

Evolutions in Education Session 1_ Room 1 - Effective approaches to mentoring - what works and why_- 20240424_151105-Meeting Recording

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Leigh.Worrall

Hi everybody.

Welcome to this session this afternoon to the conference. Not always easy having one of the first slots, but lovely to see so many of you joining and interested in coming along to my session this afternoon.

So and traditional Welsh fashion, "bore da pawb", good afternoon everybody. My name is Leigh Worrall and I am PGCE curriculum tutor at the Open University's PGCE program for secondary English here at our course. And I have currently have oversight of professional learning within the programs, which means that I work with our mentors, our school coordinators and senior leaders within our schools on the PGCE and with our practice tutors who are external verifiers for our program.

Before I tell you a little bit more about myself and more importantly, our project that I'm going to present on this afternoon, it'd be really great to see what your role is and what's kind of brought to you here this afternoon.

What made you choose this session about your background? Etcetera?

So hopefully if I've set this up correctly, we'll be launching a poll in a moment, and it'll just ask you to hopefully choose from a range of options which will ask you about your background or your role.

Fingers crossed you should be seeing a poll in a moment, and if one of them doesn't appear for you, it doesn't apply to your background or role then please just feel free to put in the chat or to tick 'other'. I'd suggest that you go with what your main role is at the moment, so some of those might overlap. You might have all of those roles. I'm not sure, I know I wear many hats, as do most of us who work in education and tend to juggle a lot of plates and balls. Just the nature of our field, don't we?

So please feel free to kind of pick the one that I suppose represents you the most

while I'm telling you a little bit more about our project and what I'll be talking about today.

A bit about me really to start with and about where I work and you heard a little bit from Ben Lewis about the context of Welsh education earlier on so I won't go into detail about that, but I'll speak about our program and as currently outlined, I'm working for the PGCE. I'm a tutor here on our program which is now in its fifth year and we've just been successfully reaccredited to continue for another five years. So we're kind of celebrating that at the OU and the PGCE, which is great, and I've worked on the program for the last three years overseeing the professional learning of our mentors, school coordinators and practice tutors and also my first cohort of 21 graduates who successfully graduated this summer, who chose to undertake new pathways into teaching as part of an expanding offer of secondary subjects, namely English with drama and English with Media. I'm currently overseeing another two cohorts, one in their first year and another about to complete their studies this summer. Before this I worked in a range of secondary schools across Wales, teaching English and held roles in middle leadership as head of English for a number of years and head of sixth form for a few years before I took the leap into ITE (initial teacher education) three years ago.

The PGCE in Wales Partnership is a unique pathway to teaching because we offer 2 routes: a part time and a salaried route and we are unique in that we are the only ITE provider in Wales that offers a salaried route into teaching. We have students both in primary and secondary phases, and the program differs from all traditional postgraduate routes into teaching because it's a two year course and because of that we advocate for a graduated approach to teaching from familiarization to consolidation and autonomy and teaching within the classroom.

The nature of the routes that we offer allows our students to train as teachers while retaining time for wider commitments. And this might be part time employment, either in a school setting or not, or family or caring responsibilities. And in this way, we offer more flexible routes to the teaching profession. As Ben and Eric mentioned earlier in their keynote address, we are a Pan-Wales program with partnership schools based right in the far northwest of Wales from Holyhead, all the way down to the southeast on the borders of Monmouthshire and are a fully distance learning provider. Our training materials, our guides and even our training and induction

events are all completely online and at distance and while this is of course not unique to the Open University, it is unique in the context of initial teacher training both in Wales and across the Four Nations of the UK.

It's unique, therefore, in its approach and its pathways into teaching. We're a bilingual course and we offer to aim to offer a fully bilingual provision and allow our students to complete their practice elements in Welsh medium schools as well as in their assignments, and our resources are fully bilingual, and we try to offer seminars in Welsh medium as much as possible.

So I'll just have a little look and see what we've got in terms of some of the results that are coming out and I'll close the poll. So hopefully you've had a chance to respond and it looks like we've got quite an equal share across the audience this afternoon of teacher educators, so those involved in teacher training or those interested in teacher education, or training, researchers, or who are teaching themselves so a nice range and a few mentors or people involved in mentoring so lovely to see a range of contexts being represented this afternoon.

So to build on that really, what I'd like to know is a little bit more about why you're here. So it might be to do with your role.

It might be because you're doing some research.

It might be because you were asked to come.

I'm not sure, but we want to create a little word cloud really just to try to capture two or three words outlining your reasons for joining this session today and try to avoid saying it's my role. Try to think about what it is you're hoping to gain from the session. What inspired you from maybe the title or our outline, and it might be that you, you know, you are a mentor yourself and it's something that you want to get bit of experience in. Awesome inspiration, that kind of thing. So we'll see if we get a range of ideas or any themes start to emerge from our cloud today. And all the responses this afternoon are anonymized, so hopefully we can submit those later on and share them on the common room padlet as we like to call it this afternoon.

So we've got mentors turning up a bit curious, become a better mentor, collaborating with mentors. Nice ideas coming through there. Couple more seconds. They're lovely.

Hopefully this afternoon will give you a chance to discuss your mentoring or think about what makes a great mentor, but also just to hear some and view some of the responses from a project that I was involved in.

So we'll close that poll and hopefully we're able to share that with wider audience later this afternoon.

Apologies if the results do not appear on your screen then. See if I can make them show. There's just a few words on this, there's "collaborate with mentors", "becoming a mentor". "Mentor" is the biggest thing in the middle, so not surprisingly, really that you're possibly here because you are a mentor and you're hoping to gain a little bit of insight and maybe inspiration or ideas for either your research or your role. Perhaps that's why you've come along this afternoon.

So today I'm going to talk to you about successful project that Clare who I can see on the screen this afternoon has joined us, knows quite a lot about and has sat in a few times. But it's really something that I love talking about and love sharing and really hope that it is inspirational. It was funded by the Faculties Praxis Centre for Scholarship and Innovation here at the Open University.

I've always very much been involved in ITE within schools, and I've always wanted to have that platform to conduct research with schools, into effective approaches to supporting student teachers. Very early in my career here, I had the opportunity to apply for this funding and conduct this project, which looked to explore effective approaches from both the students perspective, but also their in-school educators. Initially our application went in to partnerships across schools across Wales for a willingness to take part in this project. As you can see from the map on the screen, many showed an interest from across the breadth and length of Wales and wanted to take part, which was great. In total, 51 participants contributed to our study between January and March 2022 and the fact that I'm still talking about this project two years later shows perhaps how successful it was and how inspirational and the impact that it's had on are not only our research our approach, but also our partnership with our schools.

The participants who were involved were either involved in an interview, a discussion group or presentation of audio or written submission if they weren't able to attend one of the other two events. Given the distance and online nature of our schools, our and our program, all our sessions were conducted online using teams and transcriptions tools were enabled. The transcription and translation into Welsh of all those transcriptions was funded by the project, because again, like mentioned earlier, we wanted everything to be fully bilingual. In the end, all Welsh regional education consortia, were represented as many primary and secondary based students and staff as well as English medium context were represented. Sorry I'm just keep an eye on the chat. The cloud windows still on your screen, I'm not sure if it's on anybody else's screen at the moment.

Anybody else is having that issue?

I'll just have a look.

It's definitely closed from my end.

Have a quick look for you because I don't want that sticking sand staring in your face.

Is it showing for anybody else?

That might be maybe if you leave and pop back in, that might help.

I'm not sure that might help refresh in so you can allow you to see the slide.

Thanks, Mary.

So I can see you.

You can't see it.

So yeah, good range of representation from across our context, Welsh and English medium, primary and secondary contexts and good range of rural and urban contexts were naturally represented due to the geographical locations of our schools. As you again can seem from our map and from those who chose to be involved, it wasn't an intention of our project, but it naturally occurred, which was really great.

Participants were invited then to attend either a 1:1 interview if they were a mentor or a small interactive group discussion if they were a student teacher, and this was consciously done in order to allow our student teachers to have a supportive and encouraging environment to share their views and for mentors and school-based staff to discuss their individual approaches in depth.

So the key questions we wanted to explore in our project are outlined on the screen

and they were for us to examine what student teachers saw as effective methods of mentoring towards their achieving qualified teacher status. We wanted to know how well Mentors understood their role in supporting student teachers to achieve this, and then we wanted to think about what mentors saw as effective strategies when mentoring student teachers and why they thought this was effective, and also to then consider how well those strategies aligned with research or didn't support the research that was available.

The ultimate aim of our project was to create a series of case studies which demonstrated a range of effective approaches to mentoring from the perspective of both the student teacher and the school based mentor, which could then be shared with partnership and beyond, and use the findings to inform our own future research but as importantly, our approaches within our PGCE program, in terms of sharing effective practice, influencing materials and training and also to share more widely through publications where possible.

I'm pleased to say we've met all of the aims that we set out to do and we'll share the resources that came from this study for you, for your consideration, and hopefully use in your own practice at the end of this presentation.

As part of this, we were keen to trial the use of a creative method within our interviews and our focus groups, and as such participants who took part in our study were asked to bring along an artifact and this could range from an object, an image, or a song title of their choice which they felt represented effective mentoring to them and asked them to share these ideas as part of their session. And that's what I'm going to be asking you to be involved in this afternoon before I share the findings from our project. So to have a little go at doing this yourselves in relation to your own experience and context.

So before I do that and share our findings/what we did, I'm in a moment going to pause the recording and I'm going to put you into some breakout rooms and these will just be done randomly and the task I'm going to set use is this, to just have quite frank and open discussion if possible with the people that you find yourselves in that room with. You may or may not know them. They may be from a range of contexts. It doesn't really matter, but it's to just think about your experience of mentoring and that might be to do with school education, or it might be to do with teacher

education, or it might be to just do with your professional development or a role that you're in. Again, it doesn't really matter if you're a mentor or a mentee, it's just to think about what mentoring all that phrase, mentoring or effective mentoring means to you. And while I'm talking, while we kind of move you into those rooms to have a think about an object, a song title, or an image, so it could be something physical to be something to hand, something that you can see or something more abstract like a song title or something that you've seen recently, or an image that you perhaps don't even have with you, but you could describe and just have a conversation with the people in that room about that artifact, that object, that abstract image, and think about how that represents mentoring and what works and what doesn't work in your context.

And I'll give you a quick example, because you might be sitting thinking I don't really know what you're talking about so here's one I prepared earlier. So there's a little Freddo frog that I've actually eaten. It's gone. I tried my hardest not to eat it before the session, but I couldn't last so that to me represents mentoring and you might think I've lost my mind. I haven't lost my mind at all and it's similar to something one of our students, teachers and mentors spoke about was they brought along a chocolate bar they had in this session, resisting the urge to eat their chocolate bar, but the reason I brought along my now eaten Freddo frog is because it represents kind of that urge you have to just do things and get stuck in and do it really, really quickly when you're a student teacher and as a mentor, you need to sometimes put the reins on and say, actually, hold on. We need to go back to basics and we need to do the simple things first and we need to consolidate what you do first before you can just be launched in and take control of all your classes and teach everything and have your own classrooms and not do planning, not have to fill in the paperwork and just to kind of be set free. So to me that there is a bit like that urge that I've not resisted to eat my Freddo frog and the chocolate is often the reward so that QTS that you get the qualified teacher status you get at the end is if you do resist, it should be more enjoyable at the end. So that's what I'm going to say is my artifact for today in the current mood that I'm in represents the effective mentoring to me.

But hopefully on the screen now you can see a collage of artifacts and images which give you a snapshot of what some of our participants chose to share, and I couldn't possibly put all of the artifacts on there because we had so many.

But just give you a bit of a snapshot into what some of the student teachers and mentors chose to share. And as I said before, using our artifacts as a research tool to stimulate discussion really did prove very effective in eliciting quality responses from our participants. The discussion of their choice and the reasoning behind it was interesting and it really enable participants to speak in a very natural, unrehearsed manner, again, why I kind of threw you all into the deep end without any preparation. It enabled them to provide real life context for their work and approaches as mentors or student teachers, and speaking with real authority and knowledge about their experiences and that for us has been a real success story from this project. As you can see from the range of images displayed, the choices were really diverse. They ranged from chocolate bars like the Freddo frog that I shared with you earlier, which the mentor used to highlight the need to break down their mentoring into really manageable chunks for the student teacher, but also as something that should be enjoyed and sometimes we forget to enjoy that process as a mentor and because it can be difficult, it can be tricky, it can be hard to work through.

Some mentors chose books. One example was "To kill a mockingbird" but they chose in particular the character Atticus Finch, and they spoke about how this character for them symbolized the personal yet difficult journey that you have to go through, both as a mentor but also as a mentee. Some brought along poppets those tools that those little toys that kids have now kind of fidgeting and some for kind of stress relief as well. And they talked about how those poppets symbolized the need to work through aspects of the toy and the same way that you work through aspects of your journey through initial teacher education and becoming a mentor. It's not a natural thing to just be able to mentor somebody and the way that you mentor one student teacher is not necessarily going to work then for the next student teacher, it's a very personal approach. It's also a stress relief tool and they talked about the need to have something that was stress relieving as a teacher and as a teacher educator.

Lots of song titles came up. Glasses were used by a student teacher to explain how their mentor helped them to see more clearly and focus on the specifics and the way that her lenses did and she really spoke with great passion about how she felt like at distance she didn't really know very much, and as the mentor walked her through lesson planning and evaluations and through the process of learning to teach that

things became clear in the way that her glasses enabled things to become clearer when she actually remembered to put them on.

Interesting things came up like a watering can which when you know a student teacher turned up with a watering can it was quite amusing. But again, they spoke about in a very articulate manner about how that watering can be used to symbolize the nurturing side of a mentor who helps the student teacher to grow and develop and what was really interesting is they also spoke about overwatering. So those of you who are gardeners know, you know, probably know a lot more than I do about, you know, the need to, when to water and when not to water and that's what mentors are very good about doing with their student teachers to help them develop and grow.

Interestingly, out of all the participants, only two participants chose the same artifacts and that first really stood out again as to why this approach was so, so unique, so useful, and so successful. That artifact was a song title. It was the song, "The Climb" by Miley Cyrus, which you may or may not know but interestingly, but they both spoke about it in a different way, and one was a mentor who spoke about a range of song titles, so this wasn't their only choice, and they talked about kind of the end of the climb in reaching the end of the journey, and the student teacher talked about the climb being something really difficult in how you had to climb up this, this huge amount and take these difficult steps and make these difficult decisions along the way. I think at the time when we did the research, this must have been an anthem that was the radio and she said she was singing it to school every day and she'd start off singing it quietly and in quite a stressed manner and by the end of the journey, and she got to school, she was shouting and singing as she was driving along. And that was so lovely that she kind of came alive when she was singing, and she was pumped up as it was like her anthem for the morning, and then she'd go in and do her teaching.

My personal favourite and it's the one that I've shared on the padlet as well, is the Spiderman and I love talking about this because it's probably one of the funniest things that's ever happened to me in a formal interview for a research project but probably in my career as well, I joined the teams meeting and Spiderman was sat there. So he was head to toe in a Spiderman outfit and he was a teacher in a primary

school and it was a World Book Day so first of all that kind of explained why he was there, but he hadn't chosen to take his costume off and he started the interview in full character. So you had a voice. He was in his outfit and he kept it on throughout the interview. So he stayed in character, talking about his approaches as a mentor, and he really wanted it to use it to show and symbolize the need to take risks, not to be afraid, to be able to look silly and model this for his students, for the pupils, but also the student teachers, to push them to succeed and his quote from his case study is on the screen for you to see. And he said "it's important to get them out of their comfort zone so that they embrace opportunities to develop their own growth mindset." And it's just really stuck with me. It was really funny at the time, but you know, I was just sitting there interviewing and I wish we'd kind of said we were going to record our interview so that I could actually play it but at the time, we didn't know how successful this was going to be and we wanted those interviews to, I suppose, be as calm and inviting and safe for our participants. I think if we said we were gonna record them, I'm not sure if you would have done it in the same manner. I don't know.

Maybe one day I'll get him to come back and do it, but it really has stuck with us. So that's the example on the padlet as well.

The poster on your screen summarizes our project and our findings which we created as part of a journal submission as part of the findings of our project.

Our findings really mirrored the literature in many ways, because the research participants commented on the multifaceted role of the mentor and the importance of a range of personal attributes to support the development of effective mentor/mentee relationships.

Our conclusions highlighted that a range of effective mentoring approaches are evident across our partnership and we really wanted to showcase those and we did that through the creation of 10 case studies into effective mentoring and practice, we really feel that they reflect a range of contexts and approaches across the bilingual partnership that we have but are applicable to many contexts, not just teaching and teacher education, but across the Four Nations and beyond.

Mentoring is a really broad term. It's something quite hard to pin down exactly what it means to you, what effective mentoring means to you. It can be a really demanding role. It requires time and space to develop and learn both from a research and a practice perspective, and this really came to light through what our participants said and how they spoke about their experiences, both from a mentor and a mentee perspective.

There's a really clear indication of the existence of a reciprocal relationship that's needed for mentoring the mentor and the mentee, and that relationship does have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the process. So if that relationship breaks down, then the whole process tends to break down, or if there are barriers within that relationship, then that tends to lead to barriers in terms of a student teacher's progress as well.

There tended to be an agreement that there are many aspects to mentoring, so lots of things go into mentoring, but you need a holistic approach to it as well. So you do need to have a toolkit with lots of things within your toolkit, but you need to use those tools in different contexts at different moments in order to give them holistic support.

As mentioned at the start, the using the use of artifacts as a research tool was our greatest success story as researchers in this project and we've shared this in a range of external and internal conferences and publications at length, which I've shared at the end of the presentation for you to access and hopefully use moving forward and hopefully you'll find them useful.

A few more insights to finish with really about what some of the other mentors chose to bring in and student teachers chose to share so another really interesting and odd artifact was a bicycle tool. And again, this mentor I think was really into their cycling, but he must have had it to hand and he turned up with this, what looked like a pen knife but wasn't really a pen knife, it had lots more bits attached to it and he spoke about the need to having lots of aspects in your toolkit, like a bicycle tool, and that mentoring was very much like that and that there were different ways of doing things and different approaches that can be used in a range of ways to support mentor

sessions or discussions following lessons or whatever it might be that you're doing with your student teacher.

And a coaster popped up. Again, this was something that a mentor had with them on their desk, but they kept it because it was from their very first student teacher so it also had sentimental value, but they were talking more about the quote which says "I'm a teacher. What's your superpower?" And she was talking about that at the time that there was this insider joke that teachers having this kind of sort of superpower and that they're super heroes and she was really thinking about how truly prepared you never really are for teaching or going into the professional education in general and how what we do day to day is really quite indescribable and difficult to talk about. And that it's really actually very clever and when you actually sit down and think about what you do when you're training and mentoring somebody to be a teacher, it's actually quite clever and she hadn't really thought about it before.

The link on the screen and they are shared on the common room padlet as well, because the slides from this presentation are shared, should take you to our case studies. Like I said before, we published 10 case studies. We aimed to do five. We had such a wealth of information and so much interesting research came from the project we ended up doubling our case studies and we produced 10. They've been shared widely and both within our context and externally, and each one is unique and captures a school and student teacher's view of effective approaches to mentoring. So hopefully as you work through them, you might get some inspiration or some ideas and find them interesting to read as well, perhaps take them into your own context. So please do feel free to use them and download them. We've had over 300 downloads of this publication to date, so they are being quite widely shared and used.

On the right hand side, just a screen shot of one of the case studies. So if you click on the case (I just saw on the chat there that it's difficult to read) and if you click on the link it should take you to the case studies. It's just a screenshot and another example from one of our mentors, Rebecca. She highlighted her enjoyment and the worth she found in taking part in in the process, but also of being a mentor and her case study really mirrored the choice of title you may have seen it on our poster early, and we've used it quite a lot in some of our journal articles about finding the

joy and needing to remind yourself to find the joy in what you do, especially as mentors and as educators. She took her inspiration and her artifact from the Walt Disney quote, "Laughter is timeless" and stated "that it doesn't matter how old you are or what situation you're in at the time, always make sure you're having fun and maintaining a sense of humour; focus on the fun while you're doing things." And she went on to explain that her student teachers, part of their school, so to make sure that, you know, what you're using in whole school and collaborating with a range of teachers, is also shared with your student teacher.

The other quotation on the screen is from one of our project participants and mentor from a Community School in Carmarthenshire, whose artifact was a song lyric which was "the future so bright you've got to wear shades" and again, aptly summed up the work that this project has led to since it ended and that it's inspired us to use these findings to inform our future practice. It ensures that it's grounded in real experience as spoken about by our mentors and our student teachers, and hopefully continues to inspire others by the sharing of it, and in particular, the sharing of our research methods.

And as promised, there's links on the screen and I know that they are shared on the common room padlet, so hopefully you can access them if there's any issues in terms of accessing the resources, the case studies, please do get in touch and I'm sure we can get them to you and share them again if you're finding it difficult.

Thank you very much for attending this session. I hope you found it useful. Please continue to add to the padlet and hopefully some of the things that I've talked about today can inspire you either in your research or in your role moving forward.

It's an ongoing challenge being a mentor, but our vision was always to capture what effective mentoring looks like across a diverse range of contexts. So hopefully our materials did that and hopefully our project approach has been inspirational this afternoon.