Even if the evidence were stronger it would be difficult to see how 'sameness' in mentoring relationships could be encouraged as the reality is that formal mentoring systems for teacher-trainees will require mentors to be allocated on the basis of their subject expertise rather than any other factor. Other work by Smith et al. (2005:33) notes that research has found that 'demographic characteristics of both mentor and protégé (i.e., age, gender, rank, experience and race) can affect perceptions of the mentoring relationships as well as its outcomes'. Whilst acknowledging that sameness and difference impact on the mentoring relationship, they aim to find a core set of characteristics common to all mentors. Their review of the literature shows a wide range of possible traits including flexibility, competence, mentor personality, power, authenticity,

nurturance, approachability, inspiration, conscientiousness, integrity, courage, caring and empathy. Even though this is a diverse list they go on to formulate an even longer list of traits as identified by experienced mentors and managers in order to rank these traits. Their search for the essence of mentor, whilst valuable in terms of uncovering some of the characteristics associated with mentors, is ultimately unsuccessful.

Do mentors need to be more than just mentors?

It seems from the long list of potential attributes required of a mentor that this is not a simple role. Mentors need to be able to juggle emotional intelligence, subject expertise and organisational knowledge. They need to be able to see the bigger picture, both in terms of the organisation in which they work and the teaching profession. The breadth of the role is captured by Cunningham (2005:26) who believes that effective mentors tend to be working beyond their professional role and actively working to develop an organisational architecture which supports mentoring relationships. He sees them as making links between different parts of the educational system, internal and external. Similarly, Matthews (2003:318) feels that a 'mentor must possess certain characteristics, skills and abilities that assist in the development of a positive mentoring environment'. It seems that a mentor is not only responsible for facilitating the mentoring relationship but for creating an appropriate mentoring infrastructure.

Daloz (1986) picks up on the emotional intelligence aspects of mentoring with a two-dimensional model that describes challenge as an essential component

of mentoring which must be balanced with support and personal warmth to enable learning and development. Thus an effective mentor must be able to foster a relationship in which the mentee feels safe enough to learn from challenges that may question aspects of their sense of self (Hankey, 2004). This links to Cunningham's belief that mentors should promote an ethos in which 'it's OK not to know' as this reassures mentees that jargon and college life is confusing for everyone. However, this also reinforces the deficit model criticised by Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) which sees the learner (mentee) as lacking something which the mentor can address through a therapeutic intervention. The very act of offering the mentoring relationship as a safe environment in which to question and problem solve could reinforce existing negative beliefs held by the mentee unless the mentor has the skills to turn this into a positive experience. This demands a lot from the mentor but it is not clear what is required of the mentee in return.

What are the characteristics of mentees?

Although mentoring relationships involve both the mentor and mentee in a process aimed at developing the mentee, there is very little written about how a mentee should behave. This seems to be a huge omission as it is only possible to understand the role of a mentor in relation to the role of the mentee. I consider that the relationship is meaningless unless both parties work together towards a positive outcome. Matthews (2003:318) notes that Rylatt (1994) feels that the mentee 'must value time and experience of the mentor, listen carefully, ask good questions and always be willing to expand their potential'. Matthews feels that a successful mentoring relationship

depends on both parties being committed to making it work and, like Rylatt, she believes that the relationship must be built on openness, trust and mutual respect in order for it to work. Without this willingness to engage with the mentor, the mentee is unlikely to gain anything from the process and may run the risk of becoming a passive recipient of suggestions and directions based on the mentor's or the organisation's interests. The use of reflective practice would serve as an appropriate tool to support the mentee to carry out their function within the mentoring relationship as it does not allow for unquestioning acceptance and encourages a more equal interaction between the mentor and mentee.

Functions of the mentor

Every role has an associated set of functions – the things you 'do' to carry out your role. As with all other aspects of mentoring, there is no definitive list and Smith et al. (2005:39) identify a 'paucity of empirically derived mentor traits and functions' in the literature.

Some writers have tried to summarise the functions associated with being a mentor, for example, Kram (1983) divides the functions into either career development or psychosocial functions. She goes on to break these down into five career development functions – exposure, protection, coaching, sponsorship and challenging assignments – and four psychosocial functions – counselling, friendship, role modelling and acceptance/confirmation. This divide seems to be accepted by many following theorists, such as in the research of Smith, Haywood and Harrington (2005:46) which found that

'psychosocial behaviors were significantly more important to formal mentors than career functions'.

Other writers do not make explicit their descriptions of mentor functions, although they describe typologies which would seem to be offering a set of functions. For example, Shea (2002:43) identifies seven 'types of mentor assistance' which appear to be mentor functions –

1. **Shifting context**. Help a mentee envision a positive future or outcome.

2. **Listening**. Be a sounding board when a mentee has a problem.

3. **Identifying feelings**. Feelings can motivate mentees to achieve success or set themselves up for failure.

4. **Productive confrontation**. Discuss negative intentions or behaviors without being judgemental.

5. **Providing appropriate information**. Suggest possible solutions or sources of helpful information.

6. **Delegating authority and giving permission**. Empower a mentee's self-confidence and counteract negative injunctions that defeat success.

7. **Encouraging exploration of options**. Help mentees consider possibilities beyond the obvious or "tried and true".

Within the VCS setting, decisions about the function of mentors are likely to be based on what is required for the ITT element and what will meet the particular needs of the VCS sector. In this respect, the following will be 'essential' functions:

- To role model good teaching practice

- To act as a subject specialist for planning and support purposes

- To undertake observations of teaching and learning

- To demonstrate reflective practice and support the mentee to gain these skills

Two of these functions warrant particular examination.

Functions - Observations of teaching and learning

One of the key roles of a mentor in the schools system is to observe new teachers in the classroom. Cunningham (2005:67) feels that this element of the mentoring role in FE is of such importance that he dedicates a whole chapter to discussing it. He encapsulates his reason for this by stating that:

> …from the mentors' perspective, conducting an observation of a trainee is perhaps the best opportunity which will present itself – especially at the debriefing stage – for assisting someone to jump across a gap (or a gulf in some cases) between their present performance and what is desired.

For mentors and teachers in the VCS this might be a very challenging situation as the mentor may also be the line manager, finance officer or exams officer and so any possible conflict arising from negative feedback may ripple throughout the organisation. Issues of assessment must obviously be taken into account when choosing a mentoring model for an organisation.

Hankey (2004:392) believes that the mentoring model in use in the FE sector is based on 'reflective dialogue, rather than on assessment of practice using performance-based criteria'. She acknowledges that there is likely to be pressure to move towards the schools-based approach and I would concur, particularly in light of the standards being applied to ITT qualifications. She has raised a key issue here about the purpose of mentoring; whose interests are being served and what outcomes will be measured? If reflective dialogue is used rather than assessment against the ITT standard, then mentoring may not achieve the outcome expected of a trainee teacher, i.e., successful completion of a teaching qualification. Yet very few definitions and discussions about mentoring would ever include assessment as a framework for the mentoring process. It seems that reflective practice is assumed to be sufficiently effective to ensure a successful outcome for the mentee in terms of their qualifications.

Due to the limited resources for VCS providers and the requirements for mentors to undertake observations of teaching and learning, it will be necessary for mentors to have highly developed self-awareness in order to model and facilitate effective reflection. This is because they must not impose their ontological position onto the work of their mentees as this will simply perpetuate one style of work. Cunningham (2005:88) believes that mentors need to 'be self-aware enough to judge whether [their] views are being overly influenced by [their] own pedagogic preferences'. Mentors should be able to offer alternatives rather than trying to reproduce everything they know and use as teachers.

Functions - Reflective Practice

As noted earlier, an intrinsic part of much of the work of mentors appears to be the use of reflective practice (Maynard and Furlong, 1993) as a mentoring tool as well as the development of reflective practitioner skills in the mentee. Kraft (2000: 179) believes that 'reflection is an educational term that has been overused, misused and abused'. Yet, as previously discussed, it is deeply entrenched in all current pedagogical approaches used to deliver teacher-training in PCET. It is a concept that has been linked to teaching since Dewey (1933) distinguished between action that is routine and action that is reflective.

Reflective practice can be described in a variety of ways ranging from a critical evaluation through to a learning tool, all of which could be applicable to the role of a mentor. The common theme is that of development which, in a truly holistic mentoring relationship, would involve both the mentor in facilitating reflection for the mentee as well as engaging in reflection on their role as the mentor. The element of development for both mentor and mentee is highlighted by Turner and Harkin (2003:21) when they note that 'Being a professional carries an expectation of taking responsibility for professional development and, therefore, the notion of reflective practice to chart one's own development should be the norm'. They recognise that there should be autonomy, personal interest and responsibility for development of the outcomes in the way in which this is done. This echoes the approach of mentoring in that the agenda should to be driven by the mentee, focused on

their needs and lead to negotiated outcomes. This indicates that reflection is an inherently suitable function for mentors. But this does not explain the function of mentoring.

What is mentoring?

As well as definitions of mentor which focus on the attributes associated with individual mentors, it is important to look at definitions of the process of mentoring and organisational systems to gain a full understanding of the models of mentoring available. The definitions of mentoring are often clouded by cross-over with the fields of coaching, counselling and teaching and it is important to be clear when this occurs. Definitions of mentoring describe the structure within which mentors operate. This includes parameters such as time, expected outcomes, reporting procedures, rewards and job descriptions for mentors. An understanding of the practical application of mentoring informs the choice of models as well as the role assigned to a mentor.

Definitions of mentoring include:

Shea (2002:8)	Mentoring can be defined as a significant, long-term, beneficial effect on a person's life or style, generally as a result of personal, one-on-one contact.
	Mentoring is a process whereby mentor and mentee work together to discover and develop the mentee's latent abilities and to encourage the

mentee to acquire knowledge and skills as opportunities and needs arise.

Rogers (2007)   'Mentoring has sometimes been described as 'being a career friend', someone who knows the ropes in an organization and can act as sponsor and patron'

Some writers, such as Ferrar (2004) propose that definitions are unhelpful if not impossible. This somewhat limited examination of definitional issues fails to explore matters of accountability and effectiveness. Without an agreed definition of what is involved in the mentoring relationship and the expected outcomes it will not be possible to measure the success or otherwise of mentoring. This would seem to be of particular relevance to VCS providers establishing mentoring systems as initial definitions of the mentoring relationship will shape the ways in which it operates and is evaluated.

As well as contested definitions of mentoring, there also appears to be some antagonism between theorists and practitioners who advocate coaching rather than mentoring as the appropriate term for activities. For instance, Rogers (2007) sees the term mentoring as something old-fashioned and being replaced by coaching. Her analysis does not acknowledge that there may be a place for both, depending on context. Such discourses around coaching and mentoring do not clarify the situation or even take account of the current educational drivers. For instance, a significant strand of the National Teaching

and Learning Change Project is the training of Subject Learning Coaches (SLCs) who are subject specialist teachers working within and across disciplines. The SLC programme offers practitioners a peer-coaching model to support colleagues to improve their practice. At the same time, colleges are introducing Advanced Practitioner status for some teachers to develop good practice. Both of these roles are firmly rooted in the teaching and coaching arenas yet clearly overlap with mentoring of trainee teachers as they provide skills which can support new teachers through induction and their first classes. Lack of clarity of purpose in national initiatives and the subsequent roles for practitioners seems to be leading to a spiral of misunderstandings and uncertainty as to the boundaries between and the purposes of different approaches.

Definitions are then further confused by the inclusion of the terms teaching and learning. Many theorists use these phrases throughout their descriptions of mentoring, almost as though they are implicit and are not distinct functions requiring different skills. The difficulties of separating coaching, counselling, teaching and mentoring appear in Britnor-Guest's article (2001) when she notes that mentoring, and coaching, are 'defined as the facilitation of an individuals' learning process, enabling the individual to take ownership for their own development'. She makes no link to the impact of mentoring on the mentor or the organisation and her definition is much more focussed on the 'learning' and the mentee. Rogers (2007) discusses the boundaries between coaching and counselling whereas coaches are more likely to say they work *with* the client than counsellors who will say they are *helping* the client. This is

a useful consideration for the mentoring relationship as those based on hierarchical structures or requiring seniority may be more suited to a 'helping' model due to the imbalance in power. Mentoring using peers may be more suited to the 'working with' definition.

Models of mentoring

In the same way that 'mentor' and 'mentoring' have multiple situated definitions so there is a variety of models available to practitioners, managers and theorists. These models vary considerably according to the needs of individuals and organisations but there are some common threads. These threads focus on:

- mentoring as personal development and learning

- mentoring as a form sponsorship

- formal and informal models

- apprenticeship models where the mentee learns a 'craft'

- competence/task oriented models

There are also some common problems for the VCS with many of the models. These problems are:

- the models assume large, well-resourced organisational structures

- very small VCS providers will not have a range of subject experts

- many VCS providers will not have the capacity to train discrete mentors (the role is likely to be subsumed into another role such as that of line manager)

Even theorists focusing primarily on institutions within PCET do not seem to recognise the difficulties associated with being a small provider. Wallace and Gravells (2007:15) identify two distinct schools of thought; the European school viewing mentoring primarily as a process leading to personal development and the American school which is more like a sponsorship model. The latter is based on a relationship where an older, more experienced person actively supports a junior employee to advance their career. This seems to fit more with a business setting than the work of a VCS education provider where the advantages of being 'sponsored' would be few as the promotion structure and financial progression are both limited. It seems that the majority of the literature and models for the education sector are based on the European school of thought and that this is more appropriate to the work of teachers in VCS settings. Wallace and Gravells (2007:15) believe that, regardless of the school of thought, mentoring has two functions:

> …to enable the mentee to assimilate knowledge, skills and behaviours which help them to make that all-important transition from one stage of professional development to another [and] it can help the mentee to understand and cope with the emotional psychological challenges that such transition brings … establishing relationships, building one's self confidence and seeking reassurance.

Their definition is more rooted in the European model as reliance on a sponsor is not essential to their model. Their model indicates that mentoring can provide a stable platform for learning how to become a competent and confident teacher without the need to rely on others. It may be that, without such firm grounding and skills development, teachers will take longer to

establish themselves and/or will not have the stability to move forward later in their careers. For VCS providers the teachers who have gained self-awareness and the ability to manage relationships effectively as a result of being mentored will be more likely to support the needs of the organisation.

Many of the models offered in the educational field show a strong reliance of person-centred approaches even if they take on other characteristics less obviously linked to self-awareness. Hankey (2004:390) acknowledges that Anderson and Shannon's model of mentoring (1988) is embedded in teacher training approaches and gives prominence to the 'role of mentor as patron and friend, highlighting concepts of nurturing, caring, protecting and promoting'. However, this is only part of the model that Hankey recognises as she also identifies a drive for a Rogerian self-determining so that the mentoring support is concerned with 'empowering student teachers, with promoting autonomy and professional growth'. As she acknowledges, this latter element is more challenging and requires the mentor to have different skills and attitudes. She further explores the model being used in mentoring in teacher training and describes it as a hybrid of two models offered by Maynard and Furlong (1993); the apprenticeship and the reflective model. In the apprenticeship model, the mentor is 'the experienced practitioner whom the novice teacher emulates' and in the reflective model, 'the mentor is the critical friend and co-enquirer whose relationship with the trainee teacher will benefit both parties' through a process of professional discourse, exploring personal ideologies of teaching and learning and leading to mutual growth. Such a model requires appropriate, experienced staff to act as role models

and to facilitate reflective learning in a non-hierarchical relationship. Yet, mentors are often responsible for reporting back on the progress of their mentees which immediately introduces a tension into the relationship. Also, there is again an assumption that mentors possess well-developed skills of reflection and are 'good' teachers if they are to act as role models.

One of the constraints of attempting to provide a 'model' of mentoring is that it fails to show the dynamics of the relationship. Human interaction is, by its very nature, unpredictable and requires complex negotiations and renegotiations. Models can also fail to describe adequately the role of mentors within a mentoring system. Wallace and Gravells adapt Clutterbuck's (1985) model to show that mentors take on different roles and approaches across the levels of direction, support and challenge that are involved in the different types of helping relationships.

Figure 1

Some Ways in Which Mentors Give Support

(Adapted from Clutterbuck, 1985)

Wallace and Gravells (2007:13)

DIRECTIVE

COACH   CARE TAKER

CHALLENGING ──────────────────── SUPPORTING

FACILITATOR   COUNSELLOR

NON-DIRECTIVE
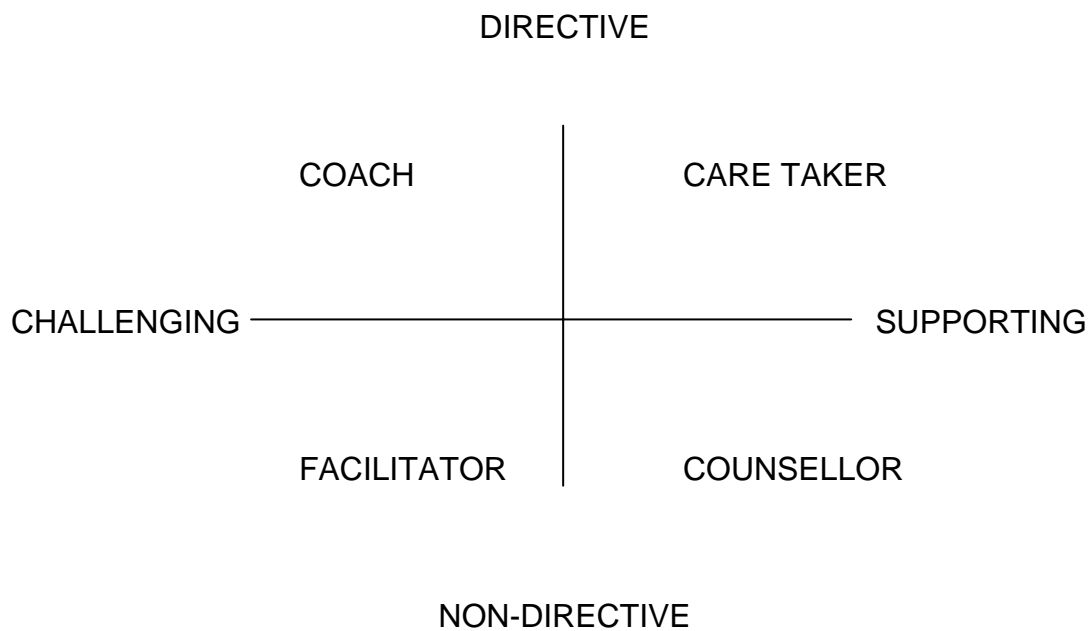
Wallace and Gravells use the diagram to highlight that the 'difficulty in defining mentoring is that it may be seen as encompassing a variety of other roles, perhaps employed at different stages of the relationship' (2007:13). The need for clarity in roles will clearly impact on the definition of mentor that is chosen in any mentoring system. Wallace and Gravells move their definition on by using the model proposed by Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) which shows that the helping relationship can be passive or active, with mentors moving between the various areas of the model depending on the needs of the mentee. Wallace and Gravells aim to show that, although mentoring

encompasses elements of teaching, counselling and coaching, it is differentiated by its purpose. They believe that mentoring is 'primarily about transition – about helping someone to move from one stage to another' (2007:15). This is a useful concept in terms of mentoring in an initial teacher training situation as there is likely to be a goal of some form of progression regardless of the teaching environment. This is not merely in terms of knowledge acquisition but relates to a process of change and development as a teacher. It also helpful to identify that purpose is a determinate in the type of approach used and that this can either be active or passive. This helps to reveal some of the assumptions and complexities within mentoring by highlighting that not all relationships are the same, that they will change in response to need and that there are a range of tools available to the mentor.

Woodd (2001:102) also offers a diagrammatic representation showing a correlation between the length of time in an organisation and the depth of mentoring relationships. In this model, she places three types of mentor along a continuum. Whilst this offers a useful framework for recognising the varying needs of mentees, Woodd acknowledges that it implies a linear progression and clearly defined roles rather than accurately reflecting the dynamism and flexibility of real mentoring situations. This seems to be a common problem with visual representations of mentoring; they are, by their very nature, too static to fully describe the potential and real interactions which take place.

Figure 2

A new model of mentoring

(Woodd, 2001)

Time in

Organisation

Career Mentor

Subject Mentor

Induction Mentor

Depth of Mentoring Relationship
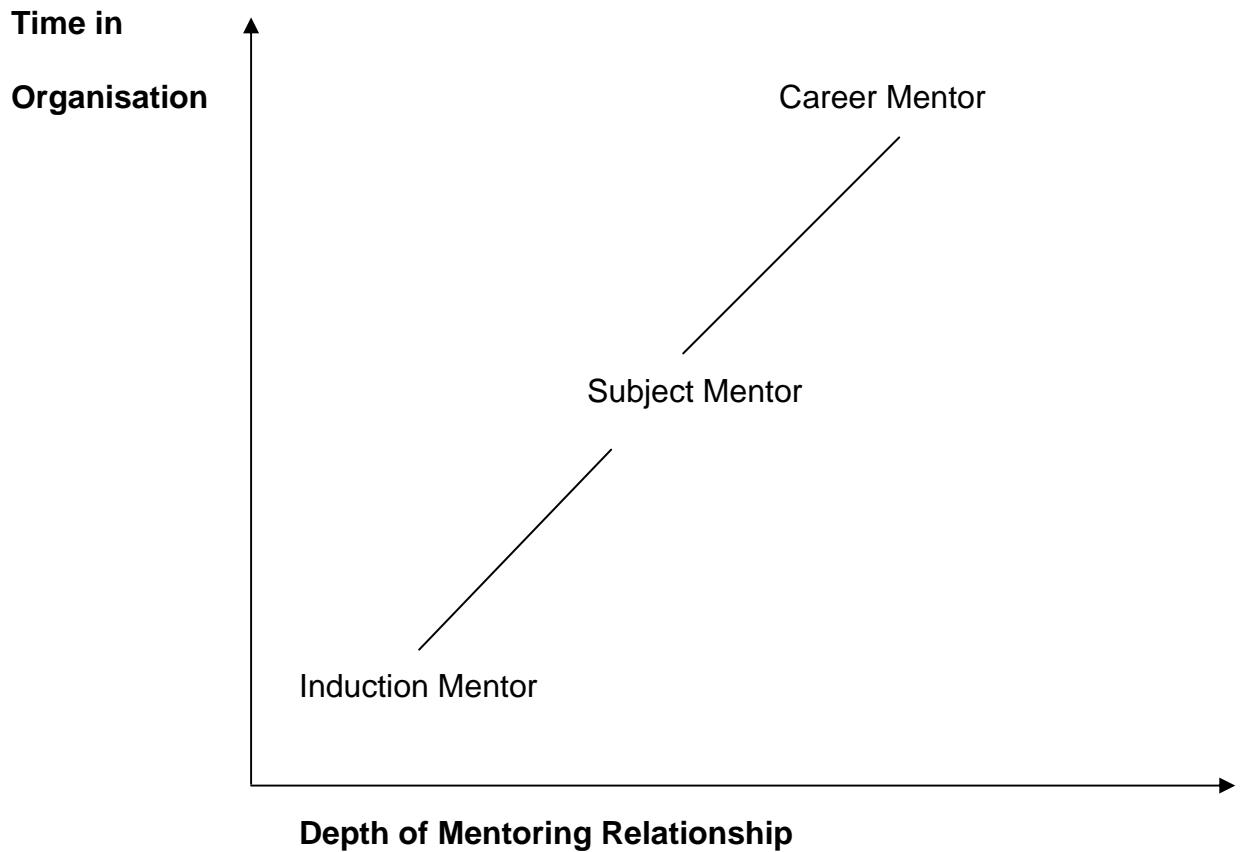
Cunningham (2005:64) simplifies the Centre for Excellence in Leadership model of mentoring (CEL, 2004) as three stages; Exploration, New Understanding and Action Planning. He recognises the limitations of such a simple framework but sees it as an accessible way of presenting mentoring to trainees. The elements that appear to be missing are implementation and evaluation leading back into New Understanding which would show how mentoring is often a cycle of emerging awareness and testing of ideas.

Shea (2002:9) provides a more flexible model of mentoring as he focuses on the characteristics of the relationship rather than the roles of the mentor. The four categories that he offers serve to provide useful descriptions of mentoring relationships and to demonstrate the continuum of formality and time. It is likely that many mentoring relationships aimed at meeting the requirements of ITT will fall into Category 1, highly, structured, short-term. This will be for pragmatic reasons rather than philosophical ones as it will be easier to provide evidence for the ITT qualifications and Ofsted inspections through a formal mentoring system. However, it may be that the organisational ethos will allow or encourage longer-term and more informal mentoring arrangements to develop.

Figure 3

Variety of Mentoring Relationships

Highly Structured

1. Highly, structured, short-term

The relationship is formally established for an introductory or short period, often to meet specific organization objectives. For example, a new employee may be paired with a senior person for company orientation.

2. Highly structured, long term.

Often used for succession planning, this relationship involves grooming someone to take over a departing person's job or to master a craft.

3. Informal, short-term.

This type of off-the-cuff mentoring ranges from one-shot or spontaneous help to occasional or as-needed counselling. There may be no ongoing relationship. This type of intervention is often thought through and heavily change-oriented.

4. Informal, long-term.

"Friendship mentoring" consists of being available as needed to discuss problems, to listen or to share special knowledge.

Formality of Relationship

Virtually No Structure

Short-Term Spontaneous

Long-Term Even for Life

Length of Intervention

Shea's (2002) model and view of mentoring seem well-suited to the VCS as it is based on a flexible, mentee-centred approach. He sees the mentor as working largely on intuition and initiative and the mentee as taking responsibility for change. He uses the language of 'The Empowering Mentor' and the 'specialness' of the mentee (2002:22). In this way, his approach advocates that the mentee is the 'expert' because the mentor does not have all the answers. Rather the answers are within the mentee and it is the role of the mentor to work with, guide and support the mentee to find those answers. This seems closer to a counselling and coaching approach than some of the traditional views of mentoring and, as such, may be more appropriate for the contemporary needs of teachers in the VCS. This is because counselling and support are often part of the fabric of VCS organisations and volunteers who go on to become teachers would be familiar with this approach. Also, the organisation may have already established an ethos that supports person-centredness in mentoring and using Shea's model may be a development of existing skills rather than a departure from current practice.

The applicability of many mentoring models is questionable in terms of the VCS. Cunningham (2005:5) believes that his model of mentoring is applicable to any setting and he notes 'community and outreach settings' as places for mentoring. He feels that 'there exists a 'package' of trainable, generic mentoring skills that may be deployed in any of these post-compulsory education environments. A mentor gaining experience, and refining his/her skills, in a general FE college would be unlikely to be daunted by the prospect of working in any of the other types of institutions'. Cunningham fails to

recognise that mentors with solely FE experience may lack credibility in the VCS. This is because the VCS has often been excluded from the formulation of policies affecting the wider sector or has been made to fit the FE model rather than having its own identity and skills base acknowledged. Cunningham also fails to tackle the issue of mandatory mentoring as part of ITT and the impact this may have on the relationship. Similarly, he does not acknowledge the impact that working for a small organisation will have on the training, available expertise, management and role of a mentor who may be required to simultaneously line-manage, mentor and train a new teacher. In such situations, it is important to recognise the potential conflict and negative impact that may arise as a result of undertaking multiple roles. Cunningham expounds the view that mentors are primarily used for induction of new teachers into the ways of the organisation rather than supporting their teacher-training studies. This seems to be at odds with the LLUK guidance that all tutors should have a subject-specific mentor as part of their studies. Is Cunningham then proposing that there should be two mentors; one to pass on the organisational culture and another to guide staff through their qualifications? This seems cumbersome and unfeasible for a small VCS provider that might only have one person experienced and qualified enough to be a mentor. As Cunningham was writing in 2005 he would not have been aware of the most current issues around limited availability of appropriate courses and the delays in introducing the new qualifications which have resulted in a patchy experience on the ground.

Cunningham (2005:53) sees the value of mentors as 'filling in all the *local details* of a national picture which can only ever have been given the 'broad brush' treatment by a training institution' (original emphasis). Similarly, Lacey (1994) believes that a mentor can help an employee to acclimatise to doing the things which are specific to an organisation. This is only a partial definition of the reality of mentoring in line with the ITT because the imposed nature of the mentoring relationship requires it to serve external purposes in the first instance, organisational interests next and the needs of the mentee last (with no regard for the needs or interests of the mentor).

The practicalities of mentoring are often ignored in models. For example, Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995:3) define mentoring as 'off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking'. There is an assumption that organisations will have the capacity to support time away from the job and that individuals within the organisation will have the subject-specific and mentoring expertise required to facilitate a transfer of knowledge and skills. Clearly, these may be considerable challenges for any organisation, particularly a small VCS provider.

Formal and informal

One of the most commonly cited ways in which mentoring systems are defined is whether they are formal or informal. Matthews (2003:317) notes that once the objectives of a mentoring programme are established it is then necessary to decide whether to run an informal or formal mentoring programme. An informal mentoring relationship for Matthews means a senior

manager takes a 'talented but less experienced member of staff under their wing, providing guidance, advice and support'. A formal mentoring relationship would mean 'systematic matching' of mentors and mentees with scheduled meetings, agreed topics and realistic expectations. The level of formality or informality varies depending on the specific context but in terms of the ITT programmes, all mentoring must be formal in that it is mandatory and needs to be recorded.

Much of the literature shows that although formal mentoring systems are often required by organisations, it is the informal ones which are most beneficial. Allen and Eby (2003:471) note that current 'theory suggests that formal mentors may not accrue the same psychological benefits from mentoring as informal mentors'. Also, it focuses on the needs of the protégé rather than the mentor. Related to this is their belief that informal mentoring relationships tend to be established as a result of some sort of attraction between mentor and mentee which leads to a more positive outcome. They see that some of the reasons for formal relationships being less successful are because mentors are reluctantly recruited, coerced or feel obliged to undertake the role rather than seeing it as a positive learning experience for themselves. In turn, this prevents a deeper relationship developing which is based on common goals and commitment. It seems that mentoring in response to the ITT is unlikely to be able to develop into this more mature and mutually beneficial model.

Linked to the formal/informal debate is whether mentors and mentees volunteer or are chosen. In some models the relationship is one that emerges

from personal choice with both parties agreeing to the relationship. In others, there is a selection process mediated by the organisation. Matthews (203:318) states that for 'any mentoring process to be successful it is important to select both the mentors and protégés carefully'. In small organisations where only one or two people are available to undertake mentoring roles the issue of choice may be negated. There may be only one person available to be the mentor and so they are required to undertake the role for all mentees. In organisations which are based on volunteering, this may add a tension to the mentoring relationship and will restrict the choice of mentoring model adopted.

Taking this issue of the formal/informal divide and the need to mediate potential tensions, Britnor-Guest (2001) describes how peer mentoring can be used by organisations that do not have a formal mentoring programme. Within education, peer mentoring is often seen as referring to mentoring between younger learners. However, Britnor-Guest describes how informal peer-mentoring can be used in the workplace and operates through a framework based on agreed parameters, a commitment to change, the mentee's agenda and measurable actions to monitor progress. It shares the same characteristics of a formal programme but does not have the same organisational input. This type of compromise may appeal to the VCS as it provides a structure for meeting the requirements of the ITT qualifications whilst remaining person-centred in approach, something which is more familiar in VCS settings.

e-mentoring

An emerging strand in the literature is that related to e-mentoring. This model is both in response to the resource constraints in organisations and an exploitation of the potential of new technology to support the mentoring process. One large vehicle for this type of support is ASSOCiate Online (http://associate.hud.ac.uk/) which offers to match subject-specific mentors to mentees through membership of an on-line community. The Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETT) are also undertaking action research projects to support the introduction of mentoring and e-mentoring is a key theme (http://www.cover-east.org/cms/uploads/MEDIA/DOCUMENTS/Action-Research-Projects---Specification.doc) There is limited empirical research or evaluative data at present that relates specifically to e-mentoring for the ITT as this is a relatively new model. However, it may be a useful approach to develop in the VCS to make best use of limited resources.

Practical considerations for choice of models in the VCS

Although there appear to be numerous possible models available to VCS providers several constraints must be taken into account:

- the model adopted must be a sufficiently formal to meet the ITT requirements

- resource implications, particularly time and money

- existing staff may not have mentoring or subject-specific skills

- small teams might mean a poor mentor can do a lot of damage or a good mentor may be over worked

The lack of 'fit' between existing models and the specific needs of the VCS can be seen by accessing sources of information designed to support providers. For example, the ITT Pilot Resources developed as part of the EECETT response to the introduction of the ITT (originally accessed via http://www.acermoodle.org.uk/ but no longer available as the materials are being rewritten) offered mentoring models which were limited and had no underpinning pedagogy. Rather they were examples of practice without any evaluation and did not take into account the diverse needs of the sector.

Mentoring systems

As the VCS will need to establish a mentoring system that is both appropriate to their setting and fit for purpose in terms of trainee teachers, it is important to have an understanding of the impact of the choice of system to ensure that it meets the needs of all the stakeholders. Cunningham (2005:13) describes this as the 'architecture' for mentoring. He believes that although PCET is a diverse sector 'it is still possible to identify factors of generic, overarching significance' such as:

- An appropriate institutional ethos that recognises and rewards mentors as well as promoting a collegial climate or community of practice

- physical resources such as a meeting space for confidential discussions

- induction, training and support for mentors which articulates the rationale for mentoring and how it is viewed by stakeholder

- selection and accreditation of mentors

- clarity and consistency regarding job roles, obligations and entitlements, ideally based on shared ownership of a mentoring contract which includes minimum levels of contact, support, observation and so on

- response to the need for subject specific mentors (as noted by Ofsted 2003)

- measuring the impact

The penultimate point, the need for subject specialist mentors, is raised by several writers (Hankey, 2004; Cunningham, 2005). This will be of particular concern to small VCS providers who may not be able to provide a suitable subject specific mentor for all trainees. DfES (now DBIS) and Ofsted promotion of this model puts providers under considerable pressure. Although Hankey's (2004) research indicated that mentors who were specialists in the same subject as the trainee teacher were seen as particularly helpful, which bears out some of the Ofsted recommendations, there is no acknowledgement that this is an ideal rather than a reality. The practicalities for many organisations are such that they may not have suitably qualified teachers who are subject specialists *and* able to mentor effectively. This will compromise them in terms of meeting the ITT requirements and the quality standards set by Ofsted.

The need for subject specific mentors highlights a tension that is created between individuals and organisations. The purpose and expectations associated with mentoring must be clear to all parties before the relationship

is established. The role of and benefits to the organisation seem to be missing in many definitions, for example, Matthews (2003:316), states that:

> …before beginning a mentoring programme it is essential that an organization address a number of key issues such as the expectations of the programme, what they want to achieve with the mentoring, how the programme will be structured and how the results of the programme will be measured. They should also ensure that the roles of both parties (mentor and mentee) are clarified, and that a process of monitoring, evaluation and review is established at the outset (Blunt, 1995; Messmer, 2000)

It can be seen in this definition that the role of the organisation is not made clear. Similarly, it does not make explicit whether the mentoring programme is to work in the best interests of the individuals or the organisation. Without this clarity, it is likely that a mentoring system may not meet the needs of either the individuals or the organisation.

The differences between organisations and their specific reasons for running mentoring systems would also benefit from examination. Cunningham (2005:33) believes that 'there are not huge variations in the ways in which mentoring is conceived by individual organisations (as) certain consistencies emerge'. He feels that this means it is not worthwhile examining a wide range of organisations in terms of their definitions. This is unhelpful in terms of the VCS as it has always been subsumed into FE for planning purposes with the expectation that things will 'fit'. If mentoring is focussed on meeting the needs of individuals and/or organisations it may be necessary to look at the different

needs of specific parts of PCET (without examining the specific needs of every organisation within it). It may also be necessary to examine the motivations behind setting and achieving outcomes as these may have different drivers across organisations and within organisations. As Locke and Latham (2007) note, it is important to acknowledge that emotions and judgements are attached to goals. If it is not clear why a goal is set or who and how it is to be achieved, it is unlikely that the individuals involved will take ownership and gain satisfaction and the organisation will not be able to measure success. Before embarking on any mentoring, definitions and purpose must be transparent.

The apparent rhetoric that mentoring is good for individuals and organisations may mean that it does not attract the same level of examination, planning and monitoring as other parts of the ITT reforms as it is not anticipated to cause any problems. This may not necessarily be the case as successful mentoring systems need more than an effective mentoring relationship. I feel that communication is a key part of effective management and the introduction of new systems. If the introduction of mentoring is based on unquestioned rhetoric it may well lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretation. Britnor-Guest (2001) notes that the benefits of mentoring programmes do not come without responsibilities and that companies should provide a clear framework for the mentoring relationship to ensure that participants have appropriate skills and attitudes for the roles. Empirical evidence gathered by Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) of a review of 10 mentoring systems in American schools showed that there was a shared objective 'to provide newcomers with a local

guide' but that, beyond this, the programmes varied widely. It is this superficial acceptance that all mentoring is good and that mentoring for ITT will necessarily follow the same pedagogical and practical models that needs to be challenged.

What are the benefits of mentoring?

As there is such a drive towards providing mentoring for trainee teachers the assumption could be that there is considerable empirical evidence of the benefits. However, much research is based on anecdotal evidence, small samples and short-term qualitative research. The need for longitudinal studies demonstrating the impact on factors such as drop-out and performance is clear. Until the existing research can be combined with more in-depth studies then it will be difficult to state exactly what the benefits of mentoring are and whether they are specific to the mentoring relationship. The benefits could simply be having someone to talk to whilst you are training to become a teacher.

The potential benefits of mentoring also need to be recognised as having an impact on different groups of beneficiaries; mentees, mentors and organisations, peers and learners It could also be argued that mentoring impacts on the education sector more generally. This may be because trainee teachers who have had positive mentoring experiences may be more effective teachers and successful mentors and may make long-term contributions to the sector. Unfortunately, there is little longitudinal research to provide evidence of the wider benefits of mentoring.

Some organisations have identified the benefits of mentoring in their in-house programmes. For example, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has produced an 'Information kit for mentoring partnerships' which outlines the benefits for 'mentorees', 'mentors' and 'the profession' (2005). Similarly, some organisations have attempted to write definitive guides such as the 'Adult Educators' Guide to Designing Instructor Mentoring' by Pro-Net (2000).

Benefits for mentees

The underlying purpose for mentoring must be to benefit mentees. If there is no discernible advantage for the mentee then the relationship becomes merely to meet a government or organisational target. There are several themes which emerge from the literature and during conversations with mentees which highlight the benefits of mentoring. These are discussed below.

It's good for you

Mentoring is a familiar term across all sectors of education as well as in other public and private sector settings. It is used both for working with employees and for supporting clients. It has a feel of something that is a 'universal good' in that it benefits everyone that it touches and that it is flexible enough to be used in very disparate settings. Mentoring is closely associated with learning (Allen and Eby, 2003) which would indicate that it is a comfortable tool for use in education.

'Me time'

As mentoring requires time to develop relationships and focus on the needs of individuals it offers 'me time' in a way which is often not available in many educational settings. Whether it is the act of mentoring or the mere fact of putting aside time for an individual, there appears to be a benefit from the investment of resources. Clutterbuck (1991:24) in Matthews (2003:329) notes that mentoring 'creates a personal atmosphere in a faceless bureaucratic organisation'. This may be less important in a small VCS provider, however it will still have some resonance as staff are working within a wider bureaucracy of funding and government targets. Also, many staff may still want 'me time' because their role is one where they spend intensive periods with needy clients. The idea of 'me time' is enhanced by what Britnor-Guest (2001) sees as the clear thinking space and opportunity to 'raise the bar' in terms of realising the potential of mentees.

Mentees feel they gain from it

Cunningham (2005:27) offers some anonymous feedback gathered about the value of mentoring as perceived by the mentees. He believes that the trainees 'are overwhelmingly receptive to being mentored' and that 'high value is being attached to the service of a mentor'.

Matthews (2003:319) lists many writers who identify the beneficial effects of mentoring as ranging from 'career enhancement, through

strengthening the individuals' ability to develop their careers, and psychosocial functions that involve helping individuals develop self-confidence, competence and job acceptance'. Matthews does not offer a balance of literature that shows any problems with mentoring. Although one of the benefits which is often identified by writers (Bress, 1997; Zeus and Skiffington, 2000) is the value of reflective practice leading to self-awareness, metacognition and transferability, Matthews does not include this in her list.

Benefits for mentors

The work associated with acting as a mentor for a trainee teacher should not be underestimated as it requires a considerable investment of resources for the mentor. As such, there must be some discernible benefit for mentors whether this is in the form of tangible rewards (pay, promotion, time off) or personal development (exchange of ideas and skills). The two key benefits for mentors as identified in the literature focus on co-learning/personal development and career reinvigoration.

Co-learning

Britnor-Guest (2001) believes that the mentoring relationship and associated learning experience that takes places is a two-way process with both mentees and mentors gaining. The element of learning seems to be of particular importance as several writers (Kram, 1996; Allen and Eby, 2003) identify co-learning as a benefit for mentors. The use of the mentoring relationship as a vehicle for personal and

professional growth seems to lie at the heart mentoring and this may be of particular relevance to mentors in VCS settings where monetary and career rewards are often scarce.

Career reinvigoration

Mentoring can be used as a developmental tool for staff in their middle and later careers by recognising their skills, knowledge and expertise as something to be shared with new staff. Kram (1985) and Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson and Mckee (1978) identify mentoring as a way of reinvigorating careers and avoiding the job plateau of mid and later careers. It can also support mentors to develop new skills in response to changing business needs. For instance, Noe (1988) sees mentoring as a way for mentors to keep up with technological changes.

Benefits for organisations

Although mentoring is experienced primarily by the two individuals in the relationship, there will be benefits to the organisation as the result of effective mentoring. Britnor-Guest (2001) identifies a range of organisational benefits including greater productivity and profitability, improved communication, morale, two-way loyalty and reduced staff turnover (although she does not offer any evidence for these observations). There are six key benefits identified in the literature:

Government drivers

For a sector which is acutely aware of the importance of the government agenda for raising quality in teaching and learning, it is not only the research and personal experience of the value of mentoring that has an impact on decisions about mentoring systems. Legislation, consultation papers and departmental guidance also encourage providers to implement mentoring. The sector is criticised because 'professional development is still insufficiently embedded into a culture of continuous improvement (DfEE, 2000:24-5) and the DfES document 'Equipping our Teachers for the Future' makes the status of mentoring explicit:

> Subject–specific skills must be acquired in the teachers' workplace and form vocational or academic experience. Mentoring, either by line managers, subject experts or experienced teachers in related curriculum areas, is essential.
> (DfES, 2004:8)

Ofsted has also identified that FE teacher-training is inadequate to provide:

> …a satisfactory foundation of professional development for FE teachers at the start of their careers…few opportunities are provided for trainees to learn how to teach their specialist subjects, and there is a lack of systematic mentoring and support in the workplace.
> (Ofsted 2003:5)

Seddon (2004) offers a powerful critique of a 'command and control' approach which puts managerialism at the forefront of the public sector. He argues against 'foisting opinion-based initiatives on people through an upward-facing hierarchy (2004:204) because he sees this as the very reason why public sector reform has failed. Rather than focusing on the work, the government has focused on targets. By externalising what constitutes an achievement (for example, gaining a qualification rather than learning), Seddon believes that reforms will be self-defeating and public sector managers will merely be 'playing the game' rather than delivering results. If this is the case, the introduction of mentoring could run the risk of becoming another target rather than truly developing teachers. Whether we agree with the value of mentoring or not, as Cunningham (2005:9) notes, 'Mentoring will occupy a far more central position from now on'.

Organisational change

In contemporary society and industry, there is huge pressure for continuous technological and structural change. The Leitch Review describes the importance of constant upskilling and reskilling of staff to enable the UK to compete in the world economy. Yet there is increasing recognition that this is not just a case of acquiring a set of skills or knowledge. Rather, it is about creating an environment of continuous learning and providing employees with transferable learning skills. As Dizon (1997:23) notes:

Increasingly, organizational members find that they must *learn* their way out of their problems – they must gather the available information and create meaning from it for themselves. Knowledge from experts or from other parts of the organization may inform their thinking but cannot replace it. What is required, then, are processes that allow the organization to continuously construct new meaning: to *learn*.

If this is true, then it is likely that organisations will need to move beyond traditional training courses to introduce new information or vocational skills to activities. These encourage profound learning experiences and give employees the tools to learn and grow from all their knowledge and interactions which take place during their time with a company. Mentoring may be one of these tools which, if introduced and utilised effectively as part of the ITT, will serve VCS providers with a mechanism for supporting staff through periods of change.

Recruitment and retention of staff

A frequently cited benefit for organisations is that mentoring supports the recruitment and retention of staff. In terms of staff recruitment, mentoring can be seen as a 'signal' to potential employees that the 'organization is committed to staff development and staff retention' (Matthews, 2003:329). However, this signal is now being mediated by the fact that mentoring is a mandatory part of the ITT process so potential staff may make their choices of employment based on the perceived quality of the mentoring support available. Matthews

(2003:329) goes on to describe how mentoring helps organisations by 'attracting high-quality staff, effective induction/socialization of new staff, improving commitment, retaining quality staff and retaining corporate knowledge and learning'. Again, with the current mandatory obligation to provide trainee teachers with mentoring potential staff may use others' judgements to evaluate the usefulness of mentors.

Beyond the recruitment and initial induction of staff, Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002:104) in Matthews (2003:330) note that 'retaining key talent is one of the most powerful and beneficial effects of mentoring'. Similarly, Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) showed through empirical research that reduced staff turnover was a key benefit in the school-based mentoring programmes they examined. This may be more important to VCS providers as they cannot afford a high turnover of staff with their limited resources. There does not appear to be much research into the impact of mentoring on reduced staff turnover except in terms of staff who are employed on short-term projects. It may be that the issues are different for VCS providers as many staff stay for a very long time in one role and it may be that part of the mentoring process is to ensure that they are in the right position and have the right skills for it. Career development might be very limited and staff may not undertake appropriate CPD in order to develop skills and knowledge so mentoring could act as a way of moving them on.

Quality improvement

It seems unlikely that the government would have introduced mentoring as a requirement in the ITT without a strong link to the quality improvement agenda. Cunningham (2005:41) notes that there have been general improvements in quality in the FE sector which may be linked to a higher profile for quality systems and monitoring of teacher performance. When mentors engage in discussions about lesson planning, resource development and learning objectives, they are '*accelerating* the professional development' of their mentees (Cunningham, 2005:42).

Transmission of organisational culture

Joining a new employer always requires the new employee to adjust to the culture of the organisation. This can be a daunting task whilst trying to come to terms with the professional requirements of the job. For a trainee teacher there will be a steep learning curve to take on board the new teaching skills required, find out the practicalities of the job and absorb the cultural norms of the organisation. It is often the tacit knowledge associated with a role that can be the most difficult to acquire. Mentoring is often seen as a way of facilitating this process (Clutterbuck 1991; Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002). As Matthews (2003:329) notes 'socialization, job competencies, clarification of roles, future career prospects, satisfaction and understanding of organizational culture can all be enhanced through mentoring'. Although mentoring can aid the induction of new staff, it can also be an organisational tool for the transmission of cultural values and norms

and may stifle the opportunity to question existing practices. Matthews does not question whether this 'assimilation' of staff into the existing culture is necessarily a good thing and whether it can suppress innovation or exclude minorities. For the VCS, it may be less relevant to 'assimilate' people as they are likely to have joined the organisation in the full knowledge of the ethos of that organisation. For example, many VCS providers were established around a cause such as faith, specific health issues or feminism. New teachers will have joined an organisation knowing the ethos and expectations associated with this even if they are not sure of how this translates into working practices.

Matthews notes that formal mentoring systems ensure the transmission of organisational culture as 'without an understanding of its culture the individual's chances of being successful or staying with the organization are reduced' (2003:318). This raises issues of homogeneity and could stifle innovation and progress if the mentoring programme only serves to perpetuate the 'habitus' without the space for questioning.

Creation of a 'learning organisation'

In the current economic climate, the terms upskilling and reskilling are very familiar. Technology moves quickly and contracts are usually short-term and need workers to be flexible. As Argyris (1991:1) notes, 'success in the market-place increasingly depends on learning, yet most people don't know how to learn'. This observation encapsulates

the importance of mentors being able to facilitate an effective learning experience as they will not just be passing on their knowledge and skills but should be able to support the mentee to gain skills to contribute to a 'learning organisation'. Mentoring can then support the establishment of 'learning organisations' (Argyris and Schön, 1978) whereby all members of staff are encouraged to develop and problem solve in a way which ensures the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the organisation. By contributing to the development of a 'learning organisation', both mentors and mentees are more likely to feel valued for their contribution to the growth of the organisation. They may also feel more able to take risks with the support of their mentor, thus allowing them to develop as practitioners more quickly and effectively, because they feel that the wider ethos of the organisation supports innovation.

Criticisms of mentoring

Reading through the literature, it appears that mentoring is seen predominantly as contributing positively to teacher training and support for teachers when they first enter PCET. But, like Hankey (2004), I have worked with trainee teachers where mentoring has been problematic. This leads me to question the seemingly taken-for-granted assumption that mentoring as part of the ITT process will be a 'good thing' for all concerned. It is particularly difficult for mentors or mentees to express dissatisfaction with a process which is generally accepted as a good thing. This will perpetuate the lack of research and analysis of the benefits or otherwise of mentoring.

In her book on coaching, Rogers (2007) examines some of the problems that can arise from an ineffective mentoring relationship. She identifies the following as key factors:

- chronic misunderstanding on both sides about obligations and expectations

- the relationship is not a priority for either side

- the mentee and mentor don't like or respect each other

- the mentee is doing it because it seems like an obligation, not out of any wish to learn or change

- the mentor is inadequately trained or has little natural aptitude for the role

- the mentor sees his or her role as being to pass on the fruits of his/her experience

This seems like a considerable range of potential problems with mentoring and appears to be implicit in much of the literature that focuses on the attributes of a successful mentor and the boundaries of mentoring relationships. Researchers and writers do not seem to make transparent the difficulties that result from failure to demonstrate appropriate mentoring behaviours. The assumption seems to be that this will somehow be resolved, either because the mentor has the attributes to change or because the process of mentoring leads to a positive outcome by some sort of osmosis.

Within schools-based mentoring, Kullman (1998:474) identifies an almost unspoken problem in that 'it is assumed that as long as mentors create the

appropriate conditions, student teachers will be ready and willing to participate in a voyage of exploration'. For trainees who have no experience of mentoring or in situations where the mentor is also used to monitor performance the mentoring process may not necessarily be perceived in positive terms. As Kullman points out there is 'an inherent contradiction' in mentoring relationships where the mentor has 'both a development and judgemental role'. This will be the case for mentors supporting trainee-teachers in the VCS settings as they are likely to be required to grade observations of teaching and learning and, potentially, be line managers responsible for allocating work.

Clutterbuck (2003) gives an example of how we need to question the evidence that mentoring is 'good'. He discusses Kram's research (1985) on which much subsequent research has been based and notes that the sample size was just 28 pairs. He goes on to note that, together with Megginson, he reviewed the formality and informality in mentoring and they reached almost totally divergent conclusions between the academic papers and actual experience in the field. They concluded that this was, at least in part, due to the result of failings in the structure and definition of much of the research. This is a serious accusation and one which deserves considerable follow up – yet that does not appear to be the case. The closest thing to a critical review of mentoring comes in Ecclestone and Hayes' (2008) work which attacks the spectrum of therapeutic interventions. However, this critique is more focused on counselling approaches and only deals with mentoring for professional development cursorily, This is partly because the thrust of their argument is

on the use of therapeutic interventions with learners and they do not examine the position of trainee-teachers as learners nor do they examine the differences between counselling, coaching and mentoring. Thus, articles, research and books which criticise mentoring are limited and issues of definition are still confusing. As Clutterbuck notes, meta-studies and literature reviews may just compound the problem as they take their starting point as a false assumption that everyone is measuring the same thing. He describes how definitions which originate from the US emphasise sponsorship and hands-on-help by the mentor but that in European and Australian definitions this behaviour would be unacceptable. Therefore, clarity of definition is essential to locate any research within the wider literature and to ensure a common understanding of the areas which are being examined by the research and those which are not.

There is also some intimation that problems with mentoring for trainee teachers in FE would be resolved if it were 'more like school teacher training' (Hankey, 2004:390). There is an assumption that school-based models are readily transferable to the PCET sector without any research to support this in practical terms.

Smith, Harvard and Harrington (2005:31) highlight an important issue for the current formalised systems within the ITT process; 'formal mentoring relationships … may not be particularly beneficial to the protégé, the mentor or the organization'. This seems to be echoed in Allen and Eby's research (2003:475) when they note that 'in short duration, mentorships initiated on a

formal basis may offer less learning and quality than those initiated informally'. Yet it is disputed by writers such as Carruthers (1992) and Parsloe (1995). This apparent contradiction may need to be explained through mediating factors such as context, benefits to participants and expected outcomes. For instance, organisations which have a long history of informal mentoring may not need to formalise the process in order for it to be effective as the culture of the organisation is one in which informal relationships can flourish. Other organisations, with less commitment to investing in staff, may need to establish the parameters of what is meant by mentoring as staff will not necessarily have the skills to set up relationships themselves (unlike in an organisation which 'hands on' the mentoring skills through informal role modelling).

Allen and Eby (2003) define 'short term' as a relationship lasting less than a year and they note that time appears to be a mediating factor in the quality of mentor relationships. Both the time and the formal/informal nature of mentoring relationships have an impact on the perceived quality of mentoring. In particular, Allen and Eby link this to the importance of perceived similarities between mentor and mentee so that relationships where both parties are seen to have commonalities are seemingly more successful. They note that Burke et al. (1993) 'found that mentors who felt more similar to their protégés reported providing more vocational and psychosocial mentoring functions than did those who felt less similar'. This adds a useful dimension for analysis of trainee teachers in the ITT process, as the requirement is for mentors to be

subject specific, thus sharing a common interest and shared professional experience with their mentees.

Time is identified as problematic by Matthews (2003) and Hankey (2004) in that mentoring demands a considerable investment within time-poor environments. Related to this, Matthews notes that staff are not always available with the necessary skills and attitudes to take part in mentoring which can lead to some unsatisfactory mentoring relationships. Although this problem is frequently acknowledged and then dismissed in the literature, it is likely to be the single factor which impacts detrimentally on all parties in a mentoring relationship. As such, it should be an important consideration in the design of any mentoring systems. If staff are not given time to take part in mentoring they may well be resistant to it as it will simply add pressure to their day, particularly if they see no reward (Hankey, 2004). Similarly, if it is seen as 'just another government initiative' which wastes time and money it will not be welcomed. Some writers see it as more than a government fad (Johnson and Ridley, 2004:xv) and others believe that everyone needs a mentor (Clutterbuck; 2001). The mentor is always seen to be the last beneficiary of the mentoring process and little research has been undertaken into the detrimental effects on the mentor, professionally or personally. Allen and Eby (2003) call for more research into the impact on mentors' performance and careers and there does not appear to be any consideration given for the professional support or supervision (as in counselling) for mentors. Although mentoring systems may describe line management procedures and the roles

and responsibilities of mentors, none offer professional quality mechanisms to support mentors.

Mentoring in the Public Sector

Mentoring is scattered throughout the public sector with seemingly little clarity of definition and extremely high expectations of what can be achieved using it. For example, the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, stated (8/10/07 Radio 4 news report) that the new role for a reduced British Army presence in Iraq would include mentoring. It is clear that mentoring is seen to have a significant role within the public sector and that this will necessarily influence the importance it has for teacher-training. Wallace and Gravells (2007:2) are clear that mentoring within FE uses the 'time and expertise of experienced and successful teachers by pairing them with a 'student' or 'trainee' teacher to whom they will provide support and guidance – not only in the practicalities of teaching but also in a specific subject area – for the duration of the teacher education programme'. Picking up on the importance of mentoring in the current climate, Cunningham identifies three broad drivers for discussing the issue of mentoring in colleges (2005:7):

1. Political and organisational shifts relating to post-compulsory education and training (PCET)
2. Trends within professions and society generally
3. Models of professional learning and development relating specifically to mentoring teachers in PCET

It is important to note that the drivers do not recognise the value of mentoring as a professional development tool rather the drivers all appear to be external

and related to wider political and professional factors. Does this mean that mentoring for PCET has not emerged from a desire to support the professional development of individuals but is in response to political will? In turn, this political driver could be one based on saving money and moulding professionals to behave in a way which suits political needs. If this is the case, will this impact on the models chosen and the ethos surrounding mentoring?

As mentoring is a new concept for teachers in PCET, it is not surprising that there is little mention of it within this specific environment until relatively recently. Cunningham's book (2005) is the first to address the very specific issues facing PCET and he identifies that Wallace (2001) makes mention of mentors in the FENTO-approved book on teaching in the sector and Huddleston and Unwin (2002) provide a practical text on college teaching which has a few sentences on mentoring. Since Cunningham's book was published there has been one further book specifically for the sector by Wallace and Gravells who first published in 2005 and reprinted in 2006 and 2007. This indicates an increasing interest in the subject but is still a limited one. At the present time, there are no books in print which deal specifically with the issues of mentoring for the VCS and the assumption seems to be that the few books that do exist will incorporate them.

In academic environments

Although this research focuses on VCS providers, some of the work that has taken place in academic settings has relevance to the exploration of models of mentoring, in order to acknowledge similarities and differences.

Cunningham (2005:11) makes an important distinction between the type of mentoring that takes places in schools and that which takes place in colleges. He notes that 'very few teachers in the former will be undergoing their training in-service, whereas this is the training mode which accounts for, by far, the greatest proportion of our [sic] own trainees'. This must clearly have an impact on the choice of models, the mentoring tools used and the resources available to allocate to mentoring systems. Cunningham notes the example that school-based mentors are likely to be more involved in the assessment of trainees' written and other tasks that are needed to become qualified. Whereas this may be less likely in FE organisations it may still be the case in smaller providers as trainee teachers will need support outside their teacher-training course in order to complete assignments and explore theory and practice.

Cunningham (2005:12) also recognises that school-based mentors currently have more incentive to undertake and carry out the role well as they receive financial rewards as well as potential career advancement. This is not yet the case in PCET generally and will always be a problem for VCS providers operating with short-term funding. This may cause inequities across the sector and may lead to problems sourcing suitably qualified mentors.

Another factor which may affect the way in which mentoring is experienced is the choice of mentoring system. Britnor-Guest (2001) notes that the mentoring 'conversations' may differ depending on the focus of the scheme. If the scheme has a skills-development focus it might be more directive and akin to one-to-one training. If it is targeting senior staff or career development it is

likely to be non-directive. In terms of ITT it may be a combination of both of these approaches as the trainee may need some direct input on certain theories or practices but more 'open' conversations to explore feelings about teaching generally and career pathways.

Matthews (2003:326) places great emphasis on designing mentoring programmes that demonstrate an understanding of 'the members' current position/status in their career and the activities or skills most relevant to them at that time' and Britnor-Guest (2001) notes that the hierarchical relationship between mentor and mentee's job roles will vary. This may be a peculiarity of highly structured hierarchical organisations such as academia or the Army where linear progression and gathering appropriate qualifications and accolades are the way to move forward.

When describing mentoring activities at the early stage of an academic career Matthews (2003:327) notes that:

> …mentors' roles would involve discussions of different teaching approaches that could be used in both large and small group situations; covering of required syllabus material; writing of examinations and assignment questions; providing feedback on lectures; providing information about Faculty/University rules regarding assessment; discussion of different types of assessment that could be used, and their advantages and disadvantages; guidance on dealing with problem students; administrative procedures; and organizing causal staff (i.e. tutors and markers).

Much of this is applicable to the new teacher in a VCS setting except that there would need to be a link to their own learning (as a requirement for the PTLLS and DTLLS) and reflective practice is likely to be the tool used to undertake the mentoring discussions. Also, there may be more links drawn between theory and practice to help the mentee explore new pedagogical constructs. There may also be more discussion about the specific needs and systems of the organisation, particularly if the mentee is new to both teaching and the organisation.

The changes in academic settings over recent years will also affect the way in which mentoring operates. Cunningham (2005:18) notes that PCET has 'suffered disproportionately from poor morale, a perception by long-serving staff that the pressures of teaching have been greatly increased' by an audit culture and 'innovation fatigue' which may impact on whether teachers choose or are chosen to mentor. It might also influence the way in which mentoring is carried out and the information and support offered by mentors. He feels that unless there is some kudos or financial reward, it is unlikely that teachers in PCET will volunteer to become mentors. As the government places more and more demands and constraints on education, so the willingness of teachers to engage in activities such as mentoring will be affected.

The VCS context

As can be seen, the existing literature is focused on mentoring as a general concept or mentoring in the FE sector. As yet, there is no specific research into the mentoring models which would be appropriate for trainee teachers in

the VCS (although there is one piece of research by Turner, Thomas and Rose (2008) which examines how the introduction of QTLS will impact on the Third Sector). Whilst it may not be essential to differentiate between different parts of the education sector in order to introduce a successful mentoring system, it is necessary to have regard for the effect of context. Clutterbuck (2003) identifies the impact that contextual factors can have on the mentoring relationship and scheme. These include the motivations that the mentor and mentee bring to the relationship, the level of training both have received, whether the relationship is supported and personal attributes such as race, age or gender. Clutterbuck does not discuss the influence of the organisational context or the context in which the organisation operates. In term of teachers in the VCS setting, it will be important to identify factors such as legislation, qualifications and professional expectations related to teaching and learning as well as finances, ethos and operational constraints associated with being a VCS body. It will also be important to acknowledge the motivation of teachers and mentors as many people join the VCS after careers elsewhere or as part of their own development before joining the workforce. This may mean that some volunteers are less willing or able to undertake formal teacher training and mentoring may need to be tailored to address these issues before dealing with the ITT requirements.

The need to understand the specific nature of organisations is identified by Hankey (2004) as she believes it is important for the Higher Education Institution (HEI) providing teacher-training (which makes the assumption that it is HEI based) and the organisation providing a teaching placement (which

makes the assumption that it is one institution which may not be the case for part-time teachers) to reach a clear understanding about the nature of the mentoring relationship. It is the duality of the organisational context and the personal attributes brought to the relationship which is likely to be particular to mentors and mentees in the VCS. Cunningham (2005:34) acknowledges the mentoring 'mix' as an important balance between the practical and the 'psychosocial' where the trainees' wellbeing and development are included. This is likely to be an important consideration in the VCS as the ethos of the organisation may be one which encourages nurturing and a holistic approach to development.

As most VCS providers are new to mentoring for teacher-trainees they do not have an existing body of knowledge or practice to refer to when developing their systems. Hankey (2004) believes that FE needs to build on good practice in mentoring. This may be difficult for VCS providers as they have not been engaged in mentoring so will need to look to other sectors for examples of good practice and tailor these accordingly. As such, there is no sector-specific 'community of practice' (Wenger, 2004) for them to join which means that they are already excluded from discourses around mentoring and may be disadvantaged when influencing discourses that will affect the way in which their teaching staff are mentored by others in the wider sector. Although some writers look to generic mentoring tools, such as collegiality, in the development of new and experienced staff the specific nature of the VCS may mean that this is not always appropriate. For instance, Turner and Harkin (2003:21) believe that collegiality 'whereby likeminded teachers communicate

and work closely with each other' has a positive effect on self-directed professional development. This implies that teachers all have the same interests or that some form of matching is required to ensure likemindedness. Whilst it is likely that all teachers will share some similar experiences it is also important to recognise the impact of professional and personal differences. In terms of the VCS, it may well be that support from colleagues within the organisations or from similar organisations is welcome because the colleagues are likeminded enough to offer empathy. The use of such generic tools without thought for the specific context of application may be more detrimental than helpful.

One of the biggest issues for VCS providers, when deciding on the appropriate model of mentoring, will be the practical constraints. Time, existing knowledge and skills, capacity to give dedicated mentoring support, even a room for a confidential conversation may all be very limited or non-existent. Some of the practices available to FE may appear like a luxury to the VCS. For example, Matthews (2003:327) states that people may need more than one mentor during their career 'to grow and develop with the staff member'. It is unlikely that many small VCS providers will have the capacity to offer more than one mentor.

Cunningham (2005:68) also spends time exploring ways for the mentor to make the experience of beginning teaching less intimidating in terms of the learners and the classroom setting. For new teachers working in the VCS this is much less likely to be an issue in that most will come from either a

professional background (such as nursing or accountancy) or have been volunteers within the organisation and are familiar with the client group. Their 'entry' into teaching will not be as sudden as for many teachers in FE colleges and the mentor will need to take into account their wealth of previous experience, both as a professional and as a learner.

Conclusion

Examining the literature has highlighted several points which will need to inform the decisions taken by VCS providers as they introduce mentoring systems to support the ITT –

- How are mentor and mentoring defined?

- How will mentors be chosen?

- How will mentors be trained and supported?

- What are the boundaries of the mentoring relationship?

- How will the organisation meet the subject-specific mentoring requirements of ITT?

The literature is, and can only be, part of the context in which VCS providers will need to create mentoring systems that meet the specific needs of their organisations. In turn, the development of mentoring systems will give rise to new opportunities for empirical research and comparative studies to provide a better understanding of the links between mentoring theory and practice.

The next chapter describes the methodology used to collect the research data.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to capture a snapshot of the situation for VCS providers introducing mentoring for trainee-teachers as part of the 2007 reforms to Initial Teacher Training (ITT).

Like Turner, Thomas and Rose (2008:5), I have used data collected predominantly from 'small organisations with local reach (operating at neighbourhood, town, or city level) [which] described themselves as either a charity or voluntary and community organisations'.

There were four phases of data collection (Table 1) – a review of the literature on coaching and mentoring to identify potential models, a focus group of managers to identify areas for investigation, interviews with managers and interviews with teachers.

Table 1 – Phases of data collection

Phase	Activities
Phase 1 Review of the literature April 2007 - February 2008	Identification of models Formulation of research questions Pilot focus group
Phase 2 Focus group of managers and teachers March 2008	Analysis of transcription
Phase 3 Interviews with managers April 2008	Analysis of transcriptions
Phase 4 Interviews with teachers May 2008	Analysis of transcriptions

These phases were conducted over an eighteen month period to investigate the four research questions underpinning the study:

1. what does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS sector?

2. what activities are taking place in the VCS sector that would be defined as mentoring?

3. what mentoring models are already in use in the VCS sector?

4. what aspects of the VCS sector influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?

Following this introduction, there are six sections to this chapter, the first sets out the C*ase for the Research* (the 'why'). Next are *Epistemology* and *Methodology* (the theoretical 'how'). *Design* then identifies the practicalities which come from the methodology, (the 'who', 'when', 'where' and 'what'). Following *Design* are a section on *Ethics* and a discussion of *Reliability*, *Validity and Generalisability*.

The Case for the Research

In this study I research how VCS providers understand and address the mandatory requirement to introduce mentoring for trainee-teachers. The context is one where reforms to the ITT have imposed a need for subject-specific mentors so that all providers in PCET are operating to the same quality standards, although they have not been and will not be funded in the same way, nor do they all operate within the FE model of delivery with large, accredited courses. VCS providers offers a relatively blank canvas in terms of exploring the impact of mentoring as they have undertaken little work to develop mentoring systems for their trainee teachers although mentoring does take place with learners in many settings.

Even without the driver of the ITT requirements, the VCS is a useful setting for research as it is often quite distanced from the mainstream activities

associated with FE in terms of its ethos and associated organisational aims. The disparities in funding and isolation from mainstream activities further distance VCS from 'accepted' practices and discourses thus offering an alternative perspective on the impact of legislation designed around existing FE models.

Added to this is my interest in the work of VCS providers and in mentoring itself. This is as both a theorist and practitioner with a particular desire to ensure that models of mentoring offered to the VCS draw appropriate workable links between theory and practice.

As mentoring for teacher-trainees is a new area for PCET providers it means that some of the existing research is only able to highlight emerging issues and problems of definition, rather than offering examples of mentoring systems already in operation. Also, the legislation has been phased in with more emphasis placed on FE providers having qualified staff than providers in other parts of the PCET sector. This does not mean that other providers will not need to complete the ITT requirements if they wish to continue to be funded. However, it does mean that there is confusion within the sector about the application of the legislation with some providers failing to acknowledge the implications of providing mentors for ITT. This combination of the newness of the ITT mentoring requirement and the phased introduction of the legislation affects the information that I have been able to gather during this research as there is still considerable uncertainty across the PCET sector.

Epistemology

The fabric which holds together any analysis of data is epistemology. By stating the epistemological stance, a researcher is making clear any potential bias or limitations in their analysis. They are describing their ontology, or how they see the world, how this may affect their choice of research methods, interpretation of data and the presentation of their findings. The view of the researcher may not be the same as that of the research subjects or the reader but, if the epistemology is stated clearly, this should support transparent analysis and a shared understanding of the material presented.

There is an array of epistemologies on offer to the researcher. Burrell and Morgan, in their influential text of 1979, identify the objectivist and subjectivist positions as defining two distinct approaches to social science research. Researchers positioned at either of these 'edges' would be at the extremes, with objectivists adopting quantitative methods of research based on principles applied to the natural sciences and subjectivists undertaking qualitative work focused on the interpretation of meaning. Pring (2005:44) warns against such a sharp division as a 'false dualism' with possibilities for cross-over being more useful. The 'strong' positions of their model are summarised by Burrell and Morgan in 'The subjective-objective dimension' diagram (1979:3) which sets up dichotomous pairings as nominalism/realism for ontology, anti-positivism/positivism for epistemology, voluntarism/ determinism for human nature and ideographic/nomothetic for methodology and identifies the extremes as 'sociological positivism' and 'German idealism'. Like most researchers, I find myself situated somewhere in the middle of

these, although some theorists believe that researchers must remain firmly towards one edge or the other (Guba, 1985).

Yet describing and occupying any 'middle ground' can be difficult for researchers (Keller, 1989:34) as theories and concepts are constantly shifting in a complex, and often uneasy, relationship with each other. It is not just in philosophical debates that these positions have been questioned. Some artists and writers of the early twentieth century (Boccioni, Duchamp, Marinetti) attempted to challenge the fixed perspective of a single reality. Their work offered multiple and simultaneous interpretations, emerging from their observations of the world, which often served to baffle their audience in the first instance. Yet once familiar with the new 'language' of the medium, it became possible to engage with and interpret the works. This is the same for any epistemological approach in research; it is important to have a shared understanding between the researcher and the reader as to the language of enquiry. This may mean that some things do not fit within the research framework and it is the role of the researcher to make the boundaries of the exploration clear to the reader.

Cohen et al. (2005:7) using the work of Burrell and Morgan (1979), describe how epistemological positions lead to specific methodological considerations, particularly the objectivist desire to discover general laws which are nomothetic and the subjectivists' focus on individual interpretation of the world leading to an idiographic understanding of research. Although I do not place myself at the far edge of subjectivism, it is the middle ground nearest to the

idiographic methodological approach that I wish to use in this research as it emphasises the impact of and on individuals rather than searching for meta-narratives to explain research data.

Following the argument of Pring (2004), I find that examining terms such as 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity', 'reality', 'truth' and 'verification', 'knowledge' and 'meaning' is essential to the process of enquiry. Like Pring, I do not accept that there is one objective reality in research, rather that there are multiple realities, which are socially constructed. Similarly, Deutsch (2004:891) describes 'the self-reflexivity that has become a traditional part of feminist research requires acknowledging the multiple positions that the researcher occupies in relation to her or his participants as well as in the world as a whole'. These positions and realities are then mediated and negotiated through social interactions, and the position of the researcher is one which further interprets the meanings presented to us. As Said, cited by Weiner (1998:7) notes:

> No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his [sic] involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of society.

This concern with acknowledging the positionality of the researcher is echoed by Pring (2004:44) when he reflects that, 'the world researched is affected by the research itself; our knowledge is a 'construction', reflecting the world, not as independent of our deliberations, but as something constructed by them'. This examination of how knowledge is constructed underpins my examination

of research data, situating my approach firmly in the subjectivist camp and using reflexivity to ensure that the inter-twined worlds of the researcher/research subject and knowledge/knower are exposed wherever possible.

Like many researchers, I have found the choice of a single epistemology challenging as elements from more than one position offer useful analytical concepts. As Foucault (1972:21) states, 'there is negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity'. The need to move away from existing ideas and to be open to the challenge of new concepts seems to be a prerequisite for effective research. The work of feminist theorists further helps to critique the traditional or 'taken-for-granted' (Alcoff and Potter, 1993:2). Within these critical parameters, I call on postmodernism and interpretivism to sharpen my analysis. This is not to say that I have found an approach which is an exact fit as a research lens, but it suits the framework of my current research and acknowledges the observations of theorists like Pring and Deutsch that researchers impact on and are impacted by the research. This recognition of our impact as researchers on the research is something I wish to make transparent in my work in order to avoid closing down avenues of thought or accepting data (and my interpretations) as the only possibilities. It is the challenge to what constitutes knowledge (Ramazanoglu, 2006; Hekman, 1992), its production and reproduction, that I have found most interesting when choosing an epistemological stance. Hankinson Nelson (in Alcoff and Potter, 1993:122) summarises this complexity of how individuals

interact with knowledge as 'knowers are situated'; none of us come to know things without first being positioned within a framework of other knowledge.

Postmodernism, based on fluidity, transparency and the need for constant questioning, is a useful tool when attempting to uncover implicit meanings and tacit knowledge in research data. However, postmodernism has challenged the very conception of epistemology (Hekman, 1992:63) and has been criticised for dismissing the role of the 'subject', something which is essential in the understanding of human interactions such as mentoring relationships. However, in terms of this research, the role of the 'subject' is less important than that of the organisations and communities they work within and the discourses which construct the meanings expressed by individuals. The need to expose hegemonic discourses, to analyse and to push the boundaries of what is known and what is knowable, to question taken-for-granted assumptions provides an appropriate epistemological framework in relation to educational research.

Whilst I use reflexivity and continual questioning (associated with postmodernism) of theories that I find incomplete, like Barr (2003:6) I am aware that this can lead to an unsatisfactory circle of questioning without offering any conclusions. It runs the risk of focusing too much on the constructions of knowledge and understanding without giving sufficient regard to the subject of enquiry, in this case, mentoring. As such, I will take a step back from the most extreme positions associated with postmodernism. This still allows for an analysis which examines the taken-for-granted assumptions

accompanying the introduction of mentoring based on models and experiences which do not necessarily reflect the perspective and needs of the VCS providers. This approach places more emphasis on the role of the organisation and external influences on individuals rather than examining the role of the individual to influence their surroundings. The issue of 'subject' can be problematic in a postmodern account. The way in which individuals exercise their 'agency' within a situation cannot be ignored, yet postmodernism does not see this as the primary focus for analysis. Within the confines of this research, I will collect the experiences and views of individuals and use an interpretive framework based on the 'community' of the organisation in which the individuals work as well as examining the impact of the wider educational community. The influence of community is identified by many researchers and, as Hankinson Nelson notes, 'communities are the primary loci – the primary generators, repositories, holders, and acquirers – of knowledge' (in Alcoff and Potter, 1993:124). Whilst I agree that an understanding of the role of communities is essential to the analysis of individual interactions, there must be a balance between the two. In this sense, postmodernism can fail to offer a sufficient research framework. In particular, mentoring poses problems as much of the existing research focuses on the 'mentoring relationships', which implies that the most important element is individual human interaction. Such a focus runs the risk of ignoring other factors, particularly those associated with organisational discourses and hegemonic responses to change. Therefore, by highlighting the short-comings and focusing on the production of knowledge, postmodernism remains a

useful analytical tool to uncover implicit and hidden meanings for individuals operating within an identified community.

Pring (2004:5) notes that:

> Human beings (and the social life in which they interact) are not the sort of things where there can be simple causal relationships between specific interventions and subsequent behaviours.

In terms of research on mentoring (a process which is generally seen as a 'good thing') it is important to remember that the complexity of mentoring relationships and the perceptions of these relationships will mediate the data offered and the way in which it is interpreted (by me as researcher) and by readers (who will bring their own ontology to the research). It is this complex set of social interactions, the production and reproduction of knowledge and the research questions that has influenced my choice of methodology.

Methodology

Methodology sets out the research approach in the context of my epistemological stance (above) and the research questions (shown earlier on page 100). The framework for the research is then described in the following section on *Design*.

There are two sections in this *Methodology*:

- Process
- Tools

Process establishes the type of research to be undertaken and discusses the appropriateness of different methods. *Tools* explains which methods were used and why.

Process

In order to choose appropriate research methods, it is important to ensure that the research 'is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic, best help answer the research questions at hand' (Flyvbjerg, 2006:242). Some methods are more or less suitable and the following section outlines the type of research which was undertaken, including an outline of the potential study options.

Although the four research questions listed in the Introduction had been set as the focus for the research, this did not preclude other data from emerging nor for changes in the collection methods. Due to the nature of the sector chosen for the research (VCS) and the topic of research (mentoring for the ITT) this immediately limited the types of organisation that could be included in the research. Even so, this gave a wide range of potential organisations on a national basis which offered the following options:

- a large, national data collection exercise to map the existing use of mentoring models in the VCS

- a case study of one organisation to undertake an in-depth analysis of a mentoring model in use

- an ethnographic study restricted to a specified group of VCS providers to gain insight into the cultural response

- a case study restricted to a specified group of VCS providers to offer limited mapping and some in-depth analysis

The choice of research methods was based on the research aim of highlighting an emerging issue in order to address the research questions whilst maintaining a manageable research process. The work of Kram (1985), on which much subsequent mentoring literature is based, used only a small sample to describe mentoring relationships. It was this sort of in-depth analysis that I chose to use in order to provide insights into the experience of VCS providers rather than offering extensive comparative data with little qualitative data to support it. Like Clutterbuck (2003), I acknowledge that a small study such as Kram's can lead to flawed data if the findings are too widely generalised and I am mindful of this in both my analysis and conclusions. As such, I would describe the research as illuminative rather than generalisable as it seeks to problematise emerging data rather than offering overarching theories.

I chose to use a combination of focus groups and individual interviews for five reasons:

- this provided qualitative data
- this offered a form of triangulation between the views of managers and the views of teachers in the same and different organisations
- I already had an established relationship with a set of providers

- an opportunity for a focus group presented itself which included participants, both managers and manager-teachers, from a range of VCS organisations

- the combination of a focus group and individual interviews allowed for different layers of discussion and analysis

Other research methods would not have provided data to address the research questions. A national quantitative study similar to that of Turner et al. (2008) would not have given the opportunity to explore emerging interpretations and possible conflicts of meaning. Similarly, a large scale study based on questionnaires (such as the studies by Hankey, 2004 and Allen and Eby, 2003) would have provided a data set which could have offered broad conclusions about the current situation. Alternatively, a case study within one organisation would have offered opportunities to undertake ethnographic work focusing on the process of mentoring (Young and Perrewe, 2000; Cresswell, 2007) to gain a clearer understanding of the culture of the organisation and the way in which it had introduced mentoring. However, this would not have provided alternative interpretations and models. It would also have focused on the culture of the organisation rather than allowing for an examination of structural considerations across the sector as well as restricting comparative enquiry about the importance of organisational culture. In order to open up the emerging discourses, in-depth qualitative data collected through a focus group and interviews appeared to offer the most potentially rich source of material.

Although I do not work for any of the organisations involved in this research, I have known them on a superficial level for two years. Therefore, I could not undertake the research as an external, visiting researcher, collecting data from a more distant perspective, in the forms of interviews and/or questionnaires. Like Deutsch (2004:887) I have had to examine my position as researcher in relation to those taking part in the research. Rather than attempt to 'create' a potentially false positivist objectivity by distancing myself from the individuals and organisations in the research, I have moved to a position of transparency. My aim is to be aware of my positionality, particularly in relation to the production of knowledge based on the experiences of others, and to use this to support my analysis.

As I was not entirely unknown to the potential research subjects and I needed a range of views to address the research questions whilst working within an interpretivist framework, I moved toward a thematic analysis using techniques from grounded research. The reason for this was that I did not set out to use ground research as my framework although I quickly found that many of the tools and ideas associated with it were important to framing my analysis. Without the parameters associated with grounded research, a thematic analysis would have run the risk of being insufficiently reflexive. It also ensured that I did not bring with me any preconceived ideas. Instead I allowed the research data to emerge and my approach to shift to accommodate it. The following section is a discussion of how grounded research supported my thematic analysis.

Grounded research

Based on the eleven stage model for planning qualitative, naturalistic research offered by Cohen et al. (2005:141), I was able to use grounded research approaches which satisfied my need to make transparent my position as a researcher as well as working with emerging data rather than attempting to fit the findings to my theory.

Grounded research, as O'Connor, Netting and Thomas (2008:28) note, is based on the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and underpins contemporary qualitative research. They also highlight how qualitative research designs have become so diverse that applying quality and rigor standards has become an increasing challenge. Glaser and Strauss' work on grounded theory seeks to literally ground theory within the data collected rather than using the research process to test existing theoretical propositions (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1984). Strauss and Corbin (1990:23) define grounded theory as –

> A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One does not begin with theory and then prove it, Rather, one begins with an areas of study and what is then relevant to that area of study is allowed to emerge.

As such, researchers are presumed to enter research without preconceived ideas of what they will find but rather, are expected to allow themes to emerge

from the data. By so doing, researchers are enabling theories to emerge, advance and develop in a way which opens up new avenues of research. However, like Barr (2003) I adopt a reflexive exploration of data in this research to avoid assumptions about what will emerge from the data. This better allows a conceptual framework to contain rather than constrain the findings and to support a thematic analysis that is open to data which does not 'fit' into themes. O'Connor et al. (2008:30) summarise it as 'the concept itself will not change but the facts at a given point in time may'. This still allows for the research to be open to challenge in terms of general applicability as comparisons are difficult. Charmaz (described by O'Connor et al., 2008:30) has added an interpretive dimension to grounded theory by focusing on 'the creation of contextualized emergent understanding rather that (sic) the creation of testable theoretical structures' which leads to a 'less rigid and prescriptive methodology with greater focus on [a] search for meaning that could further what could be called interpretive understanding rather than [the] testability of results'. It is this search for meaning which is most important for my analysis of the emerging themes.

Tools

I have used entirely qualitative measures for this research as I wish to examine how individuals and organisations are interpreting their obligations. This is to provide as wide a range as possible (within the limitations of my research group) of views to open up the field to analysis rather than to search for definitive answers. It also supports the interpretive thematic analysis and use of grounded research approaches as a method of data collection.

Design

In this research I worked with seven VCS providers to:

- examine their understanding of mentoring for trainee teachers

- analyse the mentoring models available to them

- contextualise mentoring within the wider PCET environment

- identify any unique elements of mentoring for the VCS

There is variation of size, location and purpose across these providers. Also, the participants held a range of roles. I have used a system of alpha-numeric identifiers for ease of reference as it shows which participants took part in the focus group and which participants were from the same organisation. These are summarised in the following tables.

Table 2

Characteristics of organisations and participants in focus group

Participant code	Organisation size and purpose	Participant role
A1	Small, faith-based charity working in a severely deprived ward on the edge of a large town. Focus on confidence building and Skills for Life learning.	Project Manager
F1	Very small faith-based organisation working within schools and family settings in a deprived ward on the edge of a large town.	Project Manager and tutor
F2	Very large LEA provider of adult and family learning opportunities.	Family Learning Manager
F3	Very small theatre-based adult learning provider based in a large town. Focus of work is performance-based learning activities which include literacy and numeracy development.	Project Manager and tutor
F4	Branch of a large national charity. Based in a multi-cultural residential area and supporting local people with mental health needs to re-engage with learning and work.	Course Co-ordinator
F5	Charity set up to support women through education, counselling and information. Located in a shopping centre in a large multi-cultural town.	Centre Manager and tutor
F6	Branch of a large national organisation supporting offenders. Based on the edge of a medium-sized town. Working with colleges and probation service to support learners with literacy and numeracy needs.	Course Co-ordinator

Table 3

Characteristics of organisations and participants in interviews

Organisation	Size	Purpose	Interviewees' role
A	Very small local charity. 1 senior manager. 5 teaching staff	Faith-based charity working in a severely deprived ward on the edge of a large town.	A1 – Project Manager A2 – Tutor
B	Branch of large national organisation. 5 full-time senior managers. 12 teachers and assessors	Well-established national charity with a long history of working with young people and adults. This branch has two premises in the centre of a large city.	B1 – Centre Manager B2 – senior manager and tutor B3 – tutor
C	Small charity. 4 part-time senior managers.	Charity set up to support women through education, counselling and information. Located in an old council building in a residential area on the outskirts of a large city.	C1 – senior manager and part-time tutor

Seven managers were involved in the focus group and, of these, two were also teachers. The managers represented six small voluntary organisations and one large LEA provider working with the voluntary sector. The interviews

took place with three managers leading VCS provision (one in a large national organisation and the other two in small local organisations). Of these senior managers, one also had a teaching role. There was also a middle manager with a teaching role and two interviewees who had purely teaching roles (one of whom was a volunteer and the other was employed).

A pilot focus group was convened prior to the research to test out my ideas. This group consisted of Eastern region teacher-trainers with a knowledge of the ITT mentoring requirements as well as the needs of VCS providers. The outcomes of this pilot focus group then informed the questions for a formal focus group with senior managers and semi-structured interviews with managers and teachers.

The material from both focus groups and interviews was recorded and transcribed, bearing in mind the importance of transcribing all details such as pauses and overlaps (Silverman, 2005:222).

The focus group used a series of prompt questions which had been trialled in the pilot focus group and then refined. These questions were aimed at revealing the managers' understanding and interpretation of the introduction of mentoring as part of the ITT (to address research questions one, two and three), and to provide a forum for managers to identify how they had arrived at these decisions (the final research question).

The interviews with senior managers and teachers used semi-structured questions to elicit the views of the different stakeholders. I used the research questions as prompts to guide the discussion in order to collect data to address the research questions. I looked for areas of agreement and disagreement between the stakeholders and compared this to the end product, the mentoring activity taking place. This took into account both formal and informal mentoring, issues of definition, the relevance of reflective practice, the impact of mentor/mentee attributes and the role of organisational culture. It allowed interviewees to express opinions as well as to describe existing practice.

The questions during the interviews were adjusted slightly to recognise the different positions and experiences of the interviewees. The individual interviews with mentees focused on the following questions:

- what is the purpose of mentoring in your organisation

- what sort of mentoring system is in place in your organisation

- what sort of mentoring system should be in place in your organisation

- what do you expect from a mentor

- if you have a mentor, what have been the advantages and disadvantages for you (if you do not have a mentor, what do you think the advantages and disadvantages will be)

The individual interviews with senior managers focused on:

- how have you prepared for the introduction of mentoring as part of the ITT

- what is the purpose of mentoring in your organisation

- what model of mentoring do you/will you have

- why did you choose this model

- what are the advantages and disadvantages of mentoring in your organisation

The rationale behind the questioning was to give a background to the type of preparation being undertaken by VCS organisations to introduce mentoring. Whether by design or default, this preparation would inform the way in which mentoring and mentor had come to be defined. In turn, this would influence the choice of mentoring models in use by the VCS and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of these. By interviewing both practitioners and managers it was also possible to collect data which would highlight any discrepancies between the perceptions of different stakeholders.

The questioning was deliberately open to allow for inconsistencies and confusion to surface. Rather than trying to reach a single definition or model of mentoring, the aim was to map the discourse and to expose uncertainty. This ran the risk of being problematic in research terms as the issue is new and so ill-defined that it may not have offered much in the way of themes. It was, therefore, important to be clear about potential and actual difficulties during the data collection. As Clutterbuck (2003) identified, poor research methods in the field of mentoring have had an impact on the validity and usefulness of research. Further, the research took place during a period of

considerable change in policy and practice which have had an inevitable impact on the emerging data.

I used a similar framework to Cunningham (2005:7) when he sought to explore the background to mentoring, parallels with other settings and an appropriate 'architecture' for mentoring in the FE college context. However, the interviews and specific context of VCS providers in the East of England should add to the existing literature and provide a broader picture of how mentoring is being introduced rather than being restricted to the FE context.

Like Hankey (2004), I have adopted a relativist perspective in order to recognise that I am unable to command a position of procedural or ontological objectivity. This reflects the focus of the research on individual perceptions and situated realities which are used to understand the current position rather than to test out a hypothesis. This is similar to the recent article by Lawy and Tedder (2009) which takes the personal accounts of teacher trainers to describe their views on mentoring. As such an approach removes the ability to generalise findings or to make statistical inferences from my findings, I have used 'measures' to mediate my research, similar to those introduced by Allen and Eby (2003). I used a much more limited range of measures due to the newness of mentoring teacher-trainees in the VCS sector. My chosen measures were:

- does your organisation have a mentoring system?
- is the mentoring system formal or informal?

These measures allow me to place responses along a continuum which describes the level of knowledge and involvement that organisations have with mentoring. This is in recognition of the differential stages of development for organisations introducing mentoring and their relationship to the knowledge and discourses available in the wider PCET sector.

The other variables which I have made clear in my description and analysis of responses are the size of organisation, the level of engagement with teacher training and the level of engagement with mentoring for trainee teachers.

Models of research

Woodd (2001) undertaking research into mentoring for new teachers in FE and HE uses an approach which takes into account, for both mentor and mentee, their professional qualifications, courses taught and previous experience of mentoring. I feel that a fourth dimension, experience of teaching, is relevant for the individuals and a fifth dimension, of the organisational cultural, is also important, including the level of experience and expertise that the organisation has in managing mentoring programmes.

Ethics

Undertaking research brings with it a set of ethical considerations that must be anticipated and planned for wherever possible. The BERA ethical guidelines state that:

'The British Educational Research Association believes that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for persons, respect for knowledge, respect for democratic values, and respect for the quality of educational research.'

BERA (2004)

Using this as an underlying premise and the ethics approval process of the University of Nottingham, this research has been undertaken in a manner which ensured that participants were fully aware of the nature and purpose of their involvement. They were asked for written permission to use the focus group material and one-to-one interviews.

As has been made clear in the discussion of epistemology, my relationship with the organisations and some of the individuals is well-established. Although I am external to the organisations I have worked with them and this has supported me as a researcher to gain access to organisations and individuals who may not have come forward to an anonymous request for participation. My commitment to and knowledge of the VCS has been clearly stated and any reader of this thesis should be aware of my position as a researcher and thus be able to interpret my findings in light of this.

Following the focus group and interviews, participants were sent transcripts of the audio material and given the opportunity to withdraw all or part of the material. No one chose to make amendments. It is questionable whether the absence of changes reflects the accuracy of the transcriptions and that they fairly reflected what the respondents meant to say, or whether the

respondents did not feel confident to make comments on the transcripts. All participants opted to remain anonymous and this means that the organisations have been kept anonymous as well to further protect the anonymity of participants The organisations have been given a random alphabetical designation and the participants within that organisation have been allocated a sequential number. Focus group participants have all been allocated F to identify them as taking part in the focus group and then been given a numerical identifier. This was to allow for easy identification within the research but anonymity for the participants and the organisations. There is one exception to this for the focus group participant who also took part in an individual interview. She has been identified in the focus group by the alpha-numeric identifier ascribed to her in the one-to-one interview to make it clear that she was not just part of the focus group.

Some participants may have been more reticent in their answers than others if they felt that they could be identified by members of their own team even though the research would be presented as anonymous. Also, references to third parties have been given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and this was explained at interview. However, one participant, B3, seemed to have been uneasy about giving too much detail during the interviews and did not voice many opinions until towards the end of the interview. This may have indicated that he was concerned about his views being traceable.

In terms of my position as a researcher and how this has impacted on the quality of this research, it is important for any reader of this thesis to

remember the particular interpretive framework I bring to the work and my position as a professional working in the sector. I have worked within the VCS in the East of England for some time and am known to many of the participants. This will obviously have some influence on the way in which the research was conducted and the resulting data was subsequently analysed and presented. Whilst I aim to remain reflexive in my approach my own interests will clearly colour the final interpretation. In order to moderate some of my initial assumptions, I undertook a pilot focus group to test out my research questions and to allow for new lines of enquiry to emerge. The following is a brief examination of the process.

Pilot focus group

It is important to reflect on the way in which the pilot focus group informed the research method as the pilot focus group was a mechanism which served to reduce researcher influence. This was because it acted as a filter for my initial assumptions and allowed the participants of the pilot focus group to comment on their experience of being questioned.

The pilot focus group was based on nine questions (Appendix A). The data collected was recorded and transcribed for verification by the participants. Three participants were invited to join the group; a teacher-trainer delivering ITT qualifications and working in the VCS, a manager-trainer working for a charitable organisation advising education providers, and a consultant working in the VCS advising organisations as to the requirements of the ITT. All participants had considerable experience of formal teacher-training and

mentoring as well as working within the VCS. The last participant was unable to attend on the day and so the pilot focus group went ahead with two participants.

As well as the prompt questions which were directly linked to the research questions, I included a final question, 'do you have any suggestions for working with a focus group of managers from VCS providers' to help me to reflect on and refine the questions before working with the focus group. Using the pilot focus group confirmed some of the areas for investigation and highlighted others that needed to be clarified before working with the focus group. In particular, issues around definition and clarity about the ITT requirements emerged as important as did the role and characteristics associated with mentors. This reflected the issues identified in the literature. The particular nature of the VCS was also discussed with an emphasis on the potential difficulties this could cause. Although many of the issues that I expected to arise were discussed, the focus on the use of volunteers as teachers was more pronounced than I had anticipated.

Reflections on the pilot focus group

As a result of undertaking the pilot focus group I was able to test out the questions to participants against the research questions, practise managing the responses (albeit with fewer participants than the focus group) and analyse the transcripts for themes or unexpected comments. I also asked the participants for their feedback on the questions and the process and listened to the audio recording of the discussion to identify questions which had been

unclear. This led me to re-focus several of my questions during the discussion as the participants were hesitant in some of their responses. In particular, one participant noted that the first question was difficult and asked me to read it out again. I realised that my phrasing of questions had assumed too much prior knowledge and I would either need to give some preparatory information or breakdown the questions. I also reflected on my use of questions to drive the discussion as I felt that it was too directive in places.

A practical difficulty emerged when coding the responses. Due to the lack of definitions and uncertainty around mentoring for ITT, it was difficult to unpick some of the crossover between the characteristics of a mentor, skills required and the role assigned to the mentor. Whilst there is always a series of decisions required during the analysis of data, the confusion expressed by the participants was reflected in fragmented and overlapping comments.

One of the key differences between the pilot focus group and the focus group did not become apparent until I had analysed the focus group transcript. The two pilot focus group participants had undertaken mentoring training so were able to use theoretical concepts more comfortably than most of the focus group members. This affected the way in which the discussions progressed as the focus group was more concerned with practical issues where as the pilot focus group concentrated on conceptual issues.

The next section will discuss the robustness of the subsequent research following the pilot focus group.

Reliability, Validity and Generalisability

For any research to take its place in the wider body of literature, due regard must be given to its reliability, validity and generalisability. Whilst efforts can be made to ensure the robustness of data:

> It is unwise to think that threats to validity and reliability can ever be erased completely; rather the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research. (Cohen et al., 2005:105)

Reliability

Reliability refers to the accuracy of research methods and techniques in the production of data (Mason, 2005:39). Within an interpretivist, qualitative piece of research, it is often difficult to make claims about reliability as the tools of quantitative methods to check reliability (standardisation and cross-checking of data with different instruments) are not appropriate. Some writers go as far as to suggest that it is not workable in qualitative research (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, cited in Cohen, et al., 2005:119) but it is the very essence of naturalistic research that provides a depth and texture of analysis. Cohen et al. (2005:119) identify 'the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of situations, such that the study cannot be replicated' as the strength of such studies.

Qualitative research may also be criticised for not offering formal triangulation. Silverman (2006:380) defines this as 'the comparison of different kinds of data (e.g. quantitative and qualitative) and different methods (e.g. observation and

interviews) to see whether they corroborate one another'. Such comparisons may not always be possible, for instance, when collating oral histories that cannot be corroborated. Yet this type of material can still add to our overall understanding and should not be dismissed because it does not 'fit' with a traditional method of research. In terms of my own research, I have used a focus group of managers, interviews with managers and interviews with practitioners to provide a form of triangulation.

Understanding attitudes to the introduction of mentoring for ITT in the VCS in the short period within which this research has been undertaken (what Gomm et al. (2000:109) refer to as 'temporal boundaries') means that there is a restricted boundary based on the time-frame, site of research and topic. This makes it difficult to replicate with any accuracy as mentoring for ITT can never be 'introduced' again. However, I chose an epistemology which acknowledged the shortcomings of the research and aimed to accommodate this. Without such compromises I would have been unable to collect the data as it was only available for a limited period of time. The tools I used were those inherent to grounded research, allowing the participants to lead the discussions and tempering my approach as the research unfolded. This was accompanied by a reflexive lens on my work throughout, aiming to enhance transparency as a balance to the difficulty of replicating the work in future.

As well as offering a different type of data, a richer, deeper vein of material for analysis, naturalistic research can also question the taken-for-granted nature of research methods, particularly those associated with rational and scientific

approaches. Qualitative researchers may counter accusations that their work is not 'measurable' or 'accurate' because it cannot be reproduced by arguing that the fundamental principles of what constitutes a research instrument mean that the reliability of all research is questionable. Clearly, this could become a self-defeating argument with no research being undertaken. The best that can be hoped for is to be clear about research methods, record accurately the data collected and acknowledge the constraints of the analytical tools in use. In this research, I aim to use these three aspects as my check for reliability with a particular emphasis on the need for transparency throughout the analysis.

In order to ensure transparency, this thesis has clarified the status of the participants - that none of them is an expert in mentoring and that they all have some experience of teacher-training - as well as my own status as a researcher known to the participants. The organisations which took part in the research are recognisable as similar in that they provide education to adults through VCS funding streams and so have similar teaching and learning requirements. During my analysis of the data, I have highlighted my relationship to the organisations and the individuals who took part in the research. This has been done whenever I felt that it could have had an influence on the emerging data. However, there are likely to be more instances of this than I was able to identify as I am necessarily close to the data making it more difficult to be dispassionate. The supporting literature has been described to provide the reader with a framework to understand the position I hold as a researcher of mentoring with PCET.

Validity

Unless research is valid it is worthless (Cohen et al., 2005). Silverman states that validity is truth (2005:210) and cites Hammersley (1990:57) who defines validity in research as the 'extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers'. This is a useful description as it does not demand an external or objective truth. Rather it allows for the richness of the data in qualitative studies to be the strength but acknowledges that it can also be its weakness if the presentation does not have integrity. Cohen et al. (2005:105) feel that validity in qualitative research could be addressed through 'honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher'. This is echoed in Mason's (2005:39) observation that, for research to be valid, it means that 'you are observing, identifying or 'measuring' what you say you are'. Thus, it is the academic rigour used by the researcher to ensure that appropriate checking mechanisms are applied to data collection that does not have the apparent scientific and rational approach associated with quantitative data. To some extent this would appear more valid than seemingly objective research which does not acknowledge the potential impact of knowledge constructions and discourses that may limit or skew the results. In terms of this research, it is the transparency and openness to emerging ideas that will support the validity.

The test of validity is whether the research does what it sets out to do and whether the presentation of the data represents the data collected. This is

what Cohen et al. (2005:107) refer to as internal validity. In terms of my chosen method of a thematic analysis using the tools of grounded research, reflexivity takes on a pivotal role in supporting validity. By remaining aware of my role and position as a researcher I hope to collect and present the data in a way which addresses the research questions but without limiting the outcomes through undue researcher influence.

In order to support internal validity, the research was undertaken in different types and sizes of organisation, although they had similar educational objectives, and sought out the views of managers, teachers and volunteers. This allowed for some degree of comparison across the sector and for some triangulation of findings by collecting data from different stakeholders.

Individual and group interviewees have been sent transcribed copies of what was said which Punch (2005:255) described as 'member checking'. This is an important element for transparency in the research as all participants had the opportunity to amend or remove the text thus reducing the possibility of mistakes during transcription as a result of researcher misinterpretation.

A weakness of the research in terms of validity has been the analysis by a single person. The use of reflexivity as well as the inclusion of data that did not fit with the themes I had identified during the analysis has been a way of counter-acting this weakness. I have also ensured that the interpretations of the participants are clearly distinguished from my interpretations. This has helped to give external validity in that it acknowledges where the research

may be transferable to other settings and where further research is needed to produce more satisfactory data. Suggestions for future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Generalisability

Generalisation is based on the reliability and validity of the research process. Research which is inherently interpretive, such as the exploration I have undertaken into the views of individuals in the VCS about mentoring for teacher training, will not (and should not pretend to) conform to the validity and reliability requirements of positivism. Rather it is more illuminative than generalisable. As such, this research seeks to illuminate within the boundaries of its own reliability and validity, using transparency and reflexivity to demonstrate the applicability and limitations. Authors such as Campbell (1975), Bochner (2000) and Flyvbjerg (2006) have defended the generalisability of qualitative research in these terms.

From the outset, the design of this research has not been one which aimed to offer empirical generalisations that could claim to have a wider resonance (Mason, 2005:198). However, the constructions of knowledge by individuals operating within the given set of research parameters allow findings to emerge in terms of the shared meanings that research subjects bring to the data. Therefore, I do not make any claims as to the general application of the findings in this research. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) note:

> 'the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured'.

Rather than chasing this illusive objectivity, this research aims to highlight current practices, open up discourses for further debate and illuminate the activity taking place within the VCS.

The very nature of this research is that it is a small scale study, in terms of numbers, geographical spread and educational sector. This clearly limits how much can be transferred to other settings. Similarly, it is a snapshot of an emerging situation at one particular point in the development of mentoring for trainee teachers so can only be representative of that moment. As Kram (1985) and Allen and Eby (2003) note, there is a need for much more longitudinal research to gain a clearer understanding of the nature and impact of mentoring. Therefore, whilst I would suggest that this research is illuminative it is still constrained by its scope and this must be acknowledged if applying it to other contexts.

Summary

This chapter has set out the methods of data collection, discussed the value of the pilot focus group and explained the approach to the analysis of the data. As such, this research fulfils the five points LeCompte and Preissle (1993:334) set out for the replication of a study:

- The status of the researcher

- The choice of the respondents

- The social situations and conditions

- The constructs and premises used; and

- The methods of data collection and analysis

The data collected during this research has been used to illuminate the views of managers and teachers in the VCS in the East of England. This research examines the assumptions accompanying the introduction of the ITT and the requirement for subject specific mentors for trainee teachers by comparing the views of these respondents against academic and policy literature. The data have been interpreted qualitatively because of my chosen epistemological stance and the methodological approach which asked the respondents for their perceptions rather than for fixed, agreed knowledge. Using an interpretivist methodology and a thematic analysis calling on the tools of grounded research, my understanding of the research and my place within it has continued to develop during the research process. This awareness of the need to accommodate emerging data and to be open to questioning my initial hypothesis, as well as exposing the deeper meanings of the data, remains a constant dimension of my personal research journey.

The next two chapters provide an analysis of the data collected from the research. Chapter 4 explores the focus group data and Chapter 5 focuses on the data emerging from the interviews.

Chapter 4

Presentation, Discussion and Analysis of Data

The focus group

This chapter provides a description of how the complete data set was collected, analysed and interpreted. This includes a discussion of the use of a case study approach and practical issues of coding and interpreting data within my chosen framework. Finally, it gives an overview and analysis of the data collected during the focus group (based on audio transcripts) using the framework of the four research questions identified in Chapter 1.

The data collected

In order to collect a range of data a focus group followed by one-to-one interviews were used. The focus group consisted of managers and manager-teachers. It was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis with the agreement of the participants. Similarly, interviews were undertaken with the agreement of managers, manager-teachers and teachers, audio-recorded and transcribed. An example of a consent form is in Appendix B. Collecting data from both managers and teachers provided an opportunity to compare views of stakeholders in different positions *within* organisations and *across* organisations.

Interpretation of the data

Undertaking qualitative research inevitably produces a considerable amount of data in that the participants are free to talk for as long as they wish and can pursue their own lines of thought. As I aimed to minimise researcher influence this meant that some of the data collected is not of direct relevance to the research questions, although it was of importance to the participants and therefore has an inherent validity. In order to make sense of the data in relation to my research aims, I brought my own interpretation to bear on the data to generate meaning (Miles and Huberman, 1984) whilst retaining an interpretivist concern for the individual (Cohen et al., 2005:22). This interpretation was a staged process requiring multiple layers of analysis (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999) and ones which were literal, interpretative and reflexive (Mason, 2005:78) to uncover the different levels of meaning. Initially, I undertook a sifting and sorting process by working through the transcriptions to identify commonalities and differences. This led to grouping of similar items to support a thematic analysis. In turn, this allowed for comments and ideas that seemed different, discordant or 'deviant cases' (Silverman, 2005:185) to be examined separately. Analysis of the data was undertaken at three levels to:

1) extract the literal or fact-based information (such as legislative knowledge)

2) interpret the interviewees' words to bring meaning to them in terms of the research questions and using the tools of grounded research

3) work reflexively to support my epistemological stance, which aims for transparency and acknowledgement of the researcher's role and influence on the data presented

In order to identify discrepancies within organisations, I explored separately comments which did not appear to 'fit' within the themes. The grouped and individual comments were then examined for links to the literature.

Like Woodd (2001:100) I acknowledge 'that there were differences in interpretation of the [mentoring] scheme and in what was happening in practice'. This does not mean the data collected was incorrect just that it has to be interpreted in light of the situated perspective of the research subjects based on their experiences and organisational context at that particular time Additionally, the interactions between members of the focus group and the act of questioning on the specific topic of mentoring may have led to data being moderated by the 'situation' of being collected for the purpose of research (Mason, 2005). It is in the light of these influences that the data is presented.

Case Study Method

Using a qualitative approach, the research fell into three parts:

1) a pilot focus group to test out the research questions

2) a focus group with VCS managers who already knew each other

3) a series of one-to-one interviews with managers, teachers and volunteers in three VCS organisations

The first part is discussed in Chapter 3, Methodology, and the second two parts will be presented in this chapter.

The combination of a focus group and one-to-one interviews allowed for the specific nature of the VCS to be analysed and the views of managers, teachers and manager-teachers to be collated. It also provided 'micro' case studies of the organisations involved in the interviews which offered richer comparative data to track similarities and differences within organisations and across the VCS. Although I have not focused on any one organisation, I still use a case study approach in the sense that the research 'aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its context' (Punch, 1998:150). Although some theorists dismiss case studies as too parochial and lacking in scientific rigour, Flyvbjerg (2006:224) defends the importance of case studies by arguing that people can only develop into experts on the basis of 'context-dependent knowledge' and that 'cases are important for researchers' own learning processes in developing the skills needed to do good research'. He also examines how observation rather than large scale statistical analysis leads to new theories because '*the force of example*' (2006:228) is often underestimated in critiques. This picks up on the tools of grounded research in that the researcher must be reflexive, observant and open thus allowing the research to unfold and lead the analysis rather than to be directed or constrained. As Stake (2000b:436) notes, the case study 'is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied'. It is the object - mentoring in the voluntary sector - that is important to shaping the data and how it is interpreted within this research. Following Stake's descriptions (2000b:437), this research is an 'instrumental case study' because I have examined a particular case 'to provide insight into an issue'. In

Flyvbjerg's terms the VCS would be a 'critical case' (2006:229) as it has strategic importance within a wider problem; it offers research into the least well-developed part of the PCET sector but is still likely to yield significant information from a small number of providers. The VCS organisations in which I have undertaken the research are the vehicle for providing data on mentoring and their very nature provides an area that is under-researched and potentially offering the most extreme 'case' in terms of the introduction of mentoring.

Yin's (1989:23) description of the case study is something which:

> …investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used…

This is useful to explain how the case study is the vehicle for studying and clarifying a subject. The point of clarification becomes particularly important during discussions as it highlights confusion and inconsistency. The case study that I undertake also covers the three categories offered by Yin: exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. This is because there is little written about mentoring in the VCS and it is necessary to describe at the same time as analysing the emerging data in an attempt to explain the current situation.

My research may be contested as a case study approach in that it does not aim to understand the nature of the individual organisations in which the research is undertaken. Rather, it identifies common themes emerging from the data which are relevant to the wider VCS. I do not seek to understand the

organisations, which would be more appropriate for an ethnographic study (Cresswell, 2007), only to use them as a context and vehicle for exploring the engagement of the VCS with mentoring for ITT. Like Flyvbjerg, I would argue that the case study has its own rigour and 'can "close in" on real life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice' (2006:235). It is the unfolding, questioning nature of the case study that parallels the developing understanding of mentoring for ITT in the VCS.

Tools

A focus group and interviews were used to collect data. All participants were informed that the questions were to explore the current situation across the sector rather than to make any judgement on the organisation or the individual. They were also assured that the data would be kept confidential. Providing this context was important to ensure that both the focus group and interviews could be conducted within a framework of semi-structured questions to encourage participants to explore their position and thoughts freely. I only prompted or clarified responses when participants stopped speaking. Some of my questions are potentially directive as I was concerned to pursue certain lines of investigation within the constraints of the time available to me. It was also important to develop trust with the participants and, as can be seen in the interview where the interviewee had never met me before, it allowed for a freer flow of conversation if the participant was relaxed.

Although my aim was to encourage data to emerge unconstrained and unfettered by current discourses, it is inevitable that my own thought process

will have influenced the way in which I managed the interactions with participants in both the focus group and interviews. Similarly, my interpretations of the data were not undertaken in isolation from my own views nor from the influence of the literature I had read whilst completing this research. Like Rogers (2007) I am aware that I bring with me a range of embedded assumptions which will affect the way in which I use the research tools and interpret the emerging data.

Design

This section describes the *Design* of the research. It is split into two parts; *Framework* describes the shape and timing of the research, and *Practice* details the process of the research during the data collection.

Framework

The research followed a linear path in terms of data collection. I undertook a pilot focus group to test out semi-structured questions (discussed in Chapter 3). This was followed by a focus group which was opportunistic in that I was able to work with an already established group of managers as part of a regular network meeting. I was then able to work with one organisation represented at the focus group and two other organisations in order to undertake one-to-one interviews. This enabled me to further explore some of the issues arising in the focus group whilst allowing other data to emerge.

Table 4 shows how the participants engaged with the research framework and their role within their organisations. A1 is the only participant who took part in both the focus group and an individual interview.

Table 4 - Participants

Participant	Cluster Group	One-to-one	Manager	Teacher	Teacher-Manager
A1	✓	✓	✓		
A2		✓		✓	
C1		✓			✓
B1		✓	✓		
B2		✓			✓
B3		✓		✓	
F1	✓				✓
F2	✓		✓		
F3	✓				✓
F4	✓				✓
F5	✓				✓
F6	✓		✓		

Timing of the Research

The research was timed to follow the introduction of the new ITT qualifications requiring trainee-teachers to have a mentor whilst undertaking teaching qualifications. It also followed a year of awareness-raising for providers

through presentations from organisations such as Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK), the Institute for Learning (IfL) and the Quality Improvement Agency (now the Learning and Skills Improvement Service).

Timing was important as the research sets out to establish the position when the ITT requirements were introduced rather than at a later stage when practice and ideas are more settled. Table 5 shows the timetable for the research.

Table 5 - Timetable of Data Collection

Phase	Dates	Type of Activity	Participant
	September 2007	ITT regulations come into force	
Pilot	February 2008	Focus group	Pilot A, Pilot B,
Research	March 2008	Focus group of managers	A1, F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6
	May 2008	Interview	B1
	May 2008	Interview	B2
	May 2008	Interview	B3
	May 2008	Interview	A1
	May 2008	Interview	A2
	June 2008	Interview	C1

The following section of this chapter is *Practice,* which describes the process of data collection.

Practice

A full account of the different parts of the research and when they happened can be found in Chapter 3, Research Methodology

I will now describe the data collection and coding for the focus group and interviews.

Data collection and coding of the focus group and interview data

Each transcript was coded in two ways; thematically and by research question. Some parts of the transcript were coded more than once; for example, comments relating to the purpose of mentoring frequently overlapped with the role of mentors and the skills ascribed to them. By coding from emerging themes in the first instance this allowed the analysis to remain grounded in what was important to the participants rather than what would fit with my research aims. I also began the coding before I had finished all the interviews, as I wanted to identify ideas and threads for closer examination as the interviews progressed to ensure that the theory and data were working together without one taking precedence (what Blaikie (2000:25) calls 'abductive research strategy'). Once all the interviews were complete, I revisited the initial coding to identify elements missed in the first analysis. Only when the themes had been identified, as well as comments which seemed to stand alone, were the research questions brought to bear on the analysis. The aim was to minimise researcher influence at this early stage which may have led to comments being sifted out which could illuminate the specificity of the situation for the VCS. The interviews were then re-read in light of the research questions so that the comments could be used to illustrate the research questions. Examples were checked for their context by returning to their original audio recording and transcript in each case.

The rest of this chapter provides an analysis of the data collected from the focus group.

The focus group data

As a result of the pilot focus group, I had simplified the prompt questions for use with the focus group and had reworded questions in the knowledge that they would cover more than one of the research questions. I was also more prepared to allow the discussion to run to the agenda of the participants with minimal prompts to bring it back to the issue of ITT mentoring if this became necessary. Similarly, I was aware that the prompt questions may not be needed or may be superseded by the flow of the discussion. The prompt questions are contained in Appendix C.

The process

As this group of managers had met before and the focus group took part at the end of a regular scheduled meeting, I did not need to introduce the participants to each other or to gain any background information on the individuals as they were all known to me. I did, however, open the discussion by clarifying what would be discussed (to provide a framework for their thoughts) and to ask if anybody had a mentoring system in place. I then asked if anybody had teachers going through the training process and whether they had a mentor. The aim of these questions was to ground the discussion clearly within the role of ITT mentoring. The responses were quite short and hesitant at this point so I moved on to ask 'what do you think are the key

issues of introducing mentoring in your settings?' This immediately generated interaction and the discussion became more self-directed. I did not ask directly any more of the questions on my prompt sheet as the participants were covering these points with the thread of their discussion. The focus group seemed able to raise questions, bounce thoughts and ideas to each other and progress lines of thought without much intervention. Whilst this approach allowed the group to tackle issues of interest to them rather than being driven by my research interests this made it more difficult for me during the analysis phase as I did not necessarily have 'answers' to my research questions. Whilst I would not expect neat responses that I could fit into boxes and the unexpected answers are often the most illuminating, it did mean that I had more comprehensive data for some parts of the research than others, something which I could not control using the tools of grounded research. As such, I was more aware of the need to look for links to my research questions in the interviews even though I was not able to use my chosen research tools to mediate for this unevenness of response.

Analysis

An initial analysis of the focus group transcript highlighted four recurrent themes which link to the research questions:

1) **confusion** as to what was expected or needed, how to define mentoring, what was already happening and what would work

2) the **role and characteristics** expected of a mentor, particularly in relation to the concept of **support** as a key element of mentoring

3) **barriers** to the successful introduction of mentoring, perceived and real

4) the **specific nature** of the VCS in relation to ITT mentoring and how this affects the experience of mentoring

The participants were generally in agreement about the issues facing the VCS, particularly the potential barriers. However, where there was disagreement, this has been noted and examined to ensure that all views are valued and offered to illuminate the research questions.

The above themes linked to the research questions although it should be remembered that some of the responses can only be associated by researcher interpretation and inference so may be influenced by my particular interests. To provide a structure for analysis and to acknowledge the issues that were of importance to the participants, I have grouped their responses within the four themes identified above and then analysed them against the research questions.

Even though there is a wealth of data in the focus group transcript, there is very little which directly addresses the third research question regarding the models that are already in use. This is partly due to the 'newness' of mentoring and partly to my line of questioning. As I had chosen not to direct the discussion, I did not ask questions that would have elicited more data on what the participants considered to be existing mentoring activities. This is a weakness in the data. Similarly, there is limited data for research question 2 regarding the activities that are currently taking place which would be defined as mentoring because I did not guide the discussion to cover this area. Again,

this is a weakness in the data but is as a result of my chosen research approach. To compensate for this, the flow of the discussion is driven by the interests of the participants rather than my interests thus making the emerging data less susceptible to researcher influence. Also, the lack of data on issues I would like to have explored in more detail means that there is more data on the areas of interest to the participants, which is a better reflection of the current concerns of managers and practitioners affected by issues of mentoring. The data is therefore more representative than if I had attempted to direct it and by presenting the data reflexively I aim to create transparency throughout the analysis (Mason, 2005:149).

Although I used themes to structure the analysis in the first instance, this led to multiple over-lapping strands when I came to write the analysis. This appears to be due to the confusion permeating the discussion and lack of existing mentoring models. This became even more problematic when examining the data from the one-to-one interviews. This may be due to the 'newness' of mentoring for ITT, or it may be because the VCS are less engaged with current discourses or it may be because the VCS is fragmented and does not have the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas in the way the focus group allowed. This is discussed further in Chapter 5. I therefore decided to take a pragmatic approach and, for purposes of clarity and comparison, I chose to use the research questions as my 'themes' for presenting the data in order to provide a more coherent framework. This led to a double layer in terms of thematic analysis; the themes that I identified as

emerging from the data and the overarching themes contained in the research questions. I will now examine each research question in turn.

What does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS?

The first research question was designed to explore issues of definition as well as to identify whether the views of managers and practitioners were similar or divergent. This was a way of offering some triangulation of data by comparing the views of managers and practitioners. It was also in recognition that many people in the VCS undertake dual roles as managers and teachers, even though they hold senior positions within the organisation. As such, I wanted to identify any trends related to the participants' roles and any trends specific to the VCS setting. Members of the focus group reflected this situation as they were a mixture of managers and manager/teachers. All the focus group members had a management role and all but one manager had a teaching role.

The data that emerged around this research question was a mixture of views on mentoring and mentors. As these two terms can mean quite different things (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of this point), one being a process, the other being a role, it is important to be clear how these differ in the analysis. Throughout the following section the two concepts are examined in terms of:

- 'mentoring' linked to the theme of confusion
- 'mentor' linked to the concepts of role and skills.

The term mentee is not examined in the same detail as, like the literature, it did not appear in the data as a discrete item for discussion. Where it is raised, the analysis is set against the role of a mentor.

Mentoring and Confusion

Although it was not my intention when devising the question, it became apparent that, before discussing definitions of mentor and mentoring, it was important to allow space for the participants to share their confusions and concerns. My opening question was to establish how many people had experience of mentoring under the ITT. Only one participant had some awareness. This led to me to ask an open question, 'what do you think are the key issues of introducing mentoring in your setting?' to stimulate some discussion. This prompted the response from A1 of:

"Having an understanding of what mentoring is all about." (P2/L19)

This led others to question what the expectations would be of managers and mentors. For instance, F2 said:

"…I have no idea what the expectations are…within a PTLLS course."

(P3/L10)

There was general agreement with these comments amongst the focus group. This indicates that none of the participants had a clear understanding of what mentoring would mean in the context of ITT and within their organisations or that none of them were prepared to offer a definition of mentoring. This is a phenomenon apparent throughout the literature on mentoring (Matthews, 2003; Woodd, 2001) as there is no single definition of mentoring or even an agreed set of elements associated with mentoring (see Chapter 2, Page 23

for a discussion of definitions). All participants seemed to be unclear about how mentoring would work even when staff were already engaged in teacher-training. For instance, F1 noted:

> "…we've got one person that's gone, that's got their PTLLS, not so sure about a mentor." (P1/L20)

Although this organisation had engaged with the PTLLS course and the ITT process, the manager was unclear whether or not mentoring had taken place. This would indicate that mentoring is not being used, not being used effectively, not having an impact on the organisation or communication within the organisation is weak.

This discussion around meanings and the current situation stimulated considerable debate about the perceived problems and barriers associated with mentoring. The focus on negative aspects seems to be in contrast with much received wisdom that mentoring is 'a good thing'. However, F5 commented that:

> "…I don' think any of us have asked and I don't know what level of time we need to be putting into this mentoring against the duration of teaching."
>
> (P32/L19)

This observation was made towards the end of the discussion and yet was an important point of clarity because, as F5 went on to say, they may have been getting "het up" over something quite minor. In terms of the discussion, this is a general observation but is a vital point with regard to the definition and purpose of mentoring, as much of the discussion took place without any stated 'framework of understanding'. This is an idea I will revisit in Chapter 5.

There was clearly concern about the need to undertake additional work for ITT although there was no resistance to the idea of mentoring itself. This echoes the implicit assumption identified in the literature that mentoring is a 'good thing' (Bubb, 2006; DfES, 2004; Roberts, 2000; Cohen, 1995; Parsloe, 1995) for trainee teachers, even though the participants were identifying practical constraints to its successful introduction. There was also disquiet at the lack of information available to the VCS. As F1 observed:

"I suppose the fundamental thing is we're all a bit in the dark." (P33/L5)

This may be a comment relevant to many providers at this point in the introduction of mentoring for ITT but it seems unlikely that FE colleges who are delivering ITT courses will feel quite so ill-informed. Also, the need to have time to consider the implications was noted by F6:

"It's all so new that you need a bit of time to reflect." (P32/L3)

This is a critical observation and one which is often lost in the rush of implementing a new initiative. F6 has highlighted the need to absorb the new information and activities and then take time to consider how things are working or could work. Rather than simply accepting what is on offer or what is being driven by other interests, there will be a need for reflection and evaluation.

The way in which the focus group progressed showed that many of the participants were unclear about mentoring as a concept generally. This made it difficult for most of them to express views from a position of experience, authority or confidence. Whilst the participants voiced concerns, sometimes

quite angrily, they were not arguing against the introduction of mentoring for ITT purposes. Rather, they were worried that they would not be able to do it effectively and as F5 said:

> "…it's not just ourselves as managers of organisations that need to know but, but the actual potential teacher-learner needs to know."
>
> (P33/L19)

The lack of clarity was acknowledged as having an impact on the organisation (discussed in more detail in the next section) as well as the trainee-teacher.

The confusion that emerged during the discussions was both explicit and implicit. Much of this was based on a lack of knowledge about the requirements of the ITT in relation to mentoring. This was in terms of what was required of individual organisations as well as what was required of ITT mentoring systems. There was no specific definition of mentoring offered by participants other than a general agreement that it involved supporting the mentee. Also, the lack of clarity about the ITT requirements meant that the purpose and outcomes of mentoring activity could not be clearly described or defined. It was the underlying theme throughout the focus group and this may well have driven the bulk of the discussion towards perceived barriers rather than potential benefits.

Mentor - The role and attributes expected of a mentor

Although participants had limited experience of mentors as part of the ITT process, they all had experience of being mentors or being mentored, either formally or informally. As such, they were able to describe, directly and

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indirectly, the role and the attributes they expected of a mentor. I will discuss these two elements separately.

Role

There was no single statement that encapsulated the role of a mentor which clearly reflects the literature (Matthews, 2003; Woodd, 2001). This links into the theme of confusion as shown by F1 when she said:

"…I wonder what the difference is between the tutor's role and a mentor's." (P26/L6)

The impact of the uncertainty around definition led to the focus group itself becoming a vehicle for examining the potential role of mentors. It was almost as though my interest in the views of providers in the VCS gave them a voice and the potential to resist the ideas and definitions being presented by FE providers. As Foucault (1980) identified, such resistance often takes place at a local level, leading to shifts in how power is exercised and providing pleasure for those who are resisting the power. As such, the research had an influence on the way in which participants presented their understanding of the term mentor (and mentoring).

Support was one of the most frequently mentioned aspects of mentoring. It is one of the few things consistently associated with the role of mentor by all participants. F2 is very clear about this when she says:

"A mentor is there to support." (P4/L15)

This is a rare direct statement as most other comments are more hesitant and exploratory in nature. The importance of support as part of mentoring is backed up by F1 when she says that:

> "I thought a mentor would be someone that, as you say, would support someone in their teaching process." (P6/L14)

Here F1 acknowledges the link between a mentor providing support and the need to develop the trainee teacher. Also, she alludes to the fact that it is ongoing and practitioner-based as she refers to a "teaching process", something which would take place over time and would address practical issues arising in teaching activities. F1 could also be referring to the administrative process needed to support teaching, such as completing the correct paperwork. Both interpretations of the word "process" indicate that the mentor is needed as part of the development of a teacher. Although slightly more hesitant (using "I thought" rather than "it is"), F1's comment is still a clear statement rather than a suggestion. Other comments, although expressing an opinion, seem less direct in their nature. For instance, A1 saw the role of a mentor as:

> "…supporting if somebody was struggling." (P7/L1)

And someone who:

> "…would talk through what are the issues." (P7L11)

These statements feel more general and interpretative, less related to the role of an ITT mentor and more of a coaching or counselling role. A1 has identified the need for support as something related to a 'problem' when someone is struggling with their work. This may reflect A1's position and background as

she works in a setting which uses counselling as a tool for building confidence and her own job does not include teaching.

Broadening out the idea of support within the mentor's role, F5 felt that the role should be to bring:

> "…supportive examples…" that "…enables the person to reflect more…" (P8/L5)

She goes on to include support for planning and the curriculum in the role of the mentor. This is an example of how the concept of support permeates the discussion in a positive way so that the role of mentor is one which facilitates the development of the trainee teacher. However, F2 draws a much closer link to the ITT qualification for the role of the mentor when she describes the mentor as being:

> "…someone that if you are having problems with an assignment you would go to." (P6/L9)

Support is implicit in this statement but F2 clearly sees the role as more than this. She ascribes a function to it as part of the ITT process. Whether talking about the way in which the mentor interacts with the mentee or the role of the mentor in relation to meeting the needs of the ITT, support is a key concept for all the participants. This emphasis on support is further evidenced in the data collected in the one-to-one interviews and will be discussed again in that section.

Another link to the ITT requirements was identified by F6 when she talks about observations of teaching and learning:

"It's a lot of stress, isn't it? I've seen people under a lot of stress, they, they're being observed, well they are, but also I can see how it would, sometime, depending on the personalities involved I suppose."

(P28/L3)

Her concern seems to be that mentors will undertake observations and that the mentors need to be sensitive and have the right 'personality' or traits (Cunningham, 2005; Woodd, 2001) to avoid stress for the mentee. If support is seen to be so important then any activity which could be perceived as taking on an evaluative role may cause tension. This highlights one of the potential challenges for the mentor if their role is to 'judge' the mentee, something that Cunningham describes as 'role conflict' (2005:96). Although the mentor and mentee may be effectively 'peers' within an organisation or a mentor may not be a qualified teacher, they may be required to evaluate the performance of a trainee teacher which could lead to conflict. (This differs from the schools sector, as teachers in the PCET sector are not required to be fully qualified until 2010 and there is currently no requirement for mentors to hold mentoring qualifications.) Their 'judgements' could be used to decide on whether or not the trainee teacher is performing to the standard required by the ITT qualification and this, in turn, may affect the trainee teacher's employment opportunities.

Possibly the closest to a definition of the role of a mentor is a comment offered by F1 when she describes the importance of support:

> "I thought a mentor would be someone that, as you say, would support someone in their teaching process. And help them to make them be the best teacher they can be." (P7/L13)

Within this statement, F1 captures what seems to be the essence of mentoring for most participants; support. She also ties in the importance of the mentor supporting the teaching process (to meet the needs of both the ITT and the organisation) and to improve the quality of teaching (which would be in the interests of all parties, learners, teachers, managers, funders and the government). This definition seems to meet the needs of all stakeholders.

The discussion between members of the focus group showed that there was no clear understanding of what a mentor was or would do in relation to supporting trainee teachers. There was, however, a generally positive acceptance that having a mentor was a 'good thing' although the practical constraints of introducing a mentoring system provoked considerable concern. There did not appear to be a discernible difference between the views of participants who were manager-teachers and the one person who was solely a manager.

Attributes

When describing what was needed in a mentor, the participants referred to a wide range of attributes in terms of skills and expertise. Through the discussion it became clear that a mentor would need to be multi-skilled (as identified by Hankey, 2004), and that this would be difficult to achieve. As F5 said,

"I think it's idealistic to have, to expect that everybody is going to find someone who is skills-based perfect and managerial or delivery perfect. The three areas. I think it is at this moment in time at least. Once this whole thing has been running for ten years and we have, umm god forbid, we ever get that far, and we've got resources and we've up skilled, etc, then it might be a totally different kettle of fish."

(P19/L13)

Here, F5 highlights how complex the role of a mentor could be as she indicates that, in this setting, they would need to have the right subject-specific skills, have management abilities and be an excellent teacher. She then goes on to say that this might be achievable over time but not at this point. This indicates that providers within the VCS perceive the introduction of mentoring for ITT as unachievable because the sector is not adequately prepared in terms of resources. This may be another factor preventing VCS providers from embracing the changes and engaging in discourses as they may feel ITT mentoring is so far out of reach that it is better to leave it to others.

The discussion around the attributes perceived as necessary for a mentor can be further sub-divided into four areas:

- experience
- personal attributes
- generic and subject-specific teaching skills
- skills of a mentor

Experience

Flowing through the discussion was an implicit expectation that mentors would be experienced teachers or, at the very least, experienced managers able to support teachers. Experience is often picked up by writers as an important attribute for a mentor (Matthews, 2003 identifies Kram, 1985, Ragins, 1989, Beardwell and Holden, 1994, Smith, 1998 and Walton, 1999 all include experience in their definitions of mentor). There seems to be a certain status associated with being experienced that is suited to the role of mentor. F5 said that a mentor is:

> "… someone who brings into the um, into the process of learning, um, a depth and level of experience, that the learner doesn't have." (P8/L1)

And later said that a mentor helps teachers to reflect more:

> "…and do it within that context of a broader experience." (P8/L9)

Here F5 is assuming that an experienced teacher, acting as mentor, will be able to draw on their accumulated knowledge and share it with the trainee teacher. She does not question whether they will have the skills to pass on this knowledge appropriately or successfully.

F3, although challenging a point being made about the need for a mentor to be in-house, was reinforcing the underlying assumption that mentors need experience when she said:

> "I'm going to disagree with that because I think mentoring is about, umm, experience and I think that you can learn good experience and share good practice from other organisations other than your own."
>
> (P18/L19)

The need for experience and the ability to use this to 'teach' the mentee seemed to be accepted by all members of the focus group. However, it was not clear whether all members felt that the experience had to be as a teacher. For instance, A1 stated that she did not have a teaching background but she was acting as a mentor. She was not challenged on this by other members of the focus group. This could be a reflection of the pragmatic nature of the VCS, where staff are often required to undertake multiple roles and to learn on the job. It could also be a belief that experience is a generic attribute in that it does not matter where the experience is gained but how it is used by the mentor.

Another difficulty in interpreting the perception of what skills are required of mentors is the nature of the profession in which this research is taking place. It is not clear whether it is assumed that the skill of 'teaching' a mentee is linked to the role of being a mentor or whether it is just taken-for-granted because the setting is an educational one. Therefore, being an experienced teacher may be a huge advantage in any mentoring role, but this may not have been seen as worthy of particular note by the focus group members as it is part of the fabric of the research setting. This picks up on the notion of Smith et al. (2005) that the attributes of a mentor are linked to the organisational setting. The way in which mentors and mentees are perceived and defined is closely allied to the ethos in which they work. They are 'constructed' to fit the needs and beliefs of the organisation. It is almost as if it is too difficult to offer a definition because it is too abstracted from reality and existing notions are not yet comfortable for the VCS. In the absence of

something tangible, it appears that discussions fall back on a form of ostensive definition (Govier, 2001:105) in that the easiest way to express what is meant by mentor is to metaphorically point to what it looks like or feels like. This helps to explain why there is a reliance on terms such as character and attributes as they are easier to recognise and describe.

Personal attributes

Within the discussion of mentors, there was no clear description as to what attributes would be associated with the role. This may be because the participants did not have a clear understanding of what was required from a mentor and they did not have experience of someone mentoring for ITT, which meant they did not have a 'benchmark' of a good mentor. However, there was still reference made to mentors in terms of the role requiring someone who was "multi-skilled" (P9/L3), an idea developed by Hankey (2004), and "able to support [mentees] in whatever context they're in" (F2 – P4/L17). F5 also referred to the need to 'find the right person' (P10/L6) which indicates that there is a set of skills or characteristics which the mentor needs to possess in order to carry out the role although these may not be standardised or even recognised as such. Many writers have acknowledged that mentors have certain characteristics (Woodd, 2001; Cunningham, 2005; Smith et al., 2005) but there is little agreement in the literature as to what these characteristics are or how to identify them. In an education world based on standards and targets, it is difficult to see how F5 would identify the "right person" to be a mentor as she has no professional standards against which to judge a potential mentor. There seems to be considerable reliance on

choosing mentors on the basis of intuition and who would appear to fit in with the organisation.

No one in the focus group employed mentors in a formal role at the time of the research. However, some participants felt that mentoring was taking place which indicated informal activity. This meant that none of the participants could talk about the skills or attributes of a mentor from the basis of current experience or even an agreed job description. Therefore, many of their comments are instinctive and possibly linked to how they would like a mentor to behave. A1 referred to someone who would:

"…talk through what are the issues." (P7/L11)

This is a relatively generic skill which can be associated with roles such as counselling or line management rather than necessarily being something specific to a mentor. It is also a skill which is unlikely to be prescribed in a job description. All of the participants referred to the need for mentors to provide 'support' in some way, but this seemed to be the only point of commonality in the discussion, even though there was little obvious disagreement between the participants. Again, these comments point to a general feeling of what a mentor should be like without specific measures to identify and describe how to recognise a mentor.

The issue of personality was raised by F5 and F4 (P11) particularly in relation to matching mentors and mentees. They did not specify what 'type' of personality would be more or less suited to being a mentor, but they were highlighting the potential for personality to affect the mentoring relationship.

This implies that some people may be more suited to mentoring because of their personality, or their ability to manage their traits, or the way in which mentor/mentee personalities are matched. The implicit assumption is that mentors already have certain attributes which make them more suited or attracted to mentoring. As Clutterbuck (1998) notes, the likelihood of mentoring relationships being successful is greatly enhanced if mentors receive some formal training so, even if they do have appropriate innate skills, these will benefit from structured development. By assuming that mentors are predisposed to certain behaviours, VCS providers may be limiting the effectiveness of mentoring relationships.

Generic or subject-specific teaching skills

As well as an expectation that mentors were experienced, there was also an implicit acceptance that mentors should be teachers. This was not directly questioned even when A1 said that she was acting as a mentor although she was not a qualified teacher. The focus group did not discuss whether mentors should be teachers, nor did they examine whether a generic or a subject-specific mentor would be more appropriate. Rather, they were concerned about the resource implications of providing subject-specific mentors as dictated in the legislation and this curtailed any further discussion. As F2 noted:

> "…has your teacher got a level of expertise, em, you know, how are you going to get subject specialists? I mean, I'm thinking of my wider family learning teachers. We do fitness, we do art and craft…" (P20/L6)

F5 picked up on the point by questioning whether funding would stop if subject specialists were not available in all subjects. In particular she identified a discussion group that she was running saying:

> "…although the government agenda is there for the, for the older people and this is a really good thing and we're being funded to do it but we can actually…can't do it because we haven't got any one who is qualified in it and there isn't a qualification in it, therefore you can't… you can't… can't… I mean, silly." (P20/L14)

Here F5 seems to be voicing a concern that the current model for ITT is based on FE practice which does not reflect the reality for VCS providers as many of their courses may not have a clear subject-specialism. For instance, courses such as confidence building are generic first-step provision to re-engage some of the most disenfranchised adults in the community and it may be difficult to find suitable mentors for teachers delivering these courses.

One comment that seemed to encapsulate a very specific problem for the VCS, in relation to the teaching experience required for mentors, is that many of their managers are not necessarily qualified teachers and so may not be appropriate role models, something which Cunningham (2005) felt was fundamental to being a mentor. As A1 said:

> "…it's more my role to mentor this person, but I don't have all those skills you've talked about." (P12/L12)

Without these teaching skills and qualifications it may be difficult for VCS mentors to fulfil the requirements of a mentor role or to feel confident doing so. The nature of the sector means that managers often come through the

volunteer route, an associated profession (such as social work) or are recruited for their commitment to the organisational ethos rather than for their teaching skills. F5 highlighted this when she described members of her teaching team who had been:

"…taken on for very specific reasons – they come from a community."

(P30/L3)

The impact of this in terms of finding experienced teachers to mentor trainee teachers was apparent throughout the focus group discussion. It was also reflected in the minimal contributions offered by F1 and F6, as both of these participants work in organisations where awareness about professional teaching qualifications is just beginning. Although this may change now that the ITT requirements have been introduced, the focus group participants had exposed a legacy problem based on VCS providers being driven by different stakeholders to FE colleges. Whereas being a qualified teacher is part of the profession within FE, many VCS providers will have different professionals underpinning their organisation, such as social workers and the clergy.

Skills of a mentor

As noted above, the participants had identified a range of skills required of a mentor that would lead to the role being one for a multi-skilled person (Hankey, 2004). This can be seen when I prompted the participants to identify which skills they were talking about:

Int   …trying to pick out the key words there, is that about expertise

in the subject or the teaching and learning or the organisation?

F5   Could it not be all?

All talk at once. (All areas, it could be all areas, hmm).

F5   Because it's like those three areas which are now being required under CPD. Um, you'd get your skills base. You've got your delivery getting the best for the tutor, then there's the, the concept of the planning, and the curriculum, and ... that type of thing.

Int   So, that's a multi-skilled person, are we talking about here?

F2   Yes, mmm, agree, it would have to have, yes. (P8/L15)

The participants agreed that a mentor needs to be an expert within their subject area as well as teaching delivery and knowledge of the organisation. This is a complex skills set but does not explicitly include the 'transference' skills needed for a mentor to work successfully with a mentee. The only point when this type of interpersonal skills is identified is when F4 raises the need for mentors to:

"…build that rapport quick enough to make it… effective and useful."

(P13/L11)

The focus group discussion does not explore how mentors build and maintain a relationship in terms of the interpersonal skills required although there is an implicit acceptance that listening, support and teaching skills will be part of the role. Again, this may reflect both the professional environment of teaching as well as the specific setting of the VCS, where these types of interpersonal skills may be assumed to be commonplace.

Moving beyond the interpersonal skills of mentors, the professional skills and qualifications are questioned when F4 asks:

"And do the mentors need to be trained to be mentors?" (P22/L13)

This is followed up by A1 who asks:

"…do they need to be accredited?" (P23/L8)

The participants are not arguing against training and qualifications. They are, however, checking what is required as this will impact on their ability to meet the demands of the ITT. There is an acceptance of the underlying premise around the skills and qualifications needed which reflects the ethos of the setting, but a frustration with the practical implementation being imposed from outside.

One other area which was touched upon in terms of the overlap with other skills is when A1 makes a link with counselling. She says:

"…it's almost like a bit of counselling isn't it? You would sit (right), and you (right) would talk through what are the issues. Why are you finding it difficult? (P7/L1)

All of the organisations involved provide Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and counselling as part of their service and many staff are trained in this work. As such, the person-centred skills associated with IAG and counselling in terms of working with mentees to ensure relationship building, non-judgemental listening and support (Rogers, 2007) mean that issues around interpersonal skills may be of less concern as they are embedded into the organisation. Discussions about mentor skills in other settings might need to focus on understanding the interpersonal skills and making them explicit, but

these seem to be taken-for-granted in the focus group. Instead, the discussion here is concerned with the practical implementation of the work. This may also imply some tacit knowledge within the VCS more generally in that an understanding of counselling will offer an insight into mentoring because some of the practical skills and underpinning theories are shared across both. However, without the opportunity to explore these links, it will be difficult for VCS practitioners to acknowledge the depth of their understanding or how this is put into practice. Also, assumptions about the use of counselling skills may lead to difficulties in boundaries and approaches if the mentoring relationships require judgements to be made.

Discussions around definitions inevitably linked into the practical activities associated with mentoring and this will be examined in the next section.

What activities are taking place in the VCS that could be defined as mentoring?

This research question was the least well addressed within the focus group forum. Although participants were able to talk about mentoring in a general sense and within other organisations, they initially appeared to have limited experience within their own organisation. However, this could be due to a misunderstanding as to what mentoring involves. A1 illustrated this point with a comment that demonstrated how the confusion about the ITT requirements overlapped with confusion as to the role of a mentor within organisations. She observed that:

> "…perhaps we all mentor in a way when we're doing work reviews and appraisals, but is it different to what will be mentoring if you've got a member of staff going though the teacher qualification?" (P3/L5)

This shows how mentoring activity can be intertwined with other activity and that providing a vehicle such as the ITT may give mentoring activities a more distinctive purpose. It also gave a strong indication that mentoring is already taking place, although it may not be identified or perceived as such, either by those 'mentoring' or those being 'mentored'. This sort of 'accidental mentoring' is not addressed in the literature as it is often assumed to be a separate or planned function,

Only one participant, F5, was able to describe mentoring activity in direct relation to the ITT requirements because a member of staff had undertaken a PTLLS course with a FE provider. This had not been a positive experience, partly because the "mentor was imposed" (P3/L20) and partly because there was a:

> "…mismatch between the mentor's expectations and the organisational ethos and expectations." (P4/L5)

F5 goes on to say that:

> "…discussions had to take place as to what we felt was appropriate and what this mentor was looking for." (P4/L8)

Here, there is an intervention by the employer between the mentor and the mentee as a result of what is seen as unsuitable mentoring activity. However, there is no further detail as to why it was unsuitable. Although the organisation was not undertaking mentoring there was clearly an expectation as to the

nature and content of the mentoring experience. None of the other participants offered any further examples of mentoring activity although they agreed with the comments of their colleagues. This may mean that mentoring activity is not taking place, is undervalued or unvalued. It could be that activities seen as line management or counselling are actually fulfilling the mentoring role so that mentoring is unconsciously excluded from the discourses of support. Alternatively, some organisations may have made strategic decisions not to identify activities as mentoring, as they prefer to include it in other roles for organisational or practical reasons (this can be seen in the interviews with A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 which are discussed later).

From this limited data, it is difficult to give a clear description of current mentoring activity within these organisations. Formal mentoring does seem to be limited to external mentoring (as described by F5) and informal mentoring is taking place as part of line management roles. Even so, the participants all expressed views about what they would expect from a mentoring system, which indicates that they have an awareness of what constitutes mentoring activity.

What mentoring models are already in use in the VCS?

As with research question two, it was difficult to identify existing mentoring models as none of the providers had a specific model of mentoring in place. However, some were accessing (or about to access) mentoring on offer from other organisations as part of the ITT courses and others described how they were supporting staff. It is these two elements that I will consider in this

section; external mentoring models being used and in-house mentoring activity which had not been formalised into a mentoring system.

The one concrete example of a mentoring model in use was that described by F5. A member of her team had attended a PTLLS course with a FE college and the experience had been a negative one because the mentor had been "imposed" and there was a:

> "…mismatch between the mentor's expectations and the organisational ethos and expectations." (P4/L5)

F5 explained that, as the organisation was a women's centre (therefore, women-only space) the mentor had to be a woman. The FE college provided a male mentor and informed the organisation that it was their problem. This is a very crude example of mentors needing to be 'like' their mentees as examined by Smith et al (2005). F5 went on to say that there was also a mismatch based on perceptions of what the mentor's role was because:

> "…the mentor could see themselves as absolutely supporting the student in order to get the qualification…" but "…this person is delivering in our context in a particular way." (P5/L3)

This highlights a tension between the aims of the external mentor (to ensure the mentee achieves the qualification by producing appropriate academic evidence) and the needs of the organisation (to deliver in a way which is appropriate to the learners). Using an external mentor provided by the FE teacher-training provider is pragmatic and ensured that a mentor with an understanding of the ITT requirements was available. However, it did not

necessarily meet the needs of the mentee or the organisation. As Cox (2003:1) citing Harris (1995) notes,

> Invariably in the coaching and mentoring area it is the relationship which is emphasised, whilst the contexts, which impact on the relationship and within which the relationship exists, are downplayed.

This observation reflects the experience of F5 and highlights the importance of the context in which mentoring relationships operate. Without an awareness of the impact of the context, it is unlikely that mentoring activity will be effective as it will not meet the needs of all the stakeholders.

One other organisation, represented by A1, had staff who were already engaged in PTLLS courses. Rather than using a mentor from the FE college, the line manager was providing support. This manager was not a qualified teacher, did not know the requirements of the ITT awards and did not have a mentoring background. She acknowledged that she did not hold a teaching qualification and felt she did not have the skills required of a mentor ((P12/L13). Although she had undertaken the role of mentoring staff on the PTLLS course because she felt it was her responsibility, she did not make any claims to be an ITT mentor. Rather she said that:

> "…it's almost like a bit of counselling, isn't it? You would sit…would talk through what are the issues. Why are you finding it difficult? Can I help you in any way – if it was a member of staff. Can I give you a bit more time? You know, do you need an afternoon off?" (P7/L7)

The description here is about a supportive line-management approach, using listening skills associated with counselling. This does not constitute a formal

mentoring model but does have elements that provide a practical problem-solving mechanism from the point of view of both the mentee and the organisation. It also shows that A1 is working reflectively, examining how she is interacting with a mentee and the skills in use. Again, this is a pragmatic approach which meets the needs of the organisation but is unlikely to satisfy formal ITT requirements. This does, however, support the assertions of writers such as Maynard and Furlong (1993), Hankey (2004) and Cunningham (2005) that reflective practice is an intrinsic part of mentoring. It also supports the theories of Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss (1986) and Cunningham (2005) who see mentors as role models because a mentor who behaves reflectively is more likely to encourage a mentee to work in this way.

From the limited descriptions of these two models, it seems that the current situation is one of inadequate pragmatism. Using an external mentor does not meet the needs of the organisation and using an in-house mentor does not meet the ITT requirements. Rather than addressing the issue systematically, the organisations have had to use an external mentor as they did not have someone suitably qualified or they have fallen back on informal mentoring to support the mentee to get through the course. Neither of these provides a developmental mentoring model.

The next section examines how the specificity of the VCS, the definitional issues and the lack of existing models influence decisions about future mentoring.

What aspects of the VCS influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?

The way in which the participants responded to initial questions meant that it was not possible to gather any 'direct' responses around what had influenced their choice of mentor or mentoring model because none of the organisations had an existing in-house mentoring system that met the ITT requirements. Also, their confusion around the ITT requirements and current mentoring activity meant that participants were often hesitant in their responses, as they did not have the background knowledge or experience to offer fully-informed answers. The evolving nature of the subject meant that they had not been immersed in the discourses around mentoring or ITT and this seemed to restrict some members of the group from participating. Rather, this question had to be addressed through a discussion on their views about how to introduce mentoring and what issues would influence the way in which this could be done. During the analysis of the transcript, I became aware that this had manifested itself as a series of perceived 'barriers' which I have grouped into the following themes:

- confusion
- human resources
- 'matching'
- time
- funding

The next section examines these barriers in more detail.

Barriers

Following on from the need to unpick the definitions and views of the managers as to what mentoring meant for them, a series of problems and worries started to emerge. The participants were situating the requirements of mentoring for ITT within the constraints of their organisational settings and the activity of engaging in discussion allowed concerns to be voiced, possibly for the first time. Most of the participants questioned how mentoring could be introduced within their setting and those who did not directly question it agreed with the comments of the other participants. I interpreted these comments as 'barriers' with a continuum of confusion and four elements occurring frequently in the discussion; time, funding, human resources and matching mentors to mentees. Concerns about time were referred to on five occasions, funding on eight occasions and resources (people) on thirteen occasions. Sometimes these three elements were discussed separately and sometimes as a general concern. These were the problems which were discussed most frequently during the focus group and reflect the position of the participants as managers in organisations which struggle with continuity of funding. The following section examines each of these 'barriers' in more detail.

Confusion

The concerns initially emerged as a sense of confusion as all the managers agreed that they were unsure of what was expected of them and their organisations, as is illustrated by F2's comment that:

> "I mean, I think I have no idea what the expectations are…" (P3/L10)

This led to a chorus of agreement from the other participants. The managers all appeared to be starting from a position of uncertainty about the requirements of mentoring, which may have led them to identify more barriers than managers who have a clear idea of the purpose and model of mentoring being introduced. It may also be a reflection of how the VCS is perceived or perceives itself as 'playing catch-up' with the FE providers who are already engaged with ITT and associated mentoring activities.

Human resources

F5 picked up on the issue of suitably qualified mentors and resourcing with her observation about staff who may be able to undertake a mentoring role that:

> "…they are not going to be acceptable because they're not going to have the pieces of paper. Because they, themselves, need to go through this process and be stamped and validated. So, but that's one aspect. The other aspect is the fact that you've got to marry the two up in a time frame that is okay (*speaker laughs*). We haven't got those sort of resources. However much we would like to do it. If we buy into this and think this is fantastic, we don't have the resources." (P10/L10)

This statement highlights the operational difficulties for VCS organisations with limited human resources, both in terms of qualified mentors and release time for mentors and mentees. This issue may well arise from the historical position of the VCS in terms of different funding and inspection regimes which, in turn, have led to different standards being applied to teaching staff. In essence, the VCS has not had the same opportunity to build up a well-

qualified workforce which fits the model of ITT currently being introduced. Matthews (2003) notes how problematic it will be for organisations to find mentors with the right skills and this problem is likely to be exacerbated for the VCS which is already under pressure in terms of resources.

A1 also expressed concern that although she was the appropriate person to be mentoring staff she did not feel she had the right skills to undertake the role (P12/L12). Later in the discussion, F6 asked the question:

"…how many mentors exist at the moment?" (P23/L17)

These were pragmatic points in terms of clarifying what was meant by 'mentor' (i.e. was it someone who could be identified in a particular way such as holding a specific qualification) and the capacity in the region to fulfil the need to mentor all trainee-teachers. They also highlight that, if mentoring is taking place in the VCS (or in the wider sector), it is hard to pinpoint or quantify that activity as none of the focus group members were clear about numbers of mentors, the work being undertaken or the work that needed to be undertaken. The issue of adequate human resources in terms of appropriate mentors seemed to be a barrier to some degree for all of the participants. Even though F1 and F3 did not express direct opinions, they did not challenge the discussion and were generally agreeing with the flow of the conversation leading me to conclude this was a common barrier for all of the participants.

Time

Another common concern was that of time. This was in terms of the time to release staff to be mentored and to allocate time to mentors to undertake the work. As F2 observed:

"I have two or three people, who could, who you know, have got the skills, or will get the skills to do that, but reality is how much time? Yeah? Who pays for that time?" (P9/L13)

F2 had identified the most frequent criticism of mentoring; it is time consuming (Matthews, 2003; Hankey, 2004) and, in turn, expensive.

F5 raises an interesting point when she is talking about the impact on the VCS of introducing mentoring when she says that there is a:

"miscomprehension, that oh, that's ok, because they're part-time" (P10/L2)

This is a reminder that the VCS is structured differently to many other FE providers as it relies on part-time staff and so the contextual knowledge identified by Cox (2003) is clearly important. This brings with it another set of considerations, as they will not have the same time available to engage in mentoring although there may be assumption that they have more time because they are not full-time. Similarly, A1 identifies a further issue around the availability of time to undertake mentoring activities when she says:

"Really at the end of the day, it is about the organisation, and the size of the organisation, and who you are actually working with. Sometimes I don't think (speaker laughs), that's taken into consideration at all." (P12/L20)

This observation highlights how the resources available to a smaller organisation impact on their capacity to implement change. It is not just a lack of time, a lack of staff or a lack of funding but a combination of the three which will influence how mentoring is introduced. Although they were unclear about how mentoring would work in practice, like Hankey (2004) and Matthews (2003) all the focus group participants agreed that time, funding and human resources would be problematic. As F2 noted she had staff who had the appropriate skills but she did not think they would have the time to undertake mentoring and the organisation would not have the money to pay them for this role (P9/L13). A1 also described this combination of barriers in the interview when she said:

> "the constraint's going to be capacity and the sheer pressure of yet another job that somebody's taken on. If we were bringing in somebody from outside, then the only, the only constraint at the moment is funding. Um, and unfortunately in, in this place, it's always down to funding. I think they're the big constraints, pressure of work and funding." (P11/L16)

The barriers of time and money seem to underpin the problem of finding, training and releasing suitable staff to be mentors. Also, managers in the focus group could see that this would influence their choices in relation to mentoring.

'Matching'

Another barrier identified by the participants was 'matching' the mentor and mentee so that there was an appropriate relationship. This issue is addressed

by writers such as Matthews (2003) and Turner and Harkin (2003) as a potential problem for the success of mentoring relationships. In particular, Turner and Harkin discuss the importance of teachers being 'likeminded' in order to understand each other. This resonates with the views of the focus group (and interviewees) in terms of making sure that mentors and mentees have the same knowledge and understanding of the VCS to encourage empathy in the relationship. However, it is also a potential source of conflict between the various stakeholders (mentor, mentee, employer, ITT provider) because the motivation and role of the mentor will impact on the type of relationship that is established. The extent and nature of such conflict may be mediated or exacerbated by the setting. For instance, a small VCS provider may find that the less hierarchical structure reduces potential conflict but causes more tension with the ITT provider because the two organisations do not necessarily share the same motivation for taking part in mentoring (this seems to have been the experience for F5). Also, in very small organisations the options for a 'match' maybe very limited.

Within the confines of the focus group, the concerns centred around whether the mentor would have an appropriate understanding of the specific setting and whether the requirements of the ITT qualifications would clash with the organisational and learner needs. Also, the practicalities of matching mentors and mentees were noted in terms of needing to establish the relationship quickly and the impact of a bad 'match'. This was encapsulated by F4's question:

> "…how are you going to build that rapport quick enough to make it…effective and useful and, you know. And, also, maybe to find out you're not compatible. Or you are very compatible." (P13/L10)

F4's concern emerged from her own experience of starting a PTLLS course and being unaware of whether she would need a mentor. This supports the general feeling of confusion about the current situation voiced by other members of the focus group. F1 followed up this point by noting that:

> "…you can match your trainee with the mentor, and it be a disastrous relationship, and have a detrimental effect on that person's training."
>
> (P13/L14)

This is an important acknowledgement of the potentially negative impact a poor mentoring relationship can have on a trainee teacher, something which is rarely noted in the literature (with the notable exceptions of Hankey, 2004; Smith, Harvard and Harrington, 2005 and Rogers, 2007 and, to a lesser degree, Clutterbuck, 2003 and Kullman, 1998) and even more rarely addressed when setting up mentoring systems.

This issue of 'match' was picked up less directly in discussions around how teacher-training providers could find mentors who would meet the needs of individuals working in the VCS if this was not the mentor's background. For instance, when F5 described problems with a mentor from FE F2 noted that:

> "…if it had been someone in your organisation they would have understood the organisation." (P18/L3)

This was generally felt to be the case except for one member of the discussion, F3, who disagreed because she felt that it was it was possible to:

> "…learn good experience and share good practice from other organisations." (P18/L20)

It is interesting that F3 is the newest member of the group and does not speak very often but felt able to disagree with well-established group members. This suggests that the views expressed in the focus group are candid and unrestrained by the group dynamic.

The issue of 'matching' links the theme of barriers to the specific nature of the VCS. This is shown in F5's comments about the experience of mentoring for one individual and the impact that this had on the organisation. She notes her concerns about mentors being "imposed" (P3/L20) and poorly managed expectations so that the mentoring relationship did not meet the needs of the mentee's working environment. This point was developed further by F2 who said that she thought a mentor should support a mentee:

> "…in whatever context they're in." (P4/L17)

Both participants are expressing a view that the differences between FE and VCS should not mean that FE mentors cannot support VCS mentees. This is not a discussion of being 'like' a mentee in terms of shared experience as described by Allen and Eby (2003), rather it is a need for mentors to be sensitive to the specific ethos of different VCS providers as discussed in Cox's 'contextual imperative (2003). It also highlights a risk for FE providers who do not agree a shared set of expectations with the mentee and employer at the start of the mentoring relationship. ITT providers need to be 'customer responsive' in their mentoring provision by remembering that one size does not fit everyone.

This discussion began to open up concerns about how FE providers could meet the needs of VCS teacher-trainees, both on a practical level and in terms of the nature of the VCS. F5 noted that:

"…the college clearly struggled enormously to find a mentor." (P14/L16)

And F2 noted that:

"…we're going to be delivering with WEA, I'm not sure they will have the capacity if I say, you know, you'll have to find me mentors." (P15/L6)

This indicates that there are capacity problems being encountered by large providers who are offering teacher-training courses to the VCS which in turn may impact on provision in the wider PCET sector.

Although A1, F2 and F5 raised points about how existing FE providers could offer mentoring that met their needs, the discussion was limited to a couple of examples. I prompted the participants to consider the very specific settings in which they worked and whether this would have an impact. For example, F6 works in a probation setting and F4 supports learners with mental health needs. Although I asked direct questions of F6 as to whether she felt there would be problems with external mentors working in settings with probationers, she felt it was hard to comment. Her reason for this was because she was having problems separating the mentoring provided by staff and volunteers for probationers and the mentoring that needs to be provided as part of the ITT. F4 felt more able to comment saying:

"I mean, particularly mental health need to have good relationships especially if they're anxious or have got depression they need somebody who is going to understand that and to understand that they may make an appointment they might not turn up because they don't feel good that day. And that's something that happens quite regularly and it can be irritating but it's sadly the nature of the beast." (P27/L6)

Here, F4 seemed to be voicing concern that trainee-teachers who had themselves come through a mental health support route would need to be mentored differently. A dual role for the mentor was alluded to, one where the mentor would be required to be sensitive to the type of person employed as a teacher in this setting as well as fulfilling the needs of the ITT role (this is an idea I will revisit in the final chapter). The nature of this particular organisation requires mentors to be able to support people with mental health needs back into employment which includes teaching roles. As such, it is unlikely that mentors from FE ITT providers will have the training or experience to adequately support teachers in this environment. This may be one of the more specialised settings but it provides a clear example of how the ethos of the organisation must be taken into account by the mentor.

There is an exchange between F5 and F2, which describes the experiences F5 has had of mentoring support for a teacher in her organisation and the problems associated with external mentors. F5 says that:

F5   "The mentor could see themselves as absolutely supporting the student in order to get the qualification. The qualification says you do it (*background agreement*) this way…

F2   Yeah

F5   …and if they don't do it this way am I really supporting that person, because they're not going to have the, the, the evidence. They're not going to have this, this and this.   But this person is delivering in our context in this particular way. And that was the, that was the nub of it ..." (P5/L3)

This discussion encapsulates the potential tensions caused by the differing expectations of the mentor, mentee, employer and ITT provider. F5 describes how a mentor could be providing support in terms of meeting the ITT requirements, but that this would conflict with the way in which the mentee works and the mentee's employer expects them to work.

Summary of the focus group data

The lack of a single definition of mentoring is not surprising as this is prevalent throughout the literature. What is surprising is the level of confusion about the purpose and uses of mentoring when mentoring for ITT is compulsory. Also, the degree to which the focus group members were excluded from current information and discourses generally available to other providers in the wider PCET sector. This demonstrates how VCS providers are disempowered and disengaged from the language shaping mentoring for ITT. Whilst this left them unfettered from existing arguments and so more free to express genuinely held beliefs, it also served to place them outside the knowledge-base available to their peers. The amount of activity taking place, which could be described as mentoring, but is currently not specifically identified as such, indicates that the VCS already has some of the skills and behaviours needed

to introduce mentoring, even though these may not fit in with a formal definition of mentoring for ITT. It is the specific nature of the VCS, its ethos, combined with the practical constraints of resourcing that are the biggest influences on the introduction of mentoring.

Where the focus group participants diverged from issues identified in the literature was in their discussion of 'matching' mentors to mentees. This attracted a lot of discussion, partly linked to a focus on the ethos of organisation, about harm caused by poor mentoring relationships, capacity to provide mentors and the ability of ITT providers to be responsive to customer needs. Also, their focus on barriers was important as this is often skimmed over in the literature. For example, time and funding as concerns are, perhaps, not surprising for VCS managers. The regularity with which they are mentioned is, however, disproportionate to the way in which it is addressed in the literature. For these managers, the daily constraints of funding and managing their organisations took precedence over other considerations.

I will now move on to present, discuss and analyse the data collected through the one to one interviews.

Interviews

This section provides an overview and analysis of the data collected during one-to-one interviews (based on audio transcripts) using the framework of the four research questions identified in Chapter 1 (page 16). It follows a similar

structure to the analysis of the focus group to allow for comparisons to be made.

The data collected

Following the focus group a series of interviews with managers, teachers, teacher-managers and volunteers working in the VCS in the East of England was undertaken. Like the focus group, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis with the agreement of the participants. As with the focus group, the inclusion of managers and teachers allowed for comparison of the views of stakeholders in different positions *within* organisations and *across* organisations.

The process

After data was collected through the focus group, 6 interviews were conducted from April to July 2008. These interviews were based on the four research questions (shown earlier on page 16) and themes which had emerged in the focus group.

Although the interviews were informal in tone, they were semi-structured in that they used a series of prompt questions to guide the flow of discussion. This was to maximise the use of time as all participants were undertaking the interviews voluntarily during their working day and I was conscious not to take more than about forty minutes with each person. Using this approach, I aimed to encourage open discussion but did not allow for a completely free-flowing conversation led by the participant. I was also mindful that the focus group

had provided uneven data because I had not used the prompt questions to direct the flow of discussion. After the interview, the participant received a typed transcript and was given the opportunity to withdraw all or part of it.

Analysis of the transcripts followed the same structure as that of the focus group, identifying themes in the first analysis and then overlaying the research questions.

The data emerging from the interviews showed broad similarities with that in the focus group. The main difference was that there was less interest in the barriers to the introduction of mentoring and more discussion around definitions, interpretations and experiences of mentoring. This may be a reflection of the different interests of managers and practitioners, as well as being a result of group dynamics leading the focus group discussion towards the interests of the more dominant members of the group. Also, the interviews afforded an individual more time to explore their own interests and ideas than the focus group where time was shared between the participants and mediated by interjections.

Analysis

The following analysis groups the data around the research questions in the same way as the analysis for the focus group and identifies comments which contradict or challenge the research. This is to ensure that the widest possible range of views is included in the analysis, whilst providing themes and a structure for understanding the findings.

What does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS?

As shown in all the literature, the concept of mentoring is one which is not easily defined, which has multiple strands making up any definition and which changes depending upon the definer (Dodgson, 1986). This was borne out in the interviews in that many of the participants found it difficult to offer a definition or to fully explain their understanding of mentoring. However, three themes emerged which helped to structure an analysis of this data:

- definitions

- skills

- different interpretations of managers and practitioners

I will examine definitions and skills separately and, throughout the analysis, I will highlight areas of disagreement or disjuncture between the views of managers and practitioners to map potential causes of confusion.

Definitions

The word most commonly used by interviewees when they were asked for their definition of mentoring was 'support'. This reflects the focus group data, which showed that support was an important part of the participants' understanding of mentoring. A1, who also took part in the focus group, said that:

> "…my idea of mentoring is just to support them while they're on the course, if they need to talk to me." (P2/ L17)

Here, A1 is combining the need to support with the ability to listen, the latter being a mentoring skill which emerges in several of the interviews. This comment also shows that the definition relates to an informal relationship, with contact instigated by the mentee not driven by the mentor, as A1 does not identify a purpose, structure or outcomes in the definition. As Allen and Eby (2003) note, it is often this type of informal approach that has a particularly beneficial psychological effect and it may be that there is an intuitive preference for this type of approach in an organisation that works with particularly challenging or demanding learners.

B1 also said that she did not have a formal definition but that it was:

> "…a supporting role…to give people confidence to do their job."
> (P4/L11)

Whilst B1 did not think this was a formal definition it showed that she perceived it as a role. This in itself has some implicit formality in the workplace. Also, she felt that it led to an outcome which benefited both the individual (gaining "confidence") and the organisation ("do their job"). Again this indicates something more than a casual or informal relationship. Although B1 said that there was not a formal definition, her description of the work that she undertook was far from informal which may have been because she undertook mentoring as part of a line-management role which had clearly defined parameters and outcomes.

The lack of a formal definition was apparent in all the interviews as none of the interviewees referred to a definition provided by their organisation and

none of the interviewees felt that there was a shared understanding of mentoring in their organisation. This lack of a definition within organisations and across organisations is important, as it is unlikely that mentoring work can be implemented consistently or even effectively if participants do not have a shared understanding of what it means and what is required of them. It will also be unvalued or undervalued in terms of work load calculations, which will have an impact on the ability of individuals and the organisation to support the mentoring relationship effectively.

B3 was the most hesitant participant, particularly at the start of the interview, but he still picked up the need for:

"…support…" and "…someone to listen." (P2/L40)

Later he said that a mentor:

"…would probably (*pause*) guide… guide you to what's the best possible route to take." (P4/L1)

The use of the word "guide" seems more directive than the concept of support as does the phrase "best possible route". For B3, a mentor has a responsibility to drive the process because they know best course of action. Also, his choice of words seems to place the mentee in a more passive position in the relationship, which may be a reflection of his own position as a teacher within the organisation.

A2 had a slightly different view in that she thought that a mentor was:

"…somebody who obviously has the experience that you are trying to gain. And it's somebody who you feel comfortable batting ideas off, um,

and exploring avenues, perhaps even the mentor hasn't done before. But, giving you, um, if you like a playing field to work on, er, rather than a sort of, a, and bringing you back down if you are going into orbit or something. But also, er, guiding you I suppose, but, but perhaps, and maybe putting suggestions in. But I would hope, not necessarily saying you should do that and being prescriptive I suppose." (P6/L18)

Later she says that a mentor should be able to suggest other ways of doing things and:

"…think outside the box with me." (P10/13)

A2 was the only interviewee that did not include the word support. Rather, she defined mentoring in terms of guiding and experience yet the definition is less directive than that offered by B3. Here A2 is describing a positive, two-way, relationship where ideas and suggestions are shared rather than guidance given with the expectation it will lead to an outcome – which is implicit in B3's response. A2's description is more dynamic than most of the others and, like Shea (2004) places value on the mentor as a 'sounding board'. A2 also positions the mentee in a central role as instigating ideas that the mentor can work on with the mentee.

The most complex definition was offered by B2 who said that he thought a mentor was somebody who:

"…has the experience and wisdom that they can be there with the person and listen to them and help them to reflect but not so much inputting stuff as… I guess, in some ways the same as, er… as a counsellor won't necessarily tell you what to do but they'll enable you to

hear yourself and I suppose there's something about that process about you saying something, about going 'that's absolute rubbish', or, um, or them saying, 'have you thought about or have you looked at' which, if they're good, is not directive so they're not being too kind of, 'do this, this is good', but they're saying, 'actually there's a whole lot of stuff here', it's almost broadening your mind, broadening your experience, helping you to become a better, better at reflection, better in terms of… you practice through reflection or that kind of thing…"

(P3/L5)

In common with other definitions, B2 highlights the need to listen but his definition has a different focus. He is very specific in his choice of the words "experience and wisdom" at the beginning of the definition which reflects the importance that writers such as Shea (2002), Smith et al. (2005) and Cunningham (2005) place on these attributes. B2's response is one where a mentor has knowledge and skills which can be shared with the mentee but in a way that does not 'tell' the mentee how to do things. Rather, the mentor facilitates reflective practice and, like A2, seems to act as a sounding board. The outcome implicit in this definition is that reflective practice enhances professional performance and development and that the mentee is open to analysing and improving based on prompts from the mentor. Like Cunningham (2005) there is a great reliance on both the mentor and the mentee to adopt reflective practice as a way of bouncing new ideas and promoting changes in teaching activity. There is little thought given to the potential difficulties of ensuring that this does not become either a repository for untested ideas or a self-defeating cycle of criticism. B2 is also

demonstrating his ability as a reflective practitioner in the way he explores this definition and describes how a mentor could use reflective skills to open out discussions. B2 seems to be showing that double-loop learning (Argyris, 1991), is taking place as he has moved beyond a superficial description of a set of skills to examining how those skills work and the impact they can have on the mentee.

C1 does not give a direct definition of a mentor. Instead she describes the system that exists in the organisation as well as her own line management role which includes mentoring. She also talks in terms of how teachers would perceive being mentored. Like Kram (1983) and Cunningham (2005) she places an emphasis on the mentor as a "role model" (P6/20) and that she feels that the current arrangement for mentoring to take place alongside supervision and appraisal provides an appropriate mentoring system for the specific ethos of the organisation. This last point seems particularly important to her and I will revisit this in the analysis related to the final research question. The emphasis on role modelling may also be linked to her position as a senior manager and teacher, as she will be acting as a role model for teaching staff that she manages and this may be pragmatic recognition of existing practice.

Skills

Interviewees interpreted mentoring on the basis of their experience of being mentored or being a mentor. This meant that when they were describing what

they understood mentoring to mean, they often referred to the skills and attributes associated with mentors. In particular, they discussed:

- experience

- interpersonal skills

- subject-specific skills

I will examine each of these in turn.

Experience

The concept of 'experience' arose in each interview which reflects discussions in the focus group. B2 talks about the importance of experience for a mentor to be able to guide a mentee and to offer credible ideas and thoughts. He states that he sees a mentor as someone who has "experience and wisdom" (P3/L4) and that:

> "I suppose there's something about experience which doesn't therefore mean you can mentor but if you haven't got it I wonder if you can." (P10/L20)

Like Cunningham (2005) and the DfES report (2004), B2 feels that experience underpins the skills set of a mentor and, even though it does not necessarily prepare someone to be a mentor it seems to offer a '**tool kit**' that the mentor can call on to support the mentee. B2 does not pick up on the issue that Rogers (2007) highlights that a mentor's experience might not necessarily be shared appropriately or appropriate to share.

There is an echo of this focus on experience when B1 comments about the way in which she acts as a mentor when she says:

> "I only do it really from gut instinct as opposed to being trained…probably length of life." (P11/L12)

Whilst B2 explicitly refers to the need for a mentor to be experienced, B1 is more philosophical in that her age has given her the confidence to be instinctive in her interactions with mentees. This statement is made in light of an earlier comment where B1 says that:

> "…everybody requires a different kind of touch." (P11/L6)

B1 appears to use her experience to support her mentoring activities with staff, as she acknowledges that it requires personalisation and an intuitive response. She is relying on her accumulated knowledge and experience to support her staff. Like B1, B3 makes a link between age and experience in that he thinks a mentor needs to be of an age that can relate to their mentee. He was then prompted to explored this more and says:

> "I think you need experience in order to guide somebody." (P6/L9)

He is concerned that the mentor has **credibility** (my word) as he feels that he could not relate to a mentor who did not match his own experience. As he says:

> "If you want to learn how to bake a cake you're not going to go and see a hod-carrier…" (P6/L38)

For all three members of organisation B, there is a link between mentoring and experience which gives the mentor a certain status. It seems that, without appropriate experience, mentors may not be perceived as having the skills needed to mentor effectively.

The comments made by B3 are also reflected in A2's opinions when she is describing what she would define as a mentor:

> "I think it's somebody who obviously has the experience that you are trying to gain." (P6/l18)

Again, there is an acknowledgement that experience is valued and something that trainee teachers want to access. A2 also refers to the mentor as "guiding" the mentee (something identified by Cunningham, 2005, as important for a mentor in teacher training), another phrase which B3 identified as based on experience. As both A2 and B3 are experienced teachers but undertaking a PTLLS qualification to be compliant with the ITT regulations, it is interesting that they emphasise the importance of a mentor's experience. This may be because they recognise how important their own experience is or it may be that they want to learn from the experiences of others. Similarly, A2 uses the word "authority" (P10/L19) when describing what she would look for in a mentor. This echoes B3's comments around mentors having credibility based on their experience. As A2 and B3 are the two interviewees who have teaching rather than management roles, their views on the need for mentors to be credible may reflect their position within an organisational hierarchy. It is important to them to feel that they will be gaining something from the relationship and they are looking for credible, experienced role models on which to base their development.

Interpersonal skills

All relationships require both parties to have the appropriate interpersonal skills to initiate, develop and maintain the relationship. For a mentoring

relationship, this may be mediated by a series of boundaries or constraints which require additional skills. It may seem very obvious to state that mentors need appropriate interpersonal skills but it may be that the very obviousness of it means that these can sometimes be forgotten.

The interviewees all referred to the interpersonal skills of mentors, each highlighting slightly different things. A2 picks up on the point that not everyone has the interpersonal skills needed for mentoring when she says:

> "I suppose the mentor has to be fairly articulate (*laughs*) in putting that knowledge across (*laughs*). Because some people are very bright but they can't necessarily get that across." (P12/L21)

Within education, it may be even more likely that people are chosen to be mentors on the basis of their qualifications or achievements. Yet, if these are not accompanied by interpersonal skills which facilitate a positive relationship, mentoring will not work.

B1 refers to the need to be positive about your own skills as a mentor and to build confidence in others. When prompted, she clarifies this by saying:

> "I do think you need to be positive and enthusiastic. I think you do need to know when to temper it because I do know that I go over to and somebody goes, 'B1, that was not funny'…so, yes, so I think it's really important, erm, and to also to be able to, as it were, show confidence." (P17/L26)

Here B1 has identified motivational skills required to encourage others and to act as a role model. As well as identifying these skills for herself as a mentor,

B1 also identifies them more directly in terms of the type of mentor she would want when she says:

> "…what we would like to see in a mentor and what would, you know, it's basically kind of inspirational, who made a difference to you." (P22/L6)

This is based on her own experience of having a mentor when she was made redundant and how this mentor inspired her and gave her confidence to move on. This is not necessarily the role of an ITT mentor. However, it is likely that they will need to motivate mentees who are finding things difficult or who do not see the point of a teaching qualification and may be considering giving up teaching because of the ITT requirements.

A1 also picks up on the need to instil confidence as a mentor when she says:

> "I always go back to this word confidence…You know, you can meet that mentor, talk to that person, feeling really down, really insecure, unsure about what you're doing, and then at the end of the session or whatever you want to call it, walking out knowing that actually you're on the right track, you are capable of doing this, and it's giving the…it's giving the individual the confidence." (P6/L21)

She also says that a mentor would need to build good relationships with everyone on the project as well as have a good understanding (I infer this to be about the nature of the project), patience and empathy (P5/L19). Again, the skills described are ones which are needed to support and motivate a trainee teacher, particularly if they are having difficulties, with an emphasis on the importance of the setting. These are not necessarily skills that all

managers or teachers have. As Goleman (1995) identifies in his work on emotional intelligence, we may need to teach certain interpersonal skills rather than assuming that everyone simply acquires them. If A1 is making this assumption, it may be a reflection of the environment in which she is working where listening and motivational skills are part of the fabric of the way in which the organisation operates. This may not be the same for all organisations, particularly those outside education.

When prompted to build on his comments about a mentor being supportive and listening, B3 says that he thinks a mentor should be:

"…bubbly, friendly, warm…" (P5/L15)

Unlike the other comments around interpersonal skills, this description seems much more informal and less business-like. This may be because B3 is focused on mentoring for learners rather than teachers and his comments need to be interpreted within this context.

There does seem to be a considerable range of interpersonal skills expected of mentors by all the interviewees. This, in itself, requires mentors to have a breadth of skills to meet the ITT requirements as well as a subject-specific skills set.

Subject specific skills

In the same way as the schools sector, the ITT regulations and Ofsted recommendations (2003) specify that the mentor is expected to be a subject-specific mentor. Woodd (2001) identifies this role directly as The Subject

Mentor. The need for a mentor to have subject-specific knowledge and skills adds another dimension to the interpretation and implementation of mentoring, as it is no longer simply based on generic mentoring skills. This issue was raised with the interviewees and the responses were inconsistent.

A1 seemed unclear about the use of subject-specific mentors. She said that she thought it would help if the mentor and mentee had the same subject knowledge but went on to say:

> "…if we were bringing in somebody who didn't particularly have the qualification but had all the skills and quality, then I couldn't expect them to have a subject specialism. If we were pulling in somebody that was already qualified, then I think I would like them to have a subject specialism in literacy and/or numeracy." (P10/L14)

Later, she refers to a potential model of mentoring based on using a pool of mentors:

> "I think if you were going to have a pool of mentors then there's got to be mentors in there that's got subject specialism." (P11/L18)

She follows this up by saying, very firmly, that these mentors should be specific to the voluntary sector (P11/L24). It is almost as though A1 is conflicted about the priority skills for mentors. She acknowledges that qualified mentors should have a subject specialism, particularly if they are from a 'pool' of mentors, but she is willing to accept non-qualified mentors who are not subject specialists providing they have a range of skills which she feels demonstrate quality. The one thing she is clear about is the need for the mentor to have a VCS background.

At first, A2 is also unsure about the need for a subject-specific mentor but she reflects as she speaks by saying:

> "I mean, to a degree it depends who you are tutoring, so, if the mentor themselves is an expert in science or whatever, and you're doing something which is very English based, then I guess there needs to be. I wouldn't necessarily say entirely subject, but there has to be a commonality I guess of subject area. Um, that perhaps, yes I think there probably does, actually, thinking about it, probably does."
> (P12/L3)

This may have been the first time that A2 was asked to consider the difference between a subject-specific and a generic mentor and so her comments are more 'thinking aloud' than being indecisive. The fact that she had not thought about it is also a reflection of her position on an ITT course that has not required her to have a mentor. She is clearly very happy with the current informal mentoring arrangements in organisation A but, as she is not being supported by a subject-specific mentor, she may not be able to make a fully-informed assessment of whether this would be more suitable for her.

The problem of non-subject specific mentors is encapsulated by B1's experience of observing teachers in subject areas she does not know. She says:

> "I have to assume the person I'm observing has got the knowledge right and maybe they have just got the presentation skills that could

just be amended or in some way maybe we can look at developing those." (P27/L6)

This would not be acceptable for ITT purposes but is the reality of how organisation B manages observations of teaching and learning. Although it is part of a large national body, it is still relatively small on a local level. This means that there are not sufficient subject specialists to provide ITT mentoring within the organisation, something which was highlighted in the focus group discussions. The VCS providers are usually small and, in the East of England, often geographically disparate due to the rurality of much of the area. This will bring with it problems for providing in-house subject-specific mentors, as there will simply not be enough suitably skilled people to undertake the roles. The definition of mentoring for the VCS, then, is focused on the practical needs of the organisation rather than the specific needs of ITT. It is this pragmatic approach that hinted at a more positive element in the research; that activity is already taking place which could be defined as mentoring but is not necessarily being identified as such. The next section will explore what activities are already happening and how they are perceived in relation to mentoring for ITT.

What activities are taking place in the VCS that could be defined as mentoring?

The lack of formal definitions offered by the participants was echoed in confusion about the role of a mentor. In particular, interviewees identified issues arising from crossover with other roles. This links to Shea's (2003) definition where he defines part of the role of a mentor to act as a counsellor.

Similarly, Cunningham (2005) feels that mentors supporting trainee teachers should provide counselling. It is this blurring of definitions that B3 picks up on when he says:

> "…there's confusion, I think, what a mentor is and what a counsellor is." (P3/L30)

Counselling was also raised by B2 as he drew parallels between the skills sets:

> "I'd done some counselllingish things before and it's not counselling but goodness me a lot of the skills are the same, you know, the ability to listen, reflecting to people, summarising, um, you know, that kind of non-involved but involved…" (P14/L28)

This similarity is voiced by A1 when she says:

> "It's almost like having a counselling session, isn't it? You know, you can meet that mentor, talk to that person, feeling really down, really insecure, unsure about what you're doing, and then at the end of the session or whatever you want to call it, walking out knowing that actually you're on the right track you are capable of doing this…" (P6/L22)

This identification with a counselling role reflects the environments in which the interviewees work as all the organisations provide counselling services for their learners and many of the staff are trained in counselling. It may be that these skills are less readily identified in other settings or it may be that counselling skills represent essential skills for ITT mentors in this sector. There may also be the need to specify a purpose for mentoring that ensures it

has a different role to counselling. This would allow the same set of skills to be used but the outcomes would be different. This is important in terms of Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) critique of therapeutic interventions that diminish the professionalism of teachers. This is because mentoring which crosses over into counselling is much more likely to be problem-centred than outcome focused. In turn this places more reliance on supporting the emotional development of the mentee instead of using professional challenges and cognitive skills to support the mentee to reflect and grow. Further comparison with other settings would be needed to clarify whether the association with counselling is general to mentoring or specific to the VCS.

B1 describes how she acts as a role model for the staff that she mentors, although she does not identify it in these terms, when she says:

> "I know darned well if I am down or lacking in confidence or I went to a meeting and I performed really, really badly that the other people who are suppo… who are dependent upon me actually it, it, it, er… it triggers them so they are not going to feel as good if it looks as though I am having a bad time." (P18/L1)

This shows how B1 sees the need to lead by example to motivate her mentees. It also describes how B1 sees her role as one where she must suppress her own feelings to be an appropriate role model. This could be because she is primarily a manager and does not undertake a teaching role. As such, she is focused on getting the job done and needs to be positive and performing well so that her mentees will follow her example. It is this type of approach which may not be suitable to mentoring for ITT if the mentee needs

a role model who is a teacher, and focused on teaching and learning, rather than a mentor who is a manager and potentially concerned with other things. This would be supported by writers such as Cunningham (2005) who see that acting as a role model is essential but in terms of teaching practice rather than just professional skills.

As well as confusion, there is almost a denial of what activities could constitute mentoring. For instance, A1 said:

> "I meet with the tutors… I meet with the staff and talk through any issues. Now whether that's the same as mentoring or not? I don't really think it is, is it?" (P2/L4)

Initially, A1 found it difficult to describe her work in terms of mentoring. When prompted to give examples of the things that were happening to support trainee teachers she said:

> "…while they're on the course, to ensure that they are coping with the course. As the Project Manager, you know, my member of staff I would meet every week to ensure that they are enjoying the course, what are they doing, they could feed back to me, what's happened in the past."
> (P4/L20)

She then goes on to describe the support she offers an individual member of staff in terms of microteaching and lesson planning. A1's focus for mentoring activities, even though she does not necessarily see herself as a mentor, is to enable staff to achieve their qualification and supporting them in the delivery of sessions. A1 is not a qualified teacher, nor does she have a teaching role, yet she is undertaking some key mentoring activities in terms of the

development of her mentees' teaching skills. These 'mentoring activities' appear to be **integrated** into general line management support. Such an arrangement is likely to lead to overlap and possibly conflict, as A1 will need to ensure that the organisational needs are addressed (which she is doing through lesson planning with teachers) whilst the member of staff will also need to meet the ITT requirements and these may not always be the same thing.

Although B1 and B2 state that mentoring occurs within the organisation, B3 is clear that he did not think that mentoring for staff took place. B2 describes how he has supported other members of staff undertaking PTLLS courses and acted as a mentor by making time to listen to them and to support them through elements of the course such as microteaching. B3 has recently completed a PTLLS qualification and was adamant that he had not had a mentor and did not need one. This indicates inconsistency in the mentoring activity being offered within the organisation as well as lack of clarity about what constitutes mentoring. B3 may (or may not) have received line management support. Whatever was offered to him was not perceived by him as mentoring. A further indication that some of the mentoring activity is not being acknowledged is given by B2 when he describes supporting a member of staff:

> "So we kinda sat there, honestly he came out of it saying, 'thanks for the help', and I thought I hadn't done anything. Now how much of that is mentoring and how much of that is just, um, a form of line management or a form of support or, I don't know." (P8/L14)

The conflation of mentoring and line management could go some way to explain the confusion as to whether mentoring is or is not taking place. If it is not identified as a distinct activity it may be difficult to recognise it. The activities described by B1, B2 and B3 show that the organisation is engaging in work which could be seen as mentoring but that there is no shared understanding, agreed outcomes or defined purpose for the mentoring activity. They do not even describe the activity as having a particular purpose rather there is an implicit assumption that it is a 'good thing' without any tangible measure of its impact or value.

C1 is clear that mentoring activity:

> "…comes in under our overall system of observation, supervision and appraisal." (P2/L6)

There is no place for a separate mentoring system in this structure. In terms of mentoring for trainee teachers she states:

> "I personally wouldn't separate them from our main teaching staff, um, at this time." (P2/L20)

This may be a reflection of the organisation as it was originally a co-operative with no hierarchy and the current structure remains very flat with an emphasis on supporting and developing everyone regardless of their experiences. She also states that she does not think that:

> "…a lot of people would attach the word mentoring to anything here." (P3/L15)

Rather, staff:

> "…would see it as support." (P3/L16)

Again, this would seem to echo the nature of the organisation rather than indicate a rejection of the concept or practices associated with mentoring. Within this framework, she goes on to describe activities that take place which could be interpreted as mentoring such as:

> "…subject team meetings which are, again, a support mechanism and sharing mechanism and an opportunity for the more experience staff to assist the less experienced staff or the less experienced staff to ask questions." (P4/L3)

This statement provides insight into the approach taken to mentoring in that experience is seen as important as well as support and sharing as part of a team. The use of team meetings for mentoring may also reflect the ethos associated with the flat management structure and an organisation which values the contributions of all individuals regardless of their 'formal' skills and qualifications. However, there is no evidence offered that the opportunity to ask questions is taken up by less experienced staff nor is there any evaluation of whether this is an appropriate mentoring mechanism.

Interviewees were able to describe many activities that could be seen as mentoring but these were frequently integrated into other roles. Interviewees were not able to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities because there was no clear definition or purpose to these activities. Although there were clearly activities taking place that could be described as mentoring there did not seem to be any models of mentoring associated with them. The next section will discuss this aspect of the data in more detail.

What mentoring models are already in use in the VCS?

Data to examine this research question is limited because none of the interviewees worked in organisations where mentoring was operating as a discrete role. However, they all described activities (see previous section) which could be seen as mentoring.

The 'models' discussed by participants fall into three categories;

- mentoring schemes that are **external** to the organisation (such as those provided by FE colleges for ITT purposes)

- mentoring activity within the organisation which is **integrated** into another role

- **aspirational** mentoring models with ideas for ways of meeting the needs of the VCS

I will discuss each of these in turn, providing examples from the interviews to illuminate the application of the models.

External mentoring models

In terms of interpreting the data, an external mentoring model is taken to mean one whereby mentoring is provided by an organisation providing the ITT course. This is most likely to be a FE college for VCS providers at this time. The mentoring model will then 'belong' to the FE provider and be designed to meet the needs of the ITT.

Each organisation in this research had engaged with ITT to some extent, as members of staff had completed or were completing the PTLLS qualification.

However, there was still some confusion as to whether mentoring was taking place to support the trainee teachers as none of the staff had received mentoring as part of their PTLLS training. The interviewees did, however, all describe activities that they thought were supportive of trainee teachers and which could be seen as mentoring. The focus group also highlighted this problem, as the participants were not clear about the mentoring requirement for the PTLLS and one (F5) described a situation where a member of staff had been allocated a mentor late in the programme when the college delivering the course realised they needed evidence of mentoring.

As such, none of the interviewees had personal experience of external mentoring, although some of them expected to receive mentoring from an ITT provider if they undertook a CTLLS or DTLLS qualification. Regardless of this lack of experience, A1 was adamant that an external mentor would not work unless they had an understanding of the nature of the VCS saying:

> "…if they've got that understanding [of the voluntary sector] then I think it would work. If they come into the voluntary sector without any of that, then let's forget it. Let's forget it right now because it's not going to work. We might as well have our own team…" (P12/L12)

This statement was echoed by B2, B3 and A2 who all felt that an in-house mentor would be more appropriate than an external one. The main reason for this seems to be based on a belief that FE providers do not understand or respond to the specific environment of the VCS providers (something which was borne out by F5's experiences described in the focus group). Whether this is a real or perceived problem is difficult to judge from the data and would

benefit from further exploration. It is also difficult to judge whether continued emphasis on sector-specific mentors would be beneficial or serve to reinforce existing divisions. However, several writers, such as Shea (2002), Cox (2003) and Rogers (2007), highlight that mentors need to understand how the organisation operates in order to support mentees effectively, particularly in the early stages of their career. Whilst the data and the literature support each other there is little discussion in either the focus group or interviews as to how this directly supports the organisation (except for B1).

Models of mentoring integrated into other roles

As none of the organisations in this research is currently delivering ITT courses, they have not developed in-house mentoring models. However, all of them have staff who have or will be undergoing ITT and both the focus group and the interviews provided a strong message that mentors needed to be in-house or, at the very least, to have an understanding of the sector. It is then, perhaps, surprising that none of the organisations were actively developing models of mentoring that addressed this need and that none them had a definition of or purpose for the mentoring activity that was taking place. Some of the data may have emerged due to the stimuli of being interviewed on the topic rather than as a result of carefully considered or long-held beliefs.

The approaches to mentoring within organisations were informal at best and haphazard at worst. This does not mean that mentoring was not taking place, nor that the activities were not appropriate, fit for purpose or of a good quality.

It does, however, make it difficult to outline distinct models. For example, C1 states;

> "We don't have anyone who is officially called a mentor but part of my role is to mentor trainee teachers." (P2/L1)

And she follows this with;

> "…we don't have a specific scheme. I mean, it comes in under our overall system of observation, supervision and appraisal." (P2/6)

Similarly, B1 says:

> "We don't have a mentoring scheme as such, no." (P2/L28)

She then goes on to describe how she is encouraging staff to undertake training in mentoring and how she acts as a mentor for her staff as part of her line management role. A1 does not refer to a mentoring scheme but picks up on the issue of mentoring for trainee teachers when she says:

> "…two members of staff who are doing PTLLS at the moment are also not being mentored. However, as part of my role, er, I meet with all the staff, so I meet with the tutor, I meet with the staff and talk through issues." (P1/L27)

All three managers have identified that mentoring is taking place within other roles rather than as a discrete mentoring scheme. This is echoed by the other interviewees. For example, A2 states clearly that she does not have a mentor to support her through PTLLS but she does identify that her line manager, A1, is providing support when she says:

> "…so obviously I'm using A1 as my…asking the questions and sort of making sure I'm on the right lines. So I guess I suppose I'm using A1 as a mentor for this one." (P4/L26)

It is through the discussion that A2 is able to vocalise the idea that the support she receives from A1 is a form of mentoring, albeit not explicitly defined as a mentoring relationship. As the activities that are taking place are linked to a line management role, they cannot be defined as informal. Yet neither are they part of a formal mentoring scheme. Thus the description of mentoring models as integrated is better suited to the reality of the position for the VCS.

Another example of a potential mentoring model that is unacknowledged is when B1 describes support which she provides for her staff as part of her line management role:

> "… I just try and make sure that she's got the confidence to do the job that she is doing and I am there if she needs, erm, to throw some ideas around or just to back her up." (P2/L9)

In this one statement B1 describes three elements associated with mentoring; developing the confidence of mentees, providing a sounding board and offering ultimate support if needed. However, there is no mention of the need for the mentor to have specific subject knowledge or even expertise in the role. This seems more akin to a business model of mentoring (like Kram's career functions, 1983) and may be as a result of B1's current position as a Centre Manager and previous management experiences outside the VCS. Regardless of the model, it is clear that activity is taking place which B1 perceives as mentoring or wishes to present during the interview as mentoring, although these activities are currently not formally acknowledged as mentoring by the organisation.

The only structural commonality between all the mentoring type activities was that they were based on face-to-face contact. This may be because the organisations are small enough to facilitate this rather than any conscious decision that this was the most appropriate medium. The largest of the organisations is split over two sites and this was flagged up as an issue, although it was not seen as a problem because there were appropriate opportunities to meet with staff. (Face-to-face contact was much more of a concern in the focus group, where it was felt that there could be logistical difficulties with external mentors who were not geographically accessible). Also, all three organisations taking part in the one-to-one interviews described mentoring in terms of line management relationships with team leaders and centre managers taking it upon themselves to provide mentoring for their staff. This indicates that there is an acknowledgement that the mentor needs some sort of credibility, be it experience, knowledge or status, although this is not supported by formal structures.

As well as the face-to-face contact, the managers in organisations A, B and C talked in terms of 'regular meetings' which seems to be the most formal way of structuring the mentoring interactions. All these managers identified themselves as offering mentoring in terms of:

- listening
- supporting (in general terms)
- supporting (in terms of the ITT)

They did not, however, identify themselves as providing subject-specific support. This could be because only one of them had subject expertise as a teacher and so they did not feel able to offer this type of support.

C1 described her mentoring activities as fitting within the existing appraisal and supervision structure, thus giving the mentoring relationship some formality. B1 and B2 stated that they did have a mentoring role but they did not make the same direct link into formal structures as C1. For instance, C1 described how she had observed a teacher who needed support with developing resources and how she had set up a training session with a follow-up observation to support the teacher. This is systematic and outcome-based which would fit within a formal mentoring model. B2 approached mentoring differently in that he said that he set aside time to listen to staff but he did not describe any formal process or sequence of activities. A1's description of mentoring was similar to B2 in that the focus was on listening. The common theme is that all this activity is part of something else. It is not afforded a discrete or specific status as mentoring.

B2 is the only interviewee who refers explicitly to what Britnor-Guest (2001) describes as 'peer mentoring'. When prompted, B2 describes this as referring to his staff who:

> "…tend to reflect with one another and I think are quite good at being sort of non-directive but helping them engage with what they're saying, like reflecting back." (P5/L13)

This activity is informal, contained within an existing role and not acknowledged by the organisation. It is likely that this sort of mentoring takes place in all of the organisations as an organic part of staff development. If this is the case it could be used as a basis for establishing a more formal system.

Although there is not a clear model of mentoring attributable to any organisation, there is clearly mentoring-type activity taking place which is integrated into other roles. This is not formal in terms of having job descriptions, defined outcomes and monitoring, but it is more than an informal, ad hoc arrangement because there is recognition that mentoring supports trainee teachers to achieve their ITT qualifications. The activities that were described during the interviews can be seen as a 'semi-formal' model, as they are happening in response to increasing awareness that the ITT requires mentoring activity but they remain integrated into other functions. It may well be the stepping stone to more formal systems that are tailored to the needs of the sector. These are discussed in the following section which looks at the ideas for potential models of mentoring.

Aspirational models of mentoring

In the focus group the concept of a 'pool of mentors' was raised as a way of dealing with some of the geographical challenges and capacity issues. A1 revisits this idea in the interview when she says:

> "…perhaps having a pool of mentors, um, and then you would get feedback from other organisations as to their views of a particular person, you would go to them, you know. How were they? What were

they like? Would recommend them? It's all about recommendation, isn't it? So a pool of mentors." (P11/L6)

When prompted about whether she would want this pool of mentors to be specific to the VCS A1 said very firmly, "Yes. Yes, please." She does not go into detail as to whether the view that the VCS needs VCS mentors is based on negative experiences of the FE sector. This may mean that this view is based on assumptions or prejudice, something which is not clear in the data. A1 is proposing a model whereby the needs of the VCS are met by sharing resources in terms of trained mentors and ensuring that those mentors have an understanding of the VCS. Less clear is how the issue of recommendations would be managed as this seems to lack any rigorous quality assurance or equality of opportunity. Whilst it may well be the reality of many situations that staff, volunteers and (potentially) mentors take up their jobs on the basis of recommendation, it is rarely made this explicit.

A1 talks about what she would want from a mentor and says:

"So it's about the skills and qualities that you can bring, and perhaps work for that [mentoring] qualification. It may be a topsy turvy way of working but I think within this organisation that's the best model." (P6/L7)

This links back to the idea of the 'specificity of the sector'. Here A1 is alluding to a way of working which suits the ethos of the organisation but which would not necessarily be appropriate in the wider sector. Both A1 and C1 are clear that their organisations value what the individuals have to offer in terms of skills and experience rather than formal qualifications. Many of their learners

go on to become volunteers or members of staff thus perpetuating this ethos. 'Learner-centredness' is key to the ethos of the organisations and, I would suggest, the VCS more generally. As such, it would fit well with many mentoring models which value experience, listening and support above hard outcomes, such as that of Shea (2002).

B3 talks in terms of the type of person he would like as a mentor. He uses words such as "buddy" (P8/L41) and says he would prefer an in-house mentor as it would be "more homely" (P8/L18). He considers the practical arrangements and says that he feels the mentor should:

> "…have an office within this, within the building and if you felt you needed to talk to somebody, then, err, that person was readily available." (P9/L20)

He also thinks that the initial contact should be made between the mentor and teacher as a "friendly drop-in" rather than an appointment system but he recognises that line managers will need to be informed that staff are using their time in this way. His description of a mentoring system is an interesting mixture of formal and informal. He seems to want an informal relationship but a formal structure. He also describes what he would like in terms of the mentor characteristics when he says they should be:

> "…bubbly, friendly, warm, umm, it helps to settle the individual." (P5/L15)

The choice of words indicates traits frequently associated with women as it is unlikely that he would describe a man as "bubbly". This might reflect the general make-up of the workforce in education or it may indicate that he

perceives women as more suited to the role. It also may have been mirroring the interview situation, as I was a female. Even if he was not being gender-specific, it is clear that he thinks the role of the mentor is to put the mentee at ease and to be there for them. Later in the interview, he says that he thinks a mentor role should be undertaken by a 'buddy':

"…because they want to be not because it's their job to be." (P9/L1)

This illuminates some issues for B3 as it contradicts his later assertion that the mentor should have an office and report activity to line managers which is clearly a 'corporate' role. B3 seems to want someone who supports the mentee to the exclusion of the organisation, yet the mentor is employed by the organisation and providing information about the service to line managers. He seems torn between the desire for a mentor to support him informally as a 'buddy' and the recognition that the organisation will require such an arrangement to be managed. This is a good example of the potential tensions in mentoring relationships and the need for clarity of purpose in any future models.

B2 describes a possible model based on mentors not being line managers and being more experienced than the mentees when he says:

"I suppose what you're looking…to…is a selection of more experienced people to, to mentor the newer. And that could be, these could be people on the same grade, it could be people above the grade. I suppose, I suppose in an ideal scenario I would like to avoid line management." (P12/L23)

His reasons for avoiding line managers is that he sees mentoring as an intrinsic part of their role and staff may need a forum to voice concerns about their line manager. This raises issues around the parameters of the mentoring role. If it is mentoring for ITT, it may not be appropriate for mentees to use their mentors as someone to 'sound off' to about line managers, as this may compromise the mentoring relationship, particularly if the mentor is required to report back to the line manager on the performance of the mentee.

A model which I expected to be raised was that of remote or e-mentoring. It had arisen in the focus group as a possible strategy for overcoming geographical constraints but it was not explored further. During the interviews, it was only B2 who mentioned it in passing and B1 alluded to mentoring that was not face-to-face when she said:

"I don't think you can mentor on a piece of paper." (P13/L26)

She did not examine this any further and the fact that none of the other interviewees raised it may be because they all talked in terms of mentoring being a face-to-face activity. This is likely to reflect the way in which they work with learners as distance or e-learning may not suit the needs of many learners in the VCS setting. Also, e-mentoring would require staff to be confident with and have access to ICT, which may not be the case in some of the smaller organisations.

Mentoring models in the VCS are hard to define and to design based on the data which emerged from the interviews. Further work would be needed to clarify what an appropriate model would look like and how it would operate.

The following sections draws together the data already presented in order to identify anything specific about the VCS and attitudes to mentoring which may impact on the choice of mentoring models within and across organisations.

What aspects of the VCS influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?

Even though none of the organisations currently have discrete mentoring models or designated mentors, the interview data revealed both implicit and explicit messages about what would influence choices. The most overt comments were in terms of the values and ethos of the individual organisations and, sometimes, the wider VCS. This was important in two ways; the need for the mentor to understand the ethos of the organisation and the wider VCS as well as the usefulness to the individual organisations of perpetuating a particular ethos. The transmission of organisational culture is seen by several writers as a key part of mentoring (Clutterbuck 1991; Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002; Matthews, 2003) as it provides a way of introducing mentees to particular ways of working, as well as ensuring that hegemonic practices are perpetuated. For VCS providers, this may have a particular importance as they are built, initially, on belief and goodwill rather than established and driven by external forces.

The clearest statement about the need for mentors to understand the organisational ethos was made by A1 when she says:

"It's back to this empathy and understanding of the kind of clients that most of the voluntary and community sector would work with. We're talking about hard to reach areas…if they come into the voluntary sector without any of that, then let's forget it. Let's forget it right now because it's not going to work." (P12/L7)

As she speaks, A1 is almost angry that mentors from outside the VCS setting could come into her organisation without the appropriate understanding of the setting. This was also a strong theme in the focus group, where F5 described the problems that had been caused by a mentor from a FE college failing to understand the way in which the organisation worked with learners. Like A1, F5 is agitated to the point of anger when she describes how negative the experience was of using a mentor from FE rather than from the VCS.

This specificity of setting is further described by C1 when, during a discussion about the importance of role-modelling, she notes that:

"…we're trying to encourage a certain kind of atmosphere, we're trying to see the learner as the centre of what's going on." (L7/L24)

She is including the organisational ethos within her description of how she would see a mentor operating in that setting. As this particular organisation has a very flat management structure and has emerged from a co-operative it may explain why roles are less hierarchical and more holistic. The position of the learner is mentioned several times during this interview as a key to the way in which this organisation runs and it is clear from this comment that a mentor would need to be supportive of that ethos. Similarly, A1 describes how all the staff in the organisation tend to be empowered to gain qualifications

rather than joining the organisation with all the qualifications they need. She also emphasises how important it is for mentors to understand the ethos when she says:

> "We are totally different to the FE sector. They [mentors] need a good knowledge of community work, they would also need, perhaps knowledge is not the right word, but an understanding. It's back to this empathy and understanding of the kind of clients that most of the voluntary and community sector work with." (P12/L4)

Both A1 and C1 focus on the skills of individuals rather than qualifications as the underpinning value of their organisations. It is this ethos that influences the way in which they engage with mentors and mentoring. A1 would like someone to develop as a mentor whilst in the role rather than already being qualified. She acknowledges that this may be a "topsy-turvy" (P6/L9) approach but that it suits the organisation. C1 says that a formalised mentoring arrangement would not "really fit" (P4/20) within the organisational ethos and that they have:

> "…always had a skill sharing basis that women are of equal value and have a lot to offer everybody." (P5/L12)

The over-riding consideration for both interviewees is that learners and staff are valued for what they have to offer and that they will develop as part of their interaction with the organisation. They do not explore the possibility that a formal system could build on the supportive ethos already operating in their organisations, nor do they examine alternatives to the integrated model they have adopted (seemingly without any strategic overview of the purpose).

The comments from A1 and C1 (and those made by the focus group participants) seem to be driven by an organisational focus on learner-centred practice. It is interesting that VCS providers find it difficult to reconcile this with their perception of how an external mentor would operate when learner-centredness is a key part of much teacher-training. This indicates some sort of mismatch, either between the perceptions of VCS managers and what happens in FE or between the FE execution of teacher-training and the pedagogical drivers associated with reflective practice. At best, this mismatch can be addressed through communication and closer working together. At worst, this is mistrust rather than a mismatch and will need more fundamental change to bring the different parts of the sector together.

Although B1 does not discuss an ethos in particular, she does seem to have more of a business focus to her interpretation of mentoring. This may be a reflection of her personal background, as she worked in industry and it may reflect the fact that organisation B is a large, national provider unlike organisations A and C who are small and only have one office each. This more business orientated approach is supported by some of the comments made by B2 and B3. For instance, B2 talks in terms of "the company" being supportive of staff development and B3 identifies the need to keep "management" informed of mentoring activity. As an interviewer, I perceived that organisation B had a much more hierarchical and formal structure than organisations A and C and that this led to a different ethos and different influences on how mentoring models were considered. However, it was still not an ethos that would have been associated with a traditional FE setting due

to the nature of the learners (hard-to-reach and disadvantaged young people in work-based learning settings) and the focus on vocational rather than teaching skills for staff. Also, mentoring was already taking place with learners and identified as such. This seemed to intrude into the responses as the interviewees had a learner-based model of mentoring in mind, which was not necessarily applicable to ITT. It did, however, show that the concept of mentoring was part of the organisational ethos. Even though the interviewees from organisation B did not describe such a clear organisational ethos as those from organisations A and C, there was still a feeling of the specificity of sector which influenced the way in which the organisation was approaching mentoring. They had not introduced mentoring for staff merely because it was a requirement of ITT. They were still unpicking the practical needs and theoretical ideas. This, together with the problems around confusion, was encapsulated by B1 when she said:

> "I mean, the one thing that I would like is that everybody has the
> opportunity to understand a bit more about mentoring." (P24/L6)

For organisation B, it was the need to understand the issues surrounding mentoring that had more influence than the ethos as identified in organisations A and C.

The difference in the way the three organisations operate is seen in the comments of the interviewees from organisation B, which is the largest and most established of the organisations. They refer to the interests of the 'company' rather than the ethos of the organisation. This can be seen when B1 says she:

"…would like to see there's company value in it [mentoring]." (P24/L26)

This is the only clear reference to mentoring as serving a purpose for an organisation. Whilst other interviewees talk in terms of mentoring as a way of supporting the mentee and fitting in with the organisational ethos, B1 has made a direct link with the potential benefit to the organisation. This may reflect her position as a manager rather than a practitioner. B2, in his role as both manager and practitioner, makes a statement regarding the induction of new staff which supports B1's comment. He says that:

"I want to ease them into what they're doing and you want them to feel comfortable with that and, uh, you know, make that a positive experience for them. I want to win them over to what we're doing."
(P9/L14)

This comment identifies how the process of mentoring can be used to promote an organisational ethos as well as linking into B1's desire to see "company value" in mentoring. If mentoring for ITT is used as a tool to promote certain aspects of the organisation, it may well be more palatable if resources are limited. As all the organisations in this research have been established as the result of a cause or belief, their organisational ethos is fundamental to the way in which they operate. Therefore, it is important to promote and develop the organisational ethos, something which mentoring would be well placed to do, as well as maximising the return on any investment made.

Human resources are likely to be one of the biggest investments required for the introduction of mentoring. This had been identified in the focus group as a

potential barrier as well as generating discussions about the type of person who would be suitable as a mentor in the VCS. It is interesting that B1 describes how the absence of a mentor has had a detrimental effect on her staff when she says:

> "I think that they have actually suffered from the lack of support or, you know, lack of having someone to act as a mentor to them." (P12/L22)

This is the far extreme of the human resources problem, whereby there is simply no one available to provide mentoring and this has a negative impact on staff. B1 is acknowledging the benefit of providing a mentor which indicates that there has been some positive, although unidentified, effect of staff being mentored elsewhere.

The type of person who would be seen as a suitable choice of mentor is discussed by B2 when he is prompted to describe an ideal mentor,

> "It's probably something about, some things to do with character…in terms of…you know, understanding, um, even when they disagree. You know, can you perceive why this person's doing this, you know, not necessarily condoning it or saying it's good practice or any of that but just they have, they have, they're able to understand the people and, and be gracious with that…" (P9/L28)

B2 places importance on the character of the mentor rather than labelling the activities he describes as skills. It seems that there is an implicit assumption that a mentor has a particular type of character which will be suited to the act of mentoring. If this is the case, then this will limit the pool of potential mentors as not everyone will have the character B2 describes. It is not clear from the

data whether the characteristics which would influence the choice of mentor are specific to the VCS or whether these would be seen as important in any mentoring situation. As Woodd (2001) highlights, some skills and characteristics will have particular resonance in specific settings and it may be that mentors in the VCS are required to have particularly well-developed listening and challenging skills.

A1 is very clear that getting the right person is essential and much of her argument is based on finding someone who matches the ethos of the organisation. For instance, she says:

> "We work with a whole totally different clientele to anyone else, I think. And if people come into the sector and don't have that understanding, then it's, it's, it's set to fail." (P13/L24)

She also states that:

> "If they've got the skills but with the qualification, er, I think I'd use them, and I'd take them on. Because, like any member of staff here, we've all worked towards our qualifications since starting here." (P6/L2)

The choice of mentor is based on finding the right sort of person who will fit in with the learners and the way in which other staff have developed within the organisation. A1 does not question whether this will be acceptable in terms of ITT requirements, as she is clearly committed to the idea that people can be developed as long as they understand the setting.

For managers, funding issues frequently influence decisions. In terms of mentoring, this manifested itself in a concern about time (as any time

allocated to mentoring activities will 'cost' the organisation in terms of staff release and training). This had also been highlighted by the focus group as a barrier. B1 gives an example of how she is rationing her time in terms of mentoring staff when she says:

"…so there are times when I can see that somebody actually needs to discuss something or throw an idea around and I have to say, 'I am sorry, I am too busy'." (P10/L7)

She follows this up later by saying that there is a "time issue" (P26/L11) with undertaking observations of teaching and learning, something which is an essential element of ITT mentoring. The problem with time is further developed when she asks:

"…how do I sell it [PTLLS] to my team who say I am too busy to go?" (P30/L4)

B1 has identified that neither she nor her staff feel that they have the time to take part in mentoring. Yet she acknowledges that this type of activity is necessary. In her concluding comments, B1 highlights a fundamental tension created by a perceived lack of time when she says:

"We have not really taken time out to talk about it." (P31/L29)

This final statement underpins many of the other influences and difficulties in the decision-making process. Unless organisations set aside planning and communication time to develop a shared understanding of what is meant by mentor and mentoring in that setting, there will always be confusion and problems. This comment also synthesises some of the reasons for the confusion in the focus group; managers have not given time to discussing

mentoring and so have been excluded from discourses in the wider PCET sector as well as stifling discussion within their organisation.

B2 is also aware that time may be an issue but sees it as more of a practicality than a problem when he says that:

> "…it's just a case of finding the room and timetabling in time when you're both free, which I, which is as easy or as hard as it is I guess."
>
> (P13/L28)

This reflects the daily considerations that B2 and other staff are likely to face rather than a perceived barrier specifically related to mentoring. B2 also notes how he has managed to include mentoring as "the welfare side of line management" (P7/L19) which is a pragmatic way of providing mentoring within an existing structure without the need for additional time. B3 does not express concern about finding time to take part in mentoring (although he does think they need to be "readily available" indicating time should be allocated to the role). He does, however, acknowledge that any time spent undertaking mentoring will need to be accounted for to managers. It seems that the concern about time is related to position in organisation B, as B1 is most aware of it in her role of senior manager, B2, as a middle manager, recognises that activities can be dependent on timetabling and B3, as a teacher, sees it as something that must be recorded. Time, then, will have a differential influence according to role within this organisation.

For C1, time is a very practical problem. She identifies that her role includes mentoring, but acknowledges that she has other things which may take

priority. As she is part-time, this also limits her capacity to undertake mentoring. A1 also picks up on the way that lack of time will influence how work is prioritised when she says:

> "Yeah, I'm not quite sure if any of us could take that on at the moment because of the sheer pressure of work." (P11/L3)

This combination of work volume and time scarcity means that VCS managers may need to place mentoring at the bottom of a long priority list.

Time and, subsequently, funding clearly have a strong influence on what is feasible for the VCS. If organisations are working within short-term funding and driven by project outcomes, they will have less capacity to plan for the provision of mentoring or to fund the time needed to undertake mentoring activities.

Different interpretations of managers and practitioners

As part of the methodology, I aimed to use the views of managers and practitioners as a form of triangulation with the literature to identify any discrepancies between the views of managers and those of practitioners. However, the data is somewhat blurred, as many of the managers who took part in this research are also practitioners, a common occurrence for VCS providers.

The only clear instances of disagreement were in the perceptions of what constituted mentoring. In particular, all managers said that mentoring was taking place but the two practitioners did not necessarily recognise this. B3

was quite clear that he had not been mentored as a teacher yet his manager was clear that he had. B3 stated that:

> "The only form of mentoring I understand that there is here is obviously for clients." (P2/L23)

Even with prompting, he did not identify any activities that he had been involved in that he would have considered to be mentoring. Similarly, A1 described a range of support that she had provided for A2 but A2 did not immediately acknowledge this as mentoring. It was only through the process of the interview that A2 recognised that the work that she was undertaking with A1 was mentoring.

Beyond this, much of the data provided by managers and practitioners was very similar in terms of the issues covered and the perceptions of mentoring schemes or the role of mentors. However, if there had been a clear definition of mentoring and associated outcomes, it would have been easier to identify discrepancies between what managers expected of mentoring and what practitioners experienced. As such, it is only possible to identify one clear discrepancy between managers and teachers and that is in organisation B, where the managers felt that they engaged in mentoring support but the teacher was clear that mentoring only took place for learners.

Summary

The data presented in Part II of my research offered a rich vein of views and interpretations from the participants. However, this data was not evenly spread across the research questions, partly due to my use of grounded

research tools which allowed participants to discuss issues of importance to them rather than being directed by me as the researcher. The data did provide some common themes, particularly around what mentoring means for managers and practitioners and the need for the organisational ethos to be an inherent part of the mentoring process.

I will now move on to the final two chapters in which I will draw conclusions from the data and offer suggestions for the VCS as well as ideas for further research.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter considers the findings from the data presented in Chapter 4 weighing them against the research questions in order to draw some conclusions. It also offers a reflection on my journey as a researcher to explore what I have learned about the topic of mentoring and the process of researching.

The data was collected to address the four research questions:

- what does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS?

- what activities are taking place in the VCS that could be defined as mentoring?

- what mentoring models are already in use in the VCS sector?

- what aspects of the VCS sector influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?

The research was based on a specific educational event – the introduction of mentoring for ITT – and an examination of how the VCS as one part of the PCET sector responded to that event. Using this background and the research questions, I will now summarise the findings.

Findings

The findings can be summarised into six key points:

- the definition and purpose of mentoring and the role of mentor in relation to ITT is unclear for the VCS leading to a **continuum of confusion**

- **support** is identified by VCS providers as the key element in a mentoring relationship

- activity is taking place in the VCS that could be described as mentoring but is not necessarily being identified as such leading to it being **unvalued and undervalued**

- VCS providers feel that other providers offering mentoring for ITT need to be aware of the **specificity of setting** and the ethos of individual organisations to be able to provide the right sort of mentor and to support mentees effectively

- there is little resistance to the introduction of mentoring for ITT into the VCS with an **implicit acceptance that mentoring is a good thing** although there are numerous perceived barriers

- due to the specific nature of the VCS, the models of mentoring currently in use are based on **inadequate pragmatism** as they are a compromise rather than designed to meet the identified needs of the VCS

The structural differences associated with the VCS must be kept in mind when interpreting the data. This is identified as the 'contextual imperative' by Cox

(2003) and has been discussed by many writers (Kram, 1983; Cunningham, 2005). However, in much of the literature the focus is on understanding the way in which organisations work. The data in this research shows a stronger focus on the importance of organisational ethos and the nature of the learners. Also, the blurring of roles between managers and teachers, the crossover of roles between counselling and mentoring, the belief-based drivers within organisations and the fragmented funding streams served to frame the way in which participants interacted with the research. This is something specific to the VCS as other PCET providers are unlikely to have a similar combination of factors influencing their choices. Linked to this was the continuum of confusion running through the data which led to some gaps and overlaps in the presentation of the findings. Whilst the newness of mentoring for trainee teachers can be seen as contributing to the persistent lack of clarity there are other factors affecting how the VCS has engaged with mentoring. This is a combination of the barriers identified by many of the participants, some of which have resulted in VCS providers being excluded from the discourses around mentoring for ITT, and the particular nature of the VCS which does not fit neatly with the requirements of ITT and the emerging FE models of mentoring.

The following section uses the research questions to explore the findings, note weaknesses in the data and identify areas for further exploration.

What does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS?

Dodgson's (1986:29) observation that the definition of a mentor is elusive and differs depending on the author is borne out by the research as there was no clear definition offered during the focus group or interviews and each participant had a slightly different view of what they would expect. However, it is possible to identify some common expectations voiced in both the focus group and in the interviews. For the participants, a mentor was seen as someone who:

- provides support

- listens

- has experience of teaching

- is a role model

- works within the organisational ethos

- guides

- acts as a sounding board

Although this would not necessarily constitute a definition, it is a starting point and something for external mentors to be aware of. This list also picks up on many of the themes identified in the literature, particularly experience and role modelling, although the emphasis on support and listening is more prevalent in the data than the literature.

It must be acknowledged that some of the lack of clarity was more than just the semantics. It was based on a lack of knowledge of and engagement with

the ITT requirements in relation to providing mentors for VCS staff. The participants could not define mentor or mentoring because they were unsure of how ITT affected their organisations. This in turn impacted on the way in which they expressed their views as they were not always speaking from a fully informed position which may have made them feel uncomfortable to express strong opinions. Rather than being able to describe what a mentor is or what a model of mentoring would be like, the research participants used other ways of working towards a definition, such as describing the skills, characteristics and attributes that they associated with a mentor. Similarly, they identified a series of barriers or problems almost as a way of saying 'this is not what a mentor should be'. This is a way of using an ostensive definition (Govier, 2001) by pointing to examples of what the object to be defined – mentor – is in the hope that this better describes an elusive concept.

The fundamental nature of the confusion was evident in the focus group in particular where participants were asking questions about what was actually required under the ITT regulations. None of the participants had a clear understanding of what was expected of their organisation, of their mentors or of their mentees. This confusion was couched in terms such as 'newness' or being 'in the dark' but as the ITT regulations had been introduced in the previous year and FE colleges have already engaged with it the lack of clarity is particularly noticeable in the VCS. Without an appropriate '**framework of understanding**' it is impossible for the VCS to define the role of mentor or the way in which mentoring will take place in their organisations. This means that they are not engaging with the requirements of ITT mentoring and, more

importantly, they are not influencing the way in which mentoring is being introduced. The particular needs and interests of the VCS are, therefore, unlikely to be addressed by FE providers who are offering an approach which suits their needs but may not address the specific needs of the VCS. Again, this is borne out in the paucity of literature that addresses the context of the VCS.

This inability to provide clear definitions is further compounded by 'partial knowledge'. All participants in the focus group and interviews had some experience or knowledge of being mentored or being a mentor which led to their situated perspective. However, they had not engaged in professional discussions about these experiences or aired their views on how mentoring would work for ITT. Also, further confusion was generated because some participants were unable to separate mentoring for learners from mentoring for staff. These multiple strands of confusion became apparent during the data collection when the focus group itself became a vehicle for examining definitions and the potential role of mentors. The participants took the opportunity of a forum of professionals facing the same issues to voice their concerns, suggest ideas and construct meanings. When the tape was switched off and the group chatted informally, they all said that they would like to meet again to progress their discussions. Similarly, during the interviews it seemed that participants were thinking aloud, sometimes changing their views as they worked through ideas. This shows a lack of a shared understanding *within* organisations (as demonstrated particularly by organisation B) as well as *across* organisations (as demonstrated in the focus group). Although there

has been considerable work taking place across the wider PCET sector, the VCS providers did not appear to have been included in the discourses. The act of taking part in the research had provided a catalyst for professional discussions and must be acknowledged as influencing some of the data. As such, the work of writers such as Rogers (2007), Barr (2003) and Said (1991) is a useful reminder to me as a researcher that data can easily be affected by my assumptions about and interventions with the research subject. It also raised the question of whether mentors and mentees need an opportunity to construct their own understanding of the relationship or whether the organisation should prescribe that definition. Several writers (Smith et al., 2005; Nielson and Eisenbach, 2003; Allen and Eby, 2003; Roberts, 2000) discuss how mentors use the vehicle of the mentoring relationship to develop an understanding of their role but the same examination of role is rarely afforded to the mentee. Also, little discussion takes place as to how to negotiate the competing interests of mentee, mentor, employer and external bodies. The data seemed to indicate that the interests of these different stakeholders needed to clarified in order to arrive at a workable definition.

Moving beyond the confusion, the lack of a definition leads to problems in the implementation, management and evaluation of mentoring systems. For example, it is not possible to acknowledge what work is taking place that is mentoring and so it will be unvalued or undervalued. This will mean inaccurate work load calculations, unrecognised staff development activities and missed opportunities for the organisation to use mentoring activities effectively. Also, without some form of benchmarking as to what constitutes

mentoring activity, it will not be possible to acknowledge what work is currently being done in order to identify what activities are not being fulfilled in terms of the ITT requirements. It may be that VCS providers are already undertaking appropriate mentoring activities to meet the ITT requirements, but it is not possible to judge this without appropriate definitions. This is not an argument for the command and control approaches, criticised by Seddon (2005:49), associated with purpose, measures and methods whereby the functions dictate the outcomes, rather it is a need for transparency. Unless all stakeholders in the mentoring relationship are clear about their roles and expectations it will not be possible to engage in the activities from an informed position. It will also make reflective practice for the mentor less effective as it will be difficult to reflect on performance and interactions without a clear understanding of the role and expected outcomes. This, in turn, will block the possibility of Argyris' (1977) double- loop learning as it will never be possible to move beyond a superficial understanding of the mentoring relationship without a questioning, profound understanding of the role of mentor on which to build future interactions.

Only one theme emerged consistently in the focus group and the interviews; support as a key function of mentoring. This was identified frequently by participants as something that they would expect of a mentor and something implicit in work that they were already undertaking (that could be seen as mentoring). Support was seen as ranging from helping someone who was struggling with their ITT course work to talking people through classroom issues, and was predominantly linked to the resolution of problems. There is

an implicit thread in much of the literature around help, guidance and support with writers such as Ragins (1989) and Cunningham (2005) making direct reference to the importance of support. However, the data showed that this had much more importance for the participants than is indicated by the literature. This could be because it is a very practical explanation for the work of a mentor. It could also be because the literature is engaged in the discourses, language and theories of mentoring whereas the participants are dealing with the day-to-day perceptions of how a mentor would operate in their setting.

Although there was no consensus about the definition of mentor, there was an implicit, and sometimes explicit, theme around the importance of experience. For example, A1 referred to her lack of experience as a teacher as being problematic, A2 thought a mentor should have the experience a mentee wants to gain, B2 thought that it may not be possible to mentor without teaching experience, B1 referred to her life experiences as key to mentoring staff, F5 talked about bringing experience to the mentoring relationship to provide examples of ways of working. It was seen as a way of supporting teachers *through* the experiences of their mentors. Experience seemed to offer a '**tool kit**' of ideas and examples for mentors to call on to make their mentoring more relevant, practical and credible. However, it was difficult to gauge whether the experience was necessarily related to teaching and/or to the subject specialism. This would need further exploration. Within the existing literature, experience is frequently sited as an important mentor characteristic and is often linked to role modelling and credibility and

sometimes to age. The data did not indicate that experience per se was important although the focus on the ethos and developing people from the community suggested that context-relevant experience was important. Participants from organisations A and C described how staff were chosen for their potential and position within communities. Their experience as learners in challenging settings seemed to be part of the tool kit needed to act as a mentor in these organisations. They need to be 'like' their mentees in terms of shared experiences, something identified by Mumford (1995), Ragins (1997) and Allen and Eby (2003) as important to a successful mentoring relationship based on interpersonal comfort.

Taking into account the high level of uncertainty and confusion, my provisional definitions posited in Chapter 1 (page 7) would seem to stand but with some mediation for the specific interests of the VCS. My definitions of **mentoring** as a dynamic and holistic learning relationship which encourages reflection, growth and problem solving, **mentor** as someone who provides support, guidance and stimulation to reflect on and improve skills, knowledge and performance and **mentee** as someone who is developing skills of reflection in order to examine their thoughts, feelings and behaviour, the impact of these and how to change if necessary address many of the elements identified by the participants but I would revise them as follows:

- mentoring is a dynamic learning relationship which encourages reflection, growth and problem solving for individuals and the organisations in which they work

- a mentor provides support, guidance and stimulation to reflect on and improve skills, knowledge and performance to meet individual and organisational goals

- a mentee is a partner in the mentoring relationship, developing reflective skills to examine thoughts, feeling and behaviours and evaluating the impact of these on others in order to make appropriate changes

Definitions will, as Dodgson (1986) has noted, vary according to the author. Whilst these are my current definitions following this piece of research, they will, no doubt, change over time as mentoring develops and my understanding grows. One of the ways in which these definitions will grow is through a better awareness of what activities come to be seen as mentoring. The next section examines the current position in terms of activities taking place in the VCS.

What activities are taking place in the VCS that could be defined as mentoring?

Without a clear definition of what constitutes mentoring, it was hard for participants to describe activities that were seen as mentoring within their organisations. This meant that the data collected for this research question was limited and predominantly based on researcher interpretation to identify implicit examples.

Even when describing activities such as working with teachers on lesson planning and developing resources, some of the participants were quick to

dismiss this as not really mentoring because they did not regard themselves as appropriately trained or qualified to be mentors. There seemed to be a need to be 'labelled' as a mentor before work that was being undertaken could be acknowledged as mentoring. Others described how they took extra time to support new teachers or those on ITT courses, but they saw this as part of their line management role, particularly C1. Mentoring is not perceived as a discrete or specific role in any of the organisations. The lack of formal definitions, confused messages from professional bodies about mentoring requirements, resource constraints and the dominance of FE organisations as the providers of ITT mentors has led to the VCS undervaluing their existing expertise and activities. This may, in turn, lead to the role of mentors being undervalued if it is taken-for-granted that this work will be done, somehow, without professional recognition of the skills and expertise required of a mentor.

The only explicit examples of mentoring taking place were in relation to staff who were engaged in ITT courses with FE providers. In these instances, an external mentor had been provided. Other examples of mentoring activity were integrated into line management roles. By subsuming mentoring into line management responsibilities, there is a risk that the role has less value or is perceived as a hierarchical directive to ensure teachers are performing well rather than being seen as a developmental relationship. Whilst it is probably pragmatic for small organisations to use line managers to undertake mentoring, this runs the risk of causing tension if managers feel overloaded. Tensions will also emerge if teachers do not understand that their manager is

also their mentor and that this will change the dynamics of the relationship. As Cunningham (2007) notes, observations of teaching and learning will be a fundamental function for ITT mentors and this will necessarily lead to judgements about performance being made. If line management and mentoring judgements become conflated, it is less likely that the ITT mentoring relationship will be a supportive and developmental one which contradicts the importance of support as identified in the data.

There is also something about the nature of the VCS organisations which means that their ethos and structure may be promoting ways of working which are particularly suited to mentoring activities. For example, the role of counselling is raised by several participants. As many VCS providers offer counselling and advice services for learners, they already have skills and structures that will support the introduction of mentoring. Yet this way of working was not identified by participants as anything special or particularly suited to a mentoring system. What could be the foundations of responsive and highly developed mentoring relationships is currently a missed opportunity. At the same time, care must be taken to avoid Ecclestone and Hayes' (2008) therapeutic turn if mentees are not to become seen as deficient or needy in some way as is often the case if associated with a counselling approach. The use of the context-specific skills familiar to the VCS should be used to challenge and develop trainee teachers positively and interactively, building on their existing strengths and working as a critical friend. If this is the approach adopted, it will ensure that the mentees are not diminished in any

way and it will address Ecclestone and Hayes belief that therapeutic approaches bestow a vulnerable status on the passive recipient.

There is clearly a range of activities taking place in these organisations which could be identified as fulfilling mentoring roles. However, these activities are hidden within other roles or not acknowledged as mentoring which gives a false impression of the amount of mentoring taking place. Until the VCS sets some parameters for the role of mentors, it will not be possible to assess the extent of mentoring activity and so it may be the case that the VCS is already undertaking work which would address some or all of the ITT mentoring requirements.

The next section examines how the issues of definition and activities relate to the models of mentoring currently being used.

What mentoring models are already in use in the VCS?

None of the participants could describe a formal model of mentoring being used by their organisation. Instead, the data showed that there was a mixture of two frameworks; external mentors coming into organisations and bringing with them the mentoring model of the teacher-training organisation or integrated mentoring whereby in-house staff undertook mentoring as part of another function.

From the limited data on these two frameworks, it seems that the current situation is one of inadequate pragmatism. Using an external mentor does not

meet the needs of the organisation, because these mentors do not understand its ethos, and using an in-house mentor does not meet the ITT requirements, because the VCS does not have suitably qualified and trained mentors. Although the participants had clear ideas about the type of person they would like in the role of mentor, and how they would expect this person to work, they had not managed to bring together their expectations with the requirements of the ITT.

The data to support the research question addressing activity that can be seen as mentoring (discussed above) clearly shows that mentoring is taking place, but this is not then supported by data to show a distinct model of mentoring. As such, it was appropriate to examine aspirational models of mentoring with participants to explore how they would like mentoring to operate. An idea raised in the focus group and revisited by A1 was that of a 'pool' of mentors to share the limited resources more effectively between small VCS providers. This does have the potential to resolve some of the geographical, subject-specific and capacity issues that were highlighted in the research but would require a consortium approach to mentoring. It is also a model that is already being used and expanded as an e-mentoring tool through 'ASSOCiate-Online' (http://associate.hud.ac.uk/). However, e-mentoring as a model may not be appropriate for the VCS yet, as none of the participants offered it as a suitable tool and it would bring with it the need for IT skills as well as access to computers. This may be a model to revisit when the VCS has clarified what it needs from mentoring. Also, further research into

alternative models of mentoring would be beneficial to provide more options for the VCS.

The following section draws together the data from the first three research questions to examine specific influences on the introduction of mentoring.

What aspects of the VCS influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?

Although the VCS is part of the wider PCET sector and subject to the FE legislation which has introduced the ITT regulations and mentoring requirements, it is clear that there are differences in the way in which it operates and the culture of the organisations. I would refer to this as the 'specificity of sector', similar to Cox's (2003) contextual imperative but with a stronger emphasis on the way in which VCS providers have been established and the importance of sensitivity to their ethos. Several of the participants were clear that the specific nature of the VCS must be taken into account when providing mentors for trainee teachers, as previous bad experiences with FE colleges had led them to think that FE providers did not understand their needs. This feeling was particularly strong in the focus group, as the participants shared negative experiences of working with FE colleges for ITT. Such negativity will, inevitably, influence future encounters with mentors from the FE sector. It may even prevent VCS providers from engaging with ITT courses if they feel that the associated mentors will not be able to meet the needs of the mentees.

The type of person undertaking mentoring was something that many participants felt was crucial to the success of the mentoring relationship. Smith et al's. (2005) observation that the environment in which the mentoring takes place helps to define the characteristics of a mentor is useful here to support the data in terms of the importance of the organisational ethos. For example, during the focus group, the concept of a multi-skilled person (Hankey, 2004) emerged. This was in terms of:

- experience (either as a teacher or as a manager able to support teachers)

- personal attributes

- generic and subject-specific teaching skills

- interpersonal skills

- experience of the VCS

As VCS organisations often require people to have multiple roles and an associated range of transferable skills this is, perhaps, not surprising as a finding. In the context of mentoring for ITT, it is also not surprising as mentors are required to have a range of teaching and mentoring skills, but the additional dimension for the VCS is that they want mentors to understand the needs of VCS learners and staff. There was some disagreement around the need for mentors to have experience of the VCS, as one interviewee did not identify this as an issue and one focus group participant felt it was possible to learn from exposure to other environments, but this was not explored by other members of the focus group. This may indicate that the participants were not ready to engage with more challenging models at this time. This is not inappropriate, as this would have added to the uncertainty amongst the group.

The result of this discussion leads to a potential model of what constitutes a mentor; teaching experience, interpersonal skills, empathy with the context. All of the elements are important to the success of the mentoring relationship and may vary depending on situations. I would represent this model as follows:

Figure 4 - The VCS mentor
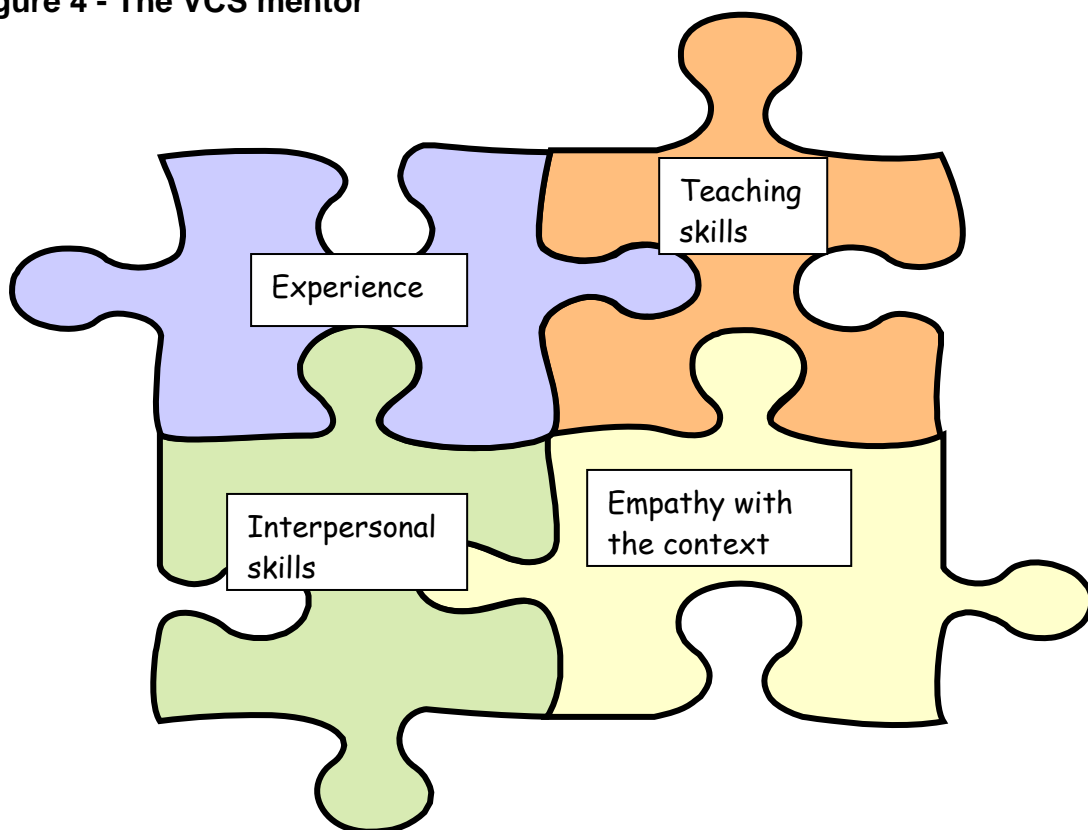
This model summarises the themes emerging from the data. It aims to encapsulate the fact that each interlocking element is needed to give a coherent view of the mentoring relationship although there are no 'edges' as the relationship is dynamic and the picture is never quite complete. This is less function-based than the models of Kram (1985), Woodd (2001) and Wallace and Gravells (2007) which is probably a reflection of the current

engagement of the participants in the discourses surrounding mentoring. The VCS providers are still at an early stage in their thinking whereby models will be based on practical, every day situations and solutions.

One area which appears frequently in the literature and which was similarly important in the data was the personal attributes ascribed to mentors. Although there was not always a direct statement that mentors needed to have certain attributes, there was a significant amount of data that described attributes as more akin to functions. Within these descriptions there was often an implicit notion that these attributes required effective interpersonal skills. As none of the organisations had designated a role of 'mentor' for anyone in terms of ITT it was not surprising that they could not list mentor attributes. However, many of the participants talked from personal experience about mentors having certain qualities including:

- wisdom

- experience

- being a role model

- the ability to listen

- the ability to support

- the ability to guide

- the ability to act as a sounding board

- the ability to facilitate reflection

All these attributes focus on the experience and facilitation skills of a mentor rather than their subject knowledge, ability to support a trainee-teacher through ITT or the ability to work in the interests of the organisation. This

might not sit well with the introduction of mentoring for ITT, with its underlying assumption that trainee teachers will be supported by subject-specialist mentors and that these mentors will assess the performance of the trainee which will affect their employment opportunities. This could easily lead to what Cunningham (2005:96) calls 'role conflict', particularly if the role of mentor is integrated into a line management role. In small organisations, this person could be the one deciding what work is allocated as well as the person undertaking performance related procedures. Clearly, this will make the role of mentor quite incestuous and, for reasons of fairness and objectivity, it may be necessary for small organisations to seek external mentors.

Cunningham (2005:12) also recognises that school-based mentors currently have more incentive to undertake and carry out the role well, as they receive financial rewards in addition to potential career advancement. This is not yet the case in PCET generally and will always be a problem for VCS providers operating with short-term funding. If VCS providers have to choose a mentoring model on the basis of cost rather than efficacy, this may cause inequities across the sector and may lead to problems sourcing suitably qualified mentors. It may also exacerbate the professional isolation that many of the very small providers experience, something which effective mentoring could actively address.

Reflections on the research process

Adopting an interpretivist position for research will always lead to 'loose ends' as the data collected will not fit neatly into boxes. Overlaying this with a

thematic analysis using the tools of grounded theory, to ensure that the data shaped the research rather than the other way round, and using reflexivity to increase transparency meant that the research process was fluid and open to change in response to the data. Every stage was punctuated by a series of questions about the adequacy of the data and my interpretation of it which, although difficult to manage, was the strength of the approach. It was particularly challenging to maintain a structure for the analysis when it became apparent that models of mentoring were not sufficiently developed to offer substantial data to address one of the research questions. As the anticipated data was not available, I found that the confusion voiced by the participants led to overlap in the analysis which made the presentation of the data less fluent. My instinct was to pull back from the 'difficult' research question but, by using the tools of grounded research, I was able to draw on data from the other research questions to inform my analysis. It also encouraged me to open up other possible lines of enquiry, such as that around aspirational models and how existing activity is undervaluing what could be potentially good mentoring practice. Using this, at times, frustrating research methodology supported me to expose the data to deeper scrutiny. It was like peeling away very thin but opaque layers in order to reveal more questions than answers. Even though this has brought me to a position where I still have questions, it has served to map the research territory more adequately so that I can at least see more of the questions that need answering.

What have I learned about mentoring?

Like Dodgson (1986) I was aware that mentoring is ill-defined in the literature and definitions fluctuate depending on the purpose being described by the author. However, I was surprised at just how unclear the concept is for the VCS. This was in terms of what is required of them under the ITT regulations and in terms of what they would want from a mentoring scheme. I was also surprised by how much mentoring activity is taking place which is not being acknowledged as such. Mentoring is not only difficult to define, it is difficult to quantify.

It was not surprising, then, that there was disagreement within and across organisations as to what constituted mentoring. This meant that existing mentoring activity was unvalued and undervalued. As mentoring is such a key element of ITT and is so frequently seen as a 'good thing', it has made me question whether being a mentor has become conflated with line management or peer support in a way which means it is no longer a 'pure' concept. The skills identified with a mentor in much of the literature (such as listening, reflection, problem solving) and the purposes of mentoring (achieving an objective) could very easily be seen as those required of a line manager. There was very little that was 'special' to mentoring in the data. By this I mean something that made it stand out from other roles. In the literature, theorists often highlight particular characteristics such as wisdom or seniority (Smith et al., 2005; Matthews, 2003: Shea, 2002) to define mentors. However, this may be misleading as it may be that it is not possible to identify characteristics in such a clear cut way and that these characteristics are

ascribed context specific meanings. The data indicated that participants intuitively knew what they wanted in a mentor or how they expected a mentor to behave. Yet they did not have a list of attributes or a model of mentoring. It may be that the very essence of being a mentor is having a tool kit of skills and experience to call on and a chameleon nature so that the mentor can accommodate the context-specific nature of the VCS as well as responding to the needs of individual mentees. Perhaps it is a false hope to set a generic definition of mentor because we need mentors to have different attributes in different relationships. In reality, the best we may be able to achieve is a set of parameters that act as a framework on which to build and maintain a mentoring relationship.

I also discovered that mentoring does not fit into neat models as much of the literature implies. The very nature of human interactions makes it difficult to pigeon-hole a lot of the mentoring activity that is taking place in the VCS. Within the research, this made it difficult to establish links between the data and the models presented in the literature. Again, this may relate to the general uncertainty about what mentoring for ITT is or it may be because, without a framework of understanding, it is not possible to identify an appropriate model of mentoring. All of the existing models have limitations in terms of being unable to represent the dynamism of human relationships. Whilst Wallace and Gravells (2007) acknowledge that there is overlap and movement in their model and Woodd (2001) sees that her model implies linear progression it is difficult to find a model that fully describes the complexity of mentoring. Shea (2002) comes closest to describing a model

that offers movement in terms of time and relationship development but the model is less satisfactory in its presentation of how mentoring is constantly shifting. It may be that mediating Shea's model with reflective practice to show how mentoring relationships evolve would offer a more suitable model for the VCS.

What have I learned about research(ing)?

Throughout the research process, I have been mindful of Barr's description of research and how it can be liberating whilst still questionable:

> The dual meaning of liberating knowledge is that on the one hand knowledge can be liberating: on the other hand what counts as knowledge is contestable as well as actually contested. (Barr, 2003:162)

This became apparent early in the research as the members of the focus group were focused on how mentoring would work within their own organisation. These different positions showed that work is still needed to ensure a common understanding of mentoring for ITT across the wider PCET sector. Constructions of knowledge and associated discourses were not what I expected to be important when I started the research. However, as Foucault (1980:93) identifies, 'Power produces knowledge. Power and knowledge directly imply one another' and exclusion from the knowledge base associated with mentoring has disempowered individuals and organisations in the VCS. It also helps to explain the lack of definitions as the participants did not have either the knowledge or power to create definitions that suited their needs. I would now see this as an important strand for further research, particularly to

uncover whether the exclusion was explicit or implicit and whether there has been a detrimental impact on the VCS as a result of this exclusion.

The exclusion of the research participants from the discourses had an impact on the data collection, because I had not anticipated how the lack of knowledge and the lack of engagement with mentoring would affect the data. This meant that I had to re-focus the research, using it to construct pathways through the confusion rather than to reach definitive answers to the research questions. Whilst I had not set out to undertake quantitative or positivist research of any sort, I had expected there to be more consensus and commonality than emerged. This served to remind me of the effectiveness of the tools of grounded research which allow for the research to respond to the emerging data in order to construct a theoretical framework. Thus my thematic analysis, which ran the risk of becoming fragmented by the lack of consensus, could remain as a framework that was flexible enough to include emerging and discordant data. Although this was sometimes frustrating, it was ultimately essential to making sense of the data. For instance, I had not expected organisational ethos to play such an important part in the discussions and I had to recognise this in my thematic analysis. Similarly, when I began the data collection I had not planned time to explore issues of definition on the basis of confusion. Rather, I had expected there to be contested definitions but in many cases there were no definitions available. Through reflection and reflexivity I have been able to adjust my theoretical framework as data emerged and, as a result, the data is uneven in response to my original research questions.

In some ways, the examination of knowledge construction and the difficulties associated with exclusion from discourses also reflected my own position as a lone researcher operating at a distance from my host institution. Without immersion in daily academic discussion and interaction with others researching mentoring, it was easy to become distracted and unfocused. I realised that my research approach would benefit from exposure to the research of others and I joined the East of England Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (EECETT) sub-group on mentoring as well as the Sub-CETT for Teacher-Training in Hertfordshire. This kept me in touch with developments at a regional level as well as linking into national projects. As such, I had the opportunity to test out ideas, check my thought process and compare emerging data with activity elsewhere in the sector. This was invaluable in helping me to identify researcher bias in my analysis of the data as well as keeping me in touch with developing theories and practices. Yet I have been mindful of Foucault's (1974:49) observation that, 'Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the process of doing so conceal their own invention'. Whilst it was useful for me to be involved in the discourses, I tried to remain aware that they are structuring mechanisms for social institutions and frequently conceal the motivations behind them. Rarely are discourses used than to promote the interests of others. In this research, the underlying discourse is that of government control of the teaching profession as established in the legislation and subsequent interpretations.

I also learned that there is a point to stop and let go. As the data emerged, it was tempting to keep adding ideas and following alternative lines of investigation but I realised that the research was becoming unwieldy and too fragmented to be useful. I had to remind myself to stay focused on the data to hand rather than trying to add to it by undertaking additional interviews. This was one of the biggest difficulties of my chosen research methodology, as it risked getting caught in constant data collection rather than attempting to analyse data to offer findings. It also drew me back to questioning my research method. This was because the emerging data began to show a strong focus on the culture of the organisations which, in hindsight, may have been better suited to an ethnographic approach. However, the framework of a case study using a thematic analysis and tools of grounded theory served well to structure data that was often confused, in the presentation by participants, as it was suitably flexible enough to accommodate the emerging data.

I will now move onto the final chapter which serves to offer recommendations for the VCS and other providers working with the VCS.

Chapter 6

Policy implications and recommendations

Introduction

This final chapter draws together some of the ideas emerging during the research and links back to my original research questions to offer recommendations for the future. It also makes clear the limitations of this research to ensure that readers are aware of the parameters within which the recommendations are formulated. Finally, I offer suggestions for further research.

What can this research offer the VCS?

Even though this research did not set out to be generalisable or to offer definitive models of mentoring to the VCS, it is able to offer recommendations based on the findings and some suggestions for further research. Within these parameters, this chapter explores the implications of these research findings and how the VCS and wider PCET sector can use them to introduce effectively mentoring for ITT which addresses the specific nature of the VCS.

The degree of uncertainty that was evident throughout the data and the way in which VCS providers in this research had been excluded from discourses indicates that work needs to be done to include all parts of the VCS in the introduction of mentoring for ITT. For the ITT reforms to be implemented successfully they will need to be communicated effectively and consistently to

all stakeholders to ensure they meet the needs of the full range of PCET providers. Similarly, without a shared understanding of meaning, agreed benchmarks and success criteria it will not be possible to measure the impact or success of the policy.

Whether exclusion from the discourses is because VCS providers have not engaged with mentoring, whether they have been forgotten or whether they have been deliberately omitted is not clear and would require further research. What is clear is that they need a vehicle for exploring the issues as well as a way of ensuring that their particular needs are addressed. It is the very process of constructing meanings, through involvement and resistance that leads to an empowered place within the discourses (Foucault, 1974). This is unlikely to be a comfortable journey at first, as was seen by the challenges to FE ways of working in the data. However, until the VCS has a framework of understanding for what they mean by mentor and mentoring for ITT, it will not be possible to engage in discourses on equal terms or to implement effectively mentoring systems. This, in turn, means that it will not be possible to make judgements about existing practice in the VCS and whether this provides an appropriate platform for mentoring approaches. This is not an argument for a move towards the target-driven public sector as criticised by Seddon (2005) and Wind-Cowie and Olliff- Cooper (2009) but it is a need to engage with the policies and practices in a way which demonstrates the value of the existing mentoring activities within the VCS. The implications for policy are thus threefold; first, the ITT requirements will not be implemented evenly across the sector, second, VCS providers could fail to be compliant with the

legislation if they do not engage fully with mentoring for ITT and, third, discourses need to acknowledge what is already working for the VCS rather than forcing them to fit into a FE model. Also, VCS providers are working with some of the key target groups for implementing other government policies (such as those related to offenders and single parents) and if the VCS providers do not feel able or willing to be part of the ITT reforms they will not be available to operate as education providers in the longer term.

Linking into the second point around VCS engagement with mentoring for ITT, the data clearly showed that activity is taking place which could be seen as mentoring. On a pragmatic level, this would be a useful starting point for the VCS when considering the development of formal models. On a conceptual level, it would require further examination to explore whether the activity was appropriate to be defined as mentoring. In particular, counselling and support were mentioned throughout the research and these skills could be used to inform a framework of understanding and to underpin a model of mentoring. By using existing skills as a starting point, this would minimise resourcing implications and would acknowledge current good practice. Linking this to a focus for the mentee on the achievement of an appropriate ITT qualification would provide a purpose and a set of basic parameters for the relationship. This could then be overlaid by the specificity of sector considerations to ensure that mentors had the knowledge, skills and experience to support mentees in the VCS. This initial model could then be offered to the VCS to integrate with the particular ethos of individual organisations rather than imposing external values and systems. Such an approach would be similar to

Britnor-Guest's (2001) informal peer-mentoring model which operates through a framework based on agreed parameters, a commitment to change, the mentee's agenda and measurable actions to monitor progress. It shares the same characteristics of a formal programme but does not have the same organisational input. The key difference would be the importance of ensuring the transmission of the organisational ethos and the adherence to ITT requirements. The implications for policy here would be to ensure that suitable mentors are available either within the VCS or as part of FE teams working with the VCS. This would mean an investment in training for the VCS to develop mentors who understand the ITT requirements or training for FE mentors who have the potential to empathise with VCS settings. It would also require negotiation around the role of mentor and the skills used as the VCS tends towards the therapeutic traits criticised by Ecclestone and Hayes (2008) whereas FE is more familiar with target-focused processes (Seddon: 2005).

Another implication of the unvalued and undervalued activity that could be seen as mentoring is that it will not be possible to measure the resource implications of the ITT reforms. If mentoring is merely absorbed into line management roles or supported through peers, the investment cannot be quantified. Also, if mentors are not required to have specific qualifications or experience they are less likely to see their role as having status or offering career enhancement. Similarly, they are less likely to receive monetary reward for additional work. A model which uses existing skills and which is integrated into current structures is clearly less expensive in the first instance. However, as mentoring develops across the sector, staff who have not been

formally recognised as mentors may find they are disadvantaged in terms of career development and job opportunities. Linked to this, the capacity of the sector to offer mentoring will be skewed if the VCS has an integrated model and FE providers have distinct mentoring pathways.

One of the most insistent themes to emerge from the data was the importance of the mentor being able to empathise with the VCS ethos. It appeared that context specific rather than subject specific mentoring skills were valued by the VCS participants. This presents a problem for the policy framework which places considerable value on subject specific mentors to raise the standards in teaching and learning. Yet the policy does not acknowledge that some subjects, such as Confidence Building or Anger Management, which are vital to the development of many VCS learners do not have an obvious subject specialism. Also, if context specific skills are so important to VCS providers it is unlikely that they will buy in to a system which forces them to prioritise other mentoring skills.

Throughout the literature and the research, the attributes of a mentor are recognised as important. Yet there is no definitive list of these attributes and very little discussion as to how these will be judged. Where Ofsted and the Common Inspection Framework provide a measure for good teaching, there is no equivalent measure for good mentoring. If mentoring is seen by DFES (2004 – now BIS) and Ofsted (2003) as an essential part of raising standards in teaching and learning, then it too may need to be judged against national standards. But how do you quantify attributes such as emotional intelligence?

The policy implications are clearly more bureaucracy in a sector which is already weighed down with inspections and audits. Also, mentoring that is prescribed to meet government standards is more likely to reproduce hegemonic discourses (to 'pass' the test) than to encourage professional challenges. As Foucault (1974) warns, the knowledge that is produced as the truth through discourse is linked to the system of power which has created and sustains it.

What can this research offer providers of ITT mentoring?

As well as providing the VCS with suggestions for the introduction of ITT mentoring, this research may also be able to support organisations that are providing mentors to the VCS. Fundamentally, the amount of confusion about what is required of mentors for ITT needs to be resolved. The legislation clearly states that mentors should be appointed as soon as a new teacher takes up post but this is not being reflected in the external mentoring models encountered by the VCS providers in this study. Some providers offer a mentor to support during a PTLLS course others do not. Unless there is consistency across the wider PCET sector, the VCS will not be able to make informed decisions and the implications are an uneven implementation of the ITT reforms.

In terms of what the VCS expects from ITT providers, the data showed that the majority of participants wanted mentors to be responsive to the specific needs of the VCS. The cultural ethos of the VCS underpinned much of the data. However, where the focus of the literature is on the use of mentoring for

the transmission of organisational culture (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Matthews, 2003) the focus for the participants was on demonstrating an empathy with the reality of the learning environment. This does not mean that VCS providers do not also wish to perpetuate the organisational ethos in fact this is very likely in an organisation established on a belief or cause. Rather, the stated need was for mentors to understand and be able to relate to the situations in which trainee teachers would be working. Recognition of the value systems associated with VCS providers is, therefore, fundamental to any mentoring relationship. This bears out Allen and Eby's (2003) observations that perceived similarities between mentor and mentees leads to a more successful mentoring relationship. Unfortunately, the limited experience that VCS providers had had with external mentors was not positive and seemed to reinforce wider experiences of FE as being unaware or unresponsive to the needs of VCS learners and settings. Where the VCS has not been engaged in mentoring discourses driven by FE needs, FE providers have not engaged with discourses relevant to the VCS and this affects their credibility as mentors for VCS trainee teachers. They do not demonstrate one of the key mentor attributes identified in the data; experience. This does not refer to teaching experience per se but teaching experience within a VCS setting. This seems to be the crucial element of mentoring support for VCS providers and, until it is addressed, there will continue to be difficulties for external providers of ITT mentoring.

Picking up on this point, and pulling together some of the other issues around lack of mentors and resources to develop mentoring in the VCS, I would

suggest that innovative approaches may be needed to overcome the real or perceived barriers to successful mentoring. At the same time, VCS providers need to resist FE definitions and models if they do not meet their needs and to claim recognition for the mentoring activities that are already in place. For example, external providers could use the existing skills and expertise of managers in the VCS to support trainee-teachers through a 'dual-mentoring' model. This would use the expertise of external mentors in terms of ITT and subject-specific input in partnership with an in-house mentor to ensure the ethos of the organisation is taken into consideration. This could be expanded into a peer coaching arrangement to develop the skills of both mentors, thus enhancing the capacity of the wider PCET sector to offer appropriately skilled mentors. This would also link into the idea, which arose at the focus group, of a 'pool' of mentors to address the geographical difficulties and subject-specific shortages. Clearly this model would require effective working relationships between the individuals involved as well as the organisations. The implications for policy are that a flexible approach such as this would offer an interim model to build up the skills and capacity of the VCS as well as improving the communication between FE and VCS providers. Both would be beneficial to the wider PCET community by moving towards a shared understanding of mentoring, an enhanced empathy for other learning settings and capitalising on existing expertise rather than 'buying-in' mentors to gap fill.

What can this research offer academe?

At present, there is very limited research on mentoring for the wider PCET sector and even less exploration of the specific needs of the VCS. This is the key contribution that this research can offer - it is opening up the debate and identifying areas for further research.

Cunningham, Wallace and Gravells are the key theorists writing about mentoring for the FE sector at the time that the ITT was introduced. There is also some emerging research from the CETTs which focuses on the experience of mentoring for ITT (Lawy and Tedder, 2009). However, this work is limited to a focus on FE colleges. Other writers concentrate on either school teachers or mentoring as a concept. Some work on ITT for the VCS is being done by writers such as Turner, Thomas and Rose (2008) but this does not offer an in-depth exploration of mentoring.

In terms of policy implementation, the research offers some alternative models of mentoring. Rather than assuming that the VCS must fit in with work taking place in the FE, there is the chance for the VCS to develop models of mentoring based on their existing practice and ethos. This acknowledges the skills and needs of the VCS whilst encouraging the VCS to gain the same standard of teaching qualifications as FE providers. It also allows for comparative and complimentary models to operate within teacher-training, thus providing research opportunities to evaluate the impact of different models. It does not offer models of mentoring that are generally applicable, nor does it address the needs of work-based learning and private training

providers. Further research to show comparisons across the full range of PCET providers would be beneficial.

The research also opens up the debate about how knowledge is constructed and disseminated. This is in terms of how discourses evolve and how the ethos of an organisation affects the way in which meaning is constructed. In particular, how definitions are created and whether it is possible to have a single definition of mentor or mentoring. This research has touched on a more general consideration for the VCS as part of the PCET sector; how can it influence discourses that are key to the way in which it operates but which are being driven by FE providers? The research is offering more questions than answers in places but these, in themselves, help to map the current position of the VCS and to offer researchers further avenues for investigation.

The research has also helped to reframe my initial hypothesis about definitions of mentor, mentoring and mentee as well as clarifying my research questions. The result is a new hypothesis which is that mentoring activity is taking place in the VCS but it is not defined as mentoring which leads to the work being unvalued and undervalued. Also, mentoring within the VCS needs to be context specific and existing models of mentoring do not meet this need.

Limitations of the research

This research is focused on a specific educational event and works with a small number of providers in a restricted geographical area. As such, it did not set out to be generalisable or comprehensive, as it cannot be replicated and

does not provide a sufficient data set to be representative of the whole VCS or wider PCET sector. Rather it aimed to be clear about the limitations of the data collected and to use this data to illuminate issues as well as identifying areas for further research. The analysis leads to a 'generalisation as a working hypothesis' (Lincoln and Guba (2000:39) after Cronbach, 1975:125) because it captures data at the outset of the introduction of mentoring for ITT and uses the analysis of this data to develop a hypothesis. It would not make sense to wait for the confusion to dissipate as influences will be brought to bear on the VCS, which may change the way in which they interpret mentoring for their particular setting. But this limits the period of time in which the research can take place. Also, the geographical constraints placed upon the research for purely pragmatic reasons (to make it physically manageable) also restrict the generalisability, as it may be revealing activity that only occurs in a small area of the UK. These shortcomings must be taken into account when considering the applicability of the research to other settings. However, I hope that there will be sufficient similarities with other settings and research to provide insights for researchers, practitioners and managers in this field.

Throughout the research, I have been keen to acknowledge limitations by using reflexivity to identify areas of potential researcher influence and bias as well as noting areas where the data have been insufficient to draw firm conclusions. Also, where the research has only been able to map current activity, it does identify areas for further research, both to highlight gaps in the data and to offer new areas for analysis.

What next?

As this research served to take a snapshot of the position for the VCS when mentoring for ITT was introduced, there are several areas for further research.

Throughout the research, it was clear that the participants wanted to engage with the concept of mentoring for ITT and they were not looking for short cuts. They were discussing activities that they currently undertake to support trainee teachers and ideas for how they could introduce mentoring systems. This indicates that they will continue to engage positively with mentoring. It would be useful to undertake longitudinal research to follow up on how this develops in terms of mentoring models introduced and their effectiveness, as well as the experiences of mentors and mentees, as this would help evaluate the impact of mentoring for the VCS. It would also be interesting to have comparisons across the wider PCET sector, to examine whether this acceptance of the need for mentoring was general or specific to the VCS.

Issues of definition persisted throughout the research and are prevalent in the literature. Research to explore definitions across the PCET sector and to evaluate the impact of definitions would help to explore constructions of meaning. Is it possible to establish a mentoring system without definitions? How do we negotiate outcomes without definitions? Do systems without definitions provide more of the psychosocial mentoring functions described by Kram (1986) than the target-driven government agenda described by Seddon (2005)? What are the expectations of a mentee? What does it mean to be a mentee?

The characteristics and skills of mentors were discussed explicitly and implicitly throughout the research, but it was not clear whether mentors are 'made' or the attributes they have are 'inherent'. Whilst this is discussed in the literature (Matthews, 2003; Clutterbuck, 1998), the specific nature of the VCS adds a particular dimension (Smith et al., 2005) as it may be that the environment and the expectations of the roles attracts people with an existing skills set. It would be useful to undertake research across the sector to compare the attributes that mentors 'bring with them' and those which they 'learn' as a result of the role. Linked to this would be an analysis of the importance of counselling skills. This arose in the data as a particular interpretation of the skills required of a mentor, but it was not clear whether this was something specific to the VCS because counselling takes place in all the organisations or whether counselling skills should be something that all mentors possess.

Following the introduction of mentoring within VCS organisations, research to explore the models developed would be useful. This would offer a practical comparison of models across the sector as well as exploring the impact of discourses on the chosen models. For example, are models chosen to compliment the skills set and needs of the VCS or are they chosen because they fit in with established practice developed by FE providers?

Finally…

This research serves to map out issues for the VCS but also for the wider PCET sector. Many of the concerns and ideas that have emerged are relevant to everyone engaged in mentoring for trainee teachers. Whether it is clarifying what the legislation means, agreeing a definition of mentoring, identifying existing good practice or finding innovative models to meet the diverse needs of PCET providers there is still a lot of work to be done to make best use of mentoring as a tool for supporting trainee teachers. Too much is implicit or assumed at present, particularly in respect of the benefits of mentoring and the role of mentor. There is even less discussion of the role of mentee. Without clarity of purpose and evaluation of the impact, mentoring for ITT will be a missed opportunity to share good practice across the wider PCET sector. Including the VCS providers in the discourses and activities will support the whole sector to develop and will enhance the capacity of the sector to meet the challenges of ITT. Without this approach, VCS providers will continue to be excluded and FE providers will continue to fail to meet their needs.

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Questions for pilot focus group

Research Questions	Questions for pilot focus group
What does mentoring mean to managers and practitioners in the VCS?	What are the issues are for VCS providers introducing mentoring under the ITT regulations? What does mentoring mean to managers in the VCS? What does mentoring mean to practitioners in the VCS?
What activities are taking place in the VCS that would be defined as mentoring?	What activities are taking place in the VCS that would be defined as mentoring?
What mentoring models are already in use in the VCS?	What mentoring models are already in use in the VCS?
What aspects of the VCS influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model?	What aspects of the VCS influence the choice of mentor and mentoring model? What aspects of the VCS influence the choice of mentor? What characteristics are required of a mentor working in this specific sector?

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title Mentoring trainee teachers in the Voluntary and Community Sector

Researcher's name Beverley Morris

Supervisor's name   Dr Chris Atkin

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.

- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.

- I understand that I will be audiotaped during the interview.

- I understand that data will be stored electronically and in as a transcript of the interview and this will be stored securely and only available to the researcher and supervisor.

- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Eduction, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ……………………………………………………… (research participant)

Print name ………………………………………… **Date** …………………………

Contact details

Researcher: *Beverley Morris, email: bev@marvellousminds.co.uk Tel: 07816 171638*

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School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: andrew.hobson@nottingham.ac.uk

Focus group 28/3/08 – questions for discussion

- Who has a mentoring system for trainee-teachers

- What issues are you coming across introducing mentoring under the ITT regulations

- How do you define mentoring

- Describe your mentoring system or the one you intend to introduce

- what has influenced your choice of mentors

- what has influenced your choice of mentoring model

Sample interview transcript

Interview C1

BM: Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research, I just want to do some background stuff first. Can you just tell me what your role is in the organisation?

Int   Okay. I am Training Department Manager and I job share that position and have done so for eight years since we last restructured, so, erm, our organisation is quite a flat organisation so a manager's role is quite wide in our organisation. It is operational through to strategic.

BM: Okay. And how many staff and learners have you got roughly at the moment?

Int: In the centre as a whole we have got about 45 members of staff and they are almost all part time, that is about 11 full time equivalents and the Training Department we have, probably, I would say six or 7 full time equivalents.

BM: Okay.

Int: And learners, this year our LSC target is 250 learners.

BM: Okay, lovely. Thank you. Ehm, at the moment do you have a mentor or are you mentoring any trainee teachers?

Int: We don't have anyone who is officially called a Mentor but part of my role is to mentor training teachers.

BM: Okay and is there a specific mentoring scheme in the organisation?

Int: No, no we don't have a specific scheme, I mean it comes in under our overall system of observation, supervision and appraisal.

BM: Right, so it is linked observation?

Int: Yes.

BM: Okay - and appraisal?

Int: And appraisal, yes.

BM: And supervision. OK, Uhm so how would you define mentoring for your trainee teachers?

Int: Well, I personally wouldn't separate them from our main teaching staff, uhm at this time because we have a variety of teaching staff at various levels of experience and I don't have, I don't personally have a cut off point as to when they are a trainee and when they are not uh, they have different levels of qualifications. Some of them have, er, are quite highly qualified and have, you know, a proper teaching certificate, maybe a PGCE or Cert Ed, but still need mentoring from time to time. Others are at the first level of gaining accreditation but all through the range they can have issues but their issues might be different so for the higher levels it might be becoming accustomed to new paperwork and how to use that to the best advantage for their learners and for the others it might include a wider range of issues, teaching methods, classroom management as well.

BM: Okay. Uhm, so do you think that is a shared definition of mentoring in your organisation?

Int: Probably not, no

BM: So how do you think people perceive mentoring here?

Int: I am not sure that a lot of people would attach the word mentoring to anything here, I don't think they would do that. They would see it as support probably. A lot of our staff would talk about whether they are supported by the management or other staff rather than mentoring.

BM: Right, okay, so support is the key.

Int: Would be the key.

BM   Okay, um so, you've mentioned support, you have mentioned the way you work with tutors, is there any other way that you feel that you offer mentoring to staff?

Int: We, we have a variety of systems that we use. They are not particularly formal and they come into play at different times. The most formal probably is the subject team meetings which are again a support mechanism and sharing mechanism and an opportunity for the more experienced staff to assist the less experienced staff or the less experienced staff to ask questions, I would usually be involved in those meetings as well but there may well be another subject specialist who is more able to offer support in that context and from time to time we buddy people up, so, but that's, that's uhm not a formal arrangement in any sense, it doesn't always happen with a new tutor and, er, it isn't, it isn't sign up to agreement, it is something that we arrange as and when is required. Usually would take the form of peer observation and, er, suggestions for general improvement, and it can work very well with

some people but occasionally the person who actually needs the support doesn't realise that they are the one that needs the support so the informality of it probably is not very good. I think if it was more formalized and more clear to an individual that actually that you are the person whose got the difficulties and this other person knows what they are doing, it might be better but in our ethos that doesn't really fit.

BM: Okay … what do you mean by it doesn't fit with the ethos?

Int: Well because we are a lot about skill sharing rather than, uhh, somebody being an expert and somebody not being an expert so for many years the whole centre has worked around a skill sharing basis so when learners come in to sign up for a course, behind that we always have that we are sharing skills, that the tutors are sharing skills with the learners.

Sound of train drowns out conversation.

BM   So you get a lot of trains here…

Int: Uhm, yeah, (Pause) The tutors are sharing skills with the learners. We don't like tutors to set themselves up as being Im the expert Im running the class and you are the learner and you do as .. we have never had that kind of atmosphere even when in the past other organisations did we always had a skill sharing basis that women are of equal value and have a lot to offer everybody comes in with a lot to offer to the Centre and the fact that they might not know how to turn on a computer doesn't mean that uh … you know.. you don't value them, and you will learn a lot from an individual in your class even if they don't have the skills when they come in so its more that basis that, that, you know even with the, the slowest learner with the most difficulties the tutor is going to learn to because the tutor is going to learn in dealing with that person.

BM: Okay, so its sounds like uhm, an important element there is that some learning takes place both for the tutor and the learner?

Int: Yeah.

BM: Is that about reflective practice for the teacher?

Int: It could be but not probably called that, er, if you were say to most of our tutors, do you, are you involved in any reflective practice they would say "what?", but yet it could be, because it is about an examination of how you are dealing with the situation. I have, for example, a learner in one of my classes a few years ago who was registered deaf-blind and had quite a serious visual impairment and a serious hearing impairment and for me that was a very, very big learning experience. How do I present this material to this learner in such a way that she can get what she wants out of this course and she

can achieve and she can feel some benefit, She gain some skills that she can use, and she did and over a period of time, it was slower than the other learners on the course but she did over a period of time gain skills that she wanted but I think I learnt as much as she did.

BM: Okay, so you are talking about the sort of skills set here of your staff. If you had to put a name on the role of Mentor, what skills, what characteristics, what would you look for in a mentor?

Int: Uhm, to be a good role model, so I do think that you do need to have the skills yourself to be able to pass them on. There are some areas of teaching where you might not need to, you might just be able to – because you're a good teacher – you might be able to say, you know, here is the information presented in such a way that people can go in and use it but I think from the mentoring point of view if you are trying to encourage someone to become a good teacher, a good classroom manager, a good uhm, transferor of skills across from one person to another, it helps if they can be a good role model. So, for example, on the most basic level, if they can produce, uh, if they can do their paperwork correctly at the end of the day and they can actually hand in paperwork that is correctly filled in and has been used in the way that it has been designed to be used, so for example the individual learning plans that they work with are individual and they are learning plans and they are a good record of the, er, students work and their feelings about what they are doing then, you know, you need to be able to do that in order to be able to encourage other tutors to be able to do that.

BM: Okay, so that's uhm, is that partly about the skill set that goes with being a teacher as well as the skills needed for this organisation?

Int: Can you rephrase that? (laughs)

BM: I'm just thinking if it's a combination of both teaching and cultural specific to the ethos of your organisation , erm, because of the way you fill in your paperwork you've got a particular outcome from it, so do you think your mentor is role-modelling that?

Int: Yes, Probably, Yes Yes. …Uhm, I would think yes. We're trying to, we're trying to encourage a certain kind of atmosphere, we're trying to see the learner as the centre of what's going on, uhm, we're trying to ensure that each individual learner is getting what they need, uhm, yes, er… I, I think a lot of it is about encouraging staff to see the whole person, uhm, and to interact with individuals in a supportive way.

BM: It sounds like you have a very strong ethos that you need to promote as part of the way that you work and I was just wondering if that's the sort of thing a mentor would need to be able to do as well?

Int: I think so. I think that makes it particularly hard in this kind of organisation because, um, you can't be everything to everybody all of

the time and, um, because we don't have anybody who's one job is to mentor that means that, umm, you have to split priorities and needs. So it can be quite difficult to schedule a mentoring experience – you need to be doing it all of the time. And yes, there are other things to do. It's probably a big issue for the voluntary sector as a whole.

BM: Yes, um…because at the moment you don't have this mythical mentor - you don't have this person to hand at all times...what would be your ideal situation for somebody to be available to mentor staff?

Int: Well…I, I. Yes. I think probably a dedicated role, erm, as I say at the moment it's wrapped up here in, in supervisions, appraisals, er…classroom observations , er...but the problem is that even with that role, we don't have just that role as being somebody's role so, erm, we did at one point have a, er, Support Worker but her role was not just around teaching staff – her role was much wider than the mentoring role. It was a role which involved resolving conflicts and things like that as well. So the only time we've had somebody you might have seen as a mentor in that sense, her role was wider again. It's the having the dedicated … only having to think about that, I think, would be the ideal. If all you had to think about was erm, the development of the staff and the, kinda customer service aspect of it that all your staff are really keyed into producing the best possible outcome for the learner or the Centre user. Some of our Centre users are not learners, erm, or would not want to be seen as that, erm, so its having that, er, customer service and staff development role that would be ideal for us.

(Train passes in background)

Bev: That's your ideal.

Int: Yes.

Bev: If you can't have your ideal, what, what would work for you?

Int: What would work for us, erm, would be more staff generally (laughs). Yes, I think if we were able to, erm, take out some of the subject specialism, er, and have subject co-ordinators, erm, who could deal with some of the subject specialism, in the sense, I mean, things like, erm, accreditation, so, er, the co-ordination of accreditation for a particular subject area because at the moment, erm, there's a confusion for staff between those different aspects, cos I personally see the accreditation side of it as a co-ordination role – making sure that each of the individual tutors for a particular subject understands what they need to do for accreditation, ie, when they need to produce portfolios or when their students need to take exams, understanding which exams they need to take – that's a very specific kind of subject area but at the moment because we offer support on, er, teaching skills and classroom management, they also imagine that, for example, that I should know everything about, er, ESOL Entry level 2, erm,

assessments, but they also think I should know everything about IT assessments and Woodwork assessment and Literacy assessments and Numeracy assessments, and actually, there is a limit in 18 hours a week in how much you can know (laughs). So that's the bit I'd like taken out, that er, subject co-ordinators who dealt with that end. Because the other side of it can easily roll in with the supervisions and appraisals – that fits very well.

Bev: OK. Let me get this clear then…So what would work for you is that you continue giving the teaching support so how you deliver your session, that type of thing, and your appraisals within the existing systems. Pull out anything that is specific to a process like accreditation. Would it also be specific to a subject like Woodwork?

Int: Er…Well actually Woodwork's not really a big deal (laughs). The Woodwork we don't have an external accreditation anyway, we only have an internal, that's not a problem because the tutor just needs support, er, in the sense of, erm, she might need someone to discuss it with occasionally, but the, er, accreditation through official bodies like OCR, OC&W, I…they have very specific processes – they are quite different, from the different accreditation bodies and there is a requirement, somebody who understands the subject, understands that process as well. So there is a difference in the different subject areas in what they need to do.

Bev: So…so that's pulling apart that mentoring role, so perhaps I'll describe it as the "nuts and bolts" of the job, could be done by one person as a formal mentor but the delivery of the teaching and that sort of thing is the expertise …

Int: Yes…I suppose I don't see the accreditation side of it as mentoring at all – I see that as co-ordination – I see that as somebody saying, erm, 'Excuse me Belinda, Don't forget, we've got a moderator coming in 2 week's time – you need to have some portfolios ready for them'. So I see that as very much a process of you do your…it's scheduling really more than anything else – the other side of it, the…erm, the .. for example, erm, how do I, how do I improve my, erm, ability to talk to the class? What can I do that will help me overcome my, erm, shyness of talking to a big group – that kind of thing I see as completely different. And that's more what I see as the mentoring. And to give an example of that, we had, er, at the start of this term, we organized an IT meeting where I asked the two tutors to each, er, produce a short presentation on the smartboards – we have new smartboards and I'd done some classroom observations, I was unhappy with the mix of teaching methods in the IT classes – there was no mix of methods – they were ignoring the fact we'd got smartboards – they were basically teaching people from handouts and I didn't…I don't feel that's appropriate. I feel we need to be…more variety etc, etc. So I came to the conclusion from talking with them that they were a little bit worried about using the smartboards. So we just had a little experience where everybody

produced a presentation and then we were able to discuss it as a group, and one of the tutors involved in that, the presentation she produced for that meeting really wasn't up to standard, erm, she'd put a lot of work into it – it was a PowerPoint presentation for an introduction to an introductory course, so she'd got beginners, complete beginners, who were probably a little bit IT–phobic anyway, erm, and produced a PowerPoint presentation that was full of detail about different types of computers and what you could do with them and what all these words meant and it was way, way, way too much. So, erm, we discussed it generally in the meeting, and I have since then, I've discussed it with her a bit more one-to-one, erm, we've talked about what she could take out of her presentation, how she needed to address that towards beginners and when she did that presentation I went in to observe her presentation and give her some feedback on the presentation. I see that as the mentoring role, erm, and er, I was pleased to see on that occasion that she had done what we'd discussed – she'd realised that she had to simplify it, she had to make it interesting, she had to make it accessible to them. She'd taken out the bizarre images that she had on one of them, examples of where you might find a computer chip that were not everyday examples and she put in some everyday examples like mobile phones and made it much more accessible. And so that's how I see mentoring. There's an issue that you can identify, erm, and it might be one person, it might be more than one person, and you look for methods that are positive and creative for the individual or individuals involved to try and build their confidence to use the correct, or a better way of dealing with something and then you check that they are doing that and the you give them some feedback on it and encourage them further in that role.

Bev: That sounds like a quality improvement model…Is that right?

Int: I guess it might be!

(Laughter)

Bev: Cos you're going through kind of auditing the process, identifying an issue and tackling it and then, erm, ….I don't know whether you'd call it mentoring or coaching, what you were doing this for that person to come up with ideas, um, and then seeing it in action, checking it was okay and giving them feedback. So it seems to go with the…..Okay…That's quite a nice description of the mentoring process that you appear to be going through with staff. Um, you've already said it's informal inasmuch as it's not called a mentoring system and it's within everything else. Would you ever want to formalise it and call it mentoring?

Int: Er…I think we would only do that if we think we probably had a consistent issue with an individual person – we might in our appraisal process, er, or, er, in a disciplinary process if it was that serious we might at that point say – there is a big issue here, we need to deal with

this, we're going to need to do it formally, this is what we are going to do and this person is going to be your mentor for this period of time. It would only be, I think, it'd only become formalised if it was something quite serious.

Bev: Okay. Okay. So, the informal system you've got working, you're happy with that supporting and supplying feedback as necessary?

Int: Yes.

Bev: And do you have any teachers at the moment going through formal teacher training like PTLLS or DTLLS, or PGCE?

Int: We have currently one member of staff who is doing the PTLLS. We do have a couple of extra staff who probably need to do that quite urgently, um, most of our staff have some other form of accreditation like City & Guilds or something like that.

Bev: So, um, Your staff who are doing PTLLS (the one that's doing and the ones that want to do it) are they going to go on and do DTLLS or PGCE?

Int: I don't think they've thought about it yet. We will be encourage our staff to do that but as yet we don't know much about what's available.

Bev: And…if they do go on the requirement is they have a mentor. Would you be looking for the provider organisation to give the mentoring or would you want to do it yourself?

Int: My suspicion is that we'll do it ourselves. I only say that because in the past when we've had people on PGCE we've had people who've been doing it at a distance and, er, we have provided in-house for those people.

Bev: Okay. Has that been successful?

Int: Yes. We've not done it much but it has been fine when we've done it. We had somebody who was doing theirs through The University of Central England or something? And she had somebody come over to do an observation on one occasion and, um, it was a very long way for them to come. It was the Head of Department that came over. I met that particular woman – we agreed that I would do it from then onwards and it all worked fine so.

Bev.   Is there anything else you'd like to say about mentoring in this setting?

Int: Erm, I think it could be a very valuable thing. We would like to do it more with learners too. What we'd really like to have is somebody who had a dedicated role for learners of, um, right from when they come in the door really, meeting, greeting, finding out what they want, what they

need, helping them to get onto the appropriate courses, and support them, as and when through those courses. Unfortunately, we don't have the money for that and can't at the moment find anyone who'd like to give us the money for that, but I actually think it'd be very cost-effective because people would come in, they would get the right assessments, they would go onto the right courses, hopefully (!), at least most of the time they go onto the right courses, erm, if they are having difficulties on the courses there'll be an element of support for them, whereas I think probably across the board, not just here, but across the board, I think a lot of people go along to colleges, sign up on a course which may or may not be the right one, they don't really know, they saw the title and thought it looked, maybe it's the right thing, erm, whenever you go along to an enrolment at a Community College or Regional College they just want you to sign up really. They don't really care what you sign up for. Um, I don't say we're like that here cos we really encourage our enrolment staff to try and find out what the women really needs, not what she says she wants when she walks in the door, but what she 'really' needs. Er, but if it's difficult, and it does take time, and yeah, in big busy place they don't have the time or the inclination, yeah, I think that quite a lot of people end up going on courses which are quite inappropriate for them and occasionally we'll have that here, we'll need to switch people to a different course, or we'll…I'll look at it and think if I'd been doing that enrolment, that woman wouldn't have been on this course, she'd be on that course, then that course, then this course, so it's something that takes time and takes…yeah, an understanding that of…of...people a little bit more than some people have. I'm not saying that I understand people brilliantly, but understanding sometimes that people want something and they don't necessarily know themselves when they walk in the door exactly what it is. So it's having that time to discover with them what they really want.

Bev: Do you see direct parallels between that description and that role with the mentoring skill that you have for tutors?

Int: Yes, I do. It's a different, erm, it's a different skills-set, if you like. But it's still about enabling somebody to do something that the want to do and to do it well. Erm, so there's a lot of the same personal skills involved in that and sort of valuing the individual, helping the individual find what they want and what they need to help them improve what they want to improve.

Bev: Okay. Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

Int: About mentoring?

Bev: Yes.

Int: Erm…well…I suppose in a way, what I'd really like to say is (laughs) I think good teachers do it all of the time. Er…and I think I've always thought that and I think that it's a form of apprenticeship really.

Er...maybe not apprenticeship in the way that apprenticeship…that that word is used now, but in the way it used to be used. Er, so in my other teaching environment - because this is not the only place where I teach - but in my other teaching environment where we train instructors for a sport, it's all done through apprenticeship. All the way through. That you have somebody who has an interest in people and an interest in sharing their skills and, er, over a period of time you help them to develop classroom management skills, observational skills themselves, yeah, if you have people who are physically interacting with other people which I have in my other role, that obviously being aware of what's going on in the gym is very important. And I see it...that as a big part of it. The apprenticeship part of it. Okay, I have, this individual has an interest in teaching in some manner and they want to do it the best way they can and what is it they need to know in order for them to be able to do it the best way they can. For some people it's different things – for some people it's classroom management, for some people it's communication, for some it's teaching methods, for some it's all of them. They want to do it, but how? And it's the helping them to get the "how".

Bev: Ok….Thank you very much.