The mentoring of overseas trained teachers

Article

Accepted Version

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.
Published version at: http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/TEAN/article/viewFile/164/277

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

The mentoring of Overseas Trained Teachers

Lionel Warner (lead author) and Abdul Qayoom

University of Reading

correspondence address:
Institute of Education
Redlands Road
Reading RG1 5EX

l.k.warner@reading.ac.uk

The mentoring of Overseas Trained Teachers

Abstract

Much research has been undertaken into the value of mentoring for beginning teachers. Less research has been done into the mentoring of Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs). The studies that have been done suggest that mentors' lack of cultural knowledge and of the pedagogical challenges faced by OTT-mentees may inhibit the integration of such teachers into school life. It may be that effective tailor-made training cannot be provided for OTTs by mentors whose skills or knowledge are insufficient. Lack of understanding of the cultural diversity of mentees may result, as studies show, in mentors failing to address relevant issues during the mentoring process. This study investigates the experiences of OTTs of mentorship in England, and suggests the importance of mentors having understanding of their culturally diverse OTT mentees. The implications of these findings in the context of recent teacher-training policy developments in England are discussed.

Introduction

Much research has been undertaken into the value of mentoring for beginning teachers. Less research has been done into the mentoring of Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs). The studies that have been done suggest that mentors' lack of cultural knowledge and of the pedagogical challenges faced by OTT-mentees may inhibit the integration of such teachers into their schools. This study investigates the experiences of OTTs of mentorship in England, and suggests the importance of mentors having understanding of their culturally diverse OTT mentees. Recent policy changes suggest that in future there is likely to be even less emphasis on the effective mentorship of OTTs. At the time of writing one route into teaching in England has closed (OTTP) but several others are newly open (School Direct, Teach First, Assessment Only, Troops to Teachers). At the same time the diversity of pupils and their teachers is increasing. Training their mentors is more important than ever.

Overseas trained teachers

Overseas trained teachers (OTTs) are usually defined as teachers who have trained outside the UK and also outside the European Union. The majority come from Commonwealth countries, especially Australia, and tend to work in London and the south east of England. During the past decade those teachers wishing to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England have had to complete an Overseas Trained Teachers Programme (OTTP), a work-based assessment programme governed by the same requirements as teacher training, within four years of first teaching here. With effect from April 2012, teachers from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA were exempted from the need to undertake the OTTP, and from July 2013 the OTTP has been discontinued.

Those OTTs who completed the OTTP are the tip of an iceberg. There is a larger shifting population of OTTs who teach for less than four years, and whose numbers are uncertain (Morgan et al, 2005). There has been a growth in the numbers of OTTs in English schools over two decades (Barlin and Hallgarten, 2001; Ross and Hutchings, 2003), particularly in the London area (McNamara et al, 2007; Miller, 2008). Recruitment agencies have been accused of exploitation (Curtis, 2003) and giving inadequate information to overseas recruits (de Villiers and Books, 2009). OTTs have been considered vulnerable (NASUWT, 2007), and have suffered prejudice (Cole and Stuart, 2005) and loss of 'confidence and self-esteem' (McNamara et al, 2007, 51). OTTs arrive determined to cultivate their teaching practice and accept new pedagogical challenges, but it is likely that they face added challenges because of their background as compared to domestically trained teachers (Stevens, Emily, & Yamashita, 2010).

Mentoring

Much research has been carried out into the mentoring of beginning teachers (for example Stones, 1984; Reid 1999; Maynard 2000). Mentoring is included in most teacher training and education programmes worldwide (Mtetwa & Thompson, 2000; Capel, 2003; Hobson et al, 2009). Its significance in withdrawals and failure rates including those of ethnic minority trainees (Basit et al, 2006) suggest that the quality of the mentorship may vary. One reason why the process of teacher-mentorship is not easy to improve is that it is a personal relationship, between individuals, with a strong emotional component (Maynard, 2000, Clarke & Jarvis-Selinger, 2005). This difficulty becomes compounded by the corporate, results-driven environment of schools (Dymoke and Harrison, 2006) and mentoring may further emphasise the institutional at the expense of the individual (Devos, 2010). The cultural differences of OTTs are in these circumstances likely to make effective mentoring even harder to achieve. Cain's exploration (2009) of the relationship of trainee teachers with their mentors suggests that educational research is under-used in the drive to improve the mentorship process. Colley (2002) suggests that mentors' description of their work does not accurately reflect what in practice they do with and for their mentees. Bozeman and Feeney (2007, 719) are less hopeful about the role of research, arguing via meta-analysis that mentoring remains under-conceptualised, and many of the research findings are "less useful than one might hope". No doubt there is some commonsense common ground; mentors should be able to make links between the person who is the mentee and the subject that s/he is learning to teach. This is in essence the concept of educative mentoring advanced by McDonald & Flint (2011); it is (a) responsive to the individual needs of the mentee and (b) based on a clear vision of good teaching. It is both professional and personal. The problem arises if the personal is imbued with cultural difference to which the mentor is less than sensitive. Curee's National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching (2009, 4) does mention that mentors should 'relate sensitively to learners' but does not explicitly address cultural needs and sensitivities of OTTs.

This study therefore investigates the experiences of mentorship from the point of view of overseas trained teachers where there was a clear difference of background, whether ethnic or national or cultural, between the teacher and the mentor. By experiences we mean not only the mentoring practices they participated in but also how they felt about them. The study does not advance a complete model of mentorship, but it does suggest that there may be limitations to the models currently employed.

Research Methods

The purpose of this research was to address two linked questions:
1.   In general how effectively do OTTs feel they are mentored?
2.   More specifically, to what extent do mentors show understanding of the needs of their OTT-mentees and respond effectively to their cultural diversity?

The research was conducted with a sample drawn from The Thames Valley, which, together with London itself, is the area of greatest OTT concentration in the England, for reasons of teacher shortage and population density. The sample consisted of teachers who had recently obtained QTS. This indicates that they are probably a more stable and successful group than the larger population of OTTs who teach briefly in the UK without needing to gain QTS. All had a language other than English as first language, and came from a range of countries including India, Nigeria and Pakistan.

Thus the sample offers a proxy measure of cultural difference. Of those included in the sample 40 were male and 10 female, working in five secondary subject areas.

The two largest subjects were Mathematics and English. These correspond to the majority secondary subjects of teachers undertaking the OTTP in recent years at the University of Reading (see Appendix 1), which are, of course, shortage subjects in local schools. Although they had only recently gained QTS there was a range of teaching experience: 10 had less than 5 years' experience, 7 had more than 20 (though not in the UK). There was a range of age: 10 were under 30, and 5 over 50. Half of the sample (26) were educated to Master's level.

Data were collected by means of a computer-based questionnaire. Ethical approval for this research was obtained in advance from The University's Research Ethics Committee. The questionnaire was completed by 40 male OTTs and 10 female OTTs. A 100% response rate was secured by means of personal follow-up emails to late respondents. These were selected from a slightly larger group of OTTs with whom original contact was made. Selection was made in order to introduce an element of stratified sampling: to represent a range of secondary subjects, different lengths of teaching experience overall, and to secure a substantial minority of female respondents. The questionnaire comprised three sections: (i) information about the teachers, (ii) views about various mentoring issues and activities, and (iii) views about aspects of diversity and cultural awareness in dealings with mentors.

Results

Section (ii) comprised 22 questions asking for agree/disagree/undecided responses to statements about whether mentors had been helpful in various ways, some fairly specific (such as AfL, APP, report writing) and others more general (such as 'helped me progress', 'set achievable targets to boost my morale', 'had a good rapport with me').

The final item asked for a summing up: 'overall, I am satisfied with my mentor and her/his practice'. The results of this item were 44% agreed, 40% disagreed, and 16% were undecided, which is close to the mean response aggregated for all 22 answers: 43, 45, 12. This finding not only confers a little reliability on the results, but also indicates substantial uncertainty about how well supported these OTTs were.

A clear majority, 60% or more, disagreed that mentor support had been adequate in five specific areas :

- positive feedback after lesson observation,
- setting achievable targets,
- assessment guidance,
- guidance on a scheme of work,
- help with report writing.

Section (iii) asked ten questions of a personal and cultural nature concerning the perceived rapport with the mentor. The full Section (iii) results are shown in Appendix 2. These results give a mixed picture of mentoring as a culturally sensitive activity. On the one hand only a small minority felt that mentors did not listen to them when discussing their subject or did not respect their religion (items 4 and 5). On the other hand a substantial majority of OTTs felt the mentor did not:

- acknowledge their subject knowledge,
- show awareness of their teaching problems or intervene to help,
- discuss their cultural background or the dominant cultural background of the school'.

A minority (3 teachers) said they did not receive any mentoring at all.

Discussion

Further research to investigate the mentoring of OTTs would be worthwhile in other parts of the country, and in primary and independent schools. It would also be revealing to find out the perceptions of the cultural support needs of OTTs from the standpoint of various stakeholders, such as headteachers and recruitment agencies.

The experience of OTT mentoring revealed in this research is a mixed picture. There are only modest signs of the mentorship being customised to take account of the professional and personal needs of the mentee. There are still signs of teachers being plunged into the deep end. Variable or inadequate support is also reported by Refugees into Teaching (not dated):'refugee OTTs, who apply to work as unqualified teachers while resident in the UK, are more likely to experience dissatisfaction with the lack of introductory support available to them when starting work as an unqualified teacher in England.' The need for support, both formal and informal, has been expressed by OTTs themselves (Warner, 2010). Whether this support takes the form of a structured induction programme or informal personal friendship, Hardy (1999) emphasises the need for it to operate on a psychological dimension, and for this to happen it is argued that the support offered, whether formal or informal, needs to be individualised. Our findings suggest that there is sometimes a lack of individual awareness and rapport in mentors of OTTs.

At the time of writing it is doubly difficult to determine whether the number of OTTs in England is likely to rise or fall. It has always been difficult to put a number to this shifting population. Now, with the abolition of the OTTP, data

will be harder to gather. Government policy implies that domestic teacher shortage can be addressed by recruiting teachers from countries with minimal cultural difference:

> 'Today I want to extend that freedom (to gain fast-track QTS) to teachers from Commonwealth countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and I hope that other Commonwealth countries such as South Africa, Jamaica and Singapore can join in due course.' (Gove, 2011)

The assumption of cultural homogeneity may be unwarranted. The expectation that any teacher from overseas can simply slot in without personal and dedicated mentoring is unjust and also, in this laissez-faire free market (Hatcher, 2006), potentially wasteful of a valuable resource. It nevertheless seems likely that these teachers will be needed. Teacher shortage in London and the Thames Valley has persisted over many years. The effect of the bulge in primary age population can only grow. And concern has been expressed about the negative effect of current School Direct policy on domestic teacher recruitment, for example by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (see Noble-Rogers, 2013).

This is not just a matter affecting teachers trained outside the UK. Features of the current school landscape indicate pressures on all teachers. The range of routes to QTS in England (School Direct, both salaried and fee-paying, Teach First, Assessment Only, Troops to Teachers) implies a greater diversity of teachers than ever. Pupil diversity shows no sign of diminishing. At the same time the professional view is that School Direct is likely to reduce the quality of mentorship (NATE, 2013). More than a decade ago Jones saw the danger that, 'mentors may succumb to the temptation of following the simplistic, but highly prescriptive route of a technicist approach' (2001, 92), rather than a personalised and professional one. This is echoed more recently by Mead: 'ultimately, coherent values development will be dependent on the expectations and readiness of mentors to go beyond restrictive outcomes-driven mentoring' (2007, 319). The danger is still there. Therefore the research considered above may be viewed as a case study to remind those involved in the training of teachers that good quality mentorship remains a vital component in the system.

References

Barlin, D. and Hallgarten, J. (2001), Supply teachers: symptom of the problem or part of the solution? London, IPPR.

Basit, T., McNamara, R., Carrington, O., Maguire, B., & Woodrow D. (2006), Did they jump or were they pushed? Reasons why minority ethnic trainees withdraw from initial training courses, British Education Research Journal, 32(3), 387-410.

Bozeman, B., & Feeney, M. (2007), Toward a useful theory of mentoring: a conceptual analysis and critique, Administration and Society, 39(6), 719-739.

Cain, T. (2009), Mentoring trainee teachers: how can mentors use research? Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 17(1), 53-66.

Capel, S. (2003), Responsibilities of subject mentors, professional mentors and link tutors in secondary physical education initial teacher education, Mentoring & Tutoring, 11, 131-151.

Clarke, A., and Jarvis-Selinger, S. (2005), What the teaching perspectives of cooperating teachers tell us about their advisory practices, Teaching and Teacher Education, 21, 65-78.

Cole, M. and Stuart, J. (2005), 'Do you ride on elephants' and 'never tell them you're German': the experiences of British Asian and black, and overseas student teachers in South-east England, British Educational Research Journal, 31(3), 349-366.

Colley, H. (2002), A 'rough guide' to the history of mentoring from a Marxist feminist perspective, Journal of Education for Teaching, 28(3), 257-273.

Curee (2009), National framework for mentoring and coaching, available at http://www.curee.co.uk/files/publication/1219925968/National-framework-for-mentoring-and-coaching.pdf (accessed 16 October 2013).

Curtis, P. (2003), Overseas ministers demand action over recruitment, available at: http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,,1073512,00.html (accessed 27 August 2013).

de Villiers, R. and Books, S. (2009), Recruiting teachers online: marketing strategies and information dissemination practices of UK-based agencies, Educational Review, 61(3), 315-325.

Devos, A. (2010), New teachers, mentoring and the discursive formation of professional identity, Teaching and Teacher Education, 26(5),1219–1223.

Dymoke, S. and Harrison, J. (2006), Professional development and the beginning teacher: issues of teacher autonomy and institutional conformity in the performance review process, Journal of Education for Teaching, 32(1), 71-92.

Gove, M. (2011), Hansard 23/05/11, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110523/debtext/110523-0001.htm (accessed 13 May 2103).

Hardy, C. (1999), Perceptions of physical education beginning teachers' first year of teaching: are we doing enough to prevent early attrition? Teacher Development, 3(1), 109-127.

Hatcher, R. (2006), Privatization and sponsorship: the re-agenting of the school system in England, Journal of Education Policy, 21(5), 599-619.

Hobson, A., Patricia, A., Malderez, A., & Tomlinson, P.(2009), Mentoring beginning teachers: what we know and what we don't, Teaching and Teacher Education, 10(1), 207-216.

Jones, M. (2001), Mentors' perceptions of their roles in schoolbased teacher training in England and Germany, Journal of Education for Teaching, 27(1), 75-94.

Maynard, T. (2000), Learning to teach or learning to manage mentors? Experiences of school based teacher training, Mentoring and Tutoring, 8(1), 17-30.

McDonald, L., & Flint. A. (2011), Effective educative mentoring skills: a collaborative effort, New Zealand Journal of Teachers' Work, 8(1), 33-46.

McNamara, O., Lewis, S and Howson, J. (2007), 'Turning the tap on and off': the recruitment of overseas trained teachers to the United Kingdom, Perspectives in Education, 25(2), 39-55.

Mead, N. (2007), How effectively does the Graduate Teacher Programme contribute to the development of trainee teachers' professional values?, Journal of Education for Teaching 33(3), 309–321.

Miller, P. (2008), Professional lives under review: evaluating the human capital impact of overseas trained teachers (OTTs) on secondary education in London,
available at
http://www.educatejournal.org/index.php/educate/article/view/175/168
(accessed 16 October 2013).

Morgan, J., Sives, A., and Appleton, S. (2005), Managing the international recruitment of health workers and teachers: do the Commonwealth Agreements provide an answer? The Round Table, 94 (379), 225 – 238.

Mtetwa, D. J., & Thompson, J. J. (2000), The dilemma of mentoring in subject teaching: implications for teacher preparation in Zimbabwe, Journal of In-Service Education, 26(1), 139-152.

NASUWT (2007), Commission on vulnerable employment: consultation response,
available at: http://www.vulnerableworkers.org.uk/wp
content/uploads/2008/05/naswut.doc (accessed 16 October 2103).

NATE (2013), Surveying the Wreckage: the professional response to changes to initial teacher training in the UK, available at
http://www.nate.org.uk/index.php?page=34&news=298 (accessed 27 August 2103)

Noble-Rogers, J. (2013), 'Research matters: School Direct', BERA Research Intelligence, 121, 21.

Refugees into Teaching (not dated), Refugee overseas trained teachers: experiences of employment and initial teacher training, available at http://www.rit.refugeecouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/OTT%20Finding%20and%20Recommendations%20RiT%20-%20final.pdf (accessed 27August 2013).

Reid, D. (1999), Investigating teachers' perceptions of the role of theory in initial teacher training through Q methodology, Mentoring and Tutoring, 7(3), 241-255.

Ross, A. and Hutchings, M. (2003), Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; OECD Country Background Report, London, Institute for Policy Studies in Education.

Stevens, D., Emily, S., and Yamashita, M. (2010), Mentoring through reflective journal writing: a qualitative study by a mentor/professor and two international graduate students, Reflective Practice, 11(3), 347-367.

Stones, E. (1984), Supervision in teacher education, London, Methuen.

Vaughan, R. (2011), Gove seeks to relax controls on overseas teachers, Times Educational Supplement 27/05/11, available at http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6085913 (accessed 1 May 2103).

Warner, L. (2010), 'Overseas Trained Teachers: part of a problem or part of a solution?' TEAN Journal 1(2), available at http://194.81.189.19/ojs/index.php/TEAN/article/view/63 (accessed 27 August 2103).

Appendix 1

from *University of Reading OTTP secondary applications by subject*

2008-9		2009-10		2010-11	
Mathematics	14	Mathematics	16	English	7
English	10	English	7	Mathematics	6
ICT	8	Science	5	PE	5
Science	4	D&T	4	Science	3

Source: internal UoR report