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Video-stimulated recall for mentoring in Omani schools

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Abstract

Purpose: This article explores the school-based learning mentoring of a senior teacher of English in Oman, who was conducting action research into her mentoring practices while engaged in part-time in-service language teacher education. The senior teacher realized teachers in her school found post-lesson discussions in English with inspectors challenging and, using video-stimulated recall, tried to help them become more reflective.

Design/methodology/approach: Qualitative case study research methodology: Semi-structured interviews provide insights into the senior teacher's perceptions of her own development and professional knowledge of reflective practice and mentoring. They also provide oral accounts of her action research, written accounts of which are provided by reflective writing. Audio-recordings and transcripts of post-lesson discussions, triangulated with classroom observation, provide evidence of mentoring practices.

Findings: The senior teacher developed creative and flexible solutions to the challenges she faced, in the process gaining confidence and assuming mentor identity. Various factors helped, including a supportive environment, the in-service teacher education course and engagement with video-stimulated recall.

Research limitations/implications: Despite methodological limitations, including limited observational data and use of self-report, there are implications for socio-cultural contexts where English has a semi-official role in mentoring discussions and where there are moves towards reflective models of teacher development.

Practical implications: Video-stimulated recall may be a particularly effective tool for supporting learning mentoring in contexts where loyalty to the 'in-group' encourages sharing. To facilitate learning mentoring, the creation and maintenance of supportive environments appears crucial.

Originality/value: Learning mentors seeking fresh ideas, teacher educators and school managers will find this useful.

Key words: video-stimulated recall, learning mentoring, language teacher education, Omani schools

Introduction

Teachers grow into mentoring roles in different ways, e.g. after promotion or through gradually assuming greater responsibilities. Though this process can be described as *learning to mentor*, where the infinitive suggests future action, we prefer *learning mentoring*, after Lampert (2009), who discusses *learning teaching*; the progressive allows for the possibility of learning while doing the work. We explore the learning mentoring of a female primary school Omani Senior English teacher (SET) using Video-Stimulated Recall (VSR) in Post Lesson Discussions (PLDs) to support reflective practice. Unique socio-cultural influences shape mentoring discussions, as Asada's (2012) work in Japan suggests. An important feature of the Omani context is that PLDs are invariably conducted in English, an important lingua franca with a semi-official status in education (Fussell, 2011), even when English language competence is limited and when Arabic is a shared first language. We report on a case study of learning mentoring in this context after reviewing the literature.

School-based mentoring

School-based mentoring entails long-term, holistic, professional relationships (Fletcher 2012, p. 69), through which mentee expertise (Hobson et al., 2009) is developed in social-constructivist (Crow, 2012) and humanistic ways (Tang, 2012) that draw inspiration from the philosophy of Carl Rogers (1967). Through building on trust and encouraging attitudes that facilitate reflective practice, (Dewey, 1933), including open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and a sense of responsibility, (Kullman, 1998), mentors can empower mentees to both evaluate their own practices and "take greater control over their own professional growth", (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997, p. 16). "Reflection is the first and most important basis for professional progress" (Ur, 1996, p. 319), but teachers need support in learning how to reflect (Wallace, 1991), both in-action (Schön, 1983) and deliberatively. Mentor-mentee dialogues, occurring within constructivist, context-specific, practice-focused approaches to teacher development (Mann, 2005), are crucial (Asada, 2012). "Collaboration, inquiry and mentorship" enable teachers "to create knowledge from their own experiences" (Gilles & Wilson, 2004, p. 88).

Learning mentoring

Learning mentoring is a continuous process, facilitated by ongoing task engagement (Gilles & Wilson, 2004) and openness to various forms of support (Hobson et al., 2009). Factors conducive to learning mentoring include a reduced teaching load (Lee & Feng, 2007), timetabling that allows mentor and mentee to meet regularly (Bullough, 2005), recognition of mentors' work (Simpson et al., 2007), a collegial learning culture (Lee & Feng, 2007), coherent rather than 'fragmented' professional development (Goodlad, 1990) and access to external help (Whisnant et al., 2005).

Research into learning mentoring has hitherto been somewhat limited (Orland, 2001) though research publications like IJMCE are starting to address this. Mentoring requires numerous qualities. These include personal characteristics such as honesty, sensitivity, enthusiasm and self-awareness, interpersonal skills, the ability to listen, empathize and criticize constructively, teaching skills, subject knowledge and professional skills related to mentoring, being able to debrief trainees and encourage them to talk about their practice (Arnold, 2006a). Practices that mentors need to develop include 'holding up the mirror', listening and prompting, as mentees are encouraged to describe, analyse and interpret classroom events (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999).

While few longitudinal studies have explored how learning mentoring develops (Orland, 2001), an exception is Gilles and Wilson (2004). Their 25 mentors "had to learn how to work with adults" (p. 103), learn to read a mentoring situation (Orland, 2001), learn to listen, learn "how to judge when to offer mentees unconditional support and when to probe to challenge their thinking" (Gilles & Wilson, 2004, p. 103). Over time, they developed greater understanding of their roles and "a newfound sense of confidence and courage… they felt their opinions counted [and developed a] sense of professional assertiveness" (p. 104).

Learning mentoring can be challenging, e.g. if stakeholders are less concerned with teacher development than with teacher training, as defined by Mann (2005), and technical competence, or if teachers expect a directive supervisory approach (Holliday, 1994). Alternatively, if the mentoring role includes assessment, this can lead to tensions (Tillema et al., 2011). Providing feedback on classroom teaching attuned to mentees' needs is one of mentors' biggest challenges (Fletcher, 2000). For example, if the feedback they receive is unnecessarily directive, mentees may feel threatened, disempowered, subservient and lacking in self-esteem (Gebhard, 1990).

Post-lesson discussions and video-stimulated recall
While observing, mentors generally use field notes, which, however, can only capture part of the classroom action. If the mentee has not seen the events the mentor has recorded, or not recognised their significance, then the mentor's interpretation must be taken on trust. Alternatively, frozen data in the form of audio- or video-recordings can be collected and presented to the mentee unfiltered by the mentor's analysis. However, video recordings are partial too, capturing only part(s) of an event, depending on where the camera is pointing, for how long and who is operating it. Collecting frozen data in classrooms to analyse in post lesson discussion was pioneered by Bloom (1953) and later became popular in pre-service teacher education in Western contexts (Tochon, 2008). VSR allows mentees' interactive decision-making, a core aspect of their practical knowledge (Borg, 2006), to be elicited in relation to observed classroom events. Practical knowledge is "the knowledge that is directly related to action … that is readily accessible and applicable to coping with

real-life situations, and is largely derived from teachers' own classroom experience" (Calderhead, 1988, p. 54).

VSR can be incorporated into an action research approach (Burns, 1999) to learning mentoring, helping mentors both evaluate their practices and gain a deeper understanding of their mentees' cognitions. However, caution is required when interpreting mentees' self-reports, as "a measure of 'sanitising'" (Lyle, 2003, p. 864) may enter the VSR process. In addition, mentees may fail to recognise the classroom from the alien perspective of the camera, struggle to articulate decision-making or feel inhibited (Calderhead, 1981). Indeed, teachers may resist the video-recording of their teaching. de Segovia and Hardison (2009) had permission denied and instead used audio-tapes, an experience which underlines the need to consider socio-cultural factors.

Accounts of VSR for mentoring purposes in Western countries with pre-service teachers suggest benefits, in terms of growth in mentees' instructional, subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge (Nilsson & van Driel, 2010) and mentors' awareness of their use of supervisory skills (Hennissen et al., 2010). However, in a study of in-service teachers in Australia (Muir et al., 2010), the VSR technique appeared to have limited impact; the experienced teachers may have been unwilling to change. For VSR to successfully encourage reflection and knowledge growth, the affective filter must be reduced (Calderhead, 1981). Climate-setting is thus important for positive rapport to be established (Al-Sinani, 2009), so the mentee feels relaxed and willing to speak (Glavaski, 2001). Mentees may be encouraged, during PLDs, to pause video-recordings to comment on critical incidents (Nilsson & van Driel, 2010).

Mentoring in an Omani context
Our research focuses on a SET, 'Mariyam', working within an Omani Basic Education school system that had been established in the late 1990s. Classes (with female teachers) were now mixed for Grades 1 to 4; after this, boys and girls attended separate schools. English was introduced from Grade 1 with a new curriculum: 'English for Me'. Senior teachers (with reduced teaching loads) were appointed to fulfil mentoring roles (ELCD, 2001) with the specific brief of encouraging reflection. In contrast, under the previous system, teachers reported directly to regional inspectors; supervisory styles could be directive (Wyatt, 2010a) and there was insufficient encouragement of reflection (Harrison, 1996).

In the late 1990s, teacher education initiatives helped Omani teachers (including English teachers, mostly Diploma-holding graduates of teacher training colleges) work with the new curriculum and contribute to curriculum renewal. These included short, in-service methodology courses. The Omani Ministry of Education also initiated a University of Leeds BA Educational Studies Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) for

Diploma-holding teachers of English. Over 900 completed the course, in six successive cohorts between 1999 and 2009 (Atkins et al., 2009).

The BA TESOL supported language development, provided a focus on language teaching methodology and contained a research strand; teachers produced research proposals, then action research dissertations. An optional last-year module, popular with SETs such as Mariyam, was in-service teacher training (INSET) and mentoring. Drawing on the work of Malderez and Bodóczky (1999), this module focused on developing a deep understanding of reflective practice and the role of mentoring in supporting this.

While studying part-time, the teachers taught four days per week in their schools, where they were observed once a semester by regional tutors, such as the authors of this study. These observations were not assessed, but provided opportunities for mentoring conversations and the development of relationships characterized by trust. Though British and male, regional tutors were welcomed into the classrooms of Basic Education schools staffed entirely by females, who tended to create Omani communities characterized by both loyalty to the 'in-group' and hospitality (Feghali, 1997). While "gender filters knowledge" (Denzin, 1989, p. 116), it did not appear to do so to a great extent in this case. PLDs were learning, sharing experiences, focused on helping the teachers relate classroom practice to theories encountered on the course and aiming to stimulate reflection, knowledge growth and the ability to handle professional discourse. Besides school visits, regional tutors provided lectures, seminars and tutorials. The BA TESOL was constructivist (Dangel & Guyton, 2004), tailored to teachers' individual and context-specific needs.

Throughout the research period, the inspectorate within the Omani Ministry of Education was changing. BA TESOL Cohort 1 graduates, including women, were being promoted. Deeper understandings of reflective models of teacher development (e.g. Al-Zadjali, 2009) were spreading. So, Mariyam was working within a context becoming more open to mentoring. Her professional history is as follows: She graduated from teacher training college in 1994, attended a short in-service course in 1998, was transferred to a Basic Education school in 1999 and made SET of a school just opening in 2000. She joined Cohort 4 of the BA TESOL in December 2002. We tell her story after outlining the research methodology.

Methodology
This paper draws on a multi-case study (Stake, 2006) following the development of five teachers (including SETs) through the three-year BA TESOL, focusing on their emerging concerns (Wyatt, 2008). Participants were volunteers whose informed consent guaranteed anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time, in accordance with ethical guidelines set by the University of Leeds and the Omani Ministry of Education. Informing the research design was the perspective that "teacher-researchers are teachers

first", nurturing the well-being of others while seeking knowledge and understanding (Mohr, 2001, p. 9).

Our primary concern is with learning mentoring. Our first research question focuses on how Mariyam developed as a mentor, supporting mentees to become more reflective in PLDs through the use of VSR. This became the topic of her action research dissertation (December 2005). Keen to engage in this task, Mariyam initially (in September 2004) expressed doubt, however, about whether she had sufficient mentoring expertise. Encouraged to proceed, she developed a research proposal, gained feedback in February 2005 and put her plan into action. Our second research question focuses on factors that supported her development.

Our research design combines several qualitative methods, described in Table 1 below, with rationale for use and limitations. There is information on data labelling.

Table 1: Research methods used

No.	Method	Rationale	Limitation	Labelling
1	Seven 40-50 minute semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008) with Mariyam conducted by the first-named author	Insights into Mariyam's perceptions of her own development and her understanding of reflective practice and mentoring. Verbal accounts of Mariyam's action research (in the last three interviews)	Self-report data	MI.1 (Mariyam Interview 1) – MI.7
2	Three assignments Mariyam produced related to mentoring: her research proposal, dissertation and a portfolio for INSET and Mentoring	Access to her understandings. A written account of Mariyam's action research (dissertation), to 'triangulate' with her oral accounts (after Stake, 1995)	Written to please a discourse community of markers	MA.1 – MA.3
3	Observation by Mariyam and the first-named author of one of Mariyam's mentees (Reema)	Insights into topics the PLD could potentially address	Potential 'reactivity' (Holliday, 2007) in Reema's class (unfamiliar observer). Just one of Mariyam's	MT.1

	teach a video-recorded Grade 1 class (she provided notes of seven other video-recorded observations)		mentees was observed by the first-named author (time pressure made it unfeasible to observe others)	
4	Eight audio-recorded PLDs conducted by Mariyam with her mentees, during which VSR was used	Insights into the extent to which Mariyam's reported mentoring practices and the principles underlying them were realized in her actual mentoring	Reliance on audio-recordings. The first-named author did not join Reema's PLD as it may have been difficult to remain a non-participant (Cohen et al., 2007)	MP.1 – MP.8
5	Written feedback provided by Mariyam's four mentees on taking part in her action research	Access to her mentees' accounts of their development we could triangulate with Mariyam's perceptions	Potential reactivity, as the feedback was supplied to Mariyam	MF.1 – MF.4

Analytical procedures were interactive with thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994) employed. Categories were developed, e.g. Mariyam's understandings of 'reflection'. A template approach (Robson, 2002) was adopted, with available data that related to themes (including observation notes and transcriptions of interviews) sorted within the template. Within their categories, data were then sequenced, juxtaposed, cross-linked and checked against research questions. Interconnected data (Holliday, 2007) were then blended during writing up. 'Thick description' (Geertz, 1973) was created, with a view to enhancing the reader's experiential understanding.

Findings
Mariyam planning her action research
Mariyam wanted to help the four teachers in her school develop as reflective practitioners through action research. As observational and interview data presented in Wyatt (2010a) reveal, she had developed considerably in her own ability to reflect critically on her teaching, helped by a positive school atmosphere. Children seemed eager to participate in Mariyam's classes; colourful posters on display helped create a literate school environment. One of Mariyam's goals as SET was to strengthen the "supportive environment and special atmosphere for teaching and learning English language in the school" (MA.1).

Mariyam also saw her role as getting teachers to share ideas, reflect and talk about their teaching. Teachers observed each other through paired peer observations and model lessons, when one would teach and the others would

observe and then later, in Mariyam's words, "share everything together". Mariyam also conducted PLDs after individual teacher observations, when she asked teachers to evaluate their lessons generally, recall what they did and why, and then evaluate success in terms of pupils' learning; e.g.; did they "understand the (English) language or not?" (MI.4).

She felt it was important teachers reflected: "thinking back critically … in order to do it well or better next time, for future development". It was part of a three-stage process; planning, teaching and reflection. To Mariyam, every stage was important, particularly "the final stage, the evaluation", when the teacher would recall the lesson, remembering important things relating to

> the learners or her teaching, something that happened, something she didn't predict in the classroom or during teaching... She will evaluate … why it was good or bad and she will try to think… according to some criteria that she has… after that, she will make some decisions… for future planning (MI.5).

When she initiated her research in 2004, Mariyam was very conscious of her own development in supporting teacher reflection. As a new SET in 2000, she had been given and tried tips on conducting PLDs. However, she felt in retrospect that her knowledge then was 'limited'; there had been "lots of difficulties before the BA" (MI.4). This course developed analytical and reflective skills and provided access to public theory (MI.5), helping her become "a more reflective modern teacher than before" (MI.7). Nevertheless, although she tried sharing ideas she had picked up on the BA course with her colleagues, Mariyam felt in 2004 that a gulf remained between her knowledge of public theory and theirs. For example, the inspector who visited her school, Yousef, asked the mentees about concepts, such as task demands and support, which, though familiar to Mariyam, were "strange for them"; they didn't "know anything about reflection or about lots of things" (MI.4).

Inspectors in the past had been directive (MI.3), but new inspectors, such as Yousef and his predecessor, Fatma, who visited the school in 2003, tended to elicit rather than tell. She recalled Fatma asking the teachers challenging questions after observing them. "First, my teachers didn't like these questions", Mariyam reported, "because they cannot talk about their lessons". Even upon completing the Ministry of Education reflection sheet they were supposed to fill in at the end of each lesson, they found it difficult to explain what they did and why (MI.4). "Therefore", she wrote in her research plan, "I want to help them think critically about what was going on in the classroom in order to try to articulate their personal theories of teaching and learning and formulate future plans" (MA.1).

Mariyam's action research would involve observations and interviews. With the teachers' permission, she would video each of them teaching and then play the video during the PLD. During this audio-recorded interview, she

would pause the video at times for stimulated recall (Bailey & Nunan, 1996) to encourage the teachers to notice more about their teaching (MI.5). Then, with reference to Ur's (1996) 'Enriched reflection' model, she would provide external input, e.g. through workshops, before observing the teachers again (MA.1). To conduct PLDs successfully, good relationships and "a comfortable atmosphere" were needed. Mariyam would ask questions, talking little herself, to find out what the teacher noticed in the lesson. At the end of the discussion, she "should ask the teacher to summarize", to consolidate what she had learned, as this would help her in future (MI.5). Throughout this process, as a mentor, she should be "kind, open-hearted and a good professional", unobtrusively collaborating while stimulating recall, she later wrote (MA.3), citing Glavaski (2001) and Moon (1994).

Mariyam conducting her research
In March 2005, when Mariyam began action research, one author sat in on a lesson Mariyam was observing, and afterwards listened to an audio-tape of her conducting feedback with the teacher, Reema. The lesson was videoed for the purpose of stimulating recall, a school assistant managing recording. It was a lively Grade 1 class, starting with a motivating action song, after which Reema used flashcards to elicit the names of the rooms inside a house, and coursebook characters. There was confusion in pronoun use, which Reema checked by holding up a flashcard and eliciting "She!" and "He!", before bringing learners forward, a boy and a girl, for further work (MT.1). Mariyam focused on this section during the PLD with Reema, pausing the video tape.

> *M (Mariyam): Were they able to produce the structure?*
> R (Reema): No, they found some difficulties in producing this sentence, the whole sentence, in the beginning they said… the name of the room only.
> *M: Yes, I noticed that.*
> R: Then, when I said 'the whole sentence', they answered using … 'in the', 'in the kitchen', 'in the bedroom'.
> *M: So they started to notice the preposition.*
> R: The preposition and the name of the room.
> *M: Why? Maybe, they are familiar.*
> R: They are familiar with the preposition.
> *M: In the previous lesson and maybe in Grade 1, the first part, 1A. What about 'he' and 'she', the pronouns? Were they able to notice 'he' and 'she' from the beginning?*
> R: No, from the beginning, no.
> *M: Ok what did you do to help them notice?*
> R: I pointed to the character and said 'he', for example, I pointed to the boy in the picture and said 'he' and to the girl and said 'she'. After that I called a girl and a boy from the class to practice the … 'he' and 'she' (MP.1).

They then watched this on video. "Why did you use pupils to clarify 'he' and 'she'?", Mariyam asked, and was told to make it "more obvious or clear", so learners did not think these pronouns referred only to book characters. Later, Mariyam elicited that producing the whole sentence was difficult because there was "a big amount of language" (MP.1). When asked what she had learned from the lesson, Reema said she would "divide the sentence" next time, breaking it down into manageable chunks. She would also use pictures of a boy and a girl earlier in the elicitation process, rather than relying on the big book, to make the use of the pronouns clearer (MP.1). Mariyam had been ready to suggest this (MI.6). She was trying to elicit, to suspend judgement. She could have asked more 'why' questions, but was aiming to be patient, a quality we detected in subsequent PLDs (MP.2-8). Mariyam made notes on her performance, reflecting afterwards: "There are some mistakes… maybe the interview wasn't so deep, there are some points maybe that I didn't ask Reema about" (MI.6).

Mariyam was sensitive to the teacher's feelings. "Reema can reflect", she reported, "but also she needs more encouragement, more support... because she is shy … and needs more practice". Her English is "very accurate but she needs to talk more about the lesson" (MI.6). By "asking her lots of 'why' questions" and prompting her with "verbal and non-verbal" cues, Mariyam felt she could help her to do so (MA.2). When she analysed the discourse for her dissertation, she cited evidence of Reema extending her responses as the conversation progressed, though Reema's turns were usually fairly short (MA.3). Part of the challenge was that Reema lacked access to public theory. Mariyam felt Reema needed "academic teaching" (MI.6), as well as support in articulating "her personal theory behind each decision" (MA.3). Mariyam seemed to want from Reema more reflection in-action (Schön, 1983), so that she could flexibly adapt her teaching, and more expansive, critical thinking during discussion afterwards. She was trying to 'hold up the mirror' (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999) to encourage this.

Mariyam learning from her research
Seeing themselves on video for the first time made participation in the action research interesting for all the teachers, Mariyam recounted in April 2005. One was fascinated, as she "focused on watching herself, watching what happened, watching her movements, how she pronounced the language". While curious, though, they were also slightly 'afraid' at the beginning. "They said Mariyam is asking about everything and she wants us to talk about everything and she wants us to think with her about everything." When they sat together, it was difficult initially, both for the teachers and for Mariyam, "using the tape recorder and the video, watching, analysing, asking questions, supporting". Later interviews were easier, though, as Mariyam explored techniques such as providing the teachers with questions in advance; she also encouraged note-taking before discussions. Then, while watching the video,

she suggested they jot down ideas, arguing "lots of things happen in the classroom they cannot notice while teaching" (MI.6).

Mariyam felt through using video she could get teachers to think deeply. VSR could "help the teachers to see themselves and to think again, think back to what happened [with] the learners and from them to what happened in the classroom… did [they] achieve [their] aims?" One problem VSR could address was that some teachers did not reflect "deeply about the lesson, about the level of the pupils… could they understand the language?". The least experienced, Huda, needed the most support during the interview process. "She always paused the tape recorder to let her think and write, and sometimes said, 'Stop please, just give me a minute to write my thoughts, my ideas and then later I will talk, but without writing I cannot talk'". Mariyam spent a long time with her, helping her think, find "suitable words, organize her ideas". And there were concepts, such as demands and support, Mariyam wanted to discuss with all. "Even up till now", the teachers could not analyse "the kinds of support" they provided in class. Mariyam introduced concepts ahead of the BA TESOL two of them would later join. Mariyam's wholehearted sincerity had carried the teachers with her. She had established warm trusting relationships, and teachers willingly gave up free time for the research. She hoped for outcomes, such as a sharing of strategies (MI.6).

Mariyam evaluating her research
Mariyam was pleased with the progress she was making in April 2005. She had aimed to help the teachers "talk freely" about their work and had received positive oral feedback from them. At the end of one in-depth reflective interview, she was told, "it was very easy now. 'I can talk … and think also and analyse my lesson.'" The teacher had not been able to do these things previously.

> She was only looking at her lessons generally, but now she can divide the lesson into steps and stages and think about them and relate each aim to each other, but she needs more help and more support in future, also (MI.6).

The written feedback Mariyam subsequently received from her mentees was also positive (MF.1-4). Huda, for example, highlighted learning about teaching methods, materials and learners and indicated she would maintain the practice of reflecting after teaching (MF.4). Mariyam felt she had successfully helped teachers "think more deeply about reflection, everyday reflection on their teaching, and think more about learning". "Some of them were reflective before", she reported, "but using the video gave them a chance to look at themselves for the first time … they discovered lots of things." She had given "them the freedom to talk and express their feelings, to think deeply about what happened" and supported them, helping them formulate their ideas. "Sometimes it was not accurate language", she concluded, "but we got the meaning from their speech and that's the important thing" (MI.7).

Mariyam reflecting on her learning

Mariyam subsequently summarised key points she had learned from the research experience that would affect her mentoring in future. These included the need to be "sensitive and careful" in considering the "specific kinds of support" required by each teacher to help her reflect, the need to "exploit shared views and good relationships with teachers", the need to be "a good listener" and to use "verbal and non-verbal strategies to encourage [teachers] to express their emotions and personal theories in a secure atmosphere". "Encouraging teamwork" was important, as was setting aside "a fixed time regularly to discuss challenges they encounter in the learning process". "Applying new methods of observation and discussion", such as VSR, was "very beneficial", as was systematic data-gathering and record-keeping (MA.2). Mariyam was very positive about her action research experience and about the INSET and Mentoring module, which she "loved" for the "free" way in which she "learned the concepts" and for their relevance to her role (MI.7).

Mariyam felt "enquiry should start from teachers themselves… the teacher is the one who should have the power and the tools of change in order to develop professional competence" (MA.3). Citing Ur (1996) she explained mentors were required to help teachers develop reflective tools. Some teachers, such as Huda, needed more support, but citing Holmes and Crossley (1994) Mariyam argued "there is always something new to learn for the mind that is open and alert" (MA.3). Mariyam was conscious of personal growth, reporting, in reference to her studies: "now we have the awareness to exploit everything around us". She felt more self-confident, more autonomous and was grateful to the government for sponsoring the course, for giving "us this chance to improve society, to improve ourselves. From ourselves we can improve our society. In education, we can help our learners, Omani learners, to learn English" in more effective ways (MI.7).

Discussion

We now address our research questions.

In what ways did Mariyam develop as a mentor?

Evidence suggests Mariyam possessed qualities mentors need (Arnold, 2006a; Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999). A caring teacher herself (Wyatt, 2010a), she was sensitive to teachers' concerns, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, able to listen well, 'hold up the mirror' and criticise constructively. Of course, she did not possess all these qualities when she started mentoring, though, and our data also suggest ways in which she was learning mentoring, both before she started engaging in researching her own practice, helped by VSR, and subsequently. It is evident that when first appointed, Mariyam's ability to fulfil a mentoring role was limited. In conducting PLDs, she was initially reliant on questions provided by inspectors. It seems she was probably unable

to utilize these to stimulate reflection, as teachers were afraid of challenging questions asked by an inspector, and could not talk about lessons in English.

Subsequently, while learning mentoring, it appears Mariyam found ways of helping them meet such challenges. Through engaging in VSR PLDs, mentees developed more positive attitudes towards reflection (Kullman, 1998) and an ability both to notice classroom events more clearly and talk about them in more depth (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999). Feelings about participating changed from acceptance to apprehension and fear to curiosity, and a realisation they needed the support being offered. These positive affective changes strike a chord when one considers the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers (1967).

Building on her positive relationships, Mariyam was able to influence changes in mentees while learning different aspects of mentoring. In PLDs, she learned to devise her own questions, incorporate these into a dialogue and structure PLDs around a mixture of her concerns and those of mentees. She had an ability to read a mentoring situation (Orland, 2001), noticing differences in teachers' abilities to talk, practise and reflect, in their conceptual understandings and in their English competence. Of crucial importance, too, Mariyam was open-minded and she developed flexibility. This flexibility was apparent in the way she learned to organize PLDs around teachers' individual needs. Monitoring her performance critically, Mariyam was *learning* mentoring. As with the mentors in Gilles and Wilson's (2004) study, Mariyam's understanding of her role seemed to broaden. She became more confident, assertively arguing, after Calderhead and Shorrock (1997), teachers need the tools to manage their own professional development. She developed into a transformative mentor (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010), focused on achieving deep change in the teachers. Unlike SETs interviewed by Al-Suleimi (2009), she did not judge the success of PLDs on whether or not suggestions were taken; she cared about getting teachers to think deeply, talk about their work and reflect, and was concerned with devising suitable means to achieve this.

What factors supported Mariyam's development?
Mariyam's development can be understood by considering various factors, besides her professional drive. She worked in a supportive environment conducive to personal growth (Lee & Feng, 2007), where she felt valued (Simpson et al., 2007). She had time to engage in mentoring, with a reduced teaching load (Lee & Feng, 2007), and spent quality time with her mentees (Bullough 2005), which she regarded as important. Mariyam also had access to external support (Whisnant et al., 2005), e.g. through inspectors such as Fatma, whose interactions with teachers she observed. These observations sharpened Mariyam's awareness of mentee needs. Furthermore, Mariyam benefited from the BA TESOL, a coherent professional development programme (Goodlad, 1990) that introduced her to concepts such as task

demands and support (Cameron, 2001), which she found useful for analysing lessons. Assignments frequently involved her in designing, trialling and evaluating materials and Mariyam's dissertation engaged her in rewarding action research. Mariyam was being mentored by course tutors and through mentoring conversations (Orland-Barak & Klein, 2005) she developed the ability to talk professionally about her work. She had the chance to share ideas about mentoring and mentoring practices and gain confidence-boosting affirmation (Bullough, 2005). In various ways, the University programme was constructivist (Dangel & Guyton, 2004; Mann, 2005). Mariyam had a minimal role in appraising teachers, which was primarily the inspector's task. This reduced the threat of role conflict (Tillema et al, 2011). Mentoring depends upon mentee engagement, which requires trust (Arnold, 2003, 2006a, 2006b) and establishing trust with others was central to Mariyam's relationships.

Mentee engagement was also stimulated by the novelty of VSR. Mariyam was able to use the video to promote a sharing of ideas. It provided an objective record of the lesson; a kind of neutral reference point, even if it was only partially objective. Its use diminished possible misunderstandings, which can occur when there is a lack of fit between the observer's notes and the teacher's recollections. There was none of the defensiveness identified in studies conducted in the West using VSR PLDs (e.g. Muir et al., 2010). Rather trust and mentee engagement in a typically safe, female Omani environment, characterized by loyalty to the in-group (Feghali, 1997), seem to have reduced anxiety that can arise (Calderhead, 1981). This increased Mariyam's feelings of self-confidence.

Mariyam benefited from a changing milieu, in which women were taking on more prominent roles within the Omani Ministry of Education (Rassekh, 2004). There was a sense of optimism about the Basic Education reforms, while ideas on professional development (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Mann, 2005), were permeating through the education system (Wyatt and Atkins, 2009). There is increasing evidence (e.g. Freeman, 2007; Wedell & Atkins, 2009; Wyatt, 2009, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b; Wyatt & Borg, 2011) of teachers contributing to curriculum renewal. Mariyam developed a sense of professional mentor identity (Devos, 2010), enabled by this changing climate.

Conclusions
There are implications from this research, albeit limited in scope, for policy and practice, particularly for international contexts where English has a semi-official role in mentoring discussions (e.g. Akcan & Tatar, 2010) and where there is a perceived need for mentors. These implications need to be set, however, within a consideration of methodological issues. Strengths of our research design include its longitudinal qualitative nature, which allowed for prolonged engagement, frequent data gathering opportunities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and triangulation (Stake, 1995). Triangulation enabled oral and written accounts offered by Mariyam of her action research to be compared

with each other and with audio-recorded PLDs that provided evidence of her mentoring practices. This supported deeper understanding and the creation of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). However, this study would also have benefited from a greater observational component and less self-reporting, to reduce potential reactivity (Holliday, 2007).

Despite limitations, our research evidence suggests:
- VSR can be an appropriate tool in school-based learning mentoring. This may be particularly so in cultures where loyalty to the 'in-group' reduces anxiety and allows for 'sharing'. Such cultures include those of the Middle East, where there is a lack of evidence of it being deployed. However, this may only be possible in certain types of school, e.g. mixed gender primary schools in Oman, such as Mariyam's. Permission is required for video-recording lessons and this is much less likely in certain contexts, e.g. girls' secondary schools in culturally conservative areas.
- Learning mentoring needs support, both within schools and externally, e.g. through constructivist in-service teacher education. Policy-makers planning interventions should consider the big picture in creating carefully-integrated environments conducive to learning mentoring.
- Encouraging learning mentoring is clearly worthwhile. However, in-service mentee teachers may need other forms of support, e.g. academic teaching, in addition to mentoring.

Anecdotal evidence gathered in 2008 suggests positive long-term effects of Mariyam's mentoring. Two of her mentees, then completing the BA TESOL as Cohort 6 students, spoke enthusiastically to one of the authors about the dedicated and supportive mentoring Mariyam had continued to provide. One of these mentees subsequently became the SET of another primary school and the other an English Learning Difficulties teacher. Writing about them in a 2011 email, Mariyam reported: "Both are special in their teaching of the English language and in applying different methods with students and teachers". Telling us about herself in the same email, Mariyam reported that she was still a senior teacher at the same school, mentoring others and doing research. She had spoken at "workshops, meetings, conferences and seminars about different issues regarding teaching and learning English." In this she was far from alone. According to Wedell & Atkins (2009, p. 209), by 2009 at least 230 BA TESOL graduates had been promoted to SET to carry out professional development workshops and mentor teachers.

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