



Chapter 3.5: The ‘Magic’ of Mentoring

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In particular, the paper will explore the value of engaging in a discursive process to highlight the problematic considerations of researching mentoring through the implementation of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). More precisely, drawing on professional identity, **positionality¹ and reflexivity**. The approach adopted of narrative research is acknowledged for its power to explore stories and give the students a voice to share their perspective (Creswell 2013: 71).

Finally, mentoring in the community at UCLan, CVCL, is underpinned by the philosophy of Paulo Freire (1993a: 96). Freire (1993a: 88) identifies the need to develop dialogue around what you are learning and why you are learning through the action/reflection praxis and problem posing dialogue. This paper will allow the opportunity to engage in dialogue around the research and create an effective learning environment to develop consciousness and self-realisation, contributing to the researcher’s own reflexive process. The focus is to encapsulate ‘the magic’ ingredients of mentoring and interrogate the influencers of mentoring discourse,

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such as Clayden and Stein (2005: 8) and Rhodes and Dubois (2006) as well as acknowledging the challenges of my research process.

Mentoring Process

The research of Clayden and Stein (2005: 8) is fundamental to my scrutiny of mentoring practice and pedagogy as they have carried out a longitudinal research study, examining 'instrumental', task focused and 'expressive' befriending roles. The research they undertook involved young people leaving care who had been mentored from between six months and three years and also young people whose mentoring project had finished two to four years previously. The results of Clayden and Stein (2005: 8) highlight that 93% of young people had reported positive outcomes from their mentoring relationship and some of the aspects they had identified included the ability to sustain relationships and improve self-confidence. According to Freire (1992: 3) this is a pertinent task of the progressive educator, in this case, the mentor to 'unveil opportunities for hope' irrespective of the difficulties and situations faced. Most certainly implies an interaction process and a learning journey between mentor and mentee that creates an opportunity to 'solder together' and recognise as well as understand the concrete reality for change to begin (Freire 1992: 19). The negative outcomes that had been reported by Clayden and Stein (2005: 8) comprised of lack of engagement, missing meetings and unplanned endings. They also found that there was a correlation between the length of the mentoring relationship and the likelihood of positive outcomes. Findings from interviews with mentors revealed that the mentors were motivated to opt for this position because of personal experiences, such as being in care themselves or being a parent as well as experience with young people and the desire to give something back. The mentors initial perception was often very 'instrumental' and goal focused but this changed over time and as they developed a relationship with the mentees. Training was also highlighted as one of the aspects that had been extremely helpful in supporting them in their mentoring relationship. This validates the importance of embedding perpetual training opportunities and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

packages within the Centre for Volunteering and Community Leadership (CVCL) mentoring programme connoted by the humanistic Freirean approach to education and active engagement through praxis (Freire 1993: 9).

However, assessing the long term impact for the mentee is a particular issue for the CVCL programme and my research because of the difficulty in measuring impact as the mentees have many influences on their lives. External multilogical influences present a challenge for the research process in terms of ascertaining the level of impact mentors have on the mentee. Other possible influencers include UCLan Student Services, Students Union, Careers Team, Academic Advisors, Lecturers and personal relationships of the mentee. Nevertheless, the findings of Clayden and Stein (2005: 34) provide a critical discourse around mentoring interaction processes and the need for mentoring relationships to develop a balance between instrumental and expressive dimensions. This flexible and negotiated step change process is dependent on the mentor's guidance. Clayden and Stein (2005: 34) also found no evidence of a simple instrumental model of mentoring and this will be an essential factor to reflect upon with regards to the mentoring relationships of UCLan students. Particularly, unpacking their notion of 'instrumental' and 'expressive' approaches and whether this is a 'magic' ingredient in the positive development of mentoring dyads.

Similarly, Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 47) suggest that a mentoring relationship is influenced by the interaction process and the mentor's approach to mentoring. Those that are driven by their mentee's interests and preferences and who are more concerned with developing the mentoring relationship by building an enjoyable and comfortable environment are more likely to create a quality relationship, in comparison to mentors who adopt a prescriptive approach to mentoring and who are not concerned with building an emotional connection. Likewise, Freire's (1993b: 9) concept of 'banking education' insinuates that mentor's that work towards helping their mentees grasp the concrete realities of their lives through emotionality, expression and dialogue connotes self-transformation and empowerment than those pursuing static processes.

Thus, this interesting inconsistency on why some individuals within the *same* mentoring program have different experiences within their

dyadic relationship is an aspect that I am pursuing to understand. Why do some mentoring relationships in this invariable mentoring program develop positive outcomes and some dyads that clearly do not work effectively? Consequently, Freire (1992: 23) discusses the importance of ‘unravelling the fabric in which the facts are given [by] discovering the “why,”’ which supports opportunities for progression with professional activity and life with others. Thus, it is the unmasking of quality mentoring relationships and focusing on ‘the point of service of mentoring’ as stated by Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 50) that is central to this study. The actual experience and exchange that takes place between mentor and mentee is what I am exploring and divulging into the details of ‘the point of service’ and how this varies with some mentors engaging in superficial exchange whilst others forge deep and meaningful connections. Thus, aiming to discover aspects of the ‘magic’ within successful mentoring relationships.

Alternatively, Rhodes and DuBois (2006: 3) have indicated that young people in long term mentoring relationships reap greater benefits in comparison to young people on short term mentoring. Consistent contact and reliability is another measurement of an effective mentoring relationship as this helps to form a lasting and meaningful bond with each other. Thus, spending more time together on a regular basis allows the mentor to be able to be directly involved in the life of their mentee and to enable positive changes to come about. In addition to this, the aspect of having a strong emotional connection between mentor and mentee is more likely to develop into a quality mentoring relationship. An acute and collaborative process of discourse and reciprocity, according to Freire (1993a: 4) is central to the development of critical consciousness and rendering positive ‘utopianism’ that defaces the path of oppression and works towards transformative possibilities, courage and hope. This suggests that my research, with its understanding into the emotional and pragmatic tensions of mentoring, will add insight to the way mentoring relationships can be structured and supported.

Historical research by Morrow and Styles (1995) also identifies the mentor’s approach as an influential factor in developing the relationship into a positive social source. The research findings of Morrow and Styles (1995)

together with radical educators, McLaren (1986: 389), Freire and Macedo (1987) and Shor (1992) suggest that mutual and humane subjectivities are important for education, empowerment and emancipation. Thus, mentees would be more satisfied and feel close to mentors that take a developmental approach and devote effort into building a connection and set expectations according to their mentees preferences and interests. On the other hand, prescriptive mentors place emphasis on their own goals rather than being driven by their mentee. As a consequence, it will be useful to explore whether this aspect is identified within UCLan mentors and whether this has an impact on the overall relationship.

Furthermore, Spencer and Liang (2009: 109) carried out a qualitative study on female mentoring relationships and found that support and challenge were the two key influential features of high quality mentoring relationships. Another ingredient to ensuring positive mentoring relationships is respect, according to Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 54). Conveying this respect through actively listening, showing an interest, valuing opinions and not being judgmental of mentees' thoughts and feelings is consequently crucial. Freire (1992: 30) discusses the rhetoric of hope in individuals that can become distorted with hopelessness and despair and as professional educators and as mentors, it is important to provide the support and courage that unveils opportunities, helps individuals (mentees) develop their own language, their own voice, their own world of citizenship.

In order to add to the empirical knowledge base on mentoring it is important to understand and reflect on the factors identified by Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 56) that could help quality relationships to develop and flourish. The measures include closeness and connection between the dyad, consistency and frequency of meetings, engagement, duration of mentoring partnership, goals and perceived support and challenge. Some of the variables are similar within my research. I will be exploring mentor and mentee engagement as well as goal setting and perceived support and challenge in order to unpack the instrumental and/or expressive mentoring style. However, through the individual semi structured interviews and reflective portfolios I envisage that I will be able to get a sense of the closeness and connection within the relationship. These assessments will

also endeavor to understand the mentors' qualities and the mentees' reaction to the mentor and acknowledges that the quality of the relationship is a product of the social interaction between mentor and mentee.

Another perspective on this is offered by Little et al. (2010: 189) who carried out a study on mentoring experiences of 72 talented teenagers attending a university based summer mentoring program. The main purpose of the study was to explore outcomes and perceptions of a mentoring experience for 'gifted' students. Although a 'gifted' young person is achieving academically and often demonstrates a high level of self-confidence, they suggest a mentor may play a critical role in supporting the young person, offering valuable guidance as well as providing a positive influence. As discussed earlier, Rhodes (2002: 3) states that a key component to a successful mentoring relationship is the feeling of a connection between mentor and mentee. According to the Rhodes Conceptual Model of Youth Mentoring, mentors who connect with their mentee emotionally and influence their social skills, improve their cognitive skills through talking to them and listening to what the mentee has to say, create a more positive mentoring experience. The mentoring experiences in the study by Little et al. (2010: 189) only lasted 3 weeks; therefore it could be argued that this cannot be truly classed as mentoring. However, Dubois and Karcher (2005) revealed findings that long term mentoring relationships give mentees far greater benefits than those that are short term or end prematurely. On the other hand, other research has identified that if the mentee is expecting to be mentored only for a specified period of time there are no detractions from the value of mentoring (Callahan and Kyburg 2005, cited in Little et al. 2010). This highlights the importance of ensuring questions are raised with regards to student mentor and mentee connection and duration as it may be a possible influential factor in the mentoring experience.

An alternative viewpoint of researchers Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 54) is to scrutinize the actual mentoring programmes itself. Divulging into the conceptual framework on mentoring projects that oversee such dyadic relationships, such as their mode of delivery, ethos and vision of projects can help to understand external factors influencing the quality of mentoring.

Mentoring Programmes as an Influential Factor

Significant research by Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 54) claims that in order to capture the quality of mentoring relationships it is important to consider the actual mentoring project that embeds this relationship. A meta-analysis evaluation undertaken by Deutsch and Spencer (2009) suggests that in order to encourage the development of effective mentoring relationships, programmes should consider the following seven points:

1. Selecting Mentors with experience
 2. Outline expectations for the frequency of contact
 3. Provide on-going training
 4. Ensure parental involvement
 5. Provide opportunities to in structured activities
 6. Ensure systematic monitoring
 7. Systematic monitoring of the implementation of program practices.
- Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 54)

At this stage, it would be helpful to relate the above points to UCLan, CVCL mentoring practice and highlight that we strive to meet all of the above points with the exception of point four, ensuring parental involvement. This is not an active practice within CVCL as many of our mentees are not just young people but come from many different contexts for example, homeless adults from the Salvation Army, adults with disabilities or mental health identified by Carers Central and Lancashire Social Services. Thus, for CVCL it is important practice to keep in touch with mentor co-ordinators within these organisations as a way of keeping track of UCLan student mentors rather than mentees and their personal relationships. It was not surprising that training was identified as an important practice which contributes to a satisfying and effective mentoring relationship. Within CVCL, students are engaged in on-going training over the academic year. However, DuBois et al. (2002a: 157) acknowledge

that much research is needed to be clear about the training content and delivery, how much is needed and the amount of mentor-staff contact that is required. This type of investigation as well as my research will inform this field of mentoring and ensure mentoring practice is understood effectively and applied successfully.

Further external variables that will be useful to draw upon within my research are the possible influences of demographic characteristics and generic profile of mentor and mentee. Key influencers of this thought is the work of Barnett (2010: 2) who exposes the notion of ‘Does it matter who mentors you?’ This focuses on the dynamics of mentoring relationships and the influence of gender, age, culture and background affecting the quality of mentoring relationships.

Demographic Characteristics

An important finding from Dubois et al. (2002a) found no specific patterns between demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and ethnicity as an influential factor on positive outcomes of mentoring relationships. They argue that process-orientated factors of a mentoring relationship, such as frequency of contact (Rhodes and DuBois 2006: 3), longevity of the relationship (Spencer and Liang 2009: 109), types of activities and engagement (Nakkula and Harris 2005: 100) are more likely to be influential aspects in the development of a positive mentoring relationship than demographic characteristics, such as age, gender and ethnicity. However, one important finding by Dubois et al. (2002b) was that boys were twice as likely to nominate their mentor as a significant adult in their lives in comparison to girls. However, there was evidence in the research of Dubois et al. (2002b) which suggests that the majority of the mentees came from a female-headed, single parent background, a factor that may have increased their receptivity to forming close ties with male mentors. It equally suggests that community mentoring projects, support initiatives and government policies should consider providing the support of male mentors in female-led households in order to ‘bridge the gap’ and fulfill this need of male role models.

Similarly, a large scale evaluation of Big Brothers and Big Sisters mentoring project by Spencer and Liang (2009: 109) found male mentoring partnerships were less likely to terminate than those involving females. Also those mentees that reported their mentor as a significant adult in their lives reported discussion on social issues, conversations of personal interest and concern to them. Thus, it will be important to explore the narratives and stories that have taken place between UCLan mentors and mentees in order to clarify how they define their mentoring approach.

Alternative challenges that I have been tackling within my research are the methodological considerations of researching mentoring practice. This exposes researchers' perspectives, such as Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 48) on whether to favour the intrusive researcher sitting in on a one-to-one personal meeting, watching and making notes (Rhodes et al. 2000: 1662) in comparison to interviews, surveys, focus groups and reflective practice (DuBois 1996: 543).

Methodological Considerations

Deutsch and Spencer (2009: 48) highlight the difficulty in researching the interaction process because of the actual nature of mentoring. Many traditional mentoring partnerships take place as one-to-one, confidential and fairly independent experiences following the matching and ice-breaker process. Thus participants may have limited contact with coordinators and other mentoring dyads. Researchers have little opportunity as a result to observe mentor and mentee interaction and rely on measurements of pre and post mentoring programs. This creates a strong reliance on the voices of participants to explain the nature of the relationship and how they work. According to the philosophy of Freire (1993: 80), engaging in "dialogue...unveiling the reality...and understanding the facts" is an important aspect and very much a standard practice of CVCL as well as IPA adopted in my research.

Rhodes et al. (2000: 1662) suggest that observations are a useful tool for assessing the perceptions of relational quality in a mentoring partnership. However, due to the confidential nature of one-to-one traditional mentoring sessions, observational research can feel intrusive and

poses methodological challenges. It can change the nature of the interaction despite having the advantage of providing an independent view and the point of service as it occurs. On the other hand, interviews and open ended surveys offer the opportunity to explore the relational quality of mentoring partnerships. In his work, Freire (1992: 30) describes his experience at an evaluation meeting with pheasants from Chile in 1964 in which he expresses how it was like a 'culture of silence' was finally shattered and the people were able to engage in critical discourse and speak out about the realities that they faced. Qualitative research and IPA in this mentoring study detrimentally focuses on the engagement of discourse, and dialogue as well as imperatively answering questions about how and why a relationship may fail. It allows opportunities to identify mechanisms that provide support to mentors who may be struggling and help to prevent early termination of the partnership. Interviews also provide an in-depth source of information, but taking part in interviews is an additional commitment on the part of mentor and mentee and can be time intensive.

DuBois (1996: 543) recommends external assessment, such as reflective portfolios and personal diaries which allow for reflection in 'real time' as offering a useful way of capturing the level of engagement, feelings of closeness, support, satisfaction and reporting any challenges faced. Reflective portfolios as a tool for assessment are also common practice within CVCL as a tool for developing a reflexive practice.

DuBois (1996: 543) also identifies external factors which include gathering data from parents, teachers, mentor co-ordinators as this can help to enhance validity of data by providing a broader social context on where the dyad is situated. By adopting these 'outreach' data collection tools, researchers, such as myself, can strive for capturing 'the magic' components of what ensures a helpful and supportive mentoring environment so that mentor and mentee can reap the greatest benefits and deliver an effective service.

On the other hand, researchers, such as Parra et al. (2002) and Rhodes (2002) have claimed that it is the mentor that is central to ensuring a developmental relationship through their competent approach, high level of confidence and range of practical skills. This suggests that it is the

'effective mentor' making use of the Freirean humanistic approach that is likely to be the 'magic' element to the mentoring relationship through interactive dialogue in the interest of liberation, empowerment and social transformation.

Effective Mentors

Parra et al. (2002) highlight a broad range of factors that are likely to influence the effectiveness of mentoring relationships including mentor strategies adopted throughout a mentoring relationship. This is because research indicates that giving mentees a choice of activities can be desirable in mentoring relationships. Thus, divulging in the activities carried out by UCLan student mentors and unpacking the strategies adopted will be instrumental in identifying the dimensions of mentoring practice.

Rhodes (2002) claims that it is largely the mentor's responsibility of facilitating and developing the relationship with confidence and underlying skills and knowledge that promotes persistence. Rhodes (2002) further argues that the mentor's self-efficacy can be very important in ensuring a positive relationship with the mentee. Following an evaluation of the Big Brother and Big Sisters mentoring project, findings revealed that only 40% nominated their mentor as a significant adult in their lives, (Rhodes 2002: 13). The results indicate a strong link between nominated mentors as significant adults at early and late stages, suggesting that mentees who feel that their mentor is an important person in their life will help to maintain that relationship. This positive perception is likely to increase receptiveness to advice and guidance received from the mentor, thus, making it easier to develop strong bonds. This study also reported that cases where a mentee's appreciation is not apparent in the early stages can have a negative impact but this changes to positive development suggesting that it is important for mentors to keep persevering even when they are feeling like they are making limited progress.

Parra et al. (2002) suggest that mentors feeling confident and having strong self-efficacy beliefs may be important in helping to establish a

strong connection with their mentee as findings from this research revealed a correlation between high self-efficacy and increased longevity of relationships.

Hamilton and Hamilton (1992: 546) found that mentors often have different views of their role and purpose. They labelled Level One Mentors as those who felt that their primary purpose was to develop a relationship; Level Two mentors they define as introducing options as their major purpose. Findings revealed that Level One mentors worried more about being liked by their mentee and choosing the right activities. Level Two mentees that put more emphasis on learning to do something produced the most functional pairs. Thus, exploration of mentor choices, feelings and confidence levels will be embedded within my research.

Less optimistic findings emerge from Royse (1998: 147) who carried out an evaluation of a locally developed mentoring project that targeted African-American teens. This concluded that there was no evidence that mentors had a beneficial impact on mentees after 15 months of mentoring. While mentors can teach responsibility and values, discuss the importance of education and even provide a glimpse of opportunities that are out there in the larger world they cannot be expected to completely neutralize the harsh conditions that the mentees live in. Freedman (1993) concludes that mentoring may be a too weak intervention to make a difference in the lives of young people most at-risk. An example of wider literature to illustrate this concept is educational theory on affective learning dimensions presented by Shephard (2008: 87). The analysis by Shephard (2008: 87) discusses the importance of education for sustainability, (and if applied to my research context, 'mentoring for sustainability') and the importance of Higher Education institutions moving away from focusing teaching and assessment on cognitive skills, knowledge and understanding but rather on the affective learning dimensions, such as values, attitudes and behaviors. This educational theoretical underpinning can be applied in mentoring to address the impact of mentor-mentee support activities and could also benefit mentoring relationships from being sustainable and productive, such as, with mentees most at-risk.

Conclusion

The review of mentoring literature raises key questions about when is mentoring most receptive. Some researchers such as, Deutsch and Spencer (2009) argue that supportive, systemic, well-maintained mentoring projects are significant influencers of effective mentoring dyads. Could this be a 'magic' ingredient of positive mentoring relationships or is it, as suggested by Barnett (2010) the dynamics of mentoring relationships and the influence of gender, age, culture and background affecting the quality of mentoring relationships?

This mentoring project has in fact supported students in developing a learning community with their mentees and interacting with them through the Freirean humanising approach that allows both mentors and mentees to enter in dialogue and in turn raising aspirations, self-esteem, courage and hope. Shor (1987: 117) identifies this as a shift from passive learning to active learning, which is particularly pertinent to the work of CVCL, the students and in the engagement with vulnerable mentees.

On the other hand, researchers, such as Parra et al. (2002) and Rhodes (2002) suggests that it is the 'effective mentor' that is likely to be the 'magic' element to the mentoring relationship through their competent approach, high level of confidence and range of practical skills. This highlights that my research will be extremely valuable in contributing to the pedagogy of mentoring and will provide a significant conceptual framework to community mentoring projects including UCLan, understand, refine and apply effective mentoring practice.

Notes

1. Editor's note: Here the researcher makes the standpoint for the position adopted for the research. The reflexivity is where the researcher takes a self-critical analysis of that position/standpoint, thus engaging in self-discovery. Positionality and reflexivity in the context of this paper, is a mutual shared process undertaken by researcher, mentor, and mentee.

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