

# School-based Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education

*The Exploratory Phase*



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More directly related to this publication, our thanks go to Professor Sandro Caruana, Dean of the Faculty of Education, for showing his trust in us by backing this initiative from day one and for agreeing to write the introductory message.

We are also very grateful to Trevor Borg, artist and faculty lecturer in art education, for designing the cover of this book. The photo on the cover, also Trevor's work, was shown in France as part of a visual narrative documenting fragments of landscape. In our opinion, the 'strong' mirror image in this photo resonates with the theme of this book, as mirrors engender reflection and generate new spatial possibilities for movement and fluctuations.

Finally, but certainly not least, we owe a lot to a number of friends and colleagues who offered us feedback on reading earlier drafts of this book. Their insightful and constructive comments served to challenge our thinking and to deepen our understandings of the embedded issues. As a result, we were able to revisit our work with new perspectives and renewed vigour – a process that led to what we would like to consider as significant improvements to the overall structure and narrative of this book.





## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B.Ed (Hons)	Bachelor of Education (Honours)
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DELLI	Department of Leadership for Learning and Innovation
DES	Directorate for Educational Services
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
DMSE	Department of Mathematics and Science Education
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
HE	Higher Education
INSET	In-service Teacher Education and Training
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MUT	Malta Union of Teachers
MTL	Master in Teaching and Learning
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPP	Office of Professional Practice
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SForD-TP	Strengthening the Formative Dimension of Teaching Practice through School-based Mentoring
SMT	Senior Management Team
TP	Teaching Practice
UMASA	University of Malta Academic Staff Association
WG	Working Group



## MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

The term ‘mentor’, originally featured in Homer’s *The Odyssey*, has developed historically to embody a figure who can give expert advice, and who can guide and direct, although his or her role is judicious and discreet. These are some qualities which are often sought when mentoring is related to caring professions, including teaching, in which the practicum component is central in one’s formation and development.

The desire to benefit from the expertise of teachers and capitalise on the support that can be offered by mentors in schools has represented the basis which has recently led the Faculty of Education to engage with stakeholders, in preparation for the introduction of mentoring in initial teacher education. The response received has been most encouraging and there is little doubt that this initiative is viewed by all as a positive and highly desirable development in our education system.

The introduction of mentoring is fundamental for the reform on which the Faculty is embarking, in its mission to prepare teachers who are expert professionals and who can address the needs of their learners while reflecting on their role in society. As stated in the principles underlying the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL), the formation of teachers “is envisaged as a journey, a process of ‘teacher-becoming’ that is never-ending”: the mentor-mentee relationship fits perfectly into this process. In fact, both the literature in the field and international practices suggest that student-teachers stand to gain from their mentors as they are introduced into the profession gradually and inquisitively. Furthermore, the introduction of mentoring can lead to a strong partnership with schools, thereby allowing faculty staff to be constantly engaged with teachers and with school authorities. Schools themselves will profit from this partnership as the Faculty’s expertise can be exploited fully, for example through direct involvement with newly qualified teachers and in continuing professional development. Such collaboration will, in turn, lead to

more educational research, part of which could be determined by the needs of schools themselves.

Mentoring in initial teacher education cannot just remain a principle that stakeholders agree upon: it must become a reality in our education system by means of which the Faculty is involved systematically with teachers who are in employment. The full realisation of the MTL, in fact, cannot merely cease with pre-service training, as the efforts made by the Faculty in order to improve its practices can provide further support to schools and to teachers in service. The Faculty's vision and mission statement, 'Promoting an Educated Public in a Participatory Democracy', is pursued "by supporting the development of educators at various stages throughout their professional journey, i.e., from novice through to beginning, experienced and expert teacher status, ensuring that the Faculty's initial and continuing education programmes invite teachers to engage with the profession's best educational thinking and cutting edge practices" (*Tomorrow's Faculty Today* 2015, 6). Mentoring is the key to this and, as shown in several educational contexts worldwide, can lead to a better induction into the profession while providing support, also through research, to teachers and schools.

Professor Sandro Caruana  
Dean, Faculty of Education  
University of Malta

## PREFACE

The Faculty of Education at the University of Malta has long set its eyes on introducing some form of school-based mentoring as part of initial teacher education (ITE). Over the years, faculty staff members have become increasingly more convinced of the professional benefits that can be derived when carefully selected and trained practitioners in schools mentor ITE students during field placements. Important developments outside the Faculty have also paved the way for the eventual introduction of school-based mentoring. Suffice it to mention the declared support, at least in principle, by a number of key stakeholders outside the Faculty who operate in the field of education. This support appears to extend across the Ministry for Education and Employment, policy makers, the Directorates for Education, high ranking administrators from the state, Church and independent school sectors, school leaders and teachers, and the teachers' union. Put differently, the indications are that the local context, in the widest sense of the word, is now ready for the development and implementation of a sustainable school-based mentoring system that is tailored to address the professional learning needs of faculty students enrolled in ITE studies.

Mentoring, however, can never be viewed as a standalone, neutral novelty that can be imported into a pre-existing system that is set in its consolidated ways of 'doing things'. The introduction of mentoring requires instead a new mind frame among key players and accompanying structures that would permit it to flourish. In the local educational context, for instance, one cannot imagine the mentoring of ITE students in an environment that is not characterised by collaboration and partnerships between the Faculty and schools. It is also imperative that there is alignment across the visions and educational practices of key players in pre-service teacher education, including those of the Faculty and schools. This suggests that mentoring can only be realised within a general re-thinking of the way ITE studies at university are conceived and organised. This opportunity came along when the Faculty decided a couple of years back

to update its vision, foregrounding in the process the principles of collaboration, partnerships and alignment, and to replace its two current pre-service teacher education programmes with a new programme, the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL). According to ongoing plans, school-based mentoring is expected to be a central feature of the MTL programme, which is scheduled to be launched in October 2016.

This book serves, among other things, to trace the path travelled by the Faculty along its 'mentoring journey', which practically began in the early 1990s and has now reached a critical stage, what has become known as the 'exploratory phase'. During this phase, which will take place during the 2015-2016 scholastic year, a number of faculty teaching areas will explore the implementation of mentoring in schools with some of their current ITE students. Each area will use a teacher mentor model of its choice, which will need however to satisfy a number of basic conditions laid down by the Faculty. It is hoped that this phase will help the Faculty to understand better how school-based mentoring can be implemented, in an effective manner, in the following years as part of MTL. Although in this book we provide some indications of the mentoring path trodden by the Faculty, it is not our intention to come up with a historically-driven account. On the contrary, we refer to this 'journey' in order to highlight the sense of continuity and growth that has characterised the efforts made by different faculty staff members over the past 25 years or so. Some of these efforts, especially those in the early years, were indeed made when the existent local context was far less favourable to mentoring than it is today.

This book, notwithstanding the embedded references to the Faculty's past, is essentially forward looking. It seeks to act in fact as a vehicle of reflection and guidance at a time when the Faculty and its partners, the schools in particular, are about to embark on the exploratory phase of school-based mentoring. Given this orientation, the readers that we have in mind are individuals who are interested in mentoring, especially in school-based mentoring as part of ITE studies within an educational context, such as the one in Malta, which is still warming up to the idea. We also think that, ideally, while the readers are persons who enjoy engaging with complex educational issues linked to mentoring, they are equally intrigued by the practicalities of real-life educational initiatives that aim to realise a mentoring vision by providing a doable and sustainable structure. The intended readers of this book, in other words, are better defined

by their interest in the theoretical and practical aspects of mentoring than say, for instance, by the position that they hold in the educational system or by the role that they can play in a mentoring scenario.

We now turn our attention to the contents of our book. We choose to highlight here the more salient features of the publication, rather than present a sequential rendition of what the reader can expect in each of its ten chapters. To begin with, knowing that mentoring can mean a variety of things – depending on the context it is being implemented in, its scope, and the actors involved – the reader is made aware of the meaning attached to mentoring in this publication. The frequent, almost exclusive, use of the term ‘school-based mentoring’ mirrors the fact that the book primarily speaks of mentoring as part of ITE, taking place in schools while student-teachers are fulfilling their field placement experiences. The book also contextualises this discussion within the local context and rationalises the need for school-based mentoring. The initial part of this book is dedicated to a discussion on how prospective teachers in Malta are currently being prepared, together with a critique of the Faculty’s current teacher preparation courses and field placement practices.

The book also briefly takes readers through the rationale behind the Faculty’s decision to develop an MTL programme and to propose new field placement experiences for student-teachers. This new teacher preparation programme aims to link, in a more effective manner, the theoretical and practical components of teacher education and forges collaboration and partnerships with schools. This helps to ensure a better control on what student-teachers are observing, with whom they are paired, and how they can receive support in a formative way and establish their presence in the school’s professional learning community. We also link this initial phase of teacher education with the induction period which follows when teachers initiate their careers in schools, and the continuing professional development of teachers in service. It is being recognised that professional teacher learning needs to be regarded as a continuum, and that diversified forms and spaces for learning need to be in place to support the increasingly challenging tasks which teachers are being asked to take.

Drawing on the Faculty’s history, this publication speaks moreover of past attempts by members of staff aimed at exploring the implementation of mentoring in schools, and of a number of local studies which offer indications of the Faculty’s and schools’ readiness for change. The ensuing insights all



point towards the need for trainee teachers to make the most of their field placement experiences and to be better supported, and for faculty TP tutors to use such experiences to become closer to what is happening in schools. It is worth noting here that the teachers, who mentored student-teachers as part of their participation in some of these studies, report that they have benefited professionally from such an experience and that mentoring student-teachers was also an opportunity for them to reflect on their own practice.

This book also attempts to be practical in its approach. It outlines in fact a number of possible roles and responsibilities which the four primary actors – that is, teacher mentors, student-teachers, TP tutors and school leaders – are being encouraged to consider when school-based mentoring is implemented during the exploratory phase. The discussion in this part of the book aims to raise a number of notions and considerations on the way each actor should relate to mentoring, rather than prescribe any expected behaviour. It problematises school-based mentoring in order to raise awareness, given our backgrounds and experiences, of potential scenarios which can facilitate or hinder the implementation of mentoring, and to sensitise readers to the systematic efforts which need to be in place for this to work.

Moreover, this book suggests that the way schools regard teaching practice, both on a logistical level when it comes to placing student-teachers in a class and the quantity and quality of support that they provide, needs to evolve. This proposal builds on the understanding that schools have an important role in this ITE mentoring process – that of inducting trainee teachers into the profession through nurturing, encouraging and assisting them to teach, to learn from their peers, and basically, to face with determination the varied challenges linked to teaching. It is possible for schools to take on this role since there are many potential mentors based in schools – basically practitioners who apart from having acquired a deep understanding of and commitment to their profession, have what it takes to guide student-teachers to become more capable and independent in their role as teachers. It is argued that these mentors can also be instrumental, through the professional conversations they hold with their mentees, in helping student-teachers become critical and reflective in the processes they experience while they are teaching, or while observing teaching and learning taking place. It is hence important that teachers, and schools, be

guided into this new role which they can take on. Considerations on how this new role, and ensuing responsibilities, can start taking shape are also raised.

Finally, this book is also intended to serve as a platform to encourage discussion on school-based mentoring. Within the Faculty itself, part of this discussion revolved around the need for mentoring, which model this mentoring approach should follow, and the shape it should take. The vision is now clearer and there are a set of principles, as communicated within this book, upon which this exploratory phase is based and which tie in with the wider vision of the MTL programme and the way the Faculty looks upon teacher education and the profession itself. This discussion now needs to be widened to include different partners who can enrich the view of mentoring with their own experiences, proposals and opportunities once they take up the initiative to join in this growing momentum for change. It may also be opportune to keep referring to the mentoring spirit identified in the more theoretical parts of this publication when the Faculty and its partners decide which mentoring model to adopt for the MTL programme, in view of the lessons learnt during the exploratory phase.

Michael A. Buhagiar  
Michelle Attard Tonna



## CHAPTER 1

# Mentoring in initial teacher education

The modern understanding of the term ‘mentoring’ can be traced to François Fénelon, a French writer and educationalist, who published a book in 1699 entitled *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (Roberts 1999). This book, which essentially continues Homer’s epic narration of *The Odyssey*, recounts the adventures of Telemachus, the young son of Odysseus the king of Ithaca, in the company of Mentor who is depicted as a wise man offering constant support, nurture and guidance (Roberts 1999). Based on this fictional characterisation, ‘mentoring’ has acquired the meaning of:

... a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development. Mentoring functions are carried out within the context of ongoing, caring relationship between mentor and protégé. (Anderson 1987; cited in Anderson and Shannon 1988, 40)

In relation to teaching and teacher education, the mentor is often portrayed as a ‘critical friend’, someone endowed with the ability to challenge the mentees in his or her care to re-examine their teaching while providing encouragement and support (Furlong and Maynard 1995). As one would expect, however, a number of models of mentoring have surfaced over the years. From their review of the literature, Maynard and Furlong (1995) have in fact identified what they consider as ‘three rather distinct models of mentoring’. These are: the ‘apprenticeship model’ in which professional learning is linked to emulation

of experienced practitioners and by supervised practice under guidance; the ‘competency model’ which is based on the notion that trainees benefit from an explicit training programme that follows a routine of observation and feedback; and the ‘reflective practitioner model’ which assumes that professional learning requires critical thinking about teaching and learning. The competency model, in particular, raises the issue of the arguable links between ‘mentoring’ and ‘coaching’. The ensuing debate gravitates around the notion that this model requires the mentor to act as trainer or coach:

The mentor takes on the role of a *systematic trainer*, observing the trainee, perhaps with a pre-defined observation schedule and providing feedback. They are in effect coaching the trainee on a list of agreed behaviours that are, at least in part, specified by others. (Maynard and Furlong 1995, 19; italics in original)

The crux of the matter is that although some argue in favour of considering ‘coaching’ as an essential component of ‘mentoring’ (e.g., Maynard and Furlong 1995; Portner 2008), others prefer to see them as two largely distinct professional activities (e.g., Podsen and Denmark 2013). Sorensen (2012) explains the fundamental difference between the two terms for those holding the latter view:

Some use the term ‘coaching’ to refer to approaches that are more direct, involving a more skilled practitioner advising others or showing them how to do things, and ‘mentoring’ as a less directive process, involving guidance and support for individuals in questioning and reflecting on their learning. (201)

Following decisions taken by members of the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta (see chapter 8), the stance in this book is that acting as a ‘mentor’ is not the same thing as acting as a ‘coach’. Thus, even if the terms ‘mentoring’ and ‘coaching’ are often used interchangeably in the literature, all references to mentoring here should be taken to exclude all forms of direct coaching on the part of mentors.

In line with the ‘less directive’ approach preferred by faculty, at least for the time being, mentors are expected to focus primarily on providing guidance and support to trainee teachers. This effectively means that the Faculty is currently

promoting a form of mentoring which draws on practices that fall primarily under the ‘apprenticeship’ and ‘reflective practitioner’ models identified by Maynard and Furlong (1995). To be able to do this, mentors will have to be individuals, often teachers, who have ‘mastered the profession’ (see Mattson, Eilertsen and Rorrison 2011b). These are not individuals endowed by a fossilised sense of achievement. On the contrary, they are good and committed practitioners who cherish lifelong professional learning and have mastered the skill of how to go about it. Ideally, these individuals, in addition to their teaching experience and the resulting teaching craft knowledge, also possess mentoring craft knowledge that is characterised by an individual’s ability to reflect on one’s own mentoring experiences (Edwards and Townsend 2014). There are also a number of human qualities that facilitate the mentoring process. For instance, the mentor should be someone who can listen and show empathy, is altruistic, discreet and non-judgemental, and also able to motivate others to continue along the journey as they face the multiple challenges of being a teacher (see Smith 2015).

On the other hand, although mentees are usually assumed to be either prospective teachers enrolled in an initial teacher education (ITE) programme or newly qualified teachers (NQTs), they can also be experienced teachers pursuing their own professional development (see Smith 2015; van Lakerveld and Fischer 2005). Still, irrespective of one’s stage along the teaching career path, the underlying idea of mentoring is to assist the mentee “to develop the capacity and confidence to make his or her own informed decisions, enrich his or her own knowledge, and sharpen his or her own abilities regarding teaching and learning” (Portner 2008, 8). The emphasis, in other words, is on supporting mentees to grow professionally by learning about teaching and in the process improve their classroom practices. This will go a long way in ensuring that teachers are better prepared to operate as autonomous professionals, which is a professional quality that, as pointed out by Darling-Hammond and Rothman (2011; cited in Smith 2015), the most successful education systems are actively trying to promote.

Although there are numerous definitions and forms of mentoring (see Ambrosetti and Dekkers 2010), local efforts in support of introducing mentoring in pre-service teacher education have always seen this innovation as a school-based initiative that is part of an ITE programme in higher education (HE). As such, the school-based mentoring initiative is a form of mentoring that seeks to

offer support that complements and extends, not substitutes, the preparation of future teachers in HE (see Maynard and Furlong 1995). This contrasts with the early 1990s political manoeuvring in the UK to use teacher mentors to remove ITE from HE and place it in schools (see Kerry and Shelton Mayes 1995).

The embedded cooperation in this conception of mentoring between teacher educators and theorists on one side and schools and practitioners on the other facilitates the bridging of the long-standing gap between theory and practice in teacher education (Van de Ven 2011). This ‘gap-closing’ results from the heightened emphasis on ‘learning *to* teach’ that mentoring adds to the traditional focus on ‘learning *about* teaching’ that characterises much of what normally goes on during ITE programmes (Furlong and Maynard 1995). Put differently, mentoring provides trainee teachers with access to professional knowledge during professional practice and sets them forth on a journey that empowers them to make personal adaptations to and renewal of that knowledge (Tillema, van der Westhuizen and van der Merwe 2015).

Mentoring’s potential to help trainee teachers become proficient and self-regulated learners explains why there have been so many appeals in recent decades to introduce at least some element of mentoring in ITE programmes (see, for instance, Furlong and Maynard 1995; Hyde and Edwards 2014; McIntyre, Hagger and Wilkin 1994; Tomlinson 1995). These recommendations appear to have largely fallen on receptive ears. In recent years, mentoring has indeed become more prominent in pre-service teacher education across the globe (Ambrosetti and Dekkers 2010; Hobson and Malderez 2013). Moreover, there is the increasing awareness that to practise as mentor one needs to undergo formal and informal professional training. This is leading to the understanding that “mentoring offers, for those who engage in the required professional learning programmes, a staged career development which opens up for different professional responsibilities, status and salary” (Smith 2015, 295). Building on the argument that mentoring trainee teachers (or novice or experienced colleagues, for that matter) is a different professional activity from teaching class students, some even suggest that mentoring should be seen as an independent profession within the teaching profession (see Smith 2015).

## CHAPTER 2

# The gap between 'theory' and 'practice'

The Faculty of Education at the University of Malta is the main provider of pre-service teacher education provision in Malta. It is currently responsible for two ITE programmes, both leading to 'Level 6' qualifications (see <http://www.ncfhe.org.mt> for the Malta Qualifications Framework [MQF]), that entitle holders to apply for a teacher's warrant. These programmes are the four-year Bachelor of Education (Honours) (B.Ed [Hons]) and the one-year Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses. The B.Ed (Hons) route into teaching has three specialisations: early childhood education and care (ECEC); primary; and secondary.

The Faculty's ITE students are expected to acquire key skills and competencies in teaching and learning, to link theory and practice and in the process become reflective practitioners (see Sultana 1995; Bezzina and Camilleri 2001). In both ITE programmes, however, these expectations are not supported by a formal mentoring component. On the contrary, reflecting the widespread tradition of favouring the 'academic' over 'practice' in teacher education (see Mattson, Eilertsen and Rorrison 2011b), the Faculty's ITE programmes tend to this day to somewhat marginalise or ignore what skilled and competent personnel in schools have to offer in the preparation of future teachers. This situation, described by Spiteri (2014) as 'untenable', seems to persist in spite of the Faculty's intention since its inception in 1978 to have strong links with schools (Fenech 1992; cited in Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000).

Over the years, there have been internal pleas to address this imbalance (e.g., Sultana 1995). Indeed, a number of projects by faculty staff were aimed at exploring how school-based mentoring might be part of the solution (see Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000; Buhagiar and Chetcuti 2014; Farrugia 2013; Spiteri



2014). For instance, way back during the 1992-1993 academic year, Professor Mary Darmanin co-ordinated a seminal school-based mentoring project that brought together foreign experts, faculty staff and students, key officials from what was known then as the Department of Education, and heads of school. The inclusive and collaborative manner in which this highly successful mentoring scheme was organised sent a clear signal that mentoring can never be a faculty-centric initiative. On the contrary, the case was made for the creation of partnerships, primarily between the Faculty and schools, which would serve to bring together the different knowledges, both equally valid, that teacher training at university and schools have to offer.

Nevertheless, in spite of these projects and the growing interest among faculty staff over the years, the implicit theory that underlines the Faculty's B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE programmes has arguably remained rather traditional. Some might even go as far as to claim that these two programmes are "based on a training model in which the university provides the theory, methods and skills; the schools provide the setting in which that knowledge is practiced" (Wideen, Mayer-Smith and Moon 1998, 167). In such a scenario, the much-needed bridging between the worlds of theory and practice is likely to suffer. Indeed, this bridging tends either to be left in the inexperienced hands of trainee teachers, or to rely on professional support interventions by dedicated and committed personnel in schools, or else to depend on fragmented efforts by individual teacher educators who operate within an ITE environment that is not always sufficiently supportive.

Contrary to what is often claimed by interested providers of professional development programmes, the knowledge, skills and dispositions that make up university courses do not necessarily transfer to the workplace in an effective manner (see Scott et al. 2004). This would explain, for instance, why student-teachers (as the Faculty's ITE students are better known while in schools) appear sometimes incapable of translating what they have learned previously at university into effective professional practices and consonant behaviour during their teaching practice (TP). What some might view as a *de facto* territorial dichotomy between 'theory' and 'practice' in the Faculty's current ITE programmes is most likely to reveal its limitations when student-teachers are out in schools during TP, a period that at times is also referred to as 'practicum'. Understandably, faculty and schools become quite concerned when faced with such situations:

Indeed, it is quite common for Faculty staff to comment amongst ourselves that student teachers find it hard to link their practices to theory. And schools, on their part, are known to complain that student teachers often do not have the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions to cope with the ever more complex teaching demands of today. (Buhagiar et al. 2015, 59)

Such 'failures' on the part of student-teachers need however to be understood and addressed, not condemned and brushed aside, in terms of the complexity involved when they feel caught up straight in the middle of what they may possibly continue to perceive as two distinct and irreconcilable worlds of academia and schools. When, in reality, not only are 'theory' and 'practice' not in contradiction, but it is crucial for all teaching professionals to engage in a continuous interaction between these two ways of understanding the world as part of being reflective practitioners (European Commission 2009). Some argue in fact that all action is an expression of theory, which can however be of a highly personal and implicit nature (Griffiths and Tann 1992). This argument, to which we adhere, challenges the traditional assumption that there is a divide between theory and practice. Indeed, we consider that

...the gap between theory and practice is better construed as a mismatch between the observer's theory and the practitioner's own theory. Or to put it another way, what we still tend to label as 'theory' and 'practice' are more accurately seen as 'public' and 'personal' theories (Griffiths and Tann 1992, 70–71).

In the case of ITE students, it is the responsibility of the Faculty in partnership with schools to create the space and environment that would permit them to build bridges and overlaps between these two worlds (see Zeichner 2010). This will go some way to ensure that what student-teachers learn in schools is "meaningful, rigorous, authentic, relevant and connected and not left to chance" (Rorrison 2011, 19). It follows, however, that one should not expect student-teachers to remedy on their own what Zeichner (2010) sees as a long-standing 'disconnection' between the theories acquired from their learning at university and in schools. The emphasis, on the contrary, should be on creating supported structural opportunities that encourage student-teachers to make explicit their personal theories, to scrutinise their personal theories and to reflect on how

their theories compare to public theories. This exercise, following which one's own personal theories are either confirmed or reconstructed, should lead to a view of 'personal' and 'public' theories as "living, intertwining tendrils of knowledge which grow from and feed into practice" (Griffiths and Tann 1992, 71).

## CHAPTER 3

# Current field placement practices

The Faculty of Education was established in 1978 within the University of Malta with the main responsibility of providing pre-service training for all prospective teachers in Malta. Given that almost 40 years have already passed since its inception, one may safely assume that most of the personnel currently employed in the local education sector – including teachers, school leaders, union leaders and policy makers – were at some point enrolled as students in one of the Faculty's ITE programmes. This rather unique national scenario, certainly dictated by the still dominant and, until very recently, exclusive role enjoyed by the Faculty in local ITE provision, suggests that there is widespread understanding among stakeholders of what it means and entails to be a student-teacher posted in one of the local schools. For while the specific details of the experience of student-teachers in schools have somewhat changed and evolved over the years, the substance has not. This experience, which in its totality is referred to as 'field placement', has remained characterised by an initial stage of observations of classroom teaching that is then followed by gradual exposure to actual teaching.

In both the B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE programmes, the field placement is considered to be an essential ITE component from which student-teachers are expected to acquire key skills and competencies in teaching and learning, and in the process become reflective practitioners as they try to link theory and practice (see Sultana 1995; Bezzina and Camilleri 2001). The class teacher does not normally stay in class for the duration of the TP period and student-teachers are consequently obliged to assume full responsibility for the classes that they teach. The only known exceptions to this 'custom', very few in reality, occur on the explicit instructions of some school leaders who insist that

the class teacher remains in class (see chapter 4). Moreover, given that proper professional development structures are often lacking in schools, one may say that in-house support for student-teachers depends, almost exclusively, on the good will of individual teachers and school leaders. This helps to explain why many student-teachers tend to consider their school posting as a matter of luck (see Buhagiar 2013; Buhagiar and Cremona 2010).

Student-teachers, however, do get a number of visits by faculty-appointed TP tutors, who need not be faculty staff, which increase gradually in quantity as their ITE studies progress. During these visits, tutors are expected to assist students by offering verbal and written feedback and advice (see *Teaching Practice Handbook* 2002). These visits are within an overarching TP evaluation system that sees tutors playing both formative and summative roles while they assess student-teachers against what Brodin (2011) calls the ‘reflective’ and ‘competence-based’ learning paradigms. Reflecting these two paradigms, the written feedback given by TP tutors, which is recorded on the student-teachers’ TP evaluation booklets, includes comments and ticking against a number of professional skills and competencies. Beyond these formalities, TP tutors are also known to offer additional support to ITE students under their charge. Some, for instance, organise regular meetings at university, after school hours, that are meant to help student-teachers reflect critically on their teaching and school experiences more generally within a supportive learning community of ITE students.

In the case of primary and secondary B.Ed (Hons) student-teachers and PGCE student-teachers, the TP tutor is required to express his or her overall evaluation after each visit by ticking either the ‘satisfactory box’ or the ‘unsatisfactory box’ on the TP evaluation booklet. This evaluation process culminates when the Faculty’s Office of Professional Practice (OPP) co-ordinates a series of post-practicum meetings for TP tutors. Each meeting focuses on the TP performance of student-teachers within a specific teaching area, with the scope of deciding for each of the student-teachers whether he or she is to be awarded a ‘pass’ or a ‘fail’. Instead of this pass/fail TP evaluation system, the practicum of student-teachers enrolled in the ECEC specialisation of the B.Ed (Hons) programme is assessed by marks and grades that contribute to the final classification of their degree. The Faculty thus concurrently operates two different TP evaluation systems, each reflecting a different conception of the role of the practicum in ITE studies and how assessment should feature in the process.

This duality mirrors the ongoing debate within the Faculty which is related to whether the practicum should be graded or not. Faculty members of staff in favour of grading refer to the *University Assessment Regulations* (2009) which stress the summative dimension of assessment without making any direct reference to its formative dimension. For some of them, however, their support for grading is possibly more a reflection of the traditional university assessment context in which they operate than a matter of personal conviction (see Chetcuti and Buhagiar 2014). Another argument of the pro-grading faction is that the pass/fail system works especially against student-teachers who excel in their teaching, as it lumps all trainee teachers, including those who just make it, in one category.

On the other hand, those who favour a non-grading system base their arguments on viewing the practicum as a formative learning experience for trainee teachers that is characterised by an emphasis on professional growth rather than judgements and rankings. In spite of the rather restrictive university regulations, this faction appears to be interested in creating the space for forms of assessment that promote learning. They argue, in fact, that one can highlight the different levels of teaching skills and competencies achieved by student-teachers through multiple sources of information that support learning rather than hinder it, as grades are likely to do. These sources can include, for instance, critical reflections written by student-teachers that are assessed by TP tutors, and asking student-teachers to provide a rationale for their practice during an interview with an *ad hoc* examination board (see Chetcuti and Buhagiar 2014).



## CHAPTER 4

# Rationale for change

ITE programmes cannot be expected to prepare teachers for all the challenges that they will face throughout their careers (Bezzina 2008; European Commission 2005). We say this in the knowledge, however, that the skills nurtured in this phase – particularly those linked to versatility, spontaneity, critical examination and experimental use of ideas – can help them cope in varied scenarios. Notwithstanding this, in many countries, the roles and functioning of schools are evolving, together with what is being expected of teachers. They are asked to teach in increasingly differentiated classrooms, to make more effective use of technologies, and to involve parents in schools, among other demands. Reflecting this reality, an essential feature of the Faculty's recently adopted vision for teacher education in Malta is that it commits itself to support the development of teachers throughout the various stages of their professional journey (see *Tomorrow's Faculty Today* 2015). This pledge builds on the understanding that “Teachers’ work...should be embedded in a professional continuum of lifelong learning which includes initial teacher education, induction and continuing professional development” (European Commission 2005, 4).

While international evidence (see, for instance, Vaillant and Manso 2013) confirms the benefits of adopting a continuum approach to teacher education by aligning ITE, induction and continuing professional development (CPD), it is now widely accepted that mentoring can play a central role in each of these three phases (see Smith 2015). The focus of this chapter, however, remains linked to the introduction of mentoring within an ITE programme. More specifically, the idea is to explore, first, how school-based mentoring can improve the Faculty's current field placement practices, and secondly, how teachers and schools can



benefit through mentoring of trainee teachers. The spotlight is consequently on the enrichment of ITE and CPD provisions through mentoring.

### The quality of initial teacher education

Unpublished internal documents reveal that the Faculty's administration now sees mentoring as one of the areas that needs to be prioritised. There has been a gradual progression towards this position over the years. In parallel with the mentoring projects referred to in chapter 2, faculty staff have long discussed and reflected on the feasibility of introducing some form of mentoring as part of ITE studies. In April 1992, moreover, in preparation for the launch of the mentoring pilot project co-ordinated by Professor Mary Darmanin, Professors John Furlong and Trisha Maynard were brought to Malta to train faculty staff and other interested stakeholders (Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000). Some ten years later, Professor Christopher Bezzina, who was co-ordinating the Faculty's OPP at that time, even proposed the introduction of a certificate course in mentoring. More recently, the *Code of Practice for Examiners during Teaching Practice* (2014) refers specifically to how TP tutors should behave in a mentoring situation even though mentoring does not formally feature in either of the Faculty's two current ITE programmes.

The Faculty's pro-mentoring position, while certainly reflecting international research that has established school-based mentoring as one of the most powerful sources of influence on trainee teachers (see Hobson and Malderez 2013), has also evolved from what can be described as a sustained internal reflection on the quality of its ITE programmes and related practices. Along this process, an increasing number of faculty staff members began to value the learning potential of mentoring within an ITE setting. For instance, for Buhagiar and Chetcuti (2014) this journey began when they identified four main concerns linked to the quality of the educational experiences of B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE students during their field placements in local schools. These were:

- Student-teachers are not necessarily observing good practice in schools.
- Given that class teachers do not normally remain in class during TP, student-teachers have to take important professional decisions on a daily basis in a largely unsupervised environment, creating a situation that probably has no parallels in other professions.

- Schools do not necessarily have the structures to guarantee that student-teachers engage in supportive communities of practice.
- The expectation that TP tutors offer both formative and summative feedback to student-teachers may lead to internal tensions in tutors that could weaken in turn the formative dimension.

As can be noted, the above concerns do not refer solely to the quality of the training provisions for prospective teachers. Indeed, there are also equally problematic ethical and entitlement considerations linked to the tradition, which practically has been discarded worldwide, of creating long-term learning environments during practicum periods that are not properly supervised by qualified teachers. A few schools, however, do seek to address these concerns by insisting that the class teacher remains in class for the duration of TP, leaving class only when TP tutors visit. In these circumstances, the continued presence of the teacher in class is reportedly dictated by monitoring needs, possibly in an effort by schools to placate any 'fears' of students and their parents, rather than inspired by the notion of creating a mentoring environment in school that supports student-teachers to grow professionally during the practicum. To this day, in other words, the Faculty's desire (see, for instance, Sultana 1995) to introduce a school-based mentoring scheme that would forge closer links between the Faculty and schools for the benefit of the professional growth of trainee teachers and education more generally remains unfulfilled.

Lacking such a scheme, many of the Faculty's ITE students end up 'feeling on their own' during TP and consequently yearn for support that is not even necessarily guaranteed from their TP tutors. This reality persists in spite of efforts by many TP tutors to help student-teachers grow professionally in a supportive environment; some even organising, for instance, meetings at university after school hours specifically for this purpose (see chapter 3). On the other hand, contrary to the expectation that TP tutors also have an important formative role to play during TP, there are still some who reportedly act exclusively as 'examiners' (see Buhagiar 2013; Buhagiar and Cremona 2010), which after all is the role that is assigned to them by university regulations (see *University Assessment Regulations* 2009). But in spite of the absence of guaranteed school-based support structures during TP and a university assessment system that prioritises summative assessment, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are

several individuals in schools who are willing and capable of offering guidance and support to student-teachers with positive results. One such story, which involved a school-based TP tutor who included a strong and structured supportive dimension to his 'official duties', inspired the conceptualisation of the research project *Strengthening the Formative Dimension of Teaching Practice through School-based Mentoring* (SForD-TP).

The SForD-TP project aimed to explore if the introduction of school-based mentoring could help eliminate, or at least alleviate, the negative consequences linked to the four main concerns highlighted by Buhagiar and Chetcuti (2014) in relation to the placement of student-teachers in schools. The overall findings of the project were very encouraging. There were strong indications that when mentoring is in the hands of expert and conscientious teachers who support mentees both inside and outside the classroom and who are also willing to collaborate with TP tutors, the ingredients and structures are in place that permit stakeholders to start addressing in a holistic manner at least some of the more pressing issues related to the quality of field placements. More specifically, according to results extrapolated from the SForD-TP project, the advent of mentoring is likely to appease the aforementioned four concerns as follows:

- **First concern:** Mentors need to be chosen from among teachers who can showcase good practice. It follows that when student-teachers observe their mentor teach, they are very likely to observe good practice. Moreover, as pointed out by Helleve, Danielsen and Smith (2015), the very act of mentoring tends to stimulate self-reflection in teachers irrespective of whether or not they have been trained specifically for the role. The introduction of mentoring, in other words, will make it possible for student-teachers to get in close contact with teacher mentors who, apart from their recognised pedagogical expertise, are continually investing in their professional growth.
- **Second concern:** There are models of mentoring in which student-teachers practically always remain in the presence of a warranted professional, the mentor, who oversees their teaching in class. This ongoing, well-informed and reassuring presence in their professional life during TP creates the space for immediate preventive or reparatory interventions, as and when required, that safeguards the interests of the students in class.

- **Third concern:** Mentoring presumes regular conversations between the mentor and his or her mentee that cuts across all aspects of professional activity during field placement (Tillema, van der Westhuizen and van der Merwe 2015). This form of professional collaboration signals a breath of fresh air in the local school culture that, similar to what often happens in other countries (see Attard Tonna and Calleja 2015; Leonard and Leonard 2003), is largely characterised by professional isolation (see, for instance, Buhagiar and Murphy 2008). Mentoring thus offers student-teachers the chance to initiate their journey of becoming reflective practitioners within a school-based professional learning community (PLC). The PLC brings together a group of “educators committed to working collaboratively in on-going processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students that they serve” (DuFour et al. 2010, 13).
- **Fourth concern:** Although it is possible to assign different assessment roles to different TP tutors (see, for instance, Chetcuti and Buhagiar 2014), mentoring ensures that when these tutors are expected to provide both formative and summative feedback, the student-teacher has at least one person, the mentor, who can focus completely on the formative dimension. This can only be guaranteed provided that this teacher mentor is not also involved in the summative evaluation process (see Portner 2008).

Apart from the encouraging results of the SForD-TP project, faculty’s growing enthusiasm and insistence to introduce mentoring as part of ITE provision is further backed by the equally promising findings that emerged from other research initiatives by its staff (see chapter 5). But the Faculty is not only working for the introduction of mentoring for the sake of its ITE students. Indeed, the Faculty is also interested in and concerned about the lifelong professional development of teachers from the induction period onwards (see *Tomorrow’s Faculty Today* 2015). The Faculty, consequently, sees in mentoring an opportunity of professional reflection and growth for practising teachers who assume the role of mentor, be this with ITE students, beginning teachers or with more experienced colleagues.

## The quality of continuing professional development

The term ‘continuing professional development’ (CPD) is said to have been coined by Richard Gardner, who was in charge of professional development for the building professions at York University in the mid-1970s. This term is now applied to many other professions, including teaching. CPD embraces the idea that individuals aim for continuous improvement in their professional skills and knowledge, beyond the basic training they may have initially received to carry out the job. With teachers, for instance, CPD aims to maintain a high standard of teaching and to retain a high quality teacher workforce (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2009). This ‘target’ is based on the number of objectives that CPD can serve. These include updating teachers’ knowledge of a subject; updating teachers’ skills, attitudes and approaches in light of new techniques and new educational research; enabling teachers to apply changes made to curricula or other aspects of their teaching practice; enabling schools to develop and apply new strategies; exchanging information and expertise among teachers; and helping teachers become more effective (OECD 2009).

The emphasis in CPD is currently shifting towards the individual, rather than the employer. In view of this, teachers are now increasingly seen to be responsible for their career development within the school in which they teach (see Gray 2005). But teachers in Malta still tend to engage mostly in the in-service teacher education and training (INSET) type of CPD organised by the Directorates for Education.

[These INSET programmes] tend to fall under a top-down structure and address issues mainly at the system level that principally relate to policy and government-initiated reforms, but also to curricular needs that education officers, employed by the Ministry, perceive the need of addressing. (Attard Tonna and Calleja 2015, 103)

These INSET experiences, which are often perceived as not grounded in the lives of practitioners (see Attard Tonna and Calleja 2015), form the backbone of ongoing professional development provision for teachers that are regulated by successive collective agreements between the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) and the Maltese Government. The latest agreement (see Government of Malta 2010) binds teachers in state and church schools to engage in INSET activities for twelve

hours each year, in addition to another six hours of professional development sessions spread across three school staff development meetings which are held throughout the scholastic year. Teachers in independent schools are not bound by this agreement, but may elect to attend in-service training organised by the directorates. A number of church and independent schools organise their own INSET courses, directed to the specific needs of their staff. For some teachers, INSET and the obligatory professional development sessions are the only professional learning experiences they engage in throughout the year. Although teachers are free to engage in other professional development opportunities once they satisfy their own INSET obligations, it is not always possible for them to be released from their teaching duties and to attend seminars and courses held during the scholastic year (see Attard Tonna 2012).

Contrary to the nature of the bulk of CPD provision in Malta, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) make the case for professional development activities to be sustained, ongoing and include participant-driven inquiry, reflection and experimentation. This is a form of CPD that, apart from supporting teachers to acquire new skills or knowledge, provides teachers with occasions to reflect critically on their practice in a way that helps them to mould new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy and learners (Nelson and Hammerman 1996; Prawat 1992; cited in Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 2011). It moves CPD, in other words, away from the idea of having pre-packaged programmes conveyed by means of traditional, top-down 'teacher training' strategies (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 2011).

Although teachers are clearly expected to participate in CPD, the effectiveness of such programmes remains a contentious issue. While it is widely claimed that well-structured CPD can lead to successful changes in teachers' practice, school improvements and improvements in student achievement (see Opfer and Pedder 2010; Passy and Waite 2008; Schostak et al. 2010), it is hard to determine whether this success or impact is a result of participation in a particular CPD activity, or dependent on the casual processes at work or other successful mediators. Still, it is often understood that for CPD to impact at the teacher, school or student levels, the necessary school conditions that support professional learning have to be in place (see Attard Tonna 2015). The emphasis on teacher learning during CPD has become so critical that some prefer to use the term 'professional learning' instead of 'professional development'.

It is clearer today than ever that educators need to learn, and that's why *professional learning* has replaced *professional development*. Developing is not enough. Educators must be knowledgeable and wise. They must know enough in order to change. They must change in order to get different results. They must become learners, and they must be self-developing. (Easton 2008, 756; italics in original)

The idea of having teachers interested in their own learning and being able to work independently towards realising this professional aspiration resonates with notions of schools as centres of critical inquiry in which teachers engage in 'practitioner research' that produces knowledge based on their own lived realities as professionals (see Anderson and Herr 1999). This knowledge is built on "the insider status of the researcher, the centrality of action, the requirement of spiraling self-reflection on action, and the intimate, dialectical relationship of research to practice" (Anderson and Herr 1999, 12). In other words, as teachers intervene in complex and difficult educational situations, they have the chance to engage in a highly contextualised form of inquiry that not only allows them to learn about teaching, but also to act on the basis of acquired knowledge. This action then begets further self-reflection and action. When a teacher takes part in this cyclic approach to learning – which promotes inquiry and problem solving; is applicable to school and classroom settings; and takes their prior knowledge and experiences into account – it is more likely that one's pursuit for professional growth will leave a positive impact on his or her beliefs and practices (see Opfer and Pedder 2010).

Mentoring can make a valid contribution here on two levels: self-reflection and learning from mentees (Helleve, Danielsen and Smith 2015). The opportunities for self-reflection embedded in mentoring mean that teachers who mentor, apart from supporting the professional development of their mentees (see chapter 4), are also investing in their own CPD. This happens because the dialogues with mentees force mentors to stop and reflect on their own way of teaching, something that they would otherwise seldom do (Helleve, Danielsen and Smith 2015). The embedded contextually-driven form of inquiry on the mentor's part explains why mentoring is viewed in some countries as a most viable alternative to the traditional, centralised in-service teacher education programmes (see, for instance, Memon, Lalwani and Meher 2006). In addition, teacher mentors stand

to learn directly from their interactions with mentees. To achieve this, they may opt for instance to “relinquish control of their classrooms in order to benefit from innovative ideas that student teachers may have to offer” (Rajuan, Beijgaard and Verloop 2007, 240). Alternatively, teacher mentors may present student-teachers with their own problems of practice and see what possible solutions they can come up with. With student-teachers constantly searching for new strategies themselves, they may well have valuable insights on how to deal with issues that arise in the classroom (Larkin 2013).

The notion that mentors can learn from mentees requires teacher mentors to position themselves as ‘learners’ (see Easton 2008), professionals who in spite of their experience and expertise are still determined to continue learning from all possible sources. This will lead to a scenario that Rush et al. (2008) have described as a ‘two-way relationship’ in which mentor and mentee are both open to receiving constructive feedback and willing to provide it. This approach on the part of the mentor will help trainee teachers to better understand the notion of seeing ‘becoming a teacher’ as a journey (see Larrivee 2000) and the importance of CPD in the process.

Even though mentoring can offer teachers varied opportunities for professional growth, it still cannot be seen as a panacea to all the problems commonly associated with CPD scenarios. In reality, while research shows that mentoring has a positive impact on the professional and personal development of teacher mentors (Hudson 2013), one should also keep in mind that

...mentoring in itself does not lead to professional learning and development. It depends on the quality of the mentoring process, and in addition to the mentor’s professional competence, the mentee must be open to mentoring... (Smith 2015, 296)

This realisation has important implications for the type of mentoring programme that the Faculty intends to introduce as part of MTL. The first consideration that comes to mind is that the programme needs to create the space and context for healthy professional exchanges and interactions that benefit both mentors and mentees. Moreover, there is also the need to encourage teachers with the appropriate professional qualities and dispositions into mentoring (see chapter 1), and to offer them adequate training on an ongoing



basis. The emphasis on the professional preparation of the mentor remains; even if, as pointed out by Helleve, Danielsen and Smith (2015), to this day there is still little understanding of how to best develop curricula for mentor education and how mentor education actually contributes to improved mentoring practices. Finally, the whole idea of having mentoring linked to professional learning and development will falter unless trainee teachers comprehend and appreciate what mentoring can do for them in a way that they willingly and genuinely open up to the process. Otherwise, teacher mentors will find it difficult to engage with profit in the two activities that can render mentoring a form of CPD for teachers, namely self-reflection and learning from mentees (see Helleve, Danielsen and Smith 2015).

Although a number of local studies have explored the idea of implementing mentoring during ITE, to the best of our knowledge, only Buhagiar and Chetcuti (2014), Farrugia (2013) and a faculty pilot project spearheaded by Professor Mary Darmanin in 1992 (see Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000) have actually incorporated a school-based mentoring component in their research designs. While it cannot be said that these studies adhered exactly to the considerations identified above for effective CPD for mentors (e.g., the teacher mentors in the Buhagiar and Chetcuti study were not trained prior to their participation), the results in relation to CPD that emerged from these mentoring experiences were very encouraging. This is especially so when one considers that none of the studies had set out to link mentoring specifically to CPD. For instance, in the Buhagiar and Chetcuti (2014) and Farrugia (2013) studies, in line with the indications highlighted by Helleve, Danielsen and Smith (2015), teacher mentors reported increased engagement in self-reflection and learning from their interactions with student-teachers. One of the teacher mentors in the Buhagiar and Chetcuti study, also known as the SForD-TP project, captured this general feeling by saying:

I think that this experience has helped me in more than one way. First of all it's always good to see alternative methods of explaining a concept, planning an activity, dealing with misbehaviour, etc. I think that one can only gain from such an experience because it makes you question your methods. We tend to assume that the methods we choose are the best ones, especially after many years of teaching, but this is not always the case. Secondly, I learned a lot from the discussions I had with the student-teacher. In fact, there were days when we both ended up searching for more information on a particular topic and then sharing our findings.

Other than positively influencing the CPD of individual teachers, mentoring can also impact the wider school community (Hobson et al. 2009). Particularly in schools characterised by professional collaboration and exchanges, mentors can serve as change agents and can gradually impact on the quality improvement processes at school. Indeed, properly trained mentors have the potential to assume responsibility for the professional development of colleagues because they know how and why it is important to challenge oneself through self-reflection (Helleve, Danielsen and Smith 2015). Mentoring also offers veteran teachers professional replenishment and produces teacher leaders with the skills and passion to make lifelong teacher development central to school culture (Moir and Bloom 2003). It also helps to strengthen teacher retention and pedagogical innovation (see Feiman-Nemser 2001).



## CHAPTER 5

# Readiness for change

The ‘rationale for change’ discussed in chapter 4 indicates that what is at stake is much more complex than the introduction of a stand-alone innovation that supports ITE students during the practicum. Beyond the actual practices, it is about bringing change in individuals and institutions linked to the preparation and development of teachers in Malta. Drawing on Weiner’s (2009) work on the readiness of organisations for change, one may argue that the proposed introduction of school-based mentoring is not likely to succeed unless the stakeholders – such as, policy makers and their administrative staff, faculty staff and ITE students, SMTs and teachers, and union leaders – are ready for it. Put differently, it is essential that these people, all of whom are vital to the successful implementation of the innovation, agree with the change and share the resolve to pursue the courses of action that are needed to implement the change (see Weiner 2009). The aim is thus to get everyone on board as the faculty and other stakeholders collaborate together to introduce mentoring as part of ITE studies. This would be in step with the partnership model which is at the heart of the Faculty’s vision (see chapter 6). The recent setting up, for the very first time, of a faculty consultative committee, which brings in all the stakeholders together, provides the structure and mechanisms to ensure that the introduction of mentoring is a truly collaborative endeavour.

Starting with the Faculty, it is evident that the drive to introduce some form of mentoring as part of ITE studies goes back a long way. Indeed, the first recorded instance, at least to our knowledge, is the mentoring programme that was piloted successfully in a number of primary schools during the 1992-1993 academic year (see chapter 2). Over the years, mentoring began gaining ever greater acceptance among faculty staff and the local educational context

has become increasingly more receptive and conducive to the idea. A strong indicator of this changed scenario is the mentoring programme that the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) organises for NQTs in state schools (see Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education 2013). Some schools in the non-state sector are also known to offer professional support for their beginning teachers. In particular, the implementation of the mentoring programme in the state sector, which is rooted in the 2010 Government-MUT collective agreement (see Government of Malta 2010), offers assurances that the principle of mentoring now enjoys the support of the Ministry for Education, the Directorates for Education and the teachers' union.

Taking note of this ever more favourable context, the Faculty's administration decided during the 2013-2014 academic year to incorporate the notion of school-based mentoring within the ongoing preparations for the new MTL programme. This important development led, among other things, to the formation of a working group (WG), which focused primarily on the introduction of mentoring, and the setting-up of the Department of Leadership for Learning and Innovation (DELLI), which has mentoring under its remit and a member of staff who is directly responsible for mentoring. Discussions within the WG, which was dissolved once DELLI was formed, culminated in the development of a faculty vision for mentoring. This vision sustains the notion that ITE students benefit when they are supported and guided in schools by carefully chosen and trained professionals who operate within an overarching structure that is characterised by partnerships between the Faculty and schools, and a commitment to align practices within the Faculty and across partners (see Buhagiar et al. 2015). As part of achieving this vision, the WG also planned to explore the introduction of mentoring in schools with B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE students during the 2015-2016 scholastic year (see chapter 8).

The decision taken by the Faculty's administration to plan the MTL programme with a mentoring component brought to fruition the efforts of an increasing number of faculty staff who worked in this direction over the past years. Some of these efforts were formal research projects, while the nature of others is far less formal, involving 'informal activities' with faculty colleagues, ITE students and practitioners in schools. To the best of our knowledge, however, written documentation exists only in the case of three research projects by faculty staff (i.e., Buhagiar and Chetcuti 2014; Farrugia 2013;

Spiteri 2014) and one undergraduate dissertation (i.e., Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000), which incidentally reached conclusions that were similar to those of the research projects by faculty staff. Although admittedly rather limited, this body of research indicates a general level of readiness for the proposed innovation among the three main ‘actors’ identified in the pertinent literature – that is, student-teachers, mentors and TP tutors. Table 1 below summarises the results, yielded from these local studies, which are more relevant to the notion of ‘readiness for change’.

**Table 1:** *The readiness for change of student-teachers, teacher mentors and TP tutors*

**Study 1: Azzopardi and Bonnici (2000)** investigated alternatives to the Faculty’s TP practices, among which the introduction of mentoring. The participants included primary and secondary 4<sup>th</sup> Year B.Ed (Hons) students, TP tutors and teachers in primary and secondary schools. Data was collected through questionnaires administered to all participants and follow-up interviews with some of them.

**Main findings related to readiness for change:** The study provides a clear indication that B.Ed (Hons) students, TP tutors and teachers seem to agree that the expertise of teachers and tutors complement each other in the supervision of student-teachers during TP. Seeing mentoring as a most positive development in ITE, these participants also made the case that trainee teachers are likely to learn more from their field placement experience when there is a partnership among the three actors that would be involved – that is, the student-teachers, teacher mentors and TP tutors. The study concluded further that, according to the views expressed by the participants, the introduction of mentoring can be part of the solution to reconcile the practical experience in classrooms with the rigour of university teacher education.

*Continued*

**Study 2: Farrugia (2013)** reported on a project that piloted the introduction of mentoring in primary schools. The participants included 2<sup>nd</sup> Year B.Ed (Hons) primary students, mentors (who were either teachers or school leaders) and TP tutors. Data was collected from all participants through a survey. In addition, mentors and TP tutors attended a follow-up meeting.

**Main findings related to readiness for change:** The B.Ed (Hons) primary students, the mentors and TP tutors all concurred that their experience in the mentoring pilot project had been a positive one. In particular, the student-teachers commented how helpful they had found the general advice and teaching strategies received from their mentors. The mentors, on their part, reported a sense of achievement, an opportunity to reflect on their practices and increased professional motivation. It was also claimed that participation in mentoring helps school leaders get closer to classroom realities. Along similar lines, the TP tutors reported feeling enriched by the experience. They were particularly convinced that their interactions with mentors helped them to understand better the school context and also to communicate better with student-teachers.

**Study 3: Buhagiar and Chetcuti (2014)** explored the introduction of a school-based mentoring system in the SForD-TP project. The participants included PGCE students specialising in mathematics education, teacher mentors and one TP tutor. Data was collected through classroom observations and self-reports based on a pre-set template that were followed by one-to-one meetings.

**Main findings related to readiness for change:** All the participants reported that, based on their experience in the project, they would recommend the introduction of mentoring during ITE studies. The student-teachers appreciated the support and advice they received from their mentors, being grateful in particular that these teachers had

remained in class with them for the duration of TP without receiving any form of compensation. Apparently feeling this appreciation, the mentors reported a high level of satisfaction in the knowledge that they had helped trainee teachers to develop professionally. Concurring that it was a professional learning experience for them, the mentors also agreed that they would mentor other student-teachers should the occasion arise. The TP tutor, on the other hand, reported observing good collaboration between student-teachers and teacher mentors in class. The tutor also claimed that providing feedback to student-teachers in the presence of their mentor made it easier for student-teachers to react to and act on the feedback.

**Study 4: Spiteri (2014)** investigated how trainee teachers view the idea of being mentored by school subject teachers. The participants were students enrolled in the English track of the PGCE programme and data was collected using an anonymous questionnaire.

**Main findings related to readiness for change:** The response of the English PGCE students to the notion of being mentored was overwhelmingly positive. They saw in mentoring an opportunity to be better supported while in schools, as there would be someone (i.e., the mentor) who understands better the school context and their students. Moreover, they largely perceived mentoring as the ‘antidote’ to the complaints that they had expressed when describing their field placement experiences.

According to international studies, student-teachers, mentors and TP tutors need to collaborate closely if the introduction of mentoring as part of an ITE programme is to be a success (see Cohen, Hoz and Kaplan 2013). Apart from these three actors, the Faculty’s WG that focused on the introduction of mentoring identified a fourth main ‘actor’: the school SMT (see Buhagiar et al. 2015). The readiness for change of these school leaders is consequently another component that needs to be factored in.



The mentoring programme that was piloted in the early 1990s had already suggested a disposition on the part of local heads of school to support student-teachers during TP, enough to act as their mentors (see Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000). This disposition was again apparent in recent months when, as part of the preparations for the MTL programme, some faculty staff attended a number of meetings with college principals and heads of school from the state sector and heads of school from the Church and independent sectors. Chetcuti et al. (2015) report that, with regards to the issue of mentoring, there was general agreement among these principals and heads that student-teachers should be mentored into the profession by teachers and SMTs. Some school leaders indeed claimed that this was already happening in their schools. Analogous pro-mentoring sentiments were also expressed during similar meetings with directors of education, education officers and faculty visiting lecturers (see Chetcuti et al. 2015). Moreover, meetings with policy makers and union leaders have always indicated that there is a growing consensus, at least in principle, in favour of the introduction of school-based mentoring in support of ITE students.

Notwithstanding the welcome positivity of all these readiness indicators, there are still individuals from across the different spheres linked to this innovation who have flagged genuine concerns that require careful consideration and remedial action (see chapter 7). Paying attention to these concerns is likely to ensure greater acceptance and commitment by key stakeholders as the Faculty prepares for what may also be viewed as the formalisation and consolidation of the many instances of good mentoring practices that already exist. One needs to keep in mind that the ultimate success of the institutionalisation of mentoring cannot be guaranteed by people who feel either coerced or obliged to take part: instead, it will depend on people who actually want to participate because they value the change (see Herscovitch and Meyer 2002). The exploratory phase that is planned for the 2015-2016 scholastic year should therefore serve as a learning experience from which lessons are drawn and actions follow. This will help to ensure that the launch of MTL in October 2016 is welcomed by the greatest possible number of individuals who are ready for change and look forward to it.

## CHAPTER 6

# The Master in Teaching and Learning

The Faculty is presently in the process of replacing its current ITE programmes with a two-year Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) that will be launched in October 2016. As from then, prospective teachers will only be able to embark on ITE studies at the University of Malta after finishing first an undergraduate degree programme that satisfies the prerequisites of the teaching area or areas of their choice (see '[http://www.um.edu.mt/educ/master\\_in\\_teaching\\_and\\_learning](http://www.um.edu.mt/educ/master_in_teaching_and_learning)' for MTL bye-laws). This new programme is nested within the Faculty's wider vision that commits it, among other things, to develop and implement pedagogical practices that foster meaningful learning, and to promote collaboration and partnerships with the various stakeholders in the field of education (see Mercieca et al. 2015). Another key consideration, which is highlighted across the document *Tomorrow's Faculty Today* (2015), is the need for alignment. The case is made for alignment that is both internal (e.g., faculty practises with students what it 'preaches' to students) and external (e.g., faculty plans take into consideration existing external structures) to the Faculty and its practices.

In particular, the new MTL route, which effectively raises pre-service teacher education in Malta from a 'Level 6' to a 'Level 7' qualification (see chapter 2), builds on the growing realisation within the Faculty that it needs to embrace change if it is to remain relevant to and a leading partner in the local teacher education scenario. The decision to go for MTL can therefore be considered as an attempt to improve the harmony between the Faculty, its environment and the needs of those that it is meant to serve. This search for 'harmony, which Allison Jr (2007) advocates strongly, necessitated that the Faculty does not merely tinker with its current ITE programmes. It was essential instead that the

Faculty comes up with a truly transformational experience that can respond to the developmental needs of prospective teachers during their ITE period and which lays down the foundations for their continuing professional development (CPD). The MTL programme thus needs to be seen as the entry point to the 'becoming a teacher' journey along which individuals are continually supported to form their professional identity (see Larrivee 2000).

In line with other professional degree programmes, MTL will exist in what Scott et al. (2004) have defined as 'the twilight zone between the university and the workplace', with the prime intent of building bridges between university and schools, and between theory and practice. To achieve this, the MTL programme will position 'learning in schools', and consequently practitioners and schools, at the centre of its operations (see Buhagiar et al. 2015). This emphasis on 'practice' does not indicate a decision by the Faculty to give less importance to theories and concepts. On the contrary, drawing on what is becoming increasingly referred to as a 'practicum turn', the idea is to make 'practice' a point of departure for reflection on educational issues in the belief that "exploring practice from a theoretical perspective is best enacted in practice" (Mattson, Eilertsen and Rorrison 2011a, 243). The success of this reflective exercise necessitates, however, that student-teachers, practitioners in schools, teacher educators and researchers collaborate together (Mattson, Eilertsen and Rorrison 2011a).

The embedded key decision to identify practitioners in schools as crucial elements in the preparation of future teachers is in line with the Faculty's efforts to continue tearing down the territorial dichotomy attached to 'theory' and 'practice' (see chapter 2). The idea is that the Faculty and schools become genuine partners, both contributing to, even if in possibly different but certainly complementary ways, the exposure of trainee teachers to education theory and effective practices. In this way of seeing things, theory is not restricted to university and practice is not restricted to schools. On the contrary, the blurring of boundaries between the Faculty and schools paves the way for shared responsibilities for learning, covering all its facets and complexities.

It is envisaged, in fact, that the MTL programme will encourage professional 'border-crossings' between university-based and school-based professionals who work with ITE students. In such a scenario, it is hoped that the practice of faculty staff working with student-teachers in schools becomes the norm. Likewise, it is also hoped that practitioners, should they so wish, contribute

to the professional development of ITE students at university. The underlying desire to “bring the classroom into the lecture room and the lecture room into the classroom” (Buhagiar et al. 2015, 64) is likely to lead to numerous opportunities for professional collaboration between faculty staff and school practitioners. This will offer occasions to both sets of professionals to make up for the little knowledge that, according to Zeichner (2010), each has of the other’s specific work practices.

To date, schools’ contribution to ITE students during field placements ranges a whole spectrum, from the passive role to that of providing guidance and support to student-teachers, and also facilitating and encouraging their growth and success. As part of inviting schools to align, in a better way, their role during ITE studies with the current understanding that they should engage directly in the formation of future teachers (see Korthagen, Loughran and Russell 2006), the MTL programme foresees the introduction of school-based mentoring. In some schools and with some teachers, this ‘novelty’ will simply formalise the good practices that are already in place when they host student-teachers during field placements. However, in some other schools and with some other teachers, the mandatory inclusion of school-based mentoring as part of ITE studies will hopefully serve to shift the manner in which they interact with student-teachers and the manner in which they contribute to the professional learning of student-teachers.

It is worth noting that the introduction of mentoring is being proposed within a redefined logistical structure that is characterised by a much greater presence of trainee teachers in schools throughout their ITE studies. According to the MTL curriculum that is currently being developed, there will a number of block weeks each year meant either to help student-teachers familiarise themselves with their school’s routines and culture (1 week) or to engage personally in teaching (5 weeks). A more radical proposal, however, is that the MTL programme will require its students to spend two days per week on off-campus activities for the whole duration of the two-year course, most of which are planned to be based in schools. Moreover, the plan is that during the time spent in schools, student-teachers will be supported by two types of mentors – the ‘teacher mentor’ who will support their learning and development as a teacher, and the ‘school mentoring co-ordinator’ who will support their integration into and acceptance by the cultures of the school and the profession (see Hobson and

Malderez 2013). This decision is based on the premise that the combined efforts of these two types of mentors will make it more likely for student-teachers to benefit from what school-based mentoring has to offer. Indeed, although the literature shows that mentors can assume multiple roles in mentoring situations (see Smith 2015), these roles can be classified more broadly under ‘supporting mentee to develop professionally’ and ‘supporting mentee to integrate within the school culture and teaching profession’.

It is needless to say, however, that although the Faculty is moving ahead with its plans for the MTL curriculum, including the setting up of an adequate mentoring programme, the implementation of these plans will also depend on logistical considerations as well as the degree of participation of key individuals, including faculty staff and practitioners in schools.

# Problematizing the introduction of mentoring

As discussed in chapter 5, the general indications are that the time is ripe to incorporate some form of school-based mentoring within ITE studies at the University of Malta. The decision to take advantage of this favourable context and make mentoring a key feature of the MTL curriculum means that faculty now has to plan carefully for the implementation of a successful and sustainable mentoring programme. The planning process, however, needs to be in line with the Faculty's vision outlined in *Tomorrow's Faculty Today* (2015). Particularly pertinent here is the understanding that the implementation of a programme benefits when relationships among stakeholders are non-hierarchical and characterised by collaboration, shared decision-making, mutual trust, open communication and efforts to reach consensus (see Durlak and DuPre 2008). The Faculty has consequently sought to create and sustain such an environment during the numerous preparatory meetings for MTL, including meetings on matters related to mentoring. As happens when someone's reflections are guided by Dewey's notion of 'openmindedness' (1933; cited in Zeichner and Liston 1996) – which presupposes an active desire to listen and be open to multiple sources, to explore alternative possibilities, and to recognise the possibility of one's errors – this process has foregrounded a number of concerns. Here are some of the more pressing concerns related to the introduction of mentoring in ITE that will have to be addressed:

- **Policy makers:** Mentoring will only become a reality if policy makers translate their long-declared support for this innovation into tangible actions. Crucial here is the need to develop the legal and administrative structures that will permit the implementation of school-based mentoring and also create a congenial environment for it to flourish. Due consideration

will need to be given, however, to establishing proper alignment with other existing mentoring provisions in the local education system (e.g., mentoring of NQTs in state sector).

- **The University:** The introduction of mentoring is likely to mean that faculty staff will be involved in a type of work (such as, a heavier presence in schools; participation in mentoring conversations; and ongoing support to student-teachers throughout their field placements) that is either undervalued or not even recognised by the current collective agreement for university staff. This situation needs to be addressed. Moreover, in recognition of the services rendered by teachers and schools to ITE studies, the university will need to consider ways of how to offer some form of adequate compensation. In line with this, the training of mentors will have to be integrated within the university's accreditation system.
- **The Faculty:** The implementation of mentoring will require the Faculty to create an internal organisational structure to sustain this innovation and to identify 'programme champions', both within and outside itself, who will be entrusted with the orchestration of the innovation from adoption to sustainability (see Durlak and DuPre 2008). A priority in the coming months will be to create the field placement tools, as mentoring is planned to occur beyond the strict TP period, and to develop and run training programmes for the various actors involved in mentoring (i.e., ITE students, the two types of mentors [see chapter 6], SMTs and TP tutors). Among other things, this training should serve to align the manner in which the Faculty and these actors, especially mentors (see Hawkey 1998), view mentoring in ITE and the roles attributed to the actors. With regards to the actual implementation, the indications are that while the Faculty should keep aiming to eventually reach its mentoring vision, the journey will need to be flexible and planned along small, doable steps that respect the strengths and limitations of the various teaching areas of the MTL programme.
- **ITE students and NQTs:** The introduction of mentoring will mean that trainee teachers will either have no experience of independent teaching during their ITE studies or less than they have at present (see chapter 8). To address this new reality, education authorities and schools will need to invest more in the support that they currently offer to NQTs. The Faculty, on its part, is offering to assist schools during the induction years of

beginning teachers, particularly through partnerships but also through plans to participate more actively in current induction programmes and in the mentoring of NQTs. Such efforts will help strengthen the links between the two years of the MTL programme and the two years of induction (see *Tomorrow's Faculty Today* 2015). The Faculty's decision to offer its services beyond ITE studies and work towards establishing what Crosswell and Beutel (2013) call an 'extended model of teacher education', leads to what can effectively become a '2+2' teacher education model. Some might even argue that in view of the undergraduate programme of studies that is set to precede the MTL programme (see chapter 6), the new route into teaching would now follow in reality a '3+2+2' model.

- **TP tutors:** The advent of mentoring will affect the Faculty's expectations for student-teachers over the two block TPs of the MTL programme (see chapter 6) and this will have to be reflected in the evaluation tools that the Faculty is in the process of developing. Although the indications are that TP tutors will retain a mentoring role and remain solely responsible for the evaluation of student-teachers, they will need to take note of the changed 'TP with mentoring' scenario and adapt their expectations and practices accordingly. For sure, TP tutors will now be required to collaborate more closely with schools, especially the mentors. The aim is for student-teachers to develop professional knowledge through 'mentoring conversations' among the key actors identified in chapter 5 (see Tillema, van der Westhuizen and van der Merwe 2015).
- **Schools:** Mentoring is not being proposed because the Faculty wants to renege part of its current ITE duties (see chapter 6). On the contrary, it is the knowledge that schools have so much to offer to the education of trainee teachers that is driving this change (see Korthagen, Loughran and Russell 2006). In practical terms, schools are being asked to become professional learning centres in addition to remaining places of practice for trainee teachers. It is therefore fundamental that schools not only understand what is being expected of them, but also agree to assume these responsibilities. What is at stake here is an improved ITE experience for prospective teachers and additional opportunities for schools and teachers to grow professionally (see chapter 4). However, this win-win situation cannot just happen. In order for the Faculty to bring about these proposed changes, the needs and realities



of schools should be kept in mind. This will help to ensure, at the very least, that what is being expected is doable provided that schools are supported and equipped with personnel and resources. Moreover, a genuine dialogue will need to be established with the Faculty in order to arrive at a shared understanding of what the MTL programme in general, and mentoring in particular, is trying to achieve and how.

- **Mentors:** The indications are that there will be two types of school-based mentors (see chapter 6). The Faculty is also insisting that it will be responsible for the selection and training of mentors. The primary concern here is likely to be the selection of mentors, as the success of mentoring during ITE studies will depend a lot on their professional competence and commitment to offer guidance and support to mentees. The importance of selecting the right people for the ‘job’ emerges clearly when one realises that they will be “requested to develop a second professional identity as school-based teacher educators, which means undertaking further formal and informal education in order to accumulate theoretical and practical knowledge and understandings to be certified as mentors” (Smith 2015, 296). Becoming a mentor, in other words, cannot be viewed as a natural career progression for all teachers or as part of the duties of SMTs in schools. There will be expert practitioners, not simply experienced (see Hattie 2003), who either choose not to mentor or else, as suggested by Newby and Heide (1992; cited in Hudson 2013), may not be suitable for mentoring.
- **Unions:** The onus of the implementation of mentoring in schools will fall primarily on the shoulders of mentors and faculty staff. With the launch of the MTL programme, ITE students will be spending much more time in schools than at present and they are expected to be mentored throughout these periods (see chapter 6). Consequently, the work in schools with the new breed of student-teachers will be arguably much more demanding than is currently the case with B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE trainee teachers. One cannot expect mentors and faculty staff to carry on as usual when their work is anticipated to increase both in quality and quantity. In this scenario, keeping in mind that mentoring will boost the quality of both ITE and CPD provision (see chapter 4), one would expect the unions representing these two sets of professionals to support the innovation. It is also crucial that these unions – basically MUT and the University of Malta Academic Staff

Association (UMASA) – engage in talks with the respective employers in order to guarantee recognition of the work done and adequate forms of compensation.

The identification of the issues and challenges highlighted above is not meant to dishearten anyone. On the contrary, it is intended as part of a soul-searching exercise leading to a realistic assessment of the situation at hand, especially now that the ‘dreaming’ stage for the Faculty about the introduction of mentoring is over. The planning stage is well underway in preparation for the launch of this innovation in a year’s time. Over the intervening months, the Faculty and its partners will therefore do well to promote the notion of mentoring among all interested parties and create adequate tools and structures that will facilitate, rather than hinder, the implementation of mentoring. Moreover, keeping the local context in mind with all its pluses and minuses, systematic efforts are needed to shed light on what is likely to work or not within the parameters of the MTL programme. Raising this awareness and reflecting on possible actions and outcomes will constitute an important step towards finding solutions to the identified problems. This is where the exploratory phase comes in.



## CHAPTER 8

# The exploratory phase

An innovation can never be imported ‘lock, stock and barrel’ from one education system into another. Foresight dictates instead that one starts by seeing what ‘works out there’ to then recontextualise these practices to the local situation in a meaningful manner (see Fairclough 2011). Towards this end, the Faculty felt the need to explore with its B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE students the novelty of having an element of school-based mentoring as part of ITE. This exploratory exercise – which the Faculty is seeing as an opportunity to ‘test the waters’ before finalising its mentoring plans for the MTL programme – is scheduled during the 2015-2016 scholastic year. The ultimate aim is to implement, evaluate, reflect on and learn from a variety of mentoring experiences in order to help the Faculty develop the best possible mentoring programme for MTL. Although this initiative is geared to benefit a programme that is still being planned, the teachers and student-teachers who will participate in the exploratory phase also stand to benefit personally in view of the positive impact that mentoring has on the quality of ITE and CPD (see chapter 4).

In order to focus on the most crucial aspect of the mentoring innovation, it was decided however that the exploratory phase would concentrate on the introduction of teacher mentors and its derivatives, leaving out the introduction of the school mentoring co-ordinators. While this is far from ideal, it was felt to be premature to include these co-ordinators at a stage when the Faculty still has to decide, in agreement with its partners, on the role to assign to them in the MTL programme. So far, there is only a generic understanding that they will assist student-teachers to integrate better within the wider cultures of the school and the teaching profession.

It is envisaged that this exercise will create the space for the trialling out of a number of ‘teacher mentor models’ that emerge from and correspond to the strengths and weaknesses of the various teaching area specialisations within the Faculty. However, while flexibility is being encouraged at this stage, all forms of implementation will have to adhere to the general mentoring indications included in the document *Tomorrow’s Faculty Today* (2015) and the *University Assessment Regulations* (2009), especially in relation to TP examination. More specifically, in relation to the parameters set by the Faculty’s vision for mentoring (see Buhagiar et al. 2015), the exploration in the teaching areas that have agreed to participate in this voluntary exercise will have to guarantee a number of conditions. The Faculty is insisting, in fact, on three conditions in view of the expectation that these will constitute the framework, at least in the foreseeable future, of the school-based mentoring component in the MTL programme. These conditions are:

- To address the ethical concerns linked to the current practice of leaving school students solely in the presence of student-teachers for the duration of TP (see chapter 4), teacher mentors will be asked to remain in class throughout the whole practicum period, including during the visits by TP tutors. However, there can be occasions when, due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., the teacher mentor reports sick or a member of the SMT urgently needs to speak to the teacher mentor), the student-teacher will still be on his or her own in class.
- The selected teachers will mentor, not coach, student-teachers (see chapter 1). As a result, the duties of teacher mentors (i.e., the teacher at primary level, in charge of a class or subject area, and the subject teacher at secondary level) will be guided by the notion of providing guidance and support during TP in order to help mentees achieve the expected competencies of their respective TPs.
- Local research reveals considerable reluctance on the part of ITE students and teachers to link the role of mentor to any form of official evaluation of student-teachers during TP (see Azzopardi and Bonnici 2000; Buhagiar and Chetcuti 2014; Farrugia 2013; Spiteri 2014). In view of these indications and also in the knowledge that a restrictive, judgemental approach by the mentor compromises the mentoring relationship and its potential benefits (Hobson and Malderez 2013), it was decided to exclude teacher mentors from having an evaluative role.

In chapter 9, we put forward a number of suggestions related to how the four actors involved in school-based mentoring – namely, teacher mentors, student-teachers, TP tutors and SMTs – can operate within the boundaries dictated by the above three conditions. The decision to bar teacher mentors, at least for now, from coaching and evaluating student-teachers, is not a reflection on their capacity and potential to carry out these specific responsibilities in addition to offering support and guidance to student-teachers. This decision emanated from a desire to introduce mentoring gradually and smoothly, to go for sustained and monitored capacity building among all the actors involved before considering what are likely to prove more ambitious mentoring options.

Moreover, in fairness to the B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE students who will participate in the exploratory phase, it was decided further by faculty that the mentoring implementation conditions will be the same for all student-teachers within the specific teaching areas that have agreed to take part. One final consideration guiding this exercise is linked to the TP assessment regulations of the Faculty's current ITE programmes. Since school-based mentoring is not formally included in the B.Ed (Hons) and PGCE programmes, it has been emphasised that models of teacher mentors will only be introduced during TPs that are primarily formative in nature. In other words, these models will be implemented during those practicums in which the primary focus of TP tutors is on helping student-teachers to develop professionally rather than also having to decide between awarding them a 'pass' or a 'fail' (see chapter 3).

The idea of having this 'testing the waters' period evolved during discussions in the Faculty's WG that focused primarily on the introduction of mentoring (see chapter 5). Details were then finalised over a number of meetings to which representatives from the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE), Directorate for Educational Services (DES), Secretariat for Catholic Education, Independent Schools' Association and Malta Union of Teachers were invited to join representatives from the Faculty. At the end of this process, a letter circular was issued jointly in July 2015 by DES, DQSE and the Faculty inviting teachers from state and non-state schools to participate on a voluntary basis in the exploratory phase of mentoring (see Appendix 1). The circular gave details of the teaching areas involved in the exercise, the eligibility criteria for teachers applying to act as mentors and the selection process. A second circular was issued, again jointly by the same entities, in September 2015 to coincide

with teachers' return to schools after the summer recess. The September circular retained the content of the July circular except for the reduction in the required teaching experience for teachers from seven to four years, and the addition of 'Home Economics' to the list of teaching areas. Information meetings for interested teachers and heads of school have also been held.

The actual exploratory phase will consist of three components, as follows:

- **Training:** Believing that mentoring is too important to be left to chance (see Ganser 1996), the intention is that the introduction of school-based mentoring in the MTL programme will be accompanied by a professionalisation process of the phenomenon. As Smith (2015) argues, this will entail creating opportunities for the people involved in mentoring to engage in both formal and informal professional learning. The exploratory phase, in spite of its limitations, is being designed to specifically launch this message and pave the way for the level of commitment that will be required once mentoring becomes institutionalised in ITE studies. The teacher applicants will therefore be requested to attend a one-off training session that will be organised by the Faculty in the initial weeks of the 2015-2016 scholastic year. Similar training sessions are in the pipeline for the student-teachers, SMTs and TP tutors who will be involved in the exploratory exercise. These sessions should ensure that mentoring during the exploratory phase will take place within a context of shared expectations and goals (Smith 2015).
- **Implementation:** Once the numbers of the volunteering teacher mentors become known, the faculty teaching areas identified in the two letter circulars sent to schools will have to decide whether or not they can proceed with their participation. For each area, this decision will depend on its perceived ability to meet the number of conditions and considerations laid down by faculty for the exploratory phase (see above). It will also be necessary that faculty members responsible for the different areas obtain informed consent from their earmarked ITE students at this stage. Then, for those who can continue, the next step will be to formulate a teacher mentor model for their area in liaison with OPP and the DELLI member of staff responsible for mentoring. It is then the Faculty's responsibility to inform teacher mentors, student-teachers, SMTs and TP tutors of the model that will be used in the respective teaching areas. Eventually, contrary to what normally happens in TP placements, student-teachers will be sent to the schools of their

designated teacher mentors. Depending on the TP period earmarked for mentoring by the respective teaching areas, a teacher mentor can expect to be responsible for his or her trainee teacher or teachers for a period of three or six weeks, and in some cases even for half days spread over a number of weeks.

- **Evaluation:** While it is already decided that an element of school-based mentoring will form part of the MTL programme, the details of this innovation have still to be worked out within the parameters of the vision that evolved initially within the Faculty and was later taken on board by other stakeholders of pre-service teacher education. By evaluating the implementation of mentoring during the exploratory phase, the Faculty will be in a better position to examine the impact of the various teacher mentor models that will be trialled out and can subsequently decide on the basis of empirical evidence whether or how to modify things before the launch of MTL (see Chelimsky 1995). The DELLI member of staff in charge of mentoring will co-ordinate the evaluation process in which it is envisaged that other faculty staff members will contribute namely to the data collection, analysis and report writing stages. Data is expected to be gathered from all participants through questionnaires, and by using classroom observations, one-to-one interviews and focus groups with a judicious selection of participants. A segment of the training sessions will focus specifically on this aspect of the exploratory phase. Although the faculty members responsible for the different teaching areas are free to implement their teacher mentor model in any of the TP periods of their respective students, ideally the bulk of the exploratory phase will take place during the first half of the scholastic year. This will give the Faculty more time to make pondered, evidence-based decisions.

A factor that should permeate throughout all the three components of the exploratory phase is the requirement that interactions among all the actors involved in mentoring will be guided by the highest ethical considerations. This will facilitate the building of safe and trusting relationships among teacher mentors, student-teachers, SMTs and TP tutors that normally characterise successful mentoring experiences. Moreover, an emphasis on ethics will also guarantee alertness to the rules and culture of the context in which mentoring



takes place (see Smith 2015) and will safeguard the interests of the students in class. For the time being, however, the training and information sessions accompanying the implementation phase will only provide generic indications of the actors' ethical obligations. Eventually, once lessons are drawn from the exploratory phase regarding the specific roles and responsibilities to be assigned to these actors, the Faculty and its partners will collaborate to formulate a code of ethics to regulate mentoring in the MTL programme. It will then be the concern of all partners to ensure that everyone involved in mentoring is familiar with this code and adheres to it.

Finally, the manner in which the exploration of mentoring has been designed – right from the training to the evaluation stages – is meant to facilitate the Faculty's endeavours to establish a form of mentoring for MTL that is essentially a 'developmental activity' for ITE students. According to Clutterbuck (2004; cited in Hobson and Malderez 2013), mentoring assumes this developmental role when it empowers and enables students to do things for themselves. Reaching this target requires however that the various actors involved in mentoring play roles and take on responsibilities that are consonant with such an ideal. The following chapter provides suggestions as to what these roles and responsibilities may entail. The idea is to offer a range of possibilities that might help the different teaching areas participating in the exploratory phase to develop their own teacher mentor model.

## CHAPTER 9

# Roles and responsibilities

Mentorship is a human relationship in which the actors have roles and responsibilities that can play a determining role in ITE. Suffice it to say that while student-teachers often consider the practicum as the most important part of their teacher education (Buhagiar 2013; Feiman-Nemser 2001; Hobson 2002; Mattson, Eilertsen and Rorrison 2011a; Patrick 2013), it is frequently claimed that teacher mentors have the greatest influence on them during this period (Awaya et al. 2003; Helgevold, Naesheim-Bjørkvik and Østrem 2015; Larkin 2013). The combination of these two factors indicates the high stakes at play when a teacher education institution decides, as the Faculty has, to introduce a school-based mentoring system in an ITE programme. This innovation in the MTL programme will effectively bring in a new breed of school-based teacher educators (i.e., the mentors) who will ‘detract from the hold’ that university-based teacher educators have traditionally enjoyed during the practicum and the wider field placement experiences. However, the Faculty is not moving in this direction because it wants to let go of some of its duties toward ITE students when they are in schools. Instead, it genuinely believes that, as shown by research on selected teacher education programmes (see Darling-Hammond et al. 2005; Zeichner and Conklin 2005; both cited in Jónsdóttir 2015), this will be in the best interest of their teacher education (see Buhagiar et al. 2015). As a result of the Faculty’s decision to exclude ‘coaching’ from the equation, at least for the foreseeable future (see chapter 8), it seems appropriate that the roles and responsibilities proposed in this chapter draw and elaborate on the following understanding of mentoring:

Mentoring is a non-hierarchical, reciprocal relationship between mentors and mentees who work towards specific professional and personal outcomes for the mentee. The relationship usually follows a developmental pattern within a specified timeframe and roles are defined, expectations are outlined and a purpose is (ideally) clearly delineated. (Ambrosetti and Dekkers 2010, 52)

The idea is to go for a form of mentoring that emphasises positive and respectful *relationships* among all the actors involved, not just mentors and mentees; creates the spaces for *processes* that lead to everyone's professional development according to one's needs and expectations; and gives due consideration to the *context* in which mentoring takes place. The intention here is not to impose an external definition of mentoring on the participants of the exploratory phase. Instead, it felt useful to guide actions during this period by a conception of mentoring that is encompassing enough to accommodate the Faculty's vision for mentoring and the rationale for organising the exploratory phase (see Buhagiar et al. 2015).

The suggestions regarding the possible roles and responsibilities of teacher mentors, student-teachers, TP tutors and SMTs are presented underneath.

## Teacher mentors

Different kinds of mentoring models give rise to different roles and responsibilities on the part of teacher mentors. As implemented in the exploratory phase and eventually in the MTL programme, mentors are expected to be both more experienced and more knowledgeable than the trainee teachers assigned to them. Still, the mentoring model that the Faculty is trying to promote is not a hierarchical one characterised by mentors dishing out the knowledge and skills that mentees either need or want. The emphasis is instead on promoting a collaborative learning environment in which teacher mentors, student-teachers and TP tutors engage in 'mentoring conversations' (see Tillema, van der Westhuizen and van der Merwe 2015) that have the potential to support and advance everyone's professional knowledge and practices (see chapter 4). Although not central to the Faculty's vision on mentoring, the mentor may also consider offering, for instance, affective

(e.g., listening empathically to student-teachers' fears and anxieties) and social support (e.g., encouraging colleagues to make student-teachers feel welcomed at school) as he or she sees fit. While the affective support may prove useful to help student-teachers handle better their relationships with students, colleagues and SMTs, the other kind of support may contribute to their socialisation process into the school's culture (Smith 2015).

Keeping these parameters in mind, here are some practical suggestions regarding the roles and responsibilities that teacher mentors can take on during the exploratory phase:

- Guide student-teachers to recognise their strengths and to use them.
- Guide student-teachers to recognise their weaknesses and engage in discussions meant at finding ways how to address them.
- Provide advice on teaching materials; suggest teaching strategies and discuss appropriateness of different teaching approaches; offer advice on classroom management; and offer recommendations related to the curriculum.
- Allow student-teachers the space to practise freely without fear of being overruled or ridiculed, especially in front of students in class, even when they make manifest mistakes.
- Discuss lesson plans with student-teachers prior to implementation and analyse lessons, whole or part(s), with student-teachers after implementation.
- Co-teach and co-reflect with student-teachers.
- Ask for feedback from student-teachers regarding their practices and discuss this feedback with them in an open and genuine manner.
- Display an openness to learn from student-teachers.
- Liaise between student-teachers and SMTs and recommend student-teachers for suitable responsibilities in school.
- Behave in manners that inspire professional attitudes and values in student-teachers.
- Help TP tutors understand better the school and classroom contexts in which they observe student-teachers.
- Help TP tutors understand better the professional commitment and abilities of student-teachers.
- Participate in feedback sessions between TP tutors and student-teachers.
- Write testimonials for student-teachers.

## Student-teachers

The introduction of mentoring heralds new learning possibilities for ITE students in Malta during field placements (see chapter 4). This promise of professional learning, however, will stand a better chance of realisation if all the actors involved, including student-teachers, actively resist the traditional notion of reducing schools to what Barab and Duffy (2000; cited in Jónsdóttir 2015) define as ‘practice fields’ in which trainee teachers limit themselves to experimenting with techniques and skills taught at university. The idea, instead, is that they see their placements in schools as an opportunity to explore openly and critically the world of schooling and education, not just teaching, under the joint guidance and support of TP tutors and school-based mentors. In particular, the ongoing occasions in a mentoring environment to share in teachers’ rituals, routines and practices will help trainee teachers to establish links between their studies at university and functioning as a teacher in schools (Jónsdóttir 2015). Moreover, apart from facilitating the formation of their professional identity (see Larrivee 2000), mentoring may also prove to be the professional experience that inculcates in them a sense of treating both academic and practitioner knowledge with equal respect (see Zeichner 2010).

Student-teachers will need however to adopt an active approach to professional learning in schools if they are to maximise the professional benefits of introducing school-based mentoring. In line with a constructivist approach to learning (see, for instance, von Glasersfeld 1989, 1995), the experience of ITE students in schools will require a change in emphasis from ‘reproduction’ to ‘construction’. More specifically, student-teachers should be discouraged from blindly reproducing the techniques and skills that they come across during their studies at university, without any fear of retribution. The push should be instead on expecting them to engage in critical self-reflection leading to the construction of professional knowledge based on the contextualised interplay between theory and practice. Moreover, opportunities to engage in self- and peer assessment activities will assist student-teachers to grow professionally as part of embarking on the journey of becoming self-directed, autonomous learners (Boud, Cohen and Sampson 2013).

In such a ‘for learning’ scenario, the evaluation of their practice in schools assumes a more supportive dimension, even when high stakes are involved. The support received should contribute to the remoulding of the experience

away from having a TP tutor who is primarily interested in assessing the level of competence with which a trainee teacher can reproduce 'knowledge' transmitted by others (see Buhagiar 2005). This will give student-teachers the occasion to substitute their often debilitating fear of being judged and their practice found lacking, with the potentially empowering joy of learning.

The following are some suggestions regarding the possible roles and responsibilities of student-teachers during the exploratory phase:

- Learn about and respect school culture and regulations.
- Seek opportunities to get to know school leaders and teachers.
- Become involved in school activities and initiatives.
- Shadow teacher mentor both inside and outside classroom.
- Engage in ongoing professional discussions with teacher mentor and TP tutors.
- Ask teacher mentor for specific assistance and advice.
- Offer to assist teacher mentor in his or her professional duties.
- Co-plan, co-teach and co-reflect with other student-teachers.
- Co-plan, co-teach and co-reflect with teacher mentor.
- Adopt a learning attitude and a disposition to try out new things.
- React positively to teacher mentor's efforts to offer support and guidance.
- Be ready to justify and defend one's ideas and practices.
- Adopt a self-reflective approach that leads to the recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses and the intent to affect improvement.
- Propose ideas and offer feedback to teacher mentor and other student-teachers.
- Consider the teacher mentor and TP tutor as two support sources that are not in competition with each other.
- React to and work on the advice given by teacher mentor and TP tutor.
- Discuss with teacher mentor the feedback given by TP tutor, and vice versa.
- Look out for learning opportunities in school beyond the mandatory practicum practices.
- Meet and discuss with TP tutor and other student-teachers after school hours.
- Use social media to engage in and learn from professional interactions.

## Teaching practice tutors

The introduction of mentoring effectively means that student-teachers will now be in contact with two types of teacher educators during their periods in schools – that is, the TP tutors, most of whom are university-based, and the school-based teacher mentors. This arrangement can better sustain the calls for a new and more effective epistemology for teacher education that, as Martin, Snow and Franklin Torrez (2011) point out, aims to promote a non-hierarchical interplay among academic and practitioner expertise. In this novel set-up, at least for Malta, TP tutors will need to relinquish their traditional, dominant hold on ITE students in schools, as they start collaborating and sharing responsibilities with practitioners who take on the role of school-based teacher educators.

A crucial element of this re-balancing act is the formation of a common ‘third space’ between university and schools, a border-crossing space where university and school activities are destined to intersect and overlap (see Jónsdóttir 2015; Martin, Snow and Franklin Torrez 2011; Zeichner 2010). The notion of a third space, which builds on the understanding that individuals make sense of the world by drawing on multiple discourses, rejects dualistic approaches such as academic versus practitioner knowledge, or theory versus practice (Jónsdóttir 2015). The emphasis is instead on the need to transform the competing either/or perspective into a both/also point of view (Zeichner 2010). This opens up possibilities for establishing a non-hierarchical dialogue between theory and practice. This dialogue lies at the heart of the notion of ‘practicum turn’ as referred in chapter 6. Drawing on the work of Louise Phelps, this is how Van de Ven (2011) describes the embedded interplay between theory and practice during this dialogue:

Practice functions as a laboratory where theory is subjected to experiments, in which objectives, forms of work, learning activities, attitudes and evaluations are put under the microscope. Theory is interpreted in the practical laboratory, then it is tested, refined, adapted and criticised. (200)

The realisation that theory and practice need one another should encourage TP tutors in particular, and university-based teacher educators more generally, to enter into negotiations with school-based educators. The aim of these negotiations would be to find ways of how to operate in this in-between space

that belongs to both sides, even if in different ways. As an initial step, it seems sensible to suggest that university teacher educators working within this space should be guided by

...three different perspectives simultaneously: the perspective of the individual learning to teach, the perspective of the teacher in a school, and the perspective of the teacher educator in a university setting. (Korthagen, Loughran and Russell 2006, 1034)

This strategy builds on the understanding that when TP tutors recognise and give prominence to the unique contributions that teachers and ITE students can bring on board, the scene is set to create the synergy that assists student-teachers to link educational theory with the realities of day-to-day practice. This has the potential in turn to close the gap between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ (see chapter 2).

For the purposes of the exploratory phase, TP tutors have here a number of suggestions in relation to their possible roles and responsibilities:

- Develop a partnership with teachers and schools.
- Support schools in CPD activities.
- Recognise and promote the professional knowledge that teacher mentors and schools can offer to ITE.
- Encourage student-teachers to respect and seek the guidance and support provided by teacher mentors.
- Encourage student-teachers to realise that teacher mentors and TP tutors complement each other.
- Relate to teacher mentors as school-based colleagues endowed with their own professional knowledge and greater possibilities to help student-teachers grow professionally during school placements.
- Seek and participate in initiatives that promote shared understandings on ITE among SMTs, teacher mentors and TP tutors.
- Promote a critical and reflective approach to teaching among teacher mentors and student-teachers.
- Discuss the work of student-teachers with teacher mentors.
- Engage teacher mentors during feedback sessions with student-teachers.
- Ensure that student-teachers do not receive mixed messages from teacher mentors and TP tutors.



- Display an openness to learn from both teacher mentors and student-teachers.
- Create opportunities to meet and discuss with student-teachers, both on an individual basis and in groups, inside and outside school during the practicum.
- Invite teacher mentors (and other teachers and SMTs) to contribute to ITE courses held at the university throughout the year.

### Senior management teams in schools

Bezzina and Testa (2005) refer to the growing pressures on local schools to develop structures and processes that would permit them to become PLCs within a national education scenario that, in line with international trends, is moving towards a decentralised form of governance. In such a model, practitioners are empowered to participate in educational decision-making. Such devolution of authority to schools calls however for a school environment that is built on ‘professional collaboration’ which is taken to “occur when teachers work together regularly, share their knowledge, contribute ideas, and develop plans for achieving educational goals” (Leonard and Leonard 2003, 3). Given that the local education context is largely unaccustomed to collegiality and collaborative work practices (see Bezzina 2002), one can easily relate to Bezzina and Testa’s (2005) assertion that establishing PLCs in Malta constitutes a challenge, to say the least. This is more so in the knowledge that similar attempts abroad to realise and maintain schools as PLCs often lead to negligible results (Leonard and Leonard 2003).

SMTs in local schools thus find themselves caught between lingering traditional operational praxes and the contemporary discourses of autonomous schools and ‘distributed leadership’. While still working within a legacy of top-down administration, departmentalisation and fragmentation of teachers along subject communities, school leaders are still expected to ensure that all members of staff and the wider community contribute to the definition and attainment of institutional goals (see Bezzina 2002). CPD provision, quite understandably, suffer in this ambivalent reality:

Teachers are very often excluded in the decision-making processes regarding their training, and they are often subjected to forms of training which do not necessarily respond to their particular needs. (Attard Tonna and Calleja 2015, 106)

One possible route out of this paralysing impasse is for SMTs to create the space for and encourage participation in CPD activities that are grounded in the lives of practitioners in school. In addition to the three obligatory staff development sessions spread across the scholastic year, schools leaders would do well to keep in mind the professional learning potential, both at individual and institutional levels, linked to the proper introduction of mentoring in schools (see chapter 4). It would however be presumptuous to suggest that mentoring by itself will change the embedded cultural context in local schools. Still, it would be a step in the right direction. The bigger picture would require, for instance, that school leaders create a culture and a community where learners (i.e., teachers, teacher mentors, student-teachers and students) can identify their personal voices and authenticity, and are helped to make connections between themselves, others and the world around them (see Seashore Louis and Wahlstrom 2011).

Awaiting such ambitious developments, what one can expect at this point is that SMTs do their part to create a scenario where the expertise of university- and school-based teacher educators can complement each other as they both engage with student-teachers in schools (Bezzina 2008). It needs to be stated, however, that while the introduction of school-based mentoring may help empower the school community by engaging it directly in the ITE phase of student-teachers, the traditional hierarchical relationship between the university and schools may remain to a certain degree. This is particularly because of the lingering notions among many educators related to the presumed divide between theory and practice, and the ill-conceived perception that the former is superior to the latter (see chapter 2). The fact that the evaluation of student-teachers' performance in schools will remain within the territory of university-appointed TP tutors can be another contributing factor.

For the time being, SMTs may consider adopting the following suggestions regarding their possible roles and responsibilities during the exploratory phase:

- Create a school culture in which learners (i.e., schools leaders, teachers, teacher mentors, student-teachers and students) are encouraged to participate in communities that help them to identify personal voices and to make connections between themselves, others and the world around them.
- Support teachers to transform themselves and their ways of being.
- Engage in dialogue with faculty in order to arrive at a common understanding of how school placements can contribute to the professional development of ITE students.
- Make student-teachers and TP tutors feel welcomed, valued and part of the school community.
- Create structures that guide student-teachers into the school culture and help them integrate.
- Give student-teachers the opportunity to voice their ideas, queries and concerns.
- Create spaces where teachers and student-teachers meet to discuss, reflect and put forward proposals related to school goals and national educational issues.
- Organise school activities in a way that stimulates teachers and student-teachers to collaborate and support each other.
- Recognise and promote mentoring as a form of CPD.
- Create structures that facilitate the work of teacher mentors.
- Discuss with teacher mentors and TP tutors the growth and development of student-teachers during field placements.
- Meet with ITE students at university, outside field placement periods, to offer advice and introduce them to the specifics and responsibilities of school life.

The exploratory phase is meant to give the participating teacher mentors, student-teachers, TP tutors and SMTs the opportunity to experience and to offer feedback on a variety of possible roles and responsibilities, some of which have been listed above, related to their involvement in school-based mentoring. The evaluation of this phase will give the Faculty a good indication of what is likely to work and not work once mentoring is included within the MTL programme.

## Embracing ‘complex hope’

The Faculty has been working towards the introduction of some form of school-based mentoring as part of ITE for more than twenty years. The indications are, however, that this long gestation period will finally bear fruit when the Faculty launches its MTL programme in October 2016. Yet this journey, which in recent years coincided with the ongoing efforts to bring about a transformational change in the Faculty’s ITE provision, is by no means over. For while the mentoring vision is set clearly in the document *Tomorrow’s Faculty Today* (2015), the Faculty now finds itself at the delicate stage of dealing with key partners in an effort to finalise the preparations and logistics that would permit the implementation of this vision. The ‘exploratory phase of mentoring’ on which the Faculty is currently embarking is a crucial component of the remaining stretch of the journey, as it will provide faculty with a final platform for reflection and evaluation leading to decisions regarding what is doable or not in the present circumstances, what can be done now, postponed to a later date or simply discarded.

Thus, what is at stake now is not where the Faculty intends to arrive eventually vis-à-vis mentoring, but rather how to go about it in a strategic manner that ensures both a taste of initial success and sustainability and growth over time. While this may mean that the initial mentoring steps in schools will probably have to be restrained, even apparently uneventful in the first years, it remains essential that good seeds are scattered where land is fertile. Only then can school-based mentoring become the much expected asset, as opposed to revealing itself a burden, to the MTL programme. In its totality, the launch of the MTL programme with a component of school-based mentoring will constitute a transformational change in the Faculty’s ITE provision. This will be a new

reality that, as discussed in chapter 7, corresponds to a number of issues and challenges that need to be addressed.

The question however remains if the willed search for transformational change can ever be viewed as a non-viable option by the Faculty. The choice appears to be between maintaining the status quo and risk becoming increasingly irrelevant in a continually evolving system and opting for transformational change with all the calculated risks that this brings. Faculty members have by now already decided in favour of change in the belief that an irrelevant ITE programme serves no purpose and is potentially counterproductive. Its willingness to face the challenge can thus be interpreted to reflect the belief that seeking change “is far less risky than clinging to comfortable but outmoded traditions” (Allison Jr 2007, 120).

The process towards change, including the introduction of school-based mentoring, will consequently have to occur within an operational framework characterised by what Grace (1994) has termed as ‘complex hope’. This will imply a determination on the part of the Faculty and its partners to forge ahead with “an optimism of the will that recognises the historical and structural difficulties which have to be overcome” (Grace 1994, 57). This strategy is therefore based on hope that is grounded and responsive to the complexities of past and present realities. Empowered by this mind frame, the stakeholders will be more likely to proceed steadily towards change and within change, even when the journey might appear unsettling and difficult at times. This will increase the likelihood that the ultimate aim of implementing a successful school-based mentoring system for ITE students becomes a sustainable reality.

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# APPENDIX 1

## LETTER CIRCULAR (DES/DQSE/04/2015)

DIRECTORATE FOR  
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES  
FLORIANA VLT 2000  
MALTA



DIRECTORATE FOR  
QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN EDUCATION  
FLORIANA VLT 2000  
MALTA

DIRECTORS GENERAL

LETTER CIRCULAR

**Information:** X **Date:** 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2015  
**Action Required:** X **Ref:** DES/DQSE/04/2015  
**To:** College Principals, Heads of State and Non-State Schools, and Heads of Sections  
**From:** DG, DES and DG, DQSE **Tel:** 2598 2404  
**Fax:** 2598 2120  
**E-mail:** dg.des.educ@gov.mt  
dg.dqse.educ@gov.mt  
**Subject:** Expression of Interest for the training of potential Mentors to be involved in the Mentoring Exploratory Phase



UNIVERSITY OF MALTA  
L-Università ta' Malta

Dear Colleague,

The DES, DQSE and the Faculty of Education (University of Malta) wish to bring to your attention the joint initiative on the mentoring exploratory phase elucidated in the attached Expression of Interest. Kindly bring this Letter Circular and the attached Expression of Interest to the attention of all employees falling within your responsibility.

Thank you for your continued support,

Yours,

George Borg  
Director General  
Educational Services

Ian Mifsud  
Director General  
Quality and Standards in Education

Prof Sandro Caruana  
Dean  
Faculty of Education (UOM)



## **Expression of Interest for the training of potential Mentors to be involved in the Mentoring Exploratory Phase**

### **1.0 Rationale**

The Directorates for Education and the Faculty of Education are exploring the implementation of school-based mentoring in a number of teaching areas during next scholastic year (2015-2016). The aim is for a number of teacher mentors to support and follow student teachers during their school placements. Teachers participating in this exercise may do so on a voluntary basis.

These teacher mentors will provide an ongoing, well-informed and reassuring presence in the student teacher's professional life during their practicum so as to create the space for professional interactions, as and when required, that would help safeguard the interests of the students in class and contribute to the professional development of prospective teachers. An ongoing dialogue between the teacher mentor and the student teacher will help ensure the development of a community of practice and initiate student teachers in their journey of becoming reflective practitioners.

The teaching areas are indicated below:

- (1) Early Childhood Education & Care (Year 1 and Year 2)
- (2) Secondary teaching areas as follows:

Art Education, Computing, Design & Technology, English, French, Geography, German, Graphical Communication, History, Italian, Mathematics, Music Studies, Personal Social and Career Development (PSCD), Physical Education, Religious Education, Social Studies, Science and Spanish.

### **2.0 The role of the teacher mentor**

The teacher mentors engaged for this exercise will remain in class with the student teacher/s during the practicum (teaching practice and/or school experience) and will be expected to collaborate closely with University tutors who, apart from retaining a mentoring role, will also be solely responsible for the evaluation of the practicum. The role of the selected teacher mentors will be primarily to support the professional development of the student teacher/s under their responsibility. This support will be expected to cover the various phases related to teaching (i.e., from the planning stage to the self-evaluation stage).

Mentoring will provide student teachers with the support they need in their formative years and facilitate the development of the knowledge and skills necessary to become teachers. Learning to become a successful teacher takes time and commitment. The teacher mentors will have a key role in supporting these student teachers to develop strategies for effective teaching that facilitates student learning and to adopt a reflective approach to teaching.

The teacher mentors engaged in this exercise will not be receiving additional remuneration and they will not benefit in a change from their current role, working conditions and teaching load.

At the end of their participation in the project, the selected teacher mentors will also be expected to provide feedback on their mentoring experience. This feedback will be analysed and presented in a report that will be used by Faculty and its partners to develop school-based mentoring as part of the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) programme that will be launched in October 2016.

A certificate of participation covering the mentor training and mentoring experience will be issued by Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

### 3.0 Eligibility criteria

Interested candidates for the role of teacher mentors must:

- i. be either a primary class teacher or a secondary subject teacher as per teaching areas indicated above;
- ii. be currently occupying a teaching position and have a minimum of seven years teaching experience in the teaching area in which they are applying to mentor student teachers;
- iii. be in possession of a Teacher's Warrant (Permanent) and a recognised teaching qualification; and
- iv. attend a one-off training session (4 hours long) that will be organised by the Faculty of Education in September 2015 as part of the INSET courses offered by DQSE, or in the initial weeks of scholastic year 2015/16.

### 4.0 Selection process

Due consideration will be given to applicants who, in addition to satisfying all the above four criteria, already possess the 'Award in Mentoring' offered by DQSE or are initiating this course in October 2015.

The teacher mentors will eventually be selected on the basis of the available number of student teachers in the different teaching areas listed above.

The teacher mentors selected through this Expression of Interest will not qualify automatically to mentor student teachers following the MTL programme that will be launched in October 2016 and they will not be obliged to offer their services as teacher mentors in the following years.

Each candidate is required to produce:

- i. An updated CV
- ii. A copy of the Teachers Warrant
- iii. A brief motivational letter (around 500 words) in which the candidate explains her / his reasons for wanting to support student teachers through mentoring.

All teacher mentors engaged for this exercise will be selected through this Expression of Interest. Applications will be received at the first instance at the Customer Care Section, Operations Department, Great Siege Road, Floriana, VLT 2000 by not later than **noon (CET time) of the 21<sup>st</sup> August 2015**. Applications can also be submitted through email at [info.education@gov.mt](mailto:info.education@gov.mt). In this case, an acknowledgement by email will be sent within three working days. Applications submitted after this date will be considered if and when the need arises.

Notwithstanding this initiative related to the mentoring exploratory phase during initial teacher training and any other ongoing discussions and developments, standing practices which uphold the principle, that support to initial teacher training is part of the professional responsibility of all teachers and schools, still prevail.





## THE AUTHORS

**Michael A. Buhagiar** joined the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta in 2008 and is a member of the Department of Mathematics and Science Education (DMSE). Although his lecturing and research interests are linked primarily to mathematics education, especially in relation to assessment and inquiry-based learning, in recent years he has also moved into teacher education. This new interest led him to co-ordinate the research project *Strengthening the Formative Dimension of Teaching Practice through School-based Mentoring* (SForD-TP) during the 2013-2014 academic year. This project explored the introduction of mentoring with a small group of PGCE students specialising in mathematics education. More recently, the Faculty entrusted Dr Buhagiar to lead a working group that focused on field placement and mentoring in preparation for the MTL programme.

**Michelle Attard Tonna** joined the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta in 2015 and forms part of the Department of Leadership for Learning and Innovation (DELLI). She is in charge of educational mentoring, a role which proposes to oversee the mentoring of student-teachers during their field placement. Her primary research interests include the professional development of teachers and comparative studies of the way teachers learn. She has contributed to various European-wide studies in the area of teacher learning and also participated in various conferences and European networks in which she has presented her research. She has completed a Ph.D with the University of Aberdeen, UK, focusing her research on professional teacher learning in Malta.

# School-based Mentoring in Initial Teacher Education

The desire to benefit from the expertise of teachers and capitalise on the support that can be offered by mentors in schools has represented the basis which has recently led the Faculty of Education to engage with stakeholders, in preparation for the introduction of mentoring in initial teacher education. The response received has been most encouraging and there is little doubt that this initiative is viewed by all as a positive and highly desirable development in our educational system.

Mentoring in initial teacher education cannot just remain a principle that stakeholders agree upon: it must become a reality in our educational system through which the Faculty is involved systematically with teachers who are in employment. The full realisation of the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL), in fact, cannot merely cease with pre-service training as the efforts made by the Faculty in order to improve its practices can provide further support to schools and to teachers in-service.

Professor Sandro Caruana  
Dean, Faculty of Education  
University of Malta

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