

Gomersall, Suzanne (2019) Exploring the perceptions held by primary teacher trainees regarding the value of peer mentoring. *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal*, 11 (2). pp. 12-22.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4655/>

***Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.***

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

**provided that**

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
  - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

**You may not**

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing [insight@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:insight@cumbria.ac.uk).

**Exploring the perceptions held  
by primary teacher trainees  
regarding the value of peer mentoring**

Teacher Education Advancement  
Network Journal  
Copyright © 2019  
University of Cumbria  
Vol 11(2) pages 12-22

Suzanne Gomersall  
Nottingham Trent University

**Abstract**

This small scale study investigated how much value undergraduate primary trainee teachers perceive there to be within a programme of peer mentoring. As this was a small scale study gathering qualitative data, the findings do not represent a general consensus and may be situational to this setting. The literature suggests that there are a wide range of benefits to using peer mentoring, such as a reduction in withdrawal rates, more successful transition into higher education and higher academic outcomes; but it is important to note that the majority of this research has been undertaken within a business setting. However, those studies undertaken within the higher education context, seem to support the findings of the earlier literature.

Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data from a sample of year 1 and year 3 undergraduates. The following themes emerged from the data: transition to university remains a concern; students can identify possible benefits and pitfalls of peer mentoring, but lacked clarity about the best way to instigate a programme; male trainees respond to this concept differently from their female peers. Due to the nature of the research, subsequent studies should be done to explore the possible implications of these themes further.

**Key Words**

Peer mentoring; transition to university; male trainee teachers; retention; withdrawal rates; higher academic outcomes.

**Introduction**

Mentoring is becoming increasingly commonplace within both industry and education. There has been a wide range of research conducted internationally, to explore what is understood by mentoring and the impact it has on both the mentors and mentees who take part (Kram, 1983; Allen and Eby, 2007; Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2014; Pye, Williams and Dunne, 2016). Kram (1983) describes the effects as 'complex, where each individual is changed in some obvious and subtle ways' (p. 617). With research from Bernier, Larose and Soucy (2005) 'making the assumption that mentoring is always entirely beneficial for students' (cited in Crisp and Cruz, 2009, p. 541), it is therefore surprising that not all English university undergraduate primary teaching degrees currently offer a mentoring programme. Instead, some primary teaching students are supported solely by a personal tutor system for the duration of their course. Tutoring can be described as focusing on subject learning, whereas mentoring focuses more on life learning, involving counselling, coaching and tutoring (Miller, 2002) and other concerns such as career, personal issues and study (Cornelius, Wood and Lai, 2016). My interest in the range of areas involved in mentoring led to me exploring the literature, to investigate whether an improved system, incorporating peer mentoring where year 3 student teacher trainees would support year 1 teacher trainees could be introduced.

**Literature Review**

Mentoring is defined by Campbell and Campbell (1997) as the pairing of a new or less experienced employee with a more experienced or senior member, to provide information and guidance to

**Citation**

Gomersall, S. (2019) 'Exploring the perceptions held by primary teacher trainees regarding the value of peer mentoring', *TEAN journal*, 11(2), pp.12-22.

increase the chance of success within the company and beyond. Alternatively, Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2016) make the connection between mentoring and social support, as sharing similar functions, for example, appraisal and belonging identified in social support. Crisp and Cruz (2009) raised concerns in their literature review, as they identified over fifty different mentoring definitions. This lack of clarity as to whether mentoring is a specific set of activities undertaken by a mentor (Kram, 1983) or whether it is a process or concept (Anderson and Shannon, 1988; Ferman, 2002), leads to a certain amount of ambiguity. Despite this, Jacobi's review (1991), as well as the more recent findings of Crisp and Cruz (2009) identify three ways in which researchers agree, namely the growth and accomplishment of an individual, assistance with professional and career development, and role modelling and psychological support.

It is important to remember that most mentoring studies before 2000 have been conducted within the business world (Anderson and Shannon, 1988). More recent mentoring research undertaken within a university setting, such as that by Colvin and Ashman (2010), suggest that the success of peer mentoring is 'the result of relationships between students, mentors and instructors' (p. 121) and is so highly valued it is suggested that this approach may be more effective than traditional teaching methods. It is therefore important to consider that the traditional 'sage on the stage' delivery method, often favoured in some higher education settings, may be less effective than collaboration with students to teach students.

Having explored what mentoring is, my literature search then explored the myriad of different approaches to mentoring, such as formal and informal (Bell and Treleaven, 2010). Through their research of an informal peer mentoring programme, Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2016) found that 70% of mentors lost interest within the initial two weeks of the programme being introduced. This resulted in 46% of students indicating that they wanted more support from their mentor. This lack of dedication and commitment from the peer mentors seems to align with the research undertaken by Noe (1998) and Ragins et al. (2000). However, only the matching and initial session were structured and formalised, leaving the participants to continue the relationship themselves. This suggests the need for the scheme to be formalised for longer.

Cornelius, Wood and Lai (2016) also identify two approaches: *academic mentors* and *peer mentors*, as separate roles undertaken by two different people. The academic mentor, would be primarily concerned with any academic difficulties, whilst the peer mentor provides emotional support, personal feedback and friendship (Strayhorn and Terrell, 2007 and Terrion and Leonard, 2007). Although Nora and Crisp (2007) identify similar key principles for peer mentoring, it is not suggested that these roles be shared out.

Withdrawal from undergraduate courses within the first year at British universities is still a concern, with the latest figures at 5.7% (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017), increasing to 20% non-completion by the final year. These statistics may be influencing universities to introduce a peer mentoring system, if research supports mentoring impacting positively upon retention rates. Since Phillips (2004) identified 35 institutions who had instigated a peer mentoring system, the non-continuation rate decreased by 2%, suggesting that peer mentoring has helped reduce this figure. Moreover, studies suggest that this is not just an issue for UK institutions; data explored by Gilmore (2014, cited in Cornelius, Wood and Lai, 2016), showed that nearly one in five Australian students withdrew from their university courses by the end of their first year. The literature suggests that high withdrawal rates may be linked to difficulties some students experience when transitioning into university, sometimes likened to entering an 'alien environment' (Askham, 2008, p89). As the diversity of today's students' backgrounds widens, it is possible this could increase the challenge of transition for some, due to less social interaction and integration, resulting in a negative experience (Leese, 2010). To try and address these transition-related issues, Leese (2010) suggests that instead of the traditional 'Welcome Week' being viewed as the only tool to aid transition, there should be a 'well-

planned and supported transitional period...especially during their early weeks and months at university' (p247).

Much of the research cites benefits for both mentors and mentees, including developing collegiality, reflection, personal satisfaction and professional development (Bell and Treleaven, 2010; Christie, 2014), as well as higher academic achievement and a reduction in withdrawal rates (Campbell and Campbell, 1997; Gardiner et al. 2007, Christie, 2014). Specific benefits for mentors are identified by Colvin and Ashman (2010) as the ability to support students, reapply concepts in their own lives, and develop connections for themselves. Although the majority of the research presents a very positive picture of mentoring (Campbell and Campbell, 1997; Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2016; Cornelius, Wood and Lai, 2016), it is important to consider possible issues, such as the peer mentor finding themselves in a 'formal position of expertise' (Christie, 2014, p962) as mentees seek academic support. Other potential considerations for mentees are: disappointment in discovering that the relationship cannot meet important development needs, fails to meet expectations, or even mentor neglect (Allen and Eby, 2007). This would suggest the need for careful consideration when introducing a peer mentoring scheme, making sure that there was real clarity regarding boundaries and expectations from the outset.

Possible reasons for the male trainees to opt out of peer mentoring are: preference for different learning styles, preference of working with other males, extremely confident in own abilities, group or pack mentality and the need to over-do the 'maleness' within a female environment. It is possible, due to the majority of primary teaching entrants being female, that the courses are more compatible with female learning styles (Mulholland and Hanson, 2003). Moving forward, the format and the teaching and learning styles utilised within the training of teachers may need rethinking to address under-recruitment and underachievement of male students within a primary teaching degree. The reality of being a minority of males in a predominantly female cohort of first year students, described as a 'shock' by some male students (Mulholland and Hanson, 2003) was mentioned in much of the literature (Carrington, 2002; Cushman, 2005 and 2010; Oldfield and Pollitt, 2017). Having quickly identified themselves as a minority group, the male students in my research tend to seek solace in the company of the other males on the course. Williams (1995) describes this behaviour as 'a sort of refuge, or a refuelling in masculinity' (p78). Mulholland & Hanson (2003) also found that the male trainees would prefer to work together to get the task completed and felt more comfortable approaching other males for guidance.

After engaging with a wide range of research, it is apparent that peer mentoring studies within a university setting are more limited, where findings of best approaches are inconclusive. In order to gain improved clarity, my study will focus on the hypothetical introduction of a peer mentoring system by: "Exploring the perceptions held by primary teacher trainees regarding the value of peer mentoring."

### **Methodology**

The ontological and epistemological position of this paper is an interpretivist one, within a qualitative paradigm. The main emphasis for an interpretive researcher is to gain insight, rather than statistical outcomes to analyse. Rather than generating shallow but broad data from a large sample, it focuses on gathering rich data from a small number of participants (Braun and Clarke, 2013). In addition, Lambert (2012) argues that although your interpretation may be strong and persuasive, it is subjective, as another researcher could conduct similar research to the first, and draw out alternative views and perspectives, and therefore produce an alternative construction or 'truth'. This seemed to be the most appropriate approach as my research would be based on a smaller sample, consisting mostly of qualitative research gathered through interactions with primary practitioners, but being open to gain quantitative data from qualitative data.

### *Data collection methods*

It was imperative to select the right data collection methods that would gather people's views, perceptions and understanding of peer mentoring (Lambert, 2012; Hennink et al., 2010), whilst at the same time being ethical and practical. It is crucial that the data collected can be critically analysed and triangulated to increase reliability and validity (Denscombe, 2007; Laws, 2013; Bell 2014), and that these choices were informed by my literature review. Having researched various data collection methods, together with awareness that most qualitative data begins life as oral data (Evans, 2009, in Wilson, 2009), I decided to use questionnaires and interviews.

### *Approach*

The questionnaire was designed to identify perceptions of peer mentoring of the potential mentors and mentees and was distributed to 32 students, resulting in a response rate of over 90%. The data generated by the questionnaires can then add to more in-depth investigation using other methods, such as interviews (Peterson, 2000; Lambert, 2012; Bell, 2014). The questionnaire began with closed questions utilising the Likert scale (Likert, 1932), with careful consideration given to the phrasing to enable the respondents to agree or disagree to a certain level on the scale (Oppenheim, 1992). Open questions followed, allowing students to expand on their thoughts. The data collected was then subjected to thematic analysis by coding (Evans, 2009 in Wilson, 2009; Lambert, 2012) and then further explored within the interviews. Separate semi-structured interviews were then conducted with first year and third year participants, which were recorded and responses analysed alongside the literature. A further meeting with the participants was conducted, to validate my interpretation of the data.

### *Participants and Ethics*

Due to the risk of subjectivity and bias of working with my own personal tutor groups, and the potential difficulty of keeping an 'arms-length approach' to the research situation (Punch, 2009, p44), I did not work with my own personal tutees. Instead, fellow tutors, with year 1 and year 3 personal tutor groups, whose students' needs would align with Seedhouse's ethical framework (1998) of being most beneficial for the participants, were identified. Regarding ethnicity, age, gender and disability, it was a representative sample. All 32 students, made up of thirteen year 3 students and nineteen year 1 students, were given the option to participate as volunteers. Consequently, 30 students completed the initial questionnaire and 17 attended the initial group interviews. The lack of male and mature students from the subsequent interviews may have had a significant impact on the data, as the insight gained from the interviews will be overlooking views and opinions from the non-response group (Denscombe, 2007). Therefore it is important for me to recognise this as a researcher, that the data gained from the interviews contain a certain amount of bias.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### *Transition*

One over-arching theme is that transition into university is still a major concern for students. Aligning with other research findings, (Fisher and Hood, 1987; Hultberg et al., 2008; Leese, 2010), nearly all of the students questioned, regardless of age, experience or gender acknowledged concerns of starting university, with over a third of respondents identifying they were 'quite concerned'. When asked about the perceived benefits of being assigned a year 3 peer mentor at the start of university life, several female year 1 respondents thought this approach would be '*extremely useful*' and '*helpful*', as they still felt in need of support, even after ten weeks:

I feel it would benefit me as I am currently struggling to get my head around anything we read and what we need to do (file-wise)

This echoed the findings of other researchers, who concluded that the transitional period for first-year students needed to stretch well past the traditional 'Welcome Week', and into the early weeks and

months of the first term at university (Leese, 2010). In this digital age, where potential students can access a wealth of online opportunities, such as conducting virtual tours of university campuses and joining online chatrooms, one might assume that these opportunities might reduce many of the concerns from previous generations of students. However, the findings strongly suggest that although starting university is commonly regarded as positive and exciting, as it involves change, it can also be stressful for many young people. In 1987, Fisher and Hood (1987) commented on the link between moving and ill health, which could lead to withdrawal from the course. Thirty years later, it seems that this is still relevant, indicating that introducing a peer mentoring programme, which could help alleviate some of this stress and worry, should be seriously considered.

#### *Student Perception*

A second theme related to student perception of working with a peer mentor as opposed to a member of academic staff in the same role. During the group interviews, respondents distinguished a key difference between the present tutor system and a peer mentor system was the opportunity to gain support, better understanding of course-related expectations *'with somebody who isn't a lecturer, or... a formal member of staff, it's somebody who is on the same level as you.'* This preference for receiving support from a fellow student supports the findings of Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2014 and 2016):

It's more relatable hearing this from a fellow trainee.

They could've given us advice on our level because they were us not so long ago.

However, in line with Cornelius, Wood and Lai (2016), one year 1 participant recognised that having a lecturer as your tutor has benefits:

I reckon you need a lecturer to be your tutor...because it is...a professional course, and maybe you need that formality and structure to set you up for the rest of the course, and...when you go into placement.

This valuing of extra-familial adults and the benefits of these relationships are referred to by Bernier, Larose and Soucy (2005), who, building on the findings of Tinto (1987), credits these relationships not only with improvement in the students' academic performance, but also retention rates, satisfaction with college life and educational and career goals.

#### *Possible Benefits*

All students were able to articulate their views on what might be other possible benefits of peer mentoring, other than working with someone of a similar age and experience. Having the opportunity to ask questions, or for guidance and support were identified as *'helpful'* and *'useful'* frequently in their responses. The participants in this study also recognised the joint benefits of this system as an opportunity to *'work together'*, *'share what they know'* and *'gain a better understanding'* of various course-related tasks, such as collating files, writing assignments and coping with placement – or *'practical orientation issues'* (Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2016, p2002). A range of emotive language was also used, with terms such as: *'happy'*, *'less daunting'*, *'more relaxed'* and *'someone to talk to'* being used by many of the females:

This would be extremely useful. Also, offers some comfort to know they have gone through exactly what you have. Working with someone of a similar age...also means you feel more open to asking your queries and questions as they are on a similar level to you.

This mirrored the findings of Leese (2010), who also found the feeling of being able to ask questions a recurring theme in her research.

During the group interview, the year 1 respondents were shown a list of possible benefits of peer mentoring, as identified by the literature: undergraduate socialisation, confidence, self-esteem, perseverance, academic attainment and completion of studies (Kram, 1998; Bernier et. al, 2005; Collings, Swanson and Watkins 2014; Pye, Williams and Dunne 2016). When asked to identify which of these would be most important to them as a year 1, 'confidence' was most frequently selected.

When questioned about why they were so willing to provide mentoring support to first year students, the year 3 respondents recognised it was a support mechanism from which they themselves could have benefitted. Possible benefits suggested were: reassurance, support and guidance regarding expectations for the course, assignments and files, as well as having '*someone to talk to if homesick/struggling etc*' (Fisher and Hood, 1987). In the questionnaire, only one respondent referred to the benefits for themselves as a mentor, stating:

It would help the [mentor in future] to evaluate their experience so far which might encourage them in the time yet to come.

Because a semi-structured approach was used to conduct the group interview, it was possible for the interviewer to ask a supplementary question (Denscombe, 2007; Lambert, 2012; Bell, 2014), which enabled the year 3 respondents to further elaborate on possible benefits for the mentor. Consequently, further insight revealed:

I think it would help build our confidence as we don't really talk to people of our own age professionally... it would help us when going into school, knowing how to get our point across and exactly what we need to say' and 'we have got to learn to use our initiative, and get the support we need, so to do that from early on would be more beneficial.

The opportunity to deepen their own understanding was also recognised by one respondent, who recalled the benefits of explaining things to her peers during a previous school experience:

...because it would make my understanding better, so maybe if you had to explain to someone how to write analytically, that might deepen your understanding.

#### *Possible pitfalls*

Conversely, both year 1 and year 3 participants were also able to consider possible pitfalls of peer mentoring. One key hurdle to overcome from the year 1 respondents' perspectives were concerns that the third year students may be '*too busy*' to find the time to meet, due to their workloads, which was mentioned in several of the questionnaires. This was reiterated during the year 3 group interview, with phrases such as '*already have a lot on our plates*', '*adding to the pressure*' and '*on top of everything else.*' This would suggest that finding the right balance between the personal desire to be a good mentor, along with time and other commitments, needs careful consideration (Colvin and Ashman, 2010). A surprising factor was the feeling that meeting and working with older or more experienced trainees might be intimidating, with a number of female respondents mentioning this. Other less frequent comments referred to the risk of the year 3s '*getting annoyed with all the questions*', possible clash of personalities where the mentor and mentee '*may not get on*'.

The main concern, mentioned by nearly half of the year 3 respondents in both the questionnaire and the focus group interview, was about their ability to give the right advice (Christie, 2014; Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2016; Cornelius, Wood and Lai, 2016), especially when it came to academic guidance, such as:

Aspects like referencing need to come from a lecturer - as a year 3 I would not feel confident answering questions to do with this.

I feel like I don't want to either give them too much information, or give them the wrong information, and then it's like they might have a bit of a misconception.

If, instead of the mentoring role being undertaken by one person (Crisp 2007, 2009; and Colvin and Ashman, 2010) it was separated into two roles undertaken by different people; an academic tutor and a peer mentor (Bell and Treleaven, 2010; Cornelius, Wood and Lai 2016), then concerns regarding workload and the ability to be an effective mentor should be addressed. This would help mentees avoid crossing the barrier to ask for academic support from their peer mentor (Christie, 2014).

This raises the question about the need for peer mentor training, as explored by Colvin and Ashman (2010). The training they provided focused on developing cultural sensitivity, communication skills, time management, understanding the role of a mentor, as well as facilitating learning. However, it could be argued that students on a teacher-training route are already developing the skills and attributes required to be a mentor, but it is possible that more formal guidance may be required to transfer these skills to working with their peers. Therefore, after matching the mentors and mentees, it would be imperative that the university provides mentor training, as well as provide peer mentoring role and process guidance, to aid understanding and expectations for all involved.

#### *Formal and Informal approaches*

Having established that introducing a peer mentoring system would be welcomed, the concept of two types of mentoring, formal and informal (Bell and Treleaven, 2010; Cornelius, Wood and Lai, 2016), was introduced during the group interviews. The general consensus amongst the year 3 respondents was that informal engagement with the peer mentoring system for both mentees and mentors would be preferable, as compulsory mentors *'aren't going to give the tutee the right kind of mentoring, they're going to be kinda reluctant to do it properly, and it ends up just being harmful for everyone involved.'* Alternatively, some of the year 3 respondents felt that a certain level of formality was required, to increase attendance: *'it wouldn't be seen as compulsory, so people may think they can get away with not coming, so it maybe not work as well.'* Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2016) experienced this lack of dedication and commitment, when, after 10 weeks of a peer mentoring system being instigated, less than half of the participants were still in contact with their mentors. Additionally, by formalising the process, one year 3 respondent felt that the mentor would know which students *'are yours to look after'*.

When presented with the same choice of a formal or informal approach, the year 1 respondents were a little more uncommitted. When considering the informal model, they could see that on the one hand, you would have *'motivation from both students'* and greater flexibility to match the support to the individual student's needs, but on the other, it could fail as *'I don't think people will stick to an informal peer mentoring [system]'*. Possible benefits to adopting the alternative *'formal mentoring'* approach might be *'a structure to set you up for the rest of the course, and the working environment for when we go into placement'*, whilst simultaneously recognising there may be possible negative effects, such as a lack of motivation, pairings that were unable to build a positive relationship, and by following a set programme, not actually telling the person what they wanted to know. As a group, they concluded that combining an informal and formal approach to peer mentoring might be the best solution: *'yeah, I would say... that mixing them well together, so that they feel comfortable but they still have the structure behind them.'*

#### *Introducing and embedding peer mentoring*

When asked to consider how a peer mentoring system could be introduced and embedded successfully, there was a wide range of contradictory responses. The majority of year 1 trainees responded positively when presented with the notion of being assigned a year 3 to support them from their first day at university, supported by a year 3 respondent, who felt meeting on the first day of term *'would be nice'*, with *'everyone together in one lecture hall [then] split off into smaller groups'*. In contrast, a year 1 respondent who was supportive of the peer-mentoring concept felt that meeting on the first day might be *'too overwhelming'*. A further suggestion was that it *'would be a good idea*



*for mentees and mentors to meet before university starts'*, supporting the suggestions of Colvin and Ashman, (2010).

In terms of how it would run from thereon in, one year 3 was aware of their own needs for continued mentoring and support from their own tutor, so suggested a *'half and half'* approach to the tutoring system; with *'half the time allocated for own tutor support, other half used for peer mentoring.'*

Whilst considering timetable and workload constraints, one year 3 identified that meetings held within a peer mentoring system *'could be short and often.'* Building on this, another respondent recognised that *'peer mentoring should be set at points....in a quieter time of the year'*, which would enable the year 3 mentors to provide *'a good level of support and feel they have the time to do this properly.'* They also recognised the need for giving careful consideration to the frequency of these mentoring encounters, as *'if they are too frequent, the demand on the students would be too high, yet of it did not happen often enough, it would not be as effective as it could.'* In contrast, a year 1 respondent felt that a *'strong element of flexibility with this system'* was needed and meetings should not be timetabled.

#### *Male Trainees*

The male respondents responded quite differently. Although they responded positively to the suggestion of peer mentoring, they tempered this with possible downsides:

This would perhaps be initiated by yourself initially but certainly on an infrequent basis.

A good idea, dependent possibly on the y3's experience of the degree.

Very helpful for year 1, probably a bit of a nightmare for the y3.

Despite the findings of Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2016) that many mentoring schemes focus on vulnerable or under-represented groups, interestingly, all of the male students declined to take part, despite many of them responding positively to the suggestion of the scheme. On primary teaching routes, male students are under-represented and data shows that they underperform in comparison to their female counterparts by 14.8% (Treeford Data 2015-16 from the Inclusivity Toolkit, CADQ, Success for All), so this reluctance to participate in a programme that could potentially improve their chances of success was frustrating. Although the sample size in my research is small, it does seem to correlate with the findings being presented within the literature.

Due to the small number of males in year 3 in my research, it was highly likely the year 1 males would be paired with a female peer mentor. As it was still very early on in the course (10 weeks), it is possible they still required that security from their male peers. When collecting the responses of the initial survey, the males, who were sat in a group together, responded in a more group or pack-like manner, as it might have been viewed as weak or less masculine to request the support offered from the peer mentoring programme.

Due to the public perception that primary teaching is a low-status, female profession (Carrington, 2002; Skelton, 2003; Cushman, 2005) and is often viewed as an easy option for men (Mulholland and Hanson, 2003), it suggests that men who do train as primary teachers must have a confidence, a *'strong sense of purpose and commitment'* and have demonstrated resilience and determination early on to overcome many barriers to them when deciding to pursue a career in primary education (Oldfield and Pollitt, 2017, p31). It is possible, therefore, due to this confidence, that the male trainees didn't feel the need for the support a peer mentoring programme would offer.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these findings, due to the small sample size. To be able to increase the validity of these findings, a much larger group of male students would

need to be questioned. In addition, having now researched the possible impact of gathering data from them as a group, it would be crucial that this data was gathered from them individually.

### Conclusions

This study was to explore the perceptions of students regarding the values of peer mentoring on an undergraduate teacher-training route. From my findings, it is possible to conclude that the transition to university is still a concern, and that students feel that peer mentoring could help alleviate some of this for some students, especially if it could begin before the start of the first term. This study shows that students are able to identify benefits for mentees, but are not as clear about the benefits for mentors, such as supporting students, reapplying concepts in their own lives, and developing connections themselves (Colvin and Ashman, 2010). For future students to engage with the programme and take on the role of mentors, the benefits would need to be more clearly articulated (Kram, 1983; Crisp and Cruz, 2007; Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2014; Pye, Williams and Dunne, 2016). Both potential mentors and mentees were able to identify possible pitfalls to avoid if we were to instigate a peer mentoring programme.

As all participants could identify benefits and pitfalls for both a formal and informal approach to the programme, a lack of agreement was reached, resulting in the suggestion of combining the two approaches. This would build on the recommendations of Collings, Swanson and Watkins (2016) who found a 70% decrease in the mentor's interest, and nearly half of mentees wanting more support after only two weeks of the introduction of their mentoring pilot project.

One aspect I hadn't foreseen was the impact gender may have on this theme of peer mentoring. This led me to undertake a second literature review, to enable me to make sense of the data, and go beyond my original reading, revealed the need to tackle to gender stereo-typing that is still prevalent in our primary schools.

This study has reinforced my views that the introduction of a peer mentoring system would benefit undergraduate primary teacher trainees, but for it to be successful for all, careful consideration needs to be made regarding the organisation, the recruitment of mentors, the matching of mentors and mentees, as well as limiting the expectations of those that opt to take part. I believe the key to the success of this programme for the male trainees, is to introduce the new students to the peer mentors before they arrive on campus for Welcome Week, so that they are more likely to accept the scheme as part of the package, rather than an 'optional extra'.

### References

- Allen, T. and Eby, L. (2007). Mentor commitment in formal relationships. *Journal of vocational behaviour*, vol. 72, no.3, pp. 309-316
- Anderson, E. and Shannon, A. (1988) Towards a conceptualization of mentoring. *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 39, no. 1, pp. 33-42
- Askham, P. (2008). Context and identity: Exploring adult learners' experience of higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, vol. 32, no.1, pp. 85-87
- Bell, J. (2014). *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers*. 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. Maidenhead: OUP
- Bell, A. and Treleaven, L. (2010). Looking for professor right: Mentee selection of mentors in a formal program. *Higher Education*, vol. 61, no. 5, pp. 545-561
- British Educational Research Association, (2011). *Ethical guidelines for educational research* [online]. London: BERA. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf?noredirect=1> [Accessed December 1 2016]
- Bernier, A., Larose, S. and Soucy, N. (2005). Academic mentoring in college: The interactive role of student's and mentor's interpersonal dispositions. *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 46, no.1, pp. 29-51

- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A practical guide for beginners*. London: SAGE
- Campbell, T. and Campbell, D. (1997). Faculty/student mentor program: Effects on academic performance and retention. *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 38, no. 6, pp. 727-742
- Carrington, B. (2002). A quintessentially female domain? Student teachers' constructions of primary teaching as a career. *Educational Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 287-303
- Christie, H. (2014). Peer mentoring in higher education: issues of power and control. *Teaching in Higher Education*, vol. 19, no. 8, pp. 955-965
- Collings, R., Swanson, V. and Watkins, R. (2014). The impact of peer mentoring on levels of student wellbeing, integration and retention: a controlled comparative evaluation of residential students in UK higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 68, no. 6, pp. 927-942
- Collings, R., Swanson, V. and Watkins, R. (2016). Peer mentoring during the transition to university: assessing the usage of a formal scheme within the UK. *Studies in Higher Education*, vol. 41, no.11, pp. 1995-2000
- Colvin, J. and Ashman, M. (2010) Roles, risks and benefits of peer mentoring relationships in higher education. *Mentoring and tutoring: Partnerships in Learning*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 121-134
- Cornelius, V., Wood, L. and Lai, J. (2016). Implementation and evaluation of a formal academic peer mentoring programme in Higher Education. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp.193-205
- Crisp, G. and Cruz, I. (2009). Mentoring college students: A critical review of the literature between 1990 and 2007. *Research in Higher Education*, vol. 50, no. 6, pp. 525-545
- Cushman, P. (2005). Let's hear it from the males: Issues facing male primary school teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 227-240
- Cushman, P. (2010). Male primary school teachers: Helping or hindering a move to gender equity? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp.1211-1218
- Denscombe, M. (2007). *The Good Research Guide for Small-scale social research projects*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Berkshire: OUP
- Ferman, T. (2002). Academic professional development: What lecturers find valuable. *Journal for Academic Development*, vol. 7, no.2, pp.146-158
- Fisher, S. and Hood, B. (1987). The stress of transition to university: A longitudinal study of psychological disturbance, absent-mindedness and vulnerability to homesickness. *British Journal of Psychology*, vol. 78, no. 4, pp. 425-441
- Gardiner, M., Tiggemann, M., Kearns, H. and Marshall, K. (2007). Show me the money! An empirical analysis of mentoring outcomes for women in academia. *Higher Education Research and Development*, vol. 26, no. 4, pp.425-442
- Higher Education Statistics Agency, (2017). Available online at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation-summary> [Accessed June 10 2017]
- Hultberg, J., Plos, K., Hendry, G.D. and Kjellgran, I. (2008). Scaffolding students' transition to higher education: Parallel introductory courses for students and teachers. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, vol. 32, no.1, pp. 47-57
- Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Education Research*, vol. 61, no.4, pp.505-532
- Kram, K. (1983). Phases of the mentor relationship. *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 26, no.4, pp.608-625
- Lambert, M. (2012). *A Beginner's Guide to Doing your Research Project*. London: SAGE
- Leese, M. (2010). Bridging the gap: Supporting student transitions into higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, vol. 34, no. 2, pp. 239-251
- Miller, A. (2002). *Mentoring students and young people: A handbook for effective practice*. London: Kogan Page
- Mulholland, J. and Hanson, P. (2003) Men who become primary school teachers: An early portrait. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 31, no. 3, pp. 213-224

GOMERSALL: EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS HELD BY PRIMARY TEACHER TRAINEES REGARDING THE  
VALUE OF PEER MENTORING

- Noe, R. (1998). An investigation of the determinants of successful assigned mentoring relationships. *Personnel Psychology*, vol. 41, no.3, pp. 457-479
- Nora, A. and Crisp, G. (2007). Mentoring students: conceptualizing and validating the multi-dimensions of a support system. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*, vol. 9, no. 3, pp. 337-356
- Oldfield, J. and Pollitt, K. (2017). Overcoming the odds: Exploring the barriers and motivation for male trainee primary teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, vol. 62, no.1, pp. 30-34
- Oppenheim, A. (1992). *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. London: Continuum
- Phillips, R. (2004). Students helping students: The effectiveness of peer mentoring in the UK in higher education. *Paper presented at the psychology of education section annual conference*, Glasgow. November 5-7
- Pye, G., Williams, S. and Dunne, L. (2016). Student Academic Mentoring (SAM): peer support and undergraduate study. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*. Special Ed: Academic Peer Learning, Part 2, Apr 2016
- Ragins, B., Cotton, J. and Miller, J. (2000) Marginal mentoring: The effects of type of mentor, quality of relationship and program design on work and career attitudes. *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 43, no.6, pp. 1177-1194
- Skelton, C. (2003). Male primary teachers and perceptions of masculinity. *Educational Review*, vol. 55, no.2, pp.195-209
- Terrion, J., & Leonard, D. (2007). A taxonomy of the characteristics of student peer mentors in higher education: *Findings from a literature review*. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, vol. 15, no.2, pp. 149 -164
- Wilson, E. (2009). *School-based Research: A guide for education students*. London: SAGE
- Williams, C. (1995). *Still a Man's World: men who do "women's work"*. Berkley: University of California Press