

Research Report

Maximising learning dialogue between workplace mentors and students undertaking professional field-based experiences

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He honore, he kororia ki te Atua.

He maungarongo ki te whenua.

He whakaaro pai i nga tangata katoa.

Executive summary

Field-based experience is an integral component of many pre-service professional preparation programmes. In these practicum placements, students are paired with a mentor who is usually an experienced practitioner. While placements are regarded as a highly significant contributor to the overall programme, research suggests that student experience and the resultant learning can be varied. Sanders' 2008 doctoral research focused on the use of intentional interventions within practicum experiences in initial primary teacher training as a means of enriching learning dialogue, which is when the conversation between a supervisor/mentor and learner is characterised by genuine professional co-enquiry. This study takes that work and extends it into degree programmes preparing students for early childhood education and for counselling.

This interdisciplinary project reflects the belief that enriched learning dialogue is critical to effective field-based components of professional preparation, and that quality dialogue of this nature is enhanced when sound learning relationships are first established and when intentional tools are used to aid this dialogue.

Three institutions provided a total of 27 participant pairs – student and mentor – from the two disciplines. Participants engaged in initial online questionnaires, which explored their perceptions and experience of the mentoring relationship. They subsequently used four interventions, supplied by the researchers, within their mentor conversations and then completed a final online questionnaire reflecting on the value (or otherwise) of the interventions. After initial data analysis, a subset of the participants, both students and mentors, were interviewed as a means of authenticating and developing the perceived themes within the data.

Participants identified as key contributors to effective practicum experiences:

- a) developing a meaningful relationship
- b) open conversation at a deep level, and
- c) opportunities to challenge and be challenged.

Participants indicated that these characteristics need clearly defined structure. Additionally, several themes concerning the general field-based experience were noted. There were some similarities between participants from early childhood education and from counselling, and some notable contrasts. Specifically, while both valued the practicum experience, the two groups perceived the role of the mentor differently; the counselling students saw the mentor in a more collegial light, while early childhood students focused more on the expert role of the mentor. Although both groups recognised the value of 'challenge' within conversations, they tended to see 'support' as more evident in the relationship than 'challenge'. Counselling students experienced and expected a higher level of agency in decision making in the relationship compared to their early childhood counterparts. Both groups reported significant pressures that affected the ability to make good use of times with their mentors, and some reported difficulties in actually having any time for dialogue.

In terms of the interventions used in the study, the participants unanimously affirmed their usefulness in building relationships and enhancing enriched learning dialogue. In particular, they noted the way the interventions built trust and mutual understanding, clarified roles, and scaffolded exploration of underlying beliefs and assumptions. The tasks also brought structure to their analysis of professional practice, and increased the ability to engage in personal reflection. While the specific tasks used were found to be of benefit, the deeper finding that emerged was that the use of any wisely chosen strategy benefitted learning, rather than necessarily the specific strategies used in the study.

The study adds significant credence to the view that intentionality in structuring mentoring conversations can be highly effective in enriching learning dialogue. The use of specific tasks is shown to be one means of providing that structure. Additionally, the report highlights four areas of particular relevance to education providers:

- It is necessary to attend to how both students and mentors conceptualise their roles in relation to each other, and how they evaluate their respective contributions.
- Providers would do well to pay attention to the time given in reality to the mentor relationship. A commitment to a relationship on paper cannot be assumed to reflect what is happening in practice.
- Agency is important – the extent to which students control or feel in control of the relationship. Both too much and too little agency can have deleterious impacts on learning.
- It behoves providers to consider the value placed on the role of mentors in field-based situations by the home-base staff. Value can be communicated in many ways with the unspoken messages often more influential than those which are overt. In particular, providers need to consider their ethical responsibility to equip the mentors with the necessary skills to work effectively with their students.

It is the view of the research team that the findings have application to a broad range of both professional and vocational programmes in which students engage in field-based experiences. In addition to the conclusions and implications made here, a set of resources has been developed to help learners, mentors and organisations maximise the effectiveness of their field-based experiences. These resources are available at <http://akoatearora.ac.nz/learning-dialogue-in-field-based-experiences>

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Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to explore if and how specifically selected practicum tasks increase enriched dialogue in mentoring contexts, as suggested in Sanders (2008). Currently, a growing number of professional and vocational education programmes are reliant on field-based experiences to provide relevant, contextualised learning. This interdisciplinary project arises out of concerns about mentoring experiences in field-study contexts, for both the student and the mentor/supervisor. It proposes that enriched learning dialogue is critical to effective field-based components of professional preparation.

Enriched learning dialogue is conversation between a supervisor/mentor and novice professional that moves beyond cordial interchange to genuine professional co-enquiry.

This means that rather than focusing only on practical components such as 'what should be done' and 'how it should be done', the conversation engages with questions related to "why?"

Enriched learning dialogue is conversation between a supervisor/mentor and novice professional that moves beyond cordial interchange to genuine professional co-enquiry. This means that rather than focusing only on practical components such as 'what should be done' and 'how it should be done', the conversation engages with questions related to "why?"; that is, the rationale or theoretical considerations that underpin professional practice and decision making. In this sense, an enriched learning dialogue is an expression of reflexivity, and it requires a willingness to engage with and discuss assumptions and pre-understandings that sustain practice. The marks of such dialogue include the willingness of both parties to debate perspectives, challenge presuppositions, and welcome cognitive dissonance (Ferrier-Kerr, 2007; Graham, 2006; Haigh & Ward, 2002). The primary goal is to help novice professionals build the critical consciousness necessary for reflection, which then leads to action resulting in transformation (Steele, 2008). In order to bring about this level of reflection, students need to be challenged about how they perceive the professional role, context and the values they bring to those perceptions.

The project team is aware that research indicates that assumptions about the actual contribution of field-based experiences tend to be ill-founded *unless* specific strategic intervention occurs, leading to enriched learning dialogue between the experienced and novice professional.

In the project proposal, the general concerns expressed above were honed into four specific questions:

- What are the characteristics of field-based practice that identify as contributing to professional learning?
- How effective are strategies shown to be effective for associate and student teachers in a primary school context ... [for] creating and supporting enriched learning dialogue in field-based learning across a range of situations?
- How might those strategies be further adapted to better suit specific field-based contexts in the areas of professional development in this study?
- How can strategies considered effective in fostering learning in field-based contexts be developed as accessible, effective and relevant resources for a wider range of professional preparation programmes?

In conducting the study, the research team first identified the characteristics of field-based practice that participant mentors and students recognised as contributing to professional learning. The similarities and differences in these two sets of data were noted and compared to data gained after the introduction of the interventions designed to support enriched learning dialogue between mentoring pairs.

The research team and the participant pool were drawn from three New Zealand tertiary institutions and covered two disciplines: counsellor education and early childhood teacher education. Additionally, the project team consisted of both new and experienced researchers, and participants were drawn from face-to-face and flexible delivery programmes. The project team acknowledges that many programmes across professional and vocational sectors use field-based learning, and that each sector will have its own unique characteristics. Counselling and early childhood education will not characterise the breadth of field-based situations. However, the team believes that, while findings cannot be overly generalised, they can contribute to the ways practicum experiences are viewed and conducted across many sectors.

Various challenges and impediments were encountered during the course of the research, with the main factor being the effect of the Christchurch earthquakes on our original participant pool, which ended up being smaller than initially envisaged. However, the research method used generated sufficient evidence within the data to examine the effectiveness of the chosen tasks. These findings are important to those involved in tertiary institutions which rely significantly on field placement contributions to their learning programmes.

Literature review

Introduction

A growing number of professional and trades-based education programmes are reliant on *in situ* experiences to provide relevant, contextualised learning. Commonly, these field-based learning experiences are supervised by a nominated professional within the appropriate vocation. With increasing numbers of tertiary students nationally studying at a distance from the institution offering their preparation programme, the key role of field-based supervisors/mentors is even more significant.

For both teaching and counselling, practicum is viewed as a context within which the formative process of development as a professional can occur. It is often in the practicum context that students develop a sense of professional identity, as they have opportunities to integrate theory and practice (Gratch, 2000; Howie & Hagan, 2010; Maclean & White, 2007; Mutton, Burn & Hagger, 2010; Santoro, 1997; Webb, 2005). In these settings, it is essential that learning is maximised so that the graduate is characteristically professional and able to problem solve in a range of experiences rather than reliant on being told what to do (Arman & Scherer, 2002; Cormier & Hackney, 2005; Norsworthy, 2008; Sanders, 2008; Woodside, Oberman, Cole & Carruth, 2007). Learning in practicum occurs in two main ways: that which happens spontaneously in everyday activities and that which occurs through *guided learning strategies* (Billet, 2000, p. 272) initiated by the mentor. Thus, when students are linked with an effective mentor, a variety of positive student outcomes are highly likely, including effects on work attitudes, interpersonal relations, motivation, situational satisfaction and performance (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng & DuBois, 2008).

Field-based experiences, then, are arguably a significant context for the development of professional competence and confidence within any programme of study (Howie & Hagan, 2010; Keesing-Styles, 2004; Mutton, Burn & Hagger, 2010). However, this opportunity for learning cannot be assumed to be effective simply because it exists. Student experience in field-based situations is notoriously patchy, and anecdotal evidence suggests that it is not uncommon for student teachers and counsellors to complete a practicum without having experienced the quality of relationship that leads to genuine learning-focused dialogue with their supervisor/mentor (Sanders, Dowson & Sinclair, 2005). Mentors also report that field-based experiences can have both benefits and demands that impact significantly on their daily work (Billett, 2003).

Need for specific training for mentors/supervisors

The fact that the field-based mentors are expert in their profession does not necessarily mean they are equipped to work with novices in their field. Such work is not an instinctive activity that can be carried out by good practitioners as another layer of their professional function (Edwards & Collison, 1996). Instead, as Sanders (2008, p. 48) summarises, being a mentor:

- is a distinct intervention
- requires specific preparation (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004) even for experienced professionals (Gratch, 1998)
- includes discrete skills to be practised and mastered (Bubb, 2000; Crave, 2002; Crow & Matthews, 1998)
- requires induction into its own knowledge base
- necessitates understanding the possibilities and limitations of their role (Edwards & Collison, 1996; Walkington, 2006).

Therefore, it is vitally important that both the learning institutions and leaders in the field-based context support the work of the mentors. Expectations of mentoring outcomes are unrealistic, if this does not occur (Eby *et al.*, 2008).

Lack of researched programmes for mentor development

There appears to be agreement regarding the need for professional development for the mentoring role. However, literature related to a range of professions, such as medicine, counselling, teaching and mental health, notes the limited number of research studies of programmes designed to equip mentors/supervisors (Kilminster & Jolly, 2000; McMahon & Simons 2004; Milne, & James, 2002; Sanders, 2008; Spence, Wilson, Kavanagh, Strong & Worrall, 2001). There is an expectation that supervisors/mentors should act as advocates or mediators for the students on practicum; that is, they should take action to produce change in the environment that then allows change in the practice of both supervisor/mentor and novice professional (Billett, 2000; Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). However, there are few opportunities for supervisors/mentors to develop the skills and strategies needed to meet this goal.

Importance of dialogue

This project is informed by research within teacher education (*e.g.* Berry, 2004; Cherednichenko & Kruger, 2002; Haigh, 2000; Labaree, 2000; Norsworthy, 1998, 2008; Sanders, 1999, 2008; Sanders, Dowson & Sinclair, 2005; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007), which indicates that assumptions about the extent of learning/development through practicum experiences are overly optimistic unless specific strategic intervention occurs to enable enriched learning dialogue between the experienced and novice professional.

There is an expectation in the literature that the expert will present as many different scenarios as possible and discuss the practical and the propositional implications of each one, since such discussions are *the engine which drives well-planned active mentoring* (Edwards & Collison, 1996, p. 109). The desired result is a practicum that *fosters careful observation, examination and interpretation and analysis of (related) events* (Graham, 2006, p. 1119).

Important prerequisites

Engaging the novice in such dialogue is an essential supervisory element and key to effective field-based learning. Fundamental prerequisites for effective learning-focused communication are building a sound supervisor/student relationship and the ability to share professional knowledge.

Relationship

The importance of relationship for effective teaching and learning is well established in practicum literature (Cameron & Wilson, 1993; Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Gibbs, 2007), and is seen as a major factor in the success of the practicum (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Haigh, 2005). If the goal is to encourage a genuine learning relationship rather than merely fostering pleasant relationships (Smedley, 1996), supervisors/mentors and novices must get to know each other as people and as professionals (Johnson & Ridley, 2004), and establish *a safe, trusting environment where individual ideas, thoughts and views can be offered and explored in challenging ways without causing offence* (Sanders, 2008, p. 46).

Smythe, MacCulloch and Charmley (2009) propose that genuine dialogue only results when there is sufficient trust between the mentoring pair to allow freedom of direction within the conversation, since dialogue *happens* (p. 18). This requires a strong relationship built on self-knowledge and shared knowledge, and occurs when both parties disclose beliefs, presuppositions, past experiences,

hopes, visions and so on (Sanders, 2008). In addition, the literature shows that these experiences are more effective when there is a shared understanding of the characteristics of transformative education (Aitken, Bruce, Ferguson *et al.*, 2008; Cameron, 2007; Crickmer, 2007; Giebelhaus, 2002; Gordinier, Moberly & Conway, 2004; Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005; Norsworthy, 2008; Sanders, 2008).

The development of professional judgement requires more than knowledge of recipes. Novices need to engage in tasks grounded in the activities of practice, but they also need to talk about those activities with more expert practitioners. Crave (2002) asserts that the best methods for transfer are experiential learning, modelling and understanding performances through reflection and analysis aided by opportunities to articulate with another more experienced colleague.

It is true that relationship will build over the term of the supervisory period. However, much more can be gained from the practicum experience if a learning relationship is quickly established in the early stages of the practicum. For this to happen, an intentional approach is required, one which offers a transparent space within which to communicate. Strategies, structures and tools can provide the scaffolding that turns intention into actuality (Sanders, 2008).

Ability to share professional knowledge

It is not enough for a novice to merely observe or take part in field-based practice. As noted earlier, the nurturing of the practicum situation to ensure that the mentor and novice engage with and explore professional decision making is a critical part of professional development. This involves exploring together the craft knowledge and formal knowledge underpinning practice (Chung, 2002; Field & Field, 1994; Furlong, 2000, Sundli, 2007).

Engaging in dialogue and creating an environment conducive to enriched learning dialogue is thus an essential part of the mentor's role. Because it facilitates novices' knowledge building, mentors need the ability to articulate the skills they are using, the craft knowledge they are drawing from, and the formal knowledge that underpins their decision making (Chung, 2002; Furlong, 2000b; Sundli, 2007). Reliance on the knowledge base built up by individual novices would mean they missed out on the richness of past experience and the accumulated understanding— the heritage of past inquiry.

Despite the acknowledged need, the research evidence points to novices' difficulties in gaining access to the professional knowledge of their mentors (Zanting, Verloop & Vermont, 2003). One well-documented reason for this is lack of time (Billett, 2003; Glover & Mardle, 1995; Gore, 1995; Ramsey, 2000; Smedley, 1996). The other main reason is the apparent inability of many mentors to articulate their professional beliefs and practices. Therefore, they need to find new tools to make their knowledge accessible to the novices, who do not seem able to gain access of their own accord. Novices recall different information than experts do when viewing a problem (Crave, 2002), and are likely to be selective in what they see and hear. A novice is more likely to focus on apparent and surface features, whereas an expert looks deeper at the structure of the problem posed. Added to this is the difficulty experts often have in reducing the complexity of their knowledge to the level of the novice.

Mentors, then, may benefit from being scaffolded into the task of challenging novices' existing practice through professional dialogue and the sharing of professional knowledge (Billett, 2000). When simply commending a novice's performance, there is no need to share professional knowledge. It is enough to just confirm current behaviours, whereas when critiquing, the supervisor would need to justify observations. The result is that the relationship is kept at a safe, superficial level, where it is important to 'be nice' to each other to ensure the period of practicum is survived. In other words, neither participant wishes to 'rock the boat' (Norsworthy, 1998; Sanders, 2006). As

noted earlier, for dialogue to move beyond support, a strong relationship between the parties involved must exist.

Avenues for developing mentoring skills

These matters have been explored extensively in teacher education research, and to a lesser extent, in studies related to counselling supervision. However, how to develop these skills and dispositions in the supervisors/mentors is not a common topic of discussion. Very little has been written to assist those training the mentors. There is a clear gap in the available literature. Thus, there is a pressing need to develop strategies for supervisors/mentors and novices (Billett, 2000) to encourage and create opportunity for, and practice in, the art of enriched learning dialogue. While a few models of mentor training have been developed, there is a dearth of research-informed, practically-oriented intervention strategies and resources that are time and cost effective.

The lack of effective intervention strategies was the motivation for the longitudinal mixed-method research project at the heart of the Sanders (2008) doctoral study. Working with 12 primary school associate teachers and 34 student teachers over an 18-month period, she sought to find an economical (in respect of time) but effective strategy to provide support and challenge to those expert professionals supervising student teachers. The key outcome of her research was the positive effect of strategically chosen practicum tasks that both developed the student but also informed the mentors of possible roles and strategies to enrich their supervisory practices, particularly in the areas of relationship building and enriched learning dialogue.

Conclusion

Currently, a growing number of professional and vocational education programmes are reliant on field-based experiences to provide relevant, contextualised learning. However, research indicates that assumptions about the actual contribution of field-based experiences tend to be ill-founded unless specific strategic intervention occurs, leading to enriched learning dialogue between the experienced and novice professional. This interdisciplinary project reflects the belief that enriched learning dialogue is critical to effective field-based components of professional preparation, and that quality dialogue of this nature is enhanced when sound learning relationships are established and intentional tools are used to aid this dialogue.

Methodology

Introduction

This section describes and discusses the methodological 'map' that has guided this project. Davidson and Tolich (1999) and Opie (1999) have commented that the methodology/method sections of research reports have not always developed in the tidy, structured way that is implied in their final format. As will become apparent, while the methodology and process seemed clear when embarking on the project, events along the way necessitated re-thinking the process and some adjustments.

Part of the motivation behind this study is the research team's belief that practicum experiences are a central part of professional preparation, and a sense that, to quote Wolcott (1992), those experiences "are not as good as they might be". Nevertheless, it is the research team's responsibility to present faithfully the data and the participant voices, in such a way that the reader may make their own conclusions. A researcher's desire to provoke, challenge or transform rests ultimately with the reader.

A phenomenological approach

Our interest in exploring the experiences of students and mentors lent itself to a qualitative, phenomenological approach. In contemporary research, "[i]n its broadest meaning, phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.23). Rooted in the work of Husserl, with subsequent development from writers such as Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenological approach is concerned primarily with seeking to see as others see, and to understand the meaning that others make of their experience, rather than overlaying the interpretations of the researcher (Kvale, 1996).

Rigour

Rigour must be the concern of any research, be it positivist or post-structural, quantitative or qualitative. It may be, however, that 'rigour' can take on different appearances depending on the context. Rigour is not an abstract intellectual concept; it is about who we are as people. We suggest that, in qualitative research, rigour will have the following characteristics:

- Careful attention is paid to participant data in a context of diligent self-awareness
- There is a desire to faithfully represent participants' voices in a way that uses the power inherent in research on behalf of others. This can entail careful writing, attributing thoughts and ideas to the originator – whether participant or author – without inappropriate generalisation. Included here can be an overt declaration of the purpose of the research and the sense of researcher positioning in relation to that purpose
- Rigour can be demonstrated when a researcher adopts an attitude of humility: "This is how it appears to us" rather than, "This is how it is".

As will be discussed later in the report, the project team experienced some challenges in relation to obtaining and retaining participants, and consequently, in ensuring that we were working with robust data. Nevertheless, we believe that we worked in a manner consistent with this understanding of rigour.

Participants

The participants were pairs made up of a student and their field-based practicum mentor. Students were drawn from two professional fields: early childhood education and counselling.

Each institution had a designated research assistant who randomly selected students from the potential cohort of 105 (60 in counselling and 45 in early childhood education). These students were approached by email or telephone, given full information of the study by letter, and invited to participate. If a student accepted, the research assistant made a similar approach to the relevant mentor¹. If the mentor accepted, the dyad (pair) became participants. If the mentor declined, the student was also removed from the participant cohort. By this means, the participant group at the start of the project had 16 dyads from the two early childhood education programmes and 11 dyads from the two counselling degrees. It is worth noting that a significant number of those initially approached, particularly students, declined to participate. In the majority of cases, the reason for declining was 'busy-ness' and no time available to take on extra activities.

The initial group of 27 dyads were spread geographically from Auckland to Queenstown. Students came from each year of their programme in which practicum experience occurs. There were seven students from ECE from year one². For year two students, five were from counselling and six from ECE, and for year three, there were six counselling students and three from ECE. Students ranged between 23 to 61 years old. The average age for counselling students was 43 years old and the average age for early childhood education students was 37 years old. There were 26 female students and one male student.

Of the nine counselling supervisors, seven were female and two male. All were in their 40s and 50s, with between nine and 20 years' experience in counselling and between one and 10 years' experience as a supervisor.

Of the 16 early childhood education supervisors, 15 were female and one was male. The ages ranged between 20 and 60 years old. They had between six and 30 years' experience in early childhood education and between one and 11 years' experience as a supervisor.

Pre-intervention phase

The initial questionnaire, which was sent to all participants via an email link to Google Forms, was designed to elicit baseline information concerning:

- participant demographics
- views of the mentoring process from past learning
- expectations and hopes for their specific supervision.

The initial data collection was carried out in the second half of semester one, 2010, and gathered mainly qualitative responses. For the students only, this was followed up with a repertory grid data collection process, which collected quantitative data. This is a form of survey where the students were offered pre-selected mentor behaviours, which they were asked to rate using a Likert scale. The behaviours listed in the repertory grid were based on those espoused in the literature as being conducive to effective mentoring relationships. This tool was designed to elicit further information

¹Throughout the findings and discussion in this report, we have chosen to use the descriptor 'mentor' as the generic term. In the counselling programmes, these mentors are the students' supervisors. In the early childhood programmes, the terms 'mentor teacher' or 'cooperating teacher' are the programme names for the mentor role. These are the equivalent terms for 'associate teacher' in primary or secondary teacher education. We acknowledge that the roles can be viewed differently in differing contexts. The term 'supervisor' is especially open to different interpretation – in the report we use the term in the way it is understood in the social service context, rather than the 'foreman' role that the term might portray in an industry or business context.

² There were no year one counselling students as counselling does not have practicum in the first year.

on their perceptions and experiences of working with their mentor. The repertory grid information was collected at the end of semester one, 2010. These two processes constituted the baseline data.

Intervention phase

The next phase of the project involved asking the participant pairs to undertake four tasks – the use of four interventions – during their mentoring meetings. There was no expectation that extra meeting time would be taken for this purpose. The four interventions were sent out over four months of the second semester of 2010, with the request that one intervention be used per month.

The interventions were selected from the 12 used in the Sanders study (2008). Two (Partnership Map and Belief Inventory) were rated most highly in that research as tools to aid relationship building, while the other two (Critical Incident study and Research Report discussion) were valued as tools to scaffold genuine learning dialogue. This current study was eager to test whether these findings would be affirmed in other contexts. The interventions are described below.

Intervention 1: Partnership Map

The mentoring pair develops a visual tool for building a mutual narrative about how the practicum will play out. It covers such topics as roles, expectations, protocols, time frames and feedback strategies. This task was chosen on the basis that understanding each role is a prerequisite to establishing strong learning-focused relationships, since relationship involves the acceptance of shared responsibilities within the mentoring pair.

This intervention draws on the work of Edwards and Collison, 1996; Gehrke and Kay, 1984; Hunter, 2002; Johnson and Ridley, 2004; Knowles and Cole, 1996; McGee, 1995; Meijer *et al.*, 1999; Prestage and Perks, 2000; Rudney and Guillaume, 2003; and Smedley, 1996.

A partnership map is a visual record of a discussion between two or more parties. In the case of practicum supervision, a partnership map can be used to provide structure to the supervisory relationship by discussing social rules, principles of relating, expectations, strategies and roles of the partnership. These need to be clearly understood if practicum is to contribute effectively to the student's professional development.

If used early in the supervision relationship, partnership maps can help to deliberately and intentionally:

- set the parameters of the relationship
- confirm expectations regarding the context and the supervisory relationship
- clarify existing ambiguities
- outline protocols
- define each person's role within the relationship
- build communication strategies
- establish feedback mechanisms.

All of these contribute to an effective learning relationship. Thus, the partnership map becomes a visual basis for building a mutual narrative about how the practicum will play out.

The partnership map may be presented in a variety of ways. The most common forms are as two intersecting circles with the intersecting area being for shared/similar responses, or as three lists, one for each member of the partnership and a shared one for joint responsibilities *etc.* While the map is best introduced early in the practicum, it can be added to at any time.

Instructions:

- During a supervision discussion, set aside time to develop a partnership map.
- Decide on the form of map you will use (*e.g.* overlapping circles, 3 lists, or something else).
- Choose an aspect of the supervisory partnership, and each take a turn to discuss your assumptions, expectations, hopes of the other, desired outcomes *etc* in relation to that aspect.
- Record your main points on the map.
- When appropriate, move the discussion to another aspect of your supervisory partnership.
- Again, record your main points on the map.
- Continue in this way for as long as your available time frame allows. You may want to use a portion of several meetings to complete the partnership map.

Intervention 2: Belief Inventory (ECE example)

Students and mentors were provided with an inventory containing 10 Likert items related to attitudes and beliefs about teaching or counselling (as appropriate). They completed the inventory separately and then use the completed sheets to initiate discussion with their mentors. This task was chosen to challenge students to make their assumptions explicit, to uncover, develop and revise their own theoretical foundations, and to help the mentoring pair understand each other's professional language and bring theory to the support of practice.

This intervention draws on the work of Ferrier-Kerr, 2004; Hamlin and Weisner, 2003; Loughran, 2006; and Reynolds, 1989.

Instructions:

Here is a selection of statements relating to teaching, such as a teacher or parent might say about education in an early childhood setting. Your response to these statement(s) will reveal something of your current educational beliefs. Circle one response for each statement. Respond according to what you really think(1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=agree with qualifications; 4=strongly agree).

- Because the past strongly influences who we are, it determines our present emotions and behaviour.
- Teachers should be group facilitators more than transmitters of information.
- As a teacher, my primary task should be to carry out the educational goals and curriculum of the centre where I am working.
- It is as important for children to enjoy learning as it is for them to obtain specific skills.
- One of the primary roles of the teacher is to help children establish good socialisation skills.
- Children should have some choice in the selection of activities.
- Children need to be seen as lifelong learners, capable of initiating and directing their own learning.
- Teachers are to facilitate and to scaffold learning for children.
- Children should be able to have access to teachers at all times.
- Parents should have the right to visit the classroom at any time.

Intervention 3: Critical Incident Discussion

A critical incident is a situated and specific chance event or a disruption to a plan that signals an important change in course, and results in a shift in one's thinking. Students were introduced to a possible format (template) for writing a critical incident report. Because they are a form of autobiographical writing, critical incident reports have been shown to move student teachers/counsellors from concrete thinkers to alert, reflective thinkers. On its own, a written report

can be an effective tool, but when linked with collegial reflective discussion, it has the potential to be very powerful.

This intervention draws on the work of: Bullough and Gitlin, 1995; Chesney, 1996; Crisp and Lister, 2006; Distad and Brownstein, 2004; Fish, 1995; Griffin, 2003; Knowles and Cole, 1996; Korthagen and Kessels, 1999; Orland-Barak and Yinon, 2007; and Shulman, 1992.

This task recognises the importance of surprises in developing theory. A critical incident is a situated and specific chance event or a disruption to a plan that results in a shift in our thinking. It can be positive or negative, but either way, it causes us to question some aspect of our practice and whether the incident highlights conflict between action and belief. After such an incident, it is helpful to record a case study based on the event and to discuss this with a colleague or supervisor.

Instructions:

Each week for the next three weeks (three times), identify one critical incident in your practice and write up a brief report. Your report should include:

- a clear description of the event, incident, or interaction
- a summary of your response to the incident
- a comment on possible theoretical understandings of the incident, and
- a reflection on what you can learn from the incident that will help you in future situations.

Discuss your report with your associate teacher or supervisor, and record their comments and suggestions regarding the incident.

Intervention 4: Research Journal Article Discussion (ECE example)

Student teachers/counsellors are on the boundary of knowledge communities (Zanting *et al.*, 2003). That is, they are in the process of being inducted into the terminology, understandings, principles and ways of being in their chosen profession and therefore, are often unwilling or even unable to ask probing questions of the mentors. It is known that common set tasks can provide opportunities for discussion. This idea led to the strategy of providing the student teachers/counsellors with two copies of a recent relevant research article. The article was chosen by a member of the research team with expert knowledge in the professional field. The criteria for choosing an article were its length (brief) and its content (clear with implications for practice). One copy was for the mentor and one for the student. The students were instructed to read the article, formulate some questions relating to it, give the second copy to the mentor, and when the mentor had read the article, have a discussion about the content.

This intervention draws on the work of Edwards and Collison, 1996; Harste *et al.*, 2004; Monk and Dillon, 1995; and Zanting *et al.*, 2003.

The literature on practicum talks about the value of reflection and its role in changed practice. This task is designed to encourage the student teacher to ask questions of the associate (mentor) teacher as an aid to accessing the associate teacher's knowledge. Both the associate teacher and the student teacher will have a copy of a supplied research article, both will read the article independently, and then the student teacher will ask questions of the associate teacher relating to the article.

Instructions:

You have each been provided with one copy of a research article.

- As you read through your copy of the article, formulate and note related questions you can ask your associate (mentor) teacher.

- When you have both read the article, discuss with your mentor the questions about the content you have identified.
- Write a brief summary of your questions and the outcome of your discussion.

Post-intervention phase

Follow-up Questionnaire

At the conclusion of the intervention period, participants were emailed a link to an online questionnaire. The purpose of this follow-up questionnaire was to gather feedback on the interventions, and to hear perceptions of the mentoring process during and after the use of the interventions.

Despite intense and persistent work on the part of the research administrators (which involved both email and phone conversation follow-up), only 16 students and 12 mentors completed this questionnaire. The inability or failure to complete the questionnaire generally related to the situation that, for a variety of reasons, the participant pair had 'dropped out' of the research process at some point during semester two. It is to be noted that none of the participants who dropped out had informed the project team that they would not be continuing. From responses to the administrators, it transpired that there were a number of reasons for dropping out. In the majority of cases, the pair had not used the interventions because either the mentoring meetings simply had not taken place or because they had used the meeting times for other purposes, and consequently, they were not in a position to complete the questionnaire.

However, using the concepts of data saturation gives us confidence about the robustness of the findings. Guest *et al* (2006), in a literature review of guidelines for qualitative research, comment that "the literature did a poor job of operationalizing the concept of saturation, providing no description of how saturation might be determined and no practical guidelines for estimating sample sizes for purposively sampled interviews" (p.60). Francis *et al.* (2009), on the basis of their study, propose that a baseline of 10 interviews, with a further three interviews that show no new themes, is a "fairly effective guide" to achieving data saturation. Guest *et al.* (2006) state, "Based on our analysis, we posit that data saturation had for the most part occurred by the time we had analysed twelve interviews" (p. 74). They conclude that relatively small samples of six to 12 are likely to be sufficient when the participant group is reasonably homogenous and the area of inquiry relatively bounded.

As will be seen in the findings section of this study, the participant observations were consistent to a significant degree. Consequently, placing the experience in this study and the data collected on the foundations of the work by Guest *et al.* and Francis *et al.*, we have confidence in the themes that emerged from our data, despite the disappointing loss of participants through the process.

Analysis phase

The baseline data and the data from the final questionnaire were considered by the project team. As a first step, the data sets were read and re-read by individual members of the team who identified for themselves themes within the data. Subsequently, the team met for two full days in separate early childhood and counselling sub-groups, then in cross-sector sub-groups, and finally as the full team. By means of this process, perceived themes were rigorously debated by the team, and a set of mutually agreed themes were identified.

This initial analysis was used to form a series of questions, which were then used in group or individual interviews with a sample of participants, as a means of:

- checking that the perceived themes were affirmed by participants
- developing data on some aspects of the initial analysis.

A research assistant conducted the individual interviews with three mentors from the participant group. The external facilitator/moderator was used at this juncture to run a group discussion with three of the student participants. The data set obtained from these interviews was then added to the total project data.

Ethical considerations

At the start of the project, a formal ethics proposal was submitted to the research ethics sub-committee of BTI, and approval for the project was granted. The approved proposal was then submitted to the research ethics committees of both WINTEC and NZTC which, after clarifying some aspects of the proposal, both agreed to accept BTI's research ethics committee's approval.

In the proposal, particular note was taken of the issue of anonymity of participants, in relation to the conflict of interest between the potential roles of members of the research team and lecturers of the programmes from which students were drawn. In the process employed, all contact with the participants was through the research administrator of the particular institution. At no point did members of the research team know which students were participating. Additionally, an external consultant, independent of all the institutions, was engaged to be available to monitor the process and to field any issues arising or concerns expressed by participants.

Findings

Introduction

The findings from the pre-intervention phase are presented first, followed by the data from the post-intervention phases. All participants have been given a numeric identifier. Students are identified as St, mentors as Mt, and the programme is identified as C for counselling and E for teacher education. Pre-intervention data are drawn from the initial questionnaires and repertory grids. Post-intervention data are based on a second questionnaire and focus group/interviews.

Pre-intervention

Initial questionnaires by mentors and students revealed their current understanding of the role of mentor, the descriptors they used to articulate those roles and the value they attributed to the task of mentoring. The repertory grid, offered to students only, gave them the opportunity to report on their actual experience of the mentoring relationship in comparison to their espoused hopes for the practicum support, as recorded in the initial questionnaire. The focus of the pre-intervention phase was exploration of the expectations of the mentor role and the structure of initial meetings between the mentor and student.

Expectations of the mentor role

Both students and mentors saw the mentor as a significant and vital contributor to students' professional development, and therefore they expressed strongly the need for mutual trust and respect, both personal and professional, between the mentoring pair. Various aspects of the role were identified, generating an extensive list, much as is found in the literature. The mentoring role is seemingly complex, intricate and highly responsible.

In the view of counselling students, as a collegial mentor the supervisor should encourage the student, equip the student with skills, and strengthen the student's practice by celebrating success and expressing concerns, all the while building confidence and *personal insight* (CSt1) into his/her developing identity. There was an expectation that the mentor would check on the student's well-being, and also their ability to engage in safe practice. The mentor was seen as someone who would discuss but also listen, who would *provide a sounding board* (CSt9) so as to help the student explore ethical and contextual issues through feedback, sharing knowledge, providing constructive criticism, challenging the student's current views, and holding the student accountable to the requirements of the practicum. Thus, there is a need for excellent communication: *Communication is such an important tool for successful relationships in every aspect of my job* (CSt18).

Only one counselling student referred to the mentor's role in helping the student put theory into practice, even though the literature holds this as a very important function.

When asked what the one most important thing a mentor could offer was (Q9), the most frequently cited aspects were support and encouragement, followed closely by discussion, which included feedback about practice and ethics, direction and guidance. Several participants expressed the benefit of having access to an alternative view: *another pair of eyes and ears*. Only one counselling student mentioned challenge as an important task for the supervisor.

These sentiments were reinforced in the question asking the students to identify levels of importance from particular provided role names (sourced from the literature). All students nominated guide and encourager, and 80 per cent nominated observer and supervisor. The next most frequently mentioned roles were model, co-enquirer, motivator and dialogue partner. At the other end of the scale, the following received either no or very few votes: critical friend, agent

provocateur, instructor, assessor, evaluator. This suggests that the mentoring pairs value the supportive role over the challenge or critique role. See Figure 1.

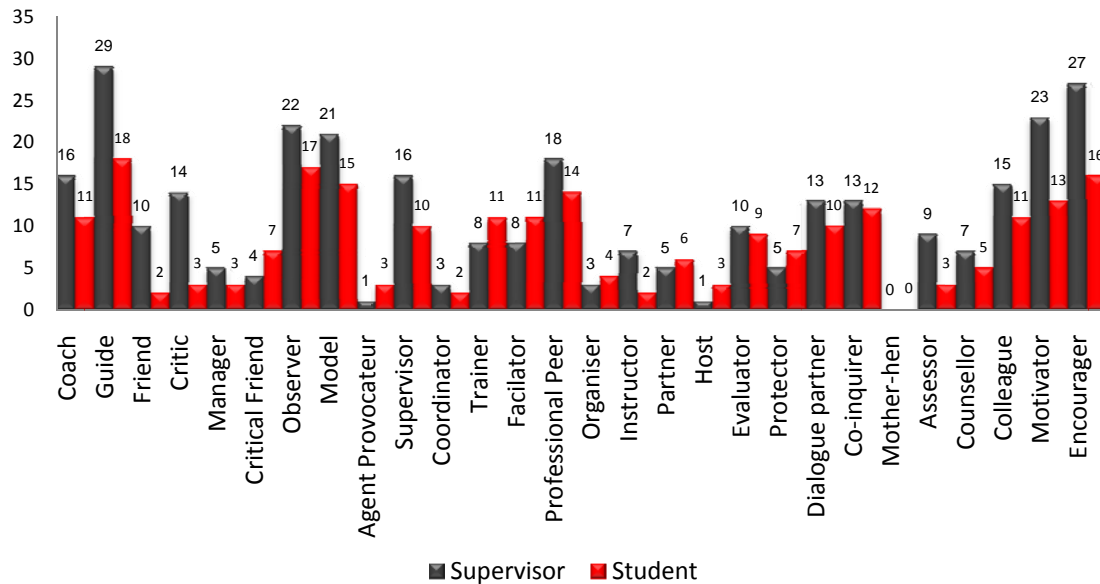


Figure 1: Important aspects of the mentoring role identified in the initial questionnaire

The student teachers’ expectations of practicum and the role of the associate teacher were in many ways similar to those of the counselling students. The context was, however, very different. For most of these students, interactions with a mentor were a daily occurrence.

As with the counsellors, the student teachers nominated ‘guide’ and ‘support’ as the main roles. Offering support entailed motivating the student teacher to continue with study, helping with assignments, and in short, *being there when I need help* (Est10). Additional roles mentioned by single participants included encouraging critical discussions through reflection, giving feedback, and questioning the student’s rationale for planning decisions. Student teachers saw the mentor teacher as a guide who offers advice from their own knowledge and experience, an expert who gives *positive criticism if I need to improve in an area* (Est22) and who *is there to tell me things I need to improve on* (Est10). They also appreciated being able to check out their own perceptions, ideas and beliefs and *to have critical discussions* (Est6) in which to *question reasons for choosing particular activities* (Est12), for example.

In talking about the role of the mentor, one student made a clear link between the professional and personal worlds: *Give constructive criticism and feedback when it is needed, so that I can grow as a person and a counsellor* (Est2).

These roles obviously rely on interaction between the mentoring pair. When early childhood mentor teachers were asked to identify strategies used to facilitate such interaction with students, half the participants listed ‘making time to talk, so as to build trusting relationships’. They also acknowledged the need to observe student teachers in action, in order to encourage, explain, introduce different perspectives, and discuss practice. Several mentors mentioned the value of oral and written feedback, and one mentor wrote of allowing the student teacher to observe her.

Counselling supervisors held very similar views, except that they spoke more of taking a *working alongside approach... I try to keep myself out of the expert position*(CMt13), and inviting the student to talk about their thoughts first, to...*draw out from them what they think is happening in their work with their client* (CMt1). They were in fact taking a counselling approach with their counselling students.

Structure of initial meetings

All participants identified two main goals for the initial meetings with the supervisor: relationship building and developing a planned approach.

Firstly, there was the goal of relationship building – of establishing open communication, getting to know each other, finding out if the partnership would work, if there was a sense the student could trust the supervisor and *vice versa*, and feel enough confidence to discuss their work. They voiced their hope that a relationship of trust would be built initially, one in which they would feel supported and valued. Examples of this are as follows:

Can we work together? (ESt17).

...ensure we have relationship to build on and go forward (CMt6).

I have a great relationship with my mentor. She knows why I am doing this degree and is supportive of that (ESt2).

I think the relationship I have with my supervisor makes a difference to the impact of the participation (CSt8).

Participants also noted that not every 'relationship' will necessarily have a sense of 'right fit' to it. Characteristics that contribute to this sense of 'fit' include: trust, rapport, feeling comfortable when discussing work, sharing goals and expectations, and honesty. In the view of participants, safety relates to being able to be honest and not feeling embarrassed. One ECE student said, *The last thing you want is to be made to feel inferior* (ESt5). Another ECE student gave an example of a lack of right fit, in that she felt that her mentor teacher undermined her actions.

Secondly, there was the goal of establishing routines, expectations and a plan of action to achieve the goals of the practicum. This discussion would also include *...beliefs about my role, how I can help, set boundaries, [and build] shared understanding of purpose* (EMt11). Several mentioned writing a contract, which included setting future dates for discussion and reflection, making sure the student is at ease with the workload. Some of the mentors talked about the need to *...explore what supervision is and what it is used for, their hopes, dreams and expectations* (CMt13).

It was noted that, as counselling participants discussed these early stages of the mentoring relationship, there appeared to be a strong sense of student agency. This sense of agency continued when discussing the structure of supervision sessions. The focus was very much on the student directing the course of the sessions, with time for both client issues and personal learning.

My supervisor works very much from the view that I go to supervision with my agenda. So we work around whatever it is that I bring up... (CSt8)

There was an expectation that the students would come prepared with an agenda, as practising counsellors do, since this showed whether or not they knew what is important for discussion. An advantage of this approach is that the students feel their personal needs are met, but as one participant observed:

...so if it's not on my agenda we don't really go there – which means that if it doesn't cross my mind that supervision is a good place to talk about or some of those things, then we don't really go there...(CSt8).

Student teachers, on the other hand, appeared to pay much more attention to the pragmatics of the relationship, hoping that early discussions would provide the structure of the meetings, how the mentoring pair would function together, the goals to be achieved, set times for discussions and to share expectations for the relationship. Of particular note are the number of respondents who referred to their hope that, in the initial meetings, the associate teacher would go through all the documentation together, and ask about how the student was progressing in their study and with which assignments they would like help. It appears that the student teachers expected their meetings with the mentors to be more prescriptive than did the counselling students. They appeared to have less of a sense of agency, as evidenced in the following statement:

She gave me advice on the way we would approach this journey together and she clarified things I was unsure of. She gave structure to my learning and offered goals for me to focus on (Est1).

Structure of on-going meetings

The participants concurred that the content of ongoing meetings should focus on professional practice and personal integration. Such discussions would include: reflecting on practice at a deeper level; making links between theory and practice; celebrating success; exploring role definitions, work habits, and congruency within self; voicing concerns; teasing out ethical issues; safety issues; critiquing observations (in person or on DVD); sharing of knowledge/experience; and plenty of time for questions. Examples of the students' responses include:

Discussing what I felt worked well, why I thought that way, alternatives that could be even more beneficial; what didn't work well, new or different ways of working with clients that would enhance my work (CSt21).

I think I should have the opportunity to raise all questions and doubts I have and get honest feedback on these as highest priority. Any other topics can be negotiated after this (CSt19).

The supervisors saw their task being to move students from the initial tendency to focus on *... am I doing this right?* (CMt6) through to *... finding the possibilities together rather than being told the answer* (CMt15). In addition, the early childhood mentors listed *behaviour management, positive guidance, stop and think before you do* (EMt7), *being child-centred* (EMt10), and *being inclusive* (EMt10) as topics needing to be included.

One student talked about the awareness that the focus would change over time: *Initially, mainly discussing clients and practicum issues – then move to more focus on ethical issues and resources being shared and discussed* (CSt2).

Challenging aspects

The main challenge mentioned by students was to do with issues of access to the mentor, when meetings were often relatively infrequent, and then knowing what to prioritise when time was limited. Early childhood mentors were often stressed by their own workload, and meetings had to be fitted in where possible. Finding time to observe as the mentor, while still working in the centre, posed a significant challenge, along with needing to juggle the role of teacher and mentor. Finding an appropriate place to meet was also difficult in a busy centre.

Even though counselling students have scheduled meeting times, in several cases counselling supervisors were unavailable for lengthy periods of time. This led to disappointment in the lack of discussion, feedback, even observation, a disappointment that is reflected in the following quote: *[no contact]...none – [supervisor] hasn't been involved so far/hasn't even asked how I am going*(CSt11).

In summary, the data from the initial questionnaire supports the view that despite recognised difficulties, the student teachers held high expectations of their mentors, and that the mentors for their part appeared to have a reasonably clear understanding of the nature of their responsibilities as mentors.

Another challenge noted by participants related to managing difference – in philosophies, points of view, disagreements, and style of practice.

Not understanding her role, "What is required from her role?" (ESt4).

Sometimes our differing philosophies can clash against each other and sometimes we can completely disagree with each other (ESt23).

Several students commented on the challenge of coping with critique of their work, and being open about their developing practice, and the effect this could have on their personal security, as noted by one student: *...owning up to anything done badly and being challenged by supervisor on points not noticed or prefer left untouched* (CSt19).

Two counselling students talked about matching the supervision conversation with the realities of practice especially when *...the supervisor hasn't met the client* (CSt17).

The mentors for their part struggled with finding ways to communicate constructive criticism without hurting the student's feelings. A further issue was dealing with the providers and *...managing supervisory requirements related to their training organisation* (CMt1).

In summary, the data from the initial questionnaire supports the view that despite recognised difficulties, the student teachers held high expectations of their mentors, and that the mentors, for their part, appeared to have a reasonably clear understanding of the nature of their responsibilities as mentors.

Coherence between expectation and reality

The repertory grid was sent to the student participants in the pre-intervention phase afforded them another opportunity to chart their mentoring experiences. As suggested in the literature, initial concerns about the stance taken by mentors were borne out in the results, with both early childhood and counselling students reporting that their actual experiences fell short of their expectations and did not meet the intended practice articulated in the questionnaire by the mentors. The questions and mean scores are presented in Appendix 1.

The strongest mentoring behaviours nominated by both groups of students focused on encouragement in some form. When the least occurring behaviours were considered, it can be noted that there appears to be little ability to either model or encourage the students towards reflective practice. This demonstrates the tendency of mentors to offer support without appropriate challenge. It would seem that the students are more aware of these discrepancies than the mentors, resulting in a mismatch of perceptions. This is in line with findings in earlier research.

However, there were signs of helpful behaviour, with several teaching students acknowledging the growing freedom to ask questions and several counselling students noting that mentors communicated in a way that made them feel like a professional and allowed them to take the initiative in conversations.

In both groups, though, the analysis of the repertory grids showed that there is still a paucity of written feedback. This was not a focus of this study, but there are structured tasks that could well facilitate this further. In addition, there appears to be an inability on the part of the mentors to guide students towards reflective practice, a need we hope the interventions will address.

Of particular interest is the wider spread within the repertory grids of assigned numerical value among the early childhood mentors than that found among the counselling mentors. The spread between those early childhood mentors seen by students to be effective mentors and those who were found lacking is very wide. This view may be influenced by the multiple roles of the early childhood mentor, the limited face-to-face time, the busyness of the centre and the lack of mentoring training; whereas the counselling mentors were paid, worked within definite time structures and had often experienced at least limited training in their role.

Summary

From the initial data, students and mentors identified several factors in the mentoring work that, in their opinion, enhanced professional learning. The first is relationship, leading to open communication, which participants saw as a significant pre-requisite to learning, and the second to permission giving to deal with the more challenging components. Both students and mentors saw the need for a safe but challenging way of working, and yet students described their interactions with mentors as more supportive than challenging. It is important to draw on the mentor's knowledge and experience, and this interaction is helped by explicit communication.

However, factors that limit professional learning were identified by participants. Firstly, time constraints impacted severely and were heightened by lack of organisation and space. Most of the ECE mentor teachers identified finding time to observe while still working as the most challenging factor. Finally, when mentoring pairs did have time together, it appears that enriched learning dialogue seldom occurred, with conversations remaining at the pragmatic, supportive level.

Discussion

This section provides an overview of themes from the phase one data sets, highlighting issues worthy of further attention by educators and mentors. Attention is drawn to comparisons and contrasts between the different participant groups – counselling and early childhood, students and mentors. The data from phase one also highlight issues raised in the literature review.

The importance of the mentoring relationship

While it would be easy to overlook, it is important to underline the observation that the student participants clearly saw, at both philosophical and pragmatic levels, the centrality of good mentoring as part of their practicum and wider professional preparation. While probably most educators in professional preparation programmes would take this for granted, it is reassuring to see students affirming their own perception of the importance of mentoring. That affirmation should provoke course coordinators to invest time and resources into this key part of a programme, a part which, because of lower visibility, is liable to attract less attention and/or investment than taught courses.

Support and challenge

While some student participants refer to the importance of being challenged about their work, students and mentors from both disciplines talk more about and rank more highly the support role. There is little in the data to explain this preference so comment is inevitably speculative. It could be that, where a relationship is early in its development or somewhat tentative in nature, there can be the temptation for both parties to keep the dialogue positive and 'safe'. It could be that awareness of the pressure of time pushes (either consciously or unconsciously) conversations towards an avoidance of potentially harder issues. However, other studies have shown the importance of balancing support and challenge (Certo, 2005a; McNally & Martin, 1998). Certo (2005b) has gone beyond the traditional idea of challenge being from the mentor to the student, and discusses the concept of challenge as a two-way street. It may be that the challenge aspect of the mentoring relationship needs specific attention in the professional preparation of mentors.

How students position mentors

The data reveal a contrast between counselling and early childhood students in relation to the way students view their mentor. Generally, the counselling students seem to see their mentor in a more collegial way, whereas early childhood students position their mentor teacher in a more expert role. Additionally, the counselling students demonstrated a greater 'client-group awareness' than the early childhood students. Counselling students seem to want to focus on using their supervision to develop their professional identity and professional skills. In contrast, early childhood students talked more about using their mentor teacher as a resource and sounding board in relation to course work.

These two observations seem linked to a greater sense of professional identity on the part of the counselling group. Understanding why this difference exists is challenging and needs further exploration, as the development of self-identity as a professional is clearly significant in any professional preparation programme.

Issues of agency

Linked to the previous theme, but worthy of separate mention, is a further contrast between the counselling group and the early childhood students. The counselling students demonstrate a greater sense of agency in the supervisory relationship than does the ECE group. It would seem that the counselling students have a greater sense of both wanting and being expected to determine the content of the mentoring meeting. In contrast, the ECE students convey an expectation of being told what to do, with much less sense of agency or of being able to influence the conduct and content of the mentor relationship.

Possible reasons for this apparent contrast are varied. It could relate to differing perceptions of the profession. It could be related to the practicum briefing given by the programme provider. Another factor to be considered here is the age of students. Students in early childhood programmes are slightly younger than trainee counsellors. This could have a bearing on the sense of freedom a student might have to be assertive in a mentoring conversation.

Other possible reasons relate to the fact that counselling student mentors are quite likely to also supervise qualified practitioners – and it is a normal expectation in that setting for the supervisee to bring the subject matter for discussion to the meeting, rather than the onus being on the mentor.

Further possible reasons relate to the fact that counselling students have relatively limited time with their mentor, and that they have to pay for the time. These two aspects of the supervisory situation could contribute to a more proactive stance of making optimal use of both time and cost.

It could be argued that the counselling students potentially have too much agency – that making effective use of supervision requires knowing what needs to be attended to and what questions to ask – things a student counsellor may not know. Avoiding an over-balanced agency would require a mentor to be cognisant of the differences between supervising a practitioner and supervising a student – an issue for the professional development and preparation of mentors.

Time

The data reveal some significant issues in relation to the availability and use of time for mentoring interaction. In different ways, both groups of students communicate a sense of a lack of time with their mentor. For the counselling group, meetings are often relatively infrequent – maybe two to four weeks apart. While training institutions stipulate a required number of sessions in relation to the amount of counselling hours undertaken, often the reality of the situation depends on the initiative of the student, and the ability of both student and mentor to find mutually convenient times to meet.

In the early childhood context, theoretically student and mentor teacher spend a great deal of time alongside each other. This, however, may not translate into focused conversation time in an uninterrupted environment. From the participant responses it is also apparent that specific circumstances may work against effective mentoring – such as mentor and student working different shifts, working in different buildings, or the mentor having other responsibilities in the centre that crowd out time with the student.

The more concerning aspect of this issue, which is apparent in the data and which also emerged as a side product of the research process, is the observation that the training provider may be completely unaware of the reality of the situation that exists in the placement. Clearly programme and practicum coordinators cannot assume that the arrangement that is in place on paper is happening in reality. Diligence is required in ensuring that consistent effective mentoring is the reality.

Perceptions of mentoring as effective

In the data, it is apparent that when students reflected on whether they felt their mentor was doing a good job, there was a much more wide-ranging response from the early childhood students compared to the counselling students, who were more positive about the quality of the mentoring received. As with other observations, there could be various explanations. It is possible that for counselling mentors, supervision is just part of what they are trained to do and therefore they function at a more proficient level. In contrast, early childhood educators are being asked to take on a role that is not necessarily within their usual activity or within their skill set. Also, while early childhood mentor teachers are remunerated to some degree, the level of remuneration is much less than that of counselling mentors, who are paid for an hour's meeting by the student directly. These financial aspects of the mentoring relationship could well impact on student experience.

Mentoring literature highlights a range of behaviours that strengthen the mentoring offered to students. The repertory grid analysis revealed often inconsistent behaviours within mentor practices and a substantial variation in the perceived mentoring strengths across the mentors, which suggests that, as highlighted in the literature, more intentional support in the mentoring role needs to be offered by the providers engaging the mentors to work with their students.

Differences between student and mentor perceptions

Finally, in these observations from the data, it is noted that students in both fields apparently see the mentoring experience differently to how their mentors see it, with mentors having a more positive perception of what happened in the mentoring sessions. It seems that mentors perceive a higher level of structure and efficacy than do students. This provokes encouragement of higher

levels of reflection on the mentoring process as it develops, within the conversations held. It also enhances the structures that scaffold and facilitate maximum benefit from the dialogue. The impact of the interventions given to participants in this study is considered below.

Evaluating the interventions

This section of the report considers the data gained from the questionnaire administered after the introduction of the four interventions, which gathered insights into the participants' responses to the interventions themselves and their perceived changes in mentoring practices as a result of the interventions. The data from the follow-up interviews and focus group are integrated into this discussion to further evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in developing enriched learning dialogue. Topics covered in the semi-structured interviews and focus group included the support versus challenge issue, whether discussions focused on technical skill or professional self, the effect of relationship on dialogue, the matter of agency, and finally, the perceived mismatch between the pairs' ideal mentoring and the actual mentoring relationship that developed.

The participants noted that the intervention tasks were well planned, with all but one mentoring pair finding the instructions easy to follow. Both students and mentors spoke of the tasks providing structure, which helped ensure the overall quality of supervision experienced. One spoke of how the tasks alleviated a 'hit and miss' approach.

The intervention tasks also provided scaffolding for the development and maintenance of a stronger relationship, by opening up lines of communication and creating more transparent dialogue. The tasks helped with content of supervision sessions, as mentoring pairs covered topics they would not normally have thought to include. They also helped the sessions to be more focused on learning dialogue and professional development. As one student noted, *I feel the sessions have been more tightly focused on the learning dialogue/professional development because of [the interventions]* (CSt 1).

The tasks were sometimes used as a springboard to more contextually appropriate activity. For example, one mentoring pair transformed the partnership map into a flower, *with each petal representing a different aspect of the relationship* (CSt1). The flexibility of the tasks was part of their appeal. Both students and mentors saw value in the way the tasks provided opportunities for specific questions to be considered prior to meeting for supervision, and then related questions could be explored further in discussion.

There were, however, some reservations about using the tasks. For the counsellors, there was the issue of using the tasks in a paid hour-long session (often fortnightly), which might then intrude into other aspects needing to be discussed within the allotted time allocation.

The teaching students voiced a different issue. While they saw their mentor every day, the busyness of the centre in general and the mentor in particular often precluded opportunities to converse at length.

A common response was to question the timing of the tasks. Many participants expressed the belief that the partnership map and the belief inventory would have been even more helpful at the beginning of the mentoring relationship.

Overall ratings

Participants were asked to rate the tasks by perceived usefulness. It should be noted that a number of the participants found this difficult *because they (were) all useful (CMT1) if for different reasons (ESt3)*. See figures 2 and 3.

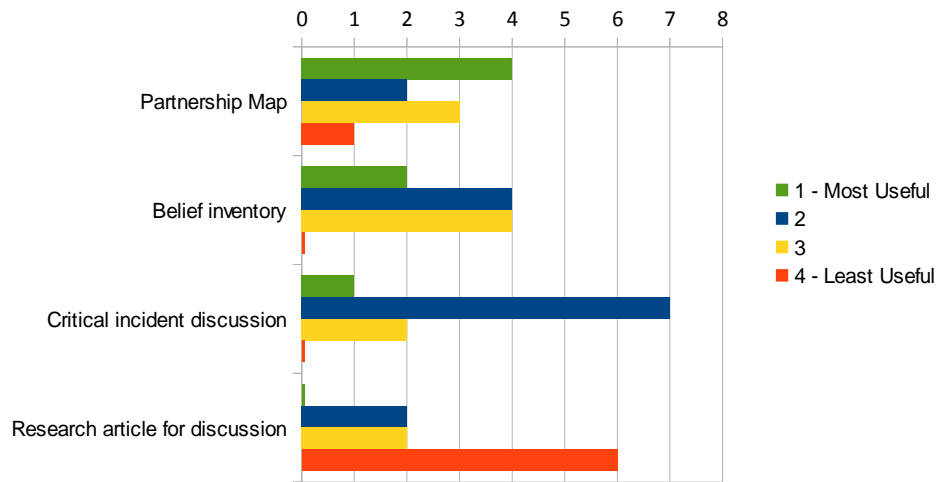


Figure 2: Perceived usefulness of the four intervention tasks (Students)

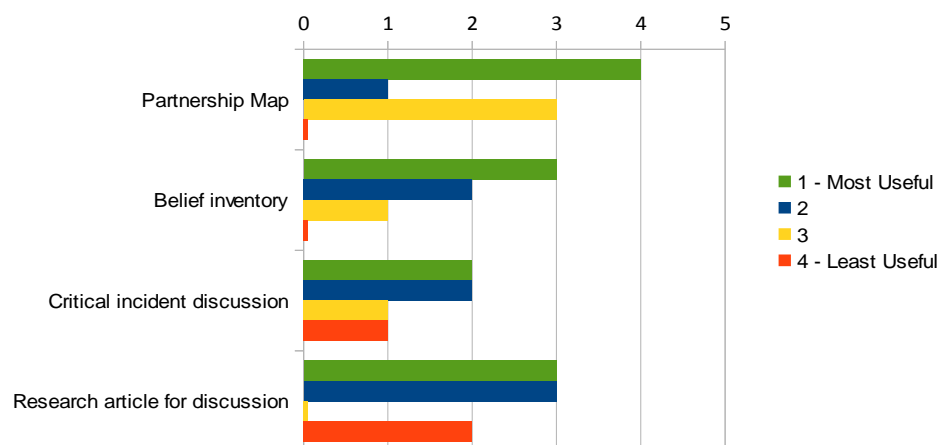


Figure 3: Perceived usefulness of the four intervention tasks (Mentors)

Overall, figures 2 and 3 show that the students and mentors both considered the partnership map, the belief inventory and the critical incident discussion as useful. There was more variability in the perceived usefulness of the research article.

Specific interventions and responses

Critical incident

This approach is already often used by counselling mentors, as it is seen by some as the basis of supervision, a fact which perhaps influenced its overall ranking as most useful task for both mentors and students. However, it was also rated highly by the student teachers and their mentors.

The critical incident task prompted the mentoring pairs to unpack students' responses and reactions to specific events in their practice so as to check for appropriateness of such, in line with professional ethics and policies. The opportunity to discuss these relevant, real life events promoted critical thinking, dialogue and honest reflection, and increased students' confidence in the congruence between their own beliefs and professional values.

It was important to discuss the incident outside of the agency and unpack what I did and how I responded and how that fitted with both the agency's policies as well as the code of ethics. (CSt2)

Partnership map

Over half the participants rated this tool as either most useful or very useful. The partnership map was seen by participants as a tool or *pathway* (CSt1) that allowed open and mutual discussions, and that resulted in a visual representation of the working partnership, clarifying expectations, explaining roles, exploring conversation protocols, and setting goals. Students reported having a clearer understanding of the mentor's view of the professional partnership, and a majority recommended that mentors continue to use this tool. For their part, the mentors highlighted the tool's role in giving direction to the partnership, helping both to 'be on the same page'. The end result was the establishment of *a solid, professional relationship* (EMt2). More than half the mentors agreed that the tool would continue to be part of their mentoring repertoire.

Belief inventory

The belief inventory was noted by a number of participants as facilitating meaningful conversations about values, which then led on to shared understandings, and provided a common language and a sense of priorities in the relationship. Both students and mentors saw this as contributing to the development of trust and honesty in the collegial relationship. Several described the tool as providing a path to follow in the mentoring relationship, and they also noted that the dialogue generated by comparing beliefs often continued into the practicum.

The belief inventory...allowed similarities in thought to be identified, highlighted areas that we thought about in different ways, and provided opportunities for us to pick up on issues that might otherwise be overlooked (CSt1).

Because often in the classroom setting decisions have to be made quickly – there will be a rapid assessment of the current existing factors, which usually reveal a number of optional decisions. The decision chosen will be determined by underlying beliefs, so it is important to be quite clear what these beliefs are founded on (EMt9).

Respondents were clear that in completing these first three tasks, they had to engage in conversations that did maximise learning dialogues and provided a platform from which other conversations and learning could take place.

Research article

The value of the research article was more contentious. Some found great benefit in the task; others thought it wasted valuable time. Those in favour noted that the article promoted discussion and made each one dig deeper, even to the point of referring to the article in later sessions. The task gave an opportunity to apply current research to practice. One student was disappointed not to discuss the article, as she saw that it contained meaty material. More mentors than students saw the task as positive. Some questioned the relevance of reading research in the first place, and others begrudged the time needed to complete the exercise.

We didn't discuss it and I didn't think it would be useful use of her paid-for time to do so. Counselling supervision was approximately monthly, so to discuss the article seemed superfluous when there were other professional issues the counsellor wished to address (ESt6).

Evidence of change

The purpose of this research project is to ascertain the effectiveness of intentionally chosen tasks designed to build learning relationships and increase the incidence of enriched learning dialogues. In particular, the research team was interested to see if the chosen interventions addressed the issues identified in both the literature and the pre-intervention data; that is, the difficulty in accessing the mentor and finding time for enriched conversations where professional knowledge is shared; the need to understand and manage differences in philosophy, values *etc*; the seeming lack of encouragement towards genuine reflection; and the favouring of support over identifying and accepting growth-inducing challenges.

Evidence of change was sought within specific statements from the two questionnaires and the focus group, along with the mentoring roles listed by the participants in the appropriate section of the questionnaires. Comparison of these data suggests that there has been change in the structure of the mentoring sessions, in understanding the roles of the mentor, in the strength of relationship, in enriched professional dialogue and in the awareness of professional identity.

Structure of the mentoring

This research demonstrates that it is possible to create more structure and meaning in mentoring sessions, by giving tasks that facilitate meaningful discussions. It is heartening to read feedback from both students and mentors, who described the impact of the tasks in terms of maximising learning dialogue; that is, the premise that the relationship and the conversations that occurred within it could be, and were, enhanced and deepened by engagement with these enriching resources.

Many of the participants made statements about changing perceptions, values, confidence and the ability to engage and participate in more meaningful ways in professional collegial relationships. They noted that discussion sessions seemed more tightly focused and that they felt supported in their learning. The participants reported that the tasks provided the mentors with more tools and structure content, and made them more aware of factors influencing effective mentoring. In particular, the tasks aided both students and mentors to more clearly differentiate between learning dialogue and general dialogue. The following statements illustrate these changes:

I feel that the sessions have been more tightly focused on the learning dialogue/professional development because of the research project (CSt2).

I have had to consider the purposes and uses of supervision (CMt6).

Range of mentoring roles

Figure 4 shows the change in the terms used to define the role of mentor. The first questionnaire saw six roles that were identified by more than half the mentors. In the final questionnaire, this had risen to 11 roles, with supervisor, coach, critical friend, dialogue partner and co-inquirer being added. It is noted that several of these additional roles would contribute to maximising professional dialogue. The students, on the other hand, named fewer roles, but this result may be skewed because of the low return rate by students for the second questionnaire. The final questionnaire, completed after the interventions, saw the participants identifying more often the roles of critical friend and colleague, thus suggesting a shift from only offering support to now also including elements of challenge.

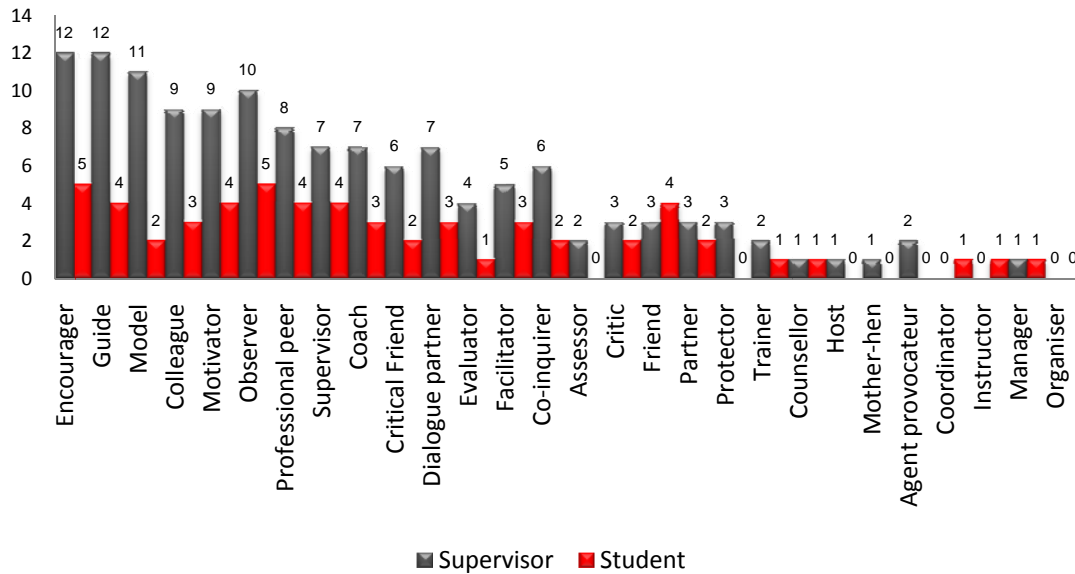


Figure 4: Important aspects of the mentoring role identified in the final questionnaire

Relationship

Both mentors and students attested to the influence of the tasks in building trust and confidence in the relationship. The students felt more comfortable to approach the mentors with questions, and more willing to be vulnerable and transparent, while building increased confidence in their own professional judgment, as noted in the following quotes.

It has taken me a long time to ask for help from my AT and I wished that I had the confidence to ask sooner...this whole research project has given me the confidence to do just that (ESt5).

When there is relationship, the challenging role becomes seen as supportive – the roles become interlocked (ESt7).

I did benefit from the structure...making me more comfortable with asking for help now – broke down my barriers for asking for help...I think the relationship I have with my supervisor makes a difference to the impact of my participation. While the tasks themselves are very relevant, I think the way we related together to the tasks was where the value truly lies (CSt1).

It made me realise I was on the same wave length as my AT and to be more confident in what I believe is the right thing to do (ESt3).

Mentors confirmed this.

The students are now more comfortable to come and communicate with me more freely (EMt7).

The tasks have greatly broadened and clarified the quality of general dialogue and therefore made possible a far better level of relationship at all levels within the work context (EMt9).

There was still some hesitation on the part of the mentors to challenge the students. A supervisor (CMt6) said that she *recognised not wanting to upset people...people sometimes get upset when you challenge them...* and her role in *shaping professional self – helping something shine...to sit comfortably in the counsellor’s seat*. This includes ethics, professional identity, what they are excited about, what they are worried about. However, the same mentor commented that the *ultimate aim to have student self-challenging is by building platforms for support and challenge* (CMt6).

Enriched Learning Dialogue

With the foundation of a strong relationship established, mentor pairs were able to embark on enriched learning dialogue related to their professional role. The tasks contributed to greater awareness of the difference between learning dialogue and general dialogue, alerting each person to strategies and approaches, and helping them to be more proactive in continuing dialogue beyond only support.

The increased dialogue allowed me to give specific positive and constructive feedback on the student's teaching practice and study skills (EMt5).

I feel like I am being more helpful if I ask. If you ask, I will tell you, but if you don't ask, I won't even think to tell you (EMt2).

One mentor articulated an interesting insight, noting that the effectiveness of the tasks lay not in the actual specifics of that task, but in the intentionality they evoked. This supports the main contention of the research, that approaching the mentoring task with tools specifically chosen for their effectiveness in building relationship and encouraging enriched learning dialogue is a key to fruitful mentoring in field-based practicums.

Thus, it seems that the intervention tasks contributed in some part to the increased effectiveness of the mentoring within the practicum pairings taking part in the research. In particular, it appears that the tasks could be used as scaffolds to aid the establishment of a learning relationship that allows for enriched learning dialogue about the important professional development occurring for students on practicum. The tasks encouraged reflection and, to a degree, the initiation of critical thinking as the working partnership developed.

Professional identity

Although professional identity as such was not a focus of this research, the data gained throughout the research process led the team to consider this issue at length. Discussions related to professional learning relationships and genuine enriched professional dialogue inevitably led us to discuss identity.

Mentors and students bring with them a set of beliefs that constitutes their emerging sense of identity, which has been influenced and moulded by their prior experiences. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1999), "professional identity develops over time, and involves gaining insights of the professional practices and the values, skills, knowledge required and practiced within the profession" (p. 6). Some mentors and students in this study encouraged self-reflection. The following quotation from a mentor indicates that *professional identity comes out of being able to see yourself operating outside the personal realm and inside professional boundaries of wherever you are working or whoever you are working with (EMt10)*. One mentor (EMt3) stated that professional identity *has made me become more confident and able to think out of the box a little bit more*.

An associate teacher (EMt10) pointed out that *when you are acting in a professional sense, then you'll find a way to relate to your student and make it possible for them to relate to you within professional boundaries...you don't have to like anybody, you just have to give them respect for who they are and what they are doing and what each person brings to the situation*.

Another mentor summed up the contributions of others very succinctly: *The role of a supervisor is to witness, celebrate, and archive progress towards professionalism...making something more visible than it has been (CMt6)*.

Conclusions and implications

In embarking on this inter-institutional, cross-disciplinary project, we asked four questions. The first two questions asked were:

- What are the characteristics of field-based practice that identify as contributing to professional learning?
- How effective are strategies shown to be effective for associate and student teachers within a primary school context...[for] creating and supporting enriched learning dialogue within field-based learning across a range of situations?

In summary, the participants identified real relationship and open conversation at more than a surface level, and the opportunity to challenge and be challenged as key contributors to learning during practicum experiences. Additionally, participants indicated that these characteristics need a clearly defined structure.

The strategies used in this study had been employed previously in Sanders' (2008) work with primary teacher education students and their associate teachers. This project found that these strategies were equally effective in the early childhood and counsellor education fields. Benefits for learners and mentors include the maximising of student learning opportunities because of better access to the mentors' professional knowledge. Having experienced the tasks, students are then able to use these in other field-based learning situations, thus becoming active learners and enquirers, able to instigate learning-focused conversations. The strategies developed and evaluated for effectiveness can be used for ongoing professional learning as graduates, and can lead to greater confidence for graduates in professional practice. It is also anticipated that exposing students to a range of strategies within the field-based learning context will equip them with skills they can use when they act as mentors in the future.

A key outcome from the study is that it seems it is not the specific strategy *per se* that is beneficial, rather the professional development gains come from the intentional use of any wisely chosen task to scaffold conversation. There appears to be a 'virtuous circle effect'. Scaffolding aids the development of real relationship, and open and honest relationship facilitates the maximisation of benefit from the use of intentional tasks.

The study provided mentors with examples of specific strategies to assist them in their role, in particular to support enriched learning dialogue. It is anticipated that this will be of benefit not only to those students involved in the project, but also to students who subsequently work with these mentors. Improving mentor effectiveness has to be an advantage for current and future learners.

The third question asked was: How might those strategies be further adapted to better suit specific field-based contexts within the areas of professional development in this study?

No participants provided a direct response to this question. While the interventions used in this study proved beneficial, it seems that the positive outcomes came primarily from the intentionality of providing scaffolding, rather than the specific tasks employed in the study. Interventions fall into two categories: those aimed specifically at developing relationship, – such as the Partnership Map, and those focused on professional issues, such as the Critical Incident Discussion. Both groups have value, and can be used at different stages in the mentoring process. The significant issues for mentors are intentionality of use and creativity of design, to maximise the effectiveness of the learning dialogue that is taking place.

The final question was: How can strategies considered to be effective in fostering learning in field-based contexts be developed as accessible, effective and relevant resources for a wider range of professional preparation programmes?

We believe that, while the focus of this study has been the preparation of early childhood educators and counsellors, there is significant application of the findings to any professional preparation in which students engage in field-based experiences away from the academic home-base. We also believe that the outcomes of the study have relevance to any vocational training programme or apprenticeship, where trainees undertake theoretical and practical experiences at different sites. As stated in the introduction, each sector, and probably each programme within a sector, will have its own character and unique aspects of field-based learning. Beneath these sector-specific attributes, however, there are commonalities across all sectors and programmes that blend institutionally based theoretical learning with field-based practical experience. Such commonalities include the importance of communication, clarity of expectations, monitoring of experience, enriched learning dialogue, support and challenge, and ways in which staff in the different settings are perceived and supported. We believe that educators in any sector that uses field-based learning could benefit from reflecting on the key findings from this study.

As mentioned above, the interventions used in the project focused on either relationship development or professional practice. The relationship map could be used in any field-based learning situation as a 'fast-track' aid to growing relationship. Similarly, the belief inventory is useful in any context to establish a platform of mutual understanding. The critical incident discussion and research article centre on professional issues. Mentors in a particular field of practice would be best placed to adapt the principle of the task to their own context; the key learning is that mentors need to make the time to create and use context-appropriate scaffolding tasks.

In addition to findings connected to the specific interventions, the study reveals a number of significant issues related to the broader context of student practicum experience. Given the importance of these experiences to professional preparation – a view endorsed by the participants in the study – the data suggest that particular attention needs to be paid to the following four areas:

1. Perceptions of role and efficacy

Noting the views of participants, we would encourage educators to attend to how students conceptualise the role of their mentor – as colleague, expert, *etc.*; how both students and mentors perceive (and measure) the effectiveness of the relationship; and how the balance of support and challenge is negotiated within the interaction. In particular, we encourage the intentional use of scaffolded tasks to encourage enriched learning dialogue, a necessary foundation for professional growth.

2. Time

On the basis of this study, institutions providing professional field-based experiences cannot assume that because a practicum exists on paper, students and their mentors are fulfilling the expectations in reality. Close monitoring of communication and accountability, especially where the practicum is happening over extended periods of time, is worthy of renewed consideration. The challenges experienced in this study in obtaining and retaining participants would suggest that institutional review of general levels of busyness, both of their students and the mentors contracted to provide support to those students, could be undertaken.

As something of an aside, but nevertheless related to the issue of time, we would encourage providers to consider how research is valued within the institution and how that sense of value is communicated to students. It may be that one reason we experienced challenges in recruiting

participants is that students held a low perception of the value of the contribution of, and hence of being involved in, research. This has been a good reminder to our institutions, a reminder to overtly, and not just in discussion but also in practice, raise the profile of the importance of being research-aware and research-involved.

3. Agency

The project reveals significant contrasts in perceptions of the levels of agency experienced by the different groups of students. This is worthy of further exploration, seeking clarification of the reasons for the differences, reviewing optimum levels of student agency (*i.e.* what constitutes too little and what too much). Students experiencing too little agency or a sense of powerlessness in the relationship may feel unable to ask questions or to direct the conversation to areas in which they know that they need assistance. Also, this situation does not prepare a student well to act as a creative, initiative-taking professional.

Conversely, having students with too much agency can result in diminished learning as a consequence of not knowing what they do not know or need to know. And, in the longer term, it is not setting a student up well to work in team contexts.

Imbalance of agency is a factor of the relational dynamic, and cannot be automatically attributed to one or other of the players. However, the nature of the relationship gives the mentor intrinsically greater power, and thus a higher responsibility to be aware of, and address if necessary this issue of agency.

It would be appropriate for education providers to alert mentors to the issue, as it may well be a dynamic that sits invisibly, but nevertheless undermines potential learning.

4. Value

It is the view of the research team that the mentor contribution to professional preparation may well be under-valued by institutional educators and consequently, also by students. We recommend increased recognition of the role played by these in-the-field professionals and consequently, recognition of the critical nature of the provision of ongoing specific training and professional development. We offer comments on three specific areas relevant to this issue of recognition.

Firstly, education providers could review the 'visibility' given to field-based mentors within the institution, both the ways in which they are talked about and the ways in which they are described or referred to within programme documentation. Raising the profile of mentors to both students and faculty can be a part of expressing value and appreciation. While geographical location can be an issue in programmes provided from a distance, inviting mentors to meet with faculty at the institution, or intentionally sending teaching staff to meet mentors on their home territory for the purpose of establishing connection with the mentor themselves, rather than purely to talk about students, can increase the sense of recognition and value.

Secondly, providers could review issues of remuneration. The two sectors in this study have very different approaches to funding the work of mentors. In one, the student is expected to pay the mentor directly, at rates set by the mentor. In the other, the institution reimburses the mentor – at a level acknowledged to be nominal – and often out of line with responsibility unit reimbursements for other roles within the workplace. While it is highly unlikely that a mentor would take on the role for the purpose of financial gain, levels of financial 'reward' do reflect the value placed on the contribution.

Thirdly, recognition comes with the level of preparation expected and provided for undertaking the role. On the one hand, the belief that anyone can be a mentor undervalues the task. On the other hand, the expectation that a mentor will undertake professional development may be appropriate, but if the expectation is that an individual will invest in that development in their own time and at their own expense, this can communicate a devaluing of the individual's contribution or commitment.

In conclusion, field-based experiences are a significant context for the development of professional competence and confidence within any programme of study. This opportunity for learning cannot be assumed to be effective simply because it exists. Student experience in field-based situations has been shown to be notoriously patchy, and any understanding of strategies that can build positive learning partnerships will be of benefit in any professional or vocational preparation programme. This study has demonstrated the positive significance of strategies used intentionally in creating enriched learning dialogue opportunities that enhance learning in a field-based context. These findings are, we believe, applicable to any programme that has a field-based component.

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Appendix 1: Repertory grid results

Counselling students

Item	Av. rating
My supervisor clearly explains the supervision process	2.6
My supervisor negotiates our roles, including boundaries	2.3
My supervisor shows interest and asks questions about me, beyond my role as a student	2.1
My supervisor allows me to get to know her/him at a personal level	2.4
My supervisor demonstrates an attitude of respect towards me	1.4
My supervisor discusses my goals for the placement	2.1
My supervisor talks about their own practice and ways of working	2.3
My supervisor talks in a way that shows they remember and relate to being a learning counsellor	1.7
My supervisor encourages me to be confident in myself	1.3
My supervisor shows interest in my work	1.6
My supervisor communicates in a way that makes me feel like a professional	1.4
My supervisor allows me to take the initiative during our conversations	1.4
My supervisor listens to me in a way that feels non-judgmental	1.1
My supervisor shares their own processes for time management, note-taking etc	1.7
My supervisor makes practical resources available to me	2.1
My supervisor shares opportunities for professional development	2.1
My supervisor provides a clear sense of scaffolding for our supervision sessions	2.7
My supervisor offers to be available if necessary between sessions	1.9
My supervisor encourages me to ask questions	1.4
My supervisor communicates an awareness of different ways of working	2.0
My supervisor clearly communicates areas for growth and development	1.7
My supervisor knows enough about me to discern between what is a challenge and what is beyond my current ability	1.6
My supervisor encourages me to find new ways of working with clients	1.7
My supervisor clearly expresses concern about the way I work when appropriate	2.1
My supervisor follows up on areas of previous discussion	2.0
My supervisor challenges me on boundary issues in my work	2.0
My supervisor gives me opportunity to practise new skills	3.1
My supervisor encourages me to 'have a go'	1.3
My supervisor models effective working in challenging situations	2.1
My supervisor helps me draw positive learning from things I felt went badly	1.7
My supervisor reflects on the supervision session at the end of the session	3.4
My supervisor provides written feedback on my work for me to think about	5.6
My supervisor discusses end-of-practicum reports with me	2.0
My supervisor provides clear feedback on observations of client sessions	1.9
My supervisor encourages me to identify areas of growth that have taken place in my practice	2.3
My supervisor encourages conversations about self-awareness and personal process	1.4
My supervisor encourages me to think about what went well and what I could do differently	2.0
My supervisor helps me to consider parallels between my personal and professional development	2.4
My supervisor makes reflection on my work a collaborative process	1.9
My supervisor discusses the impact of supervision on my practice	2.6

Early childhood education students

Item	Av. rating
My mentor teacher showed me around my early childhood centre and explained how things work and where things are	3.3
My mentor teacher gets to know me on a personal level, not just as a student	2.4
My mentor teacher shares openly about their family and interests outside the ECE centre	2.4
My mentor teacher talks a great deal about their personal philosophy – what they are doing and why	3.0
My mentor teacher talks about what I want to get out of the practicum experience	2.3
My mentor teacher talks with me on the floor of the centre	2.2
My mentor teacher sits with me at non-contact times and talks with me	3.2
My mentor teacher remembers what it is like to be a student and speaks of their experience	2.7
My mentor teacher allows me to contribute to centre meetings; my ideas are valued	2.5
My mentor teacher encourages me to be confident in myself and try new things in my teaching	2.0
My mentor teacher makes me feel like a teacher and shows me respect in front of the children	1.8
My mentor teacher allows me to take initiative, expects me to be involved from day one	2.1
My mentor teacher openly shares their goals and planning systems, and helps me adapt them for my own use	2.3
My mentor teacher helps me with my planning, and gives me ideas	2.7
My mentor teacher shows me available resources in the centre	2.1
My mentor teacher checks learning plans and gives useful feedback	2.9
My mentor teacher provides written feedback at the end of planned activities	4.5
My mentor teacher actively helps me during planned activities	3.4
My mentor teacher takes the time to sit with me and help me process the hard times	2.5
My mentor teacher allows me to ask questions no matter how silly the questions might feel	1.6
My mentor teacher purposefully gives me pre-planned activities in areas we have identified as areas of weakness	3.6
My mentor teacher knows me well enough to know what is a challenge for me and what is simply beyond me at this time	2.1
My mentor teacher pushes me to have a go, and conveys the sense that making mistakes is ok	2.0
My mentor teacher allows me to find out the importance of setting boundaries for activities	2.5
My mentor teacher allows me to deal with management issues, e.g. children fighting	1.8
My mentor teacher requires me to be professionally accountable to the team	1.9
My mentor teacher sets me up for success rather than failure	2.1
My mentor teacher places me in situations that stretch and challenge me	2.4
My mentor teacher encourages me to use the unplanned teachable moments	2.4
My mentor teacher helps me to see the good points of my teaching even if the activity does not go well	2.0
My mentor teacher allows me to look freely through their resources	1.5
My mentor teacher shares the theory behind what they do	2.5
My mentor teacher talks about their teaching experience	2.2
My mentor teacher discusses their professional development goals for the year	3.3
My mentor teacher talks to me about lectures and other learning and how I am applying it in the centre	3.3
My mentor teacher establishes meeting times regularly (at least weekly) to discuss how things are going	4.0
My mentor teacher sits with me and discusses how my teaching has gone	3.3
My mentor teacher goes through my folder with me and challenges me if reflections are lacking	3.5
My mentor teacher observes my teaching and breaks down what is going on rather than just looking at the big picture	3.6
My mentor teacher asks what went well, what went not so well, and how would I change what I did	3.2

Counselling students' repertory grid responses: Illustrative comments relating to most common behaviours (based on average)

Descriptor	Illustrative comments
My supervisor listens to me in a way that feels non-judgmental	If there is something I feel embarrassed by...or I have not done something very well in my practice, then I do not feel judged by my supervisor – instead we talk and work out why I am feeling this way and...work towards fixing the particular aspect of my practice. (St8)
My supervisor encourages me to be confident in myself	Very much so. Has helped me through waves of not feeling confident...draws on examples that reinforce the encouragement I am getting. (St8)
My supervisor encourages me to have a go	Reminds me that I am learning and mistakes are ok; it's learning from those mistakes that really matters. (St8)
My supervisor encourages conversations about self-awareness and personal process	Every session contains some elements of self-awareness and personal process. (St2)
My supervisor communicates in a way that makes me feel like a professional	This has changed over time...due to development in my confidence...fed by my supervisor's interest and encouragement...(St1)
My supervisor allows me to take the initiative during our conversation	Very much – this seems to be our style; we work with whatever I bring to supervision. (St16)
My supervisor encourages me to ask questions	I feel free to ask questions, but it's not outwardly encouraged. (St8)
My supervisor demonstrates an attitude of respect towards me	I am always treated with the utmost respect as a professional. (St2)

Counselling students' repertory grid responses: Illustrative comments relating to least common behaviours (based on average)

Descriptor	Illustrative comments
My supervisor provides me with written feedback on my work for me to think about	Limited reflection on what we have covered in a session. (St8)
My supervisor reflects on the supervision session at the end of the session	Only in the report at the end of the year. (St18)
My supervisor gives me the opportunity to practice new skills	I don't recall ever practising a new skill with my supervisor...this would be fantastic if this was in place. (St2)
My supervisor discusses the impact of supervision on my practice	Not particularly. We haven't had a discussion on how supervision is impacting on the way I work or on how I approach my practice. (St8)
My supervisor clearly explains the supervision process	I go in and talk about whatever I feel like I need to at the time. There is no ongoing explanation of the process though. (St8)

Early childhood students' repertory grid responses: Illustrative comments relating to most common behaviours (based on average)

Descriptor	Additional comments
My mentor teacher allows me to look freely through their resources	Also brings resources from home. (St4) All teaching staff share resources freely. (St12)
My mentor allows me to ask questions no matter how silly the questions might feel	
My mentor teacher makes me feel like a teacher and shows me respect in front of the children	We have a mutual respect for each other and back each other up...and work together to ensure there is consistency. (St12)
My teacher allows me to deal with management issues e.g. children fighting	Allowed me to talk and take care of the children when needed. I feel she will back me up if needed. (St25)
My mentor requires me to be professionally accountable to the team	There are set responsibilities I have to do as part of the team. (St27)

Early childhood students' repertory grid responses: Illustrative comments relating to least common behaviours (based on average)

Descriptor	Additional comments
My mentor teacher provides written feedback at the end of planned activities	Never written, always verbal. Usually her feedback is oral...we never have time enough to write. (St22)
My mentor teacher establishes meeting times regularly (at least weekly) to discuss how things are going	We don't really have meetings... Has said she is available when needed, but I have not requested a meeting and neither has she. (St25)
My mentor teacher purposefully gives me pre-planned activities in areas we have identified as a weakness	Never discussed. (St25)
My mentor teacher observes my teaching and breaks down what is going on rather than just looking at the big picture	Questions what I have done and why when it is required. (St12)
My mentor teacher actively helps me during planned activities	The only help I received was by the other student teachers; we formed a little network helping and respecting each other. The director who was supposed to be my mentor was not on the floor to observe me. (St25)