INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF LEARNING MENTORS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham

for the degree of Doctor of Education (Educational Leadership)

JULY 2012

ABSTRACT

This thesis is the result of an investigation into the use of the learning mentor support mechanism in primary schools in England. Learning mentoring is designed to reduce barriers to learning in individual children. This research was devised to enhance current knowledge of the learning mentor process and practices, and the impact of mentoring programmes on pupils.

The research approach I adopted was qualitative, involving six case studies of children being mentored in three schools. The research design included part-structured interviews with: the child; his/her mentor; class teacher and parent. Interviews were undertaken before and after the execution of learning mentor programmes. Additional data were generated by direct observation of the interaction of learning mentors and mentees, and documentary evidence was examined. Each case study was analysed and cross-case and cross-setting analyses undertaken.

Improvement for the participant mentees was related to social, emotional and behavioural factors. The learning mentor role was not always clearly defined but reflected the culture of each school, the personal characteristics of each mentor and the specific relationships within each mentor/mentee pair. Mentoring programmes were unique to each mentee's needs. Impact was slow in all six cases and was found to be facilitated or hindered by: relationships; time; the mentor undertaking multiple roles; and the expectations of the wider school staff of the school setting.

The significance of my analysis stresses the importance of the triangle of influence of the child/school/parent in aiding a child in school. Aspects of mentoring which could be more closely attended to by schools in order to provide best learning mentoring practice were: mentors identifying their strategies; the mixing of curriculum with social/emotional/behavioural targets; liaison with families; communication with the wider school staff; and the involvement of mentees in setting and monitoring their own mentoring goals.

Mentoring styles centred on the mentor, curriculum or the mentee and related to the leadership styles identified in the school settings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Andrew Hobson for tutoring me in the research for, and writing of, this thesis. I also sincerely thank Dr Bernadette Youens who kindly accepted the tutorship of the final few months of this work and supported me to its completion.

I am grateful for the cooperation of the three schools and the participation of the sample of adults and children who made this research possible. I also appreciate the support, patience and love of my husband, through often arduous study times, and of Tess and Susie who also accompanied me faithfully through this research journey.

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GLOSSARY

Term or initials	Meaning
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CUREE	Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ECM	Every Child Matters
EC	Excellence Cluster
EPA	Educational Priority Areas
EiC	Excellence in Cities
FE	Further Education
FSM	free school meals
GAT	Gifted and Talented
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectors
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index
LA	Local Authority (previously the Local Education Authority)
(NOS) LDSS	(National Occupational Standards for) Learning, Development and Support Services
LECP	Liverpool Excellence Cluster Partnership
LSU	Learning Support Unit
MAC	Mentoring and Coaching
'Mentee'	Pupil on a mentoring programme

Term or initials	Meaning
NCDS	National Child Development Study
NCH	National Children's Homes
NCLM	National Certificate in Learning Mentoring
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NMN	National Mentoring Network
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OfSTED	Office for Standards in Education
SCRE	Scottish Council for Research in Education
'sessions'	Allocated mentoring time when mentor and mentee work together
SEAL	Social, Emotional Approach to Learning
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SNTA	Special Needs Teaching Assistant
TDA	Teaching Development Agency
TA	Teaching Agency