

The issues around coaching and mentoring processes for first
year teachers within Further Education Institutes

The workforce within the further education (FE) institution has emerged as a focus of successive governments to raise standards and develop teacher professionalism with the aim to reform and regulate the workforce (Tait, 2008). Research carried out by Duckworth and Maxwell (2015) found that teachers within the FE institution have limited training to undertake their role and an unsatisfactory foundation for professional development at the start of their careers, FE teachers do not have a recognised Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year after qualification to benefit from supervised practice. Therefore, this places a focus on the provision for coaching and mentoring within the institution. It is essential to explore the systems, operations and responsibilities for coaching and mentoring within the FE arena to understand the limitations, nature and scope of the theories related to mentoring and coaching. To critically evaluate learning styles, and models of coaching and mentoring, analysing mentoring, peer coaching linked to humanistic and performance approaches. In addition, exploring the concepts of power relations, positionality, perceptions and interpretations. According to The Association for Coaching (2019) ethical considerations must underpin the process of what should occur when coaching and mentoring, highlighting the boundaries and factors that support excellence in practice. Therefore, an analysis of the ethics in relation to coaching and mentoring in the FE context will be focused on exploring influencing factors and the understanding of key roles and responsibilities linked to what does occur in practice to support the learning and development of a coachee or mentee.

Jones (2014) states that coaching is orientated to defined tasks such as skill development in the workplace and that allows the coachee to develop self-awareness and set goals for development. MacLennan (2017) defines mentoring as orientated around relationships which develop with a level of rapport, over an extended period to support development. Furthermore, that both approaches have a focus on the learning of the coachee or mentee in a specific area or field. However, Stork and Walker (2015) suggest that coaching and mentoring processes must consider the learning style of the coachee or mentee for development. Honey and Mumford's (1986, cited in Scales., et al, 2012) learning style theory suggests that teaching should match an individual's learning style. However, Coffield (2004, cited in Ingelby, 2011) argues that the view is simplistic in nature and suggests that individuals learn in a variety of styles. In addition, cautions to use of teaching to style as the process could become product focused and

not recognise the holistic learning needs and wider key factors that could impact on the learner as a coachee or mentee.

Findings from research carried out by Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) highlighted that first-year teachers often enter the FE educational institution with a low level of confidence, a fear of failure and with a desire to prove their own abilities to themselves and their colleagues. First year teachers are in a transitional phase of applying their theoretical knowledge to practice and will often underestimate the demands of the role and the challenges that they face in practice and the impact that these can have on them physically and psychologically (Jones, 2014). Stork and Walker (2015) suggests that within the first year of teaching a vast amount of emotional learning takes place by the teacher and can be the period when teachers decide to leave the profession or commit to progressing or continuing with the role. Furthermore, that the nature of mentoring during this period can be for the mentor to support the teacher as a mentee to continue to learn about their own role and nurture their holistic needs and development, more importantly to allow the mentee to feel a sense of belonging within the educational context. The humanistic model of coaching (Palmer and Wybrow, 2018) as a concept is supported by the humanistic theoretical approach of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1968, cited in McInerney, 2013) in relation to constructing a relationship between the mentor and mentee that allows for self-development, honest reflection, motivation and learning within the role. Dunn and Dunn's (1992, cited in Zepeda and Mayers, 2004) cognitive learning style theory supports the point, recognising that everyone will process information differently based on inherent traits and in response to emotional stimuli. However, Wall (2017) suggests that emotional intelligence is an essential element in the creation of an effective relationship between the mentor and mentee that can enhance or place limitations on the relationship and the learning for the mentee. Gardner (1999) pioneered the concept of personal intelligence focused on in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal understanding and the control of one's own and other feelings and emotions, later extended by Goleman's (1995) intelligence model that placed focus on personal and social capacities. Research carried out by Ambrosetti (2010) found that in current practice first year mentees in FE institutions are often mentored by colleagues of equal status and therefore suggests that this factor can be a barrier related to the mentoring relationship. The mentee may feel the mentor lacks professional skills and knowledge

to provide support and fulfil the mentoring role effectively and this can have a negative impact on the mentees confidence and learning process. Research conducted by Hobson et al., (2015) found that it is common practice within FE institutions for mentors to hold no formal mentoring or coaching qualification and places focus on the ethics of the mentor to know and understand their own limitations and to access support from a third party during the mentoring process if required to meet the individual needs of the mentee (Association for Coaching, 2019). Therefore, the emotional intelligence of the mentor is required to be aware of the mentees' feelings and views in addition to their own, show empathy, self-confidence and effective communication skills. Gardner (1995) highlights that the social capacities required of a mentor are trustworthiness, conscientiousness and collaboration to support the emotional learning process of the mentee. Ellerton (2012) argues that in order to support emotional learning the mentor and mentee must develop a rapport which is essentially trust and harmony within the relationship. Wildflower and Brennan (2011) suggest that the foundations of rapport lie in the recognition of shared beliefs, values and a sense of identity. The model and process of rapport building involves matching of the external behaviour of the mentee by the mentor both verbally and with body language, it is a powerful tool to create an effective relationship and support learning (Hawkins, 2015). However, Wildflower and Brennan (2011) caution that the approach can create a barrier for professional boundary as the relationship between the mentor and mentee can become increasingly bonded and develop into collegial friendship that requires ethical consideration to ensure that the best interests of the mentee are maintained. Research conducted by Maxwell (2014) found that clear relationship boundaries must be in place to ensure ethical practice, an agreement should be discussed by the mentee and mentor prior to the mentoring taking place, preferably in the first meeting to ensure mutual understanding of confidentiality and to identify and discuss the objectives from the process and the professional boundaries that will be in place. Gravells and Wallace (2007) support the point and state that it is a competency and an ethical duty of a mentor to allow the mentee to develop independence without overreliance on the mentor. In addition, maintain relationship structures and professional boundaries that are then revisited by both the mentor and mentee throughout the process to reflect and evaluate, making changing if needed. Therefore, it could be suggested that there should be a system in place within the structure of the educational organisation to support the mentor themselves to learn the role, develop their own competencies and

engage in regular reflection on issues linked to ethical principles and practice. However, Malderez and Wedall (2007) argue that the culture within FE institutions consists of a high workload, overstretched staff and limited opportunities for continued professional development, highlighting that the development of mentoring competencies and skills is often not an organisational priority.

Lofthouse (2015) states that the model of peer coaching can be an effective tool incorporated into the FE institutions to provide support to first year teachers and can be used alongside mentor and mentee relationships to enhance learning and development. Lofthouse (2015) describes peer coaching as professional development through learning conversations between a group of individuals focused on sharing practice rather than judgements made on first year teachers' performance. Furthermore, planning for teaching may be done collaboratively as all participants work together, share ideas, problems and solutions. Berkley (2014) suggests that the peer coaching model offers a differentiated approach and supports a variation of learning styles and personality types. Berkley (2014) makes links to the work of Myers-Briggs that suggests individuals have inborn learning preferences and personal learning patterns linked to their understanding and application of new information. Lofthouse (2015) suggests that coachee's engaging in a community of practice can provide support to establish positionality as a professional in the institution and allow for a positive perception of themselves as equal value and as a collaborator to develop professional alliances. In addition, Harper (2015) states that when regular opportunities are available for peer coaching to take place within the educational context the coachee can make the links between theory and practice in a supportive environment and growth culture. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984, cited in Kolb, 2014) provides the learning style theory to support the point that peer coaching can allow the coachee to learn through experience, apply their knowledge to practice, reflect and analyse the experience and then make change for future practice. Tobin (2015) states that peer coaching is applied in line with theoretical approach of constructivism, the coachee can co construct new conceptual knowledge, skills and personal learning. In addition, the coach can scaffold the coachee's learning to a higher level and as a result extend their own learning through the role and positionality of a facilitator in the model of coaching. Coffield (2004, cited in Ingelby, 2011) supports the point further stating that peer coaching can provide the opportunity to meet the

varied learning styles of the coachee as a learner and can lead to innovative and pioneering practices developing within the institution due to contemporary and evolving practices that are not static in state but involve taking risks and new challenges. Research conducted by Hobson et al., (2015) interviewed newly qualified teachers within FE institutions that had experienced coaching on an individual basis and as part of peer coaching and found that coaching on an individual basis had detrimental impacts on the coachee's confidence and motivation if the coach did not volunteer to fill the role and was allocated this within the organisation without choice. Therefore, the coach lacked motivation and incentive to spend time supporting the coachee. Cullimore and Simmons (2010) support the point and state that it is an ethical duty of the coach and leaders within the institution to ensure that the effective systems are in place to monitor, evaluate and review coach and coachee allocation, to provide the best practice and consider matching subject specialisms to enhance the building of relationships and develop coachee learning. A research report by Greatbatch and Tate (2018) for the Department for Education argued that coaching and mentoring in FE institutions is variable, lacks constancy and a standardised approach. Consequently, FE institutions ideology of coaching and mentoring may not be transferring to practice.

Allen et al., (2004) argue that the practice and nature of peer coaching could have limitations if open to control by the institutions performance management systems and be used to meet departmental goals and targets in line with quality assurance procedures. Therefore, negatively impact on the peer coaching process as it becomes power focused taking away the focus from the agenda of the individual coachee to the agenda of the organisational demands. The work of Foucault (1991 cited in Western, 2012) can be applied to the coaching relationship and highlights that power relations are linked to surveillance and normalisation used to manipulate and shape individuals and does not put the individual needs of the coachee at the centre. It is an ethical duty of the coach to be fully transparent with the coachee to ensure clarity about the aims and objectives of the coaching process to ensure that the coachee is not placed at a disadvantage and measured against performance criteria (Wildflower and Brennan (2011).

Findings from research conducted by Hobson et al., (2015) found that 49% of newly qualified teachers within FE institutions had their line manager as their coach or

mentor. The participants in the research stated that this factor created barriers in relation to reflection on their own experiences as they highlighted that they felt conflicted about sharing their thoughts and being honest about events linked to intersectionality and wanting to satisfy their manager in terms of their performance in the role and wanting to be valued and liked by their manager. Lancer et al., (2016) states that coaching and mentoring by a leader within an organisation embeds a hierarchical and power relationship. Furthermore, argues that often a manager has been involved in the recruitment of a mentee or coachee and therefore possess prior knowledge about them that can lead to projection in terms of assumptions and prejudgement which creates a perception of the coachee or mentee. For example, if during the interview process the coachee or mentee states that they have limited experience of teaching and subject specific knowledge this information can then lead to simplification in actions by the manager that can change the focus of the coaching or mentoring process to what the manager perceives or interprets as the best course of action (Tobin, 2015). Passmore (2011) states that integrity is an ethical principle that should underpin any coaching or mentoring relationship and that coaches or mentors must ensure a non-discriminatory approach that maintains confidentiality and avoids any conflict of interest.

Further findings from Hobson et al., (2015) suggested that the participants found that their own learning and process of reflection was enhanced when their allocated mentor was linked to their own subject specialism, identifying that a shared ethos, values and interests supported the development of the relationship and empowered the mentee's to implement new strategies and make changes to their practice. Nasta (2009) states that mentors and mentees in FE institutions that share a vocational knowledge and background develop pedagogical approaches and often share a professional status. Furthermore, states that within the organisation a mentor and mentee from the same subject specialism are often close in the everyday working environment that allows for informal discussions and reflections to take place in a relaxed and calm frame of mind that meets the needs of the mentee effectively. Schon's (1985, cited Rehring and Rodrigues, 2016) in reflection in action model supports the approach as it recognises the importance of the reflection process and the spontaneity in daily teaching practice that often pose unexpected challenges encountered by the mentee that their own practical solutions may not work. Therefore, by the mentor being available for informal

discussions the mentee can be supported to act on issues and develop their practice. The point is supported by Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical approach of the mentor working within the mentee's zone of proximal development and identify the current level of knowledge that can then be supported by the mentor as part of the ongoing mentor mentee process. Nasta (2009) states that the advantage of the mentoring undertaken by a colleague rather than a manager is that there is no need or pressure to assess the mentees performance and this can lead to greater trust, openness and wellbeing of the mentee that supports overall learning, pedagogical practice and subject related knowledge. In addition, The Association for Coaching (2019) states that excellence in ethical practice allows for the continued professional development of the mentee and a focus on maintaining the reputation of the profession.

In conclusion, the issues around coaching and mentoring in the FE educational context are complex and impacted by organisational cultures, practices and demands that directing impact on the nature and scope of the process. A variation of models of coaching and mentoring have placed focus on the barriers and limitations in place and has highlighted the importance of exploring learning styles to identify the most effective coaching and mentoring models. However, it is clear that for first year teachers in FE institutions the systems and models for coaching and mentoring in practice vary and are therefore open to some interpretation on the part of the organisation and the individual mentor or coach that is influenced by their own role and position within the organisation. It could be suggested that as each mentee or coachee has different learning styles it may be good practice to use varied coaching and mentoring models to meet the varying needs that includes individual support and opportunities to engage peer coaching and collaboration to support learning. Within each model of mentor and in relation to learning styles an essential element identified is the opportunity for a mentee or coachee to engage in regular reflective practice to action changes in practice and develop learning in an informal or formal context. The ethical considerations linked to coaching and mentoring are often underpinned by professional principles and values and influenced by the role of the coach or mentor within the organisation. The distribution and exertion of power in the relationship can place limits on the process linked to key issues such as, positionality, perception and interpretation of the individuals involved. However, what remains an essential ethical consideration throughout the whole process is that the relationship between the

coachee and coach, mentor and mentee is built on trust and places the best interests of the coachee and mentee as central.

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