



Developing Students in Enhancing the Quality of Early Childhood Development and Education

Eunice Lumsden

eunice.lumsden@northampton.ac.uk

With thanks to Dr. Anna Cox





Introduction

- This paper reports on the findings of a mentoring project on the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree aimed at both supporting the transition process and also developing skills of leading and supporting others in the mentors.
- This paper is specifically concerned with how mentoring has supported students working towards Early Years Professional Status develop skills of leading and supporting others which are central to the role.
- It builds on and develops the good practice of the Centre for Academic Practice and the School of Social Sciences in the area of mentoring at The University of Northampton.





Literature

- Mentoring is an umbrella term used to describe a range of activities designed at supporting and developing 'others' either on a formal or informal basis.
- It is evident in all aspects of life and has its roots in Greek Mythology where it is reported that Ulysses left a family friend, Mentor, to guide his son whilst he was away at war.

(Eby *et al*, 2007; Pask and Joy, 2007; Callan, 2006)





- Callan (2006:5) suggests, it is now 'culturally embedded' and a mentor model can be seen in all aspects of life as a means supporting others develop skills and knowledge.
- Eby *et al.*, (2007:1) indicate mentoring '...is everywhere, everyone thinks they know what mentoring is, and there is an intuitive belief that mentoring works.'





- Mentoring is a diverse and complex activity that can involve hierarchical or peer relationships.
- The purpose of the relationship can be multi faceted and can involve both job specific and emotional support.
- The setting in which mentoring takes place is varied.





- The transition to Higher Education is an area where the value of the mentoring role has been recognised both nationally and internationally as an effective strategy for supporting first year students (Colvin, 2007; Terrion and Leonard, 2007).
- Mentoring has been used in a variety of ways to support the student experience and can take a variety of forms, for example face to face, virtual, individual and/or group support (Storrs *et al.*, 2008).



It has also been seen as one way in which course can address the increasing challenges in Higher Education of:

- meeting targets in relation to all aspects of the student experience
- the challenges of the widening participation agenda
- retaining students

(Fox and Stevenson, 2006; Terrion and Leonard, 2007)





In Higher Education Terrion and Leonard (2007:150) definition of peer mentoring is helpful. They describe it as:

... a helping relationship in which two individuals of similar age and/or experience come together, either informally or through formal mentoring schemes, in the pursuit of fulfilling some combination of functions that are career-related (e.g. information sharing, career strategizing) and psychosocial (e.g. confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, friendship).





Benefits of Peer Mentoring in Higher Education

- Increased motivation
- Empowerment
- Transformation of the learning process from 'private to social'
- Improved learning experience
- Organisation
- Supporting marginalised groups

(Gynnild *et al.*, 2008; Storrs *et al.*, 2008; Colvin 2007)



Skills required to be a Student Mentor

Prerequisites for being a Student Peer Mentor	Psychosocial Tasks	Career Related Function
<i>Ability and willingness to commit time</i>	<i>Communication Skills</i>	<i>Programme of study</i>
<i>Race and gender</i>	<i>Supportiveness</i>	<i>Self enhancement motivation</i>
<i>University Experience</i>	<i>Trustworthiness</i>	
<i>Academic achievement</i>	<i>Interdependent attitude to mentoring, mentee, and program staff.</i>	
<i>Prior mentoring experience</i>	<i>Empathy</i>	
	<i>Personality match with mentee</i>	
	<i>Enthusiasm</i>	
	<i>Flexibility</i>	





Therefore...

The mentoring scheme offered an opportunity to build upon previous work on peer mentoring and expand it to consider how skills of leadership and supporting others could be fostered in students embarking on a professional course.



Research Aims and Objectives

Aims

- To support the transition of Year 1 students into Higher Education and with the integrated core tasks of the course.
- To enable students on the Early Childhood Studies Degree/Early Years Professional Status develop skills in leading and supporting the professional practice of others.
- To support the employability of students.



Objectives Mentors

- To provide the opportunity for students on the ECSD/EYPS to lead and support the professional practice of others through:
 - supporting first year students through 'Welcome Week' and beyond;
 - the first assignment;
 - case studies;
 - placement preparation;
 - portfolio development;
 - placement tasks;
 - placement reflection.

Methods

Questionnaire survey of:

- Year 1 Students at the outset of the course and the end of Year 1
- Mentors (Year 3) at:
 - »the outset of the process
 - »after training
 - »end of Year





Sample

Year 1

Mentors Year 3

Start 58 Students
(Possible 64)

Finish 48 Students
(Possible 58)

17 Mentors





Mentor Skill Development

Personal/ Professional/ Academic	Number of Respondents 17	Development as an EYP	Number of Respondents 17
Confidence	100%	Professional Boundaries	69%
Provide appropriate support	68%	How to support the learning of others	67%
Developed academic skills	63%	Leadership skills	53%
Organisation/ Time management	43%	How to support effectively	37%
Interpersonal skills	37%	How to deliver constructive criticism	31%
How to advise	32%	Reflection	26%



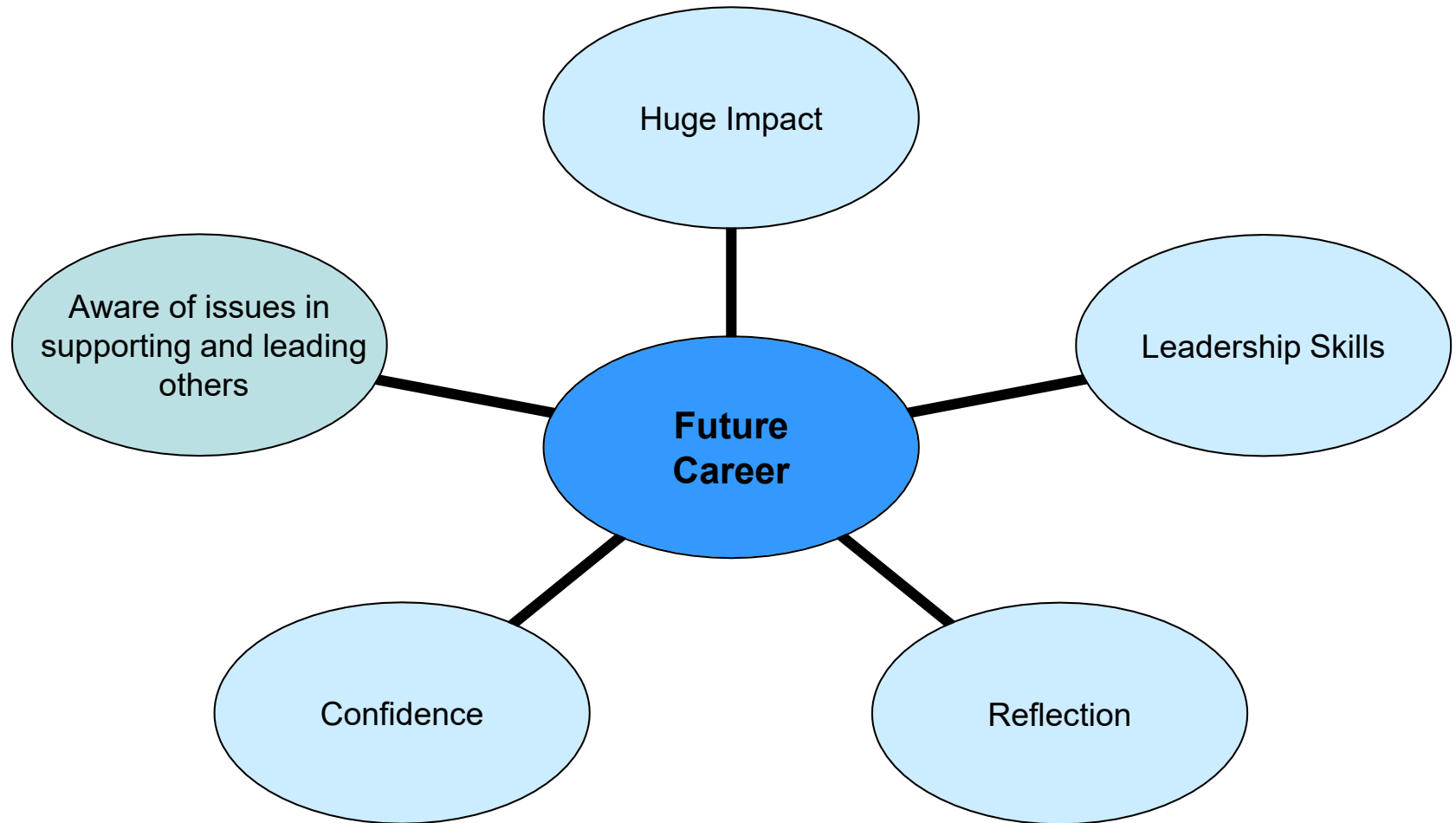
Mentee Development

Main Benefits	n 48
Confidence	100%
Academic writing/skills	100%
Supported	90%
Guidance	48%
Empowered	43%
Raised self esteem	27%
Developed communication skills	27%
Role models	20%





Support for Future Career





Discussion

- Mentoring has positive implications for all aspects of the student experience for both the mentor and mentee.
- It also provided the mentor with an opportunity to develop a range of skills essential to their development as an EYP.
- It also raised questions around general mentoring, the role of mentoring for specific tasks and the financial viability of a mentoring project.





The experience of the mentors and mentees supports previous research into the benefits of peer mentoring in Higher Education. Data from questionnaires and focus groups suggested ECS students developed:

- *Increased motivation*
- *Empowerment*
- *Transformation of the learning process from 'private to social'*
- *Improved learning experience*
- *Organisation*

There was no specific evidence in relation to marginalised groups





- Meeting targets in relation to all aspects of the student experience ---

Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the scheme.

- The challenges of the widening participation agenda ----

ECS has a diverse student cohort

- Retaining students ----

2008/9 Full Time Student start 64

Full Time Student end 58

(91% retention rate)





The Future

BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies Professional Pathway Northampton EYPS Peer Mentoring Model

Training and Support for Mentors

General mentoring training
Training to support Year 1 and 2 students with specific tasks
Support through professional practice module

Core Task Support for Students

Case Study Children
Placement Plans
Professional Development Folder
Support for Students on the Professional Pathway



Bibliography

Callan, S. (2006) What is mentoring? In: Robins, A. (ed) *Mentoring in the early years*. London: Paul Chapman Publishers. pp. 5-16.

Colvin, J. W. (2007) Peer tutoring and social dynamics in higher education. *Mentoring and Tutoring*. **15** (2), pp. 165-181.

Eby, L. Rhodes, J. and Allen, T. (2007) Definition and evolution of mentoring. In Allen T. and Eby, L. (eds) *The blackwell handbook of mentoring*. [online] Blackwell Reference online. pp. 1-12.
Available from:
<http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode?id=g9781405133739_chunk_g97814051337392> [Accessed 8th November 2008].

Fox, A. and Stevenson, L. (2006) Exploring the effectiveness of peer mentoring of accounting and finance students in higher education. **15**(2), pp. 189-202.

Heirdsfield A., Walker S. and Walsh K. (2005) Developing peer mentoring support for TAFE students entering 1st-year university early childhood studies. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*. **26**, pp. 423-436.

Hezlett, S (2005) Protégés' learning in mentoring relationships: a review of the literature and an exploratory case study. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. **7** (4), pp. 505-526.

Pask, R and Joy, B. (2007) *Mentoring-coaching: a guide for education professionals*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Terrion, J. L. and Leonard D. (2007) A taxonomy of the characteristics of student peer mentors in higher education: findings from a literature review. *Mentoring & Tutoring*. **15** (2), pp. 149-164.

Storrs, D., Putsche, L. and Taylor, A. (2008) Mentoring expectations and realities: an analysis of metaphorical thinking among female undergraduate protégés and their mentors in a university mentoring programme. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*. **16** (2), pp. 175-188.

