Critiquing the 'National Standards for School-based Initial Teacher Training Mentors in England': what lessons can be learned from inter-professional comparison?

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Abstract

Purpose – In 2016, the *National Standards for School-based Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Mentors* were published in England. This article seeks to critique these standards through a comparison of how others have framed and defined the role of the mentor, drawing on equivalent standards already published in nursing (2008) and social work (2012).

Methodology – An analysis of three sets of professional standards was conducted by adapting the 'constant comparison' approach in which the researchers sought to combine a form of inductive coding with comparison across the texts. This enabled the identification of a number of common themes and omissions across the three sets of standards.

Findings –The analysis revealed the ITT mentor standards provide a comparatively limited account of the role of the mentor, particularly in relation to the process of assessment, the power dynamics between mentors and student teachers, and the school as an institutional site for professional learning.

Originality – The study's originality lies in the inter-professional comparative analysis, which revealed a number of potentially contentious issues not immediately apparent from a close textual analysis of the ITT mentor standards.

Keywords: mentors, initial teacher education, initial teacher training, standards, nursing, social work, professional learning, practice educators

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, government policy in relation to initial teacher training (ITT) in England has been concerned with improving the quality of teachers (Jasman, 2009). This is a common theme in other countries (Darling-Hammond, 2017), but in England this has involved three main initiatives. First, the government introduced a set of professional standards that established the minimum competencies that new entrants to the profession must achieve [1]. These Teachers' Standards enabled the government to influence the content of ITT courses, by requiring providers to prepare student teachers to meet them before they can be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). This attempt to assert control over the content of ITT has been further developed by the introduction of a 'core content framework', which is essentially a curriculum for ITT and which is based on the teachers' standards for QTS (DfE, 2019). Second, all providers of ITT are inspected by the same agency that inspects schools (Ofsted). The inspection framework (Ofsted, 2018a, 2018b) provides another mechanism for influencing what providers do on their courses, as this process has been accompanied by a high-stakes grading system in which providers are awarded grades from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. If a provider receives a low grade, this jeopardises their status as a provider of ITT. Third, the government has generated increased competition between a growing number of providers, which has placed even more pressure on providers to conform to the Ofsted inspection framework in order to be seen as outstanding. This has been fuelled by policy that enables schools to run their own ITT provision, with approximately half of all student teachers now being on school-led routes (Foster, 2019). Darling-Hammond (2017) notes that these measures have been replicated across many countries, as the introduction of professional standards and expansion of school-based training routes are increasingly seen as a means of enhancing the quality of teacher preparation.

Regardless of the route (university or school led), in England, all student teachers are supported by a mentor – a named teacher, who takes on responsibility for supporting the student's professional preparation. The emphasis on the role of schools has placed the school-based mentor in an increasingly significant role (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Given this situation, the role of the mentor in ITT has received considerable attention within the literature (e.g. Hobson *et al.,* 2009; Livingstone and Flores, 2017; Lofthouse, 2018; Ralph and Walker, 2013). Although the mentor role has not become the object of direct policy regulation, Ofsted inspection reports have routinely challenged the consistency and quality of mentoring for all ITT providers – both university-led and school-led programmes (National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers [NASBTT], 2017).

In 2015, the government organised a review of ITT (Department for Education [DfE], 2015) that made several recommendations for mentoring. The review was led by Andrew Carter, then a head teacher, who stressed the importance of high-quality mentoring, its impact on teacher

training and the wider benefits of effective mentoring, such as professional development opportunities for mentors and building capacity within the school as a whole. It highlighted evidence (e.g. from Hobson and Malderez, 2013) that mentoring is not always as good as it should be. In response to the review's recommendations, the *National Standards for School-based Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Mentors* were published in July 2016 (Teaching Schools Council [TSC], 2016). These standards are intended to foster consistency and raise the profile of mentoring within schools, and although they are not (yet) mandatory, they come with a strong recommendation that all providers make use of them for the selection, development and quality assurance of mentors within ITT partnerships. The government has also committed to review the ITT mentor standards to make sure they are also appropriate for mentors of newly qualified teachers, reinforcing the view that the standards will create more consistency across the system (DfE, 2018). This recent focus on mentoring provision is an indicator of the shift towards using policy to improve and embed effective mentoring in schools, perhaps as a fourth policy mechanism for enhancing teacher quality.

At the beginning of this ITT reform process, Fish (1995) observed different approaches to understanding the mentor's role. On the one hand, there is a very narrow view defined by Fish as 'functionalist' or 'technicist', which focusses on the role of the mentor in supporting student teachers to achieve QTS. On the other hand, Fish argued for a more fully 'educative' approach to the role, which is more attentive to the complexities of teaching and learning. For example, in the introduction to her book, Fish writes that it 'is addressed to those who seek rather than to those who know' (p. ix) and thus aims to avoid any notion that there is a blueprint for good mentoring. In this vein, Mitchell (2012, discussing Hobson *et al.,* 2009) argued that mentors need to develop expertise in pedagogy (affecting adult learning), engage in critical reflection (that makes connections between theory and practice), develop a professional identity and understand social reform agendas.

In summary, the last two decades have seen a gradual recognition of mentoring in schools as a professional and complex role. Whilst this recognition has been welcomed across the sector as a shift towards raising the status of mentoring and valuing it as a professional endeavour (see, for example, the University Council for the Education of Teachers' [UCET's] (2014) call for national standards for mentors), it remains to be seen how the ITT mentor standards will be implemented and how the balance is struck between the technicist and educative interpretations. However, since the ITT mentor standards have been published, it is possible to reflect on how they define the role of the mentor and the ideas of quality that underpin them.

Inter-professional Comparison and Benchmarking

As we have already noted, the ITT mentor standards are not mandatory; they currently sit outside performative structures (i.e. they are not assessed or formally monitored). This provides some space for teacher educators to examine and debate interpretations and to appropriate them as best fits their context. One way to engage in such an open and critical exploration is through inter-professional comparison. In this section, we outline why it is useful for ITT practitioners to consider other professions where qualified practitioners assume the role of mentor (to a student on a professional education programme) alongside their other professional responsibilities. Mentors exist across diverse contexts, and so here, we have chosen to focus our comparison on ITT, nursing and social work. These three contexts are sufficiently similar because

- courses include a combination of a taught element and substantial practice-based components;
- during practice-based components, students are supervised by someone who combines this educational role with their professional role;
- as public sector professions, they have been subject to similar reform processes with regard to accreditation, training and regulation.

This process of inter-professional comparison is akin to the concept of benchmarking, which is a well-embedded tool for quality assurance within the commercial sector where cross-industry benchmarking allows organisations to improve competitiveness by adopting best practices from organisations that excel in their fields (Venugopal and Venkataraghavan, 2007).

Over the last couple of decades, the language of benchmarking has been increasingly adopted across the public sector as part of new monitoring and accountability systems. In England, schools, colleges and universities are required to self-evaluate and rigorously analyse their outcomes data relative to regional and national averages. This constitutes a form of benchmarking in relation to performance indicators. Drawing parallels between the evolution of benchmarking within the public sector and that of cross-industry benchmarking, we have used an inter-professional benchmarking approach as a comparative evaluative tool. We are aware of the general problems associated with the construction of 'best practice' (Brondyk and Searby, 2013; Neumann and Meadows, 2011) and are not asserting here that we can define and codify this in a universally acceptable way. Rather, we take the codification of the standards to represent an officially endorsed model of best practice. Through such inter-professional benchmarking, we can compare these official constructions of best practice for mentors across different professions and use this comparative evaluation to identify areas of consensus and difference across related professional roles.

In England, the terminology varies between professions, and 'mentor' is not a universal term, so in this comparative exercise we adopted the term professional work-based educator

(PWE) to describe the role. Although these roles are explored within separate literatures in social work, nursing and teaching, there is little comparative work to date investigating how these roles are constructed and practised across the professions. If we accept the notion that mentoring is a skilled profession within a profession (Lofthouse and Hall, 2013), then the ITT mentor standards can be interrogated not just within the parameters of ITT, but through comparison with other professions where similar PWE roles have emerged. McNamara *et al.* (2014) have also drawn attention to the importance of drawing upon research in workplace learning and how insights across the professions can provide us with useful perspectives on policy and practice. In accord with the government agenda to extend access to the professions through the promotion of degree apprenticeships, it seems particularly timely to develop inter-professional insights about policy and practice in work-integrated learning (Lester *et al.,* 2016; for details about apprenticeship policy in England, see Powell, 2019).

Despite the development of similar quality assurance and regulatory frameworks across professions in the public sector, government itself has not regularly committed to such comparative perspectives. By way of example, the ITT mentor standards were developed by the TSC, which appointed a working group comprised of head teachers and ITT leads from teaching schools with experience of working in a range of school-based ITT settings. The report lists 42 different educational institutions and groups who informed their findings, but no evidence was drawn from other professional fields, where similar standards have been well established. We argue that such inter-professional benchmarking can deepen criticality and build our understanding of this profession within a profession. Our approach seeks to build on Peiser *et al.*'s (2018) innovative comparison of mentoring across education, social work, nursing and paramedicine. However, whilst Peiser focused on professional knowledge development in the official mentoring standards and in practice, we have focused only on the standards as officially sanctioned models of 'good practice' and consider these in relation to the broader roles of PWEs rather than just in relation to knowledge development.

Methods: Comparing the Standards

This analysis of the ITT mentor standards builds on an established methodology within ITT literature, and in this section, we outline some of the approaches adopted by other researchers to explore similar types of documents. We start by considering some of the approaches adopted in relation to the standards for QTS and then go on to explain the approach adopted in this project for analysing the ITT mentor standards.

Hayes (1999) analysed some of the first attempts to set out the competencies required for QTS and argued for a close analysis of the text on the grounds that 'we must be clear about the operative terms we use when describing competencies' (p. 5). Similarly, Smith (2013) argued that

we need to analyse the shifting and competing discourses within these policy documents in order to unveil the assumptions that can otherwise take on the appearance of common sense. Smith drew on Fairclough's (1989) critical discourse analysis to focus initially on describing and interpreting the texts and then sought to explain them in context. Her analysis compared versions of the competences for QTS over time in order to trace shifting ideas of equality and inclusion. Whilst Smith and Hayes tend to focus on interpreting and critiquing the policy documents as texts, Goepel (2012) and Evans (2011) introduced their own models as a starting point against which to compare and critique policy. Goepels used her research about professional values to search for omissions and confusions in the competences, and Evans used her model of professionalism to perform a similar critical analysis. Beck (2009) also subjected policy texts to close critique to investigate the ways in which statements of competences reveal what policy-makers seek to establish as the 'official knowledge base' of the teaching profession. Beck saw official government policy documents, like the standards for QTS, as examples of statements in the 'official recontextualising field' (Bernstein, 1996), which have the potential to influence practice. Building on Jones and Moore's (1995) analysis of 'competences' in education, Beck argued that whilst such documents seek to present a 'common sense' view of the world, they actually reflect peculiar forms of behaviourism and a commitment to 'function analysis' that breaks up occupational performance into discrete (and measurable) tasks.

Each of the examples cited above demonstrates the important role of critique in describing the texts and revealing the assumptions that lie beneath the surface. As Foucault (1988) explained,

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought, the practices that we accept rest ... Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as we believed. (cited in Olssen *et al.*, 2004, p. 40)

To that end, these authors have employed a variety of approaches including the analysis of individual texts (Hayes, 1999), comparison of texts as they evolve over time (Smith, 2013), analysis of groups of texts on related issues (Beck, 2009) or comparison of texts against pre-determined models (Evans, 2011; Goepels, 2012). It is important to remember, though, that such analyses highlight the assumptions within such policy texts, and one needs to be clear that this tells us little about the actual effect of policy, which is variously encountered, interpreted and enacted by a variety of actors (Ball *et al.*, 2012). Such analyses elucidate the policy as a text, and in doing so reveal some of the spoken and unspoken assumptions we may have about the field in which the policy is positioned.

Our analysis builds on these approaches by comparing the statements of competencies for PWEs across three professions – nursing, social work and teaching. Whilst in educational terms the roles are fairly similar, the comparison across professions is intended to highlight some of the common sense assumptions that run across these official accounts and some of the differences between them. This is potentially useful in enabling us to more easily think beyond the common sense assumptions that exist within the single field of ITT. Below, we present the main findings from our comparative analysis of the three sets of standards for PWEs. The documents we have used are as follows:

- *Practice Educator Professional Standards and Guidance* from the College of Social Work (CSW, 2012). Whilst not statutory, these are widely implemented across England, as providers must demonstrate they have responded to the recommendations and 'the easiest way of demonstrating this will be via the college scheme' (p. 16).

- *Standards to Support Learning and Assessment in Practice: NMC Standards for Mentors, Practice Teachers and Teachers* (second edition) from the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC, 2008). These standards apply across the UK and are required for nurses to join the local register for mentors and practice teachers.

- *National Standards for School-based Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Mentors* from the TSC (2016). These are non-statutory and represent the first attempt to establish a national set of standards for school-based mentors in England.

In these documents, the professionals we are focusing on are referred to as mentors, sign-off mentors, practice educators, practice supervisors and practice teachers. Our use of the term PWE enables us to avoid privileging one set of terminology and also reflects the distinctive feature of these roles – these standards are related to professionals who assume, alongside their continuing professional duties, some form of additional responsibility for the professional preparation of new entrants to their profession. The documents are organised differently, which makes a straightforward comparison more difficult; for example, the standards for PWEs in social work include 41 statements divided into four domains plus a values statement (CSW, 2012), in nursing they include 26 statements organised into eight domains with additional criteria for sign-off mentors and practice teachers, and in teaching they include 21 statements organised under four standards.

The methodological approach we used is similar to conducting a thematic analysis in which the text is broken up into separate statements and then simultaneously reorganised to reflect similarities and conceptual connections within each document and across the documents. We extracted each individual requirement from the standards and then organised summaries of these statements into clusters so that similar issues could be grouped together. This reflects the kind of approach described by LeCompte and Preissle (1993) as 'constant comparison' where

the researcher seeks to combine a form of inductive coding with comparison across the cases (in this case across the three documents). This brought together conceptually related statements from different places within each document and enabled us to identify a number of common themes across the three standards. However, by necessity, such an approach to analysis reduces the opportunity to conduct close textual analysis, for example, by focusing on the features of the language or the recurrent patterns constructed within each text. Mutton *et al.* (2017) provide a good example of this latter approach in their analysis of the Carter Review, which gave rise to the ITT mentor standards. Their close analysis of the text reveals a number of unresolved tensions within the report itself, demonstrating that there are competing discourses at play that shape how one talks about mentoring. However, the alternative approach to analysis outlined above lends itself better to our purpose, which is to reveal some of the common assumptions across the professions and some areas where one or two professions identify issues that are ignored in others, and we discuss these in the section 'Relative Silences and Omissions' below.

Results

Shared characteristics

(i) Working with colleagues

Across all three sets of standards, the PWE is described as having to negotiate with others to ensure adequate learning opportunities are developed through the students' experiences, although there are some contrasts and different emphases in the detail. In summary, the standards specify the following:

- In social work, the PWE negotiates with others (colleagues and service users), works cooperatively, coordinates others, briefs and feeds back to others.
- In nursing, the PWE involves patients, clients, carers and professional team in learning, negotiates with others to improve learning and advocates for students to access learning opportunities.
- In ITT, the PWE brokers opportunities to observe best practice, supports trainees to access expert knowledge, resolves in-school issues where trainees lack confidence/experience and invests time in relationships with ITT partnerships.

We can see that the standards for PWEs in nursing and social work tend to focus on the workplace setting whilst the ITT PWE is also required to invest time in relationships with members of the partnership outside of the school. Whilst nursing and social work explicitly include service users, there is no comparable discussion of school pupils or parents as stakeholders in the ITT mentor standards.

Across all three sets of standards, the PWE is portrayed as playing a pivotal role in working with others to ensure the student has access to appropriate learning opportunities and that others are involved in these negotiations. This speaks to the role of the PWE as an important gatekeeper and negotiator, recognising the various roles and interests of people who are involved in the workplace. In this regard, the standards hint at someone who is adept at communication, relationship building and conflict resolution. This is also the closest the standards come to recognising the potential conflict between the workplace as a site of service delivery and a site of professional learning (a tension noted by Salm *et al.,* 2016).

(ii) Planning a personalised programme

In all three sets of standards, the PWE is envisaged as planning a personalised programme for the student, but as with the previous section, there are also some differences in emphasis between the three professions:

- In social work, the PWE makes judgements about learner needs, devises a cost-effective programme in line with learner needs/learning styles, plans activities with the learner, teaches the learner directly and delivers the programme.

- In nursing, the PWE supports students to identify their needs and meet them, integrates practice/academic experiences, selects and uses a range of learning experiences and plans and facilitates learning.

- In schools, the PWE responds to students' needs, supports their improvement towards the teachers' standards for QTS and supports them to develop time management.

In ITT, whilst there is a general requirement to respond to the student's needs to ensure improvement, the account of the PWE's activities is largely produced in terms of simply 'supporting students to achieve' each competency required for QTS.

It is striking here that the account of the PWE's role in ITT is relatively one-dimensional, whilst the other professions dwell much more on what the PWE actually does to create and implement this personalised learning plan. This speaks to a more nuanced account of their educative role and assumes the PWE has access to a varied repertoire of roles and activities, which is most clearly spelled out in the social work reference to applying 'an appropriate range of supervisory models, roles and skills, which recognise the power dynamics between practice educator and learner' (CSW, 2012, p. 8).

These differences notwithstanding, the key issue to note here is that all three sets of standards focus on the role of the PWE in providing an individualised educational experience, with social work paying the most attention to the variety of roles this might entail. This implies the PWE should have a good understanding of the kinds of learning needs a student might have and of the possible strategies that might help them make progress – a much more obviously

pedagogic set of characteristics. However, the relatively narrow conception of the PWE's pedagogic role in the ITT mentor standards does indicate that Fish's (1995) concerns about the narrowing of this role have been borne out. This is confirmed by two recent studies. First, Peiser *et al.'s* (2018) comparative study concluded that the ITT mentor standards oversimplify the complex role; second, Mutton *et al.* (2017) argued that the Carter Review tends to focus on compliance and a narrow view of what is involved in professional education.

(iii) Fostering reflection

This account of pedagogic practices also relates to the common discussion of the need to encourage student reflection on their own performance. This is unsurprising as reflection features in many models of professional education, which stems from the role of reflection within general models of experiential learning (see, for example, Attard Tonna *et al.,* 2017). In nursing, this is simply described as supporting 'critical reflection', whilst in teaching and social work, the term 'evaluation' is used. In social work, PWEs have a role in eliciting feedback from service users as part of this reflection and self-evaluation cycle, whilst in teaching, the PWE is encouraged to use 'challenge' when necessary to provoke sufficiently critical reflection.

(iv) Assessment

The commitment to reflection and evaluation is linked to the necessity of judging progress and undertaking assessment. In ITT, PWEs are simply required to 'give constructive, clear and timely feedback on lesson observations' (TSC, 2016, p. 12), but whilst they are also involved in the assessment decision, this is not reflected in the ITT mentor standards. In the other two professions, this aspect of the role is more developed; in particular, the assessment role is reserved for those with a more advanced status. These role descriptors include the following:

- In social work, the PWE uses observation for assessment, provides constructive feedback and makes it clear how the student can improve; ensures assessments are evidence based and explained clearly; evaluates evidence and resolves inconsistencies to makes difficult decisions about assessment; and documents assessment decisions.

- In nursing, the PWE provides feedback and assists students to identify future needs, understands the breadth of assessment strategies, confirms competencies have been met and manages failing students so they improve or understand the reasons for their failure.

Social work is more overt in negotiating the assessment process openly with the students, but nursing also implies that PWEs will involve students in decisions about assessment. This speaks to the technical knowledge of PWEs in understanding the requirements for professional qualification and to the pedagogic expertise of understanding assessment processes, as well as to the potentially emotional dimensions to making such weighty decisions. The relative silence on

this aspect of the role in education seems particularly worrying given the concerns of Hobson and Malderez (2013) that judgemental mentoring, or what they call 'judgementoring' may be becoming 'the default understanding of mentoring in England' (p. 89). Their research suggests a common tendency for school-based mentors to rush to judgement around students' deficiencies, rather than adopt a more open approach to discussing progress and next steps in learning. The standards for PWEs in social work indicate why this area is worth more attention as they urge PWEs to 'assess in a manner that does not stigmatise or disadvantage individuals and ensures equality of opportunity' particularly in relation to race, class, disability and gender (CSW, 2012, p. 11). Opacity in the process of PWEs forming judgements is also an area identified by NASBTT (2017) as a key issue arising from their analysis of Ofsted inspection reports.

(v) Quality enhancement

In this section, we encountered both quality assurance (QA) mechanisms and a broader commitment to improve the quality of PWE in one's institutional setting. In relation to QA, PWEs in teaching are required to moderate their judgements, in nursing are required to be accountable for their decisions and in social work PWEs must know about QA procedures and contribute to standardisation. In terms of enhancing the quality of provision, the ITT mentor standards have less to say, restricting themselves to encouraging PWEs to develop their own knowledge and skills by accessing continuing professional development opportunities. The other professions address this more broadly; for example, in nursing, the PWE is required to participate in self and peer evaluation and to provide feedback about the quality of learning and assessment in the setting. In social work, this area is much more developed, and PWEs are required to deal with disagreements and complaints, evaluate the workplace and the training organisation, elicit feedback from students to inform improvement planning and establish resources to ensure they are sufficiently supported in their role. Here we see some variation, but the strong idea emerges that the PWE must hold themselves to account to the broader profession for the judgements they make and the standards of education they provide. There is also a strong focus, particularly in social work, that PWEs must be proactive in taking some responsibility for ensuring the workplace setting functions well as a site of professional education. Once again, the relative underdevelopment of this aspect of the role within schools seems rather strange, especially considering the prominence given to management and quality assurance in the Ofsted inspection criteria for ITT (Ofsted, 2018a), and the importance of leadership and management in the criteria for school inspections (Ofsted, 2018b).

Relative silences and omissions

(i) The workplace as a learning environment

The comments above already indicate that the ITT mentor standards tend to be silent on some important issues. Picking up on the last section about quality, the standards for ITT mentors make no mention at all of the workplace as a learning environment. By contrast,

- in nursing, the standards instruct PWEs to play an active role in maintaining their workplace as a learning environment, identify aspects of the learning environment that could be enhanced and act as a resource for others' development.
- similarly, the social work PWE is given a role in creating a suitable learning environment, monitoring the continuing suitability of their workplace and addressing any shortcomings.

As we have seen, when the role of school-based mentors was being developed, writers like Fish (1995) worried that the educational function of mentors would be reduced to a narrow technical process. On this evidence, it seems that the ITT mentor standards do adopt a rather simplified and narrow view of the role (Mutton *et al.*, 2017). It is notable here that the educational role of the workplace is neglected in schools – the only institutional setting that is primarily established to promote learning – whereas, the PWE standards relating to nursing and social work are more explicit about this.

(ii) Professional relationships with students

Similarly, the ITT mentor standards are relatively silent on establishing relationships with student teachers. This strikes us as particularly surprising given that the teachers' standards for QTS (DfE, 2012) required to enter the profession are explicit about student teachers having to establish professional relationships with their pupils and colleagues. There are hints about the expected relationship; as we have seen, PWEs are instructed to 'empathise' then 'challenge' their students and 'resolve' problems, which seems to replicate some of the assumptions about teacher authority that are common in the teacher–pupil relationship. By contrast, social work PWEs are required to agree roles and relationships with their students 'to establish the basis of an effective working relationship' (CSW, 2012, p. 8), and nurse PWEs are encouraged to 'demonstrate an understanding of factors that influence how students integrate into practice settings' (NMC, 2008, p. 25). Ralph and Walker's (2013) model of 'adaptive mentorship' requires the mentor to form a view about a student's level of competence *and* their confidence in order to inform their subsequent level and style of support. This approach, and that adopted in the PWE standards for social work and nursing, seems to address some of the practical problems that arise from students arriving (generally temporarily) into contexts where relationships and behavioural norms are already established and shared by others. This silence also reflects a concern expressed by Philpott

(2014) that there is no reason to assume a good teacher of children is also a good teacher of adults, and yet in education, there tends to be an assumption that success in the first role naturally equips practitioners to undertake the second role.

(iii) Time

We have already noted that one of the distinctive features of the PWE role is that they combine their normal professional duties with the additional role of professional education, and these activities may lead to some tension. The PWE standards for social work are silent on this issue, but both the standards for ITT and nursing refer to the need for PWEs to 'prioritise' their work with professional students. Given that these standards address only the PWE role, and not the integration of that role with wider professional work, it seems to us that assertion might be more difficult to implement in practice.

(iv) Using research

The imperative for policy and public services to be research-informed has become ever greater in recent years. It is surprising, therefore, to see no mention of this in the PWE characteristics for social work. In teaching, the PWEs are encouraged to engage with research themselves and to enable the student teacher to access and use research. In nursing, the PWEs are expected to identify and develop evidence-informed practice themselves in their PWE role and to support students to apply evidence to their own practice.

(v) Professional induction

Finally, the ITT mentor standards are the only ones to mention professional induction. Here, PWEs are instructed to induct students into their professional responsibilities, develop high standards of conduct and comply with legislation.

Reflections for Initial Teacher Education

We have undertaken this comparative review of the standards from the perspective of what we can learn as teacher educators by benchmarking our relatively new standards with two professions where such standards are much more established. In this section, we reflect on some of the issues arising from the foregoing analysis. These reflect the silences, where the current ITT mentor standards have nothing to say, differences of tone and emphasis, where the ITT mentor standards seem to focus on different aspects, and one or two areas where they spell out issues about which the other professions are relatively silent.

(i) Power dynamics

The first area that stands out is the way the ITT mentor standards are relatively silent on the power dynamics and emotional dimension of workplace professional education. Students arrive in a professional context as relative outsiders, and there are power dynamics already at play in the workplace. The literature documents the complex learning transition from peripheral to core activity, but there are also established local practices of which students will be ignorant and personal relationships already in place, which often cut across the formal hierarchical structures (Sebrant, 2008; Shields and Murray, 2017; Wenger-Trayner *et al.,* 2014). It seems to us that the PWE standards in social work and nursing attend to these complex aspects more overtly than in teaching. Further, it appears that the ITT mentor standards replicate some of the characteristics of traditional teacher–pupil authority in schools. PWEs in schools are required to model exemplary practice, challenge their students and resolve their problems. These all speak of someone in authority asserting that authority over someone who is relatively powerless. By contrast, in social work and nursing there is explicit recognition of these power dynamics, and PWEs are encouraged to negotiate, reach agreement and adopt roles to minimise this power imbalance. It seems to us that this is important in recognising the agency of the student, who is already assuming many of the professional roles and values associated with the profession and who thus must negotiate a more nuanced path than this traditional teacher–pupil role implies. It also seems reasonable, given that the literature routinely addresses the emotional or pastoral dimension to ITT (Gravells and Wallace, 2012), that the formal account of this role should address this.

(ii) School as a context for professional education

The second area arising from our analysis is the relative silence about the school as a context for professional education. Perhaps this silence stems from the fact that the school is already essentially an institution dedicated to learning, unlike the other professions where the primary function is to provide social work services or healthcare. Nevertheless, we feel that the comparison highlights some of the important aspects of professional preparation that are ignored if we elide schools' educational functions with regard to pupils and student teachers. Lofthouse (2018) argued that schools should re-imagine mentoring as a dynamic hub for professional learning and institutional growth. But the PWE standards in social work and nursing indicate that such transformational thinking is already underway in those professions, as they are already more explicit about the need to reconceptualise the workplace as a site of professional learning, to evaluate the ways in which this works and to put in place the relationships and resources to ensure this is enhanced. This seems to reflect the somewhat impoverished view of ITT as a form of apprenticeship system, where one simply learns from the master, through immersive periods of school experience (see Philpott, 2014, ch. 8). It fails to acknowledge that the PWE in school may

well have to invest considerable effort in establishing the systems that cater to the needs of student teachers, and the other professions describe this function in some detail. We think this also minimises the extent to which these standards define the PWE as having a role in enhancing the quality of professional learning in schools – there is a tendency to focus on the skills of the individual PWE rather than the capacity of the school as a whole to operate as a site for professional learning.

(iii) Pedagogy

The third area that emerges from our comparison relates to pedagogy. It seems slightly unexpected that the PWE standards written for the teaching profession should have the least to say about pedagogy, but this does seem to be the case. However, across all three, this is relatively undeveloped. Taken as a whole, the standards address relationships, learning environments, and assessment, but these relate to aspects other than the core 'educative' function of the PWE. There is some discussion of reflection, and this clearly has an important role in relation to any educational programme based on experiential learning, and there are some comments about the variety of roles and processes a PWE might engage in. However, from the perspective of ITT, there is very little here other than the assumption that students need to observe best practice, reflect on their experience and receive support to achieve the competencies for QTS. The literature on professional learning discusses the ways that learning links to experience (Kemmis, 2012), to the misconceptions that arise and need to be addressed (Gravells and Wallace, 2012), to the development of professional identity (Grace, 2014) as well as to the development of appropriate skills and knowledge (Peiser *et al.,* 2018), yet the ITT mentor standards makes no reference to these broader aspects, nor to the subtle and nuanced role of the PWE in identifying and addressing these aspects of learning. This finding reflects the conclusions drawn from Peiser *et al.*'s (2018) comparative study, that all three professions require a greater focus on pedagogy.

(iv) Assessment

Finally, we have been struck by the relative silence in relation to assessment in the ITT mentor standards. Again, this is more surprising given how central assessment is to the everyday work of schools and to current debates about schooling and education policy. Teachers' marking loads have come under scrutiny, the distortions of teaching to the test have been widely discussed and the nature of those tests and exams has been the object of intense policy interventions (Jerome, 2010). And yet, when we turn to the ITT mentor standards, we have the single comment that PWEs should 'give constructive, clear and timely feedback on lesson observations' (TSC, 2016, p. 12). There is no discussion at all of the important role PWEs in schools have in relation to assessing the quality of the student's teaching and ultimately of recommending (or not) QTS. In

the other professions, there is detailed attention to this process, and in nursing there is a special status for the 'sign-off' mentor to be involved in this decision. The attention paid to the complexity of this process in the PWE standards in social work underlines how much more could be said about this within the ITT mentor standards – the negotiation of appropriate assessment opportunities, balancing of different sources of data, judgement about appropriate competencies and moderation across the institution and the partnership. From our experience of working in ITT, and from the literature, it is evident that these issues do emerge as significant aspects of the PWE role in schools, and so this silence seems to ignore a very important feature of this role. It also serves to erase the assessment decision as a process embedded in the broader relationship between the PWE and their student. This implies that assessment is a relatively separate and uncontroversial process that need not be accounted for in this definition of the PWE role.

Conclusions

In this article, we have argued that there is some benefit to adopting an inter-professional benchmarking approach to think about school-based mentoring using insights and ideas from beyond the relatively narrow field of ITT. Whilst the professions we have compared are different in some significant regards, we feel that the similarity in the PWE role makes this comparison worthwhile. It may be possible for a critic to contend that the professional contexts are so different that ITT has nothing to learn from social work or nursing, but that would seem to us to overstate the differences and ignore the similar educational functions they perform. We have used a comparative approach to enable us to critique the *National Standards for School-based Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Mentors* (TSC, 2016) and have revealed a number of silences in this official account of the role of ITT mentors – most significantly in relation to the nature of the schools as a context for professional education, the relationships between mentors and student teachers and indeed, the educational processes at the heart of the role. One conclusion we draw from this analysis is that by acknowledging the PWE's role across the professions, we have revealed the potential for strengthening insights about this role by scrutinising policy and practice without the constraints of professional boundaries.

It is important to remind ourselves what this analysis can do, and what it cannot do, and therefore to reflect on some useful next steps for research in this area. The most important caveat to mention here is that the conclusions we have drawn in the previous section do not describe a deficit in the reality of mentoring in schools; we can only comment on the deficit in this official definition of mentoring in schools. Further research could usefully investigate practice in these areas of policy silence, exploring the ways in which mentors do or do not address the power dynamics in their relationship with student teachers, the ways in which student teachers negotiate these difficulties and the cultures that emerge in school around access to resources, time, space

and so on. In relation to the relative silence about mentors' educational and assessment roles, we think there is scope to investigate what actually happens in practice that promotes or hinders the process of professional education. This line of enquiry might usefully start from Hobson and Malderez's (2013) conclusions about 'judgementoring' to explore whether the silence in this area of the standards reflects impoverished practice. We also recognise that the introduction of these standards is in the early stages of implementation, and so there is a need to investigate the ways in which the standards are being interpreted and enacted in schools. It is a genuinely open question as to whether these silences persist or whether local actors interject with their own views.

Whilst the approach adopted has helped us to develop a critique of the first official delineation of ITT mentor standards in England, we also have to acknowledge that the method we have adopted is particularly well suited to picking up similarities and discrepancies across the documents in each profession but is less sensitive to identifying gaps and omissions that are common across all three professions. There may well be other significant lines of critique that emerge from other analytical approaches. However, even bearing in mind these caveats and limitations, we have been struck that the ITT mentor standards present an impoverished account of mentoring in the teaching profession, even when one's reference point is other comparable officially endorsed professional frameworks. As a consequence, our main recommendation is that public sector policy in professional mentoring would benefit from an overt and sustained commitment to inter-professional comparison as a means to highlight areas for development and improvement. In ITT, our analysis suggests that this is quite an urgent task, and we would urge any future review of the *National Standards for School-based ITT Mentors* to adopt such an approach in order to open up the conceptualisation of mentoring and to avoid an excessively narrow technicist account of mentoring.

Endnotes

[1] Many practitioners in England prefer to refer to the field as initial teacher education (ITE), whilst official policy most often refers to initial teacher training (ITT). In this article, for the sake of simplicity we refer to ITT as this is the term used in the documents under discussion.
[2] Circular 09/92 included a set of competency statements against which student teachers were to be assessed. Since then, the teachers' standards for QTS have had several iterations with the most recent version published in 2012. These standards provide a direct mechanism for policymakers to introduce new expectations of teachers.

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