

Guide to mentoring

Advice for the mentor and mentee

A publication commissioned by ATL from Trevor Wright



Professional
development series



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1. Preface

A mentor is an experienced and expert teacher who takes on the additional role of supporting and developing colleagues. These colleagues are often trainee teachers, and in this guide we will refer to them as mentees.

In fact, teachers at many levels of the profession can find themselves being mentored. All of the principles and most of the practices recommended here apply (for example) to newly qualified teachers (NQTs) who are being mentored as part of an induction process. The successful mentor/mentee relationship is collaborative and mutually active and that is why this guide can be used equally by both. Both parties have a responsibility to explore, define and resolve mentoring issues. At times, throughout this book, we have highlighted points specific to either the **mentor** or the **mentee**, but the core text is applicable to either party.

ATL provides specific guidance on related issues, such as the induction or probation process, and our publication, *Induction: Making it Work for You*, is available either as a hardcopy or as a downloadable PDF from ATL's website at www.atl.org.uk.

If, however, a mentee feels that their relationship with their mentor is not going well, they should contact ATL for further advice.

The successful mentor/mentee relationship is collaborative and mutually active and that is why this guide can be used equally by both



2. Introduction

It is not an exaggeration to say that the work of the mentor is crucial to the teaching profession. The training of teachers drives the quality of the education service, and the mentor is at the heart of that training. While other training components (such as the role of the university provider) vary according to the training scheme, the centrality of the mentor is a constant. They have a relationship with the mentee, which no one else can equal and their influence is the major determiner of the success, nature and quality of the new teacher.

A training relationship

Given the broadening scope of teacher training contexts, and especially the increasing activity of schools within these processes, we need to refocus on what mentors are doing. It's easy to underestimate the role. For example, there are mentors who still regard the trainee teacher's placement as a form of work experience and the mentor's job as essentially one of modelling and of practice oversight.

Let's begin, then, with a clear definition. Trainee teachers don't undertake school placements to practice. They don't go to school for work experience or job sampling. Of course, they will do all of these things, but there is one single purpose behind them. They are in school to train, and the mentor is their trainer. This has clear implications in terms of planning programmes for mentees.

planning, assessing, administrating, teaching, conversing, meeting, running detentions, supervising, invigilating and covering for colleagues. The teacher's brief is a broad and varied list. But a mentee's focus must be overwhelmingly on developing effective learning strategies. But how far is each activity essential to training? Is completing a corridor duty really a rich training opportunity?

So a mentee on a placement doesn't simply undertake a watered-down version of a teacher's job. Mentees are involved in a programme of experiences designed specifically for training and development.

A teaching placement is not an apprenticeship. Of course, mentees will work closely with their mentors, as a trainee plumber might work alongside a professional; they will watch, emulate and learn, but this will be only a small part of their activity and of their relationship with their mentor. It is far from central.

Mentors are experienced and expert teachers and they are expanding their experience through their mentoring. They know how to run a classroom and they have much to demonstrate and offer the mentees. It's not uncommon for mentees, impressed and encouraged by their mentors, to become increasingly frustrated as they try to emulate their mentor in the classroom. They need to watch, they need to understand why mentors do what they do but this doesn't mean that they necessarily need to copy. Mentoring isn't a master class. It's a complex range of training activities and this is what makes for a complex relationship.



Mentors

In determining what mentees are going to do in your school, think in terms of training potential. Instead of the mantra *Teachers do it, so mentees need to do it, too*, apply the question: How far is this a beneficial training opportunity?

For example, teachers do many things during the day, and, of course, mentees need to know about them, and mentors need to be finally convinced that mentees can manage the job. They might include:

3. Managing the mentoring relationship

The mentoring relationship can be extraordinarily difficult, and, like all relationships, has to be worked at. It's unusual because it's asymmetrical, often being experienced at very different levels of intensity by the respective partners. For the mentee, it is absolutely crucial; their daily well-being and future development depend on it. For the mentor, however, it's just one of a portfolio of duties which they have to manage, and, almost certainly it won't be their highest priority.

This inevitable asymmetry generates strong emotion in the mentee, often shown in the extreme language used to describe the relationship. Mentees will frequently use words like 'love', 'hate', 'elation' and 'despair'. The mentor may be largely unaware that the mentee's emotions are so fully engaged.

The status relationship is similarly complex. The mentee is an adult who has low status, and is probably not used to this. As students mentees were central to the work of their college. As employees they might have chosen and been chosen by an employer but as trainee teachers they are less important than the teachers and the children with whom they are working. They are also required to seek support and guidance from the very person whose job it is to assess them, and this assessment is not an academic exercise but a powerful judgment about their life, career and personality. It's of little wonder that this relationship generates stress.

Managing by numbers

Managing all of this requires calm, explicitness and objectivity. One way of achieving this involves managing by numbers. For example, in the giving of post-lesson feedback, mentors are frequently perceived by mentees as being relentlessly negative. Mentees may be wrong about this, because they hear criticisms much more than they hear compliments. In any case, mentors' intentions are almost certainly positive; they offer commentary on the mentee's teaching, attached to suggestions for improvement. This is the mentor's job, after all. But there is an 80/20

rule. If the mentor's feedback isn't 80% positive, the mentee will hear it as 80% negative.

At an early stage, therefore, the mentor and mentee must establish ground rules. Like any decent rules, they must be set early on and not dragged in later in a belated attempt to cure the relationship. Both parties should negotiate and agree the numbers. A post-lesson feedback, for example, will have as its main focus three compliments, three accounts of real success and two development points. These will focus on areas that are now ready to be worked on, based not just on the observation but on the mentee's stage of development. They will include discussion and advice about improvement, with activities (such as observation of other teachers) which the mentor will set up. Both parties will recognise that the feedback uses the numbers and that the numbers provide balance.



Openness to advice may well be the single biggest success indicator on a training course



Mentors

Be sure to deliver feedback which, though properly focused on development, includes straightforward compliments about the lesson. It sometimes requires very deliberate and explicit thought to find good things to say, but it's rarely impossible. For example, the lesson may have fallen apart due to poor behaviour management, but the lesson plan may have revealed sound subject knowledge. Don't just stick with the fire-fighting aspect of feedback. Mentees certainly need your help with this, but their emotional response to what's happened may be extreme and you need to help them with that by reminding them of what they are doing well.



Mentees

You may need to ask your mentor to set up the numbers in order to decide on protocols which will ensure balance in your conversations. Don't be afraid to politely set the agenda in this way – your mentor is busy and will probably be grateful.

Explicitness

Another way of making this relationship productive is through explicitness. Each party needs to know what the other really thinks. Mentees and mentors spend far too much time and energy trying to work each other out. The value of explicitness in the mentoring conversation can hardly be overestimated. This may present difficulties because, as teachers, we aren't used to it. We are used to dealing with children. We are skilled in developing and enhancing working relationships through subtext, through the subliminal, through veiled threats, finessing and cajoling. It comes as a surprise that we can and should talk directly to mentees about themselves, their practice and their responses.

It's also a proper and teacherly instinct to want to be positive and to build confidence but sometimes mentees need to be told directly of their mentor's concerns. Naturally, this will occur within the positive context that is outlined above and throughout this guide but mentees need to know if things aren't going well, and they need to know in time to put them right. For example, a very common issue with mentees is defensiveness. A typical conversation may include the following exchange:

Mentor: You didn't really spend enough time explaining the ideas behind that task.

Mentee: Well, I didn't want to talk at them for too long.

Or

Mentor: Your questioning would be better if you asked a range of question types.

Mentee: Yes, but I particularly needed to ask factual questions because I had to check their learning.

Such responses are understandable, in fact, to some extent, they're inevitable. Mentees have reasons for what they did and want to justify themselves. But repeated defensiveness of this type, as well as being irritating, is a barrier to progress because it evades development. **In fact, openness to advice may well be the single biggest success indicator on a training course.**

This matters, so a mentor may say in private, "They are defensive. I do try. I try to put it in different ways. I try to compliment them too but they just can't take criticism." The mentor has reached the point where they need to tell this to the mentee directly. They need to tell them, "Taking criticism is important to your progress. I don't think you're very good at it." Mentees can be quite shocked at this suggestion, but the mentee can't really move forward in this or any area if no one will point it out to them.

There needs to be a dialogue about the dialogue. Of course, mentees react in different ways. Some will not be pleased and will be defensive about being defensive – but many will think again. Perhaps they hadn't noticed that they were doing it, or they hadn't appreciated how significant it was. The mentor needs to tell them, kindly but clearly, what they're doing and why it matters. They aren't children.



Mentees

Do the scripts above strike a chord with you?
Are you too defensive when being given advice?

Resting your own agenda and being open to other people's is possibly the single biggest success factor in your training.

This need for explicitness exists in both parties and an objective system, based on numbers and meetings with clear agendas and regular spaces for mentee concerns, will support it. Just as mentors may be slow to voice concerns, mentees are likely to want to keep quiet about their problems. After all, the mentor is the assessor as well as the guide and mentees may have a creditable desire to sort things out for themselves.

Year 8 is misbehaving, but the mentee says nothing. This is a fatal approach because Year 8 is likely to get worse and the mentor will need to step in as the mentee loses control in more ways than one. In any case, the mentor probably already knows about the problem.

So, we have to be explicit without ruining confidence. What is needed is a clear, professional context for these dialogues, based on the shared acknowledgement that things will go wrong for mentees. This is a given, agreed on by both parties at the outset. Learning to be a teacher is infinitely complex, contradictory and exhausting and frustrations and failures are inevitable along the way. Certainly, mentors are required to make judgements, but they should clarify how those judgements work.

Mentors expect things to go wrong; things going wrong aren't of themselves a personal failure. What should be judged on is what happens next. What does the mentee do about the problem? If they consistently fail to seek help, or are consistently defensive when help is offered, then they are not functioning professionally. If mentors have to judge, then that's where they should do it. They should not judge on the problem but on the resolution.



The mentor meeting – a possible agenda

1. Review of existing targets – met, or still pending?
2. Events of past week – mentee's successes and concerns
3. Discussion of recent collaborative work
4. Feedback on lessons observed by mentor
5. Examination of lesson planning: short- or medium-term planning and next week's lesson plans
6. Agreement of next week's targets
7. Discussion of approaches to the targets
8. Mentee's AOB



Mentees

The more you prepare in advance for your mentor meetings, the more control you will have over the agenda and the relationship.



4. The offline coach

One way of mitigating the problem of the dual role of the mentor – as guide and assessor – is to establish a third party, an offline coach who will work with the mentee.

Coaching is an activity which is growing in schools and the relationship between coaching and mentoring is complex and confusing. There are many versions of it, and these are discussed in some of the texts listed in the final section of this guide. One helpful working distinction considers the mentor to be an expert guide who knows more and has more experience than the mentee. The coach, however, may not be an expert at all. An illustration of why this is would be that you do not need to have played tennis to a high standard in order to be a world class tennis coach; the coach brings other valuable disciplines and support to the relationship.

A mentee could therefore be assigned a coach as well as a mentor and that coach may be a less experienced teacher (than the mentor). Their role would be to offer support to the mentee, as a mentor does, but with one difference – they will not be involved in the assessment of the mentee. Their view will never be sought, even informally.

Everyone, including especially the mentee, is clear about the role of the coach from the outset. The mentee can seek help from the coach with no concerns about compromising themselves.



Mentors

Is there somebody who could function as your mentee's offline coach? The sooner you set this up the better.



Mentees

If you think you would value an offline coach, it's fine to ask your mentor to provide one.

The mentee can seek help from the coach with no concerns about compromising themselves



5. The work of the mentor

So far, we have talked about the relationship and the need to frame it as a training relationship with objective and explicit dialogues. It's now time to consider some of the things that a mentor does to develop their mentee.

It's vital that the mentor moves beyond the pragmatic. They are conferring qualified teacher status, which can take the NQT into schools all over the world with infinite variety of curriculum, ethos and expectation. The training must recognise principle well beyond the day-to-day requirements and solutions of a single school. Mentors working with higher-education providers are likely to source these frameworks from them, but school-based mentees have to generate them, and the mentor must remember issues such as national policies, the systematic development of subject knowledge and the understanding of the relevance of learning theory.

There are a number of reasons for this failure. One is that the mentee has to find their own practice, which will be unique to them. Copying others may be useful or essential scaffolding activity, but it can only be temporary. In fact, mentees often begin their training with clear aspirational models of themselves as teachers. These models originate from various sources. The most common are based on the Hollywood teacher model (charismatic, exciting, empathetic), the 'my best teacher' model or a combination of the two. Understanding the limitations of such models is one of the ways in which mentees grow.

These initial input-output models need to be discussed because mentees learn important lessons from them. Most significantly, they learn that teaching is a complicated business and that simple replication isn't enough. This lesson needs to be re-applied throughout the training. The mentor needs to work with the mentee to establish an input-output process which is functional and sophisticated, not simply based on stereotypes or on copying. At the heart of this process is **reflection**.



Mentors

Consider how to connect immediate school subject-knowledge requirements, related to the demands of the mentee's current teaching, with a strategic view of the mentee's subject-knowledge development.

Inputs and outputs

Perhaps the central function of the mentor is to regulate the relationship between the mentee and their many training experiences. This is not a simple relationship based on emulation as such a view is bound to fail. In that simplistic version of the process the mentee receives inputs and tries to copy them. The input may be their observation of the mentor or another colleague or it may be a piece of reading or advice about behaviour management. It seems useful, or successful, so the mentee attempts to replicate it in their practice. This simple input-output model may appear to work for a time but it will inevitably collapse.

The mentor needs to work with the mentee to establish an input-output process which is functional and sophisticated



What do we mean by reflection?

Inputs need to be digested when they arrive and before they can be used. This is a process of reflection. It's a term commonly used around teacher-training; for example, mentees have to become **reflective practitioners**. To help them with this, they will have to do reflective writing. If a mentee is to make sense of their own experiences, reflection has to become a systematic, shared, active and targeted process. We could call this **dynamic reflection**.

A central component of this reflection is **synthesis**. The mentor and the mentee have to work together to defragment the mentee's experience, to help the mentee resolve apparent contradictions. The mentee constantly receives advice that seems contradictory by observing teachers who seem to succeed by doing things very differently from each other. They are required to read learning theory which appears entirely at odds with classroom conversations. This reflects the richness of teaching, but the mentee who can't make some sense out of all this is likely to feel dispirited. Mentees have to draw the inputs together.



Mentees

You have to work hard to link aspects of your training that seem to be contradictory. You may need to ask your mentor for explicit help about this.

One teacher will tell the mentee never to talk while children are talking – always demand and wait for silence. Another colleague will point out that some lessons would never get started at all if such advice were followed. The mentee is confused. Which is the right way? Who should the mentee listen to?

Of course, if they only received one piece of advice, there would be no confusion, but there would be little stimulus for reflection. The discussion of the two pieces of advice takes the mentee towards an understanding of the complexity of learning management. In this sense mentees need multiple inputs.

To take another example, the mentor might decide that a mentee's lesson beginnings are failing. The lessons start raggedly and good beginnings are crucial. This judgement would be made (perhaps) during an observation of the mentee's teaching and would begin a process of dynamic reflection.

Among other reflective activities, the mentor might decide that the mentee needs to watch some effective lesson openings. If mentees only observe one effective teacher managing one effective lesson beginning they have little grounds for reflection and synthesis, however impressive the exemplar may be. Mentees can attempt to replicate it. If it works, it will help pragmatically with the overcoming of a problem, but they are unlikely to understand why it's effective, and so won't be able to adapt or re-apply it. The old adage about charitable aid works well here. Mentees don't need food; they need the understanding which will help them to grow their own food.



Mentors

You don't have to do all the work. If your reflective programme requires a piece of reading on behaviour management, ask your mentee to find one and discuss it with you.

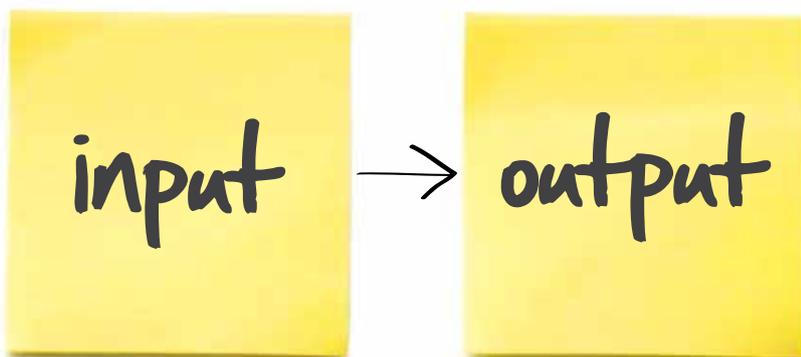
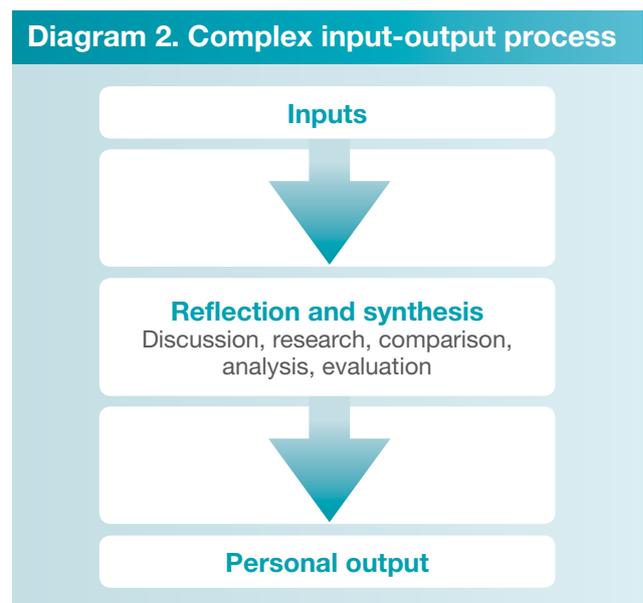
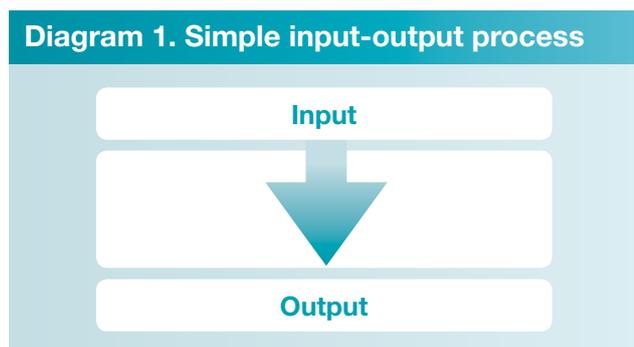


Some simple rules apply. This is not random activity but a **focused**, thematic programme. The activity is pointless if it isn't **targeted** (on a development area for the mentee) and if it doesn't yield material for **reflection**. Furthermore, the mentee needs **plurality**. The mentor must find two or more colleagues who begin their lessons effectively but differently. The mentee's understanding of the principles involved will come from discussion of the differences. Mentees need to compare rather than to copy. The mentor's job is to create these opportunities for discussion and comparison.

In summary, the input-output model for mentees must be complex if it is to be effective. A simple input-output model is based on replication.

Good practice is observed and copied. This is a two-stage process in which the mentee is almost non-existent. It can have little long- or medium-term benefit, though it may work in the short-term. The complex model, a three-stage process, places dynamic reflection between the input and the output. Discussion, synthesis, comparison, contrast, selection and personal evaluation transform the inputs into original, crafted and premeditated outputs.

The mentor must support all three stages of this complex input/output model. They must create inputs; they must support dynamic reflection through discussion and must help the mentee to crystallise these thoughts into practical classroom outputs.



Collaborative work

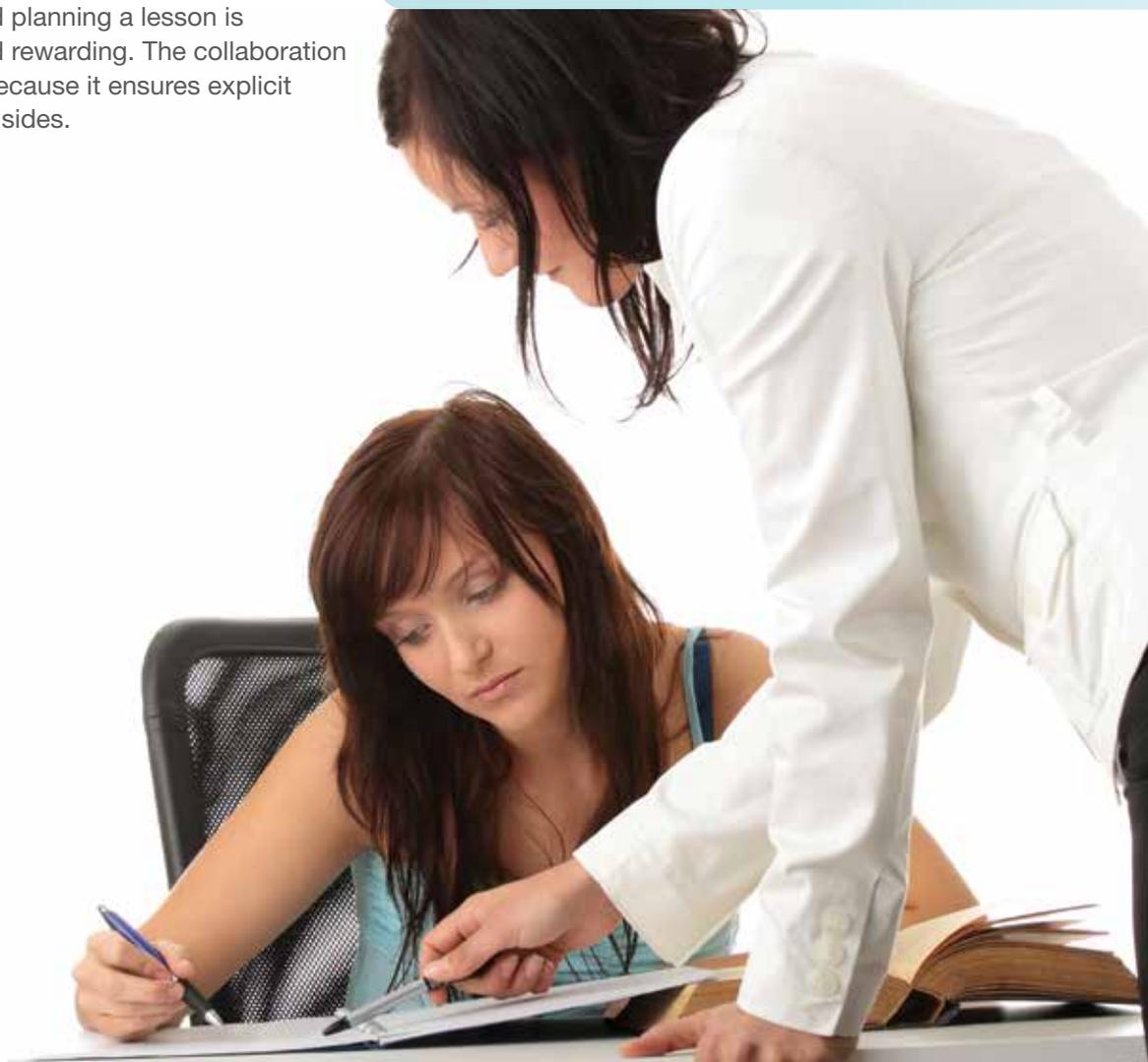
Adults learn through collaboration and collaboration is at the heart of the mentor/mentee relationship. It's much more than 'team teaching', and is the way that everyday tasks in school become transformed into rich training opportunities. For example, a mentee may be given a pile of controlled-conditions assessments to mark, because that's what teachers have to do. For a mentee, such an undertaking is probably pointless and counterproductive, partly because any mundane teaching tasks take a mentee very much longer to complete, but mainly because there is no explicit collaborative modelling in such a task. On the other hand, the mentee could be invited to sit beside the mentor as they do the marking. The mentor can then explain the decisions they are making in interpreting the criteria and then support the mentee in trying a script of their own. This is a simple but rich training opportunity. Similarly, sitting side-by-side and planning a lesson is immensely creative and rewarding. The collaboration opens up the activity because it ensures explicit understanding on both sides.

Sitting side-by-side and planning a lesson is immensely creative and rewarding



Mentors

Consider the wealth of resource available to you amongst your colleagues. You are surrounded by talent and expertise. Make an early list, revisited regularly, of people who can supply specific support to your mentee, through discussion, perhaps, or modelling or observation. People are often flattered to be asked.



The table below in diagram 3 provides suggestions for collaborative working, covering a range of significant themes such as planning, managing and assessment. It should be emphasised that throughout the table, A or B may be either the mentor or the mentee; swapping the polarity is a good thing. In fact A and B could both be mentees working together and supporting each other in these focused ways according to need and talent.

Diagram 3. Collaborative working			
Theme	Focus	A	B
Lesson planning	Parts of a lesson based on agreed learning objectives	Plans the starter and plenary	Plans the main activities
	Using learning objectives	Decides on appropriate objectives	Plans the lesson
	Group work	Decides on appropriate objectives	Devises appropriate group work
	Questioning in lesson with agreed outline	Devises main activities	Focuses on a range of appropriate questioning
	Health and safety on agreed lesson outline	Highlights health and safety issues in plan	Focuses on solutions to these issues
	Differentiation in lesson with agreed learning objectives	Devises outline plan	Modifies plan for enhanced differentiation
	Inclusion in lesson with agreed learning objectives	Devises outline plan	Modifies plan for enhanced inclusion
	Focusing on pupils' reactions and experiences	Devises outline plan	Considers effectiveness of use of pupils' attitudes and experiences
	Understanding transitions in lesson with agreed outline	Devises key activities	Focuses on key transitions between activities
	Working on EAL on agreed lesson outline	Devises key activities	Modifies plan for enhanced EAL
	Evaluation of lesson with agreed outline	Devises starter and main activities	Focuses on evaluation throughout and on plenary activity

Diagram 3. Collaborative working *continued*

Theme	Focus	A	B
Planning and teaching	Lesson planning	Plans lesson	Teaches lesson
	Feedback	Teaches	Observes and gives feedback
	Teaching a jointly-planned lesson	Teaches starter, plenary	Teaches main activities
		Acts as teacher	Acts as teaching assistant, eg for SEN or EAL
		Teaches half the class	Teaches half the class
		Teaches most of class	Teaches specific small group
		Teaches and supervises whole class	Takes smaller groups for guided group work
	Teaching a sequence of lessons	Plans and teaches lesson 1	Plans and teaches lesson 2
Plans lesson 1, teaches lesson 2		Teaches lesson 1, plans lesson 2	
Medium- and short-term planning	Creating a short-term plan	Draws the plan objectives from the medium-term plan and creates short-term overview	Plans individual lessons to objectives; gathers resources
	Resources	Creates overview of short- or medium-term plan	Lists necessary resources for plan and allocates resource creation tasks to A and B
	Creating a medium-term plan	Draws learning objectives from long-term plan, discusses with B, divides short-term planning between A and B	Creates half of the short-term plans, as allocated, and evaluates scheme before and after teaching

A or B may be either the mentor or the mentee; swapping the polarity is a good thing

Diagram 3. Collaborative working *continued*

Theme	Focus	A	B
Behaviour management	Planning for good behaviour	Plans a lesson to agreed objectives	Evaluates lesson plan; looks for danger zones; looks for motivation and interest points; checks level and appropriateness; modifies plan for good behaviour
	Teaching	Teaches	Observes with behaviour focus
	Discussion of approaches in teaching	Tries a very formal approach	Tries (and compares) an informal approach
	Beginnings	Plans and teaches	Observes and evaluates beginnings of lesson and of each section
	On-task behaviour	Teaches	Observes and records on- and off-task behaviour
Assessment	Marking work	Sets marking criteria	Marks to criteria
		Marks jointly	Marks jointly
	Marks batch of work	Second-marks sample	
Assessment for learning	Writes comments	Writes positive comments	Grades to criteria
		Writes developmental comments	Writes developmental comments
	Writes engaged comments	Writes engaged comments	
Assessment for learning	Marks work	Sets work	Develops next lesson
		Sets work	Discusses work with pupil
Assessment for learning	Takes an overview of single pupil's work	Sets up peer assessment criteria	Sets a level or grade for single pupil's work

A simple and well-known version of collaborative working is the mentee's observation of experienced teachers. It becomes a vibrant input when it's thematically focused and followed by discussion and comparison, as outlined above. It's especially important that this activity, and indeed all collaborative work, continues right through the training. It's common for collaboration to fall away as mentees grow and become independent. There's logic to this but it's also true that experienced mentees, towards the end of their course, probably

gain more from these observations than an absolute beginner as they have a better understanding of what they're looking at. So, it's vital that the explicit and developmental contacts offered by collaboration are seen as constants in the training, spurs to growth, challenge and progress, not just as early stabilisers.



Mentors

Review and refine the collaborative working every week.



6. Lesson feedback

One of the mentor's main contacts with the mentee will be the observation of lessons and the consequent provision of feedback. This is likely to form a central part of the regular meetings which must take place between them, in a private setting and using protected time.

Earlier in this publication we suggested that these exchanges must be deliberately and explicitly calibrated, with a balance of positive and negative and with agreed rules about content.

The mentor must at all times remember the point of feedback. In fact, it's not an especially useful word; feed-forward would be a more accurate description of what these conversations are intended for. Commenting on everything that happened in the lesson in a chronological stream of consciousness (ie a running commentary – a very common model of feedback) isn't especially helpful to the mentee as it lacks specific focus on future development. It also contains far too much input for the mentee to process. Feedback is a type of assessment for learning, and is pointless if it doesn't look forward, selecting key themes and developing them into targets.

The lesson is observed and feedback is given. Rather than an account of all the mentor's reactions throughout the lesson, the feedback could proceed through questioning. Sometimes the very best feedback conversation is entirely based on mentor questioning.

Questions stimulate thought, analysis and resolution in the mentee, and this stimulation is the mentor's job, because it's how the mentee learns. Questions vary in scope and purpose; here are some examples:



- Why did you plan to do that?
- Why did they react in that way?
- Do you think that it was too difficult for them?
- Was that challenging?
- Was that an appropriate example?
- Did you model that task?
- How could that have been better explained?
- Why did they settle so quickly?
- Why were they slow to start that task?
- How did that connect to the previous task?
- Was your language appropriate at that point?
- Would Ginny have reacted differently if you'd allowed more choice?
- How many types of question did you use in that lesson?
- Why?
- Where were the management danger points in your plan?
- How might they have reacted if you'd reversed the order?
- How did you get that degree of cooperation?
- Was there a creative option in the main task?
- Should there have been a creative option?
- What should you do next lesson?
- Did the differentiation that you'd planned work in the lesson?

A lesson is a journey, and the journey plan starts from the knowledge of the final destination

There are an infinite number of such questions, which properly deployed generate a conversation in which mentees don't feel intimidated and, to a degree, are allowed to make their own judgments and design their own solutions. Of course, the questions are planned in reaction to the lesson, and mentors remain the focus of support, driving the analysis with their questions and suggestions.

While such questions direct the conversation to the particular issues (good and bad) of the lesson there are perhaps four questions that all feedback should start with.

How do you think it went?

Mentors know that this is how they should begin. Rather than being on the receiving end of a barrage of comment, the mentee is invited to begin the analysis. Sometimes, however, this is the only question asked, and it's asked ritually – the mentor paying lip service to it and then quickly moving on to the real business, which is their opinion. The conversation should proceed from the mentee's initial reactions, whether or not the mentor agrees with them. This isn't just a matter of morale or courtesy, it's vital for the mentor to know what the mentee thought of their own lesson as a central factor in determining their progress.

The next three questions may frame the real analysis of the lesson. They are well known:

What were they meant to learn?

Did they learn it?

How do you know?

These are standard questions because they direct analysis immediately to learning via the learning objectives of the lesson. There are many subsidiary issues, such as behaviour management, which are, of course important topics within lesson analysis, but children go to school to learn, not to be entertained or disciplined. Mentees absolutely need to plan lessons from learning objectives (or learning questions, or intended learning outcomes – they have many names and flavours). It's very

common for mentees to plan lessons on the basis of attractive activities, without really considering what the children are learning from them. A lesson is a journey, and the journey plan starts from the knowledge of the final destination.

This understanding is surprisingly hard for mentees, but entirely essential to their development, so the mentor must always focus on this in their feedback. The above three questions focus on evaluation as well as learning.

If we expand on the 'How do you know?' question, mentors may claim that they don't think the children achieved the objective. We can illustrate this point with the following scenario:

Mentor: "They walked in through the door not knowing what a simile was. An hour later, they left the room, and they should have been carrying that new knowledge with them. I don't think they were. In my view, they **still** don't know what a simile is."

Mentee: "Yes, they **do** know."

Mentor: "How do you know that? Prove it. Prove me wrong."

Here, the mentor is moving the focus to **evaluation**, and this is often an area that mentees need to improve on. Plenaries are too often brief closing activities which provide little information to the teacher about the level of understanding; as mentees progress, they will need to develop stronger evaluative practice throughout their lessons as well as at their close. After all, the evaluation of the children's learning is also the evaluation of the mentee's teaching.





Targets

The mentor will be setting targets for the mentee; this is likely to happen during the regular (weekly) meeting. The targets should be SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-deadlined). The best targets combine elements of reactivity (reaction to observed lessons) with elements of pro-activity (arising from an overview of the mentee's training needs and abilities). Such a target might be:

- plan successful task-setting with differentiated explanations and modelling so that children settle quickly with fewer difficulties.

This target has arisen because the mentor notes in observation that, despite extensive planning and preparation of tasks, task-setting in the classroom is cursory and brief (this is a common syndrome with trainee teachers). At the same time, the mentor considers that the mentee is at a stage of training (quite an advanced one, in this case) where **differentiation** needs to be more explicit. The target combines what mentees are doing with a sense of where they need to focus at this stage.

Monitor those targets

A common weakness in training courses is the poor monitoring of targets. Targets should be set effectively, and this is good and necessary practice because it's at the heart of a personalised training programme. But very often, that's where the matter rests. Targets are set. A week later, more targets are set. Mentees may, after a few weeks, be carrying 20 or 30 targets around with them. No one has ever returned to any of these targets, to mark them as now achieved, or to reinstate them as still pending. In fact, they are quietly forgotten.

A remarkable sense of confidence, purpose and progress can be generated when targets are properly followed up. Here's an example of a simple, cyclical system for this.

1. Observation

During a lesson observation, the mentor notes that their mentee needs to expand their repertoire of question types. The mentee's tendency is to ask only closed questions.

2. Feedback

The observation is discussed during the process of giving feedback. The mentor offers suggestions for a wider range.

3. Dynamic reflection

The mentor makes some opportunities to explore this topic. These might include observation of other teachers, reading, discussion with other mentees and other staff.

4. Lesson planning

The mentee (with the mentor's help) decides which classes in the coming week will offer them the chance to use a wider range of question types. When planning these lessons, they indicate at the top of the plan that this target is specifically being addressed.

5. Observation

While observing, the mentor has the lesson plan which reminds the mentor that the questioning target is being addressed. In their observation, the mentor comments on the target (amongst other things). And then the cycle begins again, with a new target, or with the same target if it still needs work.

This then, is another feature for the weekly meeting. Last week's targets are reviewed before next week's are set. This is a short timeframe and reflects the need for targets to be small and specific. Grand targets such as **improve behaviour management** aren't helpful because they can't be enacted without being broken down. While, **tighten up lesson beginnings**, a subset of the larger target, gives the mentee something to work on and the mentor something to monitor. As with children's learning objectives, small is beautiful.



Mentees

Work the week's targets as appropriate into various lesson plans. Be sure that your mentor knows that the lesson they are watching is addressing specific targets. Ask your mentor to comment specifically on those targets.

7. Behaviour management

The first thing to say is that behaviour management mustn't be allowed to dominate conversations between mentor and mentee. It can easily do so, for good and obvious reasons. Behaviour concerns new mentees more than any other aspect of the work. Quite properly, it also concerns mentors; if the children don't listen, then good planning and ingenious resources are of no account. Initial feedback sessions are frequently based on these precepts and it's common for no other issues to be involved.

Further, the mentor will embrace behaviour management because it's work that clearly belongs to the school. The central (university) training will provide discussion, video, theory; but the school has the real thing, naughty children in actual lessons, which the mentee has to face on a practical, day-to-day basis. All of this makes good sense, but we need to remember that our criterion for activity is the training criterion. The mentee needs help in transforming pragmatic survival tactics into genuine, strategic understanding.

Firstly, then, the mentor should resist the temptation to focus solely on children's behaviour, even at the outset. Secondly, work on behaviour needs to move beyond the pragmatic if it is to become authentic training.

School policy

Discussions with mentees often focus on two areas. The most common is the school's sanctions and rewards policy. Many schools have elaborate systems, and mentees, like new staff members, need to understand how to use them. Often a piece of lesson feedback will note the misapplication of such a policy and recommend its better use in solving the mentee's problem.

Of course, the proper use of such policies is essential. They build mentees' confidence because they are a constant reassurance that the teacher isn't alone in the classroom. The very existence of these systems reminds everyone involved, including the children, that good and bad behaviour aren't simply functions of personal relationship. Indeed, a behaviour policy is effective because it depersonalises behaviour. Against such a policy background, bad behaviour is a challenge and an affront not to the mentee but to the school. These ideas are strongly reassuring to mentees, but they need to be discussed at this level of explicit analysis before they begin to have lasting effects in building their confidence and understanding. This is a move through pragmatism to reflection and principle. Mentees don't just have to know that these things work; they have to know why.



The mentee needs help in transforming pragmatic survival tactics into genuine, strategic understanding

Management skills

The second area often brought up by mentors is the set of personal and professional qualities loosely known as management skills. The mentor may discuss voice, presence, pace, confidence. They may talk about low-key, non-confrontational relationships.

These two areas: school policy and teacher skills, are usually the only contexts in which behaviour is discussed. They are in a sense both concerned with what is sometimes known as *extrinsic* behaviour management. Extrinsic work will certainly help with some school-based difficulties and effect some classroom improvement, but for this discussion to be truly developmental, it needs to cover more complex and analytical areas where the mentee can discover transferable skills. Certainly, real progress is made in behaviour when the mentee considers the deeper and more lasting significance of *intrinsic* learning management.

Intrinsic management works from the principle that behaviour is best enhanced through the work. Good lesson planning will often deliver the right pupil response; to put it another way, bad planning will certainly generate bad behaviour. Good planning in this sense includes (for example):

- clarity of learning objectives
- differentiation of activities
- the sensible deployment of variety and choice
- the pitching of work at the right level
- the intelligent design of resources
- the careful preparation of teacher explanation and task-setting
- the planning of lessons with clear through lines and well thought out transitions.

This is the beginning of a detailed and complex discussion about how pupil behaviour is affected by the work of the lesson, by its manner, content and planning. It is addressed in initiatives such as *Behaviour for Learning*. Children who don't understand, for example, will become disenchanted – they will stray off task. When the mentor analyses this

with the mentee, the mentor needs to move beyond rewards and sanctions and teacher performance. They need to move beyond the pragmatic and into a wide and deep conversation which ranges over many aspects of teaching and learning, making connections for the mentee which are less obvious, more challenging and more yielding of long-term understanding.



Mentors

Try always to move from the pragmatic and extrinsic to the principled and intrinsic.

Differentiation

Just as behaviour management moves from pragmatic problem-solving to sophisticated understanding, so attitudes to **differentiation** mature as training progresses. It's an issue that generates much anxiety and guilt, even in experienced teachers. Mentees need robust and practical confidence-building approaches. An audit of a mentee's current work will generate reassuring data on their practice. They could address the following questions.

Do you ever:

- Talk to individuals about their work in any context?
- Do you discuss their coursework drafts with them?
- Check understanding of tasks when task setting?
- Give some extra explanation in response to a pupil question?
- Vary class questioning?
- Give pupils time to discuss tasks in pairs?
- Write comments on children's work, addressing its strengths, suggesting improvements and developments, and engaging with the content?
- Ask the class questions, for example, during a plenary or a lesson transition?

- Answer pupil questions, and make spaces for them to ask?
- Assess pupils' work?
- Provide a variety of resources?
- Use pupils as experts, for example by allowing them to plan presentations on their own subject enthusiasms?
- Allow peer assessment from time to time, so that pupils see (or hear) and discuss each other's work?
- Have group discussion?
- Allow pupils to work in areas of personal interest?
- Give a choice of tasks from time to time; for example, allowing groups to choose their feedback method or allowing individuals to choose their text type (poster, leaflet, newspaper, letter)?
- Use a variety of activities to move towards your learning objectives?
- Explain things in two or three ways?
- Set research homework?
- Set 'family' homework, such as interviewing your Mum about her favourite music?
- Chat?
- Praise?
- Ask for pupil opinions on an issue or a text, and perhaps list and discuss those opinions?
- Run interactive starters?
- Work collaboratively with the whole class, for example, on a shared writing exercise?
- Work with selected groups, for example on shared reading?
- Work with learning support assistants, including briefing and debriefing them?
- Use an interactive whiteboard for example, to note and print pupil contribution?
- Evaluate learning and modify your teaching?

Variety is not trivial, it is a central pedagogical strength

Mentees will be able to answer 'yes' to many of these questions, and in so doing they are proving that they do already differentiate. They are also appreciating that differentiation and good teaching are virtually synonymous.

As the training progresses, mentees will need to show a growing confidence and **multiple intelligences** along with **VAK** (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic learning) are well known systems to help them focus. They are used, possibly over-used, in schools and on training courses, where much effort can be expended on the inflexible attachment of learning styles to individuals. A mentee needs to be helped by these approaches to see that their classroom needs variety: variety of activity, variety of explanation, variety of example and variety of language. A mentor should be seeking this variety; variety is not trivial, it is a central pedagogical strength.



Mentees

Don't be frightened of differentiation. It's an art as much as a science. Audit your differentiation practice by working through the questions on this page.

8. Explanations and task setting

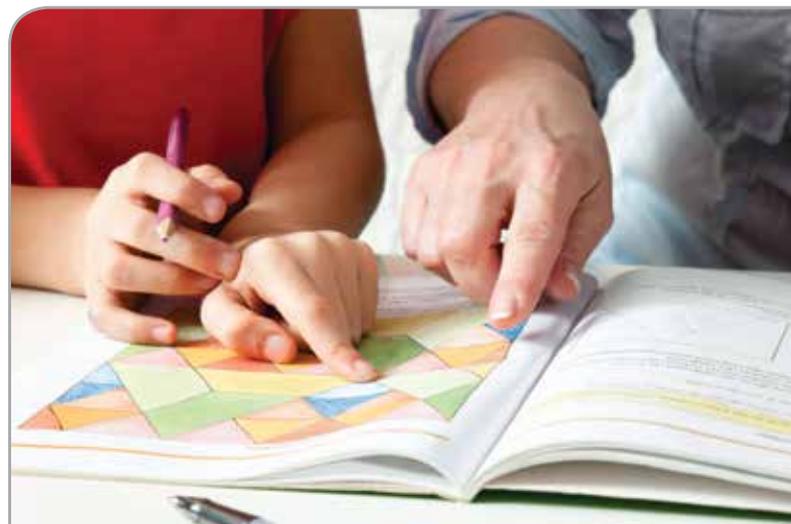
The mentee needs to build their explanations. It's common for mentees to spend much time planning pupil activities, but often they themselves are almost non-existent in their lesson plans. There is a current and creditable feeling that teachers mustn't talk too much, and that good activities and attractive resources will carry the lesson. The best mentees develop as they understand that, in addition, their own language needs planning. Whether in explaining new ideas, or in task setting, mentees need to decide how explanations are going to sound. They have to prepare the varied examples and anecdotes which will carry the lesson's meaning.

This is part of **task setting**. The transitional moments between lesson activities are rich and important lesson components, and mentors need to comment on these as well as on pupil activities and resources. A typical transition includes:

- the completion of a task
- evaluation of learning so far
- key definitions
- explicit statement of learning objectives
- examples
- feedbacks
- consolidation
- explanation and modelling of the new task
- connection of new task to previous task.

This is very complex, and mentors need to see that mentees are planning their own input in transitions as well as pupil activity. There is often a tendency to believe that strong worksheets will carry the lesson, and the danger is that the mentee becomes an administrator of lessons rather than a teacher. Discovery is great, but explorers need guides as well as maps.

Discovery is great, but explorers need guides as well as maps



QDO

QDO is a useful mantra for task setting. The teacher checks with the class that pupils understand the task (**Q**, for **Any questions?**). The teacher tells the pupils how long the task should take – 30 minutes or three weeks (**D**, for **Deadline**). The teacher tells them what they should have achieved by then (**O**, for **Outcome** – three problems solved, a poem written, a map labelled). Simple though it is, this mnemonic can transform task setting and settle children to work.

9. Learning theory

Good mentoring covers the full breadth of training, not just a pragmatic, school-based corner of it, so learning theory is the business of the mentor. In particular, the mentor needs to show the mentee that theory is part of the solution, not part of the problem. It has things to tell the mentee about their classroom. Expert teachers evidence this connection every day – even if they don't know it.

Apart from multiple intelligences and VAK, mentioned earlier, mentees benefit from an understanding of constructivism and social constructivism. General constructivism, for example, includes the idea that children build new learning onto old. The new learning can be likened to a piece of a jigsaw puzzle; it cannot simply be forced anywhere into the puzzle, the receptor has to be found. New learning fits and bonds when it finds its receptor, something already in the child that can accept the new idea. Constructivism values the existing experience of the child. Mentors could discuss with mentees how the children's current experience could be exploited as a receptor for the new ideas of the lesson.

Social constructivism values conversation as a way of defining new ideas – literally, translating them into the learner's understanding. Mentors could discuss with mentees how a lesson could be enriched by more conversation, regular pair and group work, in which new ideas are articulated, predicted, trialled and re-interpreted.



Mentors

You don't have to do all the work. If you need your mentee to match learning theories such as constructivism to their lesson planning, ask them to do the research and then discuss it with you.

The new learning can be likened to a piece of a jigsaw puzzle; it cannot simply be forced anywhere into the puzzle, the receptor has to be found



10. Frameworks

Teachers' standards

All teachers, including trainees as they qualify, must achieve the teachers' standards, and training is likely to be systematically linked to them in some way. Mentors will want to use the standards in their conversations, observations and target setting, so that towards the end of the training the mentee can evidence that they have been met. How such evidence is represented is a matter for the training provider.

The standards (referenced in the final section of this guide) are a mixture of generalisations and specifics. To meet all of them, the training must be more than practical and pragmatic. For example, the standard requiring the teacher to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching will be met in part by discussion of learning theory in the classroom, as outlined above. Another standard requires that teachers involved with early reading demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic, synthetic phonics. This is a serious national focus in reading development, requiring specialist knowledge which may go beyond the pragmatic, day-to-day life of a mentee in school. It may involve additional reading, for example. It may involve the mentee teaching the mentor. In this way, the standards must be referenced and consulted throughout the training; it cannot be assumed that a good teaching-practice experience will inevitably meet all of them.

Ofsted trainee teacher characteristics

This is a second major national framework against which mentees should be trained and assessed. It differs from the standards in several ways. It is specifically for trainee teachers. It offers a different set of categories. It separates its statements into Ofsted grades. But like the standards, it offers a strong basis for conversation and development.

Simply defining 'risk' moves a mentee on towards understanding and refining their practice

The characteristics present an interesting collection of images of teaching. They are very useful for mentors wanting to develop mentees. Perhaps a competent mentee has reached a plateau (this is frequent and well documented). A self-assessment against the characteristics, and an action plan to raise grades in specific sections, can be of enormous benefit. For example, the mentee and mentor could consider the difference between **satisfactory** and **outstanding** in one or two appropriate areas. These are large, strategic movements, not weekly targets. Consider the difference between a teacher who:

- takes risks when trying to make teaching interesting
- and one who has an adequate but limited range of strategies.

In developing a competent mentee in the middle of training, a discussion of what 'risks' are would be personal and fascinating. They might include teaching without IT support (no interactive whiteboard, no PowerPoint) or teaching without plan or allowing pupils to plan lessons. Simply defining 'risk' moves a mentee on towards understanding and refining their practice.

These are useful frameworks and should never be far away from the mentor or mentee. Finally, though, the mentor's chief resource is themselves. To use this resource to the utmost, they may have to analyse their own practice in a way that they aren't used to doing. An expert teacher is instinctual in the way they work. They no longer need to think about what they do at the level of explicitness required by a mentee. In order to make their expertise available to the mentee, they need to reflect on and define their own practice. Before they can support their mentee, they may need to rediscover themselves.

11. Suggested reading

The following texts may also be of interest.

Wright, T (ed) (2010).

How to be a Brilliant Mentor.
Routledge.

Wright, T (2007).

How to be a Brilliant Trainee Teacher.
Routledge.

Wright, T (2008).

How to be a Brilliant Teacher.
Routledge.

Arthur et al (1997).

Subject Mentoring in Secondary School.
Routledge.

Fletcher, S (2000).

Mentoring in Schools: A Handbook of Good Practice.
Routledge.

Garvey et al (2003).

Mentoring in Schools Pocketbook.
Management Pocketbooks

Newell, S and Jeffery, D (2002).

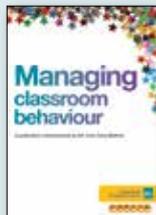
Behaviour Management in the Classroom: A Transactional Analysis Approach.
London: David Fulton.

Teachers' standards are available from the Department for Education at www.education.gov.uk.

Ofsted trainee teacher characteristics may be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk.



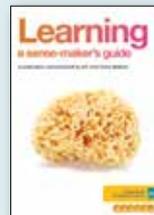
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