

# **Improving Skills for Work-Place Practice through Mentoring Student Reminiscence Workers in Care Homes**



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# Key Terms

- **Reminiscence** – a social and creative activity used to improve communication and enhance quality of life amongst older people in residential care homes.
- **Mentor** – someone who provides individual support for personal development in a work or educational setting. “A mentor is a person who helps another to think things through” (Roger Pask, 2004).

# Background

Reminiscence is a social and creative activity used with older people of all abilities. Norfolk Adult Education's Older People's Team trains care workers to deliver reminiscence activities with older people living in residential and nursing homes with the aim of improving the quality of life of residents.

Some students attending a six week course in reminiscence had difficulty putting their skills into practice in the workplace afterwards.



This research explored the use of workplace mentoring to increase the extent to which students applied their new skills. We also hoped to develop our training package as part of securing future funding.

# Exploring the Literature



- No research on mentoring appears to have been carried out relating to reminiscence worker training. There is some literature which provides evidence of the effectiveness of this approach in vocational training for people in care-related professions such as nursing (e.g Gray & Smith, 2000 and Andrews & Chilton, 2000)
- A range of recent literature explores the use of online mentoring (e.g. Murphy *et al*, 2005 and Shrestha *et al* 2009) suggesting that it can be as effective as face-to-face contact

# Research Method

- Experienced reminiscence workers were trained in mentoring skills focusing on building trusting relationships, facilitating problem solving and fostering confidence.



- 6 mentors worked with 9 mentees over four sessions following the students' successful completion of the classroom based course. Mentors and mentees kept diaries of their experiences.
- Semi-structured interviews were carried out with each of the mentors and mentees after the four sessions. Interview data was transcribed and analysed alongside that from the diaries.

# Results

Data analysis through thematic coding led to the following key themes relating to the effects of mentoring during this project:

- **Mentors and mentees learned from each other**
- **Confidence building took place for mentees**
- **Motivation increased to use skills acquired on the course**
- **Skill development was enabled**
- **Trusting relationships were central to the process**
- **There were benefits for the residents**
- **Ongoing reminiscence support resources are needed**



# Results continued

- Mentees commented that the mentoring experience had helped to increase their confidence:
  - *“[Being mentored] made it seem more logical and just also to know that I was doing the right thing, which gave me a lot of self-confidence and a boost to keep going forward.”* (S3)
  - *“Although I felt nervous that I was doing things wrong ... she made me feel more confident to do another session.”* (S7)
- Mentees found that the mentoring improved their ability to run reminiscence sessions competently and to communicate with residents:
  - *“I found that I could go more into depth with [the residents] ... I was amazed what I got out of them.”* (S6)
  - *“She gave us some points to like improve on the reminiscence. She gave us information and brought things in for us.”* (S8)
  - *“She took our ideas on board and then expanded them”* (S4)

# Links to the Literature

- Mentors and mentees found that spending time working on their relationship was an important starting point:
  - 'Among the first things we learned about each other was that we had very similar values, ideals and dreams'  
(Jipson and Paley, 2000, p.39)
- Many of the mentees needed assistance overcoming nervousness:
  - 'Mentorship involves providing strong and continuous emotional support' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2000:53)
- The new online reminiscence resource we are creating acknowledges that mentors and mentees have ideas and techniques to share with each other:-
  - 'The old model of mentoring where experts who are certain about their craft can pass on its principles to eager novices no longer applies' (*ibid*:52)

# Links to the Literature

- Sennett explores how ‘a community of craftsmen’ (2008, p.25) who share their skills in problem-solving with each other, can achieve more in less time, than one person, or even a group of experts, working alone.
- We are therefore moving towards a ‘joint practice development’ model of mentoring and reminiscence training (Fielding *et al*, 2005) whereby all parties are seen as having something to offer. This is:

*... a learner-centred approach [which] ... underscores the necessity of mutual engagement ... [in] opening up and sharing practices with others. (ibid, p.72)*

# Links to the Literature – Learning Together/ Shared Power

- At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know
- Authentic education is not carried on by “A” *for* “B” or by “A” *about* “B”, but rather by “A” *with* “B”

– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

# Links to the Literature – 3 Concepts of Empowerment

Competing views of empowerment fall into 3 broad categories:

1. Functional – equipping mentees with skills needed to advance in their profession/ do their job better
2. Psychological – giving mentees a ‘voice’ and increasing self-esteem and self-confidence
3. Critical – taking action to create more equitable conditions not only individually, but especially in concert with others

Prins and Drayton – *Adult Education for the Empowerment of Individuals and Communities* in the SAGE Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education, 2010

# Links to the Literature – Andragogy/ Malcolm Knowles

- The art and science of helping adults learn is built upon two central defining attributes:
  - 1) Adult learners as self-directed & autonomous
  - 2) A conception of the role of the teacher as a facilitator of learning, rather than presenter of content
- *At times, the mentor's role was to facilitate their mentee's growth into a self-directed and autonomous learner*

# Indicators of Impact

## Hard

- A more effective reminiscence training programme which in future will include mentoring for all students completing the course
- Continued funding for our reminiscence training programme
- An online resource to support reminiscence workers of all abilities

## Soft

- Changes in self-image and increased confidence for care workers becoming reminiscence workers and for experienced reminiscence workers becoming mentors
- Improved research skills and knowledge of research processes for the team, including the primary researcher

# Implications for Practice

- In this research, mentoring was found to be an effective way of encouraging care workers to change their practice in response to training
- Mentoring was found to increase confidence to put new skills into practice
- Mentoring, and therefore training, can be more effective where the students' existing knowledge, skills and abilities are acknowledged and built upon

# Implications for Practice cont.

- The relationships between mentors and mentees were found to be a key aspect of the effectiveness of mentoring, and therefore of training
- Applying these ideas to all training for care workers needs to be researched further. However, these results suggest that key features of effective training are:
  - » Confidence building
  - » Trusting relationships
  - » Assistance being tailored to the specific situations in which students work

# Implications for Practice – Modern Apprenticeships

- Estyn (2003, p.3) supports the idea of mentoring being *'the exchange of ideas, feedback, experiences ... within a sustained relationship of mutual trust and respect'*
- However, contrary to our finding that flexibility is central to success in mentoring relationships calls for *'a consistent approach to the delivery of mentoring support'*
- Such a 'consistent approach' may make the measurement of impact more straightforward, but poses the danger of detracting from the potential impact of the mentoring relationship.

# Implications for Practice - NEETS

- In exploring the role of mentoring with young people not in education, employment or training, Helen Colley (*online, n.d.*) strongly criticizes the portrayal of young people as '*passive recipients of engagement mentoring and of the agenda set for it by (more powerful) stakeholders outside of the mentor relationship*'
- She calls for a fresh approach which looks at the '*problems disadvantaged young people faced themselves*' and thus, a more flexible approach which responds to individual needs rather than organisational targets.
- Our research found that mentors need to respond to the unique situations of their mentees. This supports Colley's view that young people cannot be made to fit into the rigid goals of engagement programmes, but instead, need to be approached and responded to according to individual need and circumstances.

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