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Co-mentoring Amongst Teachers and Leaders in Transnational Schooling Contexts

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Abstract

This chapter offers an original conceptualisation of co-mentoring—situated in the wider literature—together with evidence of its impact and factors facilitating impact across applications of co-mentoring in transnational schooling contexts. Co-mentoring is as an alternative to more traditional, hierarchical, and uni-directional approaches to mentoring in education. Extending the extant literature on collaborative mentoring (or "comentoring"), *co-mentoring* is a collaborative, compassionate, and developmental relationship—informed by specific approaches to mentoring and coaching—that is intended to support participants' professional learning, development, effectiveness, and well-being, and potentially improve their workplace cultures. Detailing three different applications of co-mentoring across the United Kingdom and United States, the chapter evidences the realization of these intended outcomes

(professional learning, etc.), and highlights factors found to be instrumental in facilitating the positive impacts of co-mentoring. We end with recommendations for undertaking research and practice that build human and organisational capacity through co-mentoring. A takeaway is that intentional approaches to co-mentoring can have value for participating parties and broader impact, as well as wide applicability.

Keywords: Collaborative mentoring, Compassionate mentoring, Co-mentoring, Mentoring, School leader, Teacher

Introduction

Education systems worldwide have experienced threats to the effectiveness, well-being, and retention of K–12 teachers (Du & Wang, 2017; Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019) and leaders (Kutsyuruba & Godden, 2019; Walker et al., 2021). Mentoring has been found to ameliorate such threats and positively impact teachers' and leaders' effectiveness, well-being, and retention (Dreer, 2021; Gillett-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2020; Wilcoxen et al., 2020; Wilson & Huynh, 2020; Winter et al., 2020). However, these desirable outcomes of mentoring are not always realised in schooling (or other) contexts (Beck & Kosnick, 2000; Hobson et al., 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Maguire, 2001).

The extent to which the mentoring of teachers and leaders achieve intended (and sometimes unintended) desirable impacts is dependent on a wide range of considerations (Cunningham, 2007; Ellis et al., 2020; Hobson & Maxwell, 2020; Searby & Brondyk, 2016). Whilst research on the matter is in its infancy, one consideration is the model, framework, or approach to mentoring to be utilised (Hobson & Maxwell, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2022), amongst a host of alternative mentoring types (Kemmis et al., 2014; Kochan & Pascarelli, 2012; Mullen, 2016).

This chapter contributes to emerging research on alternative mentoring types. It does so, firstly, through the presentation of an original conceptualisation of collaborative, compassionate, and developmental approaches to mentoring, which we call co-mentoring. Secondly, we outline different enactments of co-mentoring amongst teachers and leaders in transnational schooling contexts. Thirdly, we present evidence of positive impacts of co-mentoring, and of factors facilitating such impacts, across educational settings. Shaping this writing and analysis were three research questions:

RQ1. How is co-mentoring enacted in different professional and transnational schooling contexts?

RQ2. What positive impacts or desirable outcomes are associated with co-mentoring applications in education?

RQ3. What is it about co-mentoring and/or its application that helps to bring about the identified impacts or outcomes?

Regarding our meanings of the key concepts used herein, *mentoring* is understood as a "facilitative or helping relationship intended to achieve some type of change, learning, and/or enhanced individual and/or organisational effectiveness" (Maxwell et al., 2022, p. 11). We define *co-mentoring*, more specifically, as a collaborative, compassionate, and developmental relationship, which is intended to support participants' professional learning, development, effectiveness, and well-being, and potentially the improvement or even transformation of organisational cultures into collaborative workplace cultures. While mentoring and co-mentoring usually take the form of dyads, these relationships may alternatively involve triads, groups, communities, or networks (Mullen, 2017).

Next, we discuss different mentoring types and ways in which these may facilitate or hinder desirable mentoring outcomes, drawing on the extant literature. We then outline our co-mentoring model, followed by three applications of co-mentoring from the United Kingdom and United States. Methods informing the development of this chapter are briefly described, with demonstrations of a range of positive outcomes from our co-mentoring applications, and factors that facilitate the realisation of such outcomes. We end with recommendations for undertaking research and practice that build human and organisational capacity through co-mentoring.

Mentoring Types

Drawing on the extant literature, three "ideal types" (Weber, 2017) of mentoring can be identified. For readers unfamiliar with this concept, ideal types are analytical constructs that accentuate specific features and emphasise points of difference; they are not 'ideal' in the sense of being optimal or exemplary.

The first ideal type is a uni-directional, hierarchical, and directive approach to mentoring in which the mentor is positioned as expert and the mentee as protégé. This ideal type incorporates what Kochan and Pascarelli (2012) term the "traditional" cultural purpose of mentoring, which focuses on transmitting the existing culture, values, or beliefs of an organisation, and what Kemmis et al. (2014) call "mentoring as supervision," which—in the context of trainee and early career teachers—focuses on "preparing new teachers … so that they can meet the requirements for registration as fully qualified, autonomous members of the profession" (p. 159).

The second ideal type while also uni-directional is a more developmental (Clutterbuck, 2004), less hierarchical and relatively non-directive approach to mentoring. This ideal type incorporates Kemmis et al.'s (2014) archetype of "mentoring as support," "in which a mentor, who is not usually in a supervisory relationship with the mentee, assists the mentee in the development of their professional practice in the job" (pp. 159–160), and Kochan and Pascarelli's (2012) "transitional" cultural purpose of mentoring, which puts the spotlight on fostering mentees' development to enable them to operate successfully within organisations while nurturing their own cultural identity.

The third mentoring type is developmental, like the second, but also bi-directional with an explicit focus on cultivating change in both individuals and organisations. This non-

hierarchical ideal type incorporates Kemmis et al.'s (2014) archetype of "mentoring as collaborative self-development," in which colleagues "participate as equals in professional dialogue aimed at their individual and collective self-development," and Kochan and Pascarelli's (2012) "transformational" cultural purpose of mentoring, which promotes mutual growth for both mentor and mentee, and questioning established values and possibly outdated norms.

Whilst we recognise that not all mentoring programmes, models, frameworks, or approaches sit neatly within one of the three ideal types (Maxwell et al., 2022), there is evidence—in our own and others' research—of different outcomes associated with enactments of mentoring that the ideal types represent. For example, Kemmis et al. (2014) associated "mentoring as supervision" with the deprofessionalisation of teachers, and Hobson and Malderez (2013) showed how a similar approach to mentoring—characterised by them as judgementoring—can inhibit the development of safe, trusting relationships, rendering mentees reluctant to engage openly, honestly, and meaningfully with their mentors, thus impeding their professional learning and development (PLD) and well-being. Hierarchical, uni-directional mentoring can also promote and reproduce conventional norms and practices (Feiman-Nemser et al., l993), whilst neglecting the opportunity for reciprocal learning and growth (Mullen, 2016). On the other hand, some researchers have identified beneficial outcomes of relatively directive, uni-directional mentoring on mentees. For example, Lejonberg and Tiplic (2016) found that newly qualified teachers in Norway value mentors' communication of their evaluations, advice, and "clear feedback."

It is possible—perhaps likely—that different approaches to mentoring may be appropriate for meeting the needs of mentees at various career stages and/or in specific professional contexts. It may also be the case that some approaches are more likely to bring about short-term outcomes

(e.g., immediate improvements in teacher knowledge and/or effectiveness), and others to realise extended or long-term outcomes, such as mentees' ability to learn and develop from their own and others' subsequent experiences of teaching (Maxwell et al., 2022), or positive impacts on organisational cultures. In general, however, the evidence base is inconclusive, with further research needed on these questions. Here, we endeavour to contribute to this emerging body of research by highlighting desirable outcomes associated with a particular approach to the third mentoring type, which we call *co-mentoring*, as well as factors which contribute to bringing about such outcomes.

Co-mentoring Model

Our conceptualisation of co-mentoring, presented herein, extends Mullen's (2000, 2017) "theory of collaborative mentorship" and other early work on collaborative mentoring (Bona et al., 1995; Kochan & Trimble, 2000; Mullen & Lick, 1999). Whilst collaborative mentorship remains *a*—if not *the*—central imperative of our current conceptualisation, the "co" in co-mentoring also emphasises that our model draws on progressive approaches to <u>co</u>aching as well as mentoring, and on <u>co</u>mpassion-based coaching (Boyatzis et al., 2013), in particular (Hobson, 2022). We elaborate on each of these core features or imperatives of co-mentoring, in turn.

Originators of the term *collaborative mentoring* (also known as "*comentoring"*) appear to be Bona and co-authors (1995), who described "collaborative learning" and relationships from a feminist egalitarian perspective in their undergraduate instructional capacity. Imagining the potential of collaborative mentoring for cultural and institutional impact, they encouraged seeing beyond the interpersonal gains for those directly experiencing and benefitting from it. Diamond and Mullen (1997) built upon this study in their adaptation of collaborative mentoring to doctoral and post-graduate contexts. While a uni-directional mentoring relationship involving doctoral

supervisor (Diamond) and candidate (Mullen), the mentee's development as a teacher educator was supported. With their growing awareness of the mentee's contributions to their mutual learning plus reciprocal gains in productivity as scholars, these colleagues reinvented the supervisory relationship as bi-directional, collaborative mentorship.

Tenets that are embedded in and underlie such approaches to collaborative mentorship include: (1) a "mutually beneficial relationship" that is intentionally designed as such from the outset or evolves over time; (2) reciprocal learning and interaction respectful of differences (e.g., status); and (3) "big picture thinking" organised around common goals that aim "to make a difference" and have impact (Mullen, 2016, p. 134). Collaborative mentoring epistemologies value power-sharing and creating openings for new ways of seeing and contributing that constructively address or navigate constraints, such as social and institutional inequities (Bona et al., 1995). Collaborative mentoring theory thus supports the establishment of learning partnerships in which participants "share power and leadership and engage in dialogue, constructive feedback, collegiality, transparency, and authenticity while learning" (Schunk & Mullen, 2013, p. 364). Whilst mentors as well as mentees benefit from uni-directional mentoring relationships (Hobson et al., 2009; Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005; Simpson et al., 2007), when mentoring is enacted as a collaborative and bi-directional relationship, wider benefits can accrue for work cultures. Collaborative mentoring that is embedded in organisations can lead to positive feelings of belonging and place; educator well-being, effectiveness, and retention; systems-wide educator engagement through such means as faculty study groups and professional learning communities (PLCs); and authentic partnering and involvement with outside or affiliated entities (Kochan & Trimble, 2000; Mullen & Lick, 1999; Mullen, 2000; Neapolitan, 2003).

Whilst the evidence base on collaborative mentoring remains in its infancy, a number of studies point to its efficacy. The introduction of "embedded comentoring" in a low-performing elementary school in Maryland, US, for example, was found to have fostered a genuinely collaborative learning community which "engendered adult learning and professional relationships related to student success" (Neapolitan, 2003, p. 133). Mullen and Schunk (2012) described collaborative mentoring as facilitating a cross-pollination of knowledges, needs, interests, demonstrations, insights, and breakthroughs, and that participants make personal and professional gains that would not have been possible in uni-directional mentoring relationships. Collaborative mentoring is also said to be a catalyst for combating isolation, overcoming "stagnation," confronting inequity, and valuing diversity (Mullen, 2000, p. 5; Bona et al., 1995).

As previously noted, the "co-" in our conceptualisation of co-mentoring is not restricted to collaborative relationships, for it also emphasises that meaningful and productive mentoring relationships share key features with progressive approaches to <u>co</u>aching as well as mentoring. First, our conceptualisation of co-mentoring includes a commitment to tailoring support to the individual development needs of mentees or co-mentors, which is consistent with, as examples, differentiated coaching (Kise, 2006) and Adaptive Mentorship© (Ralph & Walker, 2010). Second, our co-mentoring epistemology highlights support for participants' well-being as much as their effectiveness and potential retention, consistent with what has been called "third generation coaching" (Grant, 2017; Roche, 2019). Related to this, and third, our co-mentoring concept is consistent with '<u>co</u>mpassion-based coaching' (Boyatzis et al., 2013) to the extent that it prioritises well-being and promotes a growth-oriented approach to PLD. By *well-being* relative to workplace mentoring, we mean wellness that cultivates "flourishing by increasing positive

emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment" and that entails feeling good and functioning well (Seligman, 2011, p. 12).

Applications of Co-Mentoring

Three applications of co-mentoring are next outlined, each of which was derived from a fuller documented case. These were selected owing to their exemplification of different approaches to, and enactments of, co-mentoring in different professional and transnational contexts.

Co-mentoring Amongst Teachers in England, UK (Application 1)

This mentoring programme was established in 2018–2019 in a coeducational independent school for 13- to 19-year-olds in England. The school leadership commissioned the support of mentoring scholars in a neighbouring university to establish a teacher mentoring scheme to foster the development of a collegial learning culture within the school. The university provided research-informed training and development opportunities for mentors and mentees, as well as advice to a mentoring coordinator. The programme was supported by the ONSIDE mentoring framework (Hobson, 2016, 2020), which postulates that mentorship tends to be more effective when it is Off-line (separated from line management and supervision), Non-judgmental, Supportive, Individualised, Developmental and Empowering. The programme was thus characterised by and enacted as a compassion-based approach to mentoring that supports participants' well-being, as well as PLD and effectiveness.

Colleagues (N = 26)—including early- and mid-career teachers, middle and senior leaders—participated in the mentoring programme in its first year: 11 as mentors, 13 as mentees, one as both mentoring coordinator and mentor to 2 colleagues, and another as mentor *and*

mentee. The 14 mentoring dyads became 13 with a mentee and mentor's departure from the school.

Mentoring relationships were initially set up as uni-directional. Then participants were trained to incorporate "reverse mentoring" (Chen, 2013; Murphy, 2012) into their regular meetings, and dyads were encouraged to do so if the mentor and mentee both considered it appropriate. Seven of the 13 mentors subsequently indicated that their relationships evolved bi-directionally. Mentoring dyads met on a face-to-face, in-person basis, on an average of 12 occasions throughout the school year, with some having additional contact, notably via email. In their meetings, participants in the role of mentee accessed support for a diverse range of issues in accordance with their individual needs, including pedagogical knowledge and strategies (e.g., lesson planning and behaviour management), time and workload management, problematic relationships with colleagues, departmental management, and career progression.

Co-mentoring Amongst Head Teachers in England, UK (Application 2)

This mentoring programme was established in 2019 by a Board of Education which oversees the work of Church of England state-funded schools in a county in the south of England. The board commissioned the same mentoring scholars who supported the programme in application 1 to help them introduce a sustainable programme intended to support the PLD, well-being, and retention of its schools' head teachers. The university again provided research-informed training and development opportunities for participants, and advice to a Board of Education mentoring coordinator.

Like application 1, the programme was based upon the ONSIDE mentoring framework (Hobson, 2016, 2020), but unlike Application 1, mentoring relationships were bi-directional from the outset. ONSIDE co-mentors were thus charged and trained to ensure a safe space in

which they could share any concerns and possibly fears relating to their work, and support each other's well-being and individual development needs. Nine such relationships were formed, though only eight were able to proceed as a member of a dyad fell ill.

For the first 6 months of the programme, co-mentors met on a face-to-face, in-person basis, once monthly. The emergence of the COVID-19 virus from January 2020, and lockdowns and school closures from March that year, reduced co-mentors' contact, and communications switched from in-person to telephone, email, and online. Co-mentors provided mutual support for a wide range of issues including school staffing, personnel and finance, time and workload management, pupil recruitment and admissions, change and performance management, and their own well-being.

School–university Peer Partnership in Florida, US (Application 3)

A mentoring project joined scholars and practitioners (N = 17) from a school–university setting in Florida, US, in a co-mentoring initiative, which took place between 1997 and 1998. The goal of the work was to undertake "participatory action research rooted in social equality" as co-mentors engaged in a collective relationship called the Partnership Support Group (PSG) (Mullen, 2000, p. 5). The framework being followed was "a co-mentoring model as the basis of research and practice [that] connect[s] people of varying levels of power and privilege who join together to pursue mutual interests and benefit" (p. 5).

School participants included the principal and beginning and experienced teachers, some of whom were simultaneously lecturers with doctorates in the onsite university's teacher education programme. University participants were professors in teacher education and educational leadership and a past president at the university that was on the same property/land as the school. All were aware of the school, which was a primary location for preservice

internships and teaching assistantships that was connected to the university by way of a physical walkway, but school–university collaboration was otherwise limited or even non-existent. This problem of authenticity in the partnership justified the need for a co-mentoring project invested not only in mutual learning but in valuing and respect among school and university representatives.

The mentoring discussions, occurring in face-to-face biweekly meetings, focused on the PSG participants' individual and joint studies of mentoring with ongoing input from the group. Storytelling and feedback served as a conversational structure for learning, listening, and giving advice on each member's field research, which was published by the PSG as a book (i.e., Mullen & Lick, 1999). Members also talked about how to overcome their "psychological barriers," and engaged in lively debate of conversational topics, including the role of principal as intentional mentor, impactful professional development schools, and multiple-level co-mentoring (dyads, groups, PLCs, etc.) embedded in learning organisations.

Methods and Analysis

The three fuller empirical cases from which the applications presented were derived utilised different methods of data generation and analysis. The UK research and development programmes that form the basis of applications 1 and 2 used four common methods, as follows:

1) A baseline survey, exploring participants' learning and development needs, prior experiences and expectations of mentoring—completed by 14 mentees in the teacher mentoring programme (application 1) and 16 co-mentors in the head teacher programme (application 2);
2) A mid-term, semi-structured interview with each mentoring coordinator;

3) Mid-term focus groups with volunteer participants—two focus groups for each programme, comprising 10 participants (5 mentees and 5 mentors) for application 1, and 9 co-mentors for application 2; and
4) An end of programme survey, which explored participants' experiences of the mentoring programmes and perceptions of its impact—completed by 24 participants in application 1 (1 mentor/mentee, 12 other mentees, 11 other mentors), and 11 co-mentor participants in application 2. (The end of programme rather than baseline surveys are the sources of all survey quotations provided in our findings section below.)

Interviews and focus group recordings were transcribed to facilitate data analysis. Ethical approval for both studies was granted by the university Research Ethics and Integrity Committee, and the research was conducted in accordance with the British Educational Research Association's (2018) ethical guidelines. Practices included the informed consent of participants to take part in the research, respect of their rights to privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, and secure data storage.

The US programme from which application 3 was developed used overlapping and distinct methods. Specifically:

1) Reflective writing and analysis by 17 co-mentors constituted primary data;
2) Participants' individual and joint studies, which used various data sources, and were produced as chapters for the aforementioned book (i.e., Mullen & Lick, 1999);
3) A survey (peer assessment) of the group's inquiry process, created by the group's leaders, was completed by all participants; and
4) All meetings during the academic year were recorded and the transcribed for analysis purposes.

Ethical protocols were approved in the university setting. Participation was voluntary; participants provided their informed consent to engage in the research and their protection was upheld. Identities (names, etc.) were revealed in the publications, as agreed by the participants who co-authored the original studies. Data were secured in compliance with regulations.

Analysis

To clarify, the above data sets had been analysed and reported for each of the three applications by us prior to our work on this chapter. For this purpose, and to address our research questions herein, we first undertook a secondary analysis (Heaton, 2004; Seale, 2011) of this existing published and unpublished literature, followed by a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the original datasets, relating to how co-mentoring was enacted in these different professional and transnational contexts (RQ1); the impacts of co-mentoring (RQ2); and the factors facilitating the realisation of those impacts (RQ3). The literature employed in our secondary analysis is marked with an asterisk in the reference section at the end of this chapter.

Findings

In this section we present our main findings, beginning with the positive impacts of co-mentoring that were identified across the three applications (RQ2), before addressing the factors that facilitated the realisation of those impacts (RQ3). (RQ1 was primarily addressed in the accounts of the three programmes previously provided, while additional detail relating to the enactment of co-mentoring follows.)

Desirable Outcomes Associated with Co-mentoring Applications

Our analyses revealed rich evidence of positive impacts of co-mentoring on participants' PLD, effectiveness, and well-being across all applications, together with some evidence of enhanced retention and organisational cultures. Below we summarise and present illustrative

evidence relating to the main identified desirable outcomes of each co-mentoring application, in turn. Before doing so, we would note that our analyses found evidence of only two negative consequences of participation in co-mentoring, which were creation of additional time pressures on individuals who already had demanding work schedules, and an unevenness in the involvement and contribution of participating parties to the work.

Application 1. Analyses reveal that participants originally designated as mentees in this co-mentoring programme experienced positive impacts on their professional knowledge and practice, their professional identity, and their well-being. One mentee stated, "*there are definitely things that I feel have improved in my teaching abilities*" (survey). Another mentee noted that the mentoring "*has allowed me to understand my new working environment a lot quicker* [and] *also made me feel valued, cared for and safe*" (survey). One discussed how, amongst other things, the mentoring conversations helped them improve their time and workload management: "*I found that very useful because I was getting in a panic state… And so, I've started implementing those changes and I do feel the benefit*" (focus group). And the mentoring coordinator shared that:

> [O]ne of [the] mentees … through discussing concerns that [they] had … turned round after session five saying that this is the happiest [they have] been at [the school], this is the happiest [they have] been with teaching, and [they are] actually looking forward to staying at [the school] (interview).

Whilst it is problematical to attribute any changes solely to participants' experiences of mentoring, it is noteworthy that, amongst the 13 mentees who completed both the baseline and end of programme surveys, the mean rating of their work effectiveness, on a scale of 0-10, increased to 7.69 from 6.69.

Analyses reveal that participants originally designated as mentors also experienced positive outcomes of participation, including enhanced critical reflection on their practice, attuned listening skills, improved knowledge and understanding of their organisations, and increased confidence in their mentoring and leadership skills. Some mentors also identified positive impacts on their professional identity and well-being, with one noting, "*Being able to mentor a colleague and see* [them] *grow in* [their] *ability to manage has been a very fulfilling role and has added to my sense of purpose in my role*" (survey).

Participants originally designated as both "mentor" and "mentee" highlighted specific benefits that came about as a result of the progression from uni- to bi-directional mentoring relationships. One mentee stated that this had helped them to "*build my own listening skills. Being able to listen, find the problem, and sum up what other people are saying is a very rewarding process* (survey). A mentor noted that adopting the role of mentee had "*made me look at one aspect of my work from a new angle… try a new approach I wouldn't have previously considered…* [and] *understand the challenges of being a mentee*" (survey).

Some participants also indicated that the co-mentoring programme was helping to foster a more collegial learning culture in their school. One mentor stated, "*we are building a trusting and more open culture in the school through this … programme*" (survey); another that "*the process of sharing builds a sense of belonging for a new staff member and strengthens a sense of the collegiate community for longer standing colleague relationships*" (survey).

Application 2. Head teacher co-mentors highlighted a range of desirable outcomes of their participation in this programme. First, participants identified various positive impacts on their professional practice, including enhanced working relationships and communication skills,

enhanced workload management, the development of more supportive, empowering and growth-oriented approaches to leadership and management, and enhanced approaches to performance management and curriculum development. Second, several head teachers also indicated that their participation in ONSIDE Peer Mentoring had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being, with different colleagues reporting feeling more valued, supported, and empowered, less isolated, and having enhanced self-worth and a greater sense of achievement. A co-mentor stated, "*I felt valued and encouraged to share good practice, listened to and appreciated for my insight*" (survey). Another co-mentor noted that co-mentoring had "*helped me to feel less isolated*" and "*what I've gained most from the process is an improvement to my actual feeling of self-worth and … just feeling sort of buoyed up by someone"* (focus group).

Third, some co-mentors suggested that enhancements to their well-being and to their self-esteem in particular could have a beneficial effect on their retention in the profession:

> My peer partner said at one point, "Oh, you know, I'm not sure you're getting very much out of this. I'm getting loads out of this, it's really good." And I said, "Well actually what I'm getting is that you're saying things that I'm saying are actually really good ideas," which was something that I needed at that time because if you're reaching a wall with some external person who's constantly telling you you're wrong and you go to somebody else who's saying "Well, actually, that's a brilliant idea. I'm going to use that in my school," your self-esteem actually keeps you in the profession, doesn't it? (focus group).

Whilst it is problematical to attribute increased ratings to their participation in the co-mentoring programme alone, as with application 1, participants' mean ratings of their

effectiveness at work increased from 6.8 in the baseline survey to 8.1 in the end of programme survey (on a scale of 0–10).

Application 3. Analyses revealed that desirable outcomes from this co-mentoring group included a significantly enhanced knowledge and understanding of—and ability to effectively engage in—mentoring, collaboration and collegial learning. Such engagement was found to result in a number of tangible outcomes, one of which was the enhancement of various research skills including data analysis, writing and other forms of dissemination. A PSG professor stated: "*This project was one in which my co-author and I participated and developed an important research relationship* [and] *found that we are very good at analysing data and writing as a team*" (Mullen, 2000, p. 10). A PSG teacher similarly wrote: "*My co-author and I have … been able to refine our working partnership and to build on each other's strengths to produce what we think is better quality writing*" (Mullen, 2000, p. 10).

Other positive impacts of co-mentoring included an enhanced capacity to build stronger relationships within their organisations, with some co-mentors reporting coming to (better) know school and university colleagues, and an improved ability to rethink and solve classroom problems. One teacher noted that *"I needed to openly discuss delicate issues with* [PSG] *colleagues who could help me to problem-solve"* (Mullen, 2000, p. 10). This teacher decided to analyse his problematic mentoring relationship with a Haitian college student (teaching assistant), their mutual difficulty teaching a split-level class, and his worry over not being able to connect with this student or others from different cultures. He concluded that, by working on the development of trust, their relationship was transformed and they "*have become better informed and certainly more empathetic"* (cited in Mullen & Lick, pp. 73–77). Beyond deeper

relationships within their organisations, participants highlighted the development of a more authentic partnership between the school and university.

The PSG members also experienced an expanded sense of professionalism or professional identity as a result of co-mentoring. Some reported serving increasingly as mentors beyond (and as a result of|) their participation in this programme, and that they had found this experience rewarding and that it enhanced their status in their institutions. Some co-mentors indicated that they felt more confident about their writing and also validated as knowers, presenters, and authors. One teacher wrote: *"I am more confident in my writing and better at conveying what I mean. I feel validated that I know what I am talking about and now consider myself something of an expert in preservice teacher development (who presents and does research)"* (Mullen, 2000, p. 10).

Factors Facilitating Positive Impacts of Co-mentoring

Our analyses revealed that some of the contributory factors to the realisation of desirable impacts of co-mentoring are well-established in the extant literature as common ingredients of mentoring programmes in general. These include rigorous and effective processes for mentor selection and mentor-mentee pairing or matching (Kutsyuruba, 2012; Lejonberg et al., 2015; Wang, 2001); effective mentor training and development (Bullough, 2005; Lejonberg et al., 2015); effective coordination of the programme (Malderez & Bodoczky, 1999; Kochan et al., 2015); and appropriate support for and resourcing of the programme by the organisation's leadership team (Cunningham, 2007; Hobson & Maxwell, 2020).

Other factors found to facilitate positive impacts of co-mentoring, on which we focus below, relate to the specific mentoring approaches or frameworks followed in our three applications, and to the common tenets of co-mentoring we outlined earlier.

Application 1. Some of the mostly commonly mentioned factors identified by participants as facilitating desirable mentoring outcomes related to the ONSIDE mentoring framework informing the programme, notably the off-line, non-judgemental and progressively non-directive features of the framework, along with its concern for mentees' well-being. Together with the commitment to confidentiality regarding mentoring conversations, these considerations combined to enable the establishment of relational trust and a safe space within which mentees were able to share issues, insecurities, and perceived development needs with mentors. Different mentees thus indicated that they were "*able to ask questions to my mentor that otherwise I wouldn't have been able to ask*" (survey), while a mentor stated unequivocally that "*It is absolutely about well-being and … people having the safe space psychologically and emotionally to say what they think and know they're not going to be judged for it*" (focus group).

Analyses suggest that the incorporation of reverse mentoring into mentoring relationships added significant value and helped facilitate the desirable outcomes outlined above. When consulted about the potential introduction of reverse mentoring, the majority of participants welcomed this on the basis, as one mentor put it, that "*it could break down any last sort of vestiges of hierarchy"* and *"have the effect of establishing a deeper level of trust*" (focus group). When asked about reverse mentoring in the end of programme survey, those who experienced it felt that this prophecy had very much been realised, with different participants stating that "*changing from mentor to mentee allowed the trust to grow*" (mentor), "*strengthened the relationship between mentor and mentee*" (mentor), and that "*reverse mentoring… is empowering and liberating at the same time for both mentors and mentees*" (mentee).

Application 2. Several factors were identified by co-mentors as contributing to the positive impacts of participating in this head teacher co-mentoring programme. These included: first, the opportunity to engage in dialogue, strategic thinking and critical reflection with peers regarding issues that they usually deal with alone; secondly, the confidential and impartial nature of the mentoring support; and thirdly, the 'off-line', non-judgemental, and relatively non-directive and empowering nature of the (ONSIDE) approach to mentoring that was being followed. In addition to these considerations, participants were clear that the non-hierarchical, collaborative and collegial nature of the co-mentoring relationship added significant value in leveraging desirable outcomes of participation. As one co-mentor explained,

> "I think that there's so many times that you're meeting with people where it is extremely hierarchical… and it's just so refreshing just to be talking to [co-mentor] and there is no hierarchy, you're equal. And … it's just lovely, isn't it, to just not have to worry about someone telling you what to do? … Sometimes when your school's not thriving, you're made to feel like you're at fault whereas… I know that it's not me because I've been Head of many other schools. But it's just sometimes just because of the nature of things you end up having people looking down and breathing down your neck. And in this [co-mentoring programme] it's not like that" (focus group).

The point is further illustrated in the extended exchange below between two head teacher co-mentors (CM1 and CM2) involved in a larger focus group discussion:

> I think this whole thing that you [co-mentors] are equal… it frees you up more to discuss the real issues (CM1). Because you can be honest, and you can also be… (CM2). And not feel foolish (CM1). You can be vulnerable, and you can, you know, air those

vulnerabilities, whereas if you don't have that relationship, you're going to keep that back and you're just going to struggle on your own yet again, and therefore be more and more isolated. So, it is so important that you feel that you can say anything (CM2). I think vulnerability is the key, as you said, because where else are you able in this profession to allow yourself to be vulnerable to others without fear of some sort of reprisal from it, or gossiping, or whatever else? (CM1) (focus group).

Application 3. Some participants indicated that positive outcomes of this group mentoring programme were enhanced by the opportunity it provided them to engage in critical reflection on their existing roles. The PSG principal stated: *"The greatest gift this group brought me was the time to reflect and write on my role as a school principal in a climate that has shaped different kinds of mentoring relationships for me, which had not previously recognised as having mentoring value"* (Mullen, 2000, p. 7).

More specific to the approach to co-mentoring followed, factors of egalitarianism and compassion were found to be pivotal, with dynamics that ranged from healthy debate to openness, active listening, safe space, "appreciative understanding," and "structured inquiry" enabling members to develop a co-mentoring relationship that built capacity for themselves and the organisation (Mullen & Lick, 1999, p. 23). A university administrator felt that the *"collaborative approach was key: meeting, exploring options, getting feedback, and staying on target were all assets to my learning,"* and new plans for collaboration were forming (Mullen, 2000, p. 10).

"Multiple-level co-mentoring" was an important organisational factor that facilitated co-mentoring at all levels of the school–university campus and across roles (e.g., teacher, principal, researcher, and president) (Mullen, 2017, p. 44). This was identified by several participants, who

viewed the PSG as having enacted a process that favors "*facilitating co-mentoring at various levels of an organization via school-based focus teams"* (PSG, focus groups, PLC, etc.) (Mullen, 2017, p. 44). The idea was that not only had school–university members engaged in co-mentoring as a team but also that a healthier learning organisation was resulting from the co-learning of representatives across levels and rank (from teacher to principal to president).

Finally, while the research revealed that different participants in the programme had not been making equal contributions, which was initially considered an area for development, this was later recognised as a creative tension in the team discussions, which became part of the process of creating a healthier learning culture that developed and retained equity-minded educators.

Conclusions and Implications

In this concluding section we suggest how our research might be located in the wider evidence base on mentoring in education, and offer recommendations for further research. First, though, we should briefly acknowledge some of the limitations of the research. Some such limitations are common to studies employing secondary data analysis, which has been critiqued on a number of grounds, including that the primary data may be incompatible with the research aims of the new study (Heaton, 1998; Irwin & Winterton, 2011). In this case, a good deal of the primary data, and earlier analysis and reporting, was in fact found to be relevant to the current research questions. In fact, we were able to be relatively confident of this at the outset due to our leadership of the original studies, and our familiarity with the datasets.

Other limitations of the current study relate to our reliance upon participants' accounts (Dingwall, 1997) of their experiences of (co-)mentoring, as provided in focus groups, interviews, and surveys. Hence, for various reasons, including the possibility of social desirability bias

(Fisher, 1993), some participants may have provided partial or even fabricated accounts. There may be some indications of this in that slightly fewer mentees than mentors in the teacher mentoring programme profiled in application 1 stated that their mentoring relationships had incorporated reverse mentoring, one interpretation of which is that a small number of mentors may have exaggerated the extent of any transition from uni- to bi-directional mentoring.

A third limitation is that, whilst as co-authors we sought to be dispassionate in our analysis and to challenge each other's interpretations, the trustworthiness of our findings may nonetheless have been compromised by potential unconscious bias towards particular approaches to mentoring to which our earlier research and professional experiences have made us predisposed. We would thus welcome independent empirical research which further examines the affordances and limitations of co-mentoring and which, in doing so, in not reliant on the accounts of co-mentors.

Despite the limitations of the current research set out above, and others, we suggest that our analyses provide sufficient evidence to support the following conclusions. First, and in relation to the study's contribution to the wider evidence base, this research corroborates earlier research findings on important architectural features of efficacious organisational mentoring programmes, including effective mentor selection, mentor–mentee (or co-mentor) pairing, and mentor training (Cunningham, 2007; Hobson & Maxwell, 2020; Searby & Brondyk, 2016). It also further strengthens the argument that the development of relational trust is a vital ingredient of efficacious mentoring relationships (Leck & Orser, 2013; Ng, 2012), partly because this facilitates open and honest discussion.

This chapter also strengthens the emerging body of literature on alternative mentoring types (Mullen, 2016) by providing new evidence on the efficacy of developmental and

collaborative approaches to mentoring, and on different applications and enactments of—and desirable outcomes associated with—an original conceptualisation of collaborative and compassionate mentoring, which also draws on some approaches to coaching that we call co-mentoring (Hobson, 2022).

Whilst we must remain tentative due to the lack of comparability of different research findings, we would note that more traditional mentoring approaches have not always facilitated the desirable outcomes that we have identified in our co-mentoring applications. For example, the constraints on the development of trust associated with the power dynamics of hierarchical mentoring relationships have been found to limit the extent to which mentees are willing to engage in open and honest conversations—and raise concerns or reveal weaknesses—with their mentors, which hampers the potential of mentoring to enhance their PLD (Hobson & Malderez, 2013; Oberski et al., 1999).

As noted in our findings, the only negative consequences of participation in co-mentoring which were identified here related to the additional time pressure on individuals with demanding work/life schedules and, relative to application 3, the unevenness of participation and involvement in the initiative at the group level. We would note that effective support for mentoring programmes seeks to ensure that, where appropriate and possible, organisational leadership teams provide workload relief to enable participants to fully engage in mentoring relationships (Bullough, 2005; Lee & Feng, 2007). We would also note that—without wishing to generalise about potential differences between/among different mentoring types—studies have also identified this and additional negative consequences of participating in hierarchical mentoring relationships, including negative impacts on mentees' well-being and retention (Beck & Kosnick, 2000; Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

We consider that future research that compares the benefits and drawbacks of different approaches to mentoring, including uni-directional hierarchical mentoring versus bi-directional co-mentoring, and the extent to which these vary according to career phase, could have significant implications for professional learning, development, well-being, and retention. While we have identified powerful desirable outcomes of co-mentoring amongst participants in the applications discussed, we acknowledge, for example, that collaborative and bi-directional mentoring *may* be less appropriate for trainee and newly qualified teachers than pairing such mentees with a relatively experienced mentor in a more hierarchical relationship (Maxwell et al., 2022), at least where resource or staffing constraints only permit their participation in a single mentoring relationship.

We end with recommendations for undertaking research and practice that build human and organisational capacity through co-mentoring. Taken together, the vignettes we presented offer different takes on co-mentoring and wide-ranging possibilities for viewing or undertaking work in this area. Based on three applications of co-mentoring in transnational schooling settings, as found, desirable outcomes were associated with co-mentoring and factors that facilitate positive impacts of co-mentoring. Educational cultures that encourage co-mentoring as a pedagogic innovation can foster strategic responses to concerns about educator well-being, support, retention, and performance across the career spectrum. Co-mentoring relationships and structures can help teachers and leaders grow as they make vibrant contributions to their workplaces, especially collaborative cultures.

Finally, as exemplified and evidenced in this chapter, co-mentoring is a theory-supported, evidence-based approach to mentoring that can support human and organisational capacity building through collaboration, engagement, and partnership in dyadic and/or group

relationships. As demonstrated, the co-mentoring model can also be implemented school- or systemwide. Co-mentoring offers a means for transforming hierarchical work cultures into vibrant collaborative workplaces, and outdated organisational knowledge, skills, and dispositions into contemporary knowledge, skills, and dispositions. A lesson from the COVID-19 era is that well-being—an aspect of collaborative and compassionate developmental (i.e., co-mentoring) relationships—cannot be ignored. We contend that well-being needs to be embedded in the theory, research, and practice of co-mentorship, and a feature of future research, policy, and practice.

Postscript

We, the authors, have chosen to use an equal sign (=) between our names instead of the ampersand (&) that specifies the first author of a shared work and main contributor. Our intention is to convey the logic that names should be displayed equally in the case of genuinely equal co-authorship practice and shared contributions to a work. Mullen and Kochan's originating concept (Kochan = Mullen, 2001; Mullen = Kochan, 2001) has been adopted by other collaborating researchers (e.g., Hobson = van Nieuwerburgh 2022). Studies in which equal or equality were used to refer to the practice of sharing authorship are on the rise in medicine and science (Hosseini, 2020). Challenges of attributing as well as crediting equal co-authorship suggest that the equal sign can be recognised as a means for signifying as well as respecting equally shared authorship and upholding integrity in research ethics.

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