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The Road to Ithaca: a mentee's and mentor's journey

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ABSTRACT In this article a teacher/researcher and an academic mentor explore the potency, possibilities and tensions of the mentoring relationship from personal perspectives. The concept of mentoring as described in this article uses the model of mentor/mentee relationship as portrayed in Homer's epic narrative the *Odyssey*. In the examination of the experience of the mentoring process, as it was interpreted and implemented by Genie Gabel-Dunk and Anna Craft, significant elements emerge as tools for professional development: Being a Teacher to a Teacher; Being a Role Model; Being a Counsellor; Being a Facilitator; Being a Supportive Protector; and Being a Guide. The concept of mentorship is critical to quality education in that it fosters the creativity, professional development and growth of individuals and is a facilitator in the passing on of skills and professional standards. The authors believe that if as educators we value individuality, then we must work diligently to preserve the concept and practice of mentorship within the current context of the economic rationalisation of teaching resources.

When you start on your journey to Ithaca,
Then pray that the road is long,
Full of adventure, full of knowledge.
Do not fear the Lestrygonians
And the Cyclopes and the angry Poseidon.
You will never meet such as these on your path,
If your thoughts remain lofty, if a fine
Emotion touches your body and your spirit.

Then pray that the road is long,
That the summer mornings are many,
That you will enter ports seen for the first time
With such pleasure and joy! ...
... To learn and learn from those who have knowledge.

Always keep Ithaca fixed in your mind.
To arrive there is your ultimate goal.
But do not hurry the voyage at all.
It is better to let it last for long years; ...

... Ithaca has given you the beautiful voyage
Without her you would never have taken the road.
But she has nothing more to give you.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not defrauded you.
With the great wisdom you have gained, with so much experience,
You must surely have understood by then what Ithaca means.
(Cavafy, 1976, p. 36)

Mentoring is not a new concept. The word 'mentor' comes from the name of a character in Homer's epic narrative, the *Odyssey*, written in 800 BC. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, was a protagonist in the Trojan War; but, before he went off to war, Odysseus hired Mentor, actually the goddess Athena, who assumed many guises throughout the narrative, and who was entrusted with the care and education of his son, Telemachus. Mentor, embodying a blend of both the masculine and feminine principles, human and superhuman qualities, thus served as 'Telemachus' teacher, role model, counsellor, facilitator, supportive protector and guide, roles that we often associate with mentors today (Bruce, 1995; Brown et al, 1999). It could be argued that the roles assumed by Mentor are in tension with each other; however, here we wish to present these roles as various facets the mentor brings to the mentee/mentor relationship. Mentoring as a practice, however, appears to have had its beginnings even earlier. Brown refers to mentoring relationships in the Hebrew Bible between Moses and Joshua, as well as Elijah and Elisha, claiming 'it is the source of the term "mentor" which lies in the Homeric text, not the relationship' (Brown et al, 1999, p. 105).

The *Odyssey* is more than simply a poetic account in the oral tradition of a young man's search for his father, and his subsequent journey from and to his home island of Ithaca. It is a quest for self, in the company of another, the mentor, and is a metaphorical journey of courage, challenge, creativity and ultimate self-discovery. (Bennetts, 2003, p. 1)

In this article it is the aspect of Homer's *Odyssey* as a narrative, describing a personal, ongoing, metaphorical journey that Anna Craft and I wish to use as a framework. Our intention is to describe our own personal, ongoing process of the mentee/mentor relationship as it has developed over the past three years. In this description we are not presenting a didactic formula to be followed by others, but a recounting of our experiences of the mentee/mentor relationship as we have experienced it. We hope that others might find elements of our

account which could be useful in their individual situations. To this end we will present our reflections on the multifaceted and complex relationship between the mentor and the mentee and how this relationship has influenced our development as professionals.

I worked as a teacher/researcher, conducting a small-scale, sharply focused research project funded by the Department for Education and Skills in the United Kingdom (UK), during the academic years 2001-02 and 2003-04, which explored the impact of the explicit teaching of critical and creative thinking skills on children's development as independent readers and writers. One of the requirements for securing the funding for the research projects was that I be supported by an academic mentor. Unlike Homer's Telemachus, my choice of a mentor was autonomous. I chose Anna Craft as a mentor because I had worked with her as one of a number of UK teacher participants on an international research project in 1998. I had also read some of Anna's writing on creativity and knew that she had expertise in this area of research and connections with Howard Gardner of Harvard's Project Zero, and so I began my menteeship with foreknowledge of her work.

For many years in universities, mentoring has been an essential part of the graduate education programme (Rothera et al, 1995) and is often considered a 'mutual admiration society' (Orlich, 1989, p. 36). Hardcastle (1988) describes the 'classic mentor relationship as one characterised by a unique interaction between two individuals where learning and experimentation takes place, coupled with the gaining of skills and competencies within a supportive atmosphere' (Hardcastle, 1988, p. 201). Tom Hays of Loyola University in Chicago insists, 'positive and successful mentorships generally begin with a sense of excitement and a strong mutual attraction and are often developmental like a "love" relationship' (Hays, 1998, p. 27). However, it should be pointed out that the mentee/mentor relationship could be described as being exclusive, undemocratic and exclusionary as not everyone has the opportunity to be involved in such a partnership, which facilitates the sharing of information, attitudes, insights, life experiences and professional philosophy. Hays and his colleagues also found that mentoring is about the development of unique relationships in which the personal characteristics, philosophies, needs and priorities of the individuals involved determine the nature, direction and duration of the relationship. Their study found that the meaning and construction of the mentee/mentor relationship are a result of the internal dynamics of the relationship and rely on the rapport developed and negotiated between the mentor and the mentee. These dynamics are dependent upon both the mentor's and the mentee's skills of interpersonal communication, perception and empathy with each other. In this study, which involved doctoral students and their mentors, they also identified phases in the mentorship cycle; but, they suggest that these phases are rather fluid and contextual to the circumstances of the relationship rather than fixed. The phases included mutual attraction, the initiation, the development of the relationship, termination and redefinition, and the

professional practice phase (where the graduate mentee gathers experience before beginning to mentor others). My participation in these two projects and the investigation of the literature relating to mentorship has affirmed for me that the mentee/mentor relationship is an old idea that works.

We have chosen to focus on the mentoring aspect of the two research projects, rather than the content, as some outcomes from the first project are already in the public domain (Gabel-Dunk & Craft, 2002a), others are being collated and the second project is still in process. The role of mentoring in teacher development turned out to be an unexpectedly significant aspect of working together on the research projects, and one worth exploring in some depth. To facilitate understanding of the complementary perspectives we were both working from, we have chosen to write this article in two distinct voices; offering each participant's perspective on the mentoring process in which we were engaged and to expose the intricacies of the mentee/mentor relationship as a developmental process.

The Context in Which the Mentee/ Mentor Relationship Was Established

Genie was a successful applicant for two Best Practice Research Scholarships sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills in the UK, in consecutive school years. These small research grants enabled her to generate research questions around her practice and although separate projects in some ways, they are in fact related in others.

These projects focused on the creation of an effective, interactive environment, which was structured by the teacher/researcher to foster and promote analytical and reflective examination of the learning process in both herself and her pupils. The initial project was based on the hypothesis that critical and creative thinking skills can be identified, taught, encouraged and developed. This topic was selected because these are areas of cognitive development which are of personal interest to me as a teacher and in which my mentor had expertise. As the teacher/researcher leading the project, I proposed to adapt and develop a discrete course of study in order to explicitly teach critical and creative thinking skills. The hypothesis was that the children within a targeted group of six children, having received explicit instruction in critical and creative thinking skills, would demonstrate enhanced achievement across the school curriculum, using the domains of independent reading and writing as measurement criteria.

The 'Mentor' Role from Both Perspectives

As I reflected on the mentee/mentor relationship, passages from Homer's *Odyssey* began to rekindle themselves on the edges of my memory. These sent me back to a translation of the original text which I had used during my undergraduate studies. In my re-examination of the tale, I was struck by the

similarities of Telemachus' experiences during his journey into maturity under the tutelage of his mentor and my own experiences during my involvement in a mentee/mentor relationship.

Odysseus relied on his adviser and trusted friend Mentor to oversee the education and development into prosperous adulthood of his son while he was absent from Ithaca, fighting in the Trojan Wars. Mentor took on responsibilities not only as a teacher, but also as a role model, guide and a supportive and discriminating friend.

Athena, the goddess of wisdom, frequently took Mentor's form in order to supplement mortal capabilities with her guidance and wisdom in ensuring that Telemachus had the proper education and awareness fitting for the future king of Ithaca. Mentor had the responsibility of guiding, inspiring and empowering young Telemachus not only to learn from her guidance but also from his own life experiences.

Odell has noted the groundbreaking significance of this story: 'Homer's story reflects one of the oldest attempts by society to facilitate mentoring. It was customary in ancient Greece for young male citizens to be paired with older males in the hope that each boy would learn and emulate the values of his mentor, usually a friend of the boy's father or a relative' (Odell, 1990, p. 53). Although this mentor/mentee pairing in the Greek society of Homer often included the sexual, as well as the intellectual and social, education of the mentee, for our purposes, it is needless to say that this was not a component in our conceptualisation of the relationship.

The *Odyssey* illustrates two very important strands in human nature and the educational process. Firstly, observing the behaviour of others facilitates learning; Mentor led by example, by being an appropriate role model. Mentor served as a useful conduit through which Telemachus was able to assimilate the wisdom and life experiences of his teacher into his own knowledge and experience. Secondly, Mentor's role also demonstrates the need for a mentor outside the normal experience of the mentee. We wanted to examine the role of Mentor as described by Homer and how this original description could be applied to our individual circumstances in the twenty-first century. We have chosen six areas to examine and discuss.

- Being a Teacher to a Teacher;
- Being a Role Model;
- Being a Counsellor;
- Being a Facilitator;
- Being a Supportive Protector;
- Being a Guide.

A driving force, from the mentor's perspective, on these research projects has been the notion of being a 'critical friend'; bringing a critical scrutiny to all that the project engaged with.

The notion of the critical friend is well embedded in the educational research community. Some current areas of exploration which are of

particular relevance to this project include receiving as well as giving (Gilles & Wilson, 2004), and the potentially difficult boundary between being a mentor and a friend at the same time (Young et al, 2004).

Being a Teacher to a Teacher

Under the guise of Mentor, Athena advised Telemachus to sail to Pylos and Sparta in order to find out, by meeting Nestor and Menelaus, whether he could learn about the fate of his father, Odysseus.

'Sir', said the wise Telemachus, 'you have spoken to me out of the kindness of your heart like a father talking to his son: and I shall never forget your words.'

In the next moment the goddess was gone, vanishing like a bird through a hole in the roof. But she had left Telemachus full of spirit and daring. He felt the change and wondered at it. (Homer, *Odyssey* 1.311-322)

Mentee. Although Telemachus, at this stage, was an experienced warrior and in many ways capable of managing Odysseus' estate in his father's absence, he was a novice in dealing with his mother's suitors' attempts to undermine his authority and install themselves as the governors of Ithaca. Here, I find a parallel between Telemachus, as a mentee, and myself. As an experienced teacher, I brought my own educational background and history of classroom experience to this mentee/mentor relationship; but involvement in research and writing was new to me.

Anna's recognition and respect for my knowledge base and experience meant that we were able to work together as equal and active partners in an interactive research process. I recall an occasion when Anna and I were pursuing funding in order to take the research project into another phase. Anna knew of a possible source but only if the focus of the research was narrowed to include only the examination of creative thinking skills. I was reluctant to exclude the critical thinking component of the project. I explained that I felt the work that I had done up to that point indicated that the linkage between critical and creative thinking skills was important. After discussing the situation, we proceeded with our application for funding including both critical and creative thinking.

Anna provided me with opportunities to challenge my own assumptions and offered alternative interpretations. Often these challenges were initiated by Anna asking me a question specific to a crucial situation and then listening with sincere interest to my response. Many times as I was engaged in answering the inquiry, I began to examine the topic from a different perspective and thus was in a position of readiness to acknowledge differing interpretations. I was encouraged to question, reflect, analyse and assess my own processes and those of the children with whom I work, in a way that was relevant and realistic.

As this relationship has evolved and matured over the past three years, I have been stimulated to clarify my original hypotheses, refining and reshaping emerging developments through a supportive, open and honest interchange between my mentor and myself. Within this framework of synergy and mutual trust, I have been able to pursue my development as a classroom practitioner and fledgling researcher. I have benefited from ongoing observation of and comment on my work as a teacher/researcher, being offered suggestions regarding research methodology, stimulus to further study, guidance with regards to literature review and critical response to writing endeavours.

Mentor. Our mentor/mentee relationship matured as a 'relational' one, as described by Young et al (2004), meaning that our understandings of the research work were mediated through our negotiated use of language in the context of our professional and personal personas.

One interesting dimension of this for our particular relationship was that, owing to geographical distance, we often corresponded by email or spoke by phone, as well as meeting face to face regularly (but less frequently). The introduction of the electronic medium provided a shift of relationship into one where, because of the often non-simultaneous nature of it, there was time to frame a reflective response and to generate ways of thinking about challenges and opportunities in the research process. The relationship, therefore, moved into a reflective and analytical mode and also one where both mentor and mentee took a lead at different times in initiating and refining ideas. The tone of the correspondence was warm although critically acute, so that when Genie was facing a challenging problem, whether conceptually or methodologically, and whether during the practical phase or the writing up, whilst the difficulties were acknowledged, feedback from me could also be provocative and critical. The potential of the electronic medium to support the process of mentoring in the exploration of classroom-based research has been documented elsewhere (Russell & Bullock, 2001).

Being a Role Model

Athena led the way and Telemachus followed her. Presently she said, 'Telemachus, you must not be in the least nervous or shy; there is no occasion for it here at all. Why have you crossed the seas, if not to find out where your father's bones lie buried and how he met his end?'

'But how, Mentor,' replied Telemachus, 'dare I go up to the great man? How shall I greet him?'

'Some things, Telemachus,' answered Athena, 'will be suggested to you by your own instinct and heaven will prompt you further.' With this Athena led off at a quick pace and Telemachus followed in her steps till they reached the spot where the people of the Pylos were assembled.

(Homer, *Odyssey* 3.19-31)

Mentee. As with many domains within education, the aspect of modelling of appropriate behaviours and attitudes has proven to be advantageous to me in this mentee/mentor relationship. Much like Telemachus who followed Athena as she set off at a quick pace, I have followed Anna's footsteps as she has provided me with a model of personal and professional deportment which I respect and, therefore, have endeavoured to emulate. This aspect of the relationship has included a model in which rigorous standards of excellence are the norm and the bending of parameters is accepted and encouraged. In October of 2001, Anna suggested that we present a joint paper detailing the baseline test for creativity which we had devised at the 10th International Conference on Thinking planned for June 2002. The preparation and presentation of this paper was my first experience of writing for and presentation to an academic audience. My first attempts were naive but since this was a joint endeavour, I was able to follow the structure and style Anna employed as a model for my own work. I found the process of documenting what I was doing with the children difficult, foreign and my first attempts very amateur, but Anna found kernels of potential in my work which she helped me to polish into something that I was proud to present. At the conference, we spent a day rehearsing our presentation together. On a very practical level I watched Anna manage her notes and overhead projections. I practised her techniques and adapted them to fit my own style. Anna offered suggestions along the way to help me refine my writing and delivery. In the final presentation, I felt confident enough to be myself; this included setting out the room and supporting resources in a manner in which I felt comfortable. This recollection exemplifies a process which has been played out in various arenas throughout the life of our mentee/mentor relationship.

I have paid particular attention to Anna's interaction with colleagues, children and myself. In these interpersonal exchanges, I have observed Anna as a person who welcomes challenges as opportunities, obstacles and setbacks as occasions for reflection and innovation and divergence as exhilarating. With these qualities as standard bearers, I too have moved in a direction, in both my personal and professional life, in which I strive to approach each new enterprise as a stage on which I can 'joyfully, rigorously, creatively rule shift' (Gabel-Dunk & Craft, 2002b).

Again referring to Homer's text, where Athena resolutely leads Telemachus ashore, reminding him of the purpose of his journey and that his progress is assured not only by his own capabilities but also by the diligent observance of the gods, including Athena herself, who is there to lead him to 'the spot where the people of the Pylos were assembled' (Homer, *Odyssey* 3.31). I have seen Anna as an aid to my learning, relying on her as a model, a second pair of eyes and ears and an additional intellect, as I have developed my own sense of professional identity and competence in areas new to me: recording, organising and analysing research data, writing and disseminating my research findings and pursuing outlets in related areas of research.

Mentor. I have striven to be a role model in three main ways. First, in terms of methodology: offering 'triangulation' of class-based work, and in the analysis of some of the data, recording some sessions myself for independent and then collaborative analysis.

Second, preparation for dissemination. Having an eye toward where the findings might be published, broadcast or shared has been a strong theme in all of our work right from the outset. An important aspect of this has been supporting Genie's writing and presentation skills (as Genie explains above, when we presented a joint paper at the International Conference on Thinking in June 2002, we spent around four weeks nightly passing drafts back and forth, and then spent a whole day rehearsing the presentation when at the conference). Another has been strategic consideration of who to share the findings with, ranging from local teachers and teacher groups such as Creative Partnerships and Education Action Zones, through to teacher groups in other parts of the UK, to UK policy makers, and the international research community.

Third, overarching problem finding and problem solving – trying to be a mentor for lifewide creativity. We met many obstacles and identified many challenges in both projects. These included the school that Genie worked in being considered a school with serious weaknesses after an unsatisfactory government inspection and Genie, as a member of the senior management team, experiencing a tension between the requirements demanded by the Office for Standards in Education (the government body responsible for school inspection and improvement in England) and her wish to commit time to this project, in the belief that it would help to address some of the problems the school was facing. Other challenges included losing a child from the experimental group (the family moved out of the area) and a teacher with whom Genie was collaborating being unable to continue with the project. A significant aspect of our interchanges has been around how to move beyond these conflicts to ensure progress; in other words, how to manifest 'lifewide creativity' (Craft, 2002).

Being a Counsellor

Athena continued to put Telemachus' strength and courage on trial while she herself withdrew.

Agelaus took command and called out to the survivors: 'Comrades, the invincible Telemachus shows signs of weakening at last! See how Mentor deserted him and he is left alone in the entrance. Don't cast your long spears all together, but let us six throw first on the off chance of hitting Telemachus and covering ourselves in glory.'

The six took their cue from Agelaus and cast with all their might. But Athena made the whole discharge miscarry. (Homer, *Odyssey* 22.236-256)

Mentee. Teaching can be a very lonely profession, with teachers having scant opportunity to work with colleagues in a collaborative way so that they can learn more about the learning–teaching process. Mentoring is a means by which teachers can reduce their isolation and receive supportive professional learning in ways that focus on the practice of teaching and provide a valuable exchange of ideas with another human being over a difficult process. This experience has provided me with scope for mutual reflection, the checking of perceptions, the sharing of frustrations and successes, and a structure for the shared thinking through of problems and making decisions.

In the *Odyssey*, Athena withdrew from the battle and allowed Telemachus to test his own abilities. Similarly, Anna often assumed this position of benevolent observer, or what has been described as an ‘enthusiastic caring onlooker’ (Goff & Torrance, 1991, p. 75), by withdrawing from active engagement and allowing me to practise independently new skills with the assurance that help would be available if needed. Again, I can compare my experience with that of Telemachus. Telemachus appeared to be overwhelmed by the six warriors; Athena intervened and thwarted the attack. The model here is one of a learner-centred alliance, where the novice is introduced to challenging situations within conditions of ‘psychological safety’ (Rogers, 1957, p. 103) and ‘psychological freedom’ (Rogers, 1959, p. 82).

Mentor. My perspective on the counsellor element of the process was to foster Genie’s creativity as a teacher/researcher, by emphasising ‘being in relationship’ (developed in previous work, e.g. Craft, 1997), with her experimental and control groups, with her data and with me as the mentor. This knowing when to intervene and when to withdraw grew from the space of being in relationship and meant strongly encouraging multi-level interaction and engagement in order to enable research themes to emerge from deep knowledge of the context and people concerned. Intuition played a significant role in actions that I took; trusting that I would be able to contact what the scientist Bohm might have called the ‘implicate order’ in our work – i.e. the relationship between matter and consciousness (Nichol, 2003), believing that I should listen to it and also act on it. Claxton & Lucas (2004) refer to intuition as involving, firstly, openness to ‘hearing’ intuitive information, secondly listening to it, thirdly respecting it and finally exploring it.

Being a Facilitator

As he prayed, Athena came close to him, this time, in the likeness of Mentor, and seemed so like him as to deceive both eye and ear when she came up and addressed him in these inspiring words: ‘Today has proved you, Telemachus, neither a coward nor a fool, nor destined to be such, for we are right in thinking that your father’s manly vigour has descended to his son! No fear, then, that this journey of yours will end in farce or failure. I myself will pick out the best for you, and we’ll have the vessel

rigged in no time and launch her on the open sea.' (Homer, *Odyssey* 2.266-274)

Mentee. In Homer's narrative, Athena's commitment was to offering Telemachus a journey steeped with challenges and in 'picking out the best' in him. Anna has cultivated developmental opportunities for me in which I have been encouraged to expand and refine my processes. She has been sensitive to the timing of these new avenues of exploration so that they would reflect my readiness and withdrawing such suggestions when my readiness seemed to stall. Sometimes, I needed a self-declared 'time-out' in order to consolidate previous lessons, practise new skills and develop insights, and at other times, I needed to slow the pace so that I could accommodate other responsibilities unrelated to the research projects.

Initially, it was Anna who encouraged me to capitalise on my successes, bolstering my abilities, and to push the boundaries just that bit further; to take that risky one more step. As the relationship has matured, I find that this one more step into the unknown is self-motivated.

In a very pragmatic way, Anna, with her expertise in education and research, has broadened my exposure to and experience of the wider academic and research communities.

Mentor. Perhaps one way in which this element of the mentor role can be interpreted is to see the 'facilitator' aspect as being a way of 'oiling the wheels'; being aware of possible ways in which the work could both be informed by the research and practice of others, as well as contributing to it. This two-way relationship is extremely important in enabling a mentee to extend their own persona and role into and beyond some of the skill areas of the mentor.

Being a Supportive Protector

'My friends, follow me!' he ordered. He led off and the crew fell in behind. Telemachus then followed Athena on board. She took her seat on the after-deck and Telemachus sat down beside her. And now, out of the West, Athena of the flashing eyes, called up for them a steady following wind and sent it singing over the wine-dark sea. Telemachus shouted to the crew to lay hands on the tackle and they leapt to his orders. They hauled up the fir mast, stept it in its hollow box, made it fast with stays and hoisted the white sail with plaited ox hide ropes. Stuck full by the wind, the sail swelled out, and a dark wave hissed loudly round her stem as the vessel gathered way and sped through the choppy seas, forging ahead on her course. (Homer, *Odyssey* 2.421-434)

Mentee. If we consider the portrayal of the relationship between Athena and Telemachus in the quotation above, we see a two-way partnership of Athena providing the wind and Telemachus commanding the hoisting of the sails so that the vessel can proceed with the voyage. Here both Athena and

Telemachus bring their different but equal talents and skills to the task of steering the ship forward on her course.

I would suggest that the experience shared by Anna and me has been a similar two-way relationship in which we have brought to the tasks before us our own individual, unique and complementary contributions into a synergy, which swells our sails and pushes us forward through our seas of learning. However, because neither Anna nor I have the capabilities of the supernatural, we have relied on authenticity, honesty, and humanity, consideration for the other, in our journey.

Anna and I inhabit personal and professional worlds often complicated by overlapping demands. We therefore established clear, negotiable parameters in order to allocate appropriate time for consultancy, observation and dialogue which would facilitate the success of the relationship and the research projects, alongside the consideration for each participant's other obligations. We have stated and documented (both through emails and face-to-face meetings) short-term and long-term goals (through setting agendas for our face-to-face meetings; planned observations and feedback; and review and examination of the research data), routes towards achieving these goals and evaluation of our success or failure in achieving them (again, this has been accomplished through a combination of email communication and face-to-face meetings).

According to Brookfield: 'One important element of mentoring adult learning is helping learners, become aware of their own idiosyncratic learning styles' (Brookfield, 1986, p. 64). It was vital that Anna and I established an understanding of and respect for the individual learning styles and processes of working which best suited our own personal and professional development. This understanding and appreciation of our different and unique contributions helped establish a basis of trust, openness and flexibility, from which I was able to maximise my learning opportunities, scrutinise my dilemmas and capitalise on my successes.

This relationship, founded in an atmosphere of benevolence, trust, honesty and openness, has provided an arena where I felt that I was able to seek advice and supervision without fear of judgement or ridicule, and has become another learning resource.

Mentor. It is all too easy to forget the dilemmas, constraints and tensions in being a classroom teacher, let alone a novice teacher/researcher. A very important aspect of being a mentor is helping the mentee to protect time, space, approach and self-esteem in undertaking their research project. Encouraging engagement from Genie's own preferred learning styles has formed a foundation to my role in these two practice-focused research projects. By the same token, Genie reciprocated so that my own family and work commitments and my own preferred working styles were accommodated through a process of open negotiation to enable the needs of

the project to be fully addressed at each stage. This was a feature of the equality of relationship characteristic of this project.

Being a Guide

As he spoke, Mentor gave a sign with his eyebrows, whereupon Prince Telemachus, took up his sharp-edged sword and gripping his spear took his stand by the chair at his father's side, armed with resplendent bronze.
(Homer, *Odyssey* 21.431-434)

Mentee. Anna, as my guide, has provided me with the ongoing critical scrutiny of my research methodology and findings, Telemachus' sharp-edged sword, which he had received as a gift from Mentor, promoted the development and visibility of this research. Perhaps the spear which Telemachus grips in his hand acted as an academic 'sounding board', supporting and helping me to articulate and refine my ideas and encouraging the enhancement of my knowledge base by suggesting pertinent literature to review, and here I see the quivering of an eyebrow.

Anna's interventions have not focused on the transference of skills, but rather, encouragement of my reflection on and clarification of my thought processes, interrogation of my motives and refinement of my practice in order for me to get the best out of myself. I view this relationship between Anna and myself as a continuum in which the goal is autonomy of purpose, self-assessment and self-prescription. Along this continuum Anna has assumed different levels of support. In the early stages of the relationship, her role as a guide and provider of 'signposts' was more in evidence. As I have developed greater confidence and independence, Anna's role has become more collaborative. And thus prepared, I too feel armed and resplendent in my mantle of inquiry and ready to stand briefly by the chair at my father's side; but impatient of loitering too long and eager to continue the journey.

Mentor. As the quotation suggests, the guide element of mentoring in this project sometimes needed little more than the (often electronic, or virtual) equivalent of an eyebrow movement. We strove for intellectually challenging inter-mental exchange in the context of warmth, enthusiasm, support and respect; sensitivity to one another was key to this. Encouraging Genie to make her own way intellectually and in terms of her practice was an important aspect of the mentoring role. This sometimes involved only the slightest hint of a possible direction, yet at other times (for example, in preparing for the presentation of an early paper in an international conference) involved what might be described as strong enculturation through feedback, critique and encouragement.

Implications of the Mentor/Mentee Relationship on Professional Practice and Development

Mentee

During these projects, I have experienced times where I felt tested to my limits; but the foundation of trust, open communication and commitment, which was established in the initial stages of our partnership, has never faltered. This foundation has enabled me to weather the storms and continue the journey. Throughout the duration of this journey, I have felt supported and challenged in equal measure; but always in the light of a vision of personal and professional growth and development.

As my sense of intellectual competence, clarity of purpose, autonomy, analytical and reflective skills have matured within this relationship, I have become more able to examine and understand more explicitly the philosophy behind and impetus for my teaching strategies; and therefore, I am able to participate in more insightful and conscious interaction with my pupils.

Professional learning about teaching is a complex process and not simply a matter of propositional knowledge or knowing about a range of strategies. Information about approaches to teaching can come from reading, workshops, conferences and so forth; but, for information to become understanding in a conscious way, individual interpretation and transformation into practice are needed.

Being caught up in my teaching routines and habits of practice has meant that the complex decision making world of the classroom has often overshadowed the importance of making my knowledge about teaching and learning explicit to myself. Knowledge of teaching theories and approaches understood in action terms alone is only a surface knowledge. Through the mentoring process, I have gained greater facility in examining and reflecting on my teaching practice and the theories and beliefs which underpin that practice, in order to make my actions as a practitioner explicit, so that new approaches can connect with what I know and believe tacitly.

Through my association with Anna, I have been introduced to educational and research communities beyond my classroom. This exposure to a broader spectrum has offered me the opportunity to share my ideas and insights in a more public arena and to engage in dialogue with other professionals beyond the boundaries of my everyday associations.

My involvement in two research projects, supported by an academic mentor, has seen me become an advocate for teacher research as professional development. I have been proactive with colleagues within my school setting and the local education teaching community in sharing my experiences and encouraging other education professionals to embark on similar journeys. As an adjunct to greater involvement with other teaching professionals, I have been able to expand my recourses for collaboration, dialogue and critical analysis. I now can rely, not only on my primary mentor but also on a network of 'mini mentors' amongst my teaching colleagues.

Mentor

Working with Genie has been nourishing for me; I have gained insights into her perspective on the classrooms she has worked in, the children she has taught and on her views of teaching and learning. Her thoughtful, creative approach to opportunities and challenges in the project has been inspiring to witness. As Genie has reflected on her practice, so I have reflected on mine – a process described by Zachary (2000), such that as well as witnessing Genie's development and growth, the process has enabled me to deepen my understanding of my own practices – a process documented in the mentor literature (Killion, 1990; Stevens, 1999; Zachary, 2000). In this collegial and relational way we have co-constructed knowledge (Gilles & Wilson, 2004), and have begun to blur the boundary between mentor/mentee and professional friendship. This again is documented as a common process in mentor/mentee relationships (Young et al, 2004).

Conclusions*Mentee*

Being involved in this mentoring relationship has greatly enhanced my ability to make tacit knowledge explicit and therefore, allowed me to infuse this knowledge into my everyday practice with a greater facility.

I would suggest that participation in a mentee/mentor relationship has affected change in my teaching practice through professional guidance, observation, doing, reflecting, systematic dialogue, generating 'why' and 'how' questions, encouragement to interrogate my own practice through critical reflection and analysis and to examine and reflect on, not only what is taught but also how and why it is taught.

As a mentee I have had the opportunity to understand that the world of research is not a foreign territory divorced from my classroom, but rather, a land waiting to be discovered. How many times in the past have I looked at an unsuccessful or fragmented lesson and asked, 'Why didn't that work?' Or looked at a group of children and thought, 'What can I do to help them learn more effectively and efficiently?' As a teacher/researcher with the support of an academic mentor, I have gained the confidence to ask these questions more frequently and publicly, and the tenacity to look for the answers. It is no longer acceptable for me to know that something works or doesn't work; I need to understand why and how I can facilitate improvements. Only by learning about what really goes on in my classroom can I truly teach not only my pupils but also myself.

Mentor

Providing mentoring support to Genie has brought to mind two influential models of learning: first and foremost social constructivism.

Perhaps the first person to write about constructivism was Piaget, the Swiss developmental psychologist, in the 1920s. He suggested that learning occurs by the child organising, sorting and developing ideas about the world around them. His theory was that all children go through the same stages of development and that it is important for them to have access to practical experiences where they could manipulate the physical world around them in order to construct their own ideas about it. It was immensely influential in the way that early years provision and primary education came to be organised. A very important direction taken more recently by constructivists has been to see the social as equally important, and hence the approach known as 'social constructivism', adopted by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (e.g. 1978), who first began publishing his ideas in the 1930s. His ideas have continued to be influential in helping us to understand ways in which children relate to people around them as they develop ideas about the world. Other thinkers who have taken Vygotsky's ideas further include Bruner (1977), who explored the idea of scaffolding children's learning; Rogoff et al (1998), who have worked on learning as culturally situated, through studies of guided participation; also the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy, whose approach to learning has proved influential in the UK and elsewhere (Magaluzzi, 1996; Project Zero/Reggio Children, 2001). In this project, the interactive mediation of meaning and perspectives has been a constructivist process, involving me as mentor scaffolding Genie's learning as a novice researcher. Although clearly this is an adult/adult scaffolding, compared with the adult/child process that these studies describe, they have in common the expert/novice relationship. Because we are both adults, the negotiation of understanding has perhaps been more explicit and consistent, and initiated by both of us.

The other learning model is that of 'learning as growth', in which growth, development and learning are seen as unfolding in response to the physical environment from a blueprint which is laid down as though it were in a seed. The theory has its roots far back into the eighteenth century in Europe. A prominent thinker who brought this idea into being was Froebel (1887, 1895), who also invented the idea of the 'kindergarten' – the 'child garden', an idea which still influences early years practice worldwide. It included the idea that the teacher or early years practitioner was a 'gardener', i.e. responsible for tending these young growing beings. Another well-known early years thinker whose ideas would form part of a learning as growth approach is Montessori (1914).

Although this model is born of an early years context, I was struck by the ways in which, when offered the compost of our mentor/mentee relationship, Genie took on the nourishment around her and got on with growing ideas, approaches, understandings, plans and possibilities in unique relationship with her previous life views and experiences.

Perhaps most significantly, what I have witnessed is a growth in both critical and creative thinking in Genie. Her contention is that this has been nurtured through the mentoring relationship. Mentoring creativity in

particular is embedded in a number of programmes and initiatives at the start of the twenty-first century.

Although some would argue that creative thinking cannot be mentored (Socolow, 2003), and others that mentoring can create dependence rather than independence (Dobson, 2003), this article attempts to encourage reflection on, and possibly further inquiry into, the potential of mentoring to release independent, critical and creative thinking and a depth of inquiry that can only arise from such a co-participative approach, which was given the space, time and resource to develop. This developmental angle is emphasised by Maynard & Furlong (1993), albeit from an entirely school-based perspective.

It is our hope that by entwining practice and research we will deepen and enrich what occurs in classrooms for young learners as well as their teachers. And it is this that we are striving to achieve in the next stage of the research project; perhaps this quotation from Homer underlines what we are about.

They were now joined by Athena, Daughter of Zeus, who had assumed Mentor's appearance and voice for the occasion. The stalwart Odysseus was overjoyed to see her. He turned at once to his dear son and said: 'Telemachus, when you find yourself in the thick of battle, where the best men prove their mettle, I am sure you will know how not to shame your father's house. In all the world there has been none like ours for valour and for manly strength.' And the wise Telemachus replied: 'As you have said, dear father, in this present mood of mine your line will not be put to shame by me. You shall see that for yourself.' (Homer, *Odyssey* 24.502-512)

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