Mentoring Teachers: Supporting Learning, Wellbeing and Retention

Malderez's *Mentoring Teachers: Supporting Learning, Wellbeing and Retention* is a book for teacher mentors, teachers becoming mentors and mentor program coordinators. It provides practical guidance for mentors and mentor trainers. She delivers a step-by-step description of mentor roles, and the way she has written this book shows how hands-on she addresses the queries and concerns of mentors working in diverse educational contexts. She turns to her readers using a personal tone. Right at the beginning, she mentions that in order to have a smooth conversation, the speaker and the listener need to understand each other. Knowing each other is very important in developing a conversation whether it is between author and reader, mentor and mentee or a teacher and their students. She believes that mentors play "a crucial and irreplaceable role in supporting their teachers' learning and well-being, which enhances teachers' retention" (p. 1).

Malderez presents real-life situations and examples that support the reader's understanding of both the content and its context. She believes that in effective mentoring, mentors support mentees while the latter develop reflective practice and learn to teach, leading to their heightened well-being and professionalism. She follows Hobson's approach (2020), which describes effective mentoring as being ONSIDE. This implies that the mentor should always be on the side of the mentee. The acronym ONSIDE means Offline, Non-judgemental, Supportive, Individualised, Developmental and Empowering (p. 5). Malderez's definition is succinct: in her terms, an effective mentor is "one who does in fact support the wellbeing and learning of the mentee and his or her integration into the cultures of the school and the wider profession" (p. 8).

The author states that an effective mentor fulfils five roles, namely, a support role, an acculturator role, a model role, a sponsor role, and an educator role. Each of these roles is developed in depth further on in separate chapters.

Let us now look at the book in some detail. In Chapter One, Malderez discusses how important it is for the parties to get to know each other on the mentoring journey. This chapter outlines a pre-mentoring task, i.e., understanding the mentoring context before starting the process. Malderez calls this a 'contextual mentoring audit (CMA)' (p. 24). Context is defined as a *place* (country, school, classroom), the group of *people* involved and the notion of *time*
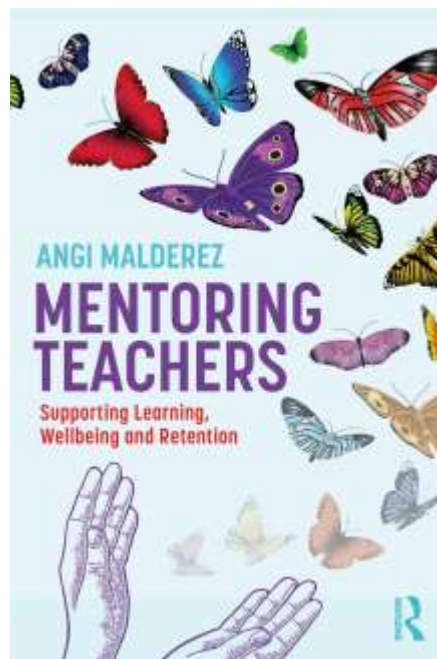
(p. 25). The basis of mentoring practice is understanding the mentee's context and background as well as their needs and expectations.

In Chapter Two, Malderez presents the first and foremost role of a mentor: Support. Building trusting relationships is the foundation of mentor-mentee relationships. When the mentee believes that their mentor is non-judgemental or acts as a critical friend, they share their issues and challenges with their mentor without being fearful of making mistakes and losing face. Malderez suggests informal chats with mentees to help understand each other's characters, experiences, expectations, needs and preferences. Developing rapport at the start can lead to a productive and trusting relationship.

In Chapter Three, Malderez describes the second role, which might mainly apply to school-based mentors, i.e., that of the Acculturator. In this role, mentors help their mentees to adjust to the school culture and the profession itself. They also introduce the mentees to all members of the school community and other various professional communities outside school for their professional development. Malderez specifies that such communities may range from local groups to national and international professional associations. The author holds that an acculturator aims to support mentees in becoming contributing members of these groups because mentees may have valuable knowledge, thoughts, and experiences to offer.

Chapter Four presents the role of a mentor as a Model. Malderez emphasizes that mentors, just like doctors and lawyers, need to keep themselves up-to-date and involved in professional institutions. They should also be accountable, display context-appropriate behaviour and speech, and follow a dress code. Mentors can also share their own classroom experiences, how they overcome their classroom challenges, and how they develop their knowledge and skills as teachers (Malderez & Bodóczky, 1999). They can sometimes invite mentees to their classes to let them observe their teaching practice. Mentors can share their reflections on their own teaching, which provides a good opportunity for mentees to learn and develop their professionalism.

Chapter Five showcases the Sponsor role, in which mentors use their knowledge and contacts to help their mentees expand their reach. If they have any such influence, they can then use it for their mentees' professional benefit. As sponsors, mentors encourage their mentees to participate in conferences or teacher development groups for their growth.

In Chapter Six, Malderez discusses the last, as well as the most important role of a mentor, namely, that of an Educator. In this role, mentors support their mentees' learning of teaching and the development of noticing skills. Malderez highlights that a teacher should be a good noticer so that he/she can reflect on what has happened in the lesson. Noticing means paying attention to something that strikes your attention. To understand the classroom context from the mentees' point of view, they should notice every detail of their classrooms, not only familiar and ordinary things but unfamiliar, unwanted, and unexpected things as well.

Chapter Seven deals with assessing mentees. Malderez reminds us that assessment can put at risk the safe and trusting relationship between mentors and mentees. Mentors can mitigate the effects of assessment by focusing more on supporting the development of mentees. Therefore, before observing their mentees' lessons for assessment, mentors can confirm the date and time for discussion with the mentees. They can explain what they will do while observing. The aim is that the mentees and even their learners should not worry about what happens during or after the observation period.

Chapter Eight discusses some ideas for practices and processes mentors can use to support their own development, which is crucial for mentors. A mentor is a role model for their mentee. If mentees understand that their mentors are making progress in their careers and witness the professional development of their mentors, then mentees get more motivated. Malderez mentions that mentors need to ask reflective and probing questions of themselves for their own development, such as *What can I learn from my experience of mentoring this week/month?* (p. 105).

Chapter Nine presents three allegorical stories that can be interpreted in various ways whilst helping mentors to develop. The story titled *The Boy and the Cocoon* reminds mentors to be patient and allow mentees to develop at their own pace. The story suggests that development and growth might be a gradual and complex process, but the result can be remarkable. Likewise, the story entitled *Mummy Mouse* exemplifies all five mentor roles i.e., support, acculturator, model, sponsor and educator. The story encourages mentors to make the right decision at the right time for their mentees' sake by introducing them to the wider world. The third story *The Desert Nomads* is related to the mentor's ability to notice the things around. It also reminds the mentors to encourage teachers to see ordinary things in their classrooms to find precious gems.

Chapter Ten concludes by highlighting the main ideas presented in the book. In mentoring, mentees are active agents and priority is given to their decisions. When mentors allow mentees to make their decisions based on their specific circumstances, their self-confidence and satisfaction towards their work increases.

The book has a few drawbacks which the writer could easily address. The first problem I noticed is that the examples are culturally bound and some mentors may find it challenging to use them in their own contexts. By thinking of more general examples for an international readership, all mentors would be able to apply them to their diverse educational contexts. Similarly, while the book is understandable for experienced mentors, novice mentors may struggle with the reading at some points. Therefore, the writer could have included, or could include in future editions, some templates for less experienced mentors. Finally, mentors these days use technologies in their professional practices, but the writer has not discussed incorporating digital devices, platforms or applications in mentoring. She could have guided them to integrate technology and digital tools to support hybrid mentoring relationships. All the same, these drawbacks do not opaque the book's worth.

Altogether, I, being a mentor myself, highly recommend this book to all language teachers who would like to become mentors, mentors and anyone else who wants to explore more about mentoring and mentor development. This book not only helps us to become more effective mentors but also provides solid guidance on how to improve as mentor trainers. Mentors themselves need to be supported in order to stay enthusiastic and this book is energising, boosting mentors' confidence to practise mentoring effectively. I hope that prospective readers will also feel encouraged in their mentoring experiences, as I have felt in mine, by reading this book.

References

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