LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

Exploring the suitability of the SPIDERWeB triadic peer-group mentoring model for developing a school-wide teacher mentoring programme

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Liverpool Hope University for the degree of Doctor of Education

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December 2025

Declaration

I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism. I declare that the work is original, except where indicated by referencing; I am the sole author of the work; and it has not been submitted previously in support of any degree or qualification or course at any university or other higher education institutions. In the writing I have documented all methods, data and processes truthfully. I have not manipulated any data.

Total word count: 59970

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Date: 3 December 2025

Abstract

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Mentoring is acknowledged to be an effective form of continuous professional development (CPD) (Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009); however, it is rarely used to support teachers' CPD beyond the early career phase (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014; Lomax, 2020) and there is little research concerning the use of mentoring for the professional development of mid- and late-career teachers.

In this study, I argue that mentoring can provide meaningful CPD for experienced teachers, and I propose an innovative model for developing a whole-school mentoring programme. I have called this model the SPIDERWeB model. Using a triadic, peer-group structure, this model fosters collaborative working across disciplines to build a network of practice that extends throughout the school. The study starts with an explanation of the rationale that informed this model and an account of how I implemented the model in my school setting.

My research sits within a social-constructivist framework and uses a phenomenological case study approach to explore teachers' experiences of the SPIDERWeB mentoring programme. Drawing on survey and interview data, which were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), I consider significant factors that influenced the effectiveness of the programme and I offer an evaluation of the feasibility of the SPIDERWeB model. Findings indicate that the SPIDERWeB model offers a holistic approach to mentoring and is an effective tool for supporting teachers' CPD at all career stages.

The study concludes with a consideration of the implications of its findings for mentoring theory and for policy and practice concerning the design and provision of CPD opportunities in schools.

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the support of my school leadership team and my colleagues, who embraced the mentoring programme and enabled me to conduct the research, and of my research participants who gave of their time and offered fresh insights into the world of mentoring.

I am indebted to my supervisors, Dr Namrata Rao, Mrs Sue Cronin and Associate Professor Owen Barden for their unwavering support and encouragement. I am grateful to all the tutors who have challenged my thinking throughout the EdD programme and pushed me to new challenges, and to Philippa and the library staff for their patience and help.

I wish to thank my family, who believed in me and kept me going with their characteristic humour and words of wisdom, and especially my husband, John, who sacrificed his weekends and kept me company on this journey.

List of Abbreviations and Key Definitions

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
ECT	Early Career Teacher
HT	Head Teacher
HoD	Head of Department (academic function)
HoY	Head of Year (pastoral function)
INSET	In-Service Training
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KS	Key Stage
MFL	Modern Foreign Languages
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
PGCE	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

Estyn The Welsh School Inspectorate ('estyn' means 'reach out' in Welsh)

Key Stage A block of years which represents a progression stage in the curriculum:

Key Stage	School years	Age range
Foundation	Nursery - Reception	3-5
1	1-2	5-7
2	3-6	7-11
3	7-9	11-14
4	10-11	14-16
5	12-13	16-18

Special Measures:

The term used when a school's performance has been judged to be poor, or inadequate, during an inspection. Following such a judgement, areas for improvement are identified and the school is then subject to termly monitoring visits, when its ongoing performance and improvement are measured against targets set by the inspection team

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the study: Where did it all begin?

I am an experienced subject mentor for beginner teachers undertaking school-based experience towards the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and I also have extensive experience as the senior mentor responsible for all the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) provision in school. Through my work with our trainees, I have seen the transformative effect that compassionate and focused mentoring can have. I have also witnessed the problems that arise when mentoring goes wrong, when mentor and mentee are not aligned. Thankfully, these situations are few; most mentors have a genuine desire to support and encourage through sharing their knowledge and experience whilst still recognising the expertise, intelligence and autonomy of their mentee.

Mentoring is a contested concept, which will be explored in detail in chapter 2. It has been described variously as guidance, support, advising, counselling, depending on the context and the approach used (Dominguez & Kochan, in Irby et al, 2020). Although difficult to define precisely, mentoring is generally understood to be a learning relationship, whereby a relatively experienced person (the mentor) guides a less experienced person (the mentee) in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to support their professional and personal development (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). In an educational context, formal mentoring is used to support teachers through key transition points in their careers (Forde & O'Brien, 2011), such as the progression towards achieving Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Schools are required to provide structured mentoring support for their trainees, and also for early career teachers, whether on the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) programme in Wales or the Early Career Teacher (ECT) programme in England. However, this requirement ceases once Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) is awarded and mentoring is rarely used to support teachers beyond the early stage of their careers. This, I think, is a pity: surely what is good for novice and early-career teachers should be good for all teachers, at whatever stage they may be in their careers?

During my MA studies, I conducted two small-scale research projects where I mentored colleagues in my peer-group - other heads of department. In both cases, the colleagues reported significant improvements in their confidence and their sense of preparedness to deal with certain aspects of their roles, and school leaders noted an improvement in the

performance of one and adopted resources created by the other (as a result of the mentoring intervention) for whole-school use. Thus, two colleagues benefited from a mentoring programme that was focused on their individual concerns and needs. How much could the school as a whole benefit if all teachers were able to access personalised training and support? And how much could many teachers benefit from the opportunity to act in a mentoring role - to share their ideas and practice, and in so doing, bring their ideas and practice into a sharper focus for themselves, as well as learning from the ideas of their mentees?

From my experiences as an ITE mentor and from the outcomes of my MA studies, I have a strong belief in the value of mentoring as a tool for professional and personal development, and in the transformative power of mentoring: effective mentoring can offer a life-changing or career-changing experience. For me, it is important that all colleagues have access to meaningful, personalised, ongoing professional development. In reality, much of the so-called 'continuing' professional development (CPD) provided is sporadic, rather than part of a continuous whole, and is often driven by government or institutional policy, rather than the interests and needs of the individual practitioner.

I believe that mentoring done well offers a strong foundation for an effective and meaningful CPD programme. However, I recognise that mentoring takes many forms and depends on a range of attributes and dispositions in both mentors and mentored for it to be successful (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007). Developing the required skills takes time, training and practice, and this relies not only on the commitment of individuals but also on institutional support. I have to acknowledge my own bias: not everyone will share my belief in the transformative value of mentoring – and this is something that I have needed to be mindful of, firstly as I implemented my mentoring model in my school, and then in my approach to my data collection, analysis and interpretation.

My study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a staff mentoring programme based on a peer-group, non-hierarchical triadic mentoring model that I devised as part of my MA studies (Appendix A). This model is premised on the notion that mentoring is a cost-effective means of providing individualised personal and professional development. However, unlike traditional dyadic forms of mentoring, where a senior colleague monitors and supports a junior colleague, my model focuses on the use of a peer-group triad. In this model, teachers work in groups of three with other colleagues at a similar level in the school hierarchy. Each individual within the group will offer a specific area of expertise which can support the development of other group members. This conceptualisation of

mentoring is founded on the notion of sharing good practice that is acknowledged as having a significant contribution to make in the processes of school improvement and teacher development.

As I considered the concept of triadic mentoring, I also imagined what it would look like if individuals from each triad, having applied their new-found understanding in their own practice, shared their experiences with colleagues involved in other mentoring triads. This might happen through informal, incidental conversations in the staffroom or through more formal opportunities for colleagues to meet and share the work done in their mentoring triads. Thus, the mentoring triads would develop into a network that reaches across the organisation. I envisaged the form of a spider's web: it is flexible and yet strong, reaching across the space between things (in this case, ideas and people) and joining them together in unexpected ways. It is a catch-all: anything that tries to move across or through it becomes inextricably involved in it. It is not always obvious but becomes visible in certain tricks of the light, or when the weather has been cold or wet enough to leave traces of frost or rain on its threads; similarly, a good mentoring relationship is always present, often in the background when things are going well and confidence is high but coming to the fore when life and work become stormy. A spider's web is intentional and purposeful. The spider creates its web, and then works to maintain it: the spider can feel when the web is taut, carrying the weight of something caught in it, or when the web is broken and needs mending. An effective mentoring programme needs a facilitator, someone who is attuned to the needs of the individuals concerned, who can create the structure of the mentoring programme and is able to know when to intervene if problems arise.

I have called my model the SPIDERWeB model. The SPIDERWeB model proposes a holistic approach to mentoring that is grounded in the following concepts:

S	Support
P	Peer collaboration
I	Interdisciplinary sharing of ideas and good practice
D	Development
E	Exploring new approaches
R	Reflective practice
WeB	Well-Being across the organisation

(See Appendix B for details of the rationale and conceptual frame for the model)

1.2 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

The study is a qualitative, interpretative study, which considers the impact of a school-wide peer-mentoring programme on teachers in a secondary school setting.

The overarching aim of my research is to evaluate the feasibility of the SPIDERWeB model as a basis for building a school-wide peer-mentoring programme to support teachers' professional and personal development throughout all stages of their careers.

To achieve this aim, I formulated the following objectives:

1. To identify how mentoring is currently used in educational settings and what is known about the value of mentoring for teachers' ongoing development beyond the early career phase

2. To explore how teachers' understanding and expectations of the mentoring process developed through their participation in a peer-mentoring triad

3. To ascertain what benefits (if any) experienced teachers perceive from participating in a triadic peer-mentoring programme for their personal and professional development

4. To critically assess the evidence and make recommendations concerning the possible application of the SPIDERWeB model to support teachers' CPD at all career stages.

My research questions were:

1. How do teachers' understanding and expectations of the mentoring process develop through their participation in a peer-mentoring triad?

2. What value does the triadic peer-mentoring process offer experienced teachers for their own personal and professional development?
    - How did the mentoring process influence the practice of experienced teachers?
    - What challenges did these teachers encounter in the mentoring process?
    - What opportunities did it offer them?

3. Based on the evidence gathered, to what extent is the SPIDERWeB model suitable for developing a school-wide mentoring network?

4. To what extent do contextual factors impact on the effectiveness of a whole-school mentoring programme?

Initially, I had not included the fourth of these questions. However, due to the challenging circumstances that unfolded during the academic year after the mentoring programme was launched, many mentoring groups struggled to maintain their mentoring relationship and some simply stopped trying, perceiving the obstacles too great to allow them to continue. I found that I needed to consider the participants' perceptions of the enablers and barriers to their engagement in the mentoring programme, and in particular the contextual impact on the mentoring programme. By contextual impact, I mean not only the circumstantial constraints caused by high levels of staff absence but also the impact of a shift in expectations, culture and ethos that came with the appointment of a new headteacher, one who admitted that he did not understand mentoring and was unwilling to allocate resources (i.e. time) to supporting the mentoring programme. I therefore added research question no.4 with this in mind.

1.3 Context and Rationale for the study

The study was situated in a small 11-16 comprehensive school in North Wales. The school was in a period of post-inspection improvement, having been put into the 'Special Measures' category in 2019. Five key areas for improvement were identified, with a focus on pupil progress and on leadership across the school, where 'leadership' related to the notion of every individual member of the school community taking responsibility for their behaviour, learning and development, and for consistently modelling good practice to promote a safe learning culture across the school. This learning culture needs to pervade the staffroom as well as the classroom: schools are places of learning for teachers as well as for pupils (Nicholls, 2006) and if teachers do not embrace and enact a spirit of enquiry, they cannot hope to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date, their enthusiasm will dwindle, and an encroaching feeling of staleness will, imperceptibly, be transmitted to their pupils.

During my year abroad in Russia, I happened to visit a village where the near-derelict church was being lovingly restored by the villagers, relying on their own limited resources. Chatting to the young caretaker, I was humbled by his sense of the long-term and his belief in the value of his work, even though it would be years before anyone would see the

fulfilment of the task they had taken on. This work had value for the community. He explained, 'A church is like a well. The well relies on the spring supplying it with fresh water. Without that fresh water, the well either dries up or becomes stagnant.' And so it is with teaching: the well (people often talk about the 'fount') of our knowledge relies on constant renewal and refreshment for it to carry authority and give meaning to our lessons. The school is a place of learning for all.

So how do we ensure that all teachers have that opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding? Some teachers may be able to attend training courses, where they gather ideas and information that they are expected to cascade (another water metaphor!) to their colleagues when they get back to school. In reality, there is rarely time in a busy school schedule for this dissemination of ideas to happen – unless the topic has to do with implementing policy, which often overrides any consideration of individual or subject-focused development (Pedder et al, 2010). It is questionable whether such courses address the specific needs of the individual or the school, and whether they provide an effective way of supporting the school in developing its learning culture (Borg, 2015). Moreover, the use of external providers reinforces the notion of the course provider as 'expert' and undermines the value of teachers' own knowledge and expertise. Rather than encouraging a spirit of enquiry, this has an adverse impact on teachers' self-belief and agency: the underlying message is that the ideas of the course provider hold more value than those of the teachers (Bell, 1991; Borg, 2015).

In 2009, Wei et al published a report on the status of teacher development, focusing mainly on the United States (US), but with some references to other countries. Many of the concerns expressed about the situation in the US have resonance with the situation in the United Kingdom (UK). Wei et al note that, in other countries where teachers' CPD has a high profile and is given high priority by policy-makers, student attainment is higher, teacher morale and job satisfaction are greater and teacher attrition rates are lower. As in the UK, most CPD in the US consists of short-term conferences or workshops. The problem with such forms of CPD is that teachers are bombarded with a plethora of new ideas and initiatives in a very short space of time, with little or no opportunity when they return to school to consolidate what they have learned.

According to Wei et al (2009), teachers need approximately 50 hours of CPD in any given area for its impact to be seen. In the UK, teachers receive 25 hours of CPD per year in the form of In-Service Training (INSET) Days, and budgeting constraints (of both money and time) mean that only a very small proportion of teachers receive any further training

opportunities, despite the expectation that teachers will engage in ongoing professional development activity (Department for Education (DfE), 2011). Moreover, the content of INSET days tends to focus on school priorities, rather than addressing individual developmental needs, yet it is important for their well-being and for the well-being of the organisation that teachers' individual concerns and needs are acknowledged and addressed (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014). A school-wide mentoring programme could help to address many of these concerns and foster the learning community that Nicholls (2006) would promote.

It is acknowledged that mentoring helps individuals to develop their skills in a supportive manner that is tailored to their specific needs and interests (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005). Mentoring is a crucial element in all teacher training programmes nowadays: it equips the individual with strategies for reflecting on their own skills and practice, and helps them to identify areas for further development (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011). Mentoring is also used in many other workplace contexts to provide individual personal and professional development and aid career progression (Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009). However, in my own experience, mentoring support is rarely offered to more experienced teachers, despite the fact that these teachers still expect, and are expected, to develop the skills to be able to take on new roles and responsibilities as their careers progress (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014).

My research interest centres on mentoring as a tool for individual and collective staff development throughout all stages of a teaching career. I propose a mentoring model, the SPIDERWeB model, which is based on a triadic peer-mentoring structure. My study explores how this might work in practice, what impact, if any, a mentoring programme using this model might have on the individuals who engage with it, and whether the SPIDERWeB mentoring model might provide a foundation for developing a school-wide mentoring system that would offer a holistic approach to staff development (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011) and foster a process of continuous learning for all (Nicholls, 2006).

1.4 Building the mentoring programme using the SPIDERWeB model

In 2021, the then Headteacher agreed to my proposal (see Appendix C) to implement a trial mentoring programme using the SPIDERWeB model, with a view to embedding it as an integral element of CPD provision in school if it proved to be beneficial. This trial programme forms the subject for my study.

Setting up the mentoring programme proved to be a time-consuming process requiring a methodical and sensitive approach in balancing individual needs and strengths within each mentoring group. This section is a reflective account of the key stages and processes that were involved in building the mentoring programme, as outlined in the flow diagram shown at fig.1.1 below.

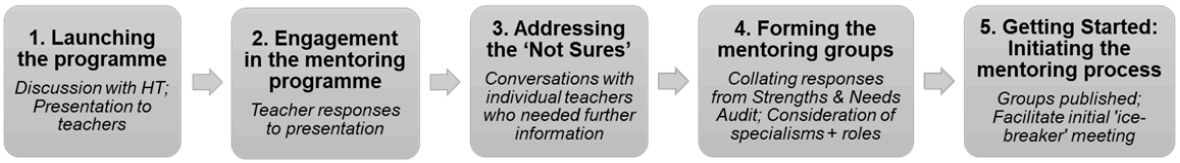

Fig.1.1 Outline of stages in building the mentoring programme

1.4.1 Launching the programme

When I first broached the subject in April 2021, the headteacher and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) were very supportive of the idea of developing a school-wide staff mentoring programme, which would be offered to teachers on an 'opt-in' basis. Crucially, the SLT understood my concerns around accountability and scrutiny, and for the sake of ensuring that colleagues felt safe to participate in the mentoring programme, it was agreed that members of the SLT would not be directly involved. The mentoring programme would be launched at the start of the new school year. I was allocated some time during the September training days to introduce the proposed programme and to run some initial training (Appendix D.1) to explore the conceptualisation of mentoring that underpins my SpiderWeb model and the mentoring programme that I envisaged.

For the introductory sessions, I divided the staff into three groups with about 20 in each group, rather than having one large group of 60, so that I could run the sessions as a workshop activity rather than as a lecture. These sessions went well, with plenty of contributions and discussion: colleagues seemed happy to engage in the activities and many were keen to offer constructive comments or ask questions. At the end of each workshop session, colleagues completed a questionnaire (Appendix E) to indicate whether or not they would be interested in the mentoring programme, the areas of practice where they felt in need of support, and what sort of support they might offer to others. I provided some examples taken from previous in-house training workshops to stimulate ideas.

1.4.2 Engagement in the mentoring programme

I was astounded at the responses I received in the questionnaires: only five or six colleagues said that they were not interested; the remainder of the responses were fairly evenly split between “Yes” and “Not sure”. This was a significantly more positive response than anticipated, and prompted some reflection on what factors might have contributed to this. Here are some of my thoughts:

My role as the lead mentor for ITE was firmly established and I have worked with most departments across the school at different times to help them develop their ITE provision. This means that I have developed a reasonable understanding of how different departments operate and respond to the requirements of their subject. I therefore have credibility when I talk to colleagues, not simply about mentoring, but about mentoring across subjects and different areas of practice.

I am passionate about the value of mentoring, and I am frustrated when I hear of other schools where offering mentoring support to trainees is seen as an ‘add-on’ rather than integral to their placement. This is a question of fairness and equity: it is about making sure that everyone who is expected to contribute to the life of the school is given appropriate support, according to their individual needs. Colleagues who have worked with me on ITE mentoring programmes understand this and know what my stance is on ITE provision. This reflects my own values and integrity, which will have been implicit in my presentation through the message that I was giving about what mentoring is, and what it is not.

One colleague had contributed to the research for my MA dissertation. She volunteered to let me mentor her in developing her literacy skills for the Key-Stage 3 (KS3) literacy programme that she was required to deliver. Initially she was very nervous: it takes a huge amount of courage for a teacher to admit that they feel their literacy skills are weak, much more so than admitting to poor numeracy skills. It is accepted that people can be weak at mental arithmetic, or find mathematical processes hard, but literacy is key to all teaching and it is very hard to admit a lack of confidence. This colleague was remarkably honest and placed a high level of trust in me – in my ability to maintain confidentiality, in my ability to support, and in my ability to not judge. This was her greatest fear, that she would be judged. I am proud to say that we developed a very strong and successful mentoring relationship, and it was wonderful to see her skills and confidence grow. Through the mentoring process, we became firm friends and we continue to build on the original mentoring relationship to mentor each other when we are finding things tough. As a consequence, this colleague is now very evangelistic about the transformative power of

mentoring. I have never told anyone of the identity of the colleague who was my case study for my dissertation, but she has. She has often called for more use of mentoring in school, citing her own experiences as evidence of its value; during her workshop session, she took the opportunity to do so again.

Finally, another colleague told me that he was interested in the opportunity to work with colleagues from other departments. As a relatively inexperienced teacher recently appointed to a departmental leadership role, he felt that the mentoring programme would help him to develop his knowledge and skills and to learn from more experienced colleagues in a similar role.

1.4.3 Addressing the 'Not Sures'

I had to think carefully about those colleagues who selected 'Not Sure' on their form. It was interesting to note that many of the 'Not Sures' had also not answered the question about what support they felt able to offer. Most of these were relatively inexperienced colleagues or colleagues who were new to the school, and so felt unable to put themselves forward in this way. This ties in with the comments made later in the group interview about impostor syndrome: even experienced teachers struggled to think about their strengths and what support they could offer others.

As teachers, we are used to being directed to attend training events: we have five statutory INSET days per year and yet it really is not clear whether we are being directed by government policy to complete five days of training, or whether we are being offered time and opportunity to do so. And the distinction is important: in the former case, we can expect the training provision to be directed by policymakers, determined by policy needs and imposed on us; in the latter interpretation, we might expect to identify our own training needs and seek the appropriate opportunities to address them. In reality, INSET days are stipulated in the school calendar, and the programme for each day is determined by school leadership, or even by the local authority. Classroom teachers are in the habit of expecting to be trained; we are not in the habit of expecting or being trusted to train other teachers, which is somewhat ironic, given that (i) many teachers play a very active part in the training of new entrants to the profession, and (ii) we are expected and trusted to spend 190 days each year training our pupils – some of whom may go on to develop policy and deliver the INSET training of the future!

So, impostor syndrome played a part in some colleagues not being sure about whether or not to engage in the mentoring programme. Some colleagues simply felt it 'wasn't for them' but didn't want to say so explicitly, perhaps for fear of offending me? And some colleagues were interested in the thought of a mentoring programme, but had concerns about time management. However, there were also a few colleagues who were interested, but were concerned about how the mentoring groups would be determined and who might work with whom. This was a concern that I was very aware of, and that needed to be handled carefully, not just for these 'Not Sures', but also for those who had indicated a definite 'Yes' in the initial questionnaire.

To address these issues, I made two key decisions. Firstly, I decided to avoid, where possible, placing colleagues who had responded 'Yes' in a mentoring group with anyone from the 'Not Sure' cohort. I did not want the enthusiasm of one to be undermined by the concerns or half-heartedness of the other. And I did not want those who were feeling cautious to feel overwhelmed by others who were more confident or enthusiastic. Secondly, I decided to talk to everyone who had responded either 'Not Sure' or 'Yes' about their needs, what they were able to offer, and which groupings might work for them. How I conducted these conversations would depend largely on which response the individual had given.

For those who responded 'Yes', it was reasonably straightforward to thank them for their interest and to check that they would be able to work with the group that I had in mind. Most colleagues in this category were happy with whatever I suggested: in their own minds they were already positively engaged in the scheme and so were less worried about whether or not it would work. This does indicate a high level of trust on their part that I would manage to arrange everything satisfactorily.

For the 'Not Sures' I took a slightly different approach: I started the conversation by acknowledging their response, and by asking them if there was anything in particular that they wanted to know before making a decision. This gave me a chance to probe their initial response, and for some it became clear that they were simply not ready to engage in the mentoring programme. However, for many of the 'Not Sures', it became clear that their response was an expression of caution: they needed that one-to-one conversation to be able to ask their own questions in private, in confidence and then to be given time to think about the answers that I gave. Most of these colleagues were happy to 'have a go' at the mentoring programme, on the understanding that they could simply stop if they felt things were not working. For these colleagues, the most important thing seemed to be that I had

listened to their concerns about the composition of the groups and about time management and sustained commitment to the programme.

I approached all of these conversations having already prepared a rough draft of proposed groups, based on my knowledge of individual personalities and of the general staff dynamic, combined with the information from the questionnaires regarding colleagues' perceptions of their strengths and needs. I do feel that these conversations were hugely important and, for some colleagues, were an influencing factor in whether or not to engage in the mentoring programme. In conducting these conversations, I realised that I was, in effect, modelling a mentoring conversation, where needs and concerns were listened to and an appropriate outcome agreed as a result - a conversation that was entirely confidential, focused totally on the individual, and was not judgemental in any way. This was me enacting the principles that I had presented in the training sessions and the credibility of my role as the instigator and facilitator of the mentoring programme depended on my ability to draw on my own mentoring skills and experience – and to get it right! However, I was also aware that it would be very easy for me to misjudge the situation and for some colleagues to view the conversation as an attempt to coerce them into taking part. I tried to be sensitive to this and in those conversations where it was apparent that colleagues were still undecided, I took the lead from their tone and manner. In these cases, the outcome was generally an agreement to leave them out of the programme at this stage.

1.4.4 Forming the mentoring groups

A key factor in encouraging colleagues to sign up for the mentoring programme was the principle that colleagues would not be working with others from the same department. There were two reasons for this: firstly, it helps to ensure that groups are non-hierarchical; secondly, it helps to maintain individual confidentiality and so encourages more open and honest mentoring conversations than might happen otherwise.

The mentoring programme is premised on a non-hierarchical peer-group format. Inevitably, when two or more colleagues from the same department are present together, some aspect of hierarchy will emerge, whether it is as obvious as head of department versus more junior colleague, or whether it is more subconscious and less apparent, such as an awareness of differing lengths of service or different strengths within the subject area. Effective mentoring relationships are grounded in trust, with both mentor and mentee feeling able to be open and honest in their dealings with each other. Just as colleagues might feel

uncomfortable with having a member of the SLT in their group, it is equally possible that some individuals may feel uncomfortable at having another member of their department present, aware of the potential for the content of a mentoring meeting to influence relationships in the department. Several colleagues later commented to me that they valued the fact that there was no-one else from their department in their mentoring group: it allowed them to talk about issues in their practice that may relate to issues in their department, but which they did not feel able to discuss in department meetings for fear of appearing to criticise or for fear of being judged.

To work out the groups, I collated all the questionnaire responses into a spreadsheet that showed at a glance each respondent's department, their developmental needs, and the areas where they felt able to offer support. I used a manual colour coding system to match colleagues according to their self-identified needs and strengths, drawing on my knowledge of the individuals to avoid personality clashes as far as possible. Colleagues were sorted into groups of three, where each individual's needs could be supported by the strengths of at least one other group member, and where each individual's strengths could support the developmental needs of the others. Examples of the colour-coded spreadsheet are in Appendix F.

It took me about four weeks to draft the mentoring groups, talk to everyone and respond to any concerns raised, including changing some of the groups and speaking to the individuals affected. On the whole, the response to the conversations was positive and supportive: colleagues generally seemed excited at the prospect of working together, even if they were unsure of how they would manage to arrange meetings.

1.4.5 Getting Started: Initiating the mentoring process

The September training session had explored what mentoring is and how it can be used in different contexts, but it had not covered any practical concerns to do with building the mentoring relationship - the stages in the development of the mentoring relationship, how to conduct a mentoring conversation and what sort of records should be kept. I was, moreover, very aware that most colleagues would need some sort of prompt to set up their first meeting.

I arranged to run a second training session on the October INSET day. This was purely for those who had signed up to the mentoring programme and it aimed to provide some practical guidance in working through what Kram (1983) termed the 'initiating phase' of the

mentoring relationship. I planned to give a short presentation (Appendix D.2), taking no more than about 20 minutes including discussion time, and then to allow colleagues time to get into their mentoring groups and, in effect, to have their first meeting. This initial meeting is a 'breaking the ice' activity: no matter how well colleagues may feel they know each other, this is a new situation for each of them, and so their sense of 'knowing' needs to be reconsidered in the light of the new relationship.

A friend once told me that children who were strangers to each other needed to eat together before they would be able to play together. Kram's (1985) initiating phase is sometimes referred to as the 'getting to know you' or the 'coffee and a chat' phase. I made sure that tea, coffee and biscuits were available and after the presentation and discussion I sent colleagues into their groups. I had consciously avoided putting them in their mentoring groups at the beginning: I wanted them to have the physical break and transition from the presentation element of the session into the practical element of 'now get started with your own groups'. Colleagues were very quick to find their mentoring groups but they were very slow to start talking to each other. I helped myself to a drink and a biscuit and as others followed my example, the conversations started. My friend was right: sharing food and drink is the best ice-breaker!

The coffee, tea and biscuits were crucial in helping everyone to relax with each other so that they could begin the tricky business of negotiating what their new mentoring relationship would look like and feel like. Colleagues were surprised to be offered refreshments in the middle of a workshop, but had I not offered them, and had I not set the example in accepting them, this session would not have achieved its objectives. In fact, it was hugely successful, to the extent that it was quite difficult to cut across all the talk and bring the session to a close, even though it was the last session of the day, at the end of what had been a very long and busy half-term.

1.5 Researcher Identity and Positionality

I have already acknowledged my belief in the value of mentoring as a powerful tool for supporting teachers' CPD, and my awareness that not everyone will share my enthusiasm. My view of mentoring is shaped by my experiences, which are unique to me and which combine to inform my personal and professional values and how I understand and respond to the world (Greenbank, 2003). It is important for the integrity of my research that I understand this and can identify the attitudes and assumptions that are now part of my

identity and will inevitably have influenced how I implemented the mentoring programme and developed my research study.

In this section, drawing on Cresswell and Poth (2018) to structure my thinking, I offer an account of the various perspectives, experiences and values that underpin my identity and have informed my approach to my research.

1.5.1 Perspectives and professional experiences that have informed my research

I am a linguist. I am fascinated by language and by how we communicate. I am fascinated by the fact *of* communication – that we manage to communicate at all, even in the same language, let alone across different languages and cultures. I am fascinated by how language develops and adapts to suit different historical and cultural contexts – how the meanings contained within words shift to accommodate different social perspectives and reflect the cultural norms and issues within a society at any given time. Thus, my approach to most situations is instinctively hermeneutic: I probe meanings, seek clarity and search for the 'right' word or phrase that best represents the situation as I understand it – and I find it immensely satisfying when I do find the 'right' word.

I am a language teacher. My whole professional life has been spent in the education of others, from infants to adults and across all abilities and interests. And in pursuing the education of others, I have enjoyed moments of wonder as I discover new understandings in my own knowledge, provoked by the questions that my students ask and my own reflections on the explanations I construct to aid their understanding. My professional life has been one of construction and reconstruction of meanings situated in my subject knowledge of the languages I teach, combined with other languages that I have learnt or have some basic knowledge of, and also my reflections on the cultural and historical contexts that underpin the development of those languages – the emergence of new vocabulary and the evolution of grammatical constructions.

I am a mentor. I 'fell into' mentoring through my MA studies. I embarked on the mentoring module with no understanding at all of what mentoring is, but as I started reading and exploring the whole notion of mentoring, it resonated. Mentoring goes hand-in-hand with teaching in so many ways, but for me it is also much more than teaching: it underpins my professional identity. Whether I see myself as a teacher, as a head of department, as the lead ITE mentor, or as a colleague and friend, mentoring informs every aspect of my professional practice.

My MA research involved mentoring colleagues as they addressed specific developmental needs. The process and outcomes of these studies, together with my work on developing our ITE provision, made me realise how few opportunities more experienced teachers have for ongoing, personalised professional development, in contrast to the intensive support and monitoring inherent in the early stages of a teaching career. This realisation informed another of my MA assignments, to design a model for mentoring that could be used in an educational setting. However, until very recently, there had not been an opportunity to test this model. In July 2021, the then Headteacher agreed to support a trial project in school to implement a whole-school staff mentoring programme using my SPIDERWeB model. The focus of my research is to evaluate the suitability of this model for my school setting, and through this, the potential suitability of my model for other schools. Through probing participants' perceptions of their experiences of the mentoring programme, I consider to what extent the SPIDERWeB mentoring model can support colleagues' ongoing professional development.

1.5.2 Philosophical values and beliefs that underpin my research

I find it hard to embrace either a Platonic or an Aristotelian ontology to the exclusion of the other. I do not subscribe entirely to the view that there is an objective reality that exists independent of our perception; I believe that reality is defined by our perceptions of events through our lived experiences, and that our perceptions are influenced by our interactions with others. However, I also believe that there has to be an originator or an original 'truth' or 'reality': there has to be a starting point on which we can base our fundamental understanding, from which our understanding can develop as we see events unfold and the world around us evolve. I remember my son as a very small child asking me, 'If God made the world, who made God?' The only possible answer to that, as far as I can see, is that God just *is*. In other words, there has to be a starting point – something has to come first.

That said, I believe that each individual has a unique experience of the world and that individual perceptions of a reality are coloured by one's previous experiences, as well as the cultural, social, historical context of one's existence. This is evidenced in the way in which different witnesses to the same event are frequently shown to present different accounts of that event, depending on how they interpret the significance of different elements in the sequence of actions making up that event. Furthermore, how an event is presented will also inform how it is perceived or interpreted (Crotty, 1998). In this respect, I have a constructivist-interpretivist view of knowledge – that knowledge is contextual and

individuals construct their understanding of an event or phenomenon by drawing on their previous knowledge and experiences, and through their interactions with others.

As a linguist, I attach great significance to the use of language, and how meaning is conveyed. Not only do words or language convey meaning and reflect reality, but they also inform our understanding of reality and can influence how reality evolves. This is evidenced by the use of advertising and propaganda: language is a very powerful, and potentially dangerous, tool that we all use to our own ends not only to express our thoughts but also to persuade others to our point of view. Moreover, to fully understand an event, it is necessary to probe not only the words used, but also the underlying assumptions or symbolism behind the words: it is not possible to simply take words 'at face value' as the choice of words, the language used, is informed by the historical, cultural, and social context of the event and the actors involved. Everyone is a part of and a player in a historical and cultural context, which needs to be acknowledged and understood in order to fully understand the 'truth' behind the words used (Zimmerman, 2015). My approach to understanding the world is to probe. This is influenced both by my experiences as a linguist, with the understanding and experience of other cultures that this brings, and by my upbringing: my father would frequently challenge my assertions by saying, 'Yes, but it all depends on what you mean by…'.

To sum up this section, I feel that I support a relativist perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Maxwell, 2012), where my beliefs embrace a realist ontology (that there is a world that exists independent of our individual perceptions) combined with a constructivist epistemology (that our knowledge of that world is constructed by us through our experiences and through our interactions with others) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This perspective is supported by a hermeneutic, symbolic-interactionist approach to understanding situations, events, and people, where 'truth' or 'reality' are negotiated through and informed by an ongoing dialectical discourse (Carter & Fuller, 2016).

The philosophical stance that informs my study can be summarised in fig.1 below:

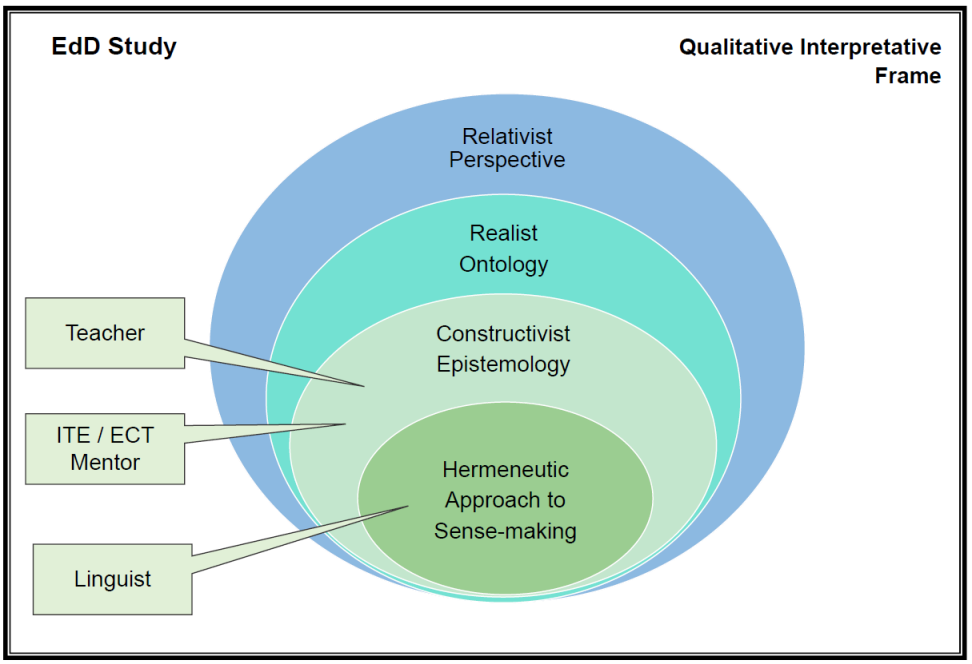

Fig.1.2 Diagrammatic representation of my EdD researcher positionality

1.6 The Structure of the Thesis

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the background, context and rationale for my study, and set out its aims and objectives. This is followed by a reflective narrative account of the steps involved in implementing the mentoring programme on which my study is based, including discussions of critical moments, explanations of my decision-making processes and reflections on the outcomes of those decisions. I have also provided an account of my values and experiences that have shaped my researcher identity and positionality.

Chapter two is the literature review. In this chapter, I first consider different understandings of CPD and key factors that promote or inhibit practitioner engagement in CPD opportunities. I then explore the literature on mentoring theory and practice, with specific reference to mentoring in educational contexts.

In chapter three, I set out my methodology and research design. I explain and justify my choice of case study as an approach and my choice of data collection methods. This is followed by a detailed account of the ethical considerations associated with this study. The chapter ends with a reflective account of the field research and the iterative process of

coding and analysing the data to arrive at the key themes. My findings are presented in chapter four, where I discuss my data in the context of three broad themes that emerged from the analysis.

Chapter five presents my conclusions and recommendations for further research. In this chapter I answer my research questions and consider the implications that my study has for current mentoring theory and for policy and practice relating to CPD. I note the limitations of my study and suggest four key areas for further research. My thesis concludes with a short reflection on the process and outcomes of my research, and what it has meant for me.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

My research investigates the suitability of the SPIDERWeB mentoring model for developing a whole-school mentoring programme, and what value such a programme might offer experienced teachers for their own personal and professional development. Thus, there are two areas of literature that need to be considered: literature concerning the personal and professional development of teachers, and literature concerning approaches to mentoring, and the uses of mentoring in educational settings.

2.1 Teachers' Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

In this section I shall explore what CPD means for teachers: what purpose it fulfils, how it is enacted, and what benefits it brings. I shall also consider some of the factors that affect teachers' perception of, and engagement in, CPD opportunities.

2.1.1 Defining CPD

Teaching is a multi-faceted, complex role, subject to ever-changing demands and values (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Kennedy, 2016). Teachers rely on their professional knowledge and experience to build the necessary resilience to function effectively in 'a setting that is hugely complex, dynamic, and intensely challenging' (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014, p.13). Teachers are responsible for ensuring their own CPD and are expected to demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning in order to maintain their credibility in the classroom, to ensure their skills and knowledge are up-to-date, and to review and refresh their own practice (Day, 1999; DfE, 2011; Welsh Government, 2019). The Standard for teachers' professional development (DfE 2016) stipulates that professional development

> *'should have a clear focus on improving … pupil outcomes, … should be underpinned by robust evidence and expertise, … should include collaboration and expert challenge, … should be sustained over time … [and] must be prioritised by school leadership' (p.6).*

Professional development is, or should be, an ongoing process that continues throughout all stages of a teacher's career (Day, 1999; DfE, 2016). In reality, however, budgetary and time constraints often mean that professional development is provided in the form of whole-school in-service training (INSET) days: individual professional development

opportunities are a sporadic occurrence rather than part of a continual process (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014).

Day (1999) offers the following definition of CPD, which is widely cited and seems to inform much of the literature on CPD:

> *'Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school and which contribute, through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues through each phase of their professional lives.' (p.4)*

It is worth unpicking each element of this definition as it provides a basis from which to consider what CPD looks like: it offers a conceptualisation of how CPD is actualised, its purpose, and its duration.

Firstly, Day's (1999) understanding of CPD encompasses all learning experiences, whether formal and intentional, or informal and unintentional. This is echoed by Heikkinen *et al* (2012), who distinguish three types of learning: formal learning is intentional, situated in an educational institution, curriculum-driven and leads to an assessed outcome; non-formal learning is also intentional but is situated in the workplace and is usually short-term, such as a training course; informal learning is the unintentional side-effect of everyday or workplace activities, the incidents and situations that contribute to life experience. Since all types of learning experience contribute to an individual's professional identity (Kelchtermans, 1993), it is reasonable to suppose that all types of learning may contribute to an individual's CPD (Day, 1999; Heikkinen *et al*, 2012). Borko (2004) notes that teacher learning occurs in a multiplicity of situations, both formal and informal, including formal training sessions, classroom practice, and conversations with colleagues and pupils. Appleby and Pilkington (2014) understand CPD as a form of situated learning: it takes place in a specific context, where the learning process is influenced by individual, social and contextual factors and can include both formal and informal learning situations. Some authors, however, disregard informal learning in their understanding of CPD, stipulating that CPD should be structured, with a specific pedagogical focus (Scutt & Harrison, 2019).

The second point that Day (1999) makes is one on which most commentators agree, that CPD should be beneficial, either for the individual, or for the organisation, or both: the overarching aim of CPD is to improve the quality of provision across the educational institution (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Scutt & Harrison, 2019). CPD is about individual and organisational *development*: a teacher's individual learning and development is informed by their setting, but should also contribute to the future direction and development of that setting (Day & Sachs, 2004; Johnson *et al*., 2019). The organisational and individual benefits that accrue from effective CPD opportunities can include improvements in teachers' knowledge, expertise and practice, higher levels of teacher retention, increased staff well-being and improvements in pupil attainment (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Scutt & Harrison, 2019).

Thirdly, CPD is a *process*, which may be enacted individually or collaboratively. In other words, CPD is about *continuing* professional development and the commitment to lifelong learning expected of all teachers at all stages of their careers (DfE, 2011; DfE, 2016; Welsh Government, 2019). It is easy to assume that teachers' development will follow a linear path through the different stages of their career, that expertise will naturally develop with experience and length of service and that therefore the need for active CPD interventions will gradually decrease as teachers enter the later stages of their careers (Day, 1999; Day & Sachs, 2004). However, Day and Sachs (2004) describe the final career phase (which they identify as the last 10-15 years) as a period of 'disenchantment [and] contraction of professional activity' (p.11): while late-career teachers have the greatest experience, they also have the greatest tendency to conservatism and are arguably the ones most in need of being pushed to update their skills, knowledge and dispositions. CPD is an ongoing process that needs to offer appropriate support and development to teachers at *all* stages of their careers (Day, 1999; Day & Sachs, 2004; Hansman, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2019).

The fourth aspect of Day's (1999) definition concerns the purpose of CPD, where Day seems to suggest that there are two dimensions to this: a moral dimension and a practical dimension. The moral dimension hints at the notion of teaching as a vocation, where the purpose of CPD is that teachers refresh their commitment to that vocation and the values that it encapsulates. Teaching is not just about the transmission of knowledge: teachers also have a responsibility for the holistic development of their pupils (Day & Sachs, 2004). Machado (2024) notes that teaching 'is a social and human process' (p.117) which has a formative and humanising function; teachers' professional development, therefore, also needs to be approached from a holistic and humanising point of view so as to support the moral dimensions of the teacher's role. In parallel with the moral dimension, Day's (1999)

definition offers a practical dimension of CPD: this concerns the teacher's acquisition of knowledge and skills in order to ensure that their classroom practice is up-to-date. Kennedy (2016) and Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) identify that for most authors, the primary purpose of CPD is ultimately to improve teaching and learning throughout the school, where the efficacy of the CPD provision is evaluated through correlations with pupil attainment. CPD is the vehicle by which teachers can refresh their subject knowledge and skills, and develop new pedagogical strategies to enhance their classroom practice (Borko, 2004; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Sinyangwe, Billingsley & Dimitriadi, 2016) and contribute to school improvement (Borko, 2004, Day & Sachs, 2004).

2.1.2 Factors affecting engagement in CPD

It is generally acknowledged that CPD is desirable and necessary for securing improvements in classroom practice and supporting teachers' resilience, motivation and well-being (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Kennedy, 2016; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). However, any CPD provision will only be effective and useful if teachers are motivated to engage with it: as Kennedy (2016) points out, the perennial problem faced by both teachers and CPD providers is that 'attendance is mandatory, but learning is not' (p.973). In this section I shall consider the factors that enable or inhibit teachers' engagement in CPD activities and affect their perceptions of its value.

Teachers are expected to be responsible for their ongoing professional development (DfE, 2011; Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Welsh Government, 2019). However, this expectation assumes that they are accorded the professional agency and autonomy to identify what their development needs are, and to exercise their responsibility for addressing those needs; in reality, however, most teachers have very little control over the CPD opportunities that are offered (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Johnson *et al.*,2019). Day (1999) notes an increasing focus on performativity by successive governments, where the quality of provision is judged by quantitative outcomes such as examination results. This led to the imposition of performance targets, an increasing erosion of teachers' autonomy and what is now seen as the commodification of education. In this climate, school leaders and policy-makers have interpreted professional development as equating to INSET, where the content of the training is determined by organisational priorities and national policy, rather than considering individual practitioner needs.

In many countries, CPD is linked to government targets of accountability and performativity (Day & Sachs, 2004; Machado, 2024). In England, the policy of linking training with

performance management has sometimes led to a punitive view of CPD, which does not encourage practitioners to engage positively in CPD activities that are suggested to them (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In Portugal, the need to justify European Union (EU) funding has led to the bureaucratisation of INSET, where career progression is directly linked to the amount of INSET attended. This has resulted in a 'tick-box' approach to CPD that satisfies policy makers but does little to address real training needs (Machado, 2024). Day (1999) notes, 'Teachers cannot be developed (passively), they develop (actively)' (p.2). Training that is prescribed by policy-makers, whether at national or organisational level, is acknowledged to be the least effective form of CPD as it is consumed passively, is not concerned with innovation and ignores individual needs (Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Kennedy, 2016; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021; Machado, 2024).

Effective CPD develops professional knowledge, fosters innovative practice and contributes to school improvement (Day & Sachs, 2004; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). This may be achieved through external training providers, who can bring in fresh ideas and help teachers to access new knowledge, or through school-led training, which is more likely to address the specific needs of the school and of individual teachers within the school (Day, 1999; Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Kennedy, 2016; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021).

Kennedy (2016) and Sims and Fletcher-Wood (2021) note that motivation to engage in a CPD activity is crucial to its success: CPD programmes that are mandated are more likely to be resented and forgotten, compared with those that are undertaken as an active choice. Motivation is determined by the teacher's perception of what value the training holds for them (Day & Sachs, 2004; Sinyangwe, Billingsley & Dimitriadi, 2016): for CPD to be effective it needs to be relevant to the individual and directly relatable to practice. There is a consensus that the most effective CPD involves opportunities for collaboration and reflection, which allow teachers to identify their own strengths and needs and then plan for their continuing development. This cannot be achieved through one-off training sessions, but requires a form of CPD that is iterative and sustained; it takes time and relies on the active and ongoing support of the school leadership (Day, 1999; Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Johnson *et al.*, 2019; Scutt & Harrison, 2019; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021).

Kennedy (2016) calls for an approach to CPD that 'promotes real learning rather than merely adding more noise to their [teachers'] working environment' (p.974). Effective CPD is a learning process but it can only have an impact if it results in practitioners learning new behaviours and changing how they approach their practice (Day & Sachs, 2004; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Coaching and mentoring programmes have been identified as

meaningful, sustainable forms of development which address all of the criteria for effective CPD (Scutt & Harrison, 2019), and which have been found to be more useful and impactful than formal training courses (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014). They 'are known to promote habit change' (Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021 p. 56) because their pattern of reflection, review and feedback helps to embed new practice and ensure that the development is sustained. However, whilst mentoring is now accepted as a fundamental element of ITE and ECT support frameworks, it is rarely used as a strategy to support the ongoing development of more experienced teachers. Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014) and Lomax (2020) express a mixture of surprise and frustration at this, commenting that mentoring is widely used 'across many other sectors and businesses' (Lomax, p.104), but not in schools.

The next section explores the literature on mentoring.

2.2 Mentoring

2.2.1 Attempts to define 'Mentoring'

The concept of mentoring is rooted in Greek legend and derives from Mentor, the tutor and guide assigned to the young Telemachus; the word 'mentor' has now come to signify a wise and trusted advisor and friend (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002). However, the exact meaning of the term 'mentoring' is much debated and it has become increasingly difficult to conceive a definition upon which everyone can agree (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2002). This is partly because mentoring as a management practice has spread rapidly across a wide range of contexts and disciplines, each having its own specific language and understanding of the mentoring process (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Burley & Pomphrey, 2011; Dominguez & Kochan, in Irby et al, 2020).

Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012), citing a Wittgensteinian social-constructivist approach to meaning, argue that mentoring is 'a contested space' (p.150), where it is not possible to arrive at a clear, stipulative definition located purely in the semantics of the word; instead, mentoring demands a descriptive definition, located in the practice of how it is enacted, which may include notions of support, guidance or supervision. This lack of stipulative definition means that the term 'mentoring' is often used very loosely to describe a range of personal situations and professional practices; it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between concepts such as coaching, mentoring, training, induction and

sponsorship , although all these terms share the notion of professional development as a core aim (Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä, 2012; Dominguez & Kochan, in Irby et al, 2020).

Moreover, mentoring is ‘culturally-based’ (Dominguez & Kochan, in Irby et al, 2020, p.5; Clutterbuck, 2021) and the expectations of the mentoring process are informed by societal and cultural perceptions. In particular, there is a divergence between the American and the European notions of mentoring: the American notion of mentoring - also known as ‘sponsorship mentoring’ - is directive and focused on career advancement, whilst the European notion tends to be more holistic, concerned with both the personal and professional development of the individual. (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002). This approach, also known as ‘developmental mentoring’, emphasises the importance of experience and expertise rather than seniority.

Bozeman and Feeney (2007) bemoan the lack of a clear, stipulative definition to provide a theoretical underpinning for any mentoring research or practice but they do identify some core characteristics which for them typify a mentoring relationship. Firstly, the relationship exists when someone with greater experience in a specific area (the mentor) provides guidance to someone with less experience (the mentee). Secondly, the mentor imparts knowledge to the mentee. Thirdly, the mentoring relationship is focused on personal and professional development and may lead to career development.

There is general agreement that the mentoring process is nurturing, supportive, developmental and intentional (e.g. Nicholls, 2006; Dominguez & Kochan, in Irby et al, 2020). Hansman (2016) describes mentoring as ‘a system of learning that will foster improvement of professional practice’ (p.31), whilst Pask and Joy (2007) define a mentor as ‘a thinker [who]...helps another person also to think’ (p.8). This is echoed by Clutterbuck (2021), who defines the mentoring process as ‘using one’s wisdom to help another person develop wisdom of their own’ (p.113). However, where mentors are inadequately prepared for the role, there is a danger that mentoring becomes a management tool to impose new ways of working when an individual has failed to meet certain performance targets. Hobson and Malderez (2013) have coined the term ‘judgementoring’ to indicate a mentoring relationship that is judgemental or punitive in nature.

Langdon and Ward (2015) note a wealth of literature offering suggestions as to what constitutes 'good practice' in mentoring, but also comment that there is a lack of empirical evidence showing the impact of mentoring on an organisation; they echo Bozeman and Feeney (2007) in calling for more longitudinal studies to develop a more robust theoretical framework for mentoring development. This contrasts with the views of Garvey, Stokes and

Megginson (2009), who argue that it is not possible to reach one universally accepted definition and prefer instead to describe different typologies of mentoring, exploring how each approach might be used.

In the following sections, different typologies of mentoring will be reviewed and a conceptualisation of mentoring will be offered to provide a context for the mentoring model that is proposed.

2.2.2 Typologies of Mentoring

2.2.2 (i) One-to-One Mentoring: the traditional dyadic model

Traditionally, a mentoring relationship is dyadic in nature. That is, the relationship exists between a more experienced or more senior individual, who offers guidance to a less experienced or more junior colleague (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005; Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009). Some commentators refer to the mentee in a dyadic relationship as the "protégé", thus highlighting the hierarchical aspects of the relationship and fostering the notion of an older, more experienced figure helping a younger colleague to progress up the career ladder (Bozeman and Feeney, 2007).

Godden, Tregunna and Kutsyuruba (2014) identify various problems which may emerge in mentoring dyads and ultimately contribute to their failure. These include relationship breakdown due to incompatible mentor-mentee pairings, lack of mentors who are both willing and have the skills to take on the role, and lack of appropriate training for mentors. To these I would also add lack of organisational support, lack of commitment to the process, lack of time allowed for mentoring sessions and lack of training for the mentees to manage their expectations of the process (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter., 2007; Kensington-Miller, 2011).

Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2009) cite Simnel's (1950) work on dyads, which states that two is the maximum number of people which can ensure the security of a secret. In a mentoring context, for 'secrecy', read 'confidentiality', a key element in the success of any mentoring process. An advantage of the dyadic form of mentoring is that it offers the best conditions to ensure complete confidentiality. A dyadic relationship has the potential to create strong bonds of friendship but if one party becomes too dependent on the relationship, or too domineering, then it is likely to fall apart.

2.2.2 (ii) Educative mentoring

Langdon and Ward (2015) support much of the literature in highlighting the need for mentors to be properly trained for their role, but for them this means that mentors are equipped to adopt a transformative approach in their mentoring: effective mentors have the capacity to be agents of change in the organisation. The hierarchical nature of traditional dyadic mentoring may promote a 'do as I do' approach from mentors, which reinforces the status quo. This approach may help new teachers to learn core skills but it does not encourage the development of new ideas. Educative mentoring builds on the constructivist view of knowledge: it challenges the mentor to interrogate their own practice and to develop an inquiry-based practice through collaborative partnership with their mentees. Thus, the mentoring process becomes increasingly reflexive for both parties and any notions of hierarchy diminish as the relationship evolves. In this respect, educative mentoring has some similarity with peer mentoring, which will be considered in the next section.

Langdon and Ward's account of educative mentoring bears some similarity to the description of Ralph and Walker's (2010) Adaptive Mentorship© Model cited by Godden, Tregunna and Kutsyuruba (2014). This model emphasises the need for both mentor and mentee to adapt their behaviours to suit the context, which involves each having an awareness of their own attributes and being sensitive towards the attributes of the other. However, I would argue that this is a necessary feature of good mentoring, regardless of the chosen model. Adaptive mentoring is intended to promote collaboration and reflexivity and to mitigate any power imbalance between mentor and mentee by focusing on the mentee's interests rather than on the role of the mentor.

Interestingly, Langdon and Ward's (2015) study focuses on the mentors rather than the mentees. Their study investigated whether the use of educative mentoring approaches helped teacher-mentors to improve their mentoring skills and support novice teachers more effectively. All their respondents reported greater levels of reflexivity in their practice, which enabled more constructive mentoring conversations and a better understanding of their mentees' needs. Their findings resonate with my own view of what effective mentoring is.

2.2.2 (iii) Peer Mentoring, Co-mentoring, Reciprocal mentoring

A less hierarchical version of the traditional dyad is found in peer mentoring, also known as co-mentoring (Godden, Tregunna & Kutsyuruba, 2014) or reciprocal mentoring (Shank, 2005; Haddock-Millar, Stokes & Dominguez, 2023). In a peer-mentoring model, the

primary focus is on fostering collaboration and reflective practice through the sharing of skills, knowledge and experience (Holbeche, 1996). The lack of hierarchy in a peer-mentoring model fosters a collegial relationship based on mutual support and respect, which facilitates the communication and collaboration necessary for the relationship to succeed (Shank, 2005; Kensington-Miller, 2011, Waddell et al, 2016). Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2009) describe peer mentoring as a two-way exchange where there are mutual benefits to both parties. In some peer-mentoring models, there is an agreement for the roles to swap in turn between both parties as each person learns from the skills and expertise that the other brings to the mentoring process (Burley & Pomphrey, 2011). Examples of this approach in an educational setting might be a group of trainee teachers collaborating on a lesson plan, or a group of middle managers working together to find a way of implementing a new initiative.

Godden, Tregunna and Kutsyuruba (2014) prefer the term ‘co-mentoring’, which they describe as a collaborative partnership where the mentor-mentee roles are clearly defined but with an expectation of an equal focus on the needs and dispositions of both. For Garvey and Stokes (2022), co-mentoring is a form of peer mentoring where the notions of mutual support and equal benefit are formalised and implicit within the mentoring relationship. Whilst some co-mentoring relationships may be clearly structured to ensure that both parties take equal turns to mentor and to be mentored, in other relationships the sharing of roles is more fluid and the distinction between the roles of mentor and mentee may become less clear as the relationship develops (Garvey and Stokes, 2022).

Haddock-Millar, Stokes and Dominguez (2023) note that mutuality and reciprocity are key features of high-quality, effective mentoring relationships. Like Shank (2005), they use the term ‘reciprocal mentoring’ to refer to an equal and collaborative relationship where the roles of mentor and mentee are shared. For Shank (2005), reciprocal mentoring is an intentional approach, which fosters collegiality and mitigates the risk of hegemony that may occur in traditional dyadic mentoring. Haddock-Millar, Stokes and Dominguez (2023) note that mentoring may be reciprocal by design (a mentoring programme is intentionally constructed using a non-hierarchical approach), by default (a similarity in age or status between the mentoring partners may naturally engender a high level of reciprocity) or by outcome (reciprocity develops serendipitously from a formal mentoring programme as the mentoring relationship evolves).

Kensington-Miller (2011) presents three stories of peer-mentoring relationships, all with different outcomes, which illustrate various reasons why mentoring relationships may or

may not work. She identifies five key factors to be considered when devising a peer mentoring programme; I would argue that these factors are important considerations in any type of mentoring situation. The five key factors are:

- ➢ every mentoring relationship is unique
- ➢ mentoring partners need to take time to establish a relationship before embarking on any formal mentoring
- ➢ effective mentoring relationships depend on effective communication
- ➢ both partners need to show equal and sustained commitment to the mentoring process
- ➢ it is important to agree a clear structure, including proposed timescales, frequency and location of mentoring meetings and specific goals

Additionally, where multiple mentoring partnerships are concerned, Kensington-Miller notes the need for an effective facilitator or co-ordinator, who is not a mentor, to organise pairings, facilitate initial meetings and generally provide encouragement over the course of the mentoring period.

2.2.2 (iv) Reverse Mentoring

Reverse mentoring challenges the hierarchical structure of traditional mentoring as it involves a junior, or younger, employee acting as mentor to an older, more senior colleague. The focus is not on the career progression of the mentee but on the specific expertise, knowledge and insights of the mentor. Reverse mentoring is used predominantly in the fields of commerce and industry as a way of ensuring that the knowledge-base of the organisation is refreshed and updated (Coleman & Glover, 2010; Garvey & Stokes, 2022), recognising that younger, more recently qualified employees can share new knowledge and skills with older, more experienced colleagues who may not be up-to-date with the latest technological advances (Gadomska-Lila, 2020; Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021).

Reverse mentoring is also useful in developing diversity policy in an organisation (Chaudhuri, Park & Johnson, 2022) as the younger generation of employees can help the older generation to understand recent shifts in cultural attitudes: through exploring ‘the differences of experience, understanding and attitudes … mentor and mentee learn about each other’s worlds’ (Garvey and Stokes, 2022, p.104). Thus, reverse mentoring helps both to support learning across the organisation and to foster intergenerational

understanding and collaboration: it enables the older generation to develop an awareness and appreciation of the knowledge and expertise of their younger colleagues, who in turn benefit from the opportunity to acquire organisational knowledge and develop leadership skills (Garg and Singh, 2020). The recognition and development afforded through this collaboration are key to improving engagement and retention amongst the younger generation of employees, the so-called Millennial Generation, who tend to change jobs frequently, taking their skills and knowledge with them (Gadomska-Lila, 2020; Chaudhuri, Park & Johnson, 2022).

In an educational context, mentoring between a teacher-mentor and a trainee teacher is an integral element of any ITE programme. However, the inherent reciprocity in an effective mentoring relationship may also lead to the occurrence of reverse mentoring, when a teacher-mentor benefits from the innovative ideas and fresh approaches that a trainee teacher brings to their practice (Hudson, 2013; Hansman, 2016). Moreover, it has been noted that ‘mentors are not always well-equipped to mentor novices’ (Foliot and Chaliès, 2025, p.479) as the theoretical knowledge taught at university might not be familiar to school practitioners, and this may hinder the teacher-mentor’s ability to support the trainee’s development. A reverse mentoring relationship is then likely to evolve as the trainee shares both their understanding of the theoretical content from their university course and their awareness of new technologies being developed for classroom use.

This echoes Augustiniene and Ciuciulkiene (2013), who describe the use of reverse mentoring in ITE as creating a ‘Boomerang Effect’: 'The [teacher-] mentor gives advice to the [trainee-] mentee; the mentee expresses a thought, idea, or concept and gives the mentor a new insight' (p.74). Reverse mentoring has as its goal mutual support and learning: the trainee benefits from the opportunity to share their ideas and skills, and so develop their professional identity and self-confidence. The experienced teacher benefits from the acquisition of new digital skills and theoretical knowledge; through their conversations with the trainee, they are forced to reflect on their own knowledge and perspectives, which will then help them to reconsider and refresh their own practice (Augustiniene & Ciuciulkiene, 2013; Foliot and Chaliès, 2025).

As with any mentoring relationship, reverse mentoring relies on mutual trust and respect between mentor and mentee. However, for reverse mentoring to succeed, both parties must be able to recognise each other as a source of knowledge and expertise (Hansman, 2016; Foliot and Chaliès, 2025). Moreover, because reverse mentoring upsets the normal power balance between older, more senior, employees and their younger colleagues, it is crucial that both parties are psychologically prepared for the process of mentoring, or being

mentored by, someone from a different generation (Gadomska-Lila, 2020; Garg & Singh, 2020).

When reverse mentoring is implemented successfully, both mentors and mentees benefit from the insights gained through cross-generational collaboration, whilst benefits for the organisation can be realised in terms of improved working practices and innovative solutions that draw on the up-to-date technical knowledge and skills of one generation, tempered with the wisdom and experience of the other (Gadomska-Lila, 2020).

2.2.2 (v) Group Mentoring or Team Mentoring

Group, or team, mentoring refers to a mentoring programme where there are multiple mentors or multiple mentees working in the same mentoring group (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002). Huizing (2012) identifies four typologies of group, or team, mentoring: one-to-many mentoring (OTMM), many-to-one mentoring (MTOM), many-to-many mentoring (MTMM), and peer group mentoring (PGM).

The first approach, OTMM, involves one mentor working with multiple mentees. This approach is particularly useful in online mentoring, or in a situation where the availability of mentors may be an issue (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons and Glover, 2004). In the second approach, MTOM, multiple mentors work together with one mentee; this approach is typically used in leadership development. The third approach, MTMM, may also be used for leadership development but it is especially useful for developing collaborative working practices, as it involves multiple mentors working simultaneously with multiple mentees. For example, one team might mentor another team from elsewhere in the organisation (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). Group, or team, mentoring approaches can be cost-effective for the organisation, but there is also a concern that individual developmental needs may not be met through a team-based approach (Garvey & Stokes, 2022).

These first three group mentoring models have all grown out of the traditional dyadic mentoring model, but also seek to incorporate group learning strategies. (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Huizing, 2012). The fourth configuration, PGM, is based on a peer mentoring approach; it occurs when a team comes together for the express purpose of mentoring each other. Huizing (2012) acknowledges an apparent synonymity between MTMM and PGM, but notes a clear distinction between them. In the MTMM model, the roles are clearly delineated and the mentors are clearly identified within the group for the life of the group. However, with PGM, the roles of mentor and mentee are not fixed: the

mentoring role shifts within the group according to the varying needs of the group and the expertise that individuals can bring to the discussion.

The next section considers PGM in more detail.

2.2.2 (vi) Peer Group Mentoring (PGM)

Huizing (2012) considers various studies that use PGM for building support networks. The authors included in his review all seemed to agree that the non-hierarchical approach helped to foster collaborative working and engendered creative insights to problem-solving. However, in one study the group population gradually diminished, with concerns over lack of confidentiality cited as the reason. Other disadvantages included a tendency for groups to lose focus during group discussions and a concern at the impact of dominant personalities on the group dynamic. Huizing notes that a common conclusion is that PGM programmes require an effective facilitator to ensure that the mentoring process is respected. However, this may not be easy, given that a feature of PGM is that the mentoring roles may shift as different forms of expertise are needed to address specific needs (Huizing, 2012).

Kroll (2016; 2017) describes PGM as a developmental relationship that is non-hierarchical, and 'intentionally inclusive' (Kroll, 2016, p.47), and where all the participants in the group have an awareness of 'sameness' in some aspect of their identity - for example, similarity of age, experience or situation. PGM is collaborative and reciprocal, enacted through the 'strategic and intentional use of challenge and support' (Kroll, 2017, p.78); the purpose of PGM is to transform practice and facilitate change through sharing ideas rather than the didactic transmission of knowledge (Kroll, 2016; 2017; Mullen et al, 2020). This echoes Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012), who highlight the dialogic nature of PGM, describing it as 'a place that enabled the birth of insights' (p.92) and a vehicle for transforming tacit knowledge into explicit, practical knowledge and generating new ideas. For Kroll, the reciprocal and dialogic nature of PGM means that the distinction between mentor and mentee is blurred, even irrelevant, as all participants fulfil both roles simultaneously: whilst much of the literature focuses on the benefits of the mentoring process for either the mentee or for the mentor, Kroll argues that it is more important to consider the mentoring outcomes in terms of benefits for the individual or for the organisation.

In Finland, the PGM model is now embedded in the educational system, where it is seen as an effective and important tool for supporting teachers' ongoing development, especially in the early phase of a teacher's career (Geeraerts et al, 2015). In PGM, the group determines its own mentoring agenda, supported by a facilitator who is also a trained mentor and who is paid for taking on the role. Participation in the PGM programme is voluntary but any teachers who choose to take part are given time by their schools to do so. Groups consist of between five and ten members, comprising both experienced and novice teachers; group membership spans several schools in an educational district. In this model, the focus is on aiding novice teachers' transition from trainee to professional identity, effectively supporting their progress through the equivalent of their NQT phase to achieving QTS. However, one significant difference between the Finnish PGM model and the UK programme of mentoring for QTS is that in Finland, no grading or quality assurance processes attach to the mentoring programme. Because of this, Geeraerts et al (2015) describe PGM as a 'hierarchy-free learning zone' (p.360).

Darwin and Palmer (2009) propose a form of PGM which they term 'Mentoring Circles', a group mentoring programme designed to support new faculty members in an Australian university. Like PGM, mentoring circles are offered as a solution to the concern that traditional mentoring dyads do not engender collaborative working and can be too directive, to the point of being 'paternalistic…[and concerned with]…reproduction of the status quo' (p.126). Waddell et al (2016) draw on Darwin and Palmer's (2009) model for their study, situated in a Canadian university. In both cases, the aims of the mentoring circles were to provide an institution-wide mentoring programme to facilitate integration and acculturation of new faculty members and to offer a 'safe space' for members to discuss concerns and develop new skills and strategies. Groups numbered six to eight members with varying levels of experience and lengths of tenure; they were co-ordinated by an external facilitator who was not a mentor, but whose role was to organise meetings and then 'to keep conversations focused and productive' (Darwin & Palmer, 2009, p.126). Participation was intended to be voluntary, although it emerged in Darwin and Palmer's study that some participants had been directed to attend by their managers. I would suggest that this represents a level of coercion that is unethical, both from the researcher's point of view and also from the mentoring perspective. Interestingly, in Darwin and Palmer's study, one of the three groups registered a very low level of commitment to the mentoring programme and the group stopped meeting after only five of the eight sessions originally planned. It is possible that this group contained a larger percentage of those participants who had felt constrained by their managers to attend.

As with PGM, mentoring circles foster collegial and supportive relationships and create a safe learning environment, where mentees can learn from each other as well as from their mentors. In both studies on mentoring circles, the participants had anticipated before the mentoring programme began that the greatest benefit to them would be the development of new skills and support in achieving professional targets. However, the data collected after the mentoring process showed that the participants had in fact found that the greatest benefit had been in the opportunities for building new relationships and expanding their professional network beyond the boundaries of their own discipline. Several participants noted that they felt more confident and less isolated by the end of the mentoring period (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Waddell et al, 2016). In common with other forms of mentoring, the authors also noted benefits to the mentors in terms of skills development, and benefits to the institution in terms of staff morale and improvements in practice across the faculty. They also noted that two factors critical for the success of the programme were commitment from the participants and support from faculty leadership.

Group mentoring models are particularly useful if there are fewer mentors than mentees or where each mentor has a specific area of expertise that needs to be shared. A further advantage of the group model is that the mentees are exposed to a more diverse range of experiences. This is increasingly important as modern workplace practices demand flexibility and the ability to draw on a variety of skills (Higgins & Kram, 2001; de Janasz & Sullivan, 2004). However, one problem of group mentoring is that it is potentially confusing to have multiple mentors and there is a danger that the mentoring process can become unclear (Ambrosetti, 2012). A possible solution is the use of a triadic approach.

2.2.2 (vii) Mentoring Triads

Ambrosetti's (2012) thesis focuses on the use of mentoring triads, which emerged from the group and peer mentoring constructs, and which are widely used in the context of ITE. In a triad, the configuration of the group and the roles within the group are defined according to needs of participants or of the organisation (Ambrosetti, Knight & Dekkers, 2013). Usually, the triad will comprise two mentors working together to support the mentee. The mentors may have similar levels of experience or there may be one mentor who is more experienced or more senior than the other, in which case the less experienced mentor may use the triad as an opportunity to develop their own mentoring skills with the support of their more experienced colleague. In some mentoring triads, one mentor will work with two mentees.

Ambrosetti, Knight and Dekkers (2013) argue that a triad engenders a more supportive, collaborative culture than is found in a traditional, hierarchical dyad. All parties can benefit from the breadth of ideas that arises from having two different perspectives to inform the mentoring process. Furthermore, the threefold structure offers an opportunity for one person to step back from the mentoring conversation in order to observe and reflect on the process. However, as with group mentoring, the plurality of mentors and the flexibility in their roles (as mentor or observer) can be a cause of confusion for the mentee (Ambrosetti, 2012).

School-based ITE typically uses a triadic approach, where the trainee is assigned a university tutor and also a subject mentor or professional mentor who will oversee the training experience in school. This ensures that trainees have access to both the theoretical perspective that will underpin their practice and the practical advice necessary to survive in the classroom. Campbell (2012) and Ambrosetti (2012) both note that one of the main problems encountered in triads is a lack of clarity in roles and the jostling for position that may ensue as a result. Where the triad includes a university tutor and a school mentor, this 'power struggle' manifests itself as an argument about priorities: whether the trainee should focus on the academic aspects of the course or on the preparation needed to ensure good progress in the practical element.

The triadic structure demands that all parties are flexible and able to acknowledge and accommodate the needs of everyone. There is a risk that one person can feel their needs are being overlooked if the focus turns too often to another party. This is especially true of triads that comprise one mentor and two mentees. The triad in Godden, Tregunna and Kutsyuruba's (2014) study follows this model and on closer scrutiny seems quite unequal and still very hierarchical. The triad involves two research assistants, one a Master's level student, the other a Doctoral student, both of whom are mentored by their professor. The Doctoral student is in the position of being both mentee to the professor and mentor to their fellow student. The most equal relationship develops between the two students, which is a natural reflection of the power relationships operating within the professional academic context. Much of the mentoring appears dyadic in nature, even though three parties are involved. The focus in this triad is very much on the developmental needs of the mentees, in particular those of the more junior Master's level student, who has the most to gain and the least to lose from participating in the triad. Very little mention is made of the needs of the mentors and the authors acknowledge in their conclusion that more consideration of the mentors' needs would have made for a more evenly balanced mentoring dynamic.

Ambrosetti, Dekkers and Knight's (2017) mentoring triad appears to enjoy more success. This triad comprises two trainee teachers, one first-year and one final year, and their teacher-mentor, who had requested two trainees at different stages of their development and who was actively managing the mentoring process to ensure that everyone's needs were met. The authors describe the mentoring triad as offering a holistic approach to mentoring: peer mentoring occurred between the first and final year trainees, which complemented the support offered by the mentor teacher. Analysis of the data showed that all members of the triad benefited from the arrangement. The first-year trainee benefited from having 2 role models: another trainee who understood the requirements of the course and could model the learning journey that needed to happen, and a mentor teacher who modelled professional practice. The final year trainee benefited from the opportunity to develop leadership skills as they gradually took on more responsibility for teaching the class, which naturally led them to take on more of the mentoring of their first-year colleague as well. The mentor teacher was able to focus on the explicit individual needs of each trainee as they were able to step back from the direct mentoring role and observe the trainees' practice as they worked together to support each other. From their findings, Ambrosetti, Dekkers and Knight (2017) argue that a reconceptualisation of mentoring in ITE provision might be needed, and that it might be beneficial to consider paired, rather than individual, school placements.

2.2.3 The functions and uses of mentoring

Mentoring is described as a developmental relationship that deepens over time (Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 2004) and is founded on mutual respect, collaboration and trust (Godden, Tregunna & Kutsyuruba, 2014; Hobson et al, 2024). It fulfils a variety of functions associated with professional and personal development and wellbeing (Clutterbuck, 2004; Bozeman and Feeney, 2007; Hobson, 2020; Haddock-Millar, Clutterbuck & Sanyal, 2026). Kram (1983) considers mentoring in terms of career functions, where the mentoring activity is focused on achieving career progression, and psychosocial functions, which are concerned with wellbeing and might include counselling, role-modelling and offering friendship. Both types of function can be identified in most mentoring relationships, but the balance between career functions and psychosocial functions will change depending on the needs of the participants at any given time. In the literature on mentoring in educational settings, the purposes of mentoring are divided into three main areas: individual professional development, personal development and well-being, and organisational change. These first two areas mirror Kram's (1983) career and psychosocial functions;

however, Kram (1983) does not discuss mentoring activity in terms of the whole organisation.

The most common use of mentoring in schools is to support the development of professional knowledge and skills, especially in the early stages of the teaching career (Forde & O'Brien, 2011; Geeraerts et al, 2015). However, Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) distinguish between mentoring for ECTs in Finland, where it is used to develop professional autonomy, and in the UK, where mentoring has a dual purpose of support and assessment, which creates a tension in the role of the mentor. Mentoring is also commonly used to support more senior teachers in preparation for advanced professional qualifications, such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) (Forde & O'Brien, 2011), or in developing the skills and resilience needed for a senior leadership role (Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024). Several authors note that there is scope for mentoring to be used more widely in schools, identifying mentoring as a meaningful and effective form of CPD that can offer benefits to mentees, mentors and to the whole organisation (Hudson, 2013; Hansman, 2016; Smith & Nadelson, 2016; Hands, Armstrong and Mitchell in Irby et al, 2020). However, whilst mentoring is commonly used as a form of CPD in Finland (Geeraerts et al, 2015), it is still rarely used in the UK to support ongoing professional development beyond the early career phase (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014; Lomax, 2020).

Oberholzer and Boyle (2024) add their voices to those of Thorpe and Bennett-Powell (2014), Lomax (2020), and others, who call for mentoring to be used more widely in school settings, in the same way that it is used in industry to support career-long development. They note a tendency to use mentoring (and coaching) as strategies only for supporting ITE provision, or as a form of crisis response, where teachers are only offered mentoring support when they have a problem:

> '*Mentoring and coaching should not just be drawn on when teachers are training or are perceived to be struggling.'* (p.1)

However, their view of mentoring is that it can and should be used to create a positive working atmosphere that will benefit all members of the school community. The premise of their book is this:

> *'…mentoring and coaching need to be considered part of the teacher and school leader's continuous professional development and learning toolkit,*

and…as professional learners, mentoring and coaching need to become part of the development package for teachers and leaders at all levels.' (ibid, p.1)

Each chapter of the book represents a different stage in a teaching career: Oberholzer and Boyle (2024) consider different aspects of mentoring and coaching and offer suggestions for how these might be used to support teachers at each stage in their careers. Mentoring is conceptualised as a learning relationship that evolves over time, from one of high support and high dependence to one of challenge and independence (echoing Daloz, 1986), as the teacher-mentee develops their professional identity and autonomy. Oberholzer and Boyle (2024) note that it is incumbent on the mentor to be aware of the mentee's evolving needs and to employ different strategies that are appropriate at different stages in the process; they will need to review and renegotiate the mentoring relationship in the light of the mentee's development. The focus throughout the book is very much on the developmental benefits for the mentee. However, it is important to acknowledge that the mentor's expertise and experience will also naturally develop through the mentoring relationship (Grima et al, 2012; Hudson, 2013; Langdon & Ward, 2015), and the mentoring strategies they adopt will reflect their own developing confidence and competence.

For Oberholzer and Boyle (2024), the primary purpose of mentoring is to support individual professional development and career progression. In the early career stage, this means a focus on the function of knowledge transmission. As the mentee progresses through the career stages, the mentoring can become more dialogic and collaborative with a shift in focus towards the functions of skills development and facilitating reflective practice. Oberholzer and Boyle (2024) also consider the use of mentoring to break down cultural and societal barriers to career progression, where mentoring is used to support women and people from minority groups to build their confidence, grow their aspirations and develop a greater sense of agency with respect to their career development. Here, Oberholzer and Boyle (2024) offer a view of mentoring that has a transformative purpose: the mentoring process enables individuals to achieve personal change and also, in some cases, to achieve a change in cultural attitudes in the organisation. This echoes Burley and Pomphrey (2011) and Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012), for whom mentoring has a dual purpose: to bring about change in an individual's skills, knowledge and dispositions, and to achieve cultural change in the organisation through the ongoing professional and personal development of its members.

Kram (1983) identifies a psychosocial function to mentoring that is to do with professional, personal and emotional wellbeing. The psychosocial dimension is often identified as an outcome of the mentoring process, but rarely as an intention. However, there are some studies (Bowman, 2014; Waddell et al, 2016; Hobson, 2020) that focus on the use of mentoring specifically to support wellbeing and flourishing, especially in the context of novice teachers or new members of staff joining an organisation. Waddell et al's (2016) study is situated in the higher education sector, and is concerned with the acculturation of new faculty members: mentoring was found to be an important strategy for integrating and supporting new colleagues. Bowman (2014) and Hobson (in Irby et al, 2020) both advocate the use of mentoring for the induction of novice teachers to help them acquire the organisational knowledge they need to function in their new roles. Bowman (2014) notes that working with a mentor helps novice teachers to understand the school climate and develop strategies that are consistent with organisational values; this is crucial to their confidence and wellbeing, and ultimately will help to determine how long they remain in the profession. Hobson's (2020) ONSIDE mentoring model (in Irby et al, 2020) is a formal mentoring programme aimed at supporting ECTs through the induction phase. For Hobson, the purpose of mentoring is 'to support the mentee's learning, development, and well-being, and their negotiation of the cultures of both the organisation in which they are employed and the wider profession' (in Irby et al, 2020, p.521). Hobson notes that 'well-being' is not often included in the definitions of mentoring (in Irby et al, 2020); however, like Bowman (2014), he notes that well-being, especially in the early career phase, is key to teacher retention.

2.2.4 Support and challenge as fundamental aspects of effective mentoring

Much of the literature does not make specific mention of support or challenge as key features of a mentoring programme, although many commentators identify a supportive, empathetic approach as an essential attribute of a good mentor (eg Clutterbuck, 2004; McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007; Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

The notion of support pertains to both career and psychosocial functions. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) identify support as one of the 'four main goals of mentoring' (p7) (the others being sponsorship, learning and self-reliance); however, their notion of support is to do with enabling mentees 'to engage in self-determined learning and to find their own solutions' (p.8). For Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002), support is both an intended outcome of

the mentoring practice and also has a function as a means of achieving other outcomes, especially those of self-reliance and learning.

For Daloz (1986), support is the starting point of any mentoring relationship: support 'is the activity of holding' (p.215) and creating a safe space where the mentee can start to explore their strengths and concerns. Support is affirmatory, enacted through active listening and 'expressing positive expectations' (ibid, p.218) of the mentee's experiences, values and aspirations. This affirmation engenders trust and confidence and enables the mentee to engage positively and actively in the mentoring conversation. However, Daloz (1986) also notes that support on its own does not offer development, it simply reaffirms an individual's current situation and assumptions. Development relies on introducing an element of challenge, where the individual is invited to question their current assumptions and explore new ideas (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012). However, too much challenge and not enough support risks overwhelming the mentee (Daloz, 1986) and can have a destructive impact on the mentoring relationship (Hobson & Malderez, 2013). Effective mentoring relies on achieving a balance in the 'strategic and intentional use of challenge and support' (Kroll, 2017 pp78-79). Interestingly, whilst Daloz (1986) generally refers to 'support and challenge', where support comes first, Kroll (2017) places 'challenge' before 'support' in his sentence. This suggests to me that Kroll's view of mentoring is that a challenge arises first, and then an appropriate level of support follows to enable the mentee to address the challenge. Whichever comes first in the mentoring process, for both Daloz (1986) and Kroll, (2017), support and challenge go hand-in-hand and are fundamental to good mentoring practice.

2.2.5 Benefits of mentoring

It is generally acknowledged that mentoring can bring benefits to both the mentee and the mentor, and also to the organisation (eg McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007; Thornton, 2014; Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024); benefits may be understood in terms of the career and psychosocial functions identified by Kram (1983). Whilst there is some overlap in the benefits identified by mentees and mentors, there are also some clear distinctions. It is worth noting at this point that most of the literature assumes a traditional, dyadic mentoring relationship, where a relatively inexperienced practitioner is mentored by a more experienced and expert colleague.

Career-oriented benefits for both mentees and mentors include knowledge acquisition and skills development, which enables them to transform their practice. Mentors share their

expertise and experience with their mentees, helping them to broaden their subject knowledge, and to develop practical and problem-solving skills (Kensington-Miller, 2011; Kroll, 2016; Hobson, 2020) and to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012; Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024). Simultaneously, mentors are able to update their knowledge and refresh their practice from the new knowledge and ideas that the mentees bring to the conversation (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007; Grima et al, 2012; Langdon & Ward, 2015; Hobson, 2020). The mentoring conversations help mentees to develop their capacity for reflection (Ambrosetti, 2012; Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012) and to be more adventurous in their classroom practice (Hansman, 2016; Kroll, 2016; Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024).

In helping their mentees to reflect on their practice, mentors also develop greater reflexivity, which helps them to adopt more innovative approaches both in their teaching practice (Grima et al, 2012; Hudson, 2013; Smith & Nadelson, 2016) and in their mentoring and leadership practice (Langdon & Ward, 2015). Developing their leadership skills is a key outcome for mentors (Hudson, 2013; Thornton, 2014; Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024). Other benefits reported by mentors include enhanced job satisfaction and more opportunities for career progression (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007; Grima et al, 2014). Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) and Kroll (2016) also identify career enhancement as a potential benefit for mentees.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the supportive function of mentoring, the literature identifies more psychosocial benefits for mentees than for mentors. As far as mentors are concerned, Hobson (in Irby et al, 2020) notes that their mentoring role helps them to consolidate their teacher identity, to develop more positive relationships with colleagues and with pupils and to reaffirm their commitment to the profession. Similarly, mentees are helped to develop their professional identity and sense of professional autonomy (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007). The opportunities for collaboration help both mentors and mentees to benefit from a sense of collegiality and mutual support (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012; Hansman, 2016; Kroll, 2016), especially when group mentoring strategies are used (Darwin & Palmer, 2009).

Mentoring offers important opportunities to enhance individual wellbeing and reduce stress. The development of supportive relationships are particularly important for novice teachers or new members of staff joining the organisation: they help to reduce feelings of isolation (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012; Kroll; 2016; Hobson, 2020) and foster a sense of belonging (Bowman, 2014; Waddell et al, 2016). Mentoring conversations offer a safe

space for mentees to discuss problems and share new ideas in a nurturing environment (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013; Waddell et al, 2016). This helps the mentee to build confidence (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012; Kroll; 2016; Hobson, 2020) and overcome the sense of impostor syndrome often experienced by new teachers (Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024).

Hudson (2013) observes that, if mentors and mentees individually see an improvement in their practice as a result of the mentoring process, it is logical to assume that there must also be organisational benefits. Building a mentoring culture helps to develop a strong learning culture (Huizing, 2012; Thornton, 2014; Waddell et al, 2016) and promote the notion of schools as places of learning for adults as well as pupils (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2013). Mentoring that is embedded into normal practice can help to create a positive, supportive atmosphere throughout the school (Rogers, 2006; Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024), which can help to improve staff recruitment and retention (Bowman, 2014; Waddell et al, 2016; Hobson, 2020).

2.2.6 Factors that impact the mentoring process

The success of the mentoring process may be affected by a range of factors including how the programme is organised and supported, the dispositions and attributes of the participants, how the meetings are organised, and how the relationships within the mentoring groups are played out.

Common reasons for a mentoring relationship to fail include lack of commitment on the part of the mentor or mentee, lack of organisational support, lack of time allocated for mentoring meetings, a mismatch in skills and dispositions between mentor and mentee and a lack of trust or respect of mentor or mentee for the other party (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Glover, 2004). Both the mentor and the mentee are responsible for building a good rapport and establishing a culture of trust and respect to ensure the success of the mentoring relationship (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Opengart & Bierema, 2015). However, the organisation also has a part to play in promoting a culture of positive mentoring behaviour (Finkelstein & Poteet, 2010) and to this end, it is important that ‘mentoring’ is not confused with ‘management’ and that a distinction is maintained between the roles of mentor and line manager (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Glover, 2004; Hobson et al, 2024). When the mentoring relationship becomes dysfunctional, it can have a negative impact on individual wellbeing, organisational culture and staff retention (Cranwell-Ward,

Bossons & Glover, 2004; Hobson & Malderez, 2013; Opengart & Bierema, 2015; Hobson et al, 2024).

Mentoring is described as a developmental relationship that deepens over time (Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 2004) and is founded on mutual respect, collaboration and trust (Daloz,1986; Godden, Tregunna & Kutsyuruba, 2014; Hobson et al, 2024). Kram's seminal (1983) research identified four stages in the development of the mentoring relationship – initiation, cultivation, separation, redefinition – as mentoring partners progress from initial introductions through a period of interdependence, collaboration and growing confidence towards a reassertion of their individuality and independence.

The early stage of the mentoring relationship is about establishing a rapport and developing respect and trust (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). It is important that participants understand each other's expectations and needs (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007): every mentoring relationship is unique (Kensington-Miller, 2011) and the initial meetings are 'crucial in terms of setting the tone of the relationship and establishing working principles' (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004, p.168). Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) caution that the mentoring relationship may end prematurely if there is an imbalance in expectations or commitment between mentor and mentee, or where there has been a failure to establish a rapport.

The quality of the relationship is key to the success of the mentoring process (Hudson, 2013; Hobson, 2020; Tynjälä et al, 2021); it requires time, effort and commitment to establish and maintain an effective relationship and to build the trust necessary for the mentoring group to flourish (Kensington-Miller, 2011; Hands, Armstrong & Mitchell in Irby et al, 2020). Several authors (eg Geeraerts et al, 2015; Kroll, 2017; Hands, Armstrong and Mitchell in Irby et al, 2020) advocate that participation in a mentoring programme should be voluntary: participants need to be actively interested and invested in the process for a successful mentoring relationship to develop. Daloz (1986) emphasises the importance of trust in the relationship, whilst Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) highlight the need for confidentiality and note the risk of emotional and professional harm if this is not maintained.

All members of the mentoring group have an individual and collective responsibility for ensuring a positive group dynamic (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012): the success of the mentoring relationship depends on each individual's willingness to be flexible and accommodate the needs of others in the group (Ambrosetti, 2012), and to engage fully and honestly in the mentoring experience (Langelotz, 2013; Kroll, 2017). In peer group mentoring, this means being prepared to share one's own struggles and vulnerabilities, and having a learning disposition as well as a disposition to help others (Kroll 2017); the

peer-group dynamic is undermined if individuals show a greater disposition to mentor than to be mentored and try to use their experience or expertise as an excuse to dominate the conversation (Huizing, 2012; Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012).

Trust, honesty and empathy are at the heart of any mentoring relationship. However, the mentoring relationship is premised on development: it is 'a distinctive relational learning experience whereby participants…enhance the growth and professional skills and development of the other(s)' (Kroll, 2016, p.55). This relationship will inevitably come to a natural end as the knowledge and expertise within the group develops and mentoring partners gradually realise that one can no longer meet the needs of the other (Kram,1983; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004). Eventually they will need a fresh start with new mentoring partners and the opportunity to explore new ideas: 'Mentoring is not for life – there is a finite period when you can be of use to an individual; then they need to move on to someone else' (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004, p. 117).

The period of transition and adjustment at the end of the relationship – Kram's (1983) 'separation' and 'redefinition' phases – can lead to feelings of rejection and loss if it is not managed well (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002), especially where the relationship has been terminated because it is not working. It is therefore important, when planning a mentoring programme, to consider how best to manage the end of the mentoring lifecycle to avoid resentment and minimise any sense of loss (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004). To this end, Kram (1983) and Clutterbuck (2004) advise that mentoring partners agree a timescale for the mentoring relationship at the outset so that both mentors and mentees can prepare for how the separation phase will be negotiated. Setting a formal time limit may in fact add value to the mentoring process: '…in the relationships with the least time to run…the intensity of the relationship and the learning was higher than in those where the time-frame was more relaxed' (Clutterbuck, 2004, p.116).

The way in which it is implemented and the level of organisational support are important factors that can affect the success of the mentoring programme. Cranwell-Ward, Bossons and Gover (2004) comment that 'a key role of the organisation is to provide visible support and recognition that the [mentoring] scheme is an important part of employees' development' (p.80). In other words, the mentoring programme is more likely to be a success if it is perceived as useful and valued by leaders and policy-makers.

Thornton (2014), Tynjälä et al. (2021) and Hobson et al. (2024) all identify a positive culture of organisational support as necessary to the success of the mentoring programme, whereas a lack of support and negative attitude amongst school leadership created a significant barrier. The most effective way of showing support is to give participants time to engage in the mentoring activity (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012; Hands, Armstrong & Mitchell in Irby et al, 2020; Hobson et al., 2024) and to make this allocation of time obvious, partly to reinforce the perception of value to the organisation (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004), and partly to mitigate concerns over workload, especially for the mentor, which can also be a barrier to building successful mentoring relationships (Ambrosetti, 2012; Hobson et al, 2024).

Another way of providing support is to ensure that adequate training is provided for mentors (Hudson, 2013; Geeraerts et al, 2015; Hobson, 2020) to ensure that they understand the nature of the mentoring process and how to enact it appropriately. McKimm Jollie, and Hatter (2007) and Hobson et al. (2024) argue that training is also important for potential mentees, so that they understand what they can expect from the mentoring process, and what their responsibilities in the relationship are. In addition, some authors (eg Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004) recommend that a distinction is maintained between the role of line manager and that of mentor in order to avoid potential issues of hierarchy and power impeding the development of a trusting and confidential mentoring relationship.

Hobson and Malderez' (2013) study describes the detrimental impact of mentoring that is enacted badly, where an ITE mentor was unable to resolve the tension between their dual functions of support and assessment: they coined the term 'Judgementoring' to reflect the judgemental approach that resulted. This led to conflict in the relationship and a loss in confidence on the part of the mentee-trainee. Hobson (in Irby et al, 2020) proposes the ONSIDE mentoring model (a formal framework for use with ECTs) as a way of reducing the risk of Judgementoring and ensuring a holistic, purposeful and supportive mentoring process.

Any mentoring programme requires a coordinator to manage the logistical aspects of the programme and then to maintain an oversight of the programme and to intervene and offer appropriate support if a mentor group is struggling (Kensington-Miller, 2011; Hobson et al, 2024; Haddock-Millar, Clutterbuck & Sanyal, 2026). The coordinator needs to have a reasonable knowledge of the organisation and of the individual mentoring participants as they are responsible for organising mentor-mentee pairings. Careful consideration is

needed when matching potential mentors with mentees to ensure that the skills and expertise of one can support the developmental needs of the other (Forde & O'Brien, 2011). When arranging mentoring pairings, Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) and Tynjälä et al. (2021) suggest that it is beneficial to pair individuals with people whom they do not know as this encourages them to make new connections with other people across the organisation, thus exposing them to a breadth of perspectives and ideas that they would not otherwise encounter. Furthermore, Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) note that it is easier to develop an honest and open mentoring relationship with a stranger, where there are no preconceptions regarding dispositions or values, than with someone who is already known. I would suggest that to ensure such pairings requires the mentoring coordinator to be aware of existing professional and personal connections between them, including friendships which may be located in the workplace or outside.

Few commentators address the question of existing friendships in relation to mentoring. Kram (1983) suggests that a mentor may offer friendship to the mentee as part of the mentoring function, because that is one way of showing support. This notion of friendship-in-mentoring is described by Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2009) as 'befriending' (p.90). It reflects what Aristotle identified as a utilitarian view of friendship, where the relationship is driven by the benefit or advantage that one party can offer the other, and which is distinct from 'genuine' or 'character' friendship, which is long-lasting and develops over time out of a growing trust and mutual esteem (Cooper, 1977; Kristjánsson, 2020).

Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) note that, although mutual respect between mentor and mentee is important, 'deep friendship is not required' (p.185) in a mentoring relationship. Both Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) and Tynjälä et al. (2021) advise that in fact it is important to avoid arranging groups where two or more people already share an existing friendship as this can adversely influence the development of perspectives in the mentoring relationship, or can lead to other members of the group being excluded from the conversation. Whilst there seems to be little empirical evidence of the impact of existing friendships on the mentoring process, several commentators (eg Daloz, 1986; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Garvey & Stokes, 2022) note that a lasting, 'genuine' friendship may emerge as an outcome of a successful mentoring relationship.

There is very little mention in the literature of the impact of physical setting on the group dynamic within the mentoring meeting. Pask and Joy (2007) and Coleman & Glover (2010) note that it is important to consider the environment of the meeting space: the location of

the room, the style and layout of the furniture and whether or not refreshments are available are all factors which can influence how readily individuals engage with the meeting. Coleman and Glover (2010) also note that ownership of the 'territory' tends to confer 'more authority over the meeting' (p.119) - in other words, whoever hosts the meeting is also more likely to lead the meeting and therefore have more influence over the direction that it takes.

Confidentiality is essential to the mentoring process. Pask and Joy (2007) advise, therefore, that the venue needs to offer privacy whilst still being easily accessible to everyone involved; furniture should be arranged in order 'to make eye-contact easy but not totally unavoidable' (p.23) and so that large items such as desks do not create a barrier between mentor and mentee. The physical environment helps to set the tone for the meeting: a formal environment such as a classroom can help to maintain a focused discussion and prevent side-tracking (Pask & Joy, 2007; Huizing, 2012).

Conversely, Clutterbuck (2004) notes that 'individual relationships flourish best when allowed to operate as informally as possible' (p.29): a relatively informal environment helps to establish a relaxed tone for the discussion and offers more opportunity to develop empathy and build trust. The discussion may feel less focussed than that of a formal meeting, but it may be more honest and therefore more productive. This is a key point for Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012), who argue that 'a well-functioning group is free-form and relaxed' (p.127), having noted that a welcoming physical environment, comprising 'refreshments and a cosy meeting room' (p.124), helps to ensure an open discussion with a high level of engagement.

2.2.7 Evaluating Mentoring

Mentoring may be seen as a form of training intervention (Scutt & Harrison, 2019; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021); as with any learning intervention, evaluation of both the individual mentoring relationships and of the overall programme is an important part of the learning process (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004).

The purpose of evaluation is to identify whether or not the intervention has achieved its objectives, and whether it is worthwhile in terms of the investment of resources, time and effort (Garvey & Stokes, 2022). During the lifecycle of the programme, formative evaluation offers an opportunity for ongoing quality assurance to ensure that participants' needs are being met, whilst summative evaluation at the end of the programme offers an opportunity

to acknowledge participants' achievements, as well as being used to identify what has worked well and what improvements are needed for the future (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Finkelstein & Poteet, 2010).

A commonly-used framework for evaluating training interventions is that of Kirkpatrick (1959, cited in Garvey & Stokes, 2022), where the evaluation is conducted at four levels:

1. Reactions – how the participants feel about the training provided
2. Learning – what new knowledge, skills or attitudes the participants have acquired
3. Behaviours – how the training has influenced individual practice
4. Results – the impact on organisational performance and culture

However, Garvey & Stokes (2022) also note that the Kirkpatrick model is designed to be used summatively and does not lend itself to a cycle of ongoing, formative feedback. Moreover, it assumes that consistent and quantifiable measurement tools can be used to assess the effectiveness of the training, which does not allow for the complexity and uniqueness of mentoring relationships. Mentoring is hard to evaluate because it 'relates to abstract qualities' (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002, p.296), rather than quantifiable targets. The lack of clear definition of mentoring combined with the need to preserve the confidentiality of the mentoring relationship, and the fact that it may be hard to distinguish the impact of mentoring from that of other learning activities and experiences, means that it is not possible to establish a generic method of measurement (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004; Garvey & Stokes, 2022).

That said, some form of evaluation is important in order to understand the 'worthwhileness' (Bassey, 1999, p.58) of the mentoring scheme. The mentoring process demands active commitment and engagement by both mentor and mentee. This personal investment means that it is useful for both parties to reflect on the mentoring relationship as it evolves, as well as their perceptions of the impact that it is having on their professional development. Thus, evaluation needs to be an ongoing, collaborative process that is used formatively and contributes to the learning and development of the participants (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004; Garvey & Stokes, 2022). Typically, this evaluation by participants of their mentoring activity occurs at the end of, or immediately after, a mentoring conversation (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004). In this respect, evaluation becomes part of the mentoring process. However, Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover (2004) also note that evaluation as reflection occurs at the end of the mentoring lifecycle as part of the ending process, where participants identify and acknowledge their

achievements, and then close the relationship and prepare to move on. I would argue that these two actions reflect the separation and redefinition phases identified by Kram (1983).

2.2.8 Conclusion

There are various forms of mentoring, which have all developed from the traditional dyadic model. The dyadic model is seen by many as hierarchical and potentially directive, although this depends to some extent on whether the American 'sponsorship' model or the European 'developmental' model is adopted. Dyadic mentoring offers the best format for ensuring confidentiality, but the mentee benefits from only one point of view; in some situations, multiple mentors afford a greater pool of advice, although there is a risk that too much advice from too many different perspectives can cause confusion.

Group mentoring offers an opportunity to avoid a hierarchical model and benefits mentees who enjoy group learning. However, group mentoring programmes can be difficult to coordinate and require a facilitator who will manage the more dominant voices and ensure equal opportunities for all members to participate in discussions.

Mentoring triads can offer the advantages of both dyadic and group models. If the triad is managed well, participants can benefit from the collaborative, non-hierarchical approach of group mentoring strategies, coupled with a more instructional, direct approach when needed. However, this needs to be carefully managed to ensure that the needs of the mentor are not overlooked. The model that I propose is based on a triadic structure, but also draws on aspects of the PGM approach.

Both Huizing (2012) and Langdon and Ward (2015) note a paucity of literature that focuses specifically on group mentoring. Huizing (2012) notes that his search of three databases using twelve key terms such as 'collaborative mentoring', 'group mentoring', 'mentoring circles', 'mentoring communities', 'peer group mentoring' and 'team mentoring' produced 'only 34 full-text peer-reviewed articles or dissertations' (p.27). He also notes that 'none of the books in the references of the articles…produced any resources that were dedicated to the development of group mentoring models' (p.28). Using the same keywords, I conducted a search in EBSCO for literature published in the last ten years; this search provided only 25 peer-reviewed articles, some of which had only a very tenuous link to group, peer group or triadic mentoring.

Much of the literature seems to deal with contexts outside the field of education, notably nursing. Within the field of education, the literature seems to be focused mainly on the

following three areas: (i) mentoring for supporting the development of trainee or beginner teachers; (ii) mentoring for staff development and acculturation into faculty tenure in higher education institutions (iii) mentoring for improving practice in primary schools. Moreover, much of the education literature in the area of mentoring is set in other countries - New Zealand, Australia, Canada, The United States and Finland in particular - but there seems to be very little that deals with the situation in the United Kingdom (UK). These factors would suggest that there are several gaps in the literature and that there is scope for more research into the potential impact of mentoring on the personal and professional development of mid and late-career teachers in secondary schools in the UK.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Research Design: Perspectives and values that informed my approach

The study is a qualitative, interpretative inquiry which investigates the feasibility and perceived value of developing a mentoring programme using the SPIDERWeB model.

My research sits within a social-constructivist framework, which allows for the existence of multiple realities which emerge from the individual lived experiences of both researcher and participants, and from their interactions with others (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant will have experienced and responded to the mentoring activity in their own way; their individual perceptions will be informed by their personal and professional values and experiences, and their own sense of their specific strengths and developmental needs (Greenbank, 2003). This requires a method of data collection and analysis that encourages participants to reflect on their lived experiences of the mentoring programme and on what impact (if any) it may have had on their personal and professional practice. Moreover, I am mindful that effective mentoring is a reflective and reflexive process and I believe that it is important for this to be mirrored in the research approach to be used.

It would have been interesting to ask participants to keep a reflective diary for the duration of the mentoring programme, but I was very aware of workload issues and the risk of respondent fatigue if this were to become too onerous (Bell, 2005). I therefore needed an approach that would allow participants an opportunity to be reflective, but then also allow me an opportunity to probe, and through conversation to arrive at an agreed understanding or construction of the participants' perception of the reality that they have experienced (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Bazeley, 2021) – in other words, for a hermeneutic dialectic cycle to take place (Pring, 2000; Zimmerman, 2015).

My study seeks to evaluate the feasibility of the SPIDERWeB mentoring model through exploring my participants' lived experiences of the mentoring programme and their perceptions concerning the value of the mentoring process. This is in line with a phenomenological approach, where the focus is on understanding what it is like to be in the participants' shoes (Denscombe, 2017). My participants' perceptions of their mentoring experiences are key: if a participant perceives no value in the mentoring process, then the reality for that participant is that it has no value. However, each participant will experience,

and make sense of, the mentoring process differently, and how they perceive and understand those experiences will depend on a variety of factors, such as their relationship with their mentoring partners, their prior experiences of mentoring or being mentored, or their expectations of the mentoring process. The phenomenological approach is informed by a constructivist view of reality, which holds that people make sense of their world when they share their experiences with others (Denscombe, 2017; van Manen, 2018). The use of semi-structured interview as a data-collection method sits well with this approach: using semi-structured interviews offers an opportunity to discuss and probe each participant's responses in order to construct a shared understanding of their experiences.

It is important to acknowledge that the nature of qualitative, interpretive research is such that it is not possible to achieve an objective, neutral positionality with regard to both how the research is conducted and how the data are interpreted. I realise that my understanding of my participants' responses will have been influenced by my interactions with them, not only in the research situation, but also in our professional and personal relationships. I am aware, for example, that I know some of my participants better than others due to the various roles that we have occupied at different times. I am aware that, unconsciously, I will have conducted the interview differently with each participant, and that each participant will have responded to me differently, which could have influenced the meaning of the responses that they gave. In this respect, I support the symbolic interactionist view, that meaning is subjective: it derives from, and is constantly recreated by, the interactions between individuals (Carter & Fuller, 2016; Thomas, 2016). This awareness reinforced the need for me to reflect carefully on my own sense-making as I analysed the data, and to interrogate my own instinctive reactions to my participants' responses.

3.2 A Case Study Approach

3.2.1 Why Case Study?

Case study is concerned with understanding the details of a specific phenomenon that already exists and has a distinct identity within a clearly-defined context (Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1999; Simons, 2009; Denscombe, 2017). It seeks to answer questions that probe the nature of a situation, how different aspects of a situation relate to each other, or what happens as the situation unfolds (Thomas, 2016). To evaluate the feasibility of the

SPIDERWeB model, I needed to understand teachers' experiences of the mentoring programme, and what impact participation in the mentoring programme might have had on their practice.

Simons (2009) describes case study as an 'in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project…in a real-life context' (p.21). I should like to consider each element of that statement in turn in relation to my own study, starting at the end. The 'real-life context' of my study is the school in which it is set: a comprehensive 11-16 secondary school (KS 3 and 4) in North Wales. The study was conducted between January 2022 and June 2024 and relates to a mentoring programme that was launched in September 2021. Following a change in leadership, the mentoring programme was suspended for the academic year of September 2022 to July 2023, whilst school policies were reviewed and updated. It was then reinstated in a slightly different form, but still using the principles of the SPIDERWeB triadic peer mentoring model, in September 2023.

The mentoring programme represents the case in my case study, that 'particular project' to be explored. This project is unique in several ways. Firstly, the SPIDERWeB model that underpins the mentoring programme is complex and unique: it is a model that I conceived during my MA studies and that has not yet been published, although the conceptualisation has been shared with my university community. Secondly, every mentoring relationship is a unique conjunction of people, time and place: the interactions that unfold through the mentoring process are complex, and unique to each mentoring relationship. Moreover, the mentoring programme overall is unique: a school-wide mentoring programme for all staff has never been implemented in the school, although there is a strong record of early career mentoring within ITE and NQT programmes. Thirdly, the uniqueness of the project lies in the fact that it is situated in a unique combination of process, people and setting - both temporal and geographical - and it is this combination that underpins its complexity.

The 'multiple perspectives' in my study are those of my research participants; the 'in-depth exploration' of those perspectives is achieved by a detailed, hermeneutic analysis of the data collected through a combination of group and individual interviews and a survey.

3.2.2 Strengths and Limitations of Case Study

I chose a case study approach because it is useful for developing an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon within a specific context. A key strength of case

study is the depth of insight it offers, drawing on multiple perspectives to build up a detailed picture of the essence and complexities of the whole situation (Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2016; Cresswell & Poth, 2018). However, the need to draw on multiple sources can generate large amounts of data, which can be time-consuming to analyse (Simons, 2009). It was important, therefore, that the context and parameters for my study were clearly defined (Thomas, 2016): the study was set within the context of one school, research participants were drawn from colleagues with at least three years of teaching experience and each research cycle lasted for one academic year.

The inherent uniqueness of case study leaves it open to the criticism that it is not replicable and therefore not generalisable (Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1999, Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007); to achieve trustworthiness I needed to draw on multiple data sources and then ensure that I constantly interrogated the data through careful, iterative, in-depth analysis (Stake, 1995; Simons, 2009). However, the fact that case study is not expected to be replicable also offers an opportunity for some flexibility and allowed me to adapt my design when unforeseen issues arose (Yin, 1994; Simons, 2009). Instances of this are discussed in Section 3.4.

Whilst case study is not intended to be replicable or generalisable, it is possible to draw inferences from one case that may offer insights into other, comparable situations or contexts (Stake, 1995; Bassey, 1999; Simons, 2009), and that can still contribute to the development of theory (Denscombe, 2017). My study investigated one particular mentoring programme in one particular school. Whilst my study cannot be held to represent the situation in other schools, it may offer insights into the potential impact of implementing such a mentoring programme elsewhere. My findings also offer some insights into the nature of mentoring that may contribute to the development of mentoring theory (see Section 5.2).

There is some debate over the format that a case study should take. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) note that a case study is concerned with portraying ‘real events in real contexts’ (p.253) and so lends itself to a journalistic style of writing, which conveys a sense of immediacy to the reader. Bassey (1999) identifies four broad styles of case study report, from a creative, fictional style to a more formal, structured approach, depending on the purpose of the study. Stake (1995) advocates a storytelling style with the use of ‘vignettes’ to bring the report to life; presenting the study as a fictionalised account also helps to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the setting. However, this style of writing does not sit easily with my character and, as Bassey (1999) notes, it is very

difficult to do well. Drawing on Bassey's (1999) endorsement of formal report writing, with a systematic presentation of the process and findings, I have chosen a structured approach, which follows the more conventional route normally associated with the format for a doctoral thesis.

3.2.3 Which Type of Case Study?

There is no one clear definition of case study (Bassey, 1999; Thomas, 2016), but various authors have proposed their own descriptions where they seek to distinguish different types of case study, according to the purpose of the study, or the approach being used. I wanted to understand these distinctions as I considered my own research design

Stake (1995) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case study focuses on understanding the essential nature of the case. Conversely, an instrumental case study is concerned with understanding a specific issue and any ramifications it might have. Yin (1994) situates case study research in the context of political science and administration, identifying an extrinsic (instrumental) purpose that is evaluative and intended to contribute to policy-making. Within this broad area, he identifies four categories: explanatory, which seeks to explain the causes of a particular phenomenon; exploratory, which investigates the scope or nature of an issue; comparative, which seeks to learn from the similarities and differences between multiple contexts; illustrative, which considers how certain ideas might apply in a real-life situation. However, Yin also notes that a case study might be purely descriptive, which seems to imply an intrinsic purpose, although he sets it in the context of evaluation research.

Bassey (1999) and Simons (2009) focus their definitions on the role of theory in the study, and how this has influenced the approach used. They distinguish three broad approaches, which have an informative, evaluative or descriptive function. In the first category are theory-led studies (Simons, 2009), which might be further classified as either theory-seeking or theory-testing (Bassey, 1999): these studies investigate a specific issue with the aim of developing new insights to inform policy and practice and generate new theory. The second type of approach seeks to evaluate the 'worthwhileness' (Bassey, 1999, p.58) of a project: it draws on existing theory in order to examine current practice and policy, but is not intended to contribute to the development of new theory. The third approach is comparable to Stake's (1995) intrinsic study. Bassey (1999) refers to this type of study as story-telling and picture-drawing; Simons (2009) prefers ethnographic. These

studies focus on identifying and describing the specific aspects of a phenomenon that make it interesting; however, through the description, theoretical insights will also emerge.

I found this plethora of descriptions and labels confusing: I could identify with elements of most of them, yet none of the descriptions seemed quite adequate on its own as each author considered different aspects of the study as the focus for their descriptions. Thomas (2016, p.114) helpfully tabulates what he considers to be the key types of study identified by various authors according to the focus that has informed the description:

Subject	Purpose	Approach	Process	
Special or Outlier case Key case Local knowledge case	Intrinsic Instrumental Evaluative Explanatory Exploratory	Testing a theory Building a theory Drawing a picture, illustrative Descriptive Interpretative Experimental	Single or Multiple	Nested Parallel Sequential Retrospective Snapshot Diachronic

Fig.3.1 Kinds of Case Studies - simplified (taken from Thomas, 2016, p.114)

From this table I could identify that firstly, according to its subject, my case study is a local knowledge case study. The study is located in my workplace; I shall be using my local knowledge of the school and of the mentoring programme that I have devised. Secondly, the purpose of my study is instrumental and evaluative: the study is a means to investigate the potential value of a school-wide mentoring programme and to evaluate the feasibility of my SPIDERWeB mentoring model. Thirdly, the approach is interpretative and is concerned with building and testing a theory. The theory is that a school-wide mentoring programme is beneficial to the individual development of experienced teachers, and that my model offers a feasible approach to implementing such a programme. The study is interpretative because it is concerned with trying to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of those who engaged in the mentoring programme, rather than to establish any sense of causality or correlation. Finally, my study is a single, diachronic study. It is concerned with a single phenomenon, the mentoring programme, which is monitored over an extended period of time.

So, to summarise, my study is a single, instrumental, evaluative study, which is focused on local knowledge and uses an interpretative, theory-testing approach to understand the details of a particular situation within the bounds of a specific geographical and temporal context. A phenomenological approach is used to understand my participants' perceptions of their experiences of the mentoring process.

3.3 Recruitment of participants

In the academic year 2021-2022, 39 colleagues were signed up on the mentoring programme. Of these, 27 were experienced classroom teachers; 12 were classroom support assistants and cover supervisors.

The overall profile of the staff is approximately 40% male and 60% female and the age range across the teaching staff is 26 - 58; the ages are fairly evenly spread in both gender groups. This profile was replicated in that of the cohort involved in the mentoring programme. The full range of school disciplines was also represented. 'Experienced teachers' in this context means teachers who have 3 or more years of classroom experience since QTS was awarded.

My target group of potential participants was the group of 27 experienced classroom teachers engaged in the mentoring programme; everyone in this group was invited to contribute to the research study. Included in the invitation email were a copy of the research information sheet, the research consent form, and a simple Google Form asking them to indicate whether or not they wished to participate (Appendices G, H, I). It was made clear that participation in the research was entirely voluntary, and that colleagues' continued participation in the mentoring programme was not dependent on their participation in the research study. Similarly, if they chose to withdraw from the research at any point, it would not affect their right to continue with the mentoring programme. Of the 27 mentoring participants, seven colleagues (two male, five female) volunteered as research participants.

During the academic year 2023-24, following a pause in mentoring activity due to changes in school leadership, 12 colleagues opted to join the second cycle of the mentoring programme. (This was fewer than for the previous cycle because mentoring sessions were scheduled to run concurrently with meetings for several working parties convened by the new Headteacher.) Of the 12 colleagues who signed up for this cycle of mentoring, seven were experienced teachers with an extra responsibility as a Head of Department (HoD) or a

Head of Year (HoY), three were experienced teachers with no extra responsibilities, and two were recently qualified. From this cohort, seven research participants (three male, four female) were recruited, of whom two (both female) had also been participants in the first phase of research during the first cycle of the mentoring programme. All of these research participants were experienced practitioners; five had extra responsibilities. As with the previous mentoring cycle and research phase, the age range and gender balance of the participants was reasonably representative of the overall profile of the staff body.

An overview of the gender balance, roles and length of teaching experience for participants across both phases of field research is shown in the table (fig.3.2) below :

Participants n=12	Role			Teaching Experience (Years)		
Male	Class teacher	Head of Department	Head of Year	0-5	5-10	10+
M1			✓			✓
M2	✓			✓		
M3	✓				✓	
M4		✓			✓	
M5			✓			✓
Female	Class teacher	Head of Department	Head of Year	0-5	5-10	10+
F1	✓					✓
F2		✓				✓
F3		✓				✓
F4	✓				✓	
F5	✓				✓	
F6	✓					✓
F7		✓				✓

Fig.3.2 Summary of Participants' Roles and Teaching Experience

3.4 Methods of data collection

Case study draws on multiple perspectives using a variety of data collection methods to gain a detailed understanding of a particular phenomenon (Simons, 2009). My study draws on the perspectives of the participants (n=12), who shared their experiences of taking part in the mentoring programme. In total, there were five male and seven female participants;

the age range of the participants was 28 - 50. They came from a range of different disciplines and had varying levels of practitioner experience.

Data collection took place during two distinct mentoring cycles: the first from January to July 2022, and the second from September 2023 to May 2024. The data collected were predominantly qualitative, using a combination of group interview, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, with some quantitative data from the questionnaire, where multiple choice or scale rating formats were used for some questions. The interview schedules and questionnaires were piloted with non-participant colleagues to check that they were easy to understand and not too time consuming to complete (Bell, 2005). Copies of the interview schedules and questionnaire are provided in Appendices J, K and L.

Originally, I had planned to collect data half-termly from January to July 2022. I had intended to start with a questionnaire to establish some baseline data regarding participants' previous experiences of mentoring and their expectations of this mentoring project. This would be followed by a group interview to enable a discussion about participants' experiences and expectations and to answer any questions that participants might have about the mentoring programme or about my research. Over the following three half terms I would then send participants a second questionnaire and conduct two further interviews, which would be on an individual basis. However, due to serious staffing problems in school, which had a significant impact on workload for everyone, I decided that it was too much to ask my participants to engage in that level of research activity: neither they nor I had the time, energy or mental capacity to add that amount of work to our already overloaded schedules. I needed to revise my plans and decided to use the group interview, followed by one questionnaire in the middle of the mentoring period and one set of individual interviews in July, at the end of the school year.

The group interview was conducted in February, 2022. I chose to use a group interview format as the first data collection event primarily because I wanted to give the participants an opportunity to meet as a group and discuss any questions that they might have regarding the research process or the mentoring programme. Within this first data collection, I also wanted to explore what had motivated them to sign up for the mentoring programme, what they hoped to gain from it and what benefits, if any, they hoped it might bring to the school. Apart from the intrinsic interest of the information provided, I also planned to use the participants' responses in the group interview to inform my inquiry in subsequent data collections.

In April 2022 I sent a questionnaire to the participants as a way of 'touching base' with them and checking how they were getting on with their mentoring groups and with the mentoring process overall. By this stage we had already experienced some significant barriers to maintaining the mentoring programme, but I had discussed the problems with our acting headteacher at the time and had managed to put some mitigations in place. I hoped to find out from the questionnaires whether these mitigations had helped and whether the mentoring groups were managing to enjoy successful, meaningful meetings. I also wanted to gauge my participants' current attitudes to the mentoring programme, especially given the difficult circumstances that prevailed in school at the time. The data collected in the questionnaires were also intended to provide some triangulation of the information collected through the group and individual interviews.

The questionnaires were distributed and completed electronically using Online Surveys. I was very mindful at this stage of workload issues and so decided to use predominantly closed (multiple choice or scale-rating) question formats as much as possible in the hope that my participants would find the questionnaire reasonably straightforward and not too time-consuming to complete (Bell, 2005). There were a couple of open-ended questions that required longer answers, and there were some closed questions where an option of 'other' was provided should any participant wish to provide more details, or give a response not covered in the options I had provided. Aside from ease of completion for the participants, there were advantages for me in using an electronic format. Firstly, I was able to monitor the response rate and send a reminder if necessary. Secondly, it was possible to set the questionnaire up to be anonymous - anonymity is less easy to ensure when questionnaires are completed on paper as handwriting can provide clues to a respondent's identity. Thirdly, once completed, the data is easily converted into a spreadsheet, which I could then download for manual coding and upload into MAXQDA for electronic coding when it came to analysing the responses.

At the end of the summer term I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant. These semi-structured interviews provided some rich data as participants looked back and reflected on their experiences over the year - a year where nothing in school had gone according to plan. I chose to use semi structured interviews because they offer a balance between consistency and individual expression: the same interview schedule was used for all participants to ensure that I was consistent in the questions I asked, but using a semi-structured format allowed me to probe their answers and develop a more nuanced understanding than a structured interview format would have allowed (Bell, 2005; Gillham, 2005). There was also scope for the participants to take the initiative and

develop the conversation if they wished (Thomas, 2013), and in fact it was clear that some participants were using the space of the interview to reflect and probe their own understanding of their responses: their sense-making of their experiences was an ongoing process that was being supported by the conversation we were having.

I was able to conduct all the interviews (both group and individual) in person, rather than having to set up online meetings. Meeting face-to-face allowed me to set a reasonably informal, relaxed tone; it also allowed me to take note of any non-verbal subtext, such as facial expressions or involuntary gestures that accompanied a verbal response. And because I was able to read the respondents' faces, I could also gauge whether a hesitation in responding stemmed from a sense of discomfort or was caused by the respondent taking time to reflect before giving a considered response.

With the participants' permission, I recorded each interview to ensure that I had a true record of the conversation from which I would be able to generate an accurate transcription for coding. During the interview, I also made brief notes of anything that I considered significant at the time, but knowing the interview was being recorded left me free to observe and listen actively to the participant. This meant that I was able to concentrate on their responses, including any non-verbal clues, and could react promptly to anything that seemed to merit probing further. When I came to transcribing and coding the interview, I was able to use the audio recording alongside the transcript to identify extra layers of meaning in how the responses were given: such things as pauses, changes in tempo, volume or tone of voice, and different forms of laughter all added nuances that I could not have identified from the transcript alone (Bell, 2005).

For the second phase of research, initial data were collected by means of a questionnaire, which was constructed using Online surveys and distributed to participants towards the end of the autumn term, and face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted in the summer term.

The use of interviews and surveys offered different opportunities for participants to express their views and reflect on their experiences, and for me to probe the responses and, through dialogue with each participant, to construct rich, nuanced meanings upon which we could both agree. The use of both manual coding and analysis and computer-assisted analysis (MAXQDA) supported the iterative, hermeneutic process of interpretation, reflection, probing, re-interpretation; following this cycle of construction and reconstruction of meanings, participants were invited to check that their views were accurately and fairly

reported. Any inferences drawn during the analysis and interpretation could be checked through this dialectical process.

Findings from the data analysis were used to evaluate the feasibility of the SPIDERWEB mentoring model as a basis for building a school-wide peer-mentoring programme to support teachers' professional and personal development at all career stages.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Researchers have a duty of care to their participants and have a responsibility to ensure that measures are put in place to mitigate against any risk of harm, either to their participants or to themselves (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018). The study was conducted in accordance with the BERA (2018) ethical guidelines and with the Liverpool Hope University (2014) Research Ethics Policy.

3.5.1 Stakeholder and participant consent

The study took place within my own professional setting, a secondary school in North Wales. Permission, both to set up and run the mentoring programme that is the subject of the study, and then to conduct the actual study, was first obtained from the headteacher. When the mentoring programme was launched, it was made clear that engagement in the programme would be entirely voluntary. To ensure that colleagues were able to make an informed decision as to whether or not they wished to take part, I delivered a training session to all staff where we explored the concept of mentoring and where I outlined the rationale and format for the mentoring programme; I also explained that I would be collecting data from the programme for my research project.

Research participants were recruited from those colleagues who chose to take part in the mentoring programme. Voluntary informed consent was obtained from all participants using the Liverpool Hope University research consent form; this includes a clause assuring all participants of their right to withdraw from the research at any stage, up to the point at which all the data-collection activity is complete. 'Informed consent' in this case means that they understood what would be required of them not only as participants in the research (Bell, 2005; Punch & Oancea, 2014), but also as participants in the mentoring programme. All prospective participants were provided with a research information sheet, compiled using the Liverpool Hope University research information sheet template, and were offered

the opportunity to ask for further clarification if they wished. The study did not involve the participation of children or vulnerable adults; all participants were able to give consent on their own behalf.

3.5.2 Researcher identity and participant recruitment

Being an insider researcher offers privileged access to the research setting and population, in this case the school teaching corpus, some of whom have become close friends as well as colleagues. This personal contact can make it easier to recruit participants, but there is also a risk that some may feel constrained to contribute to the research because of the professional and personal relationships at play (Bell, 2005). I was aware that my identity and my roles in school could influence both the uptake in the mentoring programme, and any response to my request for research participants. I decided that I would need to try to create some sense of separation in the minds of my colleagues between my professional teacher identity and my researcher identity.

In school I am known as an experienced teacher of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), with leadership responsibilities as a head of department and as the lead mentor for ITE provision in school. I am also the architect of the staff mentoring programme and the author of the mentoring model that my study seeks to evaluate. Any of these facets of my identity could generate potential power issues between myself and many of my colleagues, causing colleagues to feel obliged either to engage in the mentoring programme, or to participate in the research. Added to this, I was aware of the potential for power issues to emerge in the mentoring programme, between the different identities within the mentoring groups.

To mitigate against these various issues of power when setting up the mentoring programme, I ensured that:

i. I was acting purely as the coordinator for the mentoring programme and was not part of any one mentoring group myself.

ii. The mentoring groups were configured in such a way as to ensure that no individual was placed in the same group as their head of department or line manager.

iii. A clear expectation was set that all mentoring conversations were to remain confidential within the mentoring group (unless a disclosure was made that

raised concerns of an ethical, legal or safeguarding nature, in which case the school safeguarding procedures should be followed).

iv. It was made clear that the research study would focus on colleagues' perceptions of the mentoring experience; the content of the mentoring conversations would not be required in any data collection.

v. Members of the senior leadership team were excluded from the mentoring programme; this was in order to protect the confidentiality of colleagues and to ensure that colleagues would not feel under scrutiny through the mentoring process.

vi. It was made clear that the mentoring programme would not be used for any school quality assurance processes, and that engagement in the mentoring programme would not be a criterion for performance management evaluations (although colleagues could reference their involvement in the mentoring programme if they wished).

When I came to recruit research participants, it was important that, as far as possible, I did not allow personal or professional relationships to influence how I approached potential participants. I recruited participants using email, where it could be made obvious that the same email had been sent to everyone in the target sample; I hoped that this would give a clear message that I was not making any presumptions regarding individual responses. Using my university email account and citing my university ID reference for all communications concerning my research helped to draw a distinction between my teaching and leadership roles in school and my identity as a doctoral student.

3.5.3 Risks and Benefits

3.5.3 (i) Physical Risk

As the research was conducted in our normal place of work, the physical risks, either to myself or to my participants, were only those associated with day-to-day work activity.

To avoid fatigue due to research, interviews were scheduled at a time and place best suited to the participants. If any participants were to show signs of fatigue during the course of an interview, they would be offered the option to take a short break, to defer the remaining part of the interview or to withdraw from that particular interview altogether.

3.5.3 (ii) Emotional / Psychological Risk – Participants

The mentoring process has the potential to uncover deep-rooted sensitivities (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). This in itself can be emotionally challenging. In asking my participants to reflect on their experiences of the mentoring process, and share their thoughts with me, I was aware of the risk that some participants could feel uncomfortable, or become distressed, if they found themselves discussing situations that had been problematic. To mitigate this risk, I drew on my own knowledge and experience of mentoring to conduct the interviews in a sensitive and supportive manner. At the start of each interview, I checked that the participant was still happy to share information with me and I made it clear that they did not have to answer a question if it made them feel uncomfortable. Fortunately, none of my participants displayed any signs of distress and I was able to complete all the interviews without the need to take a break. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to check the information they had provided and to confirm that they were happy for me to use it, or to identify anything that they wished to be excluded from the data.

Teachers are busy people who experience high levels of stress in their day-to-day work. Contributing to my research would inevitably impact on how my participants managed their workload and I was mindful of the need to be respectful of their time. To this end, the surveys were designed to be clear and not too time-consuming to complete, with a realistic response time (one to two weeks) allowed. Interviews were scheduled at a time and place to suit the participants, and were planned to last no longer than one hour.

3.5.3 (iii) Emotional / Psychological Risk – Researcher

Alongside the risk of emotional harm to participants, it is important to acknowledge the risk of emotional distress to the researcher, which, apart from being upsetting, could compromise the integrity of the study (Punch & Oancea, 2014). It was possible, for example, that I could find it distressing if a participant were to become upset or divulge anything of a sensitive nature. Furthermore, I was aware that my researcher role of probing the lived experiences of my participants, combined with the leadership aspect of my role as facilitator of the mentoring programme, would necessarily cause a shift in my professional and personal relationships with my colleagues; this could also be a source of emotional distress. Before undertaking any data collection, I ensured that I knew what support systems were available both in school and at university, should the need arise. There were some situations which, although not distressing, I did find difficult; in these

instances, my research journal proved invaluable as an aid to reflection and a mechanism to explore my feelings and regain a sense of perspective.

The main risk for me was the psychological pressure of trying to balance the demands of the research against my day-to-day workload, exacerbated at various times by staffing issues in school. This required me to plan my workload and research commitments very carefully in order to manage my time effectively. When this became too challenging, I made sure that I discussed the situation with my line manager in school and with my supervisory team so that I could identify and agree with them the priorities that I should focus on.

3.5.3 (iv) Benefits

Through the surveys and interviews, participants were invited to reflect on their mentoring experiences, and to give feedback about the mentoring programme. This offered them an opportunity to identify their strengths and weaknesses both as mentor and as mentee, and to identify further training which could be provided to improve the mentoring programme for everyone. Moreover, the reflective process inherent in their participation in the research study had the potential to reinforce the reflective processes involved in their engagement in the mentoring programme, offering them an opportunity to interrogate their understanding of their development as a practitioner and of their ongoing developmental needs.

In addition, some participants also have a role as a subject mentor within our ITE programmes; the opportunity to reflect on their mentoring experiences has enabled these participants to consider their mentoring practice in the context of how they can best support ITE colleagues on their school experience placements.

3.5.4 Data Collection: Security, confidentiality and anonymity

A key consideration in any research project is that of confidentiality (Bell, 2005; Punch & Oancea, 2014), and this is true also of any mentoring situation (Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009). Thus, there are layers of confidentiality that need to be observed in a research project on mentoring.

3.5.4 (i) The confidentiality of the mentoring conversation

In most mentoring programmes it would be usual for the mentor and mentee to keep a record of the mentoring discussions. These records are intended mainly to help the reflexive process and the content should remain confidential within the mentoring relationship (Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009). However, school protocols require that detailed minutes are kept of all meetings, and the minutes uploaded into an electronic folder that can be monitored by the leadership team. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the mentoring conversations, I agreed with the headteacher that those engaged in the mentoring programme would be required only to log their attendance at the meeting, and to note the general topic area covered in their discussion – eg, 'Behaviour management strategies'.

3.5.4 (ii) Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity in the research process

In the research information sheet, and throughout any data-collection activity, it was made clear that participants were being asked to comment only on their own experiences of the mentoring process and their perceptions of the value it had brought to their own practice and development. Prior to each interview, I reminded participants of the confidentiality of the mentoring conversation and asked them not to divulge any details that might compromise this. Participants were asked not to refer to others by name; any inadvertent references to other people or to the school were anonymised or removed before any analysis took place. Any references to individual roles and responsibilities were also removed.

At the end of each interview, participants were invited to check my notes for accuracy and permission was sought for their responses to be used. At this point, participants were given an opportunity to identify anything that they felt should be kept in confidence and excluded from the data.

3.5.4 (iii) Storage of and access to data: security

Where possible, I used electronic means for collecting, storing and analysing data. To maintain confidentiality throughout the research project, any data collected electronically were exported into a password-secured folder on my own password-secured device. I am the only person who has access to this device. Any material that was generated and processed manually was stored in a locked cabinet that only I can access.

Survey data were collected using Online Surveys, in line with university policy. Online Surveys is the preferred system because it has in-built safeguards to uphold confidentiality. The account is password-protected and access to the survey is restricted to only those respondents using an email address that has been authorised by the survey owner.

Interviews were recorded (with the participants' permission) using a digital voice recorder and transcribed using Otter.ai; the recordings and transcriptions were coded using MAXQDA. Both Otter.ai and MAXQDA are password-secured accounts. Once the recordings and transcripts had been exported to my device, the original recordings were deleted from the voice recorder.

All data were anonymised prior to analysis. Participants were invited to suggest a pseudonym to protect their identity, but in fact most participants chose not to do so. I therefore used alpha-numeric codes to differentiate between participants in interview transcripts, during data analysis and in the presentation and discussion of my findings.

I have not shared or discussed any personal information or data that has not been anonymised.

3.6 Field Research and Approach to Data Analysis

This section provides a narrative account of the iterative process involved in the coding and analysis of my data; fig 3.2 below outlines the steps that were involved in this process. Some preliminary themes that emerged at various stages of this process are identified within the narrative, which is followed by a brief account of how I arrived at my main themes.

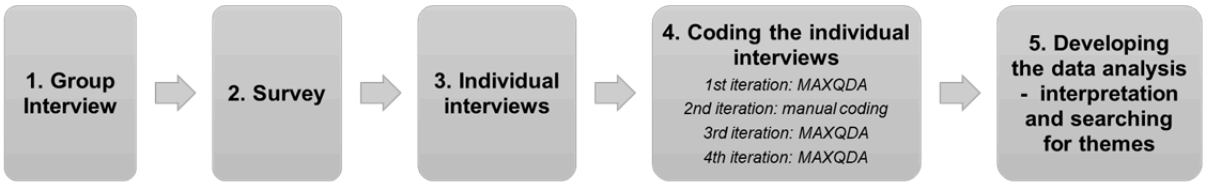

Fig.3.3 Outline of stages in iterative process of data collection, coding and analysis

There were twelve participants in the study. Data were collected through a group interview (n=7), survey (n=12) and semi-structured individual interviews (n=12), and analysed using

a thematic analysis (TA) approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022). Using multiple methods of data collection helps to achieve trustworthiness as the data collected from each participant at different stages can be triangulated and checked for consistency.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed using Otter.ai (Crumley, 2018). The transcriptions and recordings were analysed both manually and electronically using MAXQDA. Prior to analysis, I checked each transcription, corrected inaccuracies, and annotated them where I noticed something in the recording that was not conveyed in the transcription, such as a particular tone of voice. All data were anonymised before any analysis took place.

During the group and individual interviews, I tried to be aware of the possible influence of the group or individual situation - whether there was any element of 'group speak', whether participants were more, or less, inclined to be honest in one situation or the other, and whether anything was said by any participant in one form of interview that appeared to contradict their response in the other.

My initial instinct was to expect greater honesty in the individual interviews, where participants could not be influenced by others in the group; however, this assumes that respondents were happy to engage with me in this situation. I needed to be sensitive to situations when participants were reticent or wary, and consider whether this was caused by the group or individual context. Conversely, in one individual interview, I did have a sense that the participant was giving slightly exaggerated answers, introducing a performance element in their responses that was not apparent in the group situation. So, it may be that the group situation helped some participants to stay more focused on responding to the question, rather than thinking about creating an effect.

Where there were apparent contradictions, I needed to consider how to account for them - whether this was the effect of the group situation compared with the individual situation, or whether they reflected a change in perspective over time, or the impact of some other event. These considerations pointed to a need for careful and reflective probing of my own responses to the data as I analysed it, alongside the reflective, iterative, thematic analysis of the actual data itself.

3.6.1 Group Interview

The first data collection was conducted through a group interview (Appendix I). A descriptive coding approach was used (Saldaña, 2021) to identify ideas that might inform

the questions to be explored in subsequent data collections. My initial coding attempts were done manually, annotating the transcript to document my own sense-making of the responses and using a coding-book to record the codes that were generated. This first level of coding allowed me to familiarise myself with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and to start considering possible themes and categories..

Having worked through the transcript manually, I used MAXQDA to code it again electronically, using the categories identified from the manual coding to inform the codes used in MAXQDA. As I worked, I found that my initial codes were not nuanced enough to account for some of the layers of meaning that I was beginning to identify. I decided to keep the same broad categories at this stage, but added sub-categories to allow for this.

3.6.2 Survey

The online survey (Appendix J) was designed to be straightforward and quick to complete, bearing in mind both issues with teachers' workload and the potential irritation caused by surveys that are vague, overly complicated, or time-consuming. The survey was therefore constructed using questions that mostly required tick-box responses: participants were asked either to select one of a range of options or to select as many of the options as applied to them. The options offered in each question were informed by participants' responses in the group interview and by my own observations of situations in school. This was intentional. Firstly, I wanted to ascertain whether my participants' views had changed since the group interview as a result of any mentoring activity that they had undertaken. Secondly, I was aware of the potential for my own researcher bias to influence my observations: including options that related to my observations would help to check whether my perceptions aligned with those of my participants. An option of 'other' was also provided for participants to add further responses if they wished: this afforded an opportunity for them to include ideas that I may not have considered, which would also help to obviate researcher bias. Two questions required participants to provide a longer response in their own words about their experiences; these questions were necessarily open-ended and presented using a neutral tone to ensure that participants recorded their own thoughts and, as far as possible, were not influenced by my expectations.

The purpose of the survey data was triangulation and to seek corroboration of my understanding of the responses from the group interview. The 'other' option allowed participants to add information that might have corrected any misunderstanding or oversight on my part, but in fact this option was not used; this would suggest that

participants were satisfied that their views were adequately represented by the statements offered, and that I had correctly understood the responses given in the group interview. This is important because it would appear to indicate that I had not made any assumptions that had caused me to misinterpret or misrepresent the views of my participants. The two open-ended questions provided more detail to supplement participants' responses to the closed questions; these responses were coded and analysed using the same approach as for the interview data.

3.6.3 Individual interviews

A third data-collection was conducted using semi-structured individual interviews (Appendix K). The same interview schedule was used with each participant, but the conversation was allowed to develop as naturally as possible within the context of the interview. Using the same interview schedule ensured some consistency and allowed for a meaningful comparison of the experiences reported by each participant. However, the semi-structured approach provided scope for me to probe each participant's responses, and for participants to reflect and offer their own additional insights (Gillham, 2005).

3.6.4 Coding the individual interviews

Mindful of the need to interrogate and probe the data, and my interpretation of the data, I used an iterative approach to coding (see fig.3.3 below). Applying multiple iterations of coding enabled me to achieve a nuanced, layered understanding of the data, which helps to support the credibility and trustworthiness of my findings. This iterative approach also helps to address issues of transferability: whilst case study is not held to be generalisable, the constant interrogation of my sense-making helps to ensure that the insights gained are robust enough to be transferable to other similar situations and may be used to support or inform other studies in this field.

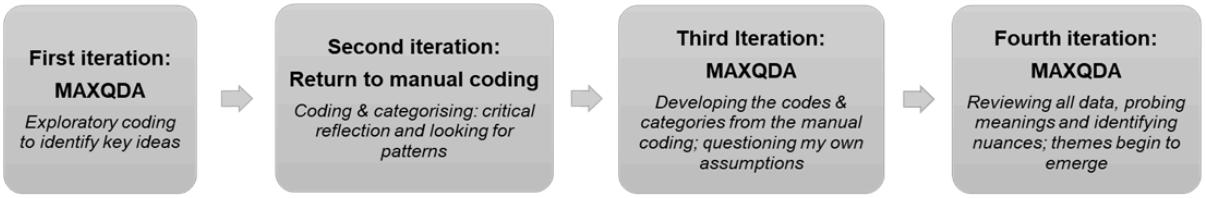

Fig.3.4 Iterative coding of individual interviews

3.6.4 (i) First iteration: MAXQDA

Given the amount of data generated in the individual interviews, I used MAXQDA for coding, using an exploratory coding approach (Saldaña 2021) to identify key ideas contained in the data. I took the descriptive codes from the group interview data as my starting point, adding further codes as I encountered comments that suggested something new. To minimise code proliferation, I used the same codes as often as possible, sorting the codes into categories as I worked (Saldaña, 2021). However, I still felt confused by the number of different codes generated, and was struggling to identify clear patterns that might point towards possible themes.

3.6.4 (ii) Second iteration: return to manual coding

I needed a different approach that would help me to work in a more focused and reflective way. From reading Saldaña (2021), I decided to return to manual coding on the individual interviews, using coloured pens and highlighters to code and categorise concurrently. Where a piece of data seemed to contain different layers of meaning that placed it in multiple categories, simultaneous coding (Saldaña, 2021) was used. My manual coding mirrored the process that I had been using with MAXQDA, but I found it easier to work on paper.

I used my coding book to record all the codes used, which helped me to identify patterns in the data; from this, ten broad categories emerged, each of which had multiple sub-categories. I supplemented my codes with analytical memos, which helped me to reflect critically on the data, and on my own assumptions and biases as I engaged in the sense-making process. I enjoyed thinking about 'What do they mean by…?' and found myself reflecting on my own understanding of mentoring, compared with the understandings revealed in the comments of my participants.

The manual coding exercise gave a good overview of all the interview data and I felt ready to use MAXQDA again for the next level of coding.

3.6.4 (iii) Third Iteration: MAXQDA

I set up a new project in MAXQDA and worked through each interview transcript again using the code system from my manual coding to provide some provisional codes and categories (Saldaña, 2021).

Some key ideas were emerging: notions of trust, judgement, hierarchy were mentioned by all the participants, as were issues concerning time, workload and the adverse circumstances that prevailed in school during this period. Participants who reported positive experiences referred to notions of support, confidence, collaboration, reflection, sharing new ideas, connecting with different people, integration and socialisation, and wellbeing. Conversely, participants who reported a negative experience cited lack of motivation, absence of a mentoring partner, lack of understanding, and a mismatch in expectations or personalities within the mentoring group as possible causes, as well as issues to do with time, workload, and circumstances. This echoes Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent (2004), who identified similar themes in their analysis of mentoring literature published between 1986 and 2002.

Some responses were particularly insightful and thought-provoking, pointing the way to possible themes that I had not anticipated. These included issues to do with friendship within the mentoring context, echoing Mullen and Klimaitis (2021), and references to theory, where a participant articulated an idea which unknowingly echoed a seminal text, such as Kram (1983). Participants also expressed very clear ideas on what they felt mentoring was, or should be, and what it was not; most of their views echoed the definitions and descriptions of mentoring identified by Mullen and Klimaitis (2021).

Much of what I was noting in the data chimed with my own views of mentoring and so I found myself questioning the integrity of my coding thus far. Braun and Clarke (2022) identify reflexivity as ‘a fundamental characteristic of TA’ (p5). Their definition of Reflexive TA notes the ‘inevitable subjectivity’ (p294) of the iterative process of coding, followed by theme generation, development, review, and redefinition, and the consequent need for the researcher to reflect critically on their own assumptions and practices, and how these may influence the approach to data analysis. The focus throughout is hermeneutic: an active and analytical reading of the data that probes meaning and seeks out ‘nuance, complexity

and…contradiction' (p7). With all this in mind, I wondered whether the codes used in my first cycle of coding were too much dictated by my own expectations and assumptions, and whether I would have identified different codes had I followed a more actively hermeneutic approach. I asked myself the following questions:

- If I undertake another iteration of coding, how far will I be able to generate new codes from the meanings I perceive; will I find myself re-using the pre-conceived codes that I used in my first cycle of coding?

- If I generate new, different codes from a fresh reading of the data, will I then identify different themes? Will this lead to more clarity, or just add to the complexity?

- If I do not manage to generate new codes, but find myself using the same or similar, does this mean that my original codes were good? Does it mean that the themes identified so far are indeed the themes waiting to be found, or have I still not probed enough?

3.6.4 (iv) Fourth iteration: MAXQDA

To explore these questions, I worked through the interview and survey data again, actively questioning what I understood by each response and allocating new codes to specific meanings. I allocated multiple codes where the meaning was ambiguous or where I felt that there were several layers of meaning. It was useful to refer to the analytic memos written during the manual coding exercise - they helped me to explore my assumptions and probe my responses to the data - but I also added new analytic memos in MAXQDA specific to this cycle of coding.

At this stage, rather than allocate colours to the codes as I generated them, I used one colour for all the codes. In doing so, I hoped to be more certain of identifying emergent themes from the meanings contained in the data: whilst colour-coding is a useful tool for distinguishing the different codes, categories and themes once they have been identified, applying it too early risked reinforcing my own assumptions.

Having coded all the data again, I looked for instances where several codes had a similar meaning or referred to a similar phenomenon. Through grouping these codes together, I was able to start identifying categories and possible themes; at this point I allocated colours in order to distinguish them more easily. Where I felt that one code might link to multiple

themes or categories, I duplicated the code so that I could allocate it to as many different groups as seemed appropriate.

This cycle of coding generated many new codes, but unlike the proliferation of codes that resulted from my first attempt at using MAXQDA, I felt that this exercise was more methodical, better informed by methodological theory, and supported by a growing familiarity with the processes involved (Bazeley, 2021). I was able to take a fresh look at the data and found some comments to be more insightful or more nuanced than I had previously realised. I am certain that I managed to adopt a greater degree of 'qualitative sensibility' (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.7) in this exercise; I was also aware that with every iteration of coding, my knowledge of the data deepened and I felt increasingly attuned to the different voices to be encountered in it.

3.6.5 Developing the data analysis – interpretation and searching for themes

Having completed several iterations of coding and analysis, I found myself struggling to know how to identify clear, broad themes which would frame my data analysis. My first attempt at a draft of my data analysis chapter was too descriptive: it relied predominantly on paraphrasing the data and included very little interpretation or synthesis. And yet, I had written copious analytic memos throughout the coding process. Following advice from my supervisors, I transferred my analysis into a spreadsheet, or rather, a couple of spreadsheets. This helped to clarify my thoughts, to identify potential themes and, crucially, to identify how the data linked to my research questions.

3.6.5 (i) Spreadsheet 1: Considering enablers and barriers - a possible approach to identifying themes

Much of the data seemed to reflect whether or not participants felt that they had enjoyed a successful, positive process. All participants noted the impact of the circumstances in school at the time; some participants had managed to overcome the difficulties, whilst others found themselves facing barriers that felt insurmountable and that prevented any effective engagement in the mentoring programme.

In this first spreadsheet, I noted the enablers and barriers to the mentoring process that my participants had identified. At one point, I had considered whether these might offer a sensible thread through my analysis, especially given the number of issues encountered during the research period. However, whilst identifying the enablers and barriers was a

useful exercise, I do not feel that it contributed a great deal towards being able to identify clear themes to answer my specific research question. For each condition that could be classed as an enabler, there was a converse condition that represented a barrier to effective mentoring. The factors that my participants identified echoed established knowledge, but left me with a 'so what' question in my mind.

Comparing and contrasting the conditions that support or prevent the development of a mentoring programme seemed a very binary approach: either the organisational context is able and willing to maintain a staff mentoring programme or it is not. This approach does not address the question regarding the feasibility of implementing a specific mentoring model, which, moreover, is multi-faceted in nature. My research question was not about the necessary conditions for supporting a mentoring programme but was concerned with whether the SPIDERWeB model is an appropriate model for use in a secondary school setting. This presupposes the willingness of the school to develop and support a mentoring programme for staff, which is not a question of yes or no, but how.

That said, it is worth considering briefly the enablers and barriers identified by participants as some of them do relate specifically both to the particular context and to the rationale that underpins the SPIDERWeB model. Given the school situation, participants identified more barriers than enablers to their successful participation in the mentoring process. Barriers included issues to do with staff absence, workload, lack of allocated time, and the pressures endemic in an ongoing process of regular inspections and the level of scrutiny that this entailed. Participants also identified that a culture of constant scrutiny and accountability imposed by the headteacher, with a focus on whole school development priorities, was in direct conflict with the ethos of a mentoring programme that was designed to address the ongoing professional development needs of the individual.

Conversely, participants who enjoyed a worthwhile and useful experience identified that the most significant factor was the development of a strong group dynamic, founded on the willingness of all members of the group to maintain their commitment to attending mentoring sessions. Developing a strong group dynamic also relied on building an ethos of trust within the group where individuals could feel 'safe', free from scrutiny and able to express themselves honestly without fear of being judged. For this, individuals needed to be positively disposed towards the mentoring process, able to show empathy, open to new ideas, able to work collaboratively and willing to reflect critically on their own practice. This echoes previous research (eg McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007; Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

Specific to the rationale that informs the SPIDERWeB model, participants identified the triadic and, crucially, non-hierarchical structure as an enabler to productive mentoring conversations. The absence of any involvement of senior leaders and the fact that no two individuals from the same department were in the same group helped participants to enjoy the sense of a 'safe space', whilst the triadic structure offered a breadth to the discussions and avoided the sense of hierarchy of experience speaking to inexperience that is the basis of the more traditional dyadic approach.

3.6.5 (ii) Spreadsheet 2: The SPIDERWeB acronym, and beginning to understand categories and themes

My research project aims to evaluate the feasibility of my SPIDERWeB mentoring model, a model that I devised for a school-wide mentoring programme to support the professional and personal development of experienced teachers. The image of a spider's web is for me very intuitive as well as being very visual. In nature, a spider's web is strong, yet flexible; it stretches across a void, linking two or more structures or aspects of a structure, and it catches everything that flies (or falls) into it. This reflects my conceptualisation of an effective mentoring programme: I have a vision of building a mentoring ethos in school that offers individual development for everyone across the teaching body, based on a culture of support and sharing good practice that transcends disciplinary divides.

When I devised the SPIDERWeB model, I also considered what aspects of mentoring might be represented in the words SPIDER WEB if it was used as an acronym. For each letter, I had identified two or three possible key words that might offer a 'snappy' description of the conceptualisation of mentoring contained in the model. I was clear about the meaning of 'WeB' - this refers to Well-Being, which is identified in much of the literature as a key element in good mentoring, whether as a stated aim of the mentoring process, or as an incidental outcome. However, I had never really pinpointed exactly what S, P, I, D, E and R represented, and this lack of definition was hindering my ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the model.

I set up a spreadsheet with the individual letters from the acronym as the column headings, along with the possible words that they might represent – eg, S might mean 'supportive', 'serendipitous' or 'sharing (good practice)'; I also added a couple of columns for issues not covered by a specific element of the acronym, and for additional observations. The first column was left blank: this was for row headings drawn from the codes that I had used in previous iterations of analysis.

For this cycle of analysis, I worked mainly from my analytic memos, referring back to the interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of any quotes and to check that I had not missed anything significant. For each memo, I located the quote that it referred to and I copied the quote, or a paraphrase of it, and the accompanying memo into the relevant column on the spreadsheet, according to which aspect of the SPIDERWeB model it seemed to illustrate. This process forced me to interrogate my own memos and to consider if there were any other possible interpretations, thus adding another layer to the hermeneutic process. I used separate cells for each datum (i.e. each quote with its accompanying memo); where a quote might relate to more than one aspect of the model, I copied the information into all the relevant columns, ensuring that all the entries from one piece of data were in the same row. For every entry, I also noted which participant had provided the information so that I could find the quote easily should I need to check any contextual details; it would also help me to identify if there were any significant differences in experience offered by the two phases of mentoring. Where several participants had expressed the same idea, I recorded quotes or paraphrases from all those participants together in the relevant cell.

At this stage, I was still unclear about the difference between themes and categories. However, from reading Morse (2008) and Vaismoradi et al (2016), I felt that my row headings represented categories as they 'determine what is in the data' (Morse, 2008, p.727) and 'describe ideas that are directly expressed in the text' (Vaismoradi et al, 2016, p.102), whilst the column headings pointed towards the themes as they refer to concepts in mentoring theory and so link the participants' experiences to established knowledge (Vaismoradi et al, 2016). Moreover, since they represent the different elements of the SPIDERWeB model, the column headings also represent the key topics to be explored in the narrative (Morse, 2008) – that is, the evaluation of the feasibility of the model.

From the row headings, I could identify clear categories that included: the impact of the group dynamic, issues of trust and hierarchy and questions of who the mentoring programme is for, issues of connection and acculturation, questions of friendship versus mentorship, the triadic structure of the programme and the needs audit that informed the allocation of groups. I would also include the various enablers and barriers amongst the categories. These are all ideas that were expressed directly by the participants.

My column headings now demanded further thought: sorting the data according to the different elements of the SPIDERWeB model had helped to clarify what the acronym represents. I had arrived at a clearer conceptualisation of a model that:

- is intentionally Supportive
- uses a Peer group structure
- is Interdisciplinary
- is Developmental
- fosters Exploration in one's practice
- is a Reflective process
- promotes the Well-Being of the whole organisation

As these key words were informed by the data, they also pointed towards potential themes to be explored and offered a basis for a discussion of the data that was grounded in the participants' perceptions of their experiences of the SPIDERWeB approach to a school-wide mentoring model.

Building these spreadsheets was helpful. From the first spreadsheet I was able to identify the enablers and barriers identified by my participants, which highlight what elements are necessary to the effective implementation of any mentoring programme, regardless of the model used. This in itself is useful information that I can share with school leaders in any discussions that may be had concerning any future development of the mentoring programme. Identifying and understanding these enablers and barriers helped me to reflect not only on the safeguards that need to be built into any policy decisions regarding the mentoring programme, but also on my own practice as a mentor of ITE and early-career colleagues.

However, it was the second spreadsheet that was most productive. Interrogating and organising my analytic memos was quite cathartic: whereas I had previously felt stuck in the data and confused by the different ideas expressed, I now found myself able to link the different ideas to each other and to my research questions.

As I continued to probe the data, and my interpretation of the data, further key ideas emerged, in addition to those identified through the SPIDERWeB acronym, which could be grouped into three broad areas: (i) ideas concerning the nature and purpose of mentoring; (ii) enablers and barriers to the mentoring process; (iii) observations that resonate with my own view of mentoring and the rationale that underpins the SPIDERWeB model. This thought process is summarised in the concept map below (Fig. 3.5):

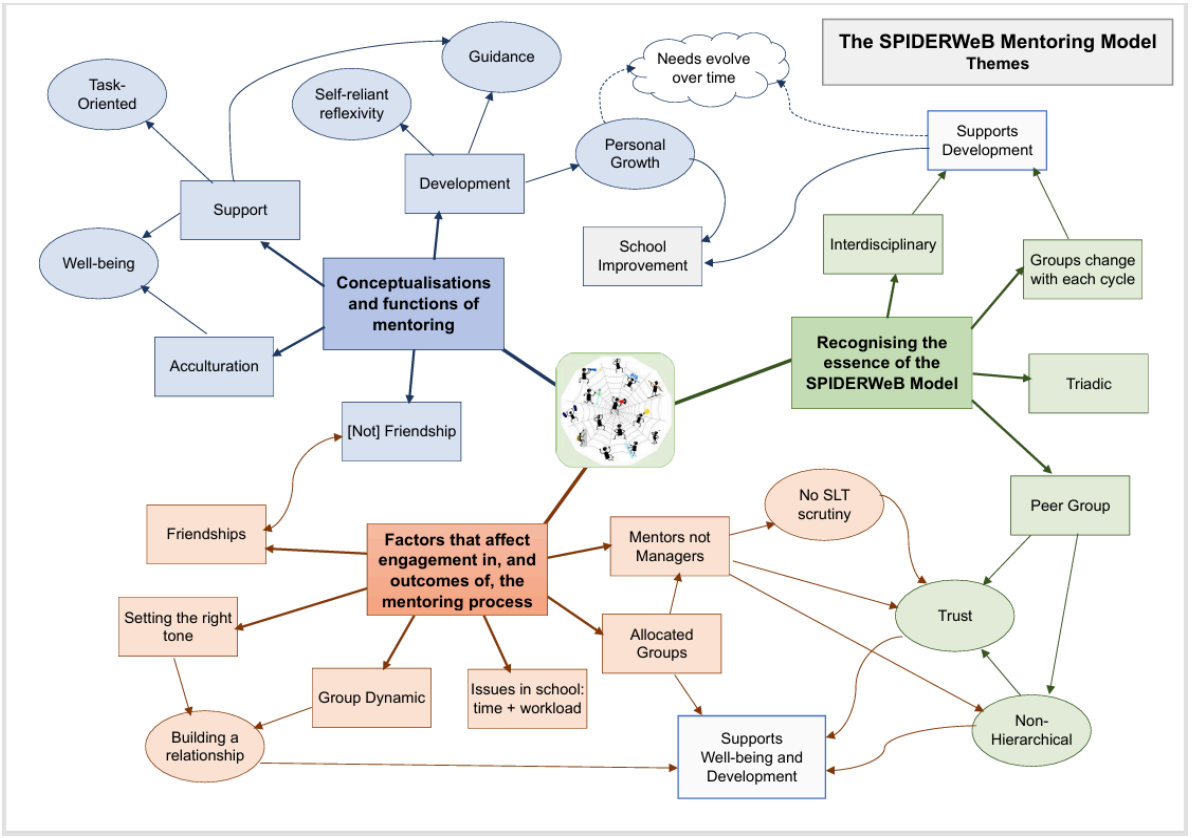

Fig.3.5 SPIDERWeB Mentoring model: Concept map of themes & sub-themes that emerged from the data

The three broad areas identified by the different colours form the themes and sub-themes which will be discussed in the next chapter. For each main theme (shown in bold), there are several sub-themes (shown in the small rectangles). Within these sub-themes, other key notions could also be identified (shown in the oval shapes), which in some cases provided a link to other sub-themes, or provoked further ideas.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

In this chapter I present and discuss my findings. The discussion is organised according to the three broad themes which emerged from the data analysis, as outlined in the previous chapter.

The first theme, 'Conceptualisations of mentoring', concerns participants' theorising about the purpose of mentoring and their reflections on what mentoring means to them. The second theme, 'Factors that affect engagement in, and outcomes of, the mentoring process' is concerned with logistical constraints and factors that could be identified in the school culture at the time, which acted as either enablers or barriers to participants' ongoing engagement in the mentoring process. The third theme, 'Recognising the essence of the SPIDERWeB model', is concerned with participants' reflections on how the mentoring programme was constructed and the specific aspects of the SPIDERWeB model that participants identified as a result of their engagement in the programme.

These themes and their associated sub-themes are shown in the table below (Fig. 4.1):

Theme 1: **Conceptualisations of Mentoring**	**Theme 2:** **Factors that affected engagement in, & outcomes of, the mentoring process**	**Theme 3:** **Recognising the Essence of the SPIDERWeB Model**
Mentoring has: • a developmental function • a task-oriented function • a well-being function	• circumstances in school • group dynamic • allocated groups and productive struggle • issues of friendship	The value of: • the peer group • the triadic format • changing groups each year • interdisciplinary groups • the 'GoTo' List

Fig.4.1 SPIDERWeB Mentoring model: Main themes & sub-themes that emerged from the data

4.1 Conceptualisations of mentoring

Participants expressed some very clear ideas about what they felt that mentoring is, and what it is not; their individual conceptualisations of mentoring were informed both by previous mentoring experiences and by their participation in the SPIDERWeB mentoring programme.

Within their conceptualisations of mentoring, participants described both functional and affective dimensions to the mentoring process. Three types of function can be identified (Fig.4.2 below): (i) a developmental function - supporting the development of professional knowledge, skills and expertise through sharing ideas and experiences; (ii) a task-oriented function - providing specific advice to generate solutions to specific problems; (iii) a well-being function - fostering connections across the staff body, breaking down isolation and aiding the acculturation and integration of new staff. Participants felt that mentoring was effective in fulfilling these functions because of the opportunities it offered to ask questions, share ideas and to reflect on one's own practice in a supportive, non-hierarchical and non-judgemental environment. The affective dimensions of mentoring included the notion of a 'safe space', feeling supported, feeling welcomed and included, able to overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness, and experiencing growing self-confidence. Participants were also very clear that mentoring should not be used as a management tool for evaluating individual performance; nor should it have school improvement as its primary goal, although participants agreed that school improvement could be a possible outcome.

Conceptualisations of Mentoring	
Developmental function	➢ *reflection and reflexive practice aids self-reliance: development as 'self-help'* ➢ *support in building skills and knowledge: personal and professional growth* ➢ *addressing individual needs rather than a focus on the school agenda*
Task-oriented function	➢ *specific solutions for specific problems*
Well-being function	➢ *Support: mentoring group as 'safe space'* ➢ *integration, acculturation and connection*

Fig.4.2 Conceptualisations of Mentoring: Key notions

4.1.1 Mentoring as a developmental function: facilitating reflection and reflexive practice to enable self-reliant development and individual growth

Several participants (n=6) alluded to the notion of mentoring as a reflective process which both challenges and empowers the individual to identify ways in which they can improve their practice (Daloz, 1986; Hudson, 2013):

> *'I've looked at myself...' (F1)*

> *'It was…an opportunity to discuss and reflect and think about what you were doing, and then trial things out and go back. But it wasn't, you know, this is what you're going to do.' (F7)*

'I've definitely benefited from having somebody that I knew I could go to if I was stuck…and that actually understood: I could help me.' (F4)

'…you'd kind of improve yourself…' (M2)

These participants share a conceptualisation of mentoring that is to do with self-help, generating one's own solutions rather than relying on instruction from others. For them, the value of the mentoring conversation lies in the way in which it supports the individual to interrogate their own thoughts or practices and thus find a way forward for themselves that answers their needs at the time. However, F4 also identifies that empathy is an important element in the mentoring conversation: she felt that her mentoring group understood her situation well enough that they could help her to explore why she felt 'stuck', and then to identify a possible solution. This echoes Daloz (1986): the mentoring conversation and the questions that it provokes are as important as any answers that may emerge. It is important for the mentee to find their own answers and thus 'improve themselves'.

For two participants, this process of critical self-reflection is facilitated by the skill of the mentor, whose key function is one of guidance as they help the mentee to explore their current reality and then, from the insights gained, to develop a vision of a future possibility and identify the means by which they might achieve it (Daloz, 1986).

'Mentoring is not about what you know, it's about asking the right questions, and helping them [the mentees] develop to get to their point, by themselves, but guiding them. I think facilitating that is really important.' (M1)

'This is about guiding each other, sharing good practice and what's worked for you and how you can help somebody with something that they don't feel as confident with.' (F5)

Both of these participants identify that the purpose of mentoring is to help others to develop their own practice, either by 'asking the right questions' (M1), or by sharing experiences that may generate ideas for new ways of working (F5). They seem to suggest that mentoring is in many ways an altruistic process. For M1, the knowledge of the mentor is irrelevant: the mentoring process needs to focus on developing the understanding and practice of the mentee, and this should start from the knowledge-base of the mentee, not the mentor. For F5, the mentor's role includes sharing something of themselves in order to help the mentee find their own way forward (Kroll, 2017). In the previous examples at the start of this section, the participants took the perspective of the mentee but here, M1 and

F5 cast themselves in the role of mentor, facilitating the development of the mentee. However, the point made in both cases is the same: the function of the mentor is to empower the mentee to explore their own ideas and develop approaches that suit their own individual needs.

For one participant (F4), a key feature of the school mentoring programme was the fact that the mentoring groups are reorganised each year based on an updated skills and needs audit completed at the start of the school year in September. Changing the groups in this way fosters new links between colleagues and builds the network of support across the organisation:

> *'…that's what the point is, that you are supporting each other. Almost like a child, and you're parents: you're supporting them because you want them to be able to do those things so that they can move on...' (F4)*

I was struck by F4's analogy of a child being nurtured and prepared for the point at which they would be ready to leave home and make their own way in life: it chimes with my own conceptualisation of an effective mentoring relationship as it looks forward to the next phase, in much the same way that Kram's (1983) notion of 'redefinition' allows for the possibility of new opportunities. This analogy offers a conceptualisation of mentoring as growth, where both mentor and mentee engage in a process of transition from interdependence to independence. For F4, mentoring is an intentional, developmental relationship which seeks to enhance personal growth as well as professional skills development (Kroll, 2016). To achieve this, it is important to move on and embrace the next opportunity, even if it means leaving a successful group that you have enjoyed working with. F4 understands that moving on to a different group will enable her to make more connections across the staff body, which will expose her to different perspectives and help her to broaden her outlook as she continues on her professional journey. She also recognises that, over time, this cycle of moving on will help to build not only her own individual support network, but also a support network that stretches across the whole school. F4 has identified the core rationale of the SPIDERWeB model.

When the mentoring programme was first implemented, it was with the aim of enabling teachers to identify and address their own individual developmental needs. However, with the arrival of a new headteacher (HT2), this purpose was called into question: given that the school was in special measures, HT2 felt that all staff development activity should focus

on addressing the school priorities for improvement identified in the Post-Inspection Action Plan (PIAP).

Two participants felt that it was not unreasonable for HT2 to expect staff to consider the recommendations of the PIAP when determining their own areas for development:

> *'I suppose that's not awful - it is teaching and learning. But then could you do a mix of both?' (F5)*

> *'I'm thinking individual needs, but based around the school priorities…so individual needs could be met but they'd have to have a focus of moving us in the direction we need to be moved in.' (F2)*

Both F5 and F2 felt that it was feasible and sensible for colleagues to address both their individual development needs and those of the school at the same time. For F5, this is simply a matter of common-sense, whereas for F2 it is a matter of compliance. F2 felt that teachers should be expected to use the PIAP as a framework to inform their choice of which aspect of their practice to develop. This would ensure a clear rationale and focus for their mentoring activity, and at the same time ensure that all colleagues were aware of, and working to address, the post-inspection recommendations for improvement.

Conversely, several participants (n=9) felt very strongly that the mentoring programme should not be used to address whole-school areas for improvement, but should be focused primarily on individual needs:

> *'…that's not mentoring, in my opinion…we're not helping each other to do things for us, we're helping each other to do things for school...But surely, if we're helping each other to do things for us, that boosts our well-being and how capable we are, which in turn, wouldn't that boost the school priorities anyway?' (F4)*

> *'I wouldn't have been part of the mentoring programme if I thought it was just going to be focused on school priorities. That's not what I wanted. It's about me improving as a professional, as opposed to me trying to meet the needs of school that we should be doing anyway. It should be about me trying to move myself forward as well as an individual...and that's purely going to benefit school in the long run, isn't it? (F3)*

> *'I think it should be benefiting individual people rather than for Estyn personally, because it smacks a bit of just teaching for the test, in a way, which I don't think can [bring] change. I think it should be to benefit people holistically rather than just for Estyn's sake.' (M3)*

For all of these participants, the purpose of mentoring is to support individual development and should not be used as a management tool to bring about organisational change; the mentoring process should be driven by the individual identifying their own needs and developmental targets, which may not necessarily coincide with organisational aims. Moreover, M3 suggests that a focus on organisational improvement is at best short-sighted, and potentially detrimental to the development of both the individual and the organisation. The notion of 'teaching to the test' implies a short-term approach and a lack of solid understanding in the necessary skills and knowledge. M3's argument is that organisational improvement can only be secured through ensuring that individual needs are addressed. Any mentoring programme, therefore, needs to have as its purpose the development of individual skills, knowledge and well-being in order for the organisation to flourish.

These participants all offer an understanding of mentoring as a holistic process that operates on multiple levels to support both the professional development and personal well-being of the individual. Although they feel that the PIAP should not be the primary focus of the mentoring programme, they also identify that addressing individual developmental needs through the mentoring programme will help to address whole-school issues and thus would eventually benefit the organisation as a whole. This echoes much of the literature on mentoring, which notes that organisational improvement is often an incidental consequence of individual skills development achieved through mentoring (eg. Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009).

4.1.2 Mentoring as a task-oriented function: specific solutions for specific problems

For one participant (F2) the whole concept of mentoring (specifically peer-mentoring) was bound up in the task-orientated notion of functional support:

> *'I've gone to […], when…I need help with spreadsheets and SIMs and stuff. She's the one who can support me with that, and she does that really calmly… So peer working with someone who knows what you don't know, is massively important.' (F2)*

> *'…that's how it's been for me when people like […] will come and go, can I show you my learning plan and compare it to yours? That's peer mentoring…which is basically what we've been doing with the Curriculum for Wales steering group. We've been going to other schools, and we'll just bring our paperwork and go 'Oh, I could use that, show me how that's worked', or 'I'm really not getting the hang of this…I don't know what to do'. So we all get together and talk it through...' (F2)*

For F2, the purpose of peer mentoring is to fill a knowledge gap, to provide an explanation of how to approach a specific task or problem and to offer a solution that will work in that instance. This is akin to Klasen and Clutterbuck's (2002) description of needs-based mentoring, where 'a pool of mentors is available for individuals to call on...when information or assistance is required' (p. 22). In the SPIDERWeB model, this aspect of mentoring is addressed through the 'GoTo' list, which provides colleagues with information on whom to approach for help in specific areas (see section 4.3.5). However, the overarching aim of the SPIDERWeB model is to offer a more holistic approach to supporting teachers' ongoing professional and personal development.

4.1.3 Mentoring as a well-being function: Support, acculturation and connection

Support both underpins the mentoring process and can be a significant outcome. The ability of the mentoring partners to offer support to, and to accept support from, each other is crucial to the success of the mentoring relationship; at the same time, individuals in a successful mentoring relationship often describe a sense of feeling supported as a result of their mentoring experience. All participants alluded to a notion of support as inherent in the mentoring process.

For M5 and F7, the sense of support that they derived from their mentoring triad has informed their conceptualisation of what mentoring is:

> *'Mentoring provides a safe space to support each other without feeling judged...It was an opportunity to share common problems and to listen to different ways of tackling common issues or issues particular to individuals in the group.' (M5)*

> *'It's beneficial because it feels supportive. It's not as though you're being told what to do, you know, you are actually just talking to each other on quite a friendly level really aren't you?' (F7)*

M5 and F7 were in the same mentoring group; they clearly felt that their group was managing to establish an atmosphere where they felt safe and valued, so that they felt able to share experiences and ideas, to interrogate their current realities and explore possibilities for developing their future practice (Daloz, 1986; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano 2013). What is key for both of them is that the solution to any issue will be generated through their group discussions, rather than being imposed on them as something that they are directed to do.

M5 equates support with a non-judgemental approach and the creation of a 'safe space' where individuals can explore their strengths and concerns, whereas F7 equates her sense of support with the feeling that she is 'just talking', as if among friends, rather than being directed towards a particular course of action. For both participants, support is affirmatory, enacted through active listening and responding in a friendly, encouraging, and non-judgemental tone to an individual's experiences, values and aspirations (Daloz, 1986). This affirmation engenders trust and confidence and enables all members of the group to engage positively and actively in the mentoring conversation.

These participants suggest that support is fundamental to the mentoring process, echoing Daloz (1986). However, the key aim of the SPIDERWeB model is to provide a vehicle for individualised CPD, and one of my research questions concerns what value the triadic peer-mentoring process offers experienced teachers for their own personal and professional development. Whilst mentoring is founded on support, Daloz (1986) notes that support on its own does not offer development, it simply reaffirms an individual's current situation and assumptions. Development relies on balancing support with an element of challenge, where the individual is invited to question their current assumptions and explore new ideas. F7's sense of 'just talking to each other' suggests that whilst she may be exploring different ideas through the conversations, she is perhaps not aware of being actively challenged. According to Daloz, this would bring into question what value the mentoring conversations had offered these teachers in terms of their active and ongoing professional development.

Conversely, providing support may also be considered as one of the main goals of mentoring: building a supportive relationship enables the individual to articulate problems and work out possible solutions. Both M5 and F7 refer to the supportive nature of their conversations, where feeling supported is both an outcome of their mentoring conversations and also a means of achieving other outcomes, such as building resilience and developing self-reliance in tackling issues that they faced (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002).

One purpose of mentoring in some contexts is that of acculturation, the process of helping new colleagues to engage with the routines, people and culture of the organisation. One participant (F5) identified the process of integration and acculturation as a significant aspect of her experiences:

> *'I started during COVID, when nobody could go near each other. So I feel like I was here for a year and I didn't really speak to that many people because of the situation. Now I'm trying to integrate a bit more, which I was really scared to do [before].' (F5)*

'…[my mentoring partners] are both really chatty, so they make you feel at ease really easily as well, which is kind of unusual for me...' (F5)

As a newcomer to the school, F5 initially felt isolated but her engagement in the mentoring programme helped to break down that sense of isolation and develop a sense of belonging in the whole school community, rather than feeling trapped in the confines of her classroom or department. Whilst it is particularly helpful for new colleagues, developing this sense of connectedness can benefit everyone and contribute to the overall wellbeing of the whole organisation:

'I think it's really beneficial for everyone, it's what we need: I think the job can be quite lonely sometimes, because you're just in your room on your own.' (F5)

F5 has identified one of the peculiarities inherent in teaching: the ongoing tension between the isolation and autonomy of one's own classroom set against the need to be able to work as part of a team and to engage in a shared vision and ethos. For F5 one of the most valuable outcomes of the mentoring programme was that it helped her to resolve this tension. She values the fact that she was pushed into talking with new people, with whom she then built a strong working relationship and friendship, and (echoing Kroll, 2016) she is in no doubt that the mentoring programme could afford other colleagues a similar sense of connectedness. For me, this is a fundamental aspect of my vision of a whole-school mentoring programme: the development of a support network that stretches across subject divides and is not reliant on the normal hierarchical roles encapsulated in departmental structures. Building connections across the staff body in order to foster collegiality and support well-being is inherent in the SPIDERWeB model.

My data shows a variety of conceptualisations of mentoring, with different participants offering their own understanding based on their own individual experiences of the SPIDERWeB mentoring programme. Some participants were able to draw on previous experiences of being mentored or of mentoring others, which informed their approach to the SPIDERWeB programme and influenced their expectations. Those participants with little or no previous experience of any mentoring activity were able to offer an interpretation of what the SPIDERWeB mentoring programme had meant to them. All participants understood mentoring to be a complex process that can fulfil a variety of purposes and operates across both the functional and affective dimensions of an individual's professional and personal identity. The overall consensus of my participants echoes much of the literature: mentoring is a non-judgemental, supportive relationship founded on trust that

offers opportunities for personal and professional development and supports personal and professional well-being.

4.2 Factors that affected engagement in, and outcomes of, the mentoring process

Participants were asked to consider what factors had helped them to engage successfully in the mentoring programme, and what factors had made it difficult (Fig.4.3). The main factors which caused barriers to a successful mentoring experience included concerns over workload and lack of protected time for mentoring meetings, and colleague absence, which hindered the development of an effective group dynamic. Conversely, factors which supported a positive mentoring experience included individual commitment and a positive disposition towards the mentoring process, which enabled the development of a strong group dynamic, and having time for mentoring meetings scheduled in the school calendar. Other factors which participants felt affected the quality of the mentoring experience included their choice of meeting space, the fact of being allocated to a group rather than choosing one's mentoring partners, and the potential influence of pre-existing friendships.

Factors that affected engagement in, and outcomes of, the mentoring process	
Circumstances in School	➢ *Issues of time and workload* ➢ *Organisational support*
Group Dynamic	➢ *Issues of engagement and commitment, and dispositions within the group* ➢ *Building the relationship; phases of the mentoring process* ➢ *Organising meetings and setting the 'right' tone – physical setting + refreshments; each meeting mirrors the overall mentoring process*
Allocated groups and productive struggle	➢ *Develop new working relationships* ➢ *Use of skills + needs audit to identify common interests that might aid mentoring relationship* ➢ *'Pushed out of comfort zone' and confront assumptions*
Issues of friendship	➢ *Tensions arising from an existing friendship* ➢ *Questions of honesty*

Fig.4.3 Factors that affected engagement in, and outcomes of, the mentoring process

4.2.1 Circumstances in School: Issues of time, workload and organisational support

Time, or time management, was a significant issue for all participants: a lack of time, or conflicting demands on their time and pressures of workload, were cited as the main barriers to their engagement in mentoring activity.

> *'I just feel it was quite a big frustration in terms of time…it almost seemed like it was a bolt on for some people because there was so much pressure elsewhere … it was just something else that seemed like it was taking up time, when actually time was really precious at that point…' (M1)*

'What made it difficult was the fact that we were swamped in our own work to actually give time to something else, that probably would have benefited us.' (M2)

'We would have met up more - I think we had Estyn around the point we'd arranged [a meeting], and we just couldn't because I was doing marking, M2 had something else. And so did F4. So that was a barrier: it was just time.' (F5)

These comments all allude to the lack of dedicated time for mentoring meetings and the difficulties that participants faced in trying to create an opportunity to meet. Directed meeting time had not been allocated for mentoring activity and high levels of staff absence meant that cover requests initially agreed by the SLT to facilitate arranging mentoring meetings during the working day could not be honoured. Colleagues who wished to continue their mentoring activity found themselves having to arrange this in their own time, which was increasingly difficult in the context of the cumulative pressures on workload caused by the unprecedented circumstances.

F5 sounds a note of regret that her group 'could have met up more', but an impending inspection meant that they had to forgo a meeting for the sake of responding to other demands on their time and attention. M1 and M2 both note with some irony that, had it been better established by this point, the mentoring programme could have been hugely beneficial in helping everyone to negotiate the difficulties of the situation. However, mentoring can be emotionally and mentally demanding (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004); it is understandable that for colleagues who are already feeling 'swamped' (M2), trying to arrange mentoring meetings simply became another demand on their time, adding to the pressures rather than offering a possible means to alleviating the burden. The experiences of my participants are not new; their comments echo Tynjälä et al. (2021) and Hobson et al. (2024), whose findings have also shown that issues of time and workload can compromise commitment to mentoring activity if they are not resolved.

Conversely, when it did become possible to schedule some protected time in the school calendar for mentoring meetings, this was identified as a key enabler for helping participants to maintain their commitment to the mentoring programme:

'…designated times are important, because it gives you that guaranteed time to meet.' (M1)

'I prefer set times, just because I think that if you're told, do it in your own time, then I think you would prioritize something else instead.' (M2)

'It helped when we were given time in the timetable … When that was what we were given to do, it meant that we could go and do it…' (F4)

'It's useful to have a designated time because it does give people that focus.' (F3)

These participants all identify that they found it helpful to have the mentoring time formally identified in the calendar. It meant that the mentoring sessions could not be disrupted by other, conflicting demands on their time. Having a clearly identified time removed the need for colleagues to negotiate with each other in order to find a mutually acceptable time to meet and it also prompted them to prioritise the mentoring meeting, and prepare for it, rather than allowing themselves to be distracted by other tasks.

The issues identified to do with time and workload are not uncommon: lack of time is one of the most commonly cited causes for a mentoring relationship to fail (Clutterbuck, 2004) and Burley and Pomphrey (2011) note that even scheduled mentoring meetings 'are often subsumed by other things' (p.106). However, the experiences of my participants show that such issues are less likely to arise if scheduled time for mentoring meetings can be identified formally on the school calendar. This offers some protection to mitigate against meetings being overtaken by other demands; it also implies a level of organisational support and recognition that validates the mentoring activity, which in turn will help those involved to feel that what they are doing is perceived by the SLT as having value (Hobson et al, 2024).

4.2.2 Group Dynamic

Developing a positive and effective group dynamic was found to be crucial to the success of the mentoring process. Participants noted that this relied not only on the engagement and commitment of all members of the group, but also their ability to establish a rapport and build a strong working relationship founded on trust and mutual respect (Hobson et al, 2024). Participants also noted the importance of setting the 'right' tone, both at the start of the relationship and also at the start of every meeting.

4.2.2 (i) Issues of engagement and commitment, and dispositions within the group

The levels of engagement and commitment shown by individuals and the relationships that then formed within the mentoring groups were identified as key factors in determining the success of the mentoring programme.

Two participants admitted that they had struggled to arrange any meetings with their groups. The main barriers that they cited were chronic absenteeism and a lack of willingness of some individuals to prioritise mentoring sessions, even when they were scheduled in the school calendar:

> *'On two occasions, there was a member of staff missing out of the three…And then on the third occasion, it was just a case of lots of other stuff going on in school that we just didn't have...you know, priorities went other ways…I'm going to add that I was available for all the meetings - it was the others that weren't available.' (F3)*

> *'…people would have something else that they had to go to or they'd forget…or something came up. So it just didn't happen…I don't think some people were taking it seriously...it was a case of, oh, well, I've got other stuff I need to do…' (F2).*

Commitment of all parties to, and respect for, the mentoring relationship is crucial for the mentoring group to work and achieve a positive mentoring experience (Kensington-Miller, 2011; Hands, Armstrong and Mitchell in Irby et al, 2020). Both F3 and F2 were clearly frustrated at the lack of commitment shown by other members of their groups. Ongoing absences and the unwillingness of some individuals to prioritise mentoring meetings made it difficult for the remainder of the group to sustain their own commitment to the mentoring programme and eventually these groups fell apart. F3's comment in particular carries an implied criticism of the lack of commitment that she perceives in the other members of her group. F3 acknowledges that, to some extent, the problem lay in the pressures of time and workload identified by other participants (section 4.2.1). However, her comment that she was available for meetings suggests a perception that, had they been fully committed to the process, her mentoring partners would have remembered about mentoring meetings and would have made them a priority notwithstanding any other calls on their time. This is also implied in F2's comment about whether or not people were taking the mentoring programme seriously.

Participation in the mentoring programme was voluntary: it is widely recognised that any form of professional development programme that is mandated may induce resentment and is therefore less effective than CPD opportunities that are voluntary (Kennedy, 2016; Kroll, 2017; Tynjälä et al, 2021). This is felt to be especially true of mentoring activity, where voluntary involvement is considered essential to securing ongoing commitment (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004). However, I wonder if making the school mentoring programme voluntary was in fact what contributed to the lack of commitment of some, and F2's sense that some people were not taking it seriously.

I firmly believe that mentoring relationships should be entered into voluntarily; however, it is also apparent from F2 and F3 that voluntary participation does not guarantee commitment. This carries several implications for practice in how mentoring programmes are implemented and managed: firstly, any training or preparation for a mentoring programme needs to stress the importance of commitment and the responsibility that each individual has for sustaining and developing the mentoring relationship (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002); secondly, times for mentoring meetings should be formally scheduled; thirdly, the programme coordinator needs to have some way of monitoring attendance and must be able to intervene if it seems that a group is in danger of failing due to lack of commitment (Hobson et al, 2024).

In contrast with F2 and F3, another participant (M2) noted that good attendance in his group was a key enabler in allowing his mentoring group to function effectively:

> *'…all three of us were in school for the majority of the year. So that obviously made it easier for us, whereas other groups probably had more staff off on a regular basis...' (M2)*

M2 acknowledges the difficulties faced by some groups and recognises that his group was fortunate not to have been affected by the levels of absence that other groups experienced. However, as F3 and F2 note, whilst good attendance enables the mentoring group to function on a practical level, the success of the mentoring relationship also depends on the willingness of each individual to engage in the mentoring process (Kroll, 2017; Tynjälä et al, 2021).

The notions of individual commitment and a disposition to engage with the mentoring process were identified by M2, F4 and F5 as key factors for a positive mentoring experience:

> *'I think it's something that you've got to buy into to be able to get the benefit from it massively. I think if you see that as a burden, then you're not going to see anything from it.' (M2)*

> *'I think with some groups, it's been difficult…I've noticed that other people just don't have the time to do it, or don't seem to want to bother if one person's dropped out...I feel sorry for those groups, because it's kind of gone dead for them...' (F4)*

> *'I think if everyone used it and did it, as much as [we did], I think it would have helped them a lot. I know quite a few people have had struggles with just meeting up generally, and busyness and schedules and stuff. But I think…if everyone managed to meet up and have that time to do it, I think it'd be really beneficial…' (F5)*

These participants were all in the same group (group A) and their comments reflect their shared ethos of commitment, intentional engagement and mutual respect. For M2, an individual's approach to the mentoring process will inevitably shape their experience: the more positive one's attitude, the more positive the outcomes. F4's comment suggests compassion and an acknowledgement of the issues faced by some groups, but it also implies a sense of pride in the success of her own group. F5's comment reflects her enthusiasm for the mentoring programme: she can envisage a potential benefit for the whole organisation if colleagues were to engage more positively in it.

Each member of this group recognises the need to 'buy in' (M2) to the process and to be prepared to give something of themselves (Kroll, 2017) in order to reap any benefit. Their comments also allude to a level of altruism that prevailed in this group: each individual was motivated not only by the potential benefits to their own development, but also by a genuine desire to support each other in what they perceived as a collaborative learning journey (Kroll, 2017).

However, these comments also carry an implied criticism of those individuals who did not manage to engage as positively with their respective groups. Whilst M2, F4 and F5 acknowledge the issues to do with time, workload and commitment which overwhelmed other groups, their sympathy for those groups is limited: after all, their group was also facing many of those difficulties and yet they managed to persevere and build a strong group dynamic premised on each individual making an intentional commitment to the mentoring process. This echoes Clutterbuck (2004), who notes that individuals who are truly invested in the mentoring relationship will find ways of working around any difficulties that arise.

In the second phase of the mentoring programme, both F4 and F7 identified that the disposition of the third person in their group tested the resilience of their group dynamic:

> *'I did find that perhaps someone within the group thought that they were there to tell others within the group, rather than be mentored...There was a hierarchy within that group. But it didn't necessarily reflect the roles and responsibilities of the people.' (F7)*

> *'…there was one person, I'm not really sure if they wanted to do the mentoring, or they wanted to be a mentor. And we were not equal in that sense. Because despite the fact that they probably did have things that we were contributing towards them, it always seemed that they didn't particularly want any advice. Which I know you kind of take with a pinch of salt, but it doesn't make the dynamics very easy.' (F4)*

F7 and F4 found that the disposition of the third member of their group to perceive himself more as mentor than as mentee made some conversations unnecessarily difficult as it led to a sense of 'hierarchy within the group' (F7), which undermined any sense of equality or reciprocity in the mentoring relationship.

The experiences reported by all of these participants demonstrate that mentoring relationships rely on the 'right' combination of personalities, values and dispositions to flourish. Some groups fell apart very quickly, often due to a lack of motivation of one or more members of the group. Group A, however, flourished because of the commitment and engagement shown by each individual. Interestingly, F5 repeatedly referred to her group as 'the team', which suggests that she perceives a collective and interdependent identity that is greater than the sum of the individuals within the group. 'Team' suggests cohesion and shared goals, built on the mutual respect, trust and commitment of all its members. Rogers (2007) equates mentoring to teamwork with a focus on colleague support, and it would seem that Group A exemplifies this. The success of group A is attributable to their individual dispositions and willingness to enter into the mentoring process wholeheartedly - and to take individual and collective responsibility for making it work. Their positive attitude made for positive outcomes, which enabled them to grow and develop both as a group and as individuals.

4.2.2 (ii) Growing the Group: Building the relationship and the phases of the mentoring process

The early stage of the mentoring relationship is about establishing a rapport and developing trust (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). One participant (M1), who had some previous mentoring experience, was keen to stress the importance of what Kram (1983) terms the initiation phase, with its focus on building the relationship:

> *'…we started off getting to know each other, I think that was really important…'(M1)*

> *'I feel like in the job that we do relationships are probably the most important thing. So there was no point going into a mentor scheme without us knowing each other really well because [that] would benefit us both.' (M1)*

> *'So I could really unpick what would work well for her...And that's really difficult to do unless you know the personality you're working with…That was our start point…let's focus on this first and we'll really understand each other before we get into the more upskilling areas that we're both looking to do' (M1)*

'But I don't feel like we really got to that stage as much as we should have done.' (M1)

M1 identifies the need for mentoring partners to develop a good understanding of each other in order to establish a strong foundation from which the mentoring relationship can grow. This focus on building the relationship echoes his teaching philosophy: 'in the job that we do, relationship is probably the most important thing'. M1 is reluctant to shift the focus of the mentoring sessions towards that of skills development until he and his mentoring partner feel that they know each other 'really well'; however, he also realises that they failed to arrive at this point, because of his preoccupation with the need to understand each other. Kram's (1983) model identifies four stages in the development of the mentoring relationship – initiation, cultivation, separation, redefinition – which describe points on a continuum as mentoring partners progress from initial introductions through a period of interdependence, collaboration and growing confidence towards a reassertion of their individuality and independence. Building the relationship underpins the mentoring process, but the relationship will develop and deepen throughout the mentoring period as a result of the mentoring activity. Whilst it is important to give time to this crucial initiation phase, it is also important to allow the relationship to evolve according to the needs of the individuals concerned.

M1's comments indicate a desire to make the mentoring process 'work' for him and his mentoring partner. He recognises that building a positive relationship is a key enabler for a successful mentoring experience (Hudson, 2013) and highlights the importance of setting an appropriate tone and establishing a good rapport in the early stages of the mentoring cycle (Kram, 1983; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004).

4.2.2 (iii) Organising the mentoring meetings and setting the 'right' tone; each meeting is a microcosm of the whole process

The need to consider the influence of the physical setting on the tone of the meeting, and on the group dynamic within the meeting, was noted by several participants (n=8), who found that they could enjoy a more honest, productive discussion if they established a relaxed, informal tone at the outset (Clutterbuck, 2004). Most participants (n=10) chose either to find a 'neutral' space to meet, such as the staffroom or the library, or to take it in turns to host the meeting in their teaching rooms:

'We made a rota so that we used each other's rooms' (M5)

'We started doing them in our rooms. But then as the weather got nicer, it was definitely nicer to go outside and have the neutral space. Because I think sometimes when you go into someone else's classroom, it can be a bit like oh, this is their room…' (F5)

'It was nice…to meet on neutral ground…we met in the library or the staff room…[so] we didn't feel like you're stepping on someone else's turf. And it also meant that one person wasn't going, "I'm going to lead this meeting because you are in my space". So it did keep the conversation a bit more open, a bit more free.' (F3)

These participants all identify the desire to ensure fairness in the logistical planning so that no one person would feel either imposed upon and expected to assume responsibility for the group, or empowered to take the lead and exert authority over the group (Coleman & Glover, 2010). M5's group achieved this by agreeing a rota so that the same person did not host every meeting. F5's group initially also rotated their meetings around different rooms, but eventually they preferred, as did F3's group, to meet in an entirely neutral space that carried no sense of ownership which might place any sort of constraint on the tone of the meeting and on individuals' willingness to participate. F3 also identifies the need to avoid the risk of one person dominating the meeting because of their privileged position as host.

These participants recognised that the physical environment would have an impact on their group dynamic, and therefore on the success of their mentoring activity. Choosing to meet in a neutral space, or ensuring that all members of the group take turns to host the meeting, helped to ensure an equal balance of power, maintain the non-hierarchical nature of the peer group, and enable an 'open' and 'free' conversation.

Two participants, M3 and F5, noted that their mentoring meetings invariably included refreshments: they felt that this helped to create an informal tone and encouraged everyone to engage in the mentoring conversation:

'We went to F6's room, had a cup of tea, and she kindly gave us a biscuit.' (M3)

'That's the kind of environment it's like down there anyway. So we were lucky to have a nice room to do it in really…It's probably psychological as well. It's like being at home with a cup of tea and a biscuit. (M3)

'So it'd be like, right meeting tonight, guys? ...Yeah, bring a coffee… [CVT: Why?] …It's more relaxed, isn't it? It's not quite as official…It's, "Right, bring a coffee, we'll have a chat." It's more of a chat with guidance within it, because it's more relaxed and you can be more open.' (F5)

Unlike the other participants, M3 noted that his group (M3, F6 and one other) always used the same room because it ‘was a nice room’ and F6 was also able to provide refreshments. M3 acknowledges the psychological effect of F6’s hospitality, noting that this helped them to relax, as if they were ‘at home with a cup of tea and a biscuit’. This group had no concerns regarding any potential imbalance of power; they enjoyed the comfortable, welcoming environment that F6 was able to provide, recognising this as an enabling factor in helping them to engage easily in the mentoring conversation (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012).

F5’s group also chose to start their meetings with some refreshment: as they agreed the meeting time and place, someone would invariably say, ‘bring a coffee’. When asked why, F5 explained, ‘it’s more relaxed and you can be more open’. F5’s comments contain two key points. Firstly, this group felt it was important to adopt an informal, relaxed approach to their meetings because they recognised that this would help them to be more open and honest with each other in their discussions: adopting an informal approach helps the mentoring relationship to flourish (Clutterbuck, 2004). Secondly, this group identified that to ‘bring a coffee’ – in other words, to enjoy some sort of refreshment together – would help to achieve the relaxed tone that they wanted. (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012).

I was particularly interested in the fact that both of these groups chose to start their meetings with some refreshment. It reminds me of the training session when the mentoring groups met for the first time: the conversation was initially awkward but became much easier as people helped themselves to refreshments (see section 1.3.5). This strategy of using refreshments as an ice-breaker is a good example of the initiation phase of the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1983), when the mentoring partners need to find a way of making a connection which will enable them to establish a rapport and start building their relationship.

Kram (1983) refers to four phases of the relationship as it evolves through the mentoring process; however, F5’s comments would seem to suggest that the ‘initiation’ phase is important not just at the start of the whole process, but also at the start of every meeting. F5’s description of the discussion in each individual meeting as ‘natural flow' also reflects the organic nature of an effective mentoring relationship. It would seem logical that if every meeting needs to start with a brief ‘initiation phase’ then every meeting will also move through the other three phases as the focus of the discussion shifts to the main business of the meeting (‘cultivation’) and then draws to a conclusion (‘separation’). The end of the meeting marks the start of the ‘redefinition’ phase, when individuals have the opportunity to

reflect on their progress, their evolving relationship with their mentoring partners, and on what they need to do before the next meeting.

My data appears to suggest that each individual mentoring meeting will follow a sequence that mirrors the four phases in the evolution of the mentoring relationship. In other words, each meeting represents a microcosm of the whole mentoring process.

4.2.3 Allocated groups and productive struggle

A key feature of the SPIDERWeB model is that individuals are allocated to mentoring groups according to the information provided in the skills and needs audit. The only stipulation in determining the groups is that no individual should be placed in the same group as another member of their normal departmental team. This is to avoid any issues of hierarchy and to support the notion of the mentoring group as a neutral space.

Although some colleagues were initially wary of working with different people, most participants (n=10) found it beneficial to be placed in a group that was independent of any other working relationships, and identified this as an enabler in helping them to develop a productive mentoring relationship.

> *'I like the fact that I was just with different people that I wouldn't necessarily have spoken to. And I think that's useful.' (F4)*

> *'It was nice that you chose them, because you obviously knew what we'd put on our sheets. And you were able to identify people that wanted similar links...otherwise, I think people would just tend to stick in their departments, and then all the ones they sit with in the staff room. I'd rather it be chosen for me.' (F3)*

These participants recognised that they found themselves interacting with colleagues whom they would not normally speak to, and they enjoyed making these new connections. They also acknowledged that my overview of all the information from the skills and needs audit enabled me to identify possible links between colleagues, which those individuals would not have known of otherwise.

Some participants (n=5) talked of being 'pushed out of their comfort zone' to work with different people and felt that this was beneficial to the mentoring process:

> *'…some people will not push themselves out of their comfort zone, [but] I think that's really important. So if you choose your own groups, you might automatically gravitate towards people who are very similar to you, to the people you're most*

comfortable with. And actually, that's not beneficial. You need people who are different to you…' (M1)

'…I'm not sure people would put themselves out of their comfort zone if they got to choose their own groups. They would naturally go with [people who] speak to them all the time, whereas it does push you out of your comfort zone, doesn't it, speaking to people you wouldn't ordinarily speak to? Mentoring-wise I think that then works better?' (F3)

'I think if you chose your group, you would stay in the same circle, and that's what everyone would do. The whole point is that you are building those different relationships, and you are having those different perspectives, it would just turn into a chat if it was picking your own group.' (M2)

These participants felt that working with different people was beneficial and important because it made them confront their own assumptions and consider different perspectives. For all of them, there is a sense in which mentoring should not be too 'comfortable': the opportunity to build new relationships and explore the new ideas that they encountered was an important aspect of the mentoring process. Their comments support the notion that mentoring works best when mentoring partners do not know each other well, echoing Kram's (1983) assertion that an important aspect of mentoring is the process of co-constructing the mentoring relationship.

4.2.4 Issues of friendship

Befriending, where friendship is offered by the mentor to support the mentoring relationship, is cited as a necessary element in the mentoring process (Clutterbuck, 2004; Langelotz, 2013). It is also acknowledged that a close personal friendship may result from the mentoring process (Kram, 1983). However, friendship between mentor and mentee is not held to be a prerequisite to a successful mentoring relationship (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). Two participants expressed concerns about the potential for an existing friendship to impact the mentoring relationship.

4.2.4 (i) Tensions arising from an existing friendship

One participant identified that her pre-existing friendship with another member of her group had been a barrier to her ability to engage fully in the mentoring conversations.

'But I did find that because maybe I'm too friendly outside work with Jan (not her real name) *that I knew too much about her...Perhaps I would have had a different*

view of her if I worked with her, but didn't know her personal life as well as I did?' (F1)

I was not aware until I conducted the interview with F1 that she and Jan enjoyed a long-standing and close friendship outside school. Initially, F1 thought that this might be helpful, but she then found herself feeling uncomfortable, even anxious, as she struggled to resolve a sense of tension between her existing friendship and the mentoring relationships in her group. F1 felt that her knowledge of Jan's personal life influenced how she interpreted and responded to some of the comments that Jan made in the mentoring meetings; she was particularly fearful that she might unwittingly bring confidences from their friendship into the mentoring discussion.

F1 felt that this pre-existing friendship had affected the mentoring relationship, and recognised that the mentoring process could affect the friendship. She also voiced one other concern, that the third member of the group might perceive the closeness of the existing friendship and feel excluded from the conversation:

'…hopefully, it hasn't happened, but it could have been me and Jan and then [...] feels out on a limb...' (F1)

Because of her concerns, F1 was cautious about how much she actively engaged in the discussions, and consequently she felt that her own needs were not being met. She recognised that working in a group where there were no pre-existing friendships would have offered a more balanced and positive experience - not just for her, but for the other members of the group as well.

4.2.4 (ii) Questions of honesty

One participant (F5) was initially nervous about working with people whom she did not know but she identified that this had in fact helped her to engage more honestly with the mentoring process: she felt that any pre-existing friendship within the mentoring group could have been a barrier to the development of the mentoring relationship.

'[Given a choice] *I would just have stayed with who I know…like Ellen* (not her real name) *because I've known her since we trained together…and I don't think it would have gone as well. Because I know her really well, I don't necessarily then think I'd want to go, actually I really struggled with this…It's like telling your mum something and then thinking that she's going to be disappointed in you...*' *(F5)*

Firstly, F5 recognises that she would naturally choose to work with friends, or people whom she already knows, which would mean that she would not necessarily have the opportunity to engage with new ideas. Secondly, F5 understands the need for openness and honesty in the mentoring relationship and realises that she was helped to achieve this by a sense of anonymity in working with people whom she did not know and, crucially, who did not know her. She wants to be able to admit when she has found something difficult, but does not want to expose herself to the risk that her friends might 'be disappointed' in her, and that the friendship might be compromised as a result. Building a mentoring relationship with relative strangers enabled her to explore her practice and express her uncertainties without worrying about how her department colleagues or her friends might then perceive her.

Both F1 and F5 identify a need to separate their mentoring identity from their departmental or friendship identities. It is generally accepted that friendships may emerge from a successful mentoring relationship, but I have not managed to find any discussion in the literature about the impact of a pre-existing friendship on the mentoring process, or of the mentoring process on an existing friendship. The data from F1 and F5 would seem to indicate that not only is friendship 'not necessary' at the start of the process (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002, p.185), but in fact it can be detrimental both to the mentoring process and to the wellbeing of the individuals concerned.

4.3 Recognising the Essence of the SPIDERWeB Model

When the mentoring programme was launched, the triadic peer-group format was necessarily outlined to colleagues so that they understood how the programme would be organised. However, the rationale that underpins the SPIDERWeB model was not made explicit before or during the mentoring period, and so it was interesting to find that some participants highlighted certain aspects of their experiences and perceptions of the programme that echoed my own rationale in devising the model (Fig 4.4).

Recognising the Essence of the SPIDERWeB Model	
The value of the peer group	➢ *Empathy: understanding the demands of each other's role* ➢ *Openness, honesty and trust* ➢ *For and against 'designated' mentors*
The value of the triadic format	➢ *Develop breadth of discussion* ➢ *Mitigate risk of personality clash* ➢ *Different perspectives offer choice: demands individual agency*
The value of changing groups each year	➢ *Prevent stagnation* ➢ *'Fresh start' if the group is not working* ➢ *Building a network of support*
The value of interdisciplinary groups	➢ *Exposure to new perspectives and approaches: innovation* ➢ *Identify common issues* ➢ *Avoid department tensions*
The value of the 'GoTo' List	➢ *Finding help with specific issues* ➢ *Contributes to support network*

Fig.4.4: Recognising the essence of the SPIDERWeB Model

4.3.1 The value of the peer group

In the SPIDERWeB model, mentoring is conducted in peer groups: each member of the group has a dual role as both mentor and mentee and, as far as possible, individuals with leadership roles are not placed in the same group as a junior colleague. In general, participants liked this format, noting both practical and emotional benefits.

Two participants identified that working with their peer group offered a practical benefit in terms of empathy and understanding:

> *'I found that quite useful, because obviously, they can see things from your perspective if they're at the same level as you, but also from a different perspective, because they're a different subject area.' (F7)*

> *'I quite enjoyed it in terms of we're all at similar ages or of a similar position in terms of what we do in the school, but all have different subjects. So it was kind of interesting to see how they deal with things differently to how I would.' (M2)*

For both F7 and M2 the value of the peer group lay in the fact that their mentoring partners understood the demands of their role, because they were all fulfilling a similar function within the school hierarchy. However, the interdisciplinary nature of the mentoring groups offered fresh perspectives from other subject areas, which helped them to develop their own understanding and practice.

For several participants (n=6), the peer-group format helped to foster open and honest dialogue and collaboration within the mentoring group:

'It was nice the fact that there wasn't a line manager looking over us so you could speak freely in that sense' (F1)

'I felt that the group, everybody felt that they could express themselves freely, really without fear of anything being said elsewhere or of being made to look a fool or anything like that.' (M3)

'I liked it. I think there was less judgement. And I think sometimes…I can feel intimidated by people who are higher than me, just because I feel like I've got to reach a certain standard, or I've got to prove myself, I suppose. And I think because we were all around the same level, it's been quite nice that we can just have that discussion … [and] just be open and honest … Whilst if it was someone actually higher, I would have been a bit more held back, a bit more like, I don't want to say that, I might sound stupid...' (F5)

These participants all identify that the value of the peer group format lay in its non-hierarchical nature. For F1 and M3, the absence of more senior colleagues enabled them to 'speak freely' without fear of being judged; at the same time, their comments also imply trust in their group that the confidentiality of the mentoring conversation would be respected. F5 identifies her lack of confidence and her need to 'prove herself' when dealing with senior colleagues and she recognises that working with her peer group helped her to engage openly and honestly in the group discussion, without fear of 'sounding stupid'.

The overall consensus amongst these participants was that the peer-group format engendered collaboration, trust and honesty within the mentoring group, qualities that are key to the success of any mentoring relationship. However, the peer-group approach was challenged by HT2, who questioned how we could guarantee that the mentors in each group were 'qualified' for the role. He favoured a more directive approach where each group would have a member of the SLT to act as their designated mentor.

Most participants (n=11) were opposed to the idea of having a designated mentor, either from the SLT, or appointed by the SLT:

'No. No…if you deem someone a mentor, that makes them the hierarchy of your group straightaway and it defeats the purpose of what you're trying to do.' (M2)

'No, because I think if it's like that, … the judgment's back in, isn't it like you feel like someone's better than you? And that isn't what this is about. This is about guiding each other, … sharing good practice and what's worked for you and how you can help somebody with something that they don't feel as confident with. I think if there's a person that's specifically a mentor, that's… one upmanship and complete judgment.' (F5)

'There should not be a [designated] mentor or leader dishing out sage advice. Each person brings their own experiences and skills to share' (M4)

For M2 and F5 the idea of a designated mentor appointed by the SLT would introduce a hierarchy which would be detrimental to the group dynamic and would undermine the purpose of the mentoring programme. F5 identifies this as 'guiding each other' and 'sharing good practice' and notes that for this to be effective and supportive, any advice needs to be offered in a non-judgemental way; the implication of the SLT appointing a mentor to each group is that the individuals within the group have already been judged to be wanting. M4 echoes F5 in noting that the peer group structure recognises the skills and experience of ordinary classroom teachers: you do not have to be a member of the SLT in order to demonstrate good practice, or to have ideas and expertise that are worth sharing with colleagues.

On the other hand, one participant identified a potential benefit in choosing a 'designated mentor' who would be able to support the mentoring group, especially in the early stages of the mentoring programme:

'I think it depends on the people in the group. I think some of the groups … have a natural leader in amongst them who kind of controlled things. I think the group I was in, none of us were naturally comfortable leaders…You don't want someone who's going to take over...But I felt that we were kind of lacking in some direction, because we didn't have a natural leader or natural mentor in the group...' (F3)

F3 was aware that her group struggled to establish an effective mentoring relationship because none of them was willing to take the lead. For her group at the time, this was a disadvantage of the peer-group format. Whilst she did not want to be in a group where someone considered themself to be 'in charge', F3 recognises that the mentoring conversation needs to be managed proactively, and that this demands a level of confidence and assertiveness which she felt was missing in her group; F3 suggests that the presence of a formally designated mentor could help some groups to develop an effective group dynamic and to identify a clear sense of direction and purpose.

Bearing in mind the concerns expressed by M2 and F5 above, it is debatable as to whether any such mentor should be allocated from the SLT, or whether the mentoring coordinator should intervene and facilitate the mentoring discussions. In any case, F3 has identified an area for development as far as this mentoring programme is concerned: the programme coordinator needs to have a robust strategy for checking in with each group to identify

those groups who are working well and those groups who need some support (Hobson et al, 2024).

One participant (F4) was concerned at the assumption by HT2 that he needed to identify specific mentors who would then direct the mentees in their group to work on a particular focus. She felt that this approach ignored the range of skills and expertise available in the staff body and ignored the ability and willingness of staff to support colleagues in their skills development.

> *'I think there needs to be the trust that we know our own capabilities, and that we are being realistic with ourselves. And I think it will become evident within the triad…you're going to notice, if somebody said, '...I'm a wizard on Google Docs', and then you know more than them…But even then, is that going to be a bad thing? Because if you happen to know more than them, perhaps you can show them something. So you're still helping them.' (F4)*

The main issue that F4 raises here is one of trust and in doing so, she strikes at the heart of HT2's management philosophy: his wish to allocate designated mentors to each group carries an assumption that he needs to direct the development of individual members of staff. This approach denies colleagues the opportunity to identify and address their own individual concerns and development needs, and implies a lack of trust in the staff body and the ability of each individual to know where their respective strengths and weaknesses lie. F4 also questions whether it actually matters if someone finds that another member of their mentoring group is more skilled than they are in an area that they had identified as a strength in the skills audit. For her, what matters is how the group works through this situation to ensure that all members of the group still feel supported by and able to learn from each other.

Participants were generally not in favour of having designated mentors allocated to mentoring groups, although they recognised that some groups might benefit from nominating one member of the group to assume responsibility for organising and chairing mentoring meetings, at least in the early stages of the mentoring lifecycle. The main objection to having designated mentors appointed by the SLT was that this would introduce a hierarchy into the group, and thus undermine one of the core principles of the SPIDERWeB model - that it uses a peer-group format, which is by definition non-hierarchical, in order to build trust and foster collaboration and reciprocity in the mentoring process (Kroll, 2017).

4.3.2 The value of the triadic format

Traditionally, mentoring uses a dyadic format, where one mentor works with one mentee. The SPIDERWeB model uses a triadic format, where three people work together, sharing the roles of both mentor and mentee according to their individual strengths and needs. Most participants (n=9) liked the triadic format because it added a breadth to their discussions that they felt would have been missing had they been working in pairs.

> *'Well, nobody gets left behind...there's always somebody to speak to. And it's not that someone can kind of sit on the sidelines and just be left out.' (F4)*

> *'I felt that it worked, because you'd have two people perhaps giving different perspectives. And then you could choose and adapt or combine both of it really. Whereas if it's just one on one, it's fewer suggestions. So I think that did work, having three.' (F7)*

> *'I think because we kind of bounced ideas off each other. And everyone had an input. It wasn't like a discussion between two of them and one of us just sat there. Everyone did have an opinion and ideas. I think if there were just two of you, if I thought I had a good idea and just said it to that one person then I'd be like, "Yeah, that's great." But with three of us it was, "That was good...have you ever tried it this way?" …so then they could interject and bring a new perspective onto it. So I think the triad definitely works.' (F5)*

> *'I think it helps, because then you've got someone else's opinion on it as well … I think the more… advice that you can get on something, and a different perspective of it as well, would help you improve … because one to one you trust in that person fully, seeing whatever that person is saying as holy. So with that third person being there as well, it's definitely going to help in terms of going, "Oh, maybe that isn't the best way of doing it, this is a different way." So you've got different routes.' (M2)*

All of these participants highlight the fact that the presence of a third person simply adds another perspective. However, the significance of this added dimension seems to differ slightly from one participant to the next. For F4, the third person means that the group is more likely to function effectively: any potential personality clash between two people is mitigated by the presence of a third and yet the group is still small enough that nobody can hide and avoid taking part in the discussion. For F7, F5 and M2, the extra perspective offers a choice of routes to follow: the mentee can choose to follow one piece of advice or another, or to combine both and find a third way that suits the specific situation at the time. F5 feels that this breadth of perspectives brings a richness to the discussion: she felt that when she shared her ideas with only one other person, the idea might be acknowledged but not necessarily discussed and probed. When she worked in her mentoring triad, the

multiplicity of perspectives meant that a discussion ensued which allowed everyone to explore the idea from different angles – and everyone in the group could benefit from the insights gained as a result.

M2 makes two points. Firstly, exposure to a breadth of perspectives is beneficial for developing and improving one's practice: the more ideas you explore, the better it is for your professional development. Secondly, he notes the tendency that some mentees have in a dyadic mentoring relationship to take the mentor's word as 'holy' – in other words, to simply take the mentor's advice and act on it without necessarily considering whether there might be an alternative approach. Both M2 and F7 identify that the range of perspectives brings with it a choice of actions: the individual needs to weigh up each piece of advice and decide what is most useful to them in the circumstances. This puts the onus firmly on the individual to engage actively in the discussion, to evaluate the various options available and then to take responsibility for whatever course of action they choose to pursue - in other words, to exercise agency in their own development.

All of these participants felt that the triadic format offered them a richer mentoring experience than they would have had using a traditional dyadic structure. Not only did the triadic model offer a breadth of discussion and variety of perspectives and opinions, but the responsibility of evaluating a range of options also engendered a more active learning experience compared to the relative passivity inherent in a discipleship notion of traditional dyadic mentoring.

4.3.3 The value of changing groups each year

In the SPIDERWeB model, the timescale for each mentoring cycle is bounded by the duration of the academic year: the end of the summer term in July offers a natural 'separation' and 'redefinition' point as some staff move on to new schools or look forward to a change in roles or responsibilities. The mentoring cycle ceases in July and new groups are allocated in September for the new academic year. However, it has been noted that mentoring partners often decide to continue the mentoring relationship on an informal basis after the mentoring lifecycle has formally ended (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004). This notion is a key aspect of the SPIDERWeB model: the expectation is that individuals will maintain informal links with their previous mentoring groups after they move on to the next group, thus creating a network of knowledge and support that will underpin and enhance their personal and professional development.

Most participants (n=9) were very clear that the mentoring groups should change each year, either to prevent a sense of stagnation in the relationship or, in the case of one participant, to ensure that those who had experienced difficulties in their mentoring groups did not feel trapped in a group where the relationship was not working.

> *'I think I would probably say, jumble the groups up ... You might find that you perhaps didn't work as well with someone that you thought you would … you'd like the opportunity then to change to work with someone else different … And obviously, then, it can be a different focus and might need to tap into other people then for that different focus.' (F3)*

F3 understands that effective mentoring relies on establishing a good relationship and that some relationships work better than others; when the relationship is not working well, moving to a new group offers a fresh start (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). She also recognises that working with new people can be a prompt to re-evaluate one's expectations and objectives, which in turn is a prompt to explore different areas of expertise. F3's comment reflects disappointment in the failure of her group to establish an effective relationship but it also offers a note of optimism: for her, allowing people to move to a different group is not a negative reaction to a difficult situation but a positive solution that offers everyone fresh opportunities for development

The need to refresh one's ideas and avoid stagnation was cited by some participants (n=6) as a reason to change the mentoring groups regularly:

> *'…the point for me is that it's different people. I feel like if you've consistently got meetings throughout the year, I would hope that by the end of that year, you've walked your path together, you've learned what you need to learn from each other, and now it's time to go your separate ways…whereas if we stuck it out and kept with the same, then you're going to get too same-y.' (F4)*

> *'I think they do need to change regularly, otherwise you are going to get stuck in a bit of a rut…' (F7)*

> *'I think if I stayed in the same group, it would probably lose its impact. So personally, I think it's probably better to jumble things up and come out of a comfort zone, because sometimes it's easy, isn't it? Just to speak to the same people all the time, gossiping?' (M3)*

> *'Groups should be rotated to stop them becoming friendship cliques.' (M4)*

All of these comments acknowledge the inevitability that the mentoring relationship will eventually cease to be productive (Kram, 1983) as mentoring partners are gradually less

able to offer an appropriate level of both support and challenge (Daloz, 1986) to be of benefit to each other.

F4's comment identifies mentoring as a relationship that offers mutual support and development for everyone involved in the mentoring journey (Godden, Tregunna & Kutsyuruba, 2014); she also suggests that it is important to acknowledge when that particular journey has ended and the relationship is no longer useful (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002).

F4 and F7 both identify a need to change the mentoring groups regularly in order to avoid the risk of stagnation. This might manifest as the different individuals in the mentoring group adopting the ideas and practices of the others to the extent that they lose their individuality (F4), or the group might find itself stalling and unable to progress for a lack of fresh ideas (F7). These comments point to the need to plan for the 'separation' and 'redefinition' phases of the relationship as individual needs change over time to the point where the expertise within the group can no longer offer any fresh ideas to sustain the ongoing development of its members (Kram, 1983).

F4's comment suggests that the need to move on to a new mentoring partnership is in fact an indicator of a successful relationship: individuals need to move on because they 'have learned what they need to learn from each other'. Any discussion in the literature regarding the ending of the mentoring relationship seems to focus on the potential sense of loss and the need to manage this sensitively to avoid resentment (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004), whereas F4 seems to offer a more positive view of the separation phase, especially where it is planned into the mentoring lifecycle.

For M3 and M4 the risk of stagnation lies in the gradual evolution of the mentoring relationship into friendship (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002), at which point it becomes easy for the discussion to lose its developmental focus. In recognising his need to change groups and 'come out of a comfort zone', M3 acknowledges the success of his group but also understands that 'just to speak to the same people all the time' will not facilitate the sharing of fresh ideas; conversations that are 'easy' do not contain enough challenge to help him develop (Daloz, 1986). M4's expression 'friendship cliques' is interesting: whilst it acknowledges the notion of friendship as an outcome of mentoring, it also implies that this friendship could become detrimental to the group dynamic. 'Friendship clique' suggests something that is introspective and exclusive. For M4, the groups need to change regularly so that individual members of a group do not become so entrenched in their own 'togetherness' that they fail to engage effectively with others, thus undermining the

development of a cohesive and inclusive support network, which is the core aim of the SPIDERWeB model.

Some participants (n=5) identified that changing groups each year would not only help them to refresh their practice and avoid stagnation, but would also enable them to grow their support network across the school:

> *'I know that if I did need, let's say, to go and speak to [...] about [xxxx], well, I've got my relationship there now. And I could do that. But it would be helpful to move on to be with someone else...' (F4)*

> *'So if I then changed my triad maybe next year, and did it with another group of people it just widens the amount of people I know fairly well. And also, it widens my knowledge of them so if I did have an issue, I know who to go to.' (M1)*

In these comments, F4 and M1 both offer a positive view of the notion of changing the mentoring groups each year. F4 identifies that changing mentoring groups is not about moving away from a group that is no longer useful, rather it is about moving on to the next stage of the developmental journey. Moreover, moving to a new group does not preclude her maintaining a good relationship with her former mentoring partners: she knows that she can still talk to them whenever she wants. Both F4 and M1 recognise that moving to a new group simply adds to the variety of ideas that they are exposed to and adds to the number of colleagues whom they feel able to approach to ask for help or advice. M1 also adds that in building a rapport with other colleagues he will not only have a wider pool of contacts to draw on for support, but he will also develop an understanding of each individual and their areas of expertise; this means that he will be able to identify the best person to approach when he needs help.

Two participants (M2, F5), both from mentoring group A, wanted to stay in the same group, simply because they had enjoyed a very positive experience, although both participants acknowledge the subjectivity of their view:

> *'I like my group, but that's fine. That's the bias that I'd be coming on to this with. I'd kind of say that I like my group, therefore it continues. But other people might want to jumble theirs up. Probably if I had a bad group, I'd be saying the opposite…' (M2)*

> *'I'd like to stay in the same one. I don't know if they'll say the same about me. But…we've got the no judgment thing now…from a me point of view, I've liked working with them, and seeing their ideas.' (F5)*

For F5, the sense of a safe, non-judgmental space was particularly important. After her initial nervousness, she was relieved at how well her group worked together. Both F5 and M2 felt secure in this group and wary of the prospect of any change that might leave them feeling less positive. However, M2 also acknowledges that he feels fortunate in his group and that he would feel differently if his group had not managed to form such a positive group dynamic. He recognises the need to be able to change groups if the relationship is not working (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002).

There is a sense in these two comments of a friendship evolving out of the mentoring relationship (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002), and this not only informs M2's and F5's views of the mentoring process, it also underpins their desire to maintain the same group. Interestingly, both participants also commented in favour of having allocated groups, specifically so that individuals did not gravitate towards their friends but were made to confront new ideas (see section 4.2.3).

Although the rationale that underpins the SPIDERWeB model had not been made explicit, several participants identified unprompted that the essential aim of the model is to build a network of support that reaches across the whole staff body, and recognised that this is achieved by ensuring that mentoring groups change with each academic year. Limiting the mentoring lifecycle to the school year enables mentoring participants to plan for the end of the mentoring relationship, which should mitigate any feelings of loss and help to avoid resentment through the separation phase of the relationship. It also allows for a period of adjustment and redefinition to coincide with the end-of-year activity of allocating new timetables and roles in preparation for the start of the new academic year in September. Participants recognised that changing the mentoring groups regularly would offer a fresh start to groups where the mentoring relationship was not working well and would help to prevent stagnation or complacency in groups that might be in danger of becoming too comfortable. They also recognised that, as well as growing their individual support network, changing the mentoring groups helps to support creativity and innovation as individuals are exposed to fresh ideas with every mentoring cycle.

4.3.4 The value of interdisciplinary groups

The SPIDERWeB model is intentionally interdisciplinary in nature, with no two members of any mentoring group coming from the same department. This was done primarily to ensure the sense of a 'safe space', where individuals are able to explore their own developmental needs free from the constraints of existing departmental working relationships. The

interdisciplinary structure was also intended to foster collaboration and support across departmental divides.

All participants valued the opportunity to share ideas with different colleagues outside of their normal department teams and identified the interdisciplinary nature of the model as an important aspect of the mentoring programme.

> *'I like that kind of situation where you're talking to different people about work from different perspectives in different areas and different subjects, because that helps me.' (M2)*
>
> *'…it's getting you talking to people from other departments and seeing how things are done in different ways.' (F7)*
>
> *'…seeing different people's perspectives on things has been nice because you don't do it normally. You just talk about what you do…But we're all different aren't we? Everyone's got good ideas. It's just if you can't share them, then a good idea has not gone that far…As a department, we share resources and things, but it's nice to have a perspective from another subject.' (F5)*
>
> *'For me from a practical background, working with someone from a classroom, it's interesting to see how they deal with things, but I think it'd be an eye opener if they came to watch us and see how we deal with things as well down in a practical situation. Our relationships are different. And the way we speak to them [the pupils] is different and just the organisation of lessons is so different.' (F3)*

These participants enjoyed working with colleagues from other departments because it introduced them to a variety of perspectives which they might not otherwise have encountered. They identified that teachers from different subject areas offered different approaches to solving problems, informed by their specific subject knowledge and pedagogy. Sharing different ideas and understanding the approaches used in other departments enabled some individuals to adapt their practice and to adopt an approach that might seem obvious to a colleague from a different discipline but that was creative and innovative as far as their own subject was concerned.

The interdisciplinary nature of the mentoring groups not only allowed teachers to share different ideas, it also enabled them to know that many of the issues they faced were not specific to their own individual or departmental practice, but were issues that were being felt across multiple departments.

> *'…it's good that you're able to see that you're not isolated in some of the issues that you're experiencing. You're able to see that it's a whole school issue, which perhaps we need to address.' (F7)*

For F7, a key benefit of working with other departments was that it helped colleagues to know that they were not alone in dealing with some of the issues they faced. This can offer reassurance to the individuals experiencing those issues and, perhaps more importantly, it can also help to highlight if there is a wider problem that needs to be addressed as a whole-school concern.

Only one participant echoed my primary concern, that individuals would feel constrained by a perception (either conscious or unconscious) of an inherent departmental hierarchy if they were in a mentoring group with colleagues from the same department:

> *'I don't think it would work mentoring with people that you work closely with in school...It definitely works better being with people from departments that perhaps don't work quite so closely with me. So it's kind of less judgement...' (F3)*

F3 felt that working with colleagues from other departments helped her to feel more able to engage in an open and honest mentoring discussion. She felt that it would be difficult to build an effective mentoring relationship with someone from the same department, where any existing tensions in departmental relationships could impede the mentoring process. For F3 it was important to separate her mentoring identity from her departmental identity so that she could engage freely in the mentoring conversations away from the scrutiny of others in her department.

The interdisciplinary nature of the mentoring triads is a key feature of the SPIDERWeB model. It helps to foster collaborative working practices which can dispel feelings of isolation and which can enable individuals to explore their developmental needs without fear of this impacting, or being constrained by, the working relationships within their department team. Through sharing ideas with colleagues from different subject areas, individuals are able to develop new insights and approaches that can help them both to refresh their own practice and also to support innovation and improvement in their department.

4.3.5 The value of the 'GoTo' List

The 'GoTo' list is compiled from the information gathered in the skills and needs audit at the start of each mentoring cycle. It sits alongside the mentoring programme and its purpose is to indicate which colleagues are able to offer support in specific skills or areas of practice.

> *'I think that the 'Go to' is really good. I think that will be really helpful. Because especially if I had an issue with whatever, then I could go and look at the list, and think oh, that person will be good for that. I'll go and speak to that person. And I think that would work really well.' (M1)*

M1 recognises the 'GoTo' list as a useful resource to help him know where to go to find help for something specific; he realises that every time he approaches a different colleague for advice, it adds to his support network. In this way, the 'GoTo' list contributes to the organisational network of support that the SPIDERWeB model aims to develop.

The real power of the SPIDERWeB model, however, lies in the mixing of groups at the end of every mentoring cycle, which gradually builds connections across the whole staff body. In pointing towards people who can offer a 'quick fix' to a specific issue, the 'GoTo' list simply offers a shortcut to some of those connections. Thus, the GoTo list will help to reinforce the support network across the organisation but it will not build the support network as the strength of the network lies in the lasting relationships that the mentoring process fosters.

4.4 To summarise: Key points from the findings

As fig. 4.1 shows, participants' responses covered three broad themes: conceptualisations of mentoring, factors that affect engagement in the mentoring process, and recognising the essence of the SPIDERWeB model.

Participants expressed a clear sense of what they perceived as the nature and purpose of mentoring, which they identified as a reflective process that offers a means to self-help, where the value of the mentoring conversation lies in the opportunity to interrogate one's own practice. They were clear that mentoring should not be used as a management tool to drive an organisational agenda, but should be focused on supporting the professional and personal development of the individual. Mentoring can support the acculturation of new colleagues, foster a sense of cohesion across the staff body, and contribute to individual and organisational well-being.

All participants cited issues to do with time and workload as key factors impacting their engagement in the mentoring process; they also noted that individual commitment and a disposition to engage fully in all aspects of the mentoring activity were crucial to the success of the mentoring relationship. Setting the right tone for the meeting was important: several participants found that sharing refreshments helped to develop an open and honest conversation. Participants also noted a benefit in working with new people: existing friendships were found to be potentially detrimental to the mentoring relationship and there was recognition that mentoring was more effective when it involved working with people who could offer different perspectives to challenge one's own thinking.

Although it had not been made explicit, participants identified several key features of the SPIDERWeB model that they felt had enhanced the mentoring experience. They welcomed the absence of hierarchy and non-judgemental ethos afforded by the peer-group format and they valued the triadic format for the breadth of discussion and diversity of perspectives that it offered. Participants enjoyed the interdisciplinary nature of the groups as it offered them insights into different pedagogical approaches and opportunities to share new ideas, but also noted the value of changing groups each year in order to extend their support networks.

An overview of the mentoring programme and the key enablers, barriers and benefits identified by participants is provided in Appendix M.

As F5 noted, teaching is a lonely job that does not afford the opportunities for impromptu conversations about the work that other professional environments offer. Mentoring meetings gave colleagues that opportunity – to share ideas and support each other in honing their professional skills.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

The aim of my research was to evaluate the feasibility of the SPIDERWeB model as a basis for building a school-wide peer-mentoring programme to support teachers' professional and personal development throughout all stages of their careers.

To achieve this aim, my first objective was to identify how mentoring is currently used in educational settings and what is known about the value of mentoring for teachers' ongoing development beyond the early career phase. This information is presented in my literature review, which identifies that, in the UK, mentoring is rarely used to support teachers' CPD beyond the early career phase, despite a consensus that mentoring offers an effective means of supporting an individual's personal and professional development and has been shown to be more cost-effective than externally-sourced training. This contrasts with the situation in Finland, where peer-group mentoring is embedded in the educational system as the primary source of professional support and development.

My field research, in the form of a case study, was designed to address the second and third objectives, that is, to explore how teachers' understanding and expectations of the mentoring process developed through their participation in a peer-mentoring triad, and to ascertain what benefits (if any) experienced teachers perceive from participating in a triadic peer-mentoring programme, and to what extent they feel it can enhance their personal and professional development. These issues have been considered in detail in chapter 4; a summary of the key findings is presented in section 5.1 below as I provide responses to my research questions.

My final objective, to critically assess the evidence and make recommendations concerning the possible application of the SPIDERWeB model in school, is addressed in my response to research question no.4 and also sections 5.2 and 5.3 where I consider the implications that my study has for theory, policy and practice.

In sections 5.4 and 5.5, I note the limitations of my study and offer recommendations for further research. The chapter concludes with some personal reflections on my own journey through this study.

5.1 Response to Research Questions

5.1.1 How do teachers' understanding and expectations of the mentoring process develop through their participation in a peer-mentoring triad?

For most participants, their understanding and expectations of the mentoring process were informed initially by their experiences of being mentored as trainee or beginner teachers (M2; M3; F4), or of mentoring trainees during their ITE school-based practicum (M1; M4; M5; F5). This form of mentoring is traditionally dyadic and often more directive than collaborative: the mentor expects and is expected to impart their knowledge and expertise to ensure the mentee acquires the necessary skills to achieve QTS. In contrast, the SPIDERWeB model, with its triadic, peer-group format, fosters a more collaborative approach based on the sharing of ideas and experiences. Following their participation in the SPIDERWeB mentoring programme most participants reported a more layered understanding of the mentoring process, recognising the multifaceted and complex nature of the mentoring relationship.

From their experiences, participants identified three functions of mentoring: (i) a developmental function whereby individuals were able to develop their skills, knowledge and expertise through the balance of support and challenge provided in the mentoring conversation; (ii) a task-orientated function which offered individuals specific solutions to specific problems; (iii) a well-being function which included the integration and acculturation of new members of staff, as well as supporting the emotional and mental well-being of individuals during a period of high challenge and uncertainty in the life of the school. Participants identified that the mentoring process involved elements of all three functions, with each function assuming greater or lesser significance at any given time, according to individual need and organisational circumstances.

Initially, some participants (F2 in particular) had looked to the mentoring process to help them identify answers to specific problems; however, by the end of the mentoring period, most participants identified that the main purpose of mentoring was to support their individual, long-term development and that this would happen not by looking for answers, but by exploring questions (eg M1; M2; F4): the role of the mentor is not to tell, but to ask questions that challenge and empower the mentee to interrogate their assumptions. Answers offer a short-term fix to a problem, but they do not offer anything new; questions invite you to consider what is not yet known and thus point forwards to future possibilities (Gaarder, 1997). Moreover, some participants (F1; F5) identified that, contrary to their

expectations, this process of exploration was easier and more productive when done with relative strangers than with friends; they identified that mentoring is not the same as friendship, although the bonds of a strong, supportive mentoring relationship may translate to friendship after the mentoring relationship has ended. The question of friendship in mentoring will be discussed in more detail in section 5.2: Implications for Theory.

My case study shows that through their participation in a peer-mentoring triad, these teachers' understanding and expectations of the mentoring process developed from the traditional dyadic notion of knowledge-transmission achieved through a hierarchical relationship towards a more nuanced understanding of mentoring as a complex balance of support and challenge in order to secure an individual's professional and personal development and well-being.

5.1.2 What value does the triadic peer-mentoring process offer experienced teachers for their own personal and professional development?

- How did the mentoring process influence the practice of experienced teachers?
- What challenges did these teachers encounter in the mentoring process?
- What opportunities did it offer them?

During the first phase of the field research, the school was dealing with exceptionally challenging circumstances caused by the impact of COVID-19, which led to high levels of staff absence, and by the effect of being in Special Measures, with the additional workload and regime of termly inspections that this entails. Under such circumstances, the priority for many staff was to safeguard their emotional and mental well-being, rather than to look for ways to develop their professional practice.

For most participants, the greatest value in the mentoring process, both during this period and in the second phase of field research, was in the opportunity to share concerns and seek support in dealing with day-to-day issues that they encountered: they valued the opportunity to have an open and honest discussion in a safe space without fear of feeling judged (eg M3; M5; F7). For one colleague (F2), the mentoring programme offered a means to seek short term task-oriented support, where she could ask her mentoring group for specific advice on how to complete a particular task. A few participants identified areas where they felt the mentoring programme had contributed to their practice, and were able to cite specific examples of strategies that they had implemented as a direct result of a

mentoring conversation (M2; F4; F5). One participant, for example, changed her approach to behaviour management in her classroom (F5). This not only helped her to improve her own classroom practice, it also influenced the approach she used in supporting a trainee in her department.

The main challenges that the participants encountered were those caused by the circumstances in school at the time, where workload and colleague absence made it difficult for some groups to meet (F2; F3). Few participants identified any challenges within the mentoring process: most mentoring groups developed a strong group dynamic and worked well to achieve a supportive, empathetic mentoring relationship. However, three areas of challenge stand out for me:

(*a) The mismatch in commitment and expectations between different members of the group*

The two mentoring groups that failed in phase one failed partly because of ongoing staff absence, but partly also because there was a mismatch between individual members of each group regarding their commitment to, or expectations of, the mentoring process and the other members of their mentoring group. One participant (F2) felt that some members of her group might not have been 'taking it seriously' as they failed to commit to meetings; however, she also expected the mentoring process to provide 'quick-fix' solutions to specific concerns, which the other members of her group were not able to provide. The other participant whose group failed (F3) noted that she 'was available for all the meetings', implying that others in her group were unable or unwilling to make the same level of commitment.

(b) The tension between mentorship and friendship

Two participants (F1; F5) noted concerns at the potential impact of an existing friendship on the cohesion of the mentoring groups. For F1, this tension was real: she enjoyed a close friendship with another member of her group and was concerned (i) that the mentoring relationship might cause tensions in the friendship, and (ii) that the friendship might impact on the third member of the group and unwittingly cause this individual to feel uncomfortable.

This is discussed in more detail in section 5.2: Implications for Theory.

(*c) How individuals perceived themselves – as mentors or as mentees, or both*

The triadic peer group format was premised on the idea that all members of the group would find themselves acting variously as both mentor and as mentee. In the groups that worked well (eg M2, F4, F5), all members of the group embraced this notion and managed to take it in turns to mentor and to be mentored. However, it was noted that some individuals struggled to manage both aspects and identified strongly as either mentee or mentor, but not both. One participant (F1) admitted that a lack of confidence meant that she found it hard to see herself as a mentor, and realised that she had not benefitted as much from the mentoring conversations as her more confident colleagues. In another group, F7 and F4 commented that the third member of their group 'thought that they were there to tell others…rather than be mentored'. This lack of reciprocity was frustrating for F4 and F7, who noted an adverse impact on the group dynamic and unnecessary tensions in some conversations. This echoes Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012), who warned of the tendency for one individual to dominate if they felt that they had a particular level of expertise.

My case study shows that, in general, the triadic peer-mentoring process offered a supportive, non-judgemental environment within which participants could share ideas and explore a variety of approaches to issues that they encountered. However, most participants felt that, at this point in time, the general situation in school was not stable enough to enable colleagues to focus as much as they might like on addressing their own individual professional development needs. Nevertheless, most participants agreed that the triadic peer-mentoring process proposed in the SPIDERWeB model offered a good foundation for establishing strong working relationships and building a sense of stability and cohesion across the staff body; in the short term this would support staff well-being and eventually would provide a space for staff to explore and address their ongoing developmental needs.

5.1.3 Based on the evidence gathered, to what extent is the SPIDERWeB model suitable for developing a school-wide mentoring network?

The SPIDERWeB model proposes a triadic peer-group structure for a school-wide mentoring programme. The aim of the model is to foster collaboration between colleagues from different disciplines and develop a network of support which extends throughout the school.

The SPIDERWeB model has 7 areas of focus, as represented in the acronym: it offers Support, uses a Peer-group structure, fosters Interdisciplinary collaboration, has a Developmental focus, invites teachers to Explore new ideas and Reflect on their practice; through the establishment of a supportive culture it aids the Well-Being of the individual and the organisation.

At the time of the first phase of field research, the school was in Special Measures and was experiencing unprecedented levels of staff absence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: morale was low and stress levels due to workload were high. These were not the most conducive circumstances in which to implement a new mentoring programme, and some mentoring groups were unable to sustain their initial interest and commitment. The situation during the second phase of field research was more stable, although the school was still in special measures and some of the pressures caused by the ongoing impact of COVID-19 persisted. However, the mentoring groups formed during this phase of field research enjoyed more continuity: all the mentoring groups in this phase managed to sustain their mentoring activity throughout the designated mentoring period.

The model itself was not made explicit to participants before or during the study, yet most participants identified all of the seven elements of the SPIDERWeB model in their experiences of the mentoring process. Moreover, some participants also talked of growing a support network as a result of the connections made with colleagues across the school, thus identifying the vision and rationale that underpins my conceptualisation of the SPIDERWeB model. This will be discussed in more detail in section 5.2: Implications for Theory.

My case study shows that, despite the circumstantial difficulties, the SPIDERWeB model worked well in our school setting and that it offered a suitable model for developing a school-wide mentoring network. Two participants in phase one represented groups that failed, but even these participants felt that the model could work, identifying that the mentoring programme would have enjoyed greater success had the situation in school been easier. Overall, participants identified that the model offers a holistic approach to mentoring and supports not only the professional and personal development of teachers at all career stages, but also their personal and professional well-being.

5.1.4 To what extent do contextual factors impact on the effectiveness of a whole-school mentoring programme?

Participants identified several contextual factors that enabled or hindered their participation in the mentoring programme and therefore impacted on its effectiveness. These factors included issues concerning the composition and dynamic of the mentoring group, time and workload, and organisational support.

All participants identified that the quality of the relationship that developed within the mentoring group was key to the success of the mentoring process. Building an effective group dynamic and establishing a positive, non-judgemental tone in the meetings were important enablers. Participants felt that the non-hierarchical peer-group structure was a significant enabler to developing a supportive and trusting ethos in their groups, with several participants describing their groups as a 'safe space' where they felt able to talk honestly without worrying about how their comments might be perceived. For most participants, building an honest and trusting mentoring relationship was made easier by being allocated to groups and working with colleagues outside of their normal teams, whereas pre-existing friendships within a mentoring group were identified as a barrier to the mentoring relationship. Building an effective group dynamic required the commitment of all members of the group; ongoing staff absence and the failure of some individuals to commit to meetings was a significant barrier to the success of some groups.

Concerns over workload and time management were barriers to individuals' continued engagement in the mentoring programme. Organisational support in the form of allocating set times in the school calendar for mentoring meetings was identified as a key enabler, but pressures of workload remained a barrier in some instances and caused some individuals to miss mentoring meetings for the sake of responding to other demands on their time and energy.

5.2 Implications for Theory

My study contributes to existing mentoring theory in three ways:

1. It proposes an innovative model for building a whole-school mentoring programme to support teachers' CPD
2. Building on Kram's (1983) theory of the stages in the mentoring relationship, my study offers new insights into how the mentoring relationship is enacted

3. It contributes to the discussion concerning mentoring vis-à-vis friendship.

These areas are discussed in detail below.

5.2.1 It proposes an innovative model for building a whole-school mentoring programme to support teachers' CPD

The SPIDERWeB model is an innovative model for building a whole-school mentoring programme that supports teachers' continuing personal and professional development at all career stages from ITE through to mid- and late-career. My data shows that the triadic, peer-group structure combined with the interdisciplinary approach fosters a supportive, non-judgemental culture which enables colleagues to explore new ideas and address their own development needs. This approach to mentoring not only benefits individual staff but can also contribute to organisational improvement with the development over time of a school-wide network of support.

The following paragraphs consider the seven aspects of the SPIDERWeB model, explaining with reference to the data how each contributes to teachers' CPD.

S = Support

Participants identified support as a key function of mentoring (Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 2004); in the context of the study – ie the circumstances of the school at the time - support was a crucial aspect of the mentoring programme and all participants commented on the sense of feeling supported. 'Support' manifested in various ways: eg, as a 'safe space' to share concerns (M5), the encouragement to try new strategies but at the same time 'not being told what to do' (F7), getting help with specific tasks or plugging a knowledge gap (F2), or being helped as a newcomer to develop a sense of belonging (F5). Support operates on both a professional and a personal level; for some participants, personal support was more important at the time than professional development, but the point for them was that the mentoring process was driven by their individual needs and the needs of the group.

P = Peer Group

The strength of the peer group format is that it is 'a hierarchy-free learning zone' (Geeraerts et al, 2015, p.360). This was particularly important in a performative culture driven by the impact of post-inspection improvement plans. Participants noted and appreciated the fact

that the SLT were not involved in any of the mentoring groups as it ensured that the mentoring groups could develop a safe, supportive and non-judgemental group dynamic where participants felt able to 'speak freely' (F1) and 'without fear of anything being said anywhere else' (M2). Moreover, the peer group brought a practical benefit as participants recognised that their mentoring partners understood the demands of their role and so could suggest realistic approaches to problems. Participants agreed that the peer group fostered empathy, collaboration, honesty and trust, which are all key ingredients in a successful mentoring relationship (Clutterbuck, 2004; McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007).

I = Interdisciplinary

The intentionally interdisciplinary nature of the mentoring programme ensured that colleagues shared ideas across different subject areas and avoided any subliminal sense of hierarchy that might pertain between two colleagues from the same department. Participants valued the opportunity to share ideas with colleagues from other departments because the ensuing conversations brought them fresh insights into their own practice (eg M2, F7, F5) and offered a different lens through which to understand different situations, such as behavioural concerns or approaches to classroom and lesson organisation (F3). It also reduced feelings of isolation as it became clear that some issues were common across all departments; this in turn provided useful information that could be fed back to the SLT to inform school policy and development (F7). Participants noted that the interdisciplinary nature of their mentoring groups fostered collaboration and innovation; they identified it as a key aspect of the mentoring programme.

D = Developmental

Mentoring is, primarily, a developmental relationship (Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 2004), where individual development is achieved through a balance of targeted support and challenge (Daloz, 1986) in response to the needs of the individuals involved (eg Oberholzer & Boyle, 2024). Participants found that the mentoring process offered them both professional development, where their practice changed as a result of the mentoring conversations, and also personal development, where they noticed a difference in how they engaged with certain aspects of school life. For example, F4 and M2 both note that they developed more resilience to be able to find their own solutions to problems, which helped them to improve their practice and develop their sense of autonomy; F5 noted an impact on her practice not only as a classroom teacher, but also as an ITE mentor, which then led to a significant development in the practice of her trainee. The consensus of all participants

was that the mentoring process should be driven by the individual needs of those involved, not by the requirements of the post-inspection improvement plan or by the SLT's perceptions of what was needed. Moreover, participants identified that, by allowing mentoring groups to address individual concerns, many of the school development needs would also be addressed. This has implications for policy and practice.

E = Explore

Teachers' professional development involves a process of review and renewal of their practice (Day, 1999), in other words, teachers need to have time and opportunity to explore (and reflect on) their current practice in order to identify ways to develop and improve. In the SPIDERWeB model, this is achieved through the triadic peer-group format and by allocating participants to interdisciplinary groups, where they are intentionally required to collaborate with colleagues whom they do not know well.

Participants liked the triadic format because it brought a greater breadth of perspectives into the mentoring conversation than would be the case in a traditional dyadic model. This meant that participants had to consider and weigh up different possibilities for developing their practice, rather than relying solely on the perceived wisdom of one mentor (e.g. M2, F5, F7).

The interdisciplinary mentoring groups were determined by the information provided in the skills and needs audit. Participants valued the opportunity to make connections with 'different people that [they] wouldn't necessarily have spoken to' (F4). They recognised that the overview afforded by the skills audit enabled me to identify potential links between individuals that were not immediately obvious – 'you were able to identify people who wanted similar sorts of links' (F3); 'I didn't know that F5 was doing a Masters' (F4) – and identified that forging new links with different colleagues (who might not share the same perspective) pushed them to explore their practice in unexpected ways (M1, F4, F3, M2).

R = Reflect

The ability and opportunity to reflect on their practice is fundamental to teachers' ongoing development (Kelchtermans, 1993); mentoring is one strategy that fosters impactful reflective practice (Hudson, 2013; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021). Participants felt that the supportive, non-judgemental peer-group structure enabled mentoring conversations that were at the same time both empathetic and encouraged them to reflect critically on their

own practice: ‘I’ve looked at myself’ (F1). This reflection is achieved through ‘asking the right questions’, but not necessarily giving or expecting any answers (M1).

WeB = Well-Being

The SPIDERWeB model offers a holistic approach to mentoring: it is concerned with the professional and personal development and well-being of the individual, but it is also concerned with the development and well-being of the organisation as a whole. Ensuring that individuals are supported and able to express concerns in a safe, non-judgemental environment (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), have adequate and appropriate opportunities for reflection and development (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014) and that they feel valued and an integral part of the organisation (Bowman, 2014) all contribute to the well-being of the individual and consequently to the well-being of the organisation (Hobson, 2020). For all of my participants, well-being was a hugely important outcome of the mentoring process, especially given the circumstances in school during this period. F5 noted that ‘the job can be quite lonely sometimes’; engaging in the mentoring programme helped to alleviate that sense of isolation and helped all my participants to recognise that they were not alone. At the time of the study, improving their well-being was arguably more important for some participants than securing any sort of development in their professional practice – but that is the point of the SPIDERWeB model: it is designed to allow individuals to use the mentoring process as best suits their needs.

For me, the analogy of a school-wide mentoring programme with the concept of a spider’s web is intuitive: it encapsulates my mentoring values and my understanding of what ‘good’ mentoring involves.

A Spider’s Web is…

- flexible and elastic:
    - the web is irregular but strong, stretching across both fixed and flexing structures
    - the spaces between the threads are important
- constantly evolving:
    - new threads are spun to repair / reinforce
    - threads from one web might lead out and link to… perhaps another web?
- a “catch-all” -- but what is caught is then dealt with

- not always easy to see:
    - tricks of the light make webs more or less visible, but they are still there; they still have structure and function even if they are not immediately obvious.

The Spider's Web Model is intended as a strong, supportive safety-net, which enhances the learning culture and well-being of the whole organisation.

5.2.2 Building on Kram's (1983) theory of the stages in the mentoring relationship, my study offers new insights into how the mentoring relationship is enacted

Kram (1983) identifies four phases in the development of the mentoring relationship: initiation, cultivation, separation, redefinition, which are explained briefly in Fig 5.1 below:

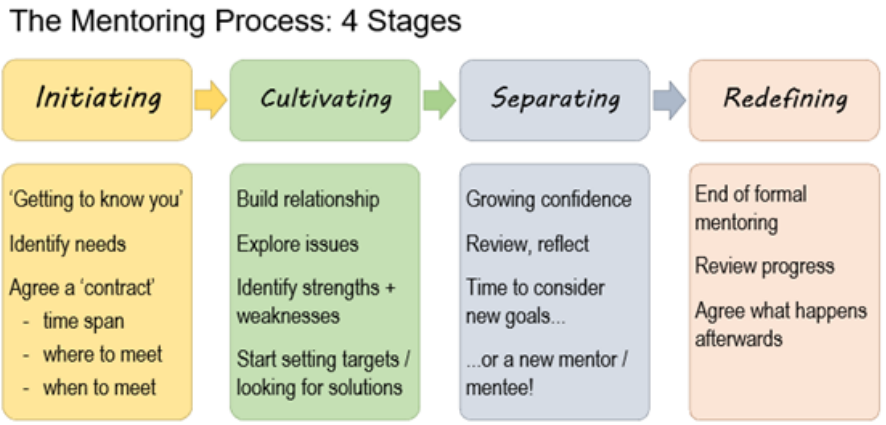

Fig.5.1 Phases of the Mentor Relationship (adapted from Kram,1983)

The initiation phase is critical (Cranwell-Ward, Bossons & Gover, 2004) as it sets the tone for how the mentoring relationship will be played out. My participants identified that setting the right tone for each meeting was important, and in most cases this was achieved by considering where to meet (Pask & Joy, 2007; Coleman & Glover, 2010), with some groups choosing to find a 'neutral' space (F5; F3) and some groups using their teaching rooms on rotation so that each member of the group in turn enjoyed the privilege and responsibility of hosting the meeting (M5). However, I was particularly struck by two groups (F5; M3) who also insisted that every meeting started with some refreshment, echoing Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012), because 'it's more relaxed and you can be more open' (F5). Moreover, F5 also described how her group's meeting would invariably start with an informal 'How's

your day been?' chat, before settling down to the main business of the meeting. This pattern at the start of every meeting of finding the right setting, sharing refreshment, and taking time to 'get to know' each other again mirrors the activity typical of the initiation phase at the very start of the relationship.

F5 talks about the 'natural flow' of the mentoring conversations as her group allowed the conversation to evolve from the initial ice-breaker into something more focused as they turned their attention to the issues to be discussed in the meeting. This mirrors the 'cultivation' phase of the relationship. Based on this data, which I would argue offers evidence that the first two phases of the relationship are reflected in the natural structure of each mentoring meeting, I would suggest that the 'separation' and 'redefinition' phases might also be identifiable in each meeting. I would suggest that the conversation would naturally shift again towards the end of the meeting, as the group review the main points of their discussion and prepare to draw the meeting to a close (the 'separation' phase); after the meeting has ended, each person will, I suspect, take time to reflect individually on the meeting and on their own progress, in other words, to redefine their current reality as they start to anticipate the next meeting.

From observations made by my participants I have identified that the natural progression of each mentoring meeting appears to mirror the progression through the lifespan of the mentoring relationship. Just as it is important to consider carefully how the stages of the mentoring relationship are managed (Kram, 1983; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002), these observations would suggest that it is also important to consider how individual meetings are planned and conducted; it is interesting that most of my participants had in fact identified the need to consider at least the setting for the meeting and the tone that they wished to establish. This has implications for mentoring practice and for the nature of the training offered to mentors (and mentees), and is a potential area for further research.

5.2.3 It contributes to the discussion concerning mentoring vis-à-vis friendship.

My study supports the consensus that mentoring involves an element of befriending, but that this is not the same as friendship. It also offers clear evidence that effective mentoring relationships develop between individuals who are relative strangers to each other at the start of the process and that the mentoring relationship evolves and deepens as they get to know each other better; in some cases this evolves into friendship. Whilst it is accepted that a lasting friendship may grow out of a mentoring relationship (Daloz, 1986), there is very little research evidence about the impact of existing friendships on the mentoring

process. My data would appear to suggest that the presence of an existing friendship is in fact detrimental to the development of the mentoring relationship. In the following paragraphs, drawing on Aristotelian views of friendship, I offer some possible explanations for this.

When I formed the mentoring groups I endeavoured to ensure that each group was made up of individuals from different departments. This was to avoid any sense of hierarchy and to encourage individuals to start building an interdisciplinary support network by collaborating with colleagues whom they did not necessarily know. Several participants acknowledged that, given a choice of mentoring partners, they would have naturally chosen to work with their friends, but they realised that mentoring meetings then might not have been very productive! Mentoring is a developmental relationship that evolves over time (Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 2004); an effective mentoring relationship does not rely on the mentoring partners knowing each other beforehand, but the relationship may continue in some form after the mentoring has formally ended (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). This is borne out by my data, where participants who were relative strangers to each other at the start of the mentoring process reported that they had formed a strong bond with others in their group and had enjoyed a productive and supportive mentoring experience. In some cases, participants also reported that they had formed friendships with the other members of their mentoring group, friendships which continued after the end of the formal mentoring period.

Aristotle distinguishes between ‘character’ (or ‘genuine’) friendships that have an intrinsic value, where the friends value each other for who they are in themselves, and friendships that have an extrinsic value and utilitarian function, where the friendship is an association that develops because it brings some sort of advantage to one or other of those involved (Cooper, 1977; Kristjánsson, 2020). Utilitarian friendship is asymmetric: the benefactor does not benefit directly from the relationship. This is comparable to the notion of befriending in mentoring situations. At the start of the relationship, the mentor may offer, and the mentee may accept, friendship in the form of befriending, but this is not the same as a deep and long-lasting (genuine) friendship - although this may develop eventually. I would argue that befriending, or a utilitarian form of friendship, may occur at the start of, and during a mentoring relationship, but it is unlikely to be an outcome. Conversely, genuine character friendships are long-lasting, reciprocal and developed over time as a result of deepening trust and mutual esteem. This type of friendship is widely acknowledged to be a possible outcome of a successful mentoring partnership (eg Daloz, 1986; Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, 2009).

My data suggests, however, that the presence of an existing friendship within a newly-formed mentoring group is problematic. This echoes the findings of Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) and Tynjälä et al. (2021). The question is, why? My participants initially had hoped to be in groups with people whom they already knew and with whom they felt comfortable; one participant was initially pleased to find herself in the same group as a close friend. They all expected to find it easier to work with their friends than with relative strangers. However, in reality this proved not to be the case: the participant who was in the same group as her friend found this created an emotional tension between the friendship and the mentoring dynamic that she struggled to resolve, and other participants noted, with some surprise, that they were relieved not to have been with their friends. I would suggest that the answer to this lies in Aristotle's distinction between different forms of friendship.

Character friendship, developed over time and based on the mutual esteem that results from each person's knowledge and understanding of the other, is uniquely and fully developed; it is 'complete' (Kristjánsson, 2020, p.351). This means that it is not possible to add more to this relationship – it is already full. However, it is possible to take away from it – in other words, to undermine it in some way. And this might happen if a different dimension is introduced, such as a mentoring dynamic, which not only introduces a need for a different kind of knowledge and understanding into the relationship, but also potentially introduces an element of hierarchy, depending on how the mentor-mentee relationship is worked out.

Mentoring may be likened to a journey (Daloz, 1986), where the mentoring relationship deepens over time as the mentoring partners support each other on their developmental path. In this respect, the mentoring relationship follows a similar path to that of an evolving character friendship. However, mentoring requires probing and reflecting in order to achieve its developmental aims. The existence of a prior friendship between mentoring partners risks overloading the mentoring partnership in its early stages with too much knowledge of each other, which may prevent the mentoring relationship from developing successfully: if both parties already feel that they know each other well, they are less likely to probe and challenge the other's ideas, and are more likely to make assumptions about the other's strengths and needs.

Moreover, if character friendship resides in deep knowledge of the other, this means that each party will also be aware of how much knowledge the other holds about them, which can create a sense of vulnerability. As one participant (F5) put it, 'You always want your

friends to think well of you.' In other words, character friendship is based on mutual esteem. An effective mentoring relationship relies on the ability of both parties to be open and honest with each other and to share their vulnerabilities and concerns (Kroll, 2017). However, the level of honesty, or rather, what each individual chooses to be honest about, depends on the relationship and the situation; mentoring is focused on professional and personal development, which requires the individual to identify and address perceived areas of weakness in their practice. F5 senses that, if friendship is based on esteem, then admitting to a perceived weakness risks diminishing the esteem in which you are held, which risks undermining the friendship: once you are up on a pedestal, the only way left to you is down. For this reason, she found herself wanting to maintain a distinction between her mentoring group and her existing friendships, although she (like the rest of her group) did identify that a strong bond of friendship had emerged from the very successful mentoring relationship that they built.

The consensus of my participants is that mentorship is not to be equated with friendship, that successful mentorship may lead to a close and lasting friendship, but that it is unlikely to work the other way round. This is an area that is not much considered in the current literature and where there is potential for further research.

5.3 Implications for Policy and Practice

My study broadly supports national policy concerning the design and provision of CPD opportunities in schools, but it also carries some implications for policy, especially at a local level, and for organisational and individual practice. In order to provide some context, this section starts with a consideration of current guidance concerning CPD opportunities, before I set out the implications for policy and practice that I have identified in my study.

The first four of the Standards for Teachers' Professional Development (DfE, 2016) state that teachers' professional development should:

> *'1… have a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes;*
> *2… be underpinned by robust evidence and expertise;*
> *3… include collaboration and expert challenge;*
> *4… be sustained over time…' (p.6)*

The SPIDERWeB mentoring model supports all of these standards. Firstly, participants found that the mentoring process generated different ideas to help them refresh their

classroom practice, which had a positive impact on pupil engagement and attainment. Secondly, the mentoring process is evidence-based to the extent that individuals are required to engage in a reflective cycle, drawing on the expertise of their mentors to help them analyse their current practice in order to understand their strengths and build the skills and knowledge that will support their ongoing development. Thirdly, the mentoring programme fosters collaboration and collegiality, and finally, each mentoring cycle is intended to be sustained over the course of the academic year.

Teachers are required to take responsibility for ensuring their own ongoing professional development (DfE, 2011; Welsh Government, 2019). In order to do so, teachers have to be able to identify their strengths and areas for improvement, and must then be given time to address the developmental needs that they have identified. In reality, most of the CPD provision in schools is delivered through INSET days, when the agenda is set by the school leadership, driven by school priorities rather than individual needs. This begs the question of whom the CPD provision is for. The participants in my study felt strongly that CPD opportunities should be focused primarily on addressing individual developmental needs rather than organisational concerns, noting that helping individuals to develop their practice will contribute to whole-school development. This echoes the guidance, which recommends that CPD activities 'are designed around individual teachers' existing experience, knowledge and needs' (DfE, 2016, p.7).

Several participants noted that the INSET determined by the SLT often ignored not only the needs of some teachers but also the expertise of others. Consequently, those teachers whose needs are ignored will continue with an area of weakness in their practice that, until it is addressed, will hinder any other attempts to develop and improve – and that is ultimately detrimental to the pupils and the organisation. In addition, those teachers whose expertise is not recognised may be less likely to engage fully in the training that is provided: they will feel undervalued and undermined, especially if it becomes apparent that their knowledge and experience in a given area is equal to, or greater than, that of a training provider.

When they adopt a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to CPD and impose INSET that is delivered by an external provider, school leaders push teachers towards becoming passive consumers of training rather than being actively engaged in developing their professional practice (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014). This effectively absolves staff of any responsibility for their own development, which is contrary to the expectation set out in the teachers standards (DfE, 2011; Welsh Government, 2019). DfE (2016) guidance recognises that

external providers can offer a fresh perspective that challenge organisational assumptions; however, it also recommends that any training provision includes the use of both peer-collaboration and mentoring to facilitate problem-solving and offer appropriate support and challenge.

The fifth standard for teachers' professional development states that CPD 'must be prioritised by school leadership' (DfE, 2016, p.6). School leaders are required to understand and support the development needs of all their staff. This means that they should allocate time and other resources to ensuring that individual needs are met, recognising that in doing so, each individual's development and improvement will contribute to pupil outcomes and build a stronger organisation. Participants in my study identified the allocation of time as a significant factor for their engagement in the mentoring programme: identifying time in the school calendar for mentoring meetings helped participants to prioritise those meetings above other demands on their time, thus helping to ensure that the mentoring activity could be sustained. Supporting them in this way enabled my participants to develop their professional practice, which then had a positive impact on pupil outcomes. Giving time to an activity validates it: when the school leadership chose to allocate time for mentoring sessions, those involved in the mentoring programme felt that their mentoring activity was acknowledged as having value, not only to the individual but also to the school.

Having considered my findings in the context of current guidance relating to the provision of CPD opportunities for teachers, I would suggest that my study has implications for policy in the following areas:

1. CPD should address teachers' individual developmental needs
2. CPD provision should recognise the expertise of individual teachers
3. Effective CPD requires a regular and sustained investment of time
4. Interdisciplinary collaboration offers valuable CPD opportunities
5. Mentoring is a cost-effective form of career-long CPD

The implications in these areas, both for policymakers and for practitioners, are explained below:

5.3.1 CPD should address teachers' individual developmental needs

My study shows that when teachers are empowered to address their own developmental needs, they acquire new knowledge and skills that help them to improve their practice,

build their confidence and contribute to improvements in pupil outcomes. This corroborates the views outlined in the DfE (2016) guidance. However, my study also identifies concerns that school policy regarding CPD provision is too often determined by organisational priorities, rather than seeking to 'take account of teacher starting points, intended progression, and the impact on pupil outcomes' (DfE, 2016, p.7). The 'one-size-fits-all' approach of many externally-provided training courses ignores the possibility that some colleagues may have a more fundamental development need and may not be ready to engage in a particular training session until that need is met.

The implication from this is that school policy-makers need to build a coherent CPD policy that includes explicit opportunities for all teachers to identify and address their individual developmental needs. To achieve this, school leaders need to accord teachers agency in determining the area of focus for each stage of their CPD activity and then allow them to exercise their responsibility for addressing their own training needs (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014). As one participant (F4) noted, this requires trust and mutual respect: school leaders need to be willing to trust teachers to know their developmental needs and to be able to act responsibly to address them.

However, this also carries an implication for individual practice: teachers need to recognise and enact their responsibility for ensuring their own ongoing professional development. To do so, teachers need firstly to engage in habitual reflective practice so that they are able to identify what their development needs are, and how they might be met. Teachers then also need to commit to actively engaging in whatever CPD activity they have identified as being appropriate for their needs; this requires them to be open to new ideas and disposed to learning new skills.

The DfE (2016) guidance recommends the use of peer-collaboration and mentoring to foster reflective practice and to provide teachers with the appropriate level of support and challenge to help them address their individual developmental needs. My research evidence endorses the value of sustained peer-collaboration and mentoring: a structured peer-group mentoring programme, such as the SPIDERWeB programme, can help to address the individual developmental needs of both novice and experienced teachers.

5.3.2 CPD provision should recognise the expertise of individual teachers

My data supports the argument that a 'top-down, one-size-fits-all' approach to staff development is rarely appropriate or useful for the whole staff body: such an approach

ignores the expertise of some staff, and is patronising towards those staff who have to sit through training that is imposed on them regardless of their expertise. Conversely, participants in my study welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively and share ideas with colleagues. They benefited from being able to draw on the expertise of other teachers, who understood the context-specific demands of their roles. They also benefited from the opportunity to share their expertise and offer support to their mentoring partners: this helped them to consolidate their own skills and knowledge and to develop their self-confidence.

The policy guidance does not make specific mention of drawing on the experience and expertise of practising teachers to deliver CPD activities in their own setting. My findings would suggest that this is an oversight: echoing Johnson et al (2019), I would argue that, since teachers both know their own roles and understand the needs and demands of their context, using the skills and expertise of their own staff should be the first choice for any leadership team when planning provision for CPD.

My study offers evidence that the triadic peer-group structure of the SPIDERWeB mentoring model is conducive to building a learning culture across the organisation, by drawing on the expertise of individual teachers. Expertise derives from a combination of experience and the ongoing development of knowledge, skills and understanding. One participant (M4) noted that every individual 'brings their own experiences and skills to share'; a teacher does not have to be particularly experienced, or senior in terms of the school hierarchy, to be able to offer a fresh insight that can help others to refresh and develop their practice. Teachers who engage in a structured peer-mentoring programme such as that offered by the SPIDERWeB model are in a position to support the development of others in two ways: firstly, they can offer direct support through the mentoring conversation; secondly, by engaging in the mentoring conversation they are able to develop new knowledge and expertise that they will eventually be able to pass on to others.

5.3.3 Effective CPD requires a regular and sustained investment of time

National guidance (DfE, 2016) notes that effective CPD is iterative and cumulative. Effective CPD relies on adequate time being given for each activity, and also for each training event to be viewed as part of a more cohesive whole, which is planned to take place over an extended period of time. For CPD provision to be effective, teachers need time to engage in the learning, discuss and then enact the strategies that are proposed,

and then reflect on and evaluate the process. Moreover, CPD provision should not rely on a series of 'one-off', unconnected events, but should be a series of activities that build on each other and offer coherent progression – that is, continuing professional development.

My study supports the notion of ongoing development: participants noted that time was a key factor for their engagement in the mentoring activity, and that they benefited from the cumulative nature of the mentoring process. The implication for policymakers and school leaders is that it is important to consider how to ensure a sense of progression and continuity for all participants when planning a CPD programme; this includes the need to allocate adequate time at regular intervals through the school calendar for practitioners to engage in, and benefit from, sustained CPD activity.

Participants also acknowledged an implication for their individual practice when they noted that a sustained, active commitment to the mentoring process was key to building a successful mentoring relationship that could offer effective and meaningful CPD.

5.3.4 Interdisciplinary collaboration offers valuable CPD opportunities

Although national guidance suggests that peer-support and collaboration is helpful for problem-solving and adapting one's practice (DfE, 2016), it does not make any suggestion concerning what form that collaboration should take. My experience, both in school-based INSET and in regional or national training events, is that teachers are generally asked to work in subject teams and to discuss the training content in the context of their own subject specialism. However, a key feature of the SPIDERWeB model is that colleagues work in interdisciplinary groups. Participants in my study identified that there is significant benefit in working in interdisciplinary teams and with unfamiliar people: the interdisciplinary nature of their mentoring groups offered them new approaches and helped them to develop different strategies to add to their professional 'toolkit'.

My research offers evidence that fostering a knowledge exchange across disciplinary divides ensures that staff are constantly exposed to fresh ideas. This challenges taken-for-granted assumptions in subject pedagogies, fosters creativity and so helps develop innovative approaches to resolving issues. The implication for school leaders, policymakers and CPD providers is that it is important to recognise the value of interdisciplinary collaboration and to consider the practical working arrangements for CPD activities in order to ensure productive, insightful discussions and promote the notion of knowledge exchange across disciplines. The implication for individual practice is that

teachers need to be alert to, and ready to embrace, the benefits of working with colleagues from different areas, rather than relying solely on their own disciplinary teams for support.

However, aside from CPD policy and practice, my findings also have a philosophical implication for national education policy, which concerns the recognition and value accorded to different disciplines. My participants note the value that they derived from the interdisciplinary collaboration engendered in the mentoring programme, in terms of the different perspectives and insights offered by different disciplines. This contributed not only to the development of their classroom practice, but also supported the development of important life skills such as problem-solving, innovative thinking, creativity and resilience. I would suggest that this offers a strong argument for the need to recognise the value of all disciplines and to develop a more holistic approach to education policy, rather than prioritising investment (of both resources and curriculum time) in subject areas that are perceived as politically or economically 'valuable', at the expense of other curriculum areas whose value is less easily quantified.

5.3.5 Mentoring is a cost-effective form of career-long CPD

The DfE (2016) guidance notes that some teachers may find mentoring or coaching approaches helpful for providing support and challenge during a CPD activity. There is a growing consensus that mentoring offers an effective form of CPD (eg: Hudson, 2013; Smith & Nadelson, 2016; Hands, Armstrong & Mitchell in Irby et al, 2020) that can address both individual and organisational needs. Mentoring is used widely in commerce and industry to support professional development, and yet it is rarely used in schools beyond the early career-phase (Lomax, 2020), where a formal mentoring programme underpins the whole journey to QTS.

My study offers evidence that mentoring can benefit mid- and late-career teachers as well as those in the early-career phase. The mentoring process involves a collaborative, reflective cycle that is crucial to effective, lasting professional development (Appleby & Pilkington, 2014; Johnson et al., 2019). Moreover, the use of mentoring programmes that draw on the experience and expertise of current staff reduces the need to buy in external training packages/providers, which can be expensive. The implication of this for policymakers is that mentoring should be more formally recognised and embedded as a means of providing meaningful CPD opportunities throughout all stages of a teacher's career.

Many of my participants highlighted the reciprocal nature of mentoring: not only does the mentee benefit from the support and challenge provided by the mentor, but the mentor also benefits as they are prompted to reflect and interrogate their own assumptions through the mentoring conversation. This process is enhanced in a triadic peer-mentoring model, which focuses on sharing experiences and enabling individuals, through reflective discussion, to explore different ideas and 'develop themselves', in contrast to the more directive knowledge-transmission function of a traditional dyadic model. A triadic, peer-mentoring model facilitates a breadth of discussion that places the onus firmly on the individual to explore the ideas offered, and generate their own solution - in other words, to identify and implement into their own practice what they think will work for them. If individuals are given ownership of their own development in this way, they are arguably more likely to develop and maintain lasting, workable solutions to issues that they encounter. Such an approach not only fosters creative thinking, it also helps to build resilience and improves the capacity of individual practitioners to deal with change. Implemented in this way, mentoring not only offers cost-effective CPD for all career stages, it also offers CPD where the outcomes will have a career-long impact on a teacher's evolving practice and professional identity.

My study shows that the SPIDERWeB mentoring programme offers a cohesive and effective model for CPD that broadly supports national policy. However, my findings also offer a challenge to school leaders and policymakers to allow teachers opportunities to enact their responsibility for ensuring their own *continuing* professional development, and also to recognise the expertise of individual teachers and the value that they bring to the organisation. The overriding implication for policy and for practice is that school-wide mentoring programmes aimed at supporting the ongoing professional and personal development of teachers at all levels and stages of their careers can and should be devised and embedded as an integral part of the CPD provision available in schools; the SPIDERWeB model offers an effective example of how this might be done

5.4 Limitations of Study

The study is a case-study, which means that it is limited in scope and not replicable. The study is set in one particular school, with its own particular culture and circumstances. A different setting would yield different results; it would be interesting to see what responses would result from implementing my model in schools where there already exists a culture of mentoring and also in schools where there is no 'formal' mentoring beyond ITE / ECT.

It is possible that running the study again in the same school but under different circumstances might yield different results. However, I did conduct two phases of field research, where the circumstances differed from one phase to the next. In each phase there were seven research participants, representing four or five mentoring groups between them. Only two participants were involved in both phases of the research. It is notable that the data from phase two correlates closely with the data from phase one, despite the change in the organisational culture and the fact that most of the participants were different.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

From my conclusions, I have identified four main areas for further research:

5.5.1 Further evaluation of the SPIDERWeB model

The SPIDERWeB model has been shown to be a suitable model for developing a whole-school staff mentoring programme in my current setting. However, my study took place over two periods of field research, with an interruption between them. This means that there was no continuity in the formation of the mentoring groups across the two phases; the iterative aspect of the model, where groups change each year in order to build up a network of connections and support across the staff body has still to be properly evaluated. It would be useful, therefore, to test the model over a longer period of time to see if the support network does develop as anticipated, and to evaluate the extent to which it can promote ongoing professional development in addition to supporting well-being.

Moreover, this was a small-scale study in a very particular setting with particular circumstances. It would be useful to try the model in different schools (both secondary and primary) with different organisational cultures in order to evaluate how easy it might be to implement a school-wide mentoring programme using this model in different settings, and what benefits (if any) another setting might perceive in such a programme.

5.5.2 The role of the mentoring programme coordinator

Kensington-Miller (2011) and Hobson et al (2024) note the importance of the coordinator in supporting the mentoring programme. However, whilst the role of the coordinator is fairly clear in terms of organising and implementing the programme, how this role develops as the mentoring programme progresses is less clear. With hindsight, I feel that I should have

intervened more readily and more assertively in some groups where problems emerged; I was probably over-cautious because I was mindful of the pressures in school at the time. However, it is now clear to me that relying solely on my own mentoring experience, as well as my knowledge of the individuals and the situation, was not adequate for determining how and when to intervene. I feel that more research into the role of the coordinator is needed to be able to identify some operational principles for deciding at what point the coordinator should intervene if a mentoring group appears to be struggling, and what form that intervention should take.

5.5.3 Phases of the mentoring meeting

I have noted above, in the section on implications for theory, the apparent correlation that my data suggests between the way in which each mentoring meeting unfolds and Kram's (1983) phases in the development of the mentoring relationship. This is an area for further research as it has implications for how meetings are planned and conducted, which in turn has implications for the efficacy of the mentoring relationship. Most commentators agree that it is important that mentors (and, some would also argue, mentees) receive adequate training for their role; such training would usually include consideration of how to begin and end the mentoring relationship, aspects which are considered crucial to the well-being of both parties and to the success of the mentoring process (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002). Given the importance attached to these phases of the relationship, I would argue that it is potentially equally important for consideration to be given to the start and end of each meeting, echoing Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) and Tynjälä et al (2021), who note the painstaking preparations made by their participants when organising meetings. If such a correlation does exist between the overall progression of the relationship and the progression of each meeting, it would have implications for the nature of the training provided. I would further argue that developing an awareness of the structure of the mentoring meeting could help to avoid potentially harmful situations such as Judgementoring (Hobson & Malderez, 2013).

5.5.4 The relationship between mentoring and friendship

In the section 'Implications for Theory', I have explored the relationship between friendship and mentoring and have attempted to set out some possible reasons for why it would appear that the presence of an existing friendship in a mentoring partnership or group may be detrimental to the development of the mentoring relationship. This is an area for further

research as it has implications for the practical implementation of any form of mentoring programme: my data would suggest that it is in fact very important that mentoring programme coordinators have knowledge of any pre-existing friendships so that they are able to take this into account when allocating mentoring groups. This is a sensitive issue and how to acquire this knowledge requires very careful consideration. Moreover, further research in this area would contribute to the ongoing debate around the definition of 'mentoring' and to the academic discussion regarding notions of friendship.

5.6 Final reflections on my study: personal challenge and achievement

One of my participants commented, 'you couldn't write what we have been through as a school'. Throughout the period covered by my study, we (coincidentally) faced some extremely challenging situations, which were not conducive to establishing a staff mentoring programme. I needed to show resilience and tenacity to ensure that the mentoring programme was able to run – at a time when its value in offering a safe space for staff to discuss the challenges they faced was crucial – and that my research project could be completed. During the period covered by my research, the school underwent significant changes in its leadership, creating uncertainty as the school adjusted to the imposition of a very different culture and ethos; there were unprecedented levels of staff absence due to COVID-19, and high levels of workload-related stress amongst those staff who were still in school. This was a school in special measures, involving a regime of termly inspections, with the associated demands on time and energy.

I am proud that, in spite of all the challenges, I was able to implement and maintain a new mentoring programme in school using a model that I have devised and that reflects my conceptualisation of mentoring. I am both relieved and excited that the data from my participants demonstrates that my model works much as I had intended, offering a holistic approach to staff development and well-being. With hindsight, I needed to give more thought to how I developed the role of programme coordinator, specifically with regard to having some guiding principles for knowing when and how to intervene in groups that might be struggling. I feel that the programme coordinator needs a mentor to support them in some of the decision-making. This role was eventually filled by a member of the SLT in the second phase of the research.

I feel very humbled by the huge amount of support given to my research by my colleagues, and by the generally positive views expressed about the SPIDERWeB model. My study

provides evidence that teachers want to develop and refresh their skills and practice, but that they need time, space and encouragement to do so.

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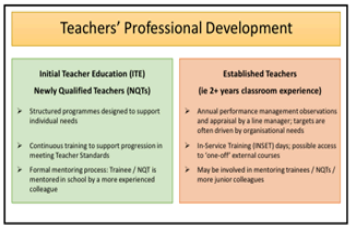
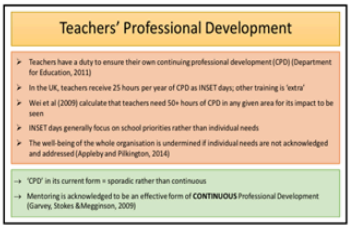
Appendices

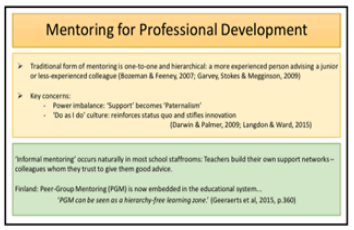
Appendix A: SPIDER model poster presentation from MA

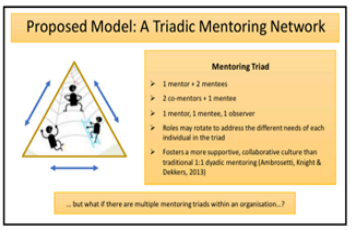
Appendix B: Rationale and Conceptual Frame for SPIDERWeB Model

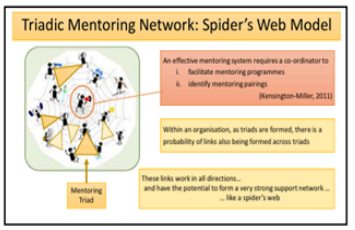
(Powerpoint presentation to LHU EdD conference 2021)

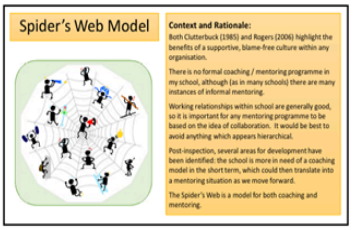


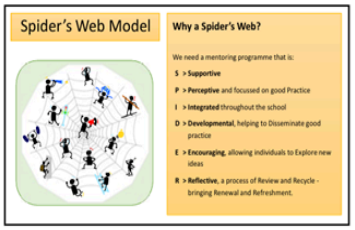


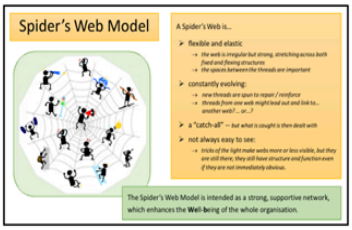


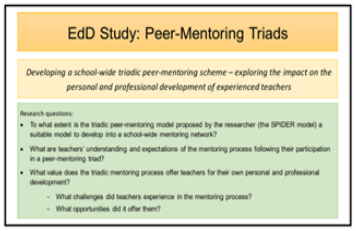












Appendix C: Preparation notes for initial meeting with Headteacher (April 2021)

Aims of study:

- To investigate the feasibility of developing and implementing a whole-school mentoring programme for staff development.
- To understand the impact on experienced (mid-career) secondary school teachers of a whole-school mentoring programme.
- To devise a model for a whole-school mentoring programme that can be applied in a secondary school setting and to understand enablers and barriers to the effective implementation of such a programme

Rationale:

- Mentoring is a key part of modern ITE programmes. The impact of such mentoring programmes is well-documented; much evidence to suggest that mentoring is an effective form of personal development.
- Mentoring is used widely in commerce and industry
- Once teachers move beyond their NQT year, the mentoring support is withdrawn – there seems to be an assumption that they know what they are doing and there is no longer any perceived need for ongoing individual support
- This is exacerbated by the time a teacher moves into any leadership role: it is assumed that they are in that role because of their expertise – the expectation is that they give support to others, but they are often not offered much developmental support for themselves. But this overlooks the fact that they have been promoted to a leadership role because of their competence and expertise in their previous role – they have yet to prove themselves in their new role!
- David Clutterbuck: 'Everyone needs a mentor' – the point is that we should be constantly looking for challenge in our work, but we cannot be expected to rise to any challenge if we are not given adequate support to help us find our way to meeting the challenge (Daloz support and challenge model). In a classroom, we would not expect a pupil to attempt a new piece of work without providing some guidance or structure for the task – but we expect teachers to carry out their daily work without regular formative guidance and support.
- External courses are expensive, not always easy or convenient to get to, may not fully address the individual needs of the participants, and do not always live up to expectation. Attending an external course is extremely disruptive because it impacts on a whole day of teaching & adds to workload in terms of setting cover work and catching up with classes afterwards, and there is always a risk that the work set may not be delivered properly to the class. The cost of supply cover and travel allowances add to the overall expense of the course.
- Teachers' workload, and the pace at which they operate, is often such that they don't have time to consider and implement all the new strategies suggested in a course, and they don't often have much time or opportunity to share ideas with colleagues.
- Constraints of budget and time mean that not all teachers are afforded the opportunity to attend an external course – so many teachers do not participate in regular CPD.
- Mentoring has been shown to be a cost-effective way of providing CPD, where individual needs and strengths can be identified and strategies for addressing any issues raised can be agreed.
- A mentoring session does not require a teacher to take a whole day away from school. This means that for the cost of 1 teacher attending an external course – estimated cost = £130 supply cover + £250 course fees = £380 (+travel expenses) it would be possible to allow 15 teachers to have 1 lesson off timetable in order to facilitate/attend mentoring sessions. Assume 45 teaching staff approx. = 3 days supply cover needed for ***all*** staff to attend 1 mentoring session.

  Assume 6 mentoring sessions per teacher per year = 18 days' worth of supply cover needed overall = £130 x 18 = £2,340 (which is roughly equivalent to 6 members of staff attending an external course, based on the estimated costs cited above).

  [This may need to be doubled to allow for mentors as well as mentees to have time for the mentoring sessions. However, this still equates to 12 staff attending an external course, compared to 90 potential mentoring sessions.]
- Mentoring sessions do not need to be individual sessions: can be done in groups / triads

Proposed model: SPIDER model:

The SPIDER model is non-hierarchical, based on the concept of mentoring triads; it is flexible, able to bend to the needs of the organisation and of the individuals in the organisation.

The focus is on allowing colleagues time and space to share ideas and ask for help; the agenda would be set by the mentees – but as each member of a mentoring triad would simultaneously be mentor and mentee as the roles rotate to meet the needs of all members of the triad, all colleagues would have the opportunity to nominate topics / areas for discussion.

The situation in school:

- A very mixed staff: broad range of experiences and backgrounds. Some long-serving colleagues
- A relatively small school, not many opportunities for individual development. eg non-core subject areas are in very small departments of 1.5 – 2 FTE teachers. Not much opportunity for an individual to take on increased responsibility within the department; heads of department are not well-equipped to take more demanding roles in other schools = risk of stagnation in ELT / SLT
- Very few colleagues have moved on recently to other jobs. Several possible explanations:
  - ➔ The school has not had a good reputation - bad press instigated by LA politics / falling exam results following the previous inspection may cause bias when people apply for jobs locally.
  - ➔ Colleagues feel secure / comfortable. Staff are generally supportive and caring; there is a good team spirit that is not often found in other settings
  - ➔ Colleagues don't feel equipped to move on and aspire to other roles in other schools
  - ➔ Age profile of staff is such that more colleagues retire than move on to a different post.
  - ➔ Colleagues feel a sense of loyalty to the school and to the pupils: strong pastoral system means that teachers build strong relationships with pupils and their families.
  - ➔ It is not easy to move on from a school in SM because it is very hard to demonstrate 'evidence of leading development and improvement' as many job adverts stipulate.
- Within the school, many colleagues feel distrust at new initiatives that are imposed top-down. There are concerns over implications for workload and for accountability.
- Constant inspection regime means that staff are tired; low morale.
- Collective memory of previous punitive approach to performance management / target setting / lesson observation; individual developmental needs were not considered as important as ensuring organisational performance targets were met. Meeting organisational targets relies on a workforce that is motivated and feels valued. Individual needs must be considered for all members of the team to feel able to perform to the best of their ability.

Mentoring model: What is needed to ensure it can work?

- supportive dialogue
- opportunities for development
- non-hierarchical
- SLT need to be seen to respect confidentiality and trust – they must not use their status to push colleagues in a particular direction
- willingness and goodwill of all colleagues to participate – this means giving everyone adequate time for mentoring sessions; colleagues also need a sense of purpose, a reason for taking part that shows them the benefits to them as individuals

Mentoring model: What are the possible barriers?

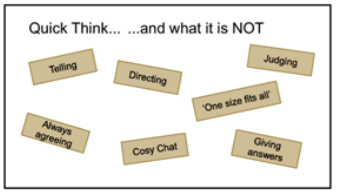
- Time
- Staff feeling constrained – or not understanding what they are doing or why
- Top-down direction trying to tell staff how to use the mentoring time (although it may be helpful to have an overarching focus for the programme, such as preparation for the new curriculum!)
- Lack of trust arising from issues to do with confidentiality
- Lack of prioritisation
- Expectation that minutes are kept – this links to issues of confidentiality. Need to agree an appropriate system of record-keeping

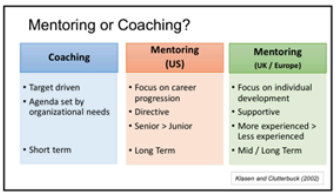
Implications for mentoring model: need to ascertain individual perceptions of strengths and areas for development in order to match mentors / mentees or devise groups/triads. Complexity in ensuring that everyone is mentored, even if not everyone is a mentor – ie need to ensure that even the mentors are mentored.

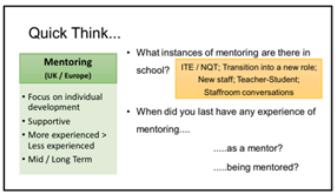
>> Triadic / group approach would make sense in terms of being able to ensure all colleagues included, with 2 or 3 different areas of development being covered by each group

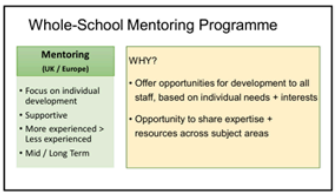
Appendix D: PowerPoint presentations to colleagues for INSET Days

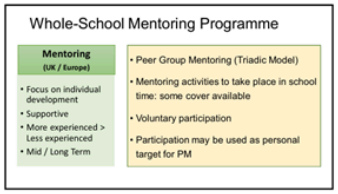
1. *Launch of mentoring programme*

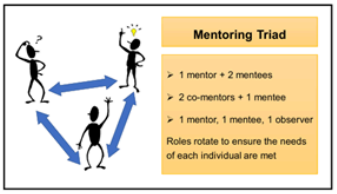


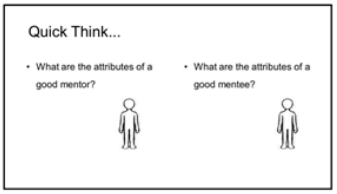


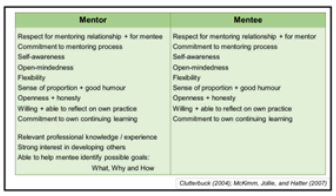


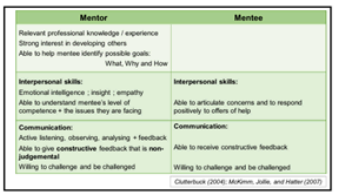


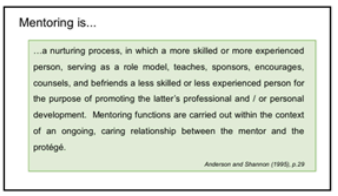


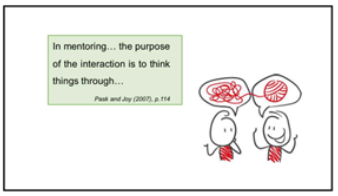


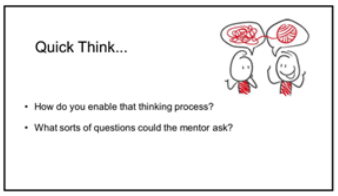


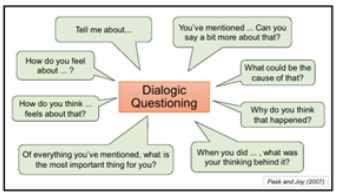


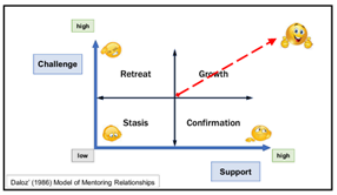


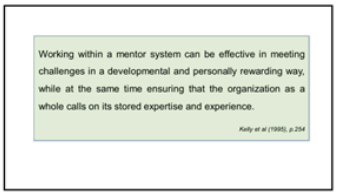


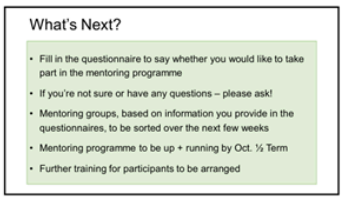


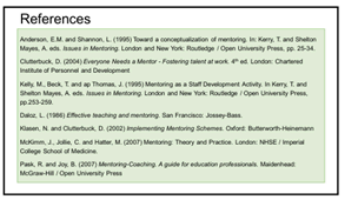




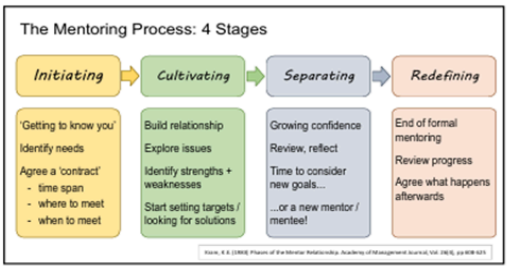


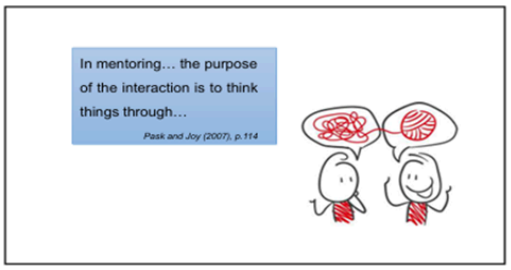


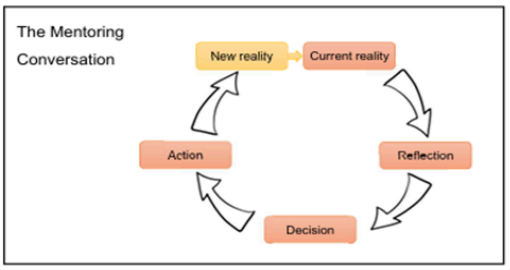


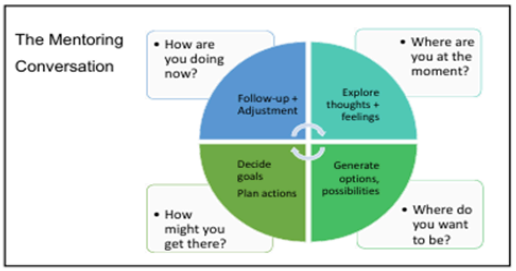


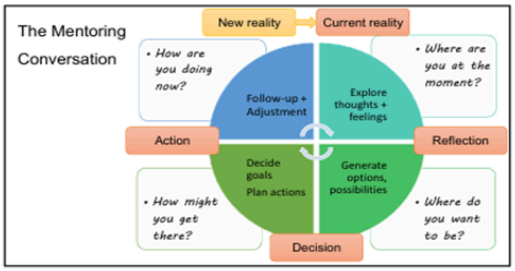
2. *Initiating the mentoring groups*

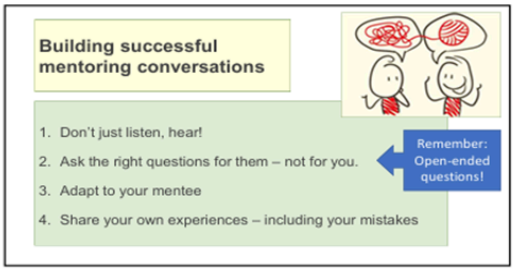


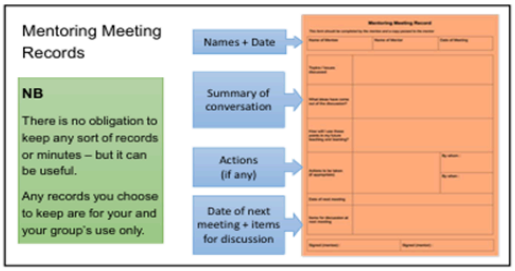


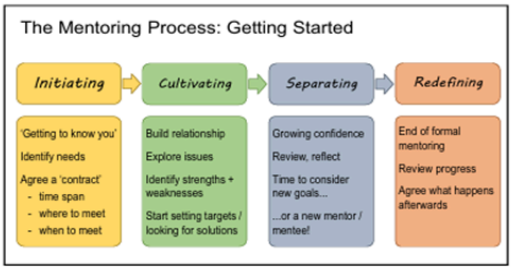


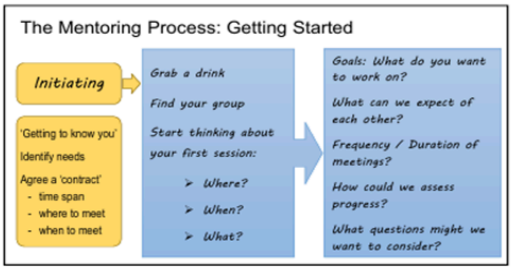












Appendix E: Skills and Needs Audit

Name _____

Please tick one of the following:

YES. I would like to take part in the mentoring programme	
NO. I would not like to take part in the mentoring programme	
NOT SURE. I'd like more information before I make a decision	

Please indicate areas / topics* where you would feel confident to offer mentoring support to colleagues: _____

Please indicate areas / topics* where you would welcome receiving mentoring support from colleagues: _____

**The following table gives some ideas based on past CPD / Pedagogy sessions:*

Professional Practice / Practical Skills	Personal Development
Google Classroom / Developing online resources Skills: Oracy / Literacy / Numeracy / DCF Differentiation Raising the level of challenge / engagement Behaviour management strategies Flipped Learning	Time management Wellbeing – managing expectations Reflective + Reflexive practice Inquiry-based practice Classroom relationships + Reaching 'difficult' pupils

Points to note:

1. Participation in the programme is entirely voluntary
2. Mentoring sessions will take place in school time – cover will be available within reason
3. Mentoring conversations are entirely confidential
4. SLT will NOT be involved: there will not be any scrutiny of mentoring activity; the mentoring programme will NOT be used in any way for QA / Inspection
5. Participation in the programme may be used as a personal target for PM if you wish
6. Mentoring groups will be cross-disciplinary: as far as possible, class teachers will not be in the same group as their head of department or head of year to avoid any clash of interest / sense of hierarchy or scrutiny
7. Within the mentoring programme, CVT hopes to collect research data to evaluate the success of the programme. There is NO obligation to contribute to this. (CVT will provide more details about the research project later in the year.)

Appendix F: Spreadsheets : Collating Mentoring Groups

(see p.172 below for explanatory notes)

1. Phase 1 of research: 2021-22

Areas of strength	Areas for development	Composition of Group	*Notes*
Lesson obs. success criteria / measuring outcomes	oracy / differentiation	middle leaders: 1 male + 2 female	
ALN / Oracy / Differentiation	ICT	teaching experience: two = 10+ years; one = 5-10 years	
ASD / SEN Support / Behaviour / ICT	Wellbeing / Differentiation	Subjects covered: ALN / English, Geography, History	
*	Pastoral / Behaviour / Wellbeing	2 male + 1 female, incl. 2 middle leaders	*Known to have good IT skills*
Pastoral Issues / Behaviour	'Open to suggestions' **	teaching experience: all = 10+ years	** Interest in developing IT use*
***	IT in the classroom	Subjects covered: ALN, History, Maths	*** Pastoral experience - support on behaviour issues / pupil wellbeing*
CfW / Video Lessons / new teachers / constructive conversations / oracy	Google sheets / excel / data analysis	3 female, incl. 2 middle leaders	* Known to have good IT skills*
*	practical subjects - open to ideas**	teaching experience: one = 5-10 years; two = 10+ years	** Possibly CfW + Oracy?*
***	Getting qualifications / Wellbeing	Subjects covered: ALN, PE, Science	*** Good IT skills; Oracy*
Creativity in lessons / using IT / Organisation / Literacy + linguistics / oracy / hyping up / engagement	challenge in top sets / calmer classroom / being quiet / personal development?	Class teachers: 1 male + 2 female	*Two members of this group also working towards MA*
Differentiation	Time Management / behaviour management	teaching experience: all = 5-10 years	
organisational skills	Flipped learning / behaviour / Google classroom	Subjects covered: Maths, MFL, Science	
ICT	*	2 male + 1 female, incl 1 middle leader	* Interest in developing engaging resources - will benefit from Graphic Design expertise brought by colleague*
Engagement / Behaviour / Management	Tech programmes / ICT software	teaching experience: two = 5-10 years; one = 10+ years	
Graphics / Displays / ICT	Classroom management / behaviour	Subjects covered: Cover, English, Science	
*	Differentiation / lesson obs / oracy	3 female, incl. 2 middle leaders	* Working in dept. that is leading on CfW, with focus on engagement / motivation*
**	Challenge / Engagement	teaching experience: two = 5-10 years; one = 10+ years	**Has good ICT skills; good use of oracy + differentiation strategies. Requested to work with other practical subjects*
***	***	Subjects covered: PE, Science, Technology	*** Open to ideas - perhaps develop CfW; known for ability to challenge and engage pupils*
*	Google Classroom / Classroom relationships	3 male, incl. 2 middle leaders	* Known to have good use of oracy strategies - will complement literacy skills offered by colleague*
Behaviour management **	Google classroom / developing online resources	teaching experience: all = 10+ years	**Also known to have good literacy skills*
***	Literacy	Subjects covered: ALN (Behaviour unit) + History, Maths, Technology	*** Digital Competence Framework lead*
'don't know' *	mental health / well-being	3 female, incl. 1 middle leader	* Lacked confidence but known for good understanding of SEN + working with pupils who have physical needs*
Mental Health issues	Computers - general confidence	teaching experience: all = 10+ years	** Although 2 ALN, both had different roles / specialisms. Discussed grouping with them but both happy to work together. I knew that one of these colleagues would find it hard to integrate into other possible groups*
classroom relationships / Google classroom / behaviour	Mental health / SEN + supporting students in the classroom	Subjects covered: RE, ALN (KS3), ALN (EBSD + KS4)**	
*	*	3 male, incl. 2 middle leaders	* Open to ideas - known for calm, pragmatic approach; good ICT skills; working on developing CfW approaches + questioning*
resources for lessons**	developing online resources	teaching experience: two = 5-10 years; one = 10+ years	** working in dept leading on CfW - focus on big picture / questioning*
***	Questioning/ Big Picture/ Behaviour/ Differentiation/ Time management/ Managing expectations/ Well-being	Subjects covered: Geography, PE, Science	*** Lacks confidence, has more rounded expertise than his list of needs suggests - will be able to offer practical ideas for resources / activities*

2. *Phase 2 of research: 2023-24*

Areas of strength	Areas for development	Composition of Group	*Notes*
Behaviour management; parental contact; motivation + challenge	ICT; EXCEL; MAT	middle leaders: 2 male + 1 female	
DCF / ICT; Questioning	Management skills (Staff)*	teaching experience: two = 10+ years; one = 5-10 years	**This teacher will benefit from the management experience brought by another member of the group from a previous role*
Behaviour, ALN, Time management, building relationships	Challenge, Monitoring (Pastoral focus)	Subjects covered: English, Geography, PE	
Differentiation	Questioning**	2 male + 1 female, incl. 1 middle leader	*** AfL link to use of questioning*
Trips; funding; promotional support*	Differentiation; marking + feedback	teaching experience: one = 0-5 years; one = 5-10 years; one = 10+ years	**This teacher is also known for their ability in effective classroom management strategies*
Formative assessment in wider lessons**	Behaviour for learning strategies	Subjects covered: Geography, PSE, Science	
Classroom relationships	Behaviour management strategies; Raising level of challenge	Class teachers: 1 male + 2 female	
*	Behaviour management; differentiation	teaching experience: one = 0-5 years; one = 5-10 years; one = 10+ years	** Working in a department that is leading on developing focus on challenge + motivation*
**		Subjects covered: ALN, Science, Welsh	*** Extensive knowledge of BfL + differentiation; enjoys opportunities to support others*
Behaviour management; building relationships; examining; wellbeing	*None requested**	1 male + 2 female, incl 2 middle leaders	** Has expressed need to update ICT skills*
Literacy + oracy skills; lesson planning	Reaching difficult pupils	teaching experience: two = 10+ years; one = 5-10 years	
Literacy; ICT + Online learning	Behaviour; reflexive practice	Subjects covered: English, History, MFL	

- Mentoring participants were grouped according to information provided in the skills and needs audit about their perceptions of their own strengths and areas for development.

- Where participants had not provided information about their strengths and / or developmental needs, I used my knowledge of their practice and interests to inform my choice of where to place them; my thinking is shown in the grey 'notes' column

- The yellow column shows a summary of the biographical data relating to the group: gender, roles, teaching experience and subject specialisms. For the sake of maintaining anonymity I have not shown the biographical details of individuals.

Appendix G: Invitation to participate in Research (Ethics)

Dear Colleagues,

Many of you will now be aware that I am studying for a doctorate on the EdD programme at Liverpool Hope University.

I am currently engaged in the research phase of the course. My area of research interest is the use of mentoring in schools to support staff development, and specifically the potential use of mentoring to support the ongoing professional development of experienced teachers. From my research I hope to gain an insight into how experienced teachers perceive their development needs and to explore whether a school-wide mentoring programme can help to address those needs.

I am emailing you because you are currently engaged in the mentoring programme that we launched at the start of September, and I would now like to invite you to contribute to my research, which will aim to evaluate the effectiveness of this year's mentoring programme. I am interested to know about your experiences of the mentoring programme, and to find out what value (if any) the peer-mentoring model that we are using might have for your ongoing personal and professional development.

I am attaching a Research Information Sheet, which outlines the research and what your participation would involve, and a Research Consent Form. Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and is absolutely not a requirement for your continued involvement in the mentoring programme. If you would be willing to share your thoughts and provide some information for my research, please would you sign and return the consent form (an electronic signature is acceptable).

Many thanks to everyone for your continuing patience and support.

Clare Temple

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY
Est. 1844

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Outline of the research (a couple of sentences in non-specialist language)

The purpose of the research is to evaluate a possible model for a school-wide peer-group mentoring programme. It will explore how experienced secondary school teachers perceive the concept of mentoring, and how their understanding and expectations of the mentoring process develop through their participation in a peer-mentoring programme. It will also seek to identify what value the peer-group mentoring process might offer experienced secondary school teachers for their own personal and professional development.

Who is the researcher?

Name: **Clare Temple**

Institution: **Liverpool Hope University**

Researcher's University email address: **18010567@hope.ac.uk**

What will my participation in the research involve?

- *Every half term you will be asked to provide a brief reflective account of your experiences of the school mentoring project. You will be sent links to an online survey and to a Jamboard: you can choose which format you use.*
- *At the end of the Summer Term, you will be asked to take part in an end-of-project interview (lasting no more than an hour) where you will be asked to explore your overall thoughts and feelings about the mentoring programme. This interview will be recorded (audio only) to ensure accurate transcription of the information you provide.*

Will there be any benefits to me to taking part?

- *An opportunity to reflect on your strengths and weaknesses both as a mentor and as a mentee within your mentoring group*
- *An opportunity to identify any further training needs that you (and your mentoring group) may have in relation to the school mentoring programme*
- *An opportunity to reflect on your development as a practitioner and to explore your ongoing developmental needs*

Will there be any risks to me in taking part?

- *There is a potential risk that you may find it difficult to respond to some requests for feedback, depending on your workload at the time*

  If this happens, please don't worry. You will have at least a week to respond to any request for feedback. I shall send one reminder in case you have simply forgotten but if you are not able to respond within the given time, please just let me know and send a response when you can.
- *There is a potential emotional risk that you may find it challenging to record your reflections on the mentoring process, which can in itself be an emotional experience*

  You may find it easier in some situations to talk through your responses with me, rather than record them yourself. If this is the case, please let me know and we can arrange a sensible time.

Please remember that you are not obliged to provide any information – so you do not have to share anything if you are not happy to do so.

- *There is a potential emotional risk that you may find it challenging, or even distressing, to explore your thoughts and feelings in the end-of-project interview.*

  Again, please remember that you do not have to share anything if you are not happy to do so. If you do find that you are getting tired or distressed at any point, you will have the option of taking a short break, postponing the rest of the interview until a later date or time, or stopping the interview altogether.

  Mentoring, and therefore reflecting on mentoring, can be an emotional process. Please remember that the school counsellor is available for staff as well as for pupils.

What happens if I decide that I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide that the information given should not be used?

- *You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any point during the course of the project* (please see note below).*

  If you wish to withdraw from the research study, please send me an email to this effect; I shall acknowledge by return.
- *You have the right to withdraw permission for any of the data that you provide to be used* (please see note below).*

  If you wish to withdraw permission for the use of some or all of the data that you have provided, please state clearly which data you do not wish me to use; if possible please do this in writing or using email and I shall acknowledge by return. However, I realise that this may be easier done in conversation, in which case I shall send an email in confirmation of the outcomes of any such discussion.*

  If you have any concerns or questions about your participation in the research at any point, please do come and discuss them with me. The content of any such discussions will remain confidential and will not be used for the research.

NOTE: The end date for withdrawing consent for your data to be used is **Friday 15th July, 2022. This marks the end of the data-collection period. After this, once data analysis takes place, it may be difficult to locate individual contributions.*

How will you ensure that my contribution is anonymous?

- *The half-termly feedback surveys /Jamboards will be set up in a Google Classroom; individual copies will be generated for each participant so that only you and I (the researcher) will be able to access what you have written.*
- *Any information you provide will be anonymised before any analysis is undertaken. I may need to share anonymised data or transcripts with my research supervisors for discussion and guidance but I shall not share or discuss any personal information or data that has not been anonymised.*
- *In the final write-up of the research, individual names will not be used: you will be offered a pseudonym to protect your identity and ensure that your contribution is anonymous*
- *You are asked not to identify the school or any individuals by name. This is mainly to ensure anonymity for them, but it will also help to protect your anonymity.*

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light that you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours which I may need to disclose to the appropriate authorities.

Appendix I: Research consent form (Ethics)

LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Title of research project:

Exploring the suitability of the SPIDER WEB triadic peer mentoring for developing a school-wide mentoring programme

Name of researcher: Clare Temple

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	Yes	No
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	Yes	No
I agree to take part in this research project and for the anonymised data to be used as the researcher sees fit, including publication.	Yes	No
I agree that any interviews in which I take part may be audio-recorded for the purpose of ensuring the accurate transcription of any data collected in this way.	Yes	No

Name of participant:

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix J: Group Interview schedule

Schedule for group interview 14/3/22

A. Questions about Mentoring background / experience

1. What experience have you already had of mentoring?

    a. of being a mentor?

    b. of being mentored?

2. What is your understanding of 'mentoring' – how would you define / explain it to others?

3. From the training sessions in September + October, how well supported and prepared do you feel for taking part in the mentoring programme?

    - - Is there any further support or training that you feel you need or would like?

4. What are you hoping to gain from the mentoring programme?

5. Do you have any concerns or misgivings about the mentoring programme?

B. CVT to outline Research process

6. Is there anything you would like to ask about the research project and research process?

Appendix K: Survey Schedule

Mentoring programme 2023-24 [Autumn Term]

The questions in this survey are about your perceptions of the mentoring programme so far.

Some of the questions are to do with logistical or practical issues; some questions are more about your personal feelings and attitudes.

Please give as much information as you can. If you would prefer not to answer any particular question, please just type or select 'prefer not to say'.

[A] Consent

This page is a copy of the consent form that you completed to give your consent for me to approach you to request information that could contribute to my research.

Please answer the questions again to confirm your willingness to participate in this survey and to give consent for me to use the information you provide.

Title of research project: Exploring the suitability of the SPIDER WEB triadic peer mentoring for developing a school-wide mentoring programme

Name of researcher: Clare Temple

Here is the URL for the Research Information Sheet in case you need it: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1TYe4OQitNA3j9WDmqx-dVOZAqnqaBY8-

1. Please type your initials* _____
2. I confirm that I have read and understand the research information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions. *

   Yes No
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. *

   Yes No
4. I agree to take part in this research project and for the anonymised data to be used as the researcher sees fit, including publication. *

   Yes No

[B] About you

This page is about your teaching experience. This information will help to give a context to your responses on the pages that follow.

5. What is your current role? Please select all that apply

	Classroom Teacher
	Subject Leader
	Progress manager
	Deputy Subject Leader
	Other (Please add details below)
	Prefer not to say

6. Please add any other roles / responsibilities not included in Q5

   _____

7. How many years of teaching experience do you have in total?

	I am in my NQT year
	1-3 years
	3-10 years
	more than 10 years
	Prefer not to say

[C] Mentoring experiences to date

This page is about your understanding of mentoring, and what experience you have of mentoring others, or of being mentored.

8. Yourself as a mentee: What experience have you of being mentored, either in your workplace, or in another context? Please select all that apply.

	Recent (ie within the last 3 years) experience of being mentored within ITE / NQT phase
	Experience of being mentored within ITE / NQT phase, but more than 3 years ago
	No recollection of having been mentored during the ITE / NQT phase
	Experience of having been mentored in another workplace - education setting
	Experience of having been mentored in another workplace - not education setting
	Experience of having been mentored in another context - not work-related
	Participation in the previous school mentoring programme 2021-22
	Prefer not to say

9. If you have selected 'mentoring in another context', please give a brief description of the context.

   _____

10. Yourself as mentor: What experience have you of mentoring others? Please select all that apply

	Some experience (ie up to 5 years) of mentoring ITE/NQT
	Extensive experience (ie more than 5 years) of mentoring ITE/NQT
	Current role includes mentoring colleagues (not ITE/NQT) (Please give details below)
	A previous role in an education setting included mentoring colleagues (not ITE/NQT) (Please give details below)
	A previous role in a non-education setting included mentoring colleagues (Please give details below)
	I have completed a coaching / mentoring qualification (Please give details below)
	Participation in school mentoring programme 2021-22
	No previous experience of mentoring others
	Prefer not to say

11. Please add further details if you wish:

    _____

12. What do you understand by the term 'mentoring'? How would you explain it to someone who has not had any experience of mentoring others, or of being mentored?

    _____

[D] The current (2023-24) staff mentoring programme

This page is about your engagement in the current mentoring programme: what you hope to get out of it, and your feelings about your experiences so far.

13. What were your main reasons for joining the mentoring programme? Please select all that apply

	Opportunity to share ideas with different people outside my usual subject team
	Opportunity to share my expertise and offer support to colleagues
	Opportunity to ask for support from people who are not my line manager
	Opportunity to connect with others
	Opportunity to focus on my personal development rather than on school priorities
	I wasn't interested in any of the working parties
	Curiosity: I wanted to see what it was like
	Other (please add details below)
	Prefer not to say

14. If you selected 'other', please add details here:

15. Thinking back to when you signed up for the mentoring programme, how did you feel at the time? Please tick to show how far you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (There is an opportunity for you to expand on these statements and give further details in Q17 and Q18)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to
It was easy to think of areas where I wanted support for my own development					
It was easy to think of areas where I could offer support to others					
I was interested in the mentoring programme but wasn't sure what I wanted to get out of it					
I signed up for the mentoring programme because I had to do something, but I didn't know what I would get out of it					
I was curious about the mentoring programme and wanted to see what it involved					
I was excited about it					
I was nervous about it					

16. How do you feel about your group and the way the groups were organised? Please tick to show how far you agree or disagree with each statement. (There is an opportunity for you to expand on these statements and give further details in Q17 and Q18)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to
I was happy to be put in a group					
I would have preferred to choose my own group and work with people I already know.					
My group is reasonably well-balanced; I think we will be able to work together to support the needs we have identified between us.					
I'm enjoying mentoring the others in my group					
I'm enjoying being mentored by the others in my group					
My group is not working as well as I had hoped.					

17. What are your feelings about the mentoring meetings you have had so far? Have your initial experiences been generally positive or negative? Please add a couple of sentences in your own words to describe how you feel at this stage.

18. Are there any other comments that you would like to add - either to expand on your answers, or that haven't been covered in the questions?

Thank you!

Thank you for taking part in this survey. I really appreciate your support and your input.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO CLICK ON 'SUBMIT'

Select NEXT to submit your responses, or select PREVIOUS if you wish to check anything before submitting.

Should you wish to amend or withdraw any of the information you have provided, please let me know by Friday 22nd March 2024, using my university email address: 18010567@hope.ac.uk

After this date I shall be working on the analysis of all the data collected, which will have been anonymised, and it may not be possible to separate your data from the data provided by other participants.

Appendix L: Individual Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Individual Semi-Structured Interview Date / time _____

[1] Practical Issues

1. How many meetings did your group manage over the year, approximately?
    a. Frequency?
    b. Only at designated times (training days / directed time after school), or other times as well?
2. What were the enablers and barriers to arranging + having meetings?
    a. Did you find it useful to have allocated meeting time? Why? / Why not?
    b. Did you meet in your own time?
    c. Which do you prefer – Designated time / Own time / Mixture?
3. Did you keep any minutes / records of your meetings?
    a. If so, did you use the proforma provided, or a different format?
        > How much use did you make of any minutes / notes you kept?
    b. If not, how did you decide what to prioritise in the next meeting?
        > ie, were sessions independent of each other, or part of an evolving sequence?

[2] About the group

4. How did you feel about mentoring / being mentored by a colleague in your peer group?
    > Did you feel equals, or did some sense of hierarchy creep in?
5. Did the [triad] format work? How did you organise yourselves?
6. Do you feel that everyone's needs were met?
    > How can you evaluate the impact?

[3] Positives + Negatives

7. What benefits (if any) did you experience?
8. What problems (if any) did you encounter?
    a. What would help you to feel more confident that your needs were being met?
    b. Did you feel adequately prepared?
    c. What other training / briefing would be useful?
9. What value overall (if any) has it added to your practitioner experience and development?

[4] The Mentoring Model + the format moving forward

10. What are your views about the possible format moving forward? How suitable a model is this for school?
    If the programme continues, should we:
    a. Make this a continuous programme?
    b. Make it more short-term?
    c. Keep the same groups from year to year?
    d. Jumble groups up?
    e. Allow individuals to choose their own groups? (Or did it work to be placed?)
11. Should the mentoring programme be focused specifically on school priorities, as identified in Estyn? Would it help to have a sharper focus like this?
12. Should the programme stay focused on individual needs?
13. Do the mentors in each group need to be clearly identified?

Appendix M: Poster presentation to EdD conference 2024