Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Untangling the complexity of mentoring feedback practices in post-compulsory initial teacher education in the UK

Dr. Clare Tyrer ●ID

Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation, University of Westminster, London, UK

ABSTRACT

In post-compulsory initial teacher education (ITE) in the UK, mentors are purported to play a critical role in shaping trainee teachers' professional development through the provision of regular, constructive and purposeful feedback on their mentee's teaching practices. However, the complexity of mentoring feedback practices – socially, spatially and temporally – situated within programmatical and institutional architectures and in the turbulent landscape of Further Education (FE), is often underestimated. Using the theory of practice architectures, this single-site case study attempts to untangle this complexity as it explores how mentoring feedback practices were realised on one post-compulsory ITE programme, examining the processes, arrangements and artefacts which enabled and constrained their enactment. The site ontological approach also examines the dynamic unfolding of mentoring feedback practices in response to these institutional conditions in time and space, concluding that their trajectory largely depends on the 'stickiness' of their relationship and congruence with other organisational practices and concerns.

Introduction

Post-compulsory education in the UK caters for a vast cohort of students from the age of fourteen upwards, with an emphasis on vocational curricula. It encompasses further education (FE) and sixth form colleges, higher education (HE), work-based provision and adult community settings. Against a backdrop of neoliberal intervention imperatives which advocate minimal state interventions and favour quantifiable and measurable teaching and assessment, the monitoring of initial teacher education (ITE) in post-compulsory education has been placed under new and increasing forms of pressure. Under the remit of Ofsted since the early 2000s, inspections of FE colleges have led to revisions in teacher training standards and qualifications and a shift in the role of mentors in ITE. With an emphasis on meeting targets, conformity to 'best practice' strategies (Coffield and Edward 2009) and assessment of trainee teachers' performance, mentoring has increasingly assumed judgemental and summative dimensions (Manning and Hobson 2017).

Although post-compulsory ITE in the UK largely replicates a school-based model of mentoring, in which subject mentors play a pivotal role in supporting trainee teachers, it is structured, administered and conceptualised differently (Tummons and Ingleby 2012). Firstly, entry routes into PCET (post-compulsory education and training) are more flexible given the focus on the vocational nature of FE. Programmes are usually part-time and in-service, with 'trainee' teachers recruited on account of their vocational experience and qualifications rather than a need for graduate status. Secondly, the concept of a subject specialist in FE is nebulous considering the range of academic and

CONTACT Clare Tyrer ✉ c.tyrer@westminster.ac.uk 🏛 University of Westminster, London, UK

vocational provision; the overlap between disciplines means sourcing a mentor with the same subject specialism is problematic (Hankey 2004). There is also no guarantee that mentors will be able to tap into their often tacit subject 'pedagogical knowledge' (Shulman 1986, 6) and articulate it in feedback discussions whilst encouraging their mentee to exude agency: to reflect on their practices and experiment with different teaching and learning approaches.

The nature of mentoring feedback in ITE

In post-compulsory ITE, key responsibilities of mentors include undertaking observations of their mentee's teaching and engaging in feedback practices. Feedback is generally considered to be a valuable and impactful component of the observation process (O'Leary 2020) and trainee teachers' professional development (Hobson 2016; McGraw and Davis 2017). Provided appropriate conditions of enactment are in place with the adoption of a dialogic rather than performance-driven approach, directed by the needs of the trainee teacher (O'Leary 2020), mentoring feedback can potentially stimulate critical reflection and inquiry (Hobson 2016; Jones et al. 2021; McGraw and Davis 2017) and enhance both practitioners' teaching and learning practices (O'Leary 2020).

Regarding how feedback should be positioned in the mentoring process, a monological transmission and hierarchical model, in which mentors are cast as experts and mentees as passive recipients, has largely been criticised in the teacher education discourse (Jones et al. 2021; Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015). Directive feedback may be valued by trainees, particularly in the initial stages of their professional development as it offers a quick fix to immediate challenges (Wang and Odell 2002). However, such an instrumental approach to feedback, based on the unidirectional transmission of knowledge and skills, is likely to result in the emulation of normative institutional practices (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015) and, thus, decentre mentee agency. It also reinforces the rhetoric of 'good' and 'best' practice in teaching and learning: that there are certain strategies which 'work' and can be replicated and transferred from one educational setting to another (Coffield and Edward 2009). The idea that teaching can be neatly packaged into a set of techniques and 'delivered' to trainee teachers is an attractive one for institutions in a neoliberal political landscape as it implies both efficiency (Nicoll and Harrison 2003) and conformity. However, these dominant discourses facilitate the production and reproduction of particular language ideologies and, thus, constrain the way mentors and mentees talk about and enact their teaching and learning practices.

A monological directive approach to feedback, therefore, is not considered to be a valuable, sustainable option for trainee teachers' professional development (Hobson 2016; Hobson and Malderez 2013; Manning and Hobson 2017). The articulation of feedback as a collaborative, democratic, dialogic and inquiry-focused practice is well documented in recent mentoring and teacher education literature (Jones et al. 2021; Manning and Hobson 2017; Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015; Payne 2018) and reflected in ITE policy documentation (OfSTED 2020, 42) which outlines the principles and purposes of feedback, embedded within the role of the mentor: 'They [trainees] receive regular, focused feedback and are supported through focused and challenging discussion'.

Despite this rhetoric of collaboration and inquiry in feedback practices, mentoring in FE is largely conducted as an individualistic professional developmental practice, disengaged from other institutional practices and the wider socio-political context (Colley 2003). Feedback practices, however, do not operate in isolation from the realisation of other practices. They co-exist and are dependent on multiple practices operating simultaneously in the institution. Take as an example the co-ordination and scheduling of mentoring feedback, dependent on, what Shove, Pantzar, and Watson (2012, 86) call the 'spatial and temporal aspects of inter-practice co-ordination'. Securing a confidential classroom or office space for feedback depends on whether it is being used for teaching practices or staff activity. Arranging time to meet depends on the mentoring participants' teaching timetables, managerial and administrative responsibilities. Bundles of feedback practices, therefore, interlink and overlap with other bundles of institutional practices, sometimes in alignment, sometimes in competition, dependent on power positions, values and contextual priorities.

In addition, the norms and procedural conditions of the observation and feedback process shape the enactment of mentoring feedback. Lesson observations are followed by a 'debriefing process' (Harrison, Lawson, and Wortley 2005, 290), involving a routinised procedural pattern: oral followed by written feedback congruent with prescribed assessment criteria and mediated by the feedback artefact. Compounded by institutional constraints including the mentoring practitioners' workload , feedback may be directed towards the technicalities of teaching rather than mentors adopting a dialogic approach to encouragementees to challenge assumptions about 'effective' pedagogical practices. Thismay also result in changes to the status quo (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015).

A greater institutional commitment to mentoring is not new, espoused by, among others, Cunningham (2007) and Hobson and Maxwell (2020) but is more relevant than ever given the increasing demands placed on mentors, evidenced in recent Ofsted ITE documentation (OfSTED 2020). In a performative culture, if feedback is largely squeezed into the priorities of the workplace, this shapes both the dispositions and practices of mentors (Kemmis et al. 2014a) as they, possibly unconsciously, position themselves as mouthpieces of the institution on the grounds of expediency. Given trainee teachers' insecure working conditions as they are forced to accept voluntary teaching placements to meet the prerequisite teaching hours of ITE programmes, mentees too may opt for 'tactical compliance' (Orr 2012, 58) to avoid risking disharmony in the mentoring relationship and possibly their chance to attain a post-compulsory teaching qualification.

Situated within the theoretical framework of practice architectures, this single-site case study aims to examine the often underestimated complexity of mentoring feedback – the discursive, social, material and political aspects of the practice – in its exploration of the site-based conditions, the processes, arrangements and artefacts, which enable and constrain its enactment in post-compulsory ITE. It also investigates how mentoring feedback practices unfolded during one post-compulsory in-service ITE programme in England.

Examining mentoring feedback through the lens of the theory of practice architectures

'We live our lives in practices' (Kemmis 2019, 31)

The opening quote, following Schatzki (2013), draws attention to the different aspects which shape our lives as individuals: the interconnected activities we undertake; the social and geographical spaces we occupy; the language and objects we use; and the relationships we form, all 'interwoven with the lives and lifespaces we encounter at different moments in time and different locations in space' (Kemmis 2019, 65). This notion of intersubjectivity, how our existence is enmeshed with arrangements, pre-existing or brought to a site, is the fundamental premise of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008; Kemmis et al. 2014b; Mahon et al. 2017). It is concerned with how practices 'happen' in their settings, shaped by enabling and constraining practice arrangements. This marks a shift in ontological emphasis from examining a social phenomenon such as mentoring feedback as an idealised entity to how it unfolds in real time and space.

Practices are conceived as bundles of sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis et al. 2014b), amalgamated in the project of a practice: its intentions, actions and ends, which may or may not be attainable (*ibid*, p.155). There is no guarantee, however, that individuals will share the same contextual concerns or interpret the aims of a project in the same way. This necessitates, therefore, a consideration of how mentoring practitioners exercise discretion at the local level, how they react to and undertake activities in their sites, and how these impact on other practices and arrangements. For example, although mentors may have received some guidance on how to undertake a lesson observation and provide feedback, they are likely to perceive the project differently from the ITE programme co-ordinator; these practices will be enacted at least partly in accordance with their self-interests. Therefore, a practice encompasses both subjective and intersubjective forces: practices are instrumental in moulding individual identities but they are also driven by personal interests.

By analysing the overlapping cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrange-ments that prefigure and hold a practice in place, the researcher is better positioned to investigate which aspects are supported and hindered by contextual conditions. For example, the establishment of a college-wide mentoring ethos links to the cultural-discursive dimensions of the practice: whether mentoring is embedded in institutional teacher professional development practices or perceived as a discrete entity. What is said and deemed appropriate to say in feedback conversations, as mentoring practitioners encounter one another in semantic space (Kemmis et al. 2014b), is influenced by educational discourses, culture and practice traditions. These emerge over time and shape the 'sayings' of feedback but do not determine how the practice unfolds. One example is the mentor asking the mentee to voice their reflections of the lesson that has been observed. This is generally considered a normalised strategy, based on historical feedback practices and pertinent to the overarching project of ITE. However, it may also be construed as paying lip-service to the dialogic nature of feedback rather than both participants truly engaging in critical discussion.

Attending to the localised material-economic arrangements in the site links to the 'doings' of feedback practices. These are concerned with what is possible, difficult or impossible to do given the physical set-up of the environment (the positioning of tables and chairs and access to a whiteboard, for example), the affordances and constraints of artefacts used in the process, and the time allocated for the lesson observation and the provision of oral feedback. This entanglement of embodied actions and material arrangements shapes how feedback is enacted and reproduced. Although the feedback practice, involving routinised activities, discourses and relationships, is likely to be familiar to the mentoring participants, its trajectory will vary from moment to moment and location to location, dependent on which combination of arrangements in the site are in existence (Kemmis et al. 2014b; Mahon et al. 2017). Feedback practices are also shaped by what is brought to the site (such as new technologies designed to enable the work of the practitioners), new 'sayings' (for example, governmental or institutional policies) and who is present. If, for example, a line manager is privy to mentoring feedback conversations, this will inevitably influence the degree of openness of the feedback and the nature of the relationship.

The 'relatings' of the feedback practice, how people relate to each other and the world, are facilitated and hindered by the social-political arrangements in the site. Mentoring entails complex webs of power relations, linked to the different roles undertaken by mentors and mentees. A mentee with a line manager as mentor, for example, may be subject to greater surveillance of their teaching and, thus, more inclined to 'play the game' in the feedback process, remaining relatively compliant rather than openly challenging the mentor's feedback. Conversely, it may be that a line manager has a greater vested interest in the progress of the mentee and is, therefore, able to build rapport and allocate more time for feedback than an overworked colleague. Social-political arrangements are also concerned with the rules, structures and regulations which govern mentoring feedback prac-tices, including asymmetrical turn-taking patterns and implicit acceptance of the mentor's authority. Finally, the way the mentoring practitioners position themselves in the organisation: the extent to which they agree with its ethos and policies and feel valued, all shape and are shaped by the 'relatings' of the practice.

The 'case': mentoring feedback practices on an in-service initial teacher development programme

This practice-based study adopted a 'light touch' (Trowler 2019) ethnographic approach to the investigation of mentoring feedback practices on a two-year part-time in-service post-compulsory ITE programme in England to attain a comprehensive understanding of how contextual conditions shaped their sustainability and development. A prerequisite for participants on this programme was to be employed as a teacher, paid or on a voluntary placement, with access to a mentor in the workplace, a large FE college. It was desirable for these mentors to teach the same discipline as their mentee although, as outlined in the introduction of this paper, the complex nature of FE, with its

blurring of subject boundaries, meant that this was not always the case. As part of the ITE programme assessment requirements, four teaching observations by the mentors needed to be undertaken. Mentors were also required to familiarise themselves with the 2014 FE Professional Standards to map their feedback and facilitate the negotiation of ongoing professional development targets.

Methodology: data collection methods and analysis

The study, part of a larger research project (Tyrer 2021), was undertaken over sixteen months to devote a significant period of time to the investigation of mentoring feedback. It was, thus, a broadly longitudinal and qualitative study (Saldaña 2003), concerned with the unfolding of feedback practices in nine mentoring dyads. 'Purposive criterion sampling' (Palys 2008) was an appropriate strategy to gain rich insights into the processes, arrangements and artefacts which shaped the enactment and development of mentoring feedback practices during the ITE programme. The criteria for the selection of mentors and mentees were the following:

(1) Mentors with varying levels of experience and seniority. In this sample, three mentors also acted as the mentee's line manager. All but one of the mentees were new to teaching and had secured voluntary teaching placements and found their own mentors.
(2) Participants from different academic and vocational disciplines. Three of the mentors were not considered experts in the subject taught by the mentee.
(3) Participants who represented a diversity of ethnicity, age, gender, culture and language to ensure no groups were deliberately excluded, and to obtain a rounded picture of mentoring feedback provision.

All the mentees were involved for the duration of the study although one sourced a teaching placement in a different institution with a new mentor. Another mentee was allocated three mentors during the ITE programme, only one of whom participated in this research.

Examining mentoring feedback through a social practice lens warranted a plurality of data collection methods to capture its 'multi-faceted and complex nature' (Nicolini 2009, 196), from the 'inside' to understand feedback from the perspective of the individual practitioner, but also from the 'outside' to make sense of the interconnectivity and dynamism of practices and the impact of the wider educational and political landscape. A form of participant observation known as stimulated recall (Bloom 1953) was one way of capturing mentoring feedback interactions and, to an extent, the conditions and arrangements which supported and obstructed the process. Twelve video recordings of eight of the nine mentoring dyads' feedback conversations were undertaken and analysed in addition to four follow-up observations to explore changes in feedback practices during the ITE programme. The study was conducted in adherence to robust institutional ethical review procedures, providing participants with sufficient detail about the research, attaining their consent and ensuring confidentiality and security of information. In addition, they were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Despite these assurances, by exposing their conversations to intense scrutiny, both mentoring practitioners may have considered their practices to be under surveillance, with the video recordings a potential means of judging their capabilities in the feedback process. Conscious of potential feelings of discomfort, intrusion and vulnerability, I was not present in the mentoring feedback discussions, and strict protocols in relation to the storage and dissemination of the video recordings were implemented (O'Leary 2020).

Video recordings of the feedback conversations acted as a stimulus to facilitate participants' recall of the 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' of the practice and provoke further discussion in the form of semi-structured interviews. All the mentors and mentees were interviewed separately to mitigate power imbalances, create an environment for open discussions and enable comparison of the practitioners' interpretations of events. During these sixteen video elicitation interviews with either

the mentor or the mentee, specific instances of the video recording were played. The participants were asked to comment whether the footage typified their mentoring feedback interactions and to relay anything of significance. Discussions focused on the following aspects:

- the role of the mentoring practitioners in the feedback interactions;
- the structure and content of the feedback;
- the nature of the feedback, directive or facilitative, including opportunities for reflection;
- the material arrangements: layout of the room, space and use of artefacts.

One criticism levelled at stimulated recall techniques is the possibility of participants 'sanitising' their retrospective accounts (Lyle 2003, 864), possibly unknowingly or out of embarrassment, to promote an image of collegiality in the mentoring relationship. Another limitation is the difficulty of articulating thought processes and accessing 'tacit knowledge' (Calderhead 1981, 231) after the event. Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging the limitation of video observations and stimulated recall interviews, the complementation of both strategies proved valuable in this study. The observations offered a 'unique insider perspective' (Rowe 2009, 434) of the settings of the feedback practice, mentoring behaviours and processes involved, whereas the interviews enabled access to the practitioners' evolving understandings of mentoring feedback practices during the ITE programme.

Another method to explore the temporal-spatial dimensions of the mentoring feedback practice and any institutional conditions which facilitated or hindered its realisation was through participatory mapping (Emmel 2008). This was conducted halfway through and towards the end of the ITE programme to illuminate the connection between the bundles of practices and material arrangements that constitute mentoring feedback practices. Guided by card prompts, including the following cues: 'time, space and duration of feedback', 'the role of the mentor and mentee in the feedback practice' and 'content of feedback', twelve participants from six of the mentoring dyads produced visual representations of their understandings of mentoring feedback practices as enacted during the ITE programme. As with the video recordings of the feedback interactions, these drawings acted as a catalyst for discussion, enabling the interviewer and participant to co-construct meaning as it emerged during the narrative. The drawings within each of the six mentoring dyads were compared to identify recurrent processes, themes and patterns, and any variation in experience during the unfolding of feedback practices.

A combination of deductive, inductive and abductive approaches were used in the analysis of the data. Informed by the theory of practice architectures, broad analytic themes were mapped to the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements which shaped the 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' of mentoring feedback practices. Inductive reasoning was also deployed to avoid confirmation bias and to identify emergent themes from the data. As a result of this interaction between deductive and inductive approaches, new classifications and concepts were developed, refined and distilled into new categories and sub-categories (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Cognisant of the fallibility of knowledge, I also turned to abductive reasoning to pose questions about the rules, rituals, and conditions constitutive of mentoring feedback practices, seeking new understandings and meaningful conclusions. As an example, scrutinising the participants' visual maps of mentoring feedback practices generated semiotic insights into the practitioners' discovery of self during the ITE programme, not only through linguistic representations but also visual icons such as capitalisation of letters, font size, compositional arrangements of boxes, arrows, and drawings.

In the discussion of the findings in the subsequent sections, a selection of the mentoring practitioners' perceptions, beliefs, and doings are illustrated in the form of 'moving vignettes' (Ely et al. 1997). Representing the data in the form of mini-narratives enabled the site ontology, bundles of human practices and material arrangements, (Schatzki 2002, 2003) to come to the fore. The vignettes also highlight the in addition to highlighting vertical forces, underlying societal structures and mechanisms, (Trowler 2019), which shaped the mentoring feedback practice. Excerpts of the post-

observation mentoring feedback interactions are provided to support the narratives and, thus, strengthen the robustness of the practice methodology. For ease of clarity, the transcriptions are punctuated along with other discourse, including paralinguistic, features, such ashesitations, interruptions, overlaps and gestures, to capture the embodied nature of feedback. A list of transcription symbols is provided in Figure S1. Finally, pseudonymised quotes from the research participants are embedded in the vignettes.

Findings

Sadia and Hamida (mentor and mentee, education studies)

Sadia was new to mentoring and thrown into the practice after Hamida's previous mentor left the institution. The one training session for the mentors organised by the accrediting university of the ITE programme had focused on the procedural aspects of the feedback process – arranging meetings, completing the observation form and referencing the Professional Standards. The cultural-discursive arrangements of the observation process were iteratively shaped by the language used in the mentoring handbook: the importance of establishing fluid and developmental mentoring processes. However, although adjectives such as 'constructive' and 'non-threatening' formed part of the lexicon of feedback in the programme documentation and were reiterated in the initial training session for mentors, there was still an evaluative element to the observation practice. Mentors were required to make a binary distinction between pass and fail in the summative judgment of the mentee's competencies. In fact, the grading of lessons had become such a normative practice in the institution, key to internal quality assurance processes, that Sadia automatically assumed that the mentor observation would also be graded, as highlighted in the excerpt below:

Sadia: So these are my feedbacks [looks at observation form] I think it was a good lesson and

Hamida: [smiles] Hey

Sadia: Yes [. . .] it was more than satisfactory

Hamida: [laughs]

Sadia: In terms of overall grading I think it was a good lesson

An observation awarded a grade three for institutional quality assurance purposes, equated to the qualitative judgment, 'needs improvement', and carried particular consequences. Conscious of the anxiety that teaching staff felt being subjected to an institutional observation grading system, Sadia sought to provide reassurance and build solidarity in the social space. Nevertheless, consistent with the 'public transcript' (Scott 1990) of institutional talk, the power influence attached to the role of feedback-giver is evident in the extract. Both parties tacitly acknowledged the hierarchical power relationship and their social positioning in the mentoring relationship. Hamida's emotive responses and gestures suggest that she welcomed confirmation of her teaching performance in alignment with institutional quality assurance procedures, the latter point highlighted in the video elicitation interview when talk of lesson grading was mentioned:

> I think she was trying to prepare me for graded observations because I know that other people . . . observe you and that will be graded and put down.

The utterance 'put down', the written documentation of teaching grades linked to staff appraisal, emphasises not only the impact of pre-determined practices and practice arrangements on the enactment of mentoring feedback, but also the structural elements which shaped these practice bundles. Here, it was the vertical flow of influence that was particularly significant (Trowler 2019): how local mentoring practices were situated within wider national discourses and policies. In this

vignette, the influence of neoliberal education policies, and their auditing and accountability discourses and practices, were clearly manifested in organisational quality assurance processes which permeated institutional teaching and interrelated mentoring practices.

The physical space-time dimension was also pertinent to the realisation of the observation practice. Given that mentors attached to the in-service ITE programme were not released from their teaching commitments, arranging regular informal observations with the mentee outside of their timetabled hours was challenging. Therefore, only the four formal, mandatory mentor observations were organised by Sadia and Hamida. In addition, as the mentoring practitioners shared a communal staffroom, for the purpose of confidentiality, an office had to be loaned for the feedback session. A lack of familiarity with the environment coupled with time pressures contributed to less dialogic feedback practices than are recommended in recent mentoring feedback literature (Jones et al. 2021; Manning and Hobson 2017; Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015) and perhaps originally envisaged by the participants themselves.

In terms of the socio-material dimension of feedback, the observation pro-forma as a mediational tool (Wertsch 1998) created and hindered possibilities for action. Its highly structured design, with explicit reference to the Professional Standards, facilitated standardisation of the feedback but hampered its free-flowing nature and any opportunities to deviate off-topic. Constrained by time, Sadia wrote up her observations of Hamida's lessons prior to the spoken feedback discussions and these written comments largely determined the agenda of the discussion: the content of the feedback; the order of topics; and patterns of interaction. The locus of control was, therefore, with the mentor as Hamida, who wanted to protect her precarious employment situation in the institution, acted in a way which best served her personal interests. She was not, however, a 'passive "slave" of structural pressures' (Røpke 2009, 2491) but rather exercised her agency in relation to institutional and programmatic enabling and constraining conditions.

Maryam, Lisa and Anna (mentors and mentee, beauty therapy)

Anna was the only trainee teacher in this study to leave the institution because of the relationship with her first mentor. For her, the material-economic arrangements of the voluntary teaching placement constrained her professional growth. As a 'guest lecturer' she was not able to teach without supervision, and she commented how she felt under constant scrutiny and evaluation, which affected her self-esteem.

For Anna, mentoring in its institutional embodiment within the FE college was not a supportive mechanism and she decided to source a teaching placement at a different organisation. The practice architectures at the new institution, which prefigured the teaching and mentoring practices, were perceived as significantly more enabling than in the previous locale. These were particularly evident in terms of supporting her emotional well-being and opening doors to professional networks and development opportunities. In the feedback sessions, she was encouraged to reflect on her 'mistakes' and explore new pedagogical approaches, independently and with others. She felt buoyed by these new interlocking practices and arrangements: ongoing support from her mentor; access to other practitioners' knowledge and resources; and socialisation into the department:

> They're building my confidence and I'm learning from my colleagues, how they deal with things. I feel now that I don't have one mentor. I feel like they're all hugging me.

Connected to these enabling social-political arrangements – a space of solidarity and a web of mentoring relationships – were the material-economic arrangements. Both formal and informal observations were undertaken and feedback was relatively informal, sometimes over coffee or in the mentor's office. Previously, Anna had felt the need to ask for feedback rather than it being embedded in the observation process.

In following Anna's mentoring journey across time and space, it was possible to observe how feedback practices travelled from one site to another: how they intersected with existing practices and arrangements. As observations and feedback practices are shaped by educational practice traditions, processes of enactment in both sites were likely to share some similarities. However, they evolved differently amongst the existent site-based practice architectures, involving variations in how they were understood and discussed, the activities involved and how people related to each other. In the second site of practice, collaboration was perceived as central to staff professional development embedded in a range of working practices, from departmental meetings, peer observations and sharing of resources. Thus, it was the dynamic interrelationship between the sayings, doings and relatings of mentoring feedback practices, how these co-ordinated and converged with other departmental practices and arrangements, that left a considerable imprint on Anna's professional trajectory.

Katie and Ngozi (mentor and mentee, health and social care)

Katie had completed her PGCE (Professional Graduate Certificate in Education) qualification at the FE institution and had moved swiftly up the organisational ranks to become Curriculum Team Leader of Health and Social Care, situated in the Access department. She conceptualised the mentoring role in terms of her 'sink or swim' experience of being mentored on the ITE programme. She also acknowledged its complex multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature as mentoring was nested within other practices in the Access department: those concerned with administration; teaching and learning; and leadership.

One material-economic arrangement that enabled the mentoring feedback practice was related to its temporal-spatial aspects. Kate would regularly drop into Ngozi's lessons as an informal means of providing support and an assuring presence. This practice was deliberately 'materials-light'; Katie did not formally record anything during these observations to keep the process non-evaluative and non-threatening. Mentoring feedback discussions were mostly held at the end of the day when she knew the staffroom would be empty. The whiteboard artefact in the physical space afforded opportunities for discussion as Katie was able to model behaviours and demonstrate tangible examples to support her feedback. This highlights the intimate relationship between the embodiment of the practice and materiality: how the whiteboard tool and human action were mutually entangled in the mentoring feedback practice, mediating discussion and creating a space for shared understandings.

Ngozi explained how these temporal-spatial practice arrangements facilitated her professional growth:

> It was an enabling environment as there were no distractions. She [the mentor] was able to explain and I could ask questions. Everything I've learned has helped me to form my understanding of teaching and . . . . who I am.

These material-economic practice arrangements, therefore, created pathways for Ngozi's professional socialisation enmeshed within the broader practice architectures of the institution. Over time, with these opportunities for informal learning, unfamiliar pedagogical practices gradually became routinised and embedded into her existing teaching repertoires. Ngozi's comments also highlight how the epistemological and ontological dimensions of a practice are inextricably connected. She learned to understand teaching and learning by being immersed in the practices of the site ontology with 'things and others' (Dall'Alba and Barnacle 2007, 6).

Nevertheless, echoing the experience of the previous vignettes, the localised material-economic practice arrangements, particularly the work pressures to which mentors were subject, considerably shaped the unfolding of mentoring feedback practices. Katie was torn between conforming to established rules of behaviour – the ritualistic nature of providing feedback with its pre-determined interactional procedures and power differentials – and providing her mentee with opportunities to engage in genuine reflection processes and, thus, exercise her individual agency. In the following excerpt, for example, Katie appears conflicted between initiating spaces for dialogue and pushing her, and indirectly, the institutional or programmatic agenda:

Katie: Did you think you modelled within the lesson this time?

Ngozi: Well, we did some of the modelling yesterday like getting them prepared for what they're going to talk [about

Katie: [But within this lesson . . .. Did you feel that you modelled in this session or do you feel that maybe you can model a little bit more in your session?

Ngozi: Okay, maybe I could model a little bit more

Katie: The reason why I say that is because you gave an introduction which is great. However, there was a point where the students were like I didn't know I had to do that and you had to go around and reorganise which was great so when you saw some people . . ..down here [points to the front of the room] who aren't understanding . . . and you said okay let me stop. I'm going to go back down to the front . . . and I'm going to reiterate my instructions . . . so I think you managed well-devised, appropriate solutions there but to avoid that happening in the future, model what you want them to do so show them exactly how you want them to run the discussion.

Katie's initial question, 'Did you think you modelled within this lesson this time?' indicates a tentative move towards approaching a delicate topic. Ngozi's comment is interrupted and Katie fosters agreement through an essentially rhetorical question: 'Do you feel that maybe you can model a little bit more in your sessions?' albeit one replete with hedging devices: 'do you think?', 'maybe', 'could' and 'a little bit' to diminish its impact. Ngozi's responses suggest mimetic compliance, superficially 'playing the game', and Katie continues to be uneasy with the authoritative role bestowed on her as she shifts between providing praise and direction.

This snippet of the micro-interactions between mentor and mentee typified the relational dynamics observed in the study. Phatic talk was kept to a minimum, possibly because both parties were conscious of self- and external surveillance, of not doing what was expected: engaging in 'purposeful' interactions about teaching and learning in a time pressurised environment. From a site ontological perspective, the excerpt also underlines the isolationist practice arrangements and conditions under which the mentors worked. Mentoring feedback practices, despite their interrelationship with other sets of practice in the institution, were hindered by a lack of arrangements designed to support their enactment. These included limited training in the cultural-discursive dimensions of feedback to facilitate a shared understanding of its purposes and practices; no formalised provision of time and space; and the perpetuation of mentoring as a dyadic relationship. In tacitly promoting mentoring as a set of 'discrete and disconnected events' (Feiman-Nemser 2001, 1049), it only exacerbated a broader discourse and culture of professional isolation (A´vila de Lima 2003) in the institution.

Discussion

Drawing on the theory of practice architectures, this study sought to respond to two research questions. The first enquired about the programmatic and institutional processes, arrangements and artefacts which enabled and constrained mentoring feedback practices on one post-compulsory ITE programme. The second asked how these practices unfolded in response to internal and external conditions. The pre-defined categories of the theory of practice architectures, cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements, facilitated a holistic understanding of the sustainable conditions necessary for mentoring feedback practices to flourish and align with the programmatic aim of professional development. Nevertheless, it was not always possible to categorise the findings from the data into three neat pillars for empirical analysis. As is clear from the vignettes, multiple sets of practices overlapped, opening up avenues of possibility and closing down others and, thus, bundles of practice arrangements could conceivably fall into one or more of these three categories. As an example, the practice of graded observations had a powerful and potentially

anxiety-inducing effect on the trainee teachers, perceived as a performance management practice to assess their teaching capabilities (O'Leary 2020). It also clearly shaped the mentoring feedback discourse: a focus on 'good practice' strategies, aligned with institutional teaching practices. As a social-political arrangement, the practice of graded observations in the institution shaped the way the participants positioned themselves in the mentoring relationship. Mentoring in a culture of performativity highlights the complex interplay of roles that mentors are expected to adopt in the feedback process as they attempt to balance facilitation with an institutional gatekeeping role. This also makes reducing the asymmetry in the relationship difficult, a key principle of democratic and dialogic mentoring practices (Jones et al. 2021; Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015; Payne 2018). Mentees too may be reluctant to engage in dialogic and critical reflective practices in the feedback conversations as any cognitive dissonance could mean jeopardising their teaching placement. They may opt instead for 'strategic silence' (Hobson and McIntyre 2013, 352), conscious of how their individual performance is related to the wider institutional agenda.

Regarding the interconnection between the socio-material arrangements and mentoring feedback practices, recurring themes emerged: the significance of geographical and social space; temporal dimensions, including the regularity of feedback opportunities and the time reserved for the spoken discussions; and access to suitable training. The dynamic interplay of practice arrangements and the materiality and enactment of artefacts in the feedback interactions was also notable, particularly the use of the observation pro-forma. Its design had been influenced by the historical policy context, with the 2014 Professional Standards interwoven into each labelled section of the form. This brought with it a certain familiarity and reassurance for the mentoring practitioners but also a predictability of response and action. Thus, the material artefact offered both affordances and constrained opportunities for mentee engagement as particular practices and power relations were reproduced through its use. The mentor largely dictated the organisation and discursive content of the feedback, reinforcing a monological approach to feedback (Jones et al. 2021; Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015) which heightened the gap in status between the 'expert' provider of feedback, the more knowledgeable mentor, and the 'novice' trainee teacher (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015). In addition, the degree to which the mediational tool promoted mentee reflection was debatable. The form's headings potentially acted as a catalyst for discussion but this depended on a plurality of aspects: the time available for feedback; the mentors' capabilities to elicit rather than transmit information; the trainee teacher's placement status; and the nature of the practitioners' relationship.

The second research question asked how mentoring feedback practices unfolded during the ITE programme. Examining how these transpired at different stages of the mentee's professional development illuminated the influence of the mentoring feedback practices' ecological relationship with other practices in the institution (Kemmis et al. 2014b; Mahon et al. 2017). Some institutional practices carried more dominance than others such as those connected with quality assurance processes. These, therefore, prefigured the practice architectures of mentoring feedback although they did not necessarily determine its development. Nevertheless, the realisation and sustainability of mentoring feedback practices in the institution depended on their congruence with other institutional practices and concerns which shaped, for example, the ease or difficulty of arranging lesson observations and subsequent feedback discussions, the deployment of resources and the level of prescription regarding pedagogical support.

Finally, the practitioners' previous histories, values, and capabilities influenced the direction of mentoring feedback, in how practices and arrangements were sustained, modified, and occasionally transformed in response to individuals' needs and institutional priorities. The mentoring practitioners' dispositions and commitments were also shaped through practising feedback in the stie. A key example of this was by participating in the outcomes-driven assessment of the mentee's teaching, mentors were obliged to prioritise compliance with programmatic processes and external standards over the developmental and self-regulatory aspects of feedback, resulting in a more 'judgemental' approach (Hobson and Malderez 2013; Hobson 2016). Contrary to the projected aims of mentoring feedback as democratic and dialogic (Jones et al. 2021; Payne 2018) situated in

much of the recent post-compulsory ITE discourse, these predominantly assessment practices perpetuated the hegemonic ideology of mentoring as 'supervision' (Kemmis et al. 2014a) rather than as collaborative professional development.

Conclusion

In the current neoliberal educational climate, the onus is largely on the mentoring practitioners to make the relationship 'work', with feedback construed as a dialogic, constructive and reciprocal process yet with a clear, instrumental focus: to meet standardised outcomes. If we want to move away from a technical-rationalist approach to teacher development to one which is more fluid (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor 2015), we need to scrutinise what is around us to be better positioned to negotiate the requisite 'conditions of possibility' (Mahon et al. 2017) within which new discourses, actions and ways of relating can become the norm. In unveiling the impact of site-based factors on the mentoring feedback enactment on one ITE programme, specifically how it was facilitated and hindered by institutional practice architectures, this study aims to broaden the debate on mentoring provision in post-compulsory teacher development. By foregrounding the significance of the co-ordination, connection and flow of practices, it highlights how mentoring feedback needs to be orchestrated in conjunction with a conglomeration of institutional practices and arrangements for it to play a critical mediating role – both ontologically and epistemologically – in the development of trainee teachers' pedagogical practices and their professional selves.

Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

Clare Tyrer is a Lecturer in Academic Professional Development at the University of Westminster. Her main research interests are in post-compulsory and higher education teacher development, particularly mentoring and feedback practices.

ORCID

Dr. Clare Tyrer http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7720-6523

References

A´vila de Lima, J. 2003. "Trained for Isolation: The Impact of Departmental Cultures on Student Teachers' Views and Practices of Collaboration." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 29 (3): 197–217. doi:10.1080/0260747032000120105.

Bloom, B. S. 1953. "Thought Processes in Lectures and Discussions." *Journal of General Education* 7: 160–169.

Calderhead, J. 1981. "Stimulated Recall: A Method for Research on Teaching." *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 51 (2): 211–217. doi:10.1111/j.2044-8279.1981.tb02474.x.

Coffield, F., and S. Edward. 2009. "Rolling Out 'Good', 'Best' and 'Excellent' Practice. What Next? Perfect Practice?" *British Educational Research Journal* 35 (3): 371–390. doi:10.1080/01411192802044396.

Colley, H. 2003. *Mentoring for Social Inclusion: A Critical Approach to Nurturing Mentoring Relationships*. Oxon: Routledge.

Cunningham, B. 2007. "All the Right Features: Towards an 'Architecture' for Mentoring Trainee Teachers in UK Further Education Colleges." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 33 (1): 83–97. doi:10.1080/02607470601098351.

Dall'Alba, G., and R. Barnacle. 2007. "An Ontological Turn for Higher Education." *Studies in Higher Education* 32 (6): 679–691. doi:10.1080/03075070701685130.

Ely, M., R. Vinz, M. Downing, and M. Anzul. 1997. *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words*. London: Falmer.

Emmel, N. D. 2008. "Participatory Mapping: An Innovative Sociological Method." *ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Toolkit*, July 2008.

Feiman-Nemser, S. 2001. "From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching." *Teachers College Record* 103 (6): 1013–1055. doi:10.1111/0161-4681.00141.

Hammersley, M., and P. Atkinson. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

Hankey, J. 2004. "The Good, the Bad and Other Considerations: Reflections on Mentoring Trainee Teachers in post-compulsory Education." *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 9 (3): 389–400. doi:10.1080/13596740400200185.

Harrison, J., T. Lawson, and A. Wortley. 2005. "Facilitating the Professional Learning of New Teachers through Critical Reflection on Practice during Mentoring Meetings." *European Journal of Teacher Education* 28 (3): 267–292. doi:10.1080/02619760500269392.

Hobson, A. J., and A. Malderez. 2013. "Judgementoring and Other Threats to Realizing the Potential of School-based Mentoring in Teacher Education." *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 2 (2): 89–108. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-03-2013-0019.

Hobson, A. J., and J. McIntyre. 2013. "Teacher Fabrication as an Impediment to Professional Learning and Development: The External Mentor Antidote." *Oxford Review of Education* 39 (3): 345–365. doi:10.1080/03054985.2013.808618.

Hobson, A.J. 2016. "Judgementoring and How to Avert It: Introducing ONSIDE Mentoring for Beginning Teachers." *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 5 (2): 87–110. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-03-2016-0024.

Hobson, A. J., and B. Maxwell. 2020. "Mentoring Substructures and Superstructures: An Extension and Reconceptualization of the Architecture for Teacher Mentoring." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46 (2): 184–206. doi:10.1080/02607476.2020.1724653.

Jones, L., S. Tones, G. Foulkes, and R. C. Jones. 2021. "Associate Teachers' Views on Dialogic Mentoring." *Teachers and Teaching* 27 (1–4): 181–192. doi:10.1080/13540602.2021.1933421.

Kemmis, S., and P. Grootenboer. 2008. "Situating Praxis in Practice: Practice Architectures and the Cultural, Social and Material Conditions for Practice." In *Enabling Praxis: Challenges for Education*, edited by S. Kemmis and T. Smith, 37–62. Rotterdam: Sense.

Kemmis, S., H. L. T. Heikkinen, G. Fransson, J. Aspfors, and C. Edwards-Groves. 2014a. "Mentoring of New Teachers as a Contested Practice: Supervision, Support and Collaborative self-development." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 43: 154–164. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.07.001.

Kemmis, S., J. Wilkinson, C. Edwards-Groves, I. Hardy, P. Grootenboer, and L. Bristol. 2014b. *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Singapore: Springer.

Kemmis, S. 2019. *A Practice Sensibility*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Lyle, J. 2003. "Stimulated Recall: A Report on Its Use in Naturalistic Research." *British Educational Research Journal* 29 (6): 861–878. doi:10.1080/0141192032000137349.

Mahon, K., S. Kemmis, S. Francisco, and A. Lloyd. 2017. "Introduction: Practice Theory and the Theory of Practice Architectures." In *Exploring Education and Professional Practice: Through the Lens of Practice Architectures*, edited by K. Mahon, S. Francisco, and S. Kemmis, 1–30. Singapore: Springer.

Manning, C., and A. J. Hobson. 2017. "Judgemental and Developmental Mentoring in Further Education Initial Teacher Education in England: Mentor and Mentee Perspectives." *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* 22 (4): 574–595. doi:10.1080/13596748.2017.1381377.

McGraw, A., and R. Davis. 2017. "Mentoring for pre-service Teachers and the Use of inquiry-oriented Feedback." *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 6 (1): 50–63. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-03-2016-0023.

Nahmad-Williams, L., and C. A. Taylor. 2015. "Experimenting with Dialogic Mentoring: A New Model." *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education* 4 (3): 184–199. doi:10.1108/IJMCE-04-2015-0013.

Nicolini, D. 2009. "Articulating Practice through Interview with the Double." *Management Learning* 40 (2): 195–212. doi:10.1177/1350507608101230.

Nicoll, K., and R. Harrison. 2003. "Constructing the Good Teacher in Higher Education: The Discursive Work of Standards." *Studies in Continuing Education* 25 (1): 23–35. doi:10.1080/01580370309289.

O'Leary, M. 2020. *Classroom Observation: A Guide to the Effective Observation of Teaching and Learning*. Abingdon: Routledge.

OfSTED (2020) "*Initial Teacher Education Inspection Framework and Handbook*." for use from September 2020. London, OfSTED.

Orr, K. 2012. "Coping, Confidence and Alienation: The Early Experience of Trainee Teachers in English Further Education." *Journal of Education for Teaching* 38 (1): 51–65. doi:10.1080/02607476.2012.643656.

Palys, T. 2008. "Purposive Sampling." In *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by L. M. Given, 697–698. Vol. 2. Los Angeles: Sage.

Payne, K. A. 2018. "Democratic Teachers Mentoring Novice Teachers: Enacting Democratic Practices and Pedagogy in Teacher Education." *Action in Teacher Education* 40 (2): 133–150. doi:10.1080/01626620.2018.1424052.

Røpke, I. 2009. "Theories of Practice — New Inspiration for Ecological Economic Studies on Consumption." *Ecological Economics* 68 (10): 2490–2497. doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2009.05.015.

Rowe, V. C. 2009. "Using video-stimulated Recall as a Basis for Interviews: Some Experiences from the Field." *Music Education Research* 11 (4): 425–437. doi:10.1080/14613800903390766.

Saldaña, J. 2003. *Longitudinal Qualitative Research: Analyzing Change through Time*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Schatzki, T. R. 2002. *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Exploration of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Schatzki, T. R. 2003. "A New Societist Social Ontology." *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 33 (2): 174–202. doi:10.1177/0048393103033002002.

Schatzki, T. R. 2013. "The Edge of Change: On the Emergence, Persistence and Dissolution of Practices." In *Sustainable Practices: Social Theory and climate Change*, edited by E. Shove and N. Spurling, 31–46. London: Routledge.

Scott, J. C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University).

Shove, E., M. Pantzar, and M. Watson. 2012. *The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How It Changes*. London: Sage Publications.

Shulman, L. S. 1986. "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching." *Educational Research Review* 57: 4–14.

Silverman, D. 2014. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. 5th edn ed. London: Sage.

Trowler, P. 2019. *Accomplishing Change in Teaching and Learning Regimes: Higher Education and the Practice Sensibility*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tummons, J., and E. Ingleby. 2012. "The Problematics of Mentoring, and the Professional Learning of Trainee Teachers in the English Further Education Sector." *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* 3 (1): 29–39. doi:10.4018/javet.2012010103.

Tyrer, C. (2021) *Beyond prescription, rhetoric and routine: a single-site comparative case study of the conceptualisation, enactment and development of mentoring feedback practices in post-compulsory initial teacher education*. [unpublished thesis], Lancaster University.

Wang, J., and S. J. Odell. 2002. "Mentored Learning to Teach according to standards-based Reform: A Critical Review." *Review of Educational Research* 72 (3): 481–546. doi:10.3102/00346543072003481.

Wertsch, J. V. 1998. *Mind as Action*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.