# Judgementoring and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education

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# Judgementoring and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education

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## Abstract

*Purpose* – The purpose of this article is to identify and examine root causes of the failure of school-based mentoring to realize its full potential.

*Design/methodology/approach* – The article draws on the re-analysis of data from two major mixed-method empirical studies carried out in England. It focuses on data generated from interviews with beginner teachers and mentors in both primary and secondary schools.

*Findings* – The findings point to a failure to create appropriate conditions for effective mentoring in England at the level of the mentoring relationship, the school, and the national policy context.

*Implications* – Implications of the findings include the need to achieve a greater degree of informed consensus on the meaning and purposes of mentoring in teacher education, and to ensure that mentors of beginner teachers are appropriately trained for the role.

*Originality/value* – The article identifies the practice of judgemental mentoring or 'judgementoring' as an obstacle to school-based mentoring realizing its potential and an impediment to the professional learning and wellbeing of beginner teachers. It also points to worrying indications that judgementoring may be becoming, through accrued experiences, the default understanding of mentoring in England.

*Keywords*: Mentoring, Judgementoring, Developmental mentoring, Teacher education, Beginning teacher, Education policy

*Paper type*: Research Paper

## Introduction

Since the 1980s, school-based mentoring has assumed an increasingly central role in the initial preparation, induction and subsequent professional development of teachers in many parts of the world. Focusing on mentoring as a component of initial teacher preparation (ITP) [1] and new teacher induction (NTI) programmes, this article draws on the analyses of data from two major empirical studies carried out in England (Hobson *et al*., 2009a; Hobson *et al*., 2012). In an earlier review of the international evidence base on mentoring beginning teachers (Hobson *et al.*, 2009b), we concluded that despite having a significant impact on the professional learning and development of many beginning teachers, school-based mentoring has nonetheless failed to realize its full potential. In this article we extend the evidence base through an examination of the root causes of this failure, and in so doing, heed Fletcher's (2012a) call, in the inaugural editorial of this journal, to begin to address the 'death of educational potential through the low-grade enactment of mentoring' (p.6). Our empirical data relate to the mentoring of student and newly qualified teachers (to whom we collectively refer as beginning or beginner teachers) in primary and secondary schools in England. That said, the wider literature, as well as our knowledge and experience of mentoring in other education systems, suggests that our findings may be applicable to mentoring in some other contexts.

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We define mentoring in teacher education as a one to one relationship between a relatively inexperienced teacher (the mentee) and a relatively experienced one (the mentor) which aims to support the mentee's learning and development as a teacher, and their integration into and acceptance by the cultures of the school and the profession. And we see mentoring as a necessarily 'developmental activity, with the emphasis on empowering and enabling [mentees] to do things for themselves' (Clutterbuck, 2004, p.11). In the process of mentoring, a mentor may adopt a number of supportive roles or stances, including those of *educator* (which involves, for example, listening, coaching and creating appropriate opportunities for the mentee's professional learning), *model* (inspiring, demonstrating and making visible aspects of being a teacher), *acculturator* (helping the mentee into full membership of the particular professional culture), *sponsor* ('opening doors' and introducing the mentee to the 'right people'), and *provider of psychological support* (providing the mentee with a safe place to release emotions or 'let off steam') (Malderez and Bodoczky, 1999; Malderez and Wedell, 2007). Amongst the key research findings discussed in this article, however, we show that in addition to or instead of these roles, some mentors adopt that of judge, and engage in judgemental mentoring – which we term *judgementoring*. Based on our analyses and illustrated by the findings presented below, we take judgementoring to be *a one to one relationship between a relatively inexperienced teacher (the mentee) and a relatively experienced one (the mentor) in which the latter, in revealing too readily and/or too often her/his own judgements on or evaluations of the mentee's planning and teaching (e.g. through 'comments', 'feedback', advice, praise or criticism), compromises the mentoring relationship and its potential benefits.*

**Context**
During the 1980s mentoring became a central feature of early university-school partnership ITP programmes in England (McIntyre, 1991) and of similar initiatives in North America (Feiman-Nemser, 1990) and other parts of Europe (Medgyes and Malderez, 1996). In the early 1990s new national government policies in England (Department for Education, 1992, 1993) stipulated that student teachers should spend a significantly larger proportion of their ITP programmes in schools than had been the case, and that while in the schools they should be supported in their learning and development by a practising teacher colleague (a 'mentor'), and assessed against government-specified teaching competences (now 'Standards'). Mentoring subsequently formed part of a broader programme of induction for newly qualified teachers (NQTs), which was introduced in the late 1990s (Teaching and Higher Education Act, 1998) and typically spans a teacher's first year in post after successful completion of their ITP.

The precise rationale for the growth of school-based mentoring – and the broader shift towards involving schools much more fully in ITP and NTI – is unclear and likely to have varied both between and within particular contexts. In some cases, perhaps especially amongst those higher education institutions (HEIs) at the forefront of the movement, these comprised attempts to provide appropriate conditions for achieving explicitly articulated *teacher learning* processes. Indeed the case for mentoring beginner teachers found support in a wide range of influential perspectives on professional knowledge and its acquisition. For example, reflective practitioner approaches (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983; Zeichner, 1994), the cognitive psychology of skill (Anderson, 2006; Tomlinson, 1998), situated cognition (Brown *et al.*, 1989; Greeno *et al.*, 1996) and sociocultural perspectives (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1991) all, although with differing justifications, suggested the need for prolonged field experiences. It followed, again with different rationales, that the learning of beginner teachers would be enhanced through the specific and individualized support of a 'teacher' or mentor 'on the spot'. We now elaborate slightly on these rationales in relation to sociocultural and reflective practitioner perspectives, both because of their purported influence on teacher education in the UK as well as further afield (Edwards *et al.*, 2002; Furlong *et al.*, 2000) and because they are especially consistent with the 'developmental' notion of mentoring to which we subscribe.

While from the 1980s teacher educators in England increasingly claimed to base their provision on a 'reflective practitioner' model of professional learning (Furlong *et al.*, 2000), in practice different notions of reflection were adopted by different providers, just as a variety of conceptualizations were

championed and discussed by different scholars (Calderhead, 1989; Furlong and Maynard, 1995). Nonetheless the case for mentoring within a broad reflective practitioner approach was both strengthened and potentially guided by two concepts from sociocultural perspectives: 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and 'scaffolding' (Wood *et al.*, 1976). With regard to the former, the mentor, in acculturator role, as a colleague and full member of the community the mentee is joining, can assist her/his movement from 'legitimate peripheral' to full 'participation'. When a mentor is in an educator role supporting the development of 'reflective practitioners', conversations with the mentee provide the ideal context for developing the practice of informed reflection 'on-action', and increase the likelihood of more appropriate intuitive responses 'in-action' (Schön, 1983). The notion of scaffolding, widely adopted as describing pedagogical help, provides further guidance as to the *types of strategies* a mentor might employ during these conversations. Space precludes a detailed discussion of the 'scaffolding moves' Wood and colleagues describe, but within a context aiming to produce reflective practitioners, a key 'task' that the mentee is learning, and which requires scaffolding in a post lesson discussion, is that of arriving at *their own* conclusions and decisions based on a process of informed reflection. In other words, one of the mentor's main goals within such perspectives – and in our developmental conception of mentoring – is to support the beginner teachers' development of 'learnacy' (Claxton, 2004), that is, their ability and willingness to manage their on-going learning from their own and others' experiences of teaching, and continue to engage in this 'alone', thus avoiding the development of a form of 'learned helplessness' (Maier and Seligman, 1976) that can result from over-reliance on another, and a corresponding lack of agency.

Despite their direct relevance to the work of school-based mentors, however, there is little evidence that mentoring practice – or policy relating to this – has been informed to any great degree by the kinds of perspectives outlined above. Indeed, it seems likely that policy-makers initiating the 'second phase' (government-led) expansion of mentoring and school-based provision for ITP and NTI that occurred in England, as well as in some parts of the US, were influenced by more managerial imperatives. In particular, school- and employment-based routes into teaching had the potential to address the issue of teacher shortages in some contexts (Feiman-Nemser, 1990), and mentoring for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) was understood to help to alleviate 'reality shock' (Gaede,1978) and support teacher retention (Johnson *et al.*, 2005). In addition, mentoring appeared to be seen as a potential mechanism for quality control as part of a broader aim of ensuring that new entrants to the teaching profession meet minimum standards, and indeed mentors of student and newly qualified teachers in England took on this role following the policy changes referred to above. In other systems (e.g. most Nordic countries), mentors do not have this additional gatekeeper role.

The apparent lack of a consistent rationale for the expansion of school-based mentoring in ITP and NTI helps to explain why studies have found considerable variation and idiosyncrasy in mentoring practice (Wang and Odell 2002). There are other explanations too. One is evidence relating to weak methods of mentor selection, leading to the designation of some who lack appropriate knowledge, skills and characteristics required for the role (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004). Another is that many mentors are not trained for the role and, even where they are, training programmes are of variable quality (Abell *et al.*, 1995). A further potential explanation relates to the fact (referred to above) that some systems require mentors, in addition to supporting beginner teachers' professional learning and development, to assess their teaching against national standards. While there is a lack of agreement in the teacher education literature about whether charging mentors with the task of assessing as well as supporting beginner teachers inevitably reduces their potential effectiveness (e.g. Heilbronn *et al.*, 2002; cf. Yusko and Feiman-Nemser, 2008), the various considerations outlined above may contribute to an understanding of why the experience of school-based mentoring has not been an unmitigated success, on which we now briefly elaborate.

**Benefits and limitations of mentoring in action**
Studies suggest that where appropriately employed, school-based mentoring is a highly effective – perhaps the single most effective – means of supporting the professional learning and development of beginning teachers (Franke and Dahlgren, 1996; Marable and Raimondi, 2007). Such research has

identified a range of positive outcomes of mentoring for beginning teachers. These include enhanced capabilities such as classroom and behaviour management, and time and workload management (Lindgren, 2005), improved self-reflection and problem-solving capacities (McIntyre and Hagger, 1996), and increased confidence, self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Johnson *et al.*, 2005; Marable and Raimondi, 2007). More generally, mentoring has been found to play an important role in the acculturation of beginner teachers, helping them to understand and adapt to the norms, standards and expectations associated with teaching in general and the specific schools in which they find themselves (Bullough and Draper, 2004; Edwards, 1998).

Research has also found, however, that mentoring does not always bring about these positive outcomes, and can actually stunt beginner teachers' professional learning and growth. Some studies suggest, for example, that it can result in the promotion and reproduction of conventional norms and practices, which render mentees unable to consolidate or develop their knowledge and use of alternative and more challenging (both for the beginner teacher and to the status quo) methodologies, such as 'progressive' and learner-centred approaches (Feiman-Nemser *et al.*, 1993; Ling, 2009). Others have found that mentoring can have harmful effects on mentees' wellbeing, with studies suggesting that in some cases the work of mentors has damaged beginning teachers' self-esteem, caused anxiety and stress, and contributed to mentees' decisions to leave the profession (Beck and Kosnick, 2000; Maguire, 2001).

This article enhances our understanding of why the potential benefits of mentoring to beginner teachers are not always realized and explains why, in some instances, it can be detrimental to the professional learning and development and/or broader wellbeing of student and newly qualified teachers. This enhanced understanding then enables us to identify means of maximising the potential of mentoring, an especially significant consideration in a context, in England, in which 'School Direct' (Teaching Agency, 2013) and other initiatives mean that beginner teachers are more reliant than ever on mentoring and other school-based support for their professional learning and development [2].

## Methods

The findings presented in this article are based on re-analyses of data generated for the 'Becoming a Teacher' (BaT) project (2003-2009) and the 'Modes of Mentoring and Coaching' (MoMaC) study (2010-12). Since detailed accounts of the research designs and methodologies of the two studies have been provided elsewhere (for BaT, see Hobson *et al.*, 2009a and Hobson, 2009; for MoMaC, Hobson *et al.*, 2012 and Hobson and McIntyre, 2013), here we present a relatively brief overview, focusing on data re-analysed for this article.

The BaT project, which sought to investigate beginner teachers' experiences of ITP, NTI and early professional development, employed a longitudinal equal status mixed methods design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998) comprising national surveys, part-structured interviews and email exchanges with participants over a five-year period. The BaT data that were analysed as part of the preparation of this article comprise transcripts of:
   1) interviews with 79 student teachers at the end of their ITP programmes – including 38 participants who had trained to teach in primary schools and 41 in secondary schools (with a range of subject specialisms), via a variety of ITP routes (postgraduate and undergraduate, university partnership, school- and employment-based programmes) from 19 different ITP providers throughout England;
   2) interviews with 73 of the same participants at the end of their first year of teaching;
   3) more regular email exchanges, throughout the Induction period, with 46 of the 73 NQTs referred to above;
   4) interviews with 46 ITP programme personnel, including 18 programme leaders, 13 subject or age-specialist tutors, and 15 school-based mentors;
   5) interviews with 27 school-based induction tutors or 'mentors'.

The primary purpose of the MoMaC research, which employed a sequential, qualitative-led mixed method design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998), was to investigate the nature, impact and potentially broader applicability of 'external mentoring' for non-specialist teachers of secondary school science in England who were participating in one of three broader training and support programmes: the pilot *Physics Enhancement Programme* (PEP), the pilot *Science Additional Specialism Programme* (SASP) and the *Stimulating Physics Network* (SPN). By external mentoring we mean those relationships where the mentors are *not* colleagues based in the same schools as the teachers they are supporting, but where the interaction between external mentors and their mentees may take place within and/or outside of mentees' schools, and may be face-to-face and/or remote. By contrast, we take school-based mentoring to be those relationships where the mentor *is* a member of staff of the same school as the mentee, and where most mentoring activity takes place within that school and on a face-to-face basis. In addition to pursuing its main purpose, the MoMaC study provided a unique opportunity to explore and cast new light on school-based mentoring through its juxtaposition with external mentoring, since most participants in the 'qualitative' [3] phase of the research were (or had been) in the rare position of experiencing both of these kinds of mentoring.

The MoMaC data that were analysed for the development of this article were generated primarily from interviews, conducted in different regions of England, with 28 beginner teachers (19 PEP, 9 SPN) who had accessed the support of an external mentor and 13 external mentors themselves (5 PEP, 8 SPN), all of whom had been invited to discuss how their experiences of school-based and external mentoring compared. We also draw briefly on the analyses of data generated via a subsequent national on-line survey of primary and secondary school teachers of all subject areas [4]. Informed by earlier analyses of our qualitative data, the survey included both fixed and open-ended response options on whether respondents felt they might benefit from the opportunity to access the support of an external mentor, and the reasons for their responses, some of which related to their experiences of school-based mentoring. From a total sample of 7581 teachers, 1558 responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 21 per cent. In the development of this article we were most interested in the responses of those survey respondents (n=171) who were in their first five years of teaching, who thus had relatively recent experiences of school-based mentoring as beginning teachers, and whose recollections of those experiences are likely to have been more reliable than those of more experienced teacher respondents.

For both the BaT and MoMaC studies, interviews were part-structured (Hobson and Townsend, 2010), and the majority were carried out face-to-face (where in a handful of cases this was not possible, telephone interviews were conducted instead). Data relating to the two studies were generated and stored, and findings are presented in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2004; BERA, 2011).

With the agreed aim of seeking to identify why school-based mentoring had failed to realize its full potential, each of the present authors undertook an initial analysis of separate samples (totalling approximately 25 per cent) of all interview data, employing constant comparative methods (Miles and Huberman, 1994). A discussion of the emergent themes (which suggested, for example, a number of school- and policy-level 'causes' of problematic mentoring relationships) led to the joint production of a coding frame and the subsequent thematic analysis by the first author of all data, using MAXQDA 10 qualitative data analysis software. Through the coding process we sought to identify and categorise all evidence relating to the nature, potential causes and consequences of negative experiences of mentoring. During this process, the coding frame was adapted slightly to incorporate additional themes and sub-themes which had not emerged during the earlier analysis phase. In presenting our findings below we draw on feminist traditions to foreground participants' 'voices' (Lingard, 1995; Mahony *et al.*, 2004). All quotations provided represent the words of beginning teachers or ITP or NTI mentors, and except where stated, are those of student or newly qualified teachers, or other recently qualified teachers reflecting on their ITP and/or NTI [5].

### Findings

Our analyses identified a failure to provide appropriate conditions for effective mentoring practice at micro- (mentoring relationship), meso- (institution) and macro- (national policy) levels, and we address each of these in turn.

### Micro level failings

Some previous studies have suggested that the success of the mentoring relationship depends to a large degree on 'the attitudes of the beginning teacher mentee' (Roehrig *et al.*, 2008, 684), including the extent to which mentees take their professional learning and development sufficiently seriously (Bubb and Earley, 2006), and are open and willing to learn and change, and prepared to operate outside of their comfort zone (Valencic Zuljan and Vogrinc, 2007). There is also evidence in our own research that the attitudes and characteristics of some mentees provide challenges to the potential success of the mentoring relationship. For example, one induction mentor claimed that their ability to undertake the mentoring role effectively was hindered where a mentee:

> *has taught lessons and thought they were very, very good...* [and] *doesn't really want to hear that ... in actual fact they are not, and their learning outcomes are not very good.* (Mentor)

However, mentees' openness or otherwise to school-based mentoring can be explained to at least some extent by the broader institutional and policy contexts within which the mentoring relationship exists, which we discuss below, and our data suggest that 'micro level' factors which affect the mentoring relationship detrimentally may be as much (or more) to do with the approaches and strategies of the mentors themselves. Mentees' lack of openness, for example, could be explained in terms of failure on the mentor's part to create a safe and trusting relationship, as the following quotation may suggest:

> [D]*uring the PGCE whatever you ask your mentor they would judge you on and* [think] *'why doesn't she know that?'*

Our evidence suggests that many mentors did indeed fail to create safe, trusting relationships, and that a major explanation for this, for which the quotation above provides a clue, is that some such mentors (and possibly a majority of school-based mentors associated with the BaT and MoMaC studies) appeared to practise what we term judgemental mentoring or judgementoring – that is, revealing too readily and/or too often their own judgements on or evaluations of mentees' planning and/or teaching. Judgementoring is perhaps most visible in the frequent use by mentors of a restrictive 'feedback' strategy in post-lesson discussions, typically involving a mentor-led evaluation of the 'positive' then 'negative' features of a lesson, followed by suggestions for improvement. The strategy is described in the following excerpt from a mentor interview:

> [W]*hen I talk to a trainee after* [observing them teach] *the thing I focus upon, first of all ... is the good sound educational points... make them feel that there are some good things coming out here. If there are points, which inevitably there will be, which need to be addressed, they must be addressed constructively... and* [I] *present the trainee with a set of strategies for dealing with* [them]. (Mentor)

At its worst, judgementoring involves mentors not merely revealing their judgements of mentees' work but also focusing almost exclusively in their interactions with mentees on *negative* judgements:

> [My mentor] *would go 'this went very well but', and then he seemed to focus dreadfully on the things that hadn't gone so well.*

> [I]*t was a really oppressive atmosphere in the school.* [From] *my... mentor... I got nothing but criticism and pressure... from Day One. She was criticising everything I did...*

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Related to this over-critical stance is an apparent belief on the part of some mentors that their approach (whether to teaching, or facilitating pupil or professional learning) is *the* right approach, one result of which is that some such mentors appear to want to produce clones of themselves:

> [M]*y mentor in my second year* [of ITP] ... *whenever I said 'this is the way we have to do things' she said ... 'oh you shouldn't be doing that ... you should be doing this' ... I kind of felt 'all that work and it is worthless because I have got to do it your way'...*

While many if not most mentees appear to value the 'constructive' part of mentors' critique of their practice or appreciate their mentors '*giving me ideas*', and while this may have a positive impact on their practice at least in the short term, there is a danger that the frequent use of such post-observation feedback strategies could stunt mentees' professional learning in the longer term by creating an over-reliance on mentors at the expense of a promotion of learnacy. It is also clear that for some beginner teachers, the experience of judgementoring has a negative impact on their wellbeing, with some describing themselves after encounters with judgementors as 'disheartened', 'demoralized', 'isolated' or 'lonely'. One mentee explained how regular exposure to 'constructive criticism' '*really pulled me down and I thought 'what's the point?'*. Related to this, it seems likely that in some cases beginner teachers' experiences of judgementoring contribute to their decisions to discontinue their ITP or leave the profession (Chambers *et al.*, 2010). Amongst those who remain, there are some indications that teachers' experience of judgementoring may in some cases have a longer term negative impact on their beliefs about the nature of 'mentoring' and their willingness to engage in further opportunities for development. For example, even though the *external* mentors to whom PEP and SPN participants had access played no role in their assessment, some were reluctant to take (full) advantage of this support because they feared that the mentor would judge them. As one NQT explained:

> *I'm always very aware that my physics knowledge isn't perhaps as good as it could be...* [and] *you don't want to leave yourself open do you? Never leave yourself open to* [someone] *thinking I'm stupid*.

To return to the point made at the beginning of this section, it follows that if some beginner teachers are unable to be open with their mentors about their perceived limitations as teachers, this will limit mentors' power to support their professional learning and development [6].

In addition to the practice of judgementoring, our analyses identified a range of additional (and sometimes related) failings of mentoring at the micro level. First, and echoing the findings of some earlier studies, our data suggest that many mentors appear to support (if only sub-consciously) 'trial and error' (Franke and Dahlgren, 1996), 'technical rationality' (Wright and Bottery, 1997) or 'proceduralist-apprenticeship' (Hobson, 2003) approaches to professional learning and development rather than 'understanding-oriented' approaches (*ibid*.) designed to examine the principles behind the practice and develop informed reflective practitioners. For example, one mentee recognised that he needed support in unpicking and analysing the root cause of a problem he was experiencing but was frustrated by his mentor's approach: '*I am actually asking you for help and you are telling me what worked for you!*' Further to our comments above about the potential implications of judgementoring and the over-use of 'constructive criticism' in particular, few mentors gave the impression that, for them, mentoring is a developmental activity which seeks to promote mentees' learnacy. Indeed, there was evidence that some mentors did not give mentees sufficient responsibility or 'challenge', or grant them sufficient autonomy, as had been found in some previous studies (e.g. Collison and Edwards, 1994; Dunne and Bennett, 1997).

Our analyses also corroborate earlier findings (e.g. Smith and Maclay, 2007) that some mentors do not have – or are not able to make – sufficient time for their mentees, while some beginning teachers questioned whether their mentors had the requisite knowledge or expertise to be effective in the role. The main grievances here were that some mentors were not same-subject specialists or not

sufficiently '*up to date*' (e.g. with the latest teaching methodologies), rendering them unable to provide adequate support for subject content or subject pedagogical knowledge (Shulman, 1987), while some of these also failed to facilitate access to someone who could – thus not adequately fulfilling the 'sponsor' mentor role referred to earlier. In addition, and in relation to ITP in particular, there was evidence that some mentors were not sufficiently familiar with the wider programme of support for beginner teachers of which mentoring was a part. The following comment from one beginner teacher was echoed by several others:

> *Sometimes we* [mentor and mentee] *were just lost as to where I was supposed to be and what she was supposed to do for me and what I was supposed to do for her.*

More generally, there were indications that some mentors were disorganised or uncommitted to the role, with some said to be more '*focused on jumping through hoops*' than helping mentees become '*better teachers*', while others appeared to have little respect for mentees as learners:

> [My mentor was] *sort of asking me to go off and make her cups of coffee and things... I don't feel then I'm being treated like I should be because that's not what I'm there for.*

A final failing, and one which offers a partial explanation for some of those outlined above, is that some mentors appear to lack a clear idea of what mentoring in teacher education *is for* and can help bring about. Our analyses certainly highlighted a lack of agreement amongst mentors about this, with some apparently nurturing unrealistic and naïve expectations of what mentoring can achieve – one stated, for example, that induction mentoring was about supporting NQTs in '*perfecting the practice of being a classroom teacher*' (emphasis added).

Having identified above a wide range of failings in school-based mentoring at the micro or mentoring relationship level, and focussed in particular on what we call judgementoring, we now argue that many of these issues can be attributed, at least in part, to failings at institution and policy levels.

**Meso-level failings**
Our analyses provide substantial evidence of a failure to support school-based mentoring adequately at the institutional level. Firstly, our data suggest that many schools do not employ rigorous methods of mentor selection based upon clear criteria, including aptitude for the role based on prior experience and perceived characteristics and expertise, and a willingness to assume it. While some mentors we spoke to indicated that they had had a degree of choice in relation to taking on the mentoring role, others did not, with some explicitly stating that they took it on because they were told to do so and/or because no one else was available. In some cases, mentoring roles were automatically attached to other (normally middle leadership) roles within the school:

> [I am] *coordinator of the year group. So, in that role, it was therefore decided that I would be mentor for those coming into my year group...* (Mentor)

This school-level failing contributes to understanding why some mentors were apparently unsuited or insufficiently committed to the role, and why some engaged in judgementoring or used methods not necessarily conducive to facilitating professional learning and development. In relation to some mentees' criticisms that the mentors they had been allocated were not same-subject specialists – and evidence (e.g. Smith and Ingersoll, 2004) does suggest that mentoring is more effective when same-subject specialists are employed – it should be acknowledged that in some cases, especially in relation to shortage subjects (such as physics) or minority subjects (such as music), a same-subject specialist was not available within the school. Nonetheless, schools *could* have made provision for mentees to be able to access a subject specialist elsewhere, but our evidence suggests that very few actually did so.

A second institution-level failing is of not ensuring mentors are appropriately trained for the role, perhaps because of a failure to recognise the difference between mentoring and performance management. Our evidence suggests that all ITP mentors and most NTI mentors had the *opportunity* to undertake some form of mentor training, yet not all mentors took advantage of this. Some mentors explained that it had not been convenient to attend because of the geographical location or timetabling of the training, while others were of the view that any training about the role would have limited value because, for example, '*experience is the best training*'. In fact, our data indicate that some of the mentor training courses provided *were* of limited value. While some usefully involved sessions on recent curriculum developments, there appeared to be very little emphasis on different ways in which mentors might scaffold beginner teachers' professional learning and development. Most mentors we talked to who had undertaken mentor training indicated that this had centred on formal and administrative aspects of the role, echoing earlier research findings in relation to both the English (Bubb and Earley, 2006) and US (Abell *et al.*, 1995) contexts. A lack of appropriate mentor training thus also helps explain why some mentors employed methods unconducive to mentees' professional learning and development, why some were not able to develop safe, trusting relationships, and why there was sometimes a lack of coherence between school-based mentoring and other aspects of ITP.

The third institution level failing lies in tasking mentors with what our data clearly show to be conflicting roles: assessing beginner teachers and supporting their professional learning. The responsibility here lies not only with schools but also with HEIs through their involvement in ITP and (to a lesser extent) NTI. Especially without effective (and time-consuming) support for mentors in developing skills for each role, and the even more demanding skills for undertaking each role without compromising either, this is likely to encourage judgementoring, discourage the formation of safe, trusting relationships, and at least partly explain the reluctance of many mentees to be open with mentors about their professional learning and development needs:

> *Sometimes it's not easy for people to share concerns with you because they feel 'that's going to be a black mark'.* (Mentor)

> [Y]*ou never want to mention any potential failings that you might have to your* [school-based] *mentor ... because you don't know what's going to go down in writing...*

A fourth institution level failing is that many schools appear to provide mentors with insufficient time to carry out the role effectively, especially given its associated administrative requirements, a consideration that was recognised by some mentees as well as mentors:

> [T]*he mentor... really had too much on his plate. I mean he was ... head of the entire humanities faculty and he was head of gifted and talented and he was doing this, that and the other, and he really didn't have the time that he needed to be able to* [be an effective mentor].

A fifth but related problem is that some schools do not timetable mentor/mentee dyads to be 'free' at the same time. As a result, one mentor explains:

> *If you are allocated time during the school day to do the mentoring you get a much more high quality amount of work done, whereas if you're doing it after school, you feel rushed, the student feels rushed* [and] *they don't want to take up your time...* (Mentor)

A further failing relates to evidence of fragmentation (Goodlad, 1990) or a lack of effective partnership working in general, and communication in particular, between some HEIs and their 'partner' schools. This is evident in and partly explains mentors' lack of familiarity with the university-based components of their mentees' ITP programmes: as one mentor put it, '*although I know the title of the university's lecture, I don't know the content*'.

Reflecting on the various institutional failings identified above it might be concluded that many

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schools fail to take the mentoring of student and newly qualified teachers sufficiently seriously or to recognise its importance to beginner teachers' development. This would certainly appear to be so in the small number of cases we noted of schools failing to provide alternative arrangements for beginner teachers whose mentors left the school during the academic year or who had lengthy periods of absence due to illness. It could also be concluded that schools do not accord adequate status to the mentoring role, and – in common with the findings of Field and Philpott (2000) – there was little evidence in our interviews with mentors that it was seen as a potentially important stepping stone in teachers' career progression. If this is the case then potentially effective mentors may not be putting themselves forward for the role. Issues highlighted here may also partially explain a further problem, the high turnover of mentors in some schools (Hobson *et al*., 2009a), and the consequent disadvantages this may have for the support of beginning teacher mentees and the cumulative development of expertise in mentoring.

More generally, our evidence suggests that some head teachers have not fostered, or schools developed, appropriate collaborative learning cultures (Hargreaves and Dawe, 1990; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Indeed, providing evidence, rather, of the judgemental cultures within which some teachers work, several respondents to the MoMaC survey stated, for instance, that they would be reluctant to seek the support of an external mentor because '[i]*t wouldn't look good to ask for help*', or:

> In the current climate, the wrong sort of head might use this as evidence that I wasn't performing adequately.

**National policy level failings**

Despite the damning account above of some schools' failure to provide appropriate conditions for successful mentoring, some of the institution-level failings we have highlighted (as well as some of those at the mentoring relationship level to which these contribute) may be at least partly explained by a failure of national policy-makers to create an enabling environment for effective mentoring practice. First, it can be argued that, like schools, policy-makers have neglected to accord sufficient status to the mentoring role through, for example, appropriate recognition in career progression frameworks and salary structures. Secondly, there has been a failure to recognise or impress upon schools the importance of rigorous and appropriate forms of mentor selection and mentor training, and of ensuring that student and newly qualified teachers have access to subject specialist support as well as support for a range of other professional learning and development needs (Hobson, 2009). More fundamentally, policy-makers might be said to have failed to promote effectively a common understanding of what mentoring ought to entail or what mentors should be seeking to achieve (a criticism that could also be levelled against HEIs and other organisations involved in ITP), and this may help explain why some mentors do not appear to understand the role and/or employ methods not conducive to scaffolding beginner teachers' learning and development.

In relation to the widespread practice of judgementoring and its negative consequences, such as the difficulties of developing a safe, trusting mentoring relationship – itself a prerequisite condition for learning and development to be possible – two features of national policy-making can be held partly responsible. The first and most specific is that of associating the *assessment* of student and newly qualified teachers with the mentoring role, with which our analyses suggest it is incompatible in the current and (as we view it) likely foreseeable contexts. This association is illustrated, in relation to NQTs, in the following wording from the Department for Education's (2012) 'Statutory guidance' to schools:

> '*The head teacher/principal must identify a person to act as the NQT's induction tutor, to provide day to day monitoring and support, and co-ordination of assessment. The induction tutor ... should be able to provide effective coaching and mentoring...* [and] *should review the NQT's progress at frequent intervals throughout the induction period... NQTs should have*

> *formal assessments carried out by either the head teacher/principal or the induction tutor*.'
> (Department for Education, 2012, p.14).

More generally, the 'National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching' (CUREE, 2005), sponsored by the (then) Department for Education and Skills, stated that the mentor's role included '*assessing, appraising or accrediting practice*' (p.3).

The second, related but more general issue is the government's role in creating (in the education system and public sector more broadly) an accountability culture typified by the pervasiveness of the Ofsted [7] school inspection regime and characterised by 'surveillance overkill' (Mahony *et al.*, 2004, p. 440). Such a culture has been found to provoke insecurity, anxiety and mistrust amongst employees (Jeffrey, 2002; Ball, 2003), and is also responsible for mentors spending a significant proportion of the limited time available completing relevant 'paperwork':

> [T]*he forms that I have to fill out, they are horrendous… I don't think they serve any purpose... I actually don't think it helps particularly in the NQTs' development.* (Mentor)

Finally, while recent official documentation has stated that mentors (or 'induction tutors' charged with providing mentoring) '*must be given sufficient time to carry out the role effectively and to meet the needs of the NQT*' (Department for Education, 2012, p.14), it can also be argued that policy-makers are nonetheless culpable because of their failure to provide sufficient funding earmarked for school-based mentoring and other support for beginner teachers (Bubb and Earley, 2006). Such funding could have helped to *ensure*, for example, that mentors are provided with sufficient time in which to undertake the role *and* to attend appropriate courses of mentor training (with some funds paying to provide cover for mentors' teaching), and that in cases where beginner teachers do not have the support of a same-subject specialist within the school, they are provided with access to appropriate external support.

## Conclusions and implications

It is important to stress that we have not sought in this article to provide a generalized account of mentoring practice in relation to ITP and NTI. Rather, we set out to examine why it is the case – in the English context – that mentoring practice is highly variable and in some cases fails to realize its 'educational potential' (Fletcher, 2012a), and we have provided evidence that a number of conditions necessary for mentoring to flourish do not exist for all beginning teachers in England. Our data preclude us from estimating the prevalence of each of the 'failings' we have identified, although – based on our analyses and our wider knowledge and experience of the field – we believe that the practice of judgementoring is likely to be widespread and that at least some of the other micro- and meso-level failings we have outlined are likely to exist in a majority of schools in England.

As we have indicated, some of the threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education – including issues relating to the lack of rigour in mentor selection, to insufficient opportunities for effective mentor training and development, and to the lack of provision of sufficient time for mentoring – have been identified by previous studies. It is disappointing that policy and practice have not been sufficiently informed by such research, and this raises questions about the extent to which policy-makers and practitioners are willing and/or able to engage with relevant studies, and about whether research is being sufficiently widely or appropriately 'disseminated' to the 'right' audiences to have an impact.

In other respects our article breaks new ground, not least through our identification and examination of the nature and some of the causes and consequences of what we term judgementoring, and how this and other failures to provide effective support for beginner teachers at the level of the mentoring relationship can be attributed, in part, to related failings at institutional and national policy levels. The practice of judgementoring potentially prevents the development of the primary context for learning at this level (the trusting and safe relationship), impedes the mentee's development of

informed reflective practice or 'learnacy' (Claxton, 2004), creates 'learned helplessness' (Maier and Seligman 1976), and negatively impacts the mentee's emotional wellbeing. In some cases, where the so-called mentor is excessively critical, the negative consequences of judgementoring – for the mentee's emotional state, professional learning and development, and their potential retention on ITP programmes or in the profession – can be especially severe. Some implications of the findings presented here are consistent with key literature relating to scaffolding learning (for example), in which there is no 'scaffolding move' (Wood *et al.*, 1976) that involves the helper 'telling' the learner their judgements on their work. Mentors will inevitably *have* such judgements but, in this view, these are primarily used to guide *their own* thinking about ways to support and scaffold a particular mentee's learning: only rarely will mentors have occasion (and feel it appropriate) to share their assessments with mentees directly – where, for instance, within a well-established trusting relationship a mentee invites them to do so in preparation for a formal observation and assessment by someone else.

We argue that one of the main causes of judgementoring is the requirement for mentors to also act as assessors and gatekeepers to the profession, especially in the absence of appropriate provision of mentor development opportunities in preparation for fulfilling both roles and for doing so without compromising either. Another – and perhaps more fundamental – factor contributing to the practice of judgementoring and other pathologies of mentoring is a lack of consensus on what mentoring in teacher education *is*, what it can or should seek to achieve, and how it differs from mentoring in other contexts. Here we share Fletcher's (2012b) view that 'it is important to distinguish between mentoring in education and mentoring in other contexts' (p.68), and concur with Bozeman and Feeney (2007) about the importance of delineating the boundaries between mentoring and related phenomena, such as coaching, with which it shares 'concept space'. For us, coaching as 'facilitated reflective practice' (Cox 2013, p.2) which aims at transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990) is *part* of mentoring, not separate from or additional to it. In the context of mentoring beginner teachers and the associated emphasis on supporting their learning, it seems logical that the main informing literature for mentor practice would be that related to teacher learning, and learning more generally. On the other hand, since mentoring is fundamentally a relationship between two people (regardless of the occupational and other contexts in which it takes place), mentoring in teacher education will inevitably share similarities with and can potentially learn from the experience of mentoring in other disciplines. Given this, and the findings reported in this article, we would argue that teacher education policy-makers in England and elsewhere have been remiss in overlooking the recommendation, from the literature on mentoring in organisations, that mentoring is more effective as an 'off-line' activity where mentors are not also responsible for line-managing, assessing or evaluating the work of their mentees (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995; Clutterbuck, 2004).

Considering more explicitly some potential implications of our findings, we believe that more consistently effective support for beginning teachers in England could be achieved if national policy-makers, schools and mentors themselves made greater efforts to create and maintain the conditions for effective mentoring that we have shown to be lacking in many cases. We see three main priorities at this time. The first is that of seeking to establish a greater degree of *informed consensus* on the meaning and purposes of mentoring in teacher education and (if it is not too late, given the experiences of many new teachers) to prevent the view of mentoring-as-judgementoring becoming the default understanding of 'mentoring' in England, or otherwise to attempt to reverse or correct this. We recognise that achieving the kind of consensus suggested presents a substantial challenge, notably because it requires a culture change, and also acknowledge that there has been some attempt, on the part of national policy-makers in England, to make an accepted definition and account of mentoring (and its association with coaching) available through the production of the 'National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching' (CUREE, 2005) referred to above. Yet while, on the one hand, the Framework's association of assessment with mentoring may have encouraged the development of judgementoring in some quarters, on the other hand it would have been naïve to have expected that the published view of a group of experts following consultation would trickle down and significantly affect what happens in mentoring relationships in schools. The strategy reminds us of the now largely

discredited cascade models of development (Hayes, 2000), and represents a restricted 'rational-empirical' strategy for affecting change in human systems ('this is what research/more knowledgeable others say'), whereas 'normative-re-educative 'strategies (the provision of new experiences and opportunities to learn from them) have been found to be more effective (Chin and Benne, 1970; Wedell and Malderez, 2013).

Secondly, related to the first priority set out above and for the reasons that we have elaborated in this article, we urge policy-makers and school leaders to free school-based mentors from the task of formally evaluating and assessing their mentees' 'performance'. Our third priority would be to attempt to ensure that *all* mentors of beginner teachers participate in appropriate and informed mentor training and development opportunities. In this regard we would recommend policy changes to stipulate that all practising mentors must have successfully completed an accredited mentor preparation programme. This in turn may require additional policy changes to enhance the status and recognition of mentors, thus making the role more attractive to individuals and schools and so achieve a sufficient number of applicants for selection to be possible.

Amongst the challenges associated with possible attempts to act upon our recommendations is the need to avoid two potential ironies or contradictions. The first concerns the imperative to ensure that schools take mentoring more seriously and create conditions for effective mentoring *without* resorting to the heavy hand of surveillance and accountability which is part of the cause of some of the failings we have outlined. The second relates to the need to encourage teachers to become non-judgemental mentors (e.g. through the type of mentor training and development opportunities provided) without ourselves or others 'passing judgement' on their existing beliefs and practices and 'telling them' how they might change these. Some clues to resolving these conundrums may be found in the wider 'educational change' and 'teacher education' literatures, some of which we have cited above.

The findings presented in this article suggest a number of potential avenues for further research. It might be valuable, for example, to explore the extent to which judgementoring in teacher education is prevalent in different educational systems and to further examine its causes, while longitudinal studies might usefully track the impact of various types of 'mentoring' in education (including both judgementoring and what we have argued is a more appropriate, developmental approach) over time, including on mentees' development of learnacy. In the meantime, we conclude by suggesting that, where some of our findings 'ring true' to readers in other contexts worldwide and/or when aspects of the context are similar, some of our recommendations may also be applicable. Where contexts differ and our findings do not reflect mentoring practices in those contexts, we would nonetheless suggest that policy-makers and practitioners in those education systems too might profitably seek to ensure that the conditions for effective mentoring we have discussed are created and maintained. More specifically, in a global environment in which policy initiatives introduced in some systems frequently find their way into others (Hulme, 2005; Wedell, 2009), we would urge them to seek to ensure that a culture of judgementoring is not allowed to develop and take hold.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

[1] By initial teacher preparation (ITP) we refer to what is also known as initial teacher education (ITE), initial teacher training (ITT) and pre-service training. We have explained our preference for the use of this term elsewhere (Hobson *et al.*, 2008).

[2] School Direct is a new school-based ITP route in which schools or partnerships of schools, working with an accredited training provider which may be HEI or non-HEI-led, request 'training places' directly (from central government) and determine the content and focus of the ITP programme (Teaching Agency, 2013).

[3] We refer to 'qualitative' research in inverted commas to acknowledge that the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methods and data are exaggerated (Hammersley, 1996).

[4] Survey data were generated in collaboration with colleagues from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), as part of their Teacher Voice Omnibus November 2011 survey. For further information, see Hobson *et al.* (2012).

[5] Few discernible differences were found between ITP and NTI regarding the nature, potential causes or consequences of negative experiences of mentoring: aside from the issue of 'fragmentation', which we discuss in relation to ITP, the issues were broadly the same.

[6] This concern is addressed more fully, and in relation to teachers' professional learning and development more generally, in Hobson and McIntyre (2013).

[7] Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) is the non-ministerial government department of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools In England (HMCI), which inspects and regulates services providing care for children and young people, and education and skills for learners of all ages.

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