

BOOK REVIEWS

Mentoring in education: an international perspective

Cedric Cullingford (Ed.), 2006

Aldershot, Ashgate

£55.00 (hbk), 236 pp.

ISBN 0-7546-4577-0

This useful addition to the rapidly growing literature on mentoring comprises 10 distinctive studies, and examines a range of conceptualizations of mentoring.

The overall geographical sweep of the text is certainly impressive, with material being drawn from national contexts as diverse as the UK, US, Jordan and—these all within one paper—China, New Zealand, France, Japan and Switzerland. Further, in Val Tarbitt's chapter focusing on mentoring online, although the emphasis is primarily on her experience with the UK's Open University, there are genuinely global dimensions to be discerned.

Cedric Cullingford's own, introductory, chapter on 'Mentoring as myth and reality' skillfully identifies certain linking themes in the above disparate studies, and is a valuable, thought-provoking essay in its own right. Importantly, one of the aspects of the studies to which he draws strong attention is their basis in real world research; every one of the contributors has been involved in exploring 'what works' (and sometimes what does not) in mentoring, whether at the individual or systemic level.

The modern spread of mentoring as an activity across such diverse endeavours as supporting student learning, or enhancing professional practice, and in contexts such as induction, is well-illustrated by this set of papers; indeed in Cullingford's succinct afterword to the volume he notes that 'the modern manifestation of mentoring is a curious mixture' (p. 210). The 'mixture' here is likely to stimulate and inform readers from mainstream educational backgrounds, teacher trainers, staff developers and human resources specialists. As a collection it will not delude anyone into thinking that mentoring is the panacea we, on occasion, may be tempted to hope it may be; none of the contributors evangelizes over the activity in the way a few other authors have done recently.

Limited space precludes being able to detail here every single one of the studies in 'Mentoring in education: an international perspective'. Rather I will try to convey a sense of the range on offer, of which the following examples are, it is hoped, interesting ones. They are intended to illustrate both the different 'niches' in education in which mentoring has been adopted, and the multiple possibilities that now exist in terms of selecting a suitable lens with which to study the activity.

Sue Warren, for example, examines the professional evolution of groups of mentors supporting trainees working towards becoming primary teachers in the UK. She

purposefully exploits the notion of learning communities in reviewing how the mentors *themselves* grew and developed as a result of their involvement in the process of supporting newcomers. Marion Jones explores somewhat similar territory, her realm being that of the newly qualified teacher rather than the teacher trainee, but concentrates far more on the socialization—or the ‘rites of passage’, as she expresses it—of the newcomers.

By way of a complete contrast (spatially and in terms of the status of mentees), Ulla Lindgren describes the scope and functioning of a programme organized from Umea University, Sweden, aimed at enhancing the performance in science, of female students in particular, at school and university level. A highly appropriate prominence is given here to the gender dimension of a mentoring relationship, where one of the specific concerns for mentees may well be that of a dearth of appropriate role models. The crucial issue of gender is even more fully explored in the paper by Val Tarbitt, referred to earlier, which draws to good effect on the author’s ‘online’ work with mature women learners. As someone becoming more and more dependent on the use of email as a supporting strategy, most notably with international students, I found her contribution to the volume of special value.

Also probably worthy of particular mention is the chapter by Edward D. Britton, attempting as it does a review—within the scope of 13 pages!—of mentoring structures and strategies in five contrasting countries which have devoted attention to their teacher induction programmes. This ambitious paper succeeds on many levels, including convincingly reminding all of us in education that, numerically, those with most to gain from mentoring, in terms of their life chances, are ultimately the learners in our schools.

As my colleague Barrie Joy comments on the back of the book, the papers in this volume are all ‘richly informative studies that scholars of mentoring will welcome’. This is a view with which I will happily concur, having already found certain perspectives contained in at least two of the contributions of special relevance to my own continuing exploration of mentoring in teachers’ professional lives. Selected principles and practices referred to in the collection are actually also ones I can envisage as extending and deepening the understanding of those in commerce or the wider community who are presently reflecting on, and striving to implement, effective mentoring frameworks. (There are many examples that could be cited of how those of us in education have borrowed mentoring-related ideas from elsewhere; it would be heartening to think of the process being reversed.)

A somewhat less positive, concluding, observation sadly needs to be made with regard to the standard of proofreading in Cullingford’s volume: he and his contributors are really quite badly let down at times by this aspect of the book’s production. The errors would, in fact, be far too numerous to list; some no doubt derive from an over-reliance on ‘spellchecking’ (e.g., ‘recourses’ for resources [p. xiv] or ‘teaching a learning’ for teaching and learning [p. xiii]). Others have to be explained in other ways (e.g., ‘Teacher Taining’ [p. 12]—as part of a subheading ...). All are distracting and ought to be remedied before any further editions of the text appear. With the growing availability of worthwhile (free) online resources, investing in a hardcover academic book should ideally mean acquiring something not only particularly useful but also really pleasurable to own.