



PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Project Title:

Mentoring for success: Co-producing a meaningful workplace mentoring scheme with students and employers

Principal Investigator: Marlies Kustatscher

School / Department: Moray House School of Education and Sport / Institute for Education, Community and Society

Team members:

Student researchers: Scott Craig, Ruta Kiaukaraite, Gillian Newall

Wider research team: Luke Addison, Kristina Konstantoni, Liz Latto, Lynn McNair, Maggie Morrison, Kay Tisdall

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Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following: nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

Brief Report (maximum 500 words)

“Being a mentor is more than just overseeing work or putting a signature to a form. Mentors should be prepared to share their empirical knowledge, engage in dialogue that is not challenging maybe, but certainly provocative, encouraging students to be appropriately critical and to broaden their own knowledge and experience beyond what is discussed in class.

Not everything a student learns can be found in the textbooks and papers; much should be experienced. Particularly for university students, mentors should provide a contrast to the purely academic knowledge, personalising and demonstrating the links between theory and practice, but also recognising when the theory might fail in practice and how to manage that reality.

I believe mentors should be open to being as reflective and reflexive as the student.”

(Excerpt from interview with a workplace mentor of a student on the BA Childhood Practice)

What did you do?

The BA Childhood Practice (BACP) is a part-time work-based degree, accredited by the Scottish Social Services Council, qualifying students to work as managers in the early childhood sector in



Scotland. The majority of our approx. 100 students are from widening participation backgrounds, female, mature, in full-time employment and with caring responsibilities.

It is a professional benchmark requirement that BACP students should have a mentor in their workplace whilst undertaking the degree. However, there is little guidance on what shape this mentoring relationship should take and how it should be supported by training providers.

Research shows that successful mentoring relationships in childhood practice can improve quality of practice and staff retention (Cummins 2004) and transform pedagogy, subvert hierarchies, and contest taken-for-granted policies and practices (Hammond et al. 2015). Whilst mentoring has been shown to be important for students from marginalized groups (Cropper 2010), there is a need to further investigate the role of mentoring especially for widening participation students and students on work-based programmes. Also, while mentoring in childhood practice has shown positive effects for the mentee and the children and families they work with, there is a research gap on the benefits for the mentor (Pavia et al. 2003).

Against this gap in the literature and the particular need identified on our programme, this project established an action research partnership of staff and students on the BACP to

- a) explore the perspectives and needs of students and workplace mentors, and
- b) identify ways in which the university can support a transformative, sustainable mentoring scheme.

Our methodology included qualitative and quantitative research with students and current workplace mentors on the BACP. The study was approved by the Moray House Ethics Committee.

What did you find out?

Our project shed light on what benefits and challenges exist for both mentees and mentors, and what both of them value in their mentoring relationships. It is important to retain some flexibility in mentoring practices, as students have different needs in terms of frequency of meetings and in terms of mentoring support provided – ranging from personal support with juggling busy lives to academic support such as helping with assessments. There is however a need for making these needs and expectations transparent and clear, and further guidance from the university on what mentoring relationships can entail can help with that. There is also a need to support students to identify a mentor, especially those who may not have a supportive workplace environment.

How did you disseminate your findings?

A detailed findings report and summary flyer are in progress, to be shared at our Induction Day with the incoming student cohort as well as current students and mentors on our programme. A Teaching Matters blog contribution and journal article are in preparation.

What have been the benefits to student learning?

For the three student researchers, the project involved methodological training (designing and carrying out both qualitative and quantitative research, including analysis). For current and future BACP students and mentors, the project provides them with clearer guidance on how to identify and build a successful mentoring relationship, as well a database to approach mentors from the BACP graduates group.



How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?

While the context of the BA Childhood Practice is very particular in terms of being a part-time, work-based programme for leaders in the childhood sector, our findings are applicable to other programmes across the university. Students on any practice-based or applied programme (e.g. health, social work etc.) can clearly benefit from mentors within the sector, to aid both their professional and academic development. The model of creating a mentor database from graduates could be beneficial to students on any degree.

Who can be contacted for further details?

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