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Mentor–mentee interactions in the practicum: Whose/Who's learning?

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Abstract

The present paper reports on a small-scale naturalistic research pilot project seeking to explore and understand the kinds of learning which ensue from the interaction between cooperating teachers acting as Mentors and student teachers during their practicum in Uruguayan State Schools. Through the use of a structured questionnaire to a randomly selected group of participants (both Mentors and Mentees), the researcher has tried disclose themes that impinge on learning from the Mentor-Mentee interaction. This study was a pilot intended as fodder for a more in-depth analysis of the Mentoring situation in Uruguay, as the country prepares to expand the mentoring model to in-service teacher development. Data were coded making reference to Wang and Odell's (2002) perspectives towards Mentoring and a tentative explanation of the learning stemming from the interaction was attempted. Also, implications for further research and practice are outlined.

Keywords: mentoring; practicum; teacher education; teacher learning.

Resumen

Este artículo comunica los resultados de un proyecto de investigación piloto realizado a pequeña escala con el fin de explorar y comprender la interacción entre docentes Mentores y futuros docentes que realizan la práctica docente con el apoyo de los primeros en colegios públicos de Uruguay. A través de un cuestionario electrónico anónimo, aplicado a un grupo de Mentores y practicantes elegidos al azar, se delinearon temas que afectan el aprendizaje que se supone resulta de la interacción entre estos actores. El propósito del presente proyecto piloto fue la aproximación a la realidad del Mentorazgo en Uruguay a fin de obtener una base sobre la misma que habilite una investigación más profunda con el objetivo de proponer cambios respecto a la implementación de Mentorazgo. Los datos se codificaron utilizando las dimensiones propuestas for Wang y Odell (2002) y se intenta una explicación inicial de los aprendizajes resultado de la interacción a la vez que se proponen futuras líneas de investigación.

Palabras clave: mentorazgo, formación docente, aprender a ser docente, práctica profesional.

MENTORING, AS A practice in education, has taken many forms over the years (Fletcher, 2000; Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Tomlinson, 1995) and it is constantly in a state of flux given the many dimensions and forms it can take. These practices, contextually situated and highly symbiotic, have led to a "literalization" (Diaz Maggioli, 2013, p. 134) of the processes and practices of mentoring across the education spectrum leading practitioners to assume that any form of peer support is a valid source of professional learning. Hence, it is not surprising that participants in the relationship may often experience dissonances between their expectations about the process and its actual outcomes. Likewise, relevant stakeholders who have an outside interest in the relationship may be mistakenly led to believe that the learning results ensuing from the interaction are, in fact, those expected.

Given this situation, a decision has been made to frame the current study within a naturalistic, interpretive perspective. This is due to the fact that it was the researcher who noticed and elaborated a working problematization of a situation about which participants may not have been overtly aware: the extent to which mentoring relationships yield the required professional learning. According to Lake, Craig-Laker and Lea (2008, p.127),

> Locating the research within a naturalistic, interpretive methodology encourages researchers to explore the data, and promote an understanding of the data that recognises its contextually dependent nature. It also seems relevant to acknowledge ourselves as researchers and to mention the role of the social and political processes of which we are inevitably a part. Each researcher contributes values, identities and experiences to the research process, and while this should not rigidly determine particular points of view it does offer a way of seeing the research that accounts for individuality and contextuality.

Individuality and contextuality in the present study should be understood as both stemming from the researcher as well as the participants, whose voices eventually configure tentative understandings of the situations they encounter in their practice through commitment to the research process. It should also be acknowledged that the limitations of this research project are many. First, the pilot project stemmed from the author's motivation and thus, it is tinted by his lens of the situation. Secondly, given the limited number of participants involved, interpretations of their responses can only hold valid to their there and then. Thirdly, this study hints at responses that constitute the tip of an iceberg that shapes the relationships between mentors and mentees in teacher education programmes and is intended to provide a working basis for a larger scale

research project.

Theoretical Background

Definitions of the process and practice of mentoring abound in professional literature (see Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009). Some authors see mentoring as mostly a one-way commitment in which mentors respond to the needs of mentees (Furlong & Maynard, 1996, in Malderez, 2009). Others view the mentoring relationship as a dual commitment during which both mentors and mentees contribute experience, dispositions and skills to help consolidate the relationship which is, essentially, a learning one (Malderez, 2009; Tomlinson, 1995).

At the moment of framing the present research project, that of Shea's (1999) seemed to depict the nature of the mentoring processes in Uruguay. Shea (1999, p. 3) defines mentoring as

> a developmental caring, sharing and helping relationship where one person invests time, know-how and effort in enhancing another person's growth, knowledge and skills, responding to critical needs in the life of another person in ways that prepare that person for greater performance, productivity or achievement in the future.

While clear and almost self-explanatory, Shea's definition fails to capture the essentially interactive, two-way nature that is desirable in any mentoring relationship, one in which, ideally, both mentor and mentee derive new learnings at the crossroads of their interaction. These learnings should form the core of the mentoring experience during which participants change and evolve as a consequence of having shared time together. As Rajuan, Beijaard and Verloop (2007, p. 226) explain,

> current literature in teacher education focuses on the changes that cooperating teachers undergo in relation with other people, contexts and situations (Kilbourn & Roberts, 1991; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Awaya et al., 2003; Johnson, 2003) and how relationships are negotiated and renegotiated on the journey to professional development.

Malderez (2009) circumscribes the aims of mentoring to helping mentees choose theoretical orientations for their work in the classroom thus helping them bridge the theory–practice gap, and scaffolding the mentee's process of noticing as well as modelling skills in professional thinking, learning and planning. In so doing, the mentor is unpacking (Fletcher, 2000) his or her knowledge through a careful process of

reflective disclosure.

Malderez and Wedell (2007) delineate five main roles that a mentor should ideally fulfill:

a) *Acculturator* – one who helps the newcomer become a legitimate peripheral participant in the school community.

b) *Model* – not to be understood as a model to be emulated but as a model of enthusiasm for the job.

c) *Support* – once a trusting relationship has been established between Mentor and Mentee, the Mentor may become "*a shoulder to cry on or a listening ear*" (Malderez & Wedell, 2007, p. 87).

d) *Sponsor* – when the mentor intercedes on the mentee's behalf.

e) *Educator* – the actual learning expected of learners: learning to teach the students in the classroom.

These five roles are congruent with the ones expected of mentors in Uruguay and they form part of what can be called the *collective professional imagination*. In this sense, these roles have become *cultural realities* through discoursal practices that have been perpetuated from one generation to the next, regardless of the educational reform in place.

While reforms have called for drastic changes in the way teachers work, the collective professional imagination has remained faithful to its habitus. This has been most evident in the recurring complaints by teacher learners about the dissonance they experience in the practicum, a dissonance characterized by conflicting messages received in both their Subject Didactics course and their practicum experience with the mentors. This may be so because much of the discussion on mentoring seems to be focused on the "'end result' in terms of what is achieved for the student teacher" (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005, p. 277) rather than on the mediated symbiotic evolution of their professional identities. In the ideal mentoring situation, as it was expressed before, both Mentor and Mentee derive powerful learnings from the interaction.

Motivation for the Study

At this point, mentoring practices in Uruguay are framed within a sociocultural perspective where the mentoring relationship is viewed as one in which the mentee's professional development is to be scaffolded by the Mentor thus helping them move along a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) created as they engage in learning and refining new teaching practices.

The motivation for the present study derived mainly from the informal observations

of the interaction between mentors and mentees that the author has carried out as a Subject Didactics teacher. If the dissonance referred to above were true, it could bear important consequences for teacher learning. As Wang and Odell (2002, p.485) put it,

> Studies on student teaching (Calderhead,1988; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987) show that student teachers learn different things from their student teaching when they hold different conceptions of professional learning and of their role as student teachers.

Disclosing the kinds of learning that ensues from the mentor–mentee dyad becomes particularly relevant to the reconfiguration of the interaction. However, in order to better understand how mentoring relationships operate in the national context, an explanatory framework for their conceptualization is needed. This framework should be general enough to allow for the unexpected answers which participants may give to the research questions, while, at the same time, being specific enough to accommodate multifaceted views of the process derived from the respondents' experience.

The framework resorts to Wang and Odell's (2002) perspectives of mentoring and describes three distinct orientations towards it: Humanistic, Situated Apprenticeship and Critical Constructivist. Given that this conceptualization spans developments in the field over the past three decades and makes reference to the main philosophical and ontological views of the process of Mentoring, it is assumed to be a valid contribution to the study.

The Humanistic perspective became popular during the 1980s and was born as a way of helping novice teachers deal with the reality shock they encountered when entering the classroom and which seemed to be responsible for the high numbers of teachers leaving the profession during their first year of teaching. This orientation sees the cooperating teacher as provider of psychological and emotional support to the mentee and obtaining, in turn, prestige and an enhanced status. While popular with both mentors and mentees alike, its downside was that many novices failed to enhance their pedagogical or content knowledge, one of the ultimate aims of mentoring (Wang & Odell, 2002). Characteristic of this model were references to nurturing and emotional support in the face of the day-to-day hurdles. Interactions within this perspective emphasised the mentor's role as an emotional crutch, leaving little space for the potential contributions the mentee could make to the relationship.

The Situated Apprenticeship perspective evolved towards the late 1980s and aimed at strengthening the mentees' field experience as a reaction to teacher education practices, which relied heavily on coursework in university settings with few effects on actual teaching. It also stemmed from a renewed emphasis on Situated Learning (Lave

& Wenger, 1991) approaches to teacher education that emphasized the need for novices to become legitimate peripheral participants of the communities of practice they would eventually become fully fledged members of (Wenger, 1998). This view emphasizes that all knowledge and theories emerge from the contexts of practice in which they are born (Roth & Lee, 2007). This perspective called for mentors to induct mentees in the acquisition of practical teaching knowledge and skills and understanding of the cultures of teaching existing in their educational institutions. With the mentor acting as a model and the mentee as his or her apprentice, the limitations of this perspective soon became evident as mentees failed to contextualize the behaviours modelled by their mentors to their own classes, or perpetuated ineffective practices learnt as a consequence of their mentoring experience. As Wang and Odell (2002, p. 497) aptly put it: "The situated apprentice perspective suggests a narrow, functional perspective on teacher learning that is intended to reproduce the existing system." Lastly, teacher mentoring within this perspective implies a predictable route from pre-service to novice to competent, which is not always feasible or necessarily linear. Again, in this perspective, it was the mentor the one with the biggest gains in the relationship although it needs to be acknowledged that mentees might have gained more in terms of skills, knowledge and dispositions for teaching.

In more recent times, a Critical Constructivist perspective has become popular. Influenced by the work of Dewey and Freire, it seeks support for novice teachers' learning to teach for social justice, given that traditional teaching approaches have failed dismally to educate the many underprivileged and at-risk populations characteristic of state-funded educational systems. For this kind of teacher education to emerge, new forms of knowledge need to be developed through collaborative inquiry. These inquiries focus on current teaching practices and continually seek to transform them towards emancipatory ends. In so doing, knowledge transformation is seen as a highly situated co-construction amongst participants. Mentors and mentees are co-generators of new knowledge and classroom practices and, together, engage in generating novel approaches to teaching (Zeichner, 1995). The power of this vision calls for educators—both budding as well as seasoned—to engage in cycles of inquiry and reflection aiming at problematizing teaching and learning for the benefit of students. Though stimulating and refreshing, this perspective is not devoid of problems. For example, given the premise that all knowledge is problematic if it is not the result of collaborative inquiry, mentees may have limited access to knowledge that others have constructed. Nevertheless, this perspective is more encompassing of the contributions of both mentors and mentees and constitutes a more desirable aim to be achieved.

These three perspectives on mentoring form the basis for the analysis of the data gathered in this study and help answer the main research question: What learnings ensue

from the interaction of Mentors and Mentees in Uruguayan State Schools?

Context of the Study

The Uruguayan National Teacher Education Council—a 31-campus Higher Education Institution—was until recently the only body providing teacher certification in Uruguay. Students complete a four-year Bachelor of Arts in Education degree with a major in a specific subject. During their second and third years, they are assigned to Mentors in the State School System, and are visited on three occasions by their Subject Didactics teacher. The Subject Didactics teacher is in charge of the Methods of Teaching course in the college. During their final year, teacher learners are assigned to a group of their own in the State School System and are expected to develop and teach the course with minimal help or support, except for that of the Subject Didactics teacher's who visits them five times during that year.

In the Uruguayan Educational System Mentors become so, solely through seniority. Having taught for a minimum of 10 years in State Schools and having been supervised by a National Inspector and obtained a satisfactory ranking, they enter a national roster from which teacher learners select the school and group that is most convenient to them, given their timetables in the college and other personal commitments. No effort is made to match teacher learners and mentors so the relationship is purely *ad hoc*. Mentors receive the equivalent of one extra group's payment for their services and are expected to welcome the teacher learners in their groups, and to add significantly to the courses taught in the college by allowing spaces for mentees to put theory into practice. There are no explicit written specifications for the Mentor's role except for an indirect mention as to their function in the National Teacher Education Curriculum. Also, there have only been two Mentor Preparation courses in the past five years that have affected only 1% of the total mentor population in the country.

It is in this context that the author decided to probe into the mentoring relationship in order to disclose the kinds of learning that ensue from the interaction. Underpinning this intention was the premise that the desired changes in pedagogical practices expected of newly qualified teachers can only happen if mentoring relationships provide the necessary scaffolding for these new learnings to emerge in the protected environment of the practicum.

It should be noted once again that the present study is limited both in scope and breadth and constitutes only an initial attempt at tackling the issue. More longitudinal studies involving larger populations will follow in order to probe the actual learning that takes place in mentoring relationships.

Methodology and Participants

The study was carried out through the administration of an online questionnaire to mentors and one to mentees. The choice of research instrument was made because of the ease of distribution and application and the resources available to the researcher. Also, with the new Information and Communication Technologies becoming increasingly more available to teachers and students in the State School System—Uruguay is implementing the *One Laptop per Child* programme nationwide in primary and secondary schools and every teacher has access to a computer with an internet connection—the researcher considered this medium preferable to face-to-face interviews or focus groups.

Mentor and mentee online questionnaires were created using a tool that reports anonymous answers. Both questionnaires focused on demographic information followed by questions regarding the respondent's perception of learning through the Mentoring experience. The content of both questionnaires was kept relatively parallel for the sake of validity and reliability of results.

Participants

Surveys were sent to a total sample of 20 teacher learners and 20 mentors in the Modern Foreign Languages Department randomly selected from the College of Education's database. Seven responses were received from teacher learners (35%) and four from mentors (25%). The return rate of questionnaires from teacher learners is considered barely satisfactory whereas the return rate of questionnaires from mentors is not adequate.

The seven student teachers had just completed a two-year mentoring experience and were now in charge of their own groups. The respondents were between 26 and 30 years of age and most had never taught before doing their first year of teaching practice with their mentors. Overall, these teacher learners acknowledged having taught for 2 to 5 years, including their mentoring years.

The following table summarizes the demographics of the seven student teacher respondents:

Sex			Male		Female	
			2		5	
Age	21–25	26–30	30–35	36–40	41–50	51+
	12.5%	62.5%	0%	12.5%	0%	12.5%
Years teaching	Less than 1	2–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21+
	12.5%	50%	25%	0%	0%	12.5%
Before doing their teaching practice...			Never taught		Little teaching	Teaching for some time
			62.5%		12.5%	25%

Table 1. Participating student teachers' profiles.

The variables of *years of experience teaching* and *teaching experience prior to the mentoring situation* were considered relevant in so far as the respondents' diversity may indicate that, having had some or even significant teaching experience, participants may have been better positioned to assess the worth of the experiences provided during the practicum. Rajuan, Baijaard and Verloop (2007, p. 224) suggest "that protégés report more negative mentoring experiences when they perceive their mentor as having dissimilar attitudes, beliefs and values from their own."

As for mentors, out of the 20 surveys sent out only four answers were received. The demographic information provided by respondents also pointed to the diversity in the mentoring force, which seems to replicate that found in the teacher learners' population. All respondents were experienced both in terms of the scope of their experience teaching as well as their experience in mentoring.

In terms of their preparation for the role, the four respondents had engaged in some formal training for the task of mentoring. Noticeably, all of them participated in meetings with the National Inspector where the mentor role was discussed, whereas 25% met regularly with the Subject Didactics Teacher to exchange views on the Mentoring process, and 75% of the participants had taken, and passed, the Mentor Preparation Course.

The following table summarizes the information provided by the mentors:

Sex			Male		Female	
			0		4	
Age	21–25	26–30	30–35	36–40	41–50	51+
	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
Years teaching			10–15	16–20	21–25	26–30
			25%	0%	0%	12.5%
Years mentoring	2–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21–25	26+
	50%	25%	0%	0%	0%	25%
Mentor preparation	None	Mentor Course	Teacher Ed. course, Private provider	Teacher Ed. course, Public provider	Meeting with Didactics Teacher	Meeting with Inspectors
	0%	75%	25%	50%	50%	100%

Table 2. Participating mentors' profiles.

Data collection

The questionnaires were created using an online survey tool that allowed for closed (multiple choice, drop-down menus, ranking, ordering and sorting) and open questions (essay style). Questions focused solely on the learning ensuing from the classroom interaction between mentors and mentees bearing in mind that "teaching practice in the school serves as the most significant factor in the shaping of the student teachers'

experience of training to be a teacher" (Rajuan et. al, 2007, p. 223).

All questions focusing on learning through the mentoring situation were open, guided questions, that is to say, participants could provide their own answers to a prompt given by the researcher. However, in both surveys, there was one fully open question at the end for participants to expand on items they would want to highlight.

The survey was kept open online for a total of 40 days during which time three reminders were emailed to the 40 potential respondents clearly stating the purpose of the study and the length of time the survey would remain open.

Data analysis

Data were coded using Wang and Odell's (2002) perspectives on mentoring as a framework for disclosing mentors and mentees' understanding of the learning stemming from their interaction. Responses were matched to the three main perspectives above and content areas were created for the different areas stemming from the responses. In going through this iterative process of reviewing the data and creating the content areas, Malderez and Wedell's (2007) Mentor functions were considered and other categories created. Finally, mentor and mentee's data were compared to find similarities and differences. On comparing them, it was noted that mentors made reference to learning as a two-way process whereas mentees' answers mostly referred to a one-way process. Hence, in the case of mentors' answers, the content area they emphasized as mutual was coded as such.

Perspective	Category	Examples
Humanistic	Support Care Symbiosis	The teacher was supportive She respected my time and process There was warmth in the relationship She cared about me as a person The teacher understood me and I understood her
Situated apprenticeship	Acculturation Education Modelling Support	Made me feel I was a colleague not a student How to share opinions How to make the class meaningful How to be calm when students misbehave How to try out new things How to organize and manage group work
Critical constructivist	Sponsorship Promotion of praxis Promotion of creativity	Helped me become aware of how important it is to reflect How to back up my teaching with theory She taught me to take risks

Table 3. Summary of teacher learners' responses.

The same process was followed at the time of analyzing data provided by the mentors. Again, through an iterative process of continuous approximation to the data, categories

were delineated for each perspective stemming from the answers given by participants. As explained above, the initial difficulty in analyzing these data was the fact that mentors referred to their own learning more than to their mentees' learning (even when the question explicitly required them to address the mentee). These digressions from the parameters of the survey by the respondents clearly indicate one of the potential drawbacks of such an instrument. Had the data been gathered through face-to-face interviews, the researcher would have been able to redirect the participant's answers to the issue of mentee's learning. However, the responses obtained are, in this case, much more revealing since they depict a reality about which the researcher was completely unaware. This reality makes reference to how the respondents perceive learning as a two-way process, a fact that begets the core of the present pilot project.

Perspective	Categories	Examples
Humanistic	Support (mutual) Sponsorship Education	Student teachers were a breath of fresh air. I helped them overcome frustrations. They shared what they were studying and that helped me grow.
Situated apprenticeship	Education Acculturation (mutual) Modelling (mutual) Awareness raising	Helped me realize I needed to plan my lessons better. The need to constantly update what I know. Taught me how to teach them to organize and plan better. Made me more aware of my classroom management. Helped me realize the power of cooperative work. Sharpen my intuition and "unpack" my tacit knowledge. I learnt a lot of things I am not supposed to do.
Critical constructivist	Acculturation (mutual) Support	Student teachers provided another point of view. Become more responsible for my students' learning. Made me realize how to relate theory and practice.

Table 4. Summary of cooperating teacher's answers.

Data were also analyzed in terms of frequency of response by weighing the number of responses for each of the three perspectives chosen. A further difficulty arose at the time of coding the answers of mentors, some of which seemed suitable for more than one perspective. Given the nature of the relationship depicted by the respondents and taking into consideration all answers in the same context, a decision was finally made to code them into one category, while also pointing out the need to discuss the overlap of two of the perspectives further on in this paper.

Results

Learning as Reported by Teacher Learners

From the analysis of the student teacher responses it would appear that learning happened in a wide assortment of ways. All three perspectives of mentoring were accounted for, which reflects the varied understanding of mentoring roles and relationships existing amongst participants. This is not strange given the relative lack of precision as to the specification of the role and responsibilities.

Of the three perspectives, the Situated Apprenticeship perspective obtained the most responses. It seems clear that teacher learners derived a lot of technical and hands-on knowledge from their interactions with their mentors. The main concerns they report are those having to do with day-to-day operational or procedural tasks of the teacher: *how to keep the students on task, how to organize effective learning experiences, how to plan*. All these concerns are reported as being natural in beginning teachers (Furlong & Maynard, 1995). These authors explain how beginning teachers share a preoccupation with making the class work by focusing on planning, class management and organization. However, they do not focus on student learning until much later stages in their practicum experience. Likewise, Richards, Lee and Tang (1998, in Borg, 2006) reporting on studies focusing on novice and expert teachers' cognition show how less experienced teachers focus more on procedural and technical aspects of teaching than on student learning. Reportedly, "[m]axims used more frequently by less experienced teachers were 'cover your lesson plan,' and 'fit your plan to match the time available'" (Borg, 2006, p. 103).

It could be claimed that the practical learning reported primarily by teacher learners here, focuses on *practice* and not *praxis*. Roth and Lee (2007, p. 190) explain that "praxis denotes the moments of real human activity that occur only once (Bakhtin, 1993), which distinguishes it from the notion of practice, which is used to denote a patterned form of action, inherently a theoretical signified." In other words, teacher learners perceive that they have learnt routines grounded on "best practices" rather than developed ownership of their own learning teaching. In doing this, they may replicate the behaviours that their mentors coached them into. Whether mentors coached mentees into practical concerns over more critical ones or, as a direct response to the mentees' needs rather than the mentor's own agenda, cannot be ascertained and opens up an interesting question for further exploration.

It should be noted that, besides these practical concerns, mentors also inducted teacher learners in aspects of the profession, truthfully fulfilling the socialization function expected of the mentoring relationship. Teacher learners reported being "allowed to share class time" and "being made feel they were a colleague and not a student." Both of these dispositions seem to show a concern on the part of the mentor to help teacher

learners gain legitimate peripheral participation in the profession. However, these efforts are reported as stemming from the practice and do not necessarily coincide with the reality of a professional teacher who focuses her actions as much on praxis as on practice.

The second perspective in frequency reported in teacher learners' answers is the Humanistic perspective. In this sense, what participants reported are attitudes the Mentor had which position them as an emotional helper. This may derive from the emphases on the technical aspects presented above which, when occurring in the classroom, may cause anxiety in teacher learners. In this sense, we can see how words such as *warmth*, *care*, *generous* and *humour* permeate the answers. One may speculate here that there might be a relationship between the first two perspectives: when faced with the cruxes of practice Mentees receive both technical information and emotional support from Mentors.

This situation is not unlike that reported by other researchers. For example, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005, p. 281) explain that

> "These two clusters seem to reflect the findings of Bleach (1999) who described Mentors as providing two sides of assistance to newly qualified teachers, the personal befriending side and the professional side. This is further supported by Williams and Prestage (2002) who discuss the contrast between the professional role and interpersonal support."

The last perspective referred to by respondents in this category is the Critical Constructivist perspective. Although incipient, compared to the frequency of answers given in the other two categories, we can see traces of mentors' actions towards emancipatory practices such as *reflection*, *trying out new things*, *taking risks* and *developing grounded theories*.

Considering the aims of the current reform agenda and the data above, teacher learners' perceptions of their learning through mentoring interactions have not progressed much beyond an apprenticeship model of the craft of teaching. This model has been nurtured and supported by a caring professional but without much overt attention to modifying the practices which have reputedly led many students to failure. This orientation of mentors towards modelling technical knowledge seems to be commonplace in the profession and has been reported by Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) as a consequence of mentors' perception of themselves as experts on teaching entrusted with passing on their practical knowledge to their mentees for the sake of their survival in the classroom. Also, Eraut (1985) cites the fact that mentors occupy most of their time managing the daily events of their classrooms and do not have time to explain the reasons for their

actions to teacher learners, a situation which Fletcher (2000, p.37) calls "unpacking their expertise." One may also speculate that, given the little preparation for the role of the mentors in this study, they may lack the skills to make their tacit knowledge about teaching and learning explicit, since this is a practice not frequently requested from teachers.

Learning as reported by mentors

Responses by mentors mirror those given by mentees in terms of the frequency of their answers as coded into each of the perspectives, which constitute the working model used in this paper. We may question the relative homogeneity in the responses of mentors and mentees in terms of the mentors' influences on the professional opinions of mentees. However, as Rajuan, Baijaard and Verloop (2007:226) remind us

> "Current literature in teacher education focuses on the changes that cooperating teachers undergo in relation with other people, contexts and situations (Kilbourn & Roberts, 1991; Boreen & Niday, 2000; Awaya et al., 2003; Johnson, 2003) and how relationships are negotiated and renegotiated on the journey to professional development. The Mentoring context is one that introduces teachers to a new role in the workplace in interaction with student teachers and teacher trainers."

It can be speculated that Mentors' responses to the needs of Mentees were responsible for prompting the development of specific views about the task of teaching at hand thus yielding the same kinds of answers which mentees have given.

In the present study mentors reported a progressive awareness-raising process stemming from their involvement in mentoring teacher learners. They made reference to their own learning more frequently than that of the teacher learners'. They saw themselves mostly as models and instructors who pursued a firmer theoretical grasp of the principles and practices of teaching and learning in order to better serve the needs of mentees.

Quotes such as "My mentee helped me realize I needed to plan my lessons better," "I discovered the need to constantly update what I know" or "My mentee taught me how to teach him to organize and plan better" point at the fact that the mentoring relationship was, indeed, a two-way process of co-construction of new theories on teaching and learning while respecting the needs of the mentee. In other words, the mentors in this study seek to enhance their knowledge, skills and dispositions in light of the needs of their mentees and it is here that their professional development seems to lie. However, no mention is made to attempts at professional development outside their interaction

with the mentees.

In this scenario, mentoring seems to have become a powerful tool for the professional development of the mentor while, at the same time, serving as a conduit for unpacking mentor's knowledge. As one mentor aptly put it: "Mentoring has helped me sharpen my intuition and 'unpack' my tacit knowledge and I also learnt a lot of things I am not supposed to do."

Given these answers, one can see the boundary between the Situated Apprenticeship and the Critical Constructivist perspective become rather blurred. In terms of frequency of responses, those coded as pertaining to the Situated Apprenticeship perspective on mentoring made reference to practical teacher concerns (planning; bridging the theory – practice gap; cooperative work; and classroom management). However, when one looks at the answers coded within the Critical Constructivist perspective, one sees how the awareness-raising effect of the mentoring relationship impinges directly on the mentor's professional development as a language teacher, and as a mentor in a more indirect fashion. In this category, mentors reported the help afforded them by mentees provided them with "another point of view" or helped them "become more responsible for my students' learning."

The Humanistic perspective was also present in the same frequency as the Critical Constructivist perspective. Here, one can see once again how the presence of the mentee acts as a catalyst for the mentor's own development: "Student teachers were a breath of fresh air," and, in a more telling way, "They shared what they were studying and that helped me grow."

It may seem then, that it is the mentor who is gaining the most out of this relationship. Although this may be a bold claim, data seem to depict a process of reflective disclosure of their own learning more than an explication of how their actions result in the mentees' learning.

Whose learning? Who's learning? The contested ground in teacher learning

From the analysis of the data above, it would appear that the mentoring relationship of Uruguayan Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages contributing to this study serves primarily as a conduit for the professional development of the mentors, while providing instrumental and practical knowledge to mentees. The potential hurdle in this situation is that this practical knowledge seems to be coded mostly as *ways of doing* and it is not certain to what extent teacher learners have access to the professional thinking which guides these actions. This may point to a potential contradiction of the main charges of a mentor, which encompass, among others, helping mentees develop noticing skills, and learning to think as a professional teacher.

However, this situation may also result from a shift in the mentors' perspectives

about their role and function within the teacher education system. As Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005, p. 285) report

> ...the Mentors' change in perceptions of their roles arise from the Mentoring experience itself, through the interactions that take place with the student teachers. This could be described as a shift from a perspective of Mentoring as a one-way process to that of Mentoring as a two-way process in which both participants can benefit.

In this view, mentoring becomes an educational process for both mentors and mentees resulting in quality learning for both. Also, the situation seems to mirror the view of learning officially sponsored by Uruguayan authorities, one of joint construction of knowledge rather than transmission. In other words, the context in which this study was carried out considers mentoring practices as a way of developing a professional identity as much as a way to help mentees hone their professional knowledge, skills and dispositions.

It would appear from this analysis that mentoring practices in Uruguay are at the crossroads between one mentoring tradition grounded on the transmission of practical knowledge and one that seeks to generate a field for the further professional growth of mentors. However, the purpose of the mentoring relationship is supposed to ultimately lie in the development of the mentee's learning. It is for this sole purpose that the relationship is started.

Ironically, it is the mentors in this study the ones who seem to reap the biggest rewards from the relationship. They gain insights on new developments in the profession via the work of their mentees, keep abreast of these developments through the updated literature their mentees come into contact with, and gain a professional space of reflection from which they can deem insights into their own praxis via the opportunity to develop new practices. It may seem that the mentoring process has evolved into a form of relationship in which participants have focused on "the social nature of learning as a process but not the social nature of learning as an outcome" (Bullock & Wikeley, 2004, p. 126).

Finally, we should also acknowledge the power of pedagogical traditions. In coming to terms with the mandates of the educational reform, veteran teachers—our mentors—have had to make significant shifts to their own educational platforms and they have done so with varying degrees of success. In trying to align themselves with *new pedagogies* mentors may have intuitively, albeit unconsciously, used the mentoring ground as the territory upon which to build the new educational foundation required from them by authorities. Rajuan, Baijaard and Verloop (2007, p. 226) depict a similar situation when they say that "the current shift from traditional instruction to student-

centered learning (Wang, 2000; van Veen et al., 2001) poses a challenge to teachers' professional orientations and the way veteran teachers mentor student teachers."

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to disclose the kinds of learning which result from the interaction between mentors and mentees in Uruguay.

While one would expect the bulk of the professional learning to lie on the mentee's experience, the learning they report is mostly practical with a good dose of support on the part of the mentors. In contrast, mentors report valuable professional learning by engaging in the relationship. If one could talk about the quality of the learning experiences it would seem that mentors have the better part in this relationship since the relationship affords them multiple opportunities for professional development, which is not provided by the educational system otherwise.

This fact notwithstanding, the present research report is limited both in terms of scope and breadth. Hence, it opens up opportunities for further inquiry. Among the themes which stem from the present report we may count: how mentors develop within the mentoring relationship, how mentees manage to develop situated knowledge outside the mentoring relationship, and also whether mentor preparation courses can influence the way mentors perform their tasks. This also opens up the question of what learning should mentors develop prior to becoming so. As Gebhard (2009, p. 255) explains

> ...it is possible for practicum teacher educators to focus attention on empowering teacher learners as to how to understand their teaching. Through an understanding of how to explore their teaching, they can adapt their teaching, including their beliefs, as well as be able to continuously construct and reconstruct their teaching and teaching identies.

The processes of interaction that may yield such vision can be the fodder for further research, as well.

Finally, one area that was purposefully not tackled in this research study and which merits further inquiry, is that of the balance of power in the mentoring relationship. An important variable left out of the equation here is that the whole research project stemmed from the Higher Education Institution personified in the Subject Didactics teacher–researcher, who is often perceived as an authority figure. Even though anonymity was secured via the use of an electronic survey, respondents may have provided compliant responses.

It seems evident that in order to counteract undesired halo effects in a study of this nature, other research instruments and even other researchers need to be involved so

as to add validity and reliability to the results. The next step would be to engage in a broader study seeking to confirm or dispute the findings discussed here as a way to contribute to a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of mentors.

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