Mentoring As An Effective Form Of Staff Development

Mentoring has been shown to be an effective form of staff development. This essay will consider how mentoring has evolved and its purpose in education. It will examine the importance of mentoring not only for newly qualified teachers (NQT) but for all Early Years Professionals (EYP). The essay will assess the benefits for the mentor as well as the mentee and consider issues which may arise. Finally, the mentoring of children in the setting will be discussed.

Throughout the essay areas of mentoring explored will be examined in relation to personal practice. Helgevold, Næsheim-Bjørkvik, and Østrem, (2015) describe mentoring as guiding newcomers to a role into existent practice. However, Monkeviciene and Autukeviciene (2015) considered that while traditional mentoring was based on behaviourist theories newer models have moved towards constructivism. In line with this Fletcher (2012); Lambert, Gallagher and Abbot-Shim (2015); Brody, Edelman, Siegal, Foster, Bailey, Bryant and Bond (2016); Del Valle (2016) and Mistry and Sood (2017) state that mentoring is a collaborative process between colleagues where the mentor has experience and knowledge of the role the mentee is undertaking and therefore can support and guide them to develop both personally and professionally, they know the pitfalls and positives as they have walked similar paths. While considering mentoring for the purposes education Mitescu (2014) and Bressman, Winter and Efron (2018) suggest that education mentoring should be focused to enable staff to work towards competencies which directly link to the needs of the setting and therefore improve provision for children. Accordingly, Monkeviciene et al (2015) showed that mentoring of teachers is one of the most effective means of professional development. Furthermore, according to Lambert et al (2015) state that mentor feedback and support to develop NQT's can improve teacher quality and therefore provide better outcomes for children. Furthermore, according to Dempsey, Arthur-Kelly and Carty (2009) and Langdon, Alexander, Faquhar, Teser, Courtney and Palmer (2016) the initial experiences of teachers is directly related to how long they will remain in the profession. However, early years settings do not only employ qualified teachers but also rely on other EYP's. According to Rodd (2013), the quality of early years provision depends on all of those in the setting. She cautions that training for early years work does not cover all areas of learning as the variety of practical issues cannot be learned by academic education alone. Therefore, mentoring can support EYP's to develop skills and learn practical ways to deal with children, parents and colleagues. Accordingly, Lane, Prokop, Johnston, Podhajski and Nathan (2014) and Mistry et al (2017) show that the professional development of staff is essential to raise the attainment levels of children and state that mentoring is a key component of this.

Within practice level two and three students are encouraged to be part of the team and take on responsibilities. In my role as a classroom assistant, I talk with the students placed in my room to find out what they would like to achieve from their placement and observe them to identify strengths and areas for development. Bennett and Burridge (2017) suggest this collegial approach ensures the mentor understands the mentee's perspective and the mentee sees where progression is to be made. Each week the students reflect on progression and tasks are proposed for the following week. Accordingly, Thompson and Thompson (2008) show that a reflective practitioner needs someone who can facilitate identifying areas for development. While education is a reflective practice with life-long learning (Monkeviciene et al 2015),

Bressman et al (2018) found that mentoring is rarely part of career progression once a career is established. However, Thompson et al (2008) showed that a mentor can help refocus practice, to think rationally and unbiased, rather than keeping with the status quo. Furthermore, Bressman et al (2018) suggest that mentoring established teachers can increase the mentor's job satisfaction and help them to feel fulfilled in their role. Similarly, Ha (2013) found that mentoring reduced teacher isolation and encouraged professional growth by reflection on the mentors own practice and their development of leadership skills.

Additionally, Rodd (2013) suggests that those who aspire to leadership need a mentor to develop their capacity for the role. Within practice the teacher who encouraged and mentored me to set up a literacy booster after schools club has in turn been mentored into a senior leadership post by another member of staff. Furthermore, as I continue my professional development and aim to train as a teacher, a fellow classroom assistant has joined me in leading this booster group and currently I am mentoring her to take on responsibility for the group. In line with this Mistry et al (2017) propose that without mentoring those who may have skills or be ready for professional development may be limited and not get the opportunities to take the next steps in career development. However, Helgevold et al (2015) caution that mentors in the setting may be focused on immediate issues rather than looking towards the bigger picture of the mentee's professional development. While, Lambert et al (2015) state that as mentoring is relatable to the setting a clear definition of outcomes may be difficult to achieve and confusion between both parties may ensue for example an EYP student or NQT may have the goal of becoming fully qualified while the mentor is concerned with them being the best fit for the setting. According to Rodd (2013), this type of mentor view is counterproductive as the goal should be for the mentee to develop their own abilities and not follow a prescribed path. In practice, when supporting level two and three students preparing for a supervisor visit, good communication with clear expectations from both sides enables the smooth running of assessment for both the student and classroom management. Accordingly, Del Valle (2016) states that the mentor should have knowledge of the mentee's role, value building their capacity and have a desire to see them succeed while Bennett et al (2017) state that mentees should understand the mentors working role.

Classrooms are busy environments and Aspfors and Fransson (2015); Lambert et al (2015) and Bressman et al (2018) caution that mentoring adds to the workload of overstretched staff. In addition, Aspfors et al (2015) and Monroe and Norris (2018) state that the management of the setting must be fully supportive to protect the time needed for mentoring, for example, children's time in school should be well spent and the child-adult ratio adhered to therefore mentoring meetings should be arranged inside contracted hours but outside of teaching time with suitable cover arranged. However, in the current financial climate this is not always possible and in practice meetings between mentee and mentor happen quickly during assemblies or have taken place in the staff room over lunch. A positive effect of this has been others with a beneficial point of view being able to offer support. In saying that this may distract from building a relationship and trust between the mentor/mentee as according to Fransson (2016); Bennett et al (2017) and Bressman et al (2018) trust is essential in the mentoring relationship. While a positive one to one relationship between mentor and mentee with trust at the core has been a focus of mentoring research Pryce, Giovannetti, Spencer, Elledge, Gowdy, Whitley and Cavell (2015) show that children attending school are mentored within a group of peers. In research undertaken with at risk pre-school and elementary stage pupils in America, who were paired with college psychology and education students trained to develop their social interactions, Trepanler-Street (2007) and Pryce et al (2015) found that all the children

considered showed social improvements with both peers and parents, additionally this had a positive impact on their academic attainment. Furthermore, Chesmore, Weiler and Taussig (2017) state that mentoring whether formal or informal in the context of modelling the regulation of emotion for children can be beneficial for children who have yet to develop this skill.

Additionally, Humphrey and Oliver (2014) and Chesmore et al (2017) state that mentoring is associated with positive social, emotional, behavioural and academic outcomes for children. Within practice children present with varying needs and well trained and experienced staff can build relationships of trust to encourage and help set them on a positive path. Accordingly, Trepanler-Street (2007) states that there a plethora of research to show how mentoring a child who is at risk of academic and social failure can have a dramatic impact, that is, that one adult who believes and supports them to do better. She goes on to say that in return the EYP learns from the experience and can in future apply this knowledge to other pupils in similar need.

This essay has shown how mentoring in the early years can have a positive effect not only on staff but also on children. Mentors benefit from increased knowledge of themselves as they reflect on their own practice while encouraging the mentee in professional development, this was also shown to have a positive impact on their job satisfaction. In turn, mentees learn from the more experienced practitioner and having this support can move forward with confidence. The importance of mentoring was also shown to be beneficial for the professional development of established staff who may otherwise remain static in their career. Children also benefit from the shared knowledge and improved practice that mentoring offers. Additionally, the implications of mentoring children in the setting showed a positive impact on their general development. Moreover, the EYP's benefitted from this type of mentoring as they learned from the children and developed skills to deal with the ever changing needs in society.