“Mentoring newly qualified teachers: A qualitative study of school-based mentoring in Irish primary schools”
“Mentoring newly qualified teachers:

A qualitative study of school-based mentoring in Irish primary schools”

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Declaration of Ownership

I, Ciara Stapleton, declare that this research is my own, unaided work, except as indicated in the acknowledgements, the text and the references.

It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Masters of Business Administration” at Dublin Business School.

It has not been submitted before, in whole or in part, for any degree or examination at any other institution.

Signed: Ciara Stapleton

Date 14 – 08 - 2013
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I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Bernadette, my sister, Aoife and my brother, Padraig, who have provided me with endless support and encouragement. Thank you for your patience and unwavering faith in me.

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List of Abbreviations

NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher

NIPT: National Induction Programme for Teachers

INTO: Irish National Teachers Organisation

DES: Department of Education and Skills

ITE: Initial Teacher Education

PST: Professional Support Team
Abstract

This dissertation examines the mentoring of newly qualified teachers in Irish primary schools, as part of the National Induction Programme for Teachers. The qualitative study begins by examining the concept and practice of mentoring in the world of education; focus is limited to an overview of the concept of teacher mentoring. Analysis of data collected from interviews with fifteen stakeholders; three primary school principals, three mentors, four mentees and five non-mentored teachers, examines mentoring best practice, intrinsic motivation of teachers, programme effectiveness and the perceived benefits for mentee, mentor and the school. The study identifies an increase in NQT confidence, the reaffirming of more experienced teachers, the enhancement of staff communications and the acceleration along the learning curve for NQTS as the central benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme. Significant obstacles which are impeding optimal functioning and the expansion of the programme are identified, including time restrictions, mentoring training and school-based mentoring in smaller schools. Ultimately, the study discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the mentoring programme, and how it could be more widely adopted and practiced within the field of teacher professional development and human resource management in the Irish education system.

Keywords: mentoring; professional development; teacher motivation; newly qualified teachers; Irish primary schools
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Making a debut in any profession is a difficult and stressful undertaking. While in many professions, the experience gained over time promotes the development of a feeling of control over various circumstances, within the teaching profession circumstances differ from one generation to another and from one pupil to another. Ligadu (2012) cites Hargreaves and Fullan’s observations that learning to teach has become more complex and multifaceted, noting that teachers are also tasked with integrating information and communication technologies and managing a diversity of learners, from different backgrounds and with special needs.

While in many schools, the responsibility of guiding and directing new teachers falls to the principal, Hall (2008, p. 29) suggests that many of these principals find themselves totally at the mercy of the ‘tsunami of principalship’. Crum et al. (2010) note that the list of duties required of a school principal mirrors one of a super hero; a list which is virtually inexhaustible and which makes the job highly fragmented. The role of mentoring a newly qualified teacher is a job that requires dedication and commitment and therefore, an auxiliary is essential. A newly qualified teacher (NQT), according to Haack (2006) needs someone who really knows the territory – someone up-to-date and aware of current methods, materials and procedures. This person is a mentor.

Hanson and Moir (2008) observe that teacher induction programmes have proliferated over the past decade in an effort to increase teacher retention, support new teachers and improve student achievement. The current mentoring system in Irish primary schools, headed by the
National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), was established in September 2010. It evolved from pilot projects in both Primary and Post-Primary schools which commenced in 2002. The general aims of the NIPT are to support NQTs in their first year of teaching by building on their learning at the initial teacher education (ITE) stage and to provide a high quality effective programme of induction. The NIPT outline induction as a process which ‘takes place during that critical period at the beginning of the newly qualified teacher’s career, usually the first year after qualifying as a teacher’, as cited in the Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education (2011, p. 16).

The programme sets out to support and promote the professional development of NQTs and quotes Feiman-Nemser (2001, p. 1026) when reasoning that ‘teachers have two jobs - they have to teach and they have to learn to teach. No matter how good a pre-service program may be, there are some things that can only be learned on the job’. Before being certified as fully qualified teachers, NQTs have to complete a probation period. This is usually a one-year period during which an inspector from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) evaluates the teacher’s work. If the Inspector is satisfied by the teacher’s performance, they will be awarded the DES Diploma which certifies that they are a fully qualified national school teacher. As outlined in the Kelleghan Report (2002), the NIPT assert that NQTs find themselves having to address a range of issues and concerns that may have been less pressing when they were completing shorter periods of teaching under rather artificial condition. They further note that the responsibilities of student teachers and full-time teachers differ considerably in classroom management and in dealing with other professionals and parents. It could be suggested that the mentoring programme which operates in Irish primary schools is more closely linked with coaching than mentoring. However, as mentoring is the agreed term used by the NIPT and accepted by the DES, this research will address the process of mentoring rather than that of coaching.
1.2 Research area

This research seeks to examine what can be learned from the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools which could enhance the programme and facilitate its expansion. The study investigates the attitudes and opinions of the main stakeholders of the NIPT mentoring programme and seeks to establish the benefits of the programme as well as the perceived obstacles to expansion.

The Framework of Support set out by the NIPT, facilitates support through workshop programmes, the NIPT website, professional support groups, school-based support and support school visits. This research focuses on school-based support and explores the possibility of the expansion of the programme, to enable the presence of a designated mentor in every Irish primary school.

![NIPT Framework of Support](image)

*Figure 1.1 NIPT Framework of Support*
1.3 Research question and objectives

This research aims to establish:

What can be learned from the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools which could facilitate the enhancement and expansion of the programme?

To this end, the researcher seeks to:

1. Explore current best practice in mentoring.
2. Investigate the source of motivation of the main stakeholders, with particular reference to the current NIPT mentoring programme.
3. Identify the principal benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme for the main stakeholders.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools.
5. Identify any significant obstacles to an expansion of the NIPT school-based mentoring programme.

Through achieving these objectives, the above question can be answered in a comprehensive and coherent fashion.

1.4 Suitability of the researcher:

In addition to the attainment of an Honours Bachelor of Education and Irish degree from Mary Immaculate College and the University of Limerick, the researcher has four years of primary school teaching experience in Ireland. The researcher did not have the opportunity to partake in a school-based mentoring programme as set out by the NIPT in her first year of teaching, as the programme had not yet been established. However, the programme is in
operation in the school in which the researcher is employed as a full-time primary school teacher. Through her studies for a Master’s degree in Business Administration, the researcher has attained a broader knowledge of areas such as organisational culture, strategic management, managing resourcing strategy, the management of performance and the importance of induction programmes. Choosing to specialise in the area of Human Resource Management, the researcher developed a specific interest in the area of mentoring, with particular reference to the mentoring of teaching professionals.

1.5 Contribution of the study

The research explores the perceptions and attitudes of the main stakeholders towards the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools, exploring its effectiveness and the benefits to all stakeholders. As the current programme is not mandatory in Irish schools, not all schools have a mentor on the teaching staff. To this end, not all NQTs have access to a mentor on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis. This research seeks to establish any enhancements which could be made to the programme and any significant obstacles to the expansion of the programme in order to facilitate more widespread access to school-based mentors.

1.6 Scope and limitations of the research

The literature review explores a wide range of academic references to initial teacher training, induction and mentoring of NQTs, as well as the attitudes of the relevant stakeholders; principals, mentors and NQTs.

The research is based on interviews with fifteen stakeholders. As there are 3,300 primary schools in Ireland, this is a very small sample. However, by ensuring that these participants are from schools located in different areas of Ireland with varying enrolment size and
religious ethos, the research aims to ensure a broader view of performance management practices in Irish primary schools.

The timeframe within which the research must be carried out for the purposes of the dissertation is quite restrictive. A more in-depth study, facilitating observation of performance management in practice, could have been completed if the dissertation timetable had permitted. It was necessary for this study to be carried out in late May, June, July and finalised in early August. As all of the participants are primary schools employees, it was imperative that interviews were conducted as early as possible, as schools close during much of July and August.

The research relies heavily on the contributions of the participants and the veracity of their answers with regard to the interview questions. To facilitate open and honest responses, the participants are not expressly named throughout the research but referred to according to their position as a stakeholder in the mentoring process.

1.7 Recipients of the research

The recipients of this thesis, conducted as part of the Master’s Degree in Human Resource Management with Dublin Business School, include:


2. Liverpool John Moores University: Awarding body.

3. Mr Eddie McConnon: Dissertation supervisor.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Mentoring in Schools

In the field of education, the concept of apprenticeship and working under a master craftsman is not foreign, according to Hall (2008) who states that almost every teacher has worked through a university authorised, unpaid student-teaching experience in the classroom of a master teacher. While mentoring is certainly not reserved solely for the beginning teacher and also aids the mid-career teacher, much has been written about its effects on the NQT. Long (2010) suggests that NQTs should have the opportunity to join together as a networked group of teachers new to the profession or integrate with small groups of teachers who are actively investigating pedagogy through systematic and rigorous processes of action research. These authors are not alone in their assertion that NQTs need a certain level of hand-holding during their debut teaching year. Hansen and Moir (2008) support the concept of mentoring for the NQT, stating that it would facilitate a seamless continuum in which content knowledge and pedagogical skills could develop concurrently through teaching, observation, dialogue and reflection. This theory could be likened to Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle (See Figure 2.1) which outlines key stages of learning as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation; all of which are constantly in action in the world of teaching. According to Armstrong (2009), the model describes how experience is translated into concepts that are then used to guide the choice of new experiences - a theory which reflects the aims of mentoring.

Brown and Hanson’s 2003 comments which opined that formal mentoring appears to be more common in the business world than in the academic world are cited by Desselle (2012), who asserts that the academic world appears to be beginning to realise the value of mentorship and
formal mentoring programmes in an effort develop its faculty members. According to Papastamis (2010) and Philips and Fagoulis (2010), mentors provide expertise to less experienced individuals, noting that people from various arenas having benefited from being part of a mentoring relationship.

Figure 2.1 Kolb’s Learning Cycle (1984)

With all this literature highlighting the benefits of mentoring, it is important to note that the implementation of a mentoring programme for NQTs is not a straightforward process but one with many dimensions to consider. Hall (2008) notes that the continuation of the learning process, as the NQT ventures into school administration, has been erratic and inconsistent, while Langa (2010) is concerned with the lack of a universally accepted definition of mentoring. Lord, Atkinson and Mitchell (2008) compile a list of descriptions of the role of mentor as outlined in Figure 2.2. This is an issue which is prevalent throughout the academic
literature on mentoring and serves to complicate the establishment of a clear, concise vision of what mentoring entails.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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<tr>
<td>Apprenticeship model</td>
<td>Mentor acts as the master teacher, conveying the rules and values, to be emulated.</td>
<td>Child and Merrill (2003); Jones et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence model</td>
<td>Mentor relates training and assessment to practice. Mentors perform the role of trainer, assessor and gatekeeper of the profession.</td>
<td>Child and Merrill (2003); Jones et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective model</td>
<td>Mentor adopts the role of critical friend who assists in the evaluation of teaching, to develop a reflective practitioner.</td>
<td>Child and Merrill (2003); Jones et al. (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as model</td>
<td>To inspire and to demonstrate.</td>
<td>Hobson and Sharp (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as acculturator</td>
<td>To help the mentee become accustomed to the particular professional culture.</td>
<td>Hobson and Sharp (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as sponsor</td>
<td>To open doors and introduce the mentee to the right people. Power and control is not shared; the mentor has primary responsibility for managing the process. Directive styles such as coaching and guiding are used.</td>
<td>Hobson and Sharp (2005); Robins (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as provider of support</td>
<td>To provide the mentee with a safe place to release emotions or let off steam.</td>
<td>Hobson and Sharp (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor as educator</td>
<td>To listen, to coach and to create appropriate opportunities for the mentee’s professional learning.</td>
<td>Hobson and Sharp (2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development model</td>
<td>Non-directive styles such as counselling and facilitating are used. Balance of formal and informal arrangements. Personal and professional change through reflection.</td>
<td>Robins (2006)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.2 Varying descriptions of the role of mentor - Lord et al (2008)*
The terms ‘coaching’ and ‘mentoring’ are often presumed to be interchangeable but in fact; the two concepts are quite different. Bush et al. (1996) summarise the difference succinctly, stating that coaching is one aspect of mentoring and mentoring may include coaching. According to Carnell et al. (2012), coaching is devoted to developing a capacity for change whereas in mentoring, the nearest to this idea is setting goals and supporting progression and articulating learning.

Rogers (2004) suggests that the coach works with clients to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness in their careers with their sole aim being to achieve the client’s potential, as defined by the client. Cordingly et al. (2004) propose that coaching supports the review and development of practice or the integration of new ways of performing, adding that coaches are more knowledgeable, are expert in particular approaches which can offer support for implementation and evaluation of the new practice. As previously stated in Chapter One, one could be propose that the NIPT mentoring programme is more closely linked with coaching than mentoring. However upon examining the definitions of ‘mentor’ as outlined in Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3, it appears as though the broader role of mentoring covers the wide range of support services which the mentor in Irish primary schools is tasked with providing.

Another key distinction which must be made is that of the difference between mentoring and induction. While Wong (2004) outlines mentoring as (i) focussing on supportive factors, (ii) involving a single or group mentor, (iii) being an isolated phase, (iv) requiring few resources, and (v) being reactive to any need that arises, quite conversely the author suggests that induction programmes (i) involve learning that impacts careers of multiple support personnel, (ii) focus on professional development in design, resources and investment, and (iii) alignment to student academic standards. With regard to the NIPT programme, the programme states that school-based mentoring is just one aspect of a five-pronged induction
support system for NQTs. In effect, one could paraphrase Bush et al. and propose that mentoring is one aspect of induction, and induction may include mentoring.

![Figure 2.3 Definitions of coaching and mentoring - Carnell et al. (2012)](image)

Although a substantial programme may well be the best investment a profession can make, Haack (2006) asserts that a weak, inconsistent and poorly supported mentoring programme will experience more pitfalls and fewer benefits. McCann, Johannessen and Ricca (2005) conclude that it is better for a school to have no mentoring programme than to have a poor mentoring programme. The instances of mentoring are random and the quality of mentoring is variable according to renowned Australian author, Peter Hudson (2010). Whilst mentoring
programmes in schools may be mandatory in countries such as Australia, Long (2010) suggests that their implementation is often questionable.

Kelly et al. (1992) outline the responsibilities of a mentor across professions as providing:

- opportunities for meaningful feedback on performance;
- opportunities for greater effectiveness in the classroom/workplace;
- opportunities to observe others as role models in classroom; and
- personal support.

However, a more robust model is Hudson’s (2010) five-factor Mentoring Model which provides a theoretical framework for collecting qualitative data from mentors and mentees. This five-factor model identifies the key areas as:

- the mentor’s personal attributes for facilitating the mentoring process;
- mentoring about the essential education system requirements;
- the mentor’s pedagogical knowledge;
- the mentor’s modelling of teaching practices; and
- quality feedback provided by the mentor.

This model is significant as it is designed specifically for the teaching profession and encompasses, and elaborates on, many of the topics discussed by the aforementioned authors. However, while Hudson’s (2010) five-factor model may imply that mentoring is a straightforward process, it would be naïve to discount the detrimental impact which could result from a mentoring programme which is too rigidly structured. Striking a balance is paramount - the programme cannot be so informal that it is hard to monitor, nor so formal that an overbearing structure stifles the desired outcome and quenches the motivation of the relevant stakeholders. It is with this in mind that this research examines some fundamental motivation theories which impact upon the mentoring process in schools.
2.2 Motivation Theories

*Expectancy Theory*

Expectancy theory states that motivation will be high when subjects (a) are clear as to what they have to do in order to get a reward, (b) expect that they will succeed in achieving the reward and (c) expect that the reward will be worthwhile. The concept of expectancy, as discussed by Armstrong (2012) was originally contained in the valence-instrumentality-expectancy (VIE) theory formulated by Vroom (1964). ‘Valence’ stands for value, ‘instrumentality’ is the belief that if we do one thing it will lead to another, and ‘expectancy’ is the probability that action or effort will lead to an outcome. Motivation is only likely where a clearly perceived and functional relationship exists between performance and outcome, and where the outcome is seen as a means of satisfying a need. Armstrong (2012) suggests that intrinsic motivation outcomes are more under the control of individuals, who can place greater reliance on their past experiences to indicate the extent to which positive and advantageous results are likely to be obtained by their behaviour. This explains why intrinsic motivation arising from work itself can be more powerful than extrinsic motivation. It could be said that expectancy theory is relevant in the case of mentoring; however it still relies on the mentor expecting a reward which they deem to be worthwhile. Therefore, a mentor must be satisfied with the reward of a successful outcome for the mentee.

*Goal Theory*

It could be said that it is ‘goal theory’ which is most reflective of the current mentoring programme in Irish primary schools. Goal theory, as established by Latham and Locke (1979) states that motivation and performance are higher when individuals are set specific goals, when goals are difficult but accepted, and when there is feedback on performance. Armstrong (2012) reiterates that participation in goal setting is important as a means of getting
agreement to the setting of higher goals. Difficult goals must be agreed upon and their achievement reinforced by guidance and advice. Finally, feedback is vital in maintaining motivation, particularly towards the achievement of even higher goals. While this is significant in relation to the mentoring process, it must be noted that although the goals set by the mentor and mentee are important, ultimately it is an outside, external inspector who will decide if they mentee has been successful in their quest to achieve their DES Diploma. The feedback which the mentor receives is the knowledge that their mentee has attained their diploma and the gratification which comes with this. Goal theory underpins the 1960s concept of ‘management by objectives’ - a process of managing, motivating and appraising people by setting objectives or goals and measuring performance against those objectives as stated by Armstrong (2009).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Theorist(s)</th>
<th>Summary of theory</th>
<th>Implications</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Process/ cognitive theory</td>
<td>Expectancy theory</td>
<td>Vroom (1964), Porter and Lawler (1968)</td>
<td>Effort (motivation) depends on the likelihood that rewards will follow effort and that the reward is worthwhile</td>
<td>The key theory informing approaches to rewards, i.e. that they must be a link between effort and reward (line of sight), the reward should be achievable and should be worthwhile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal theory</td>
<td>Latham and Locke (1979)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Motivation will improve if people have demanding but agreed goals and receive feedback</td>
<td>Provides the rationale for performance management, goal setting and feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.4 Armstrong’s Observations on Motivation Theories (2009)
2.3 Benefits for the Mentee

Renard (2003) notes that NQTs are often expected to understand procedures and be able to take on the same responsibilities as veteran teachers, with Arnold-Rogers et al. (2008) adding that teachers can easily become overwhelmed and isolated without support. According to Feiman-Nemser (2003) it is wrong to consider NQTs as finished products, while Jonson (2008) suggests that without the help of mentors, many novice teachers have difficulty adapting what they learned in the university education courses to their teaching in schools.

Competence and expertise for NQTs can be developed by engaging in reflective practice on mutually agreed issues of interest and concern according to Long (2010). Villani (2002) develops this further and advocates providing support to NQTs through mentoring, to enable them to make a smooth transition into the professional teaching environment and to reduce the experience of reality-shock when faced with the challenges of the teaching practicum. Jonson (2007) adds that consistent support creates a safe climate which facilitates taking risks and developing personally and professionally. Kilburg (2007) concludes that a nurturing environment that meets personal and emotional needs results in mentees being better able to meet their daily demands and challenges.

Philips and Fragoulis (2010) outline the benefits of mentoring to the mentee quite comprehensively, stating that mentoring:

- promotes a professional relationship that fosters guidance and support;
- may increase self-confidence;
- challenges mentees to go further, take risks, set new goals, achieve higher standards both personally and professionally;
- provides a forum to dialogue on professional issues and seek and receive advice on how to balance new responsibilities;
- provides role modelling;
- develops increased competencies and stronger interpersonal skills; and
- reflects their commitment to personal and professional growth.

While the benefits to the NQT may be straightforward and quite obvious, Haack's (2006) identification of two prime beneficiaries of mentoring and development programmes – the mentor and the organisation – urges further investigation into the benefits for other stakeholders.

### 2.4 Benefits for the School

Desselle (2012) suggests that a dyadic mentoring model which includes only mentor and mentee limits optimal development and instead advocates a triad which includes the organisation. The author observes that the issue of mentoring impacts many areas of concern throughout the organisation, including recruitment, retention, development, productivity, quality of work life and commitment. In examining the theory on this subject, it is clear that Desselle is not alone in possessing the opinion that mentoring can be hugely beneficial for the organisation. In their exploration of the advantages of mentoring for the school itself, Hanson and Moir (2008) observe that mentoring deepens teachers’ understanding of teaching and learning and promotes leadership development. They identify that among the school-related factors which impact upon student learning, leadership comes second only to teaching.

Mentoring programmes which encourage inclusion and participation, lead to personal and professional empowerment and, according to Ellinger et al. (2008), help NQTs and other practitioners to join together in mutually beneficial relationships. Haack (2006) highlights the link between the interactions of NQTs with experienced staff members and the NQT’s increased understanding of the school system while Long (2010) stresses that mentoring must
be embedded within whole school professional learning activities and networked amongst experienced teachers, with all participants focused on learning together. Further to this, a study by Bakioglu et al. (2010) asserts that school leaders will be considered to be more supportive if they extend their trust to those who appear to need it the most in their organisation, and suggests that this can be achieved through better, and more frequent, communication with NQTs and greater involvement in mentoring and induction programmes.

Long (2010) observes that NQTs are more likely to contribute to the organisational goals and to feel enriched by their jobs. Therefore, supporting NQTs to become confident and reflective practitioners who can sustain and embrace change in a positive manner will build a positive, cohesive and engaged staff. Similar views are expressed by Dawley et al. (2008) and Kilburg (2007), with the former suggesting that where NQTs believe that school leaders and other teachers value their contribution to daily work practices they are more likely to become authentically engaged in the school culture. Kilburg (2007) similarly claims that a nurturing environment that meets personal and emotional needs, results in mentees being better able to meet their daily demands and challenges.

Long (2010) theorises that the establishment of collaborative communities of learners, where mentoring of NQTs is integrated into all teachers’ professional learning, will provide schools with opportunities to become dynamic and active agents of change. The author proposes that as the mentoring programme is integrated into a school’s wider professional learning networks, as opposed to being perceived as a single autonomous strategy for the induction and development of NQTs, it becomes a vehicle for change and renewal. According to research carried out by the Alliance for Excellent Education in 2005 as cited by Long (2010), participation in a comprehensive induction programme can accelerate the time it takes for NQTs to perform at the same level as an experienced teacher, reducing this time from an
average of seven years to just three. Haack (2006) supports this claim, stating that formally organised mentoring programmes can encourage staff co-operation and interaction and lead to greater teacher effectiveness. The author notes the capability of a mentoring programme to enhance a senior teacher’s career as well as that of an NQT and suggests that a substantial programme may well be the best investment that the teaching profession can make.

Philips and Fragoulis (2010) analyse the benefits of mentoring to an organisation. Though their analysis is not directly focused on the school as an organisation, the benefits set out below can be adapted and aligned with the objectives of a school. They assert that mentoring:

- creates a positive organisational climate;
- promotes a more clear understanding of professional responsibilities and expectations;
- may result in improved employee job performance, faster learning curves and better trained staff;
- reflects an investment in employee development;
- may increase employee commitment and loyalty; and
- reflects employee-centred values.

### 2.5 Benefits for the Mentor

The benefits gained by mentors are outlined quite comprehensively by Ligadu (2010), whose research establishes that mentors gain self-awareness, develop interpersonal and communication skills (including relationship building skills), learn to use positive reinforcement, enhance their reflection abilities and develop specific skills and techniques to approach working with individual mentees. Haack (2006) suggests that selection to be a mentor and the recognition of professional competence that is reinforced by the selection, can amount to much more than ego gratification. This is endorsed by Holloway (2001) who
proposes that veteran teachers may gain a renewed sense of worth as they take on a role that contributes to the overall success of another teacher and the school as a whole. Hanson and Moir (2008) develop on this further in their findings that experienced teachers who become mentors learn to communicate effectively with administrators, articulate a vision of best practices in all their work and appreciate the power of their role. The authors also suggest that mentoring has shifted teachers’ thinking from being a teacher in a single classroom to that of being an educator with a systemic perspective, a process which broadens teacher’s view of themselves and the teaching profession, as mentors learn to see adult learning as central to their professional practice.

Haack (2006) proposes that mentoring can help long-time educators to stay motivated by bringing added responsibilities and a change of routine to their work. This can be especially valuable in the teaching profession, where opportunities for promotion are extremely limited. Haack’s findings are bolstered by the conclusions of Hanson and Moir (2008) who state that mid-career teachers have reported feeling replenished and having a renewed passion for teaching as a result of mentoring. Further studies by Hudson (2010) find that mentors believe that features which facilitate success include the mentor’s personal attributes, the mentor’s ability to address system requirements, the mentor’s articulation of pedagogical knowledge, the modelling of teaching practices and the provision constructive feedback.

Philips and Fragoulis (2010) outline the benefits of mentoring to the mentor stating that mentoring:

- strengthens their knowledge base;
- improves communication skills;
- enhances leadership, teaching and coaching skills;
- produces more reflective practitioners;
- creates new support networks;
- promotes greater collegiality;
- enhances intrinsic satisfaction; and
- demonstrates professionalism and a commitment to personal and professional development of self and colleagues.

Mentoring has powerful implications for practice, far beyond the benefits of the mentoring relationship itself, according to Hanson and Moir (2008). These authors suggest that mentoring affords veteran teachers many structured opportunities to discuss practice, to form professional partnerships and to carry with them new knowledge, skills and values that can positively influence students, other teachers, school organisations and the teaching profession.

A review of academic findings suggests that teaching is becoming more complex and multidimensional and many authors advocate the implementation of a mentoring programme in order to support NQTs and improve the quality of teaching. Within the mentoring programme, the apprentice will be guided by a more experienced professional in order to ensure a seamless continuum of knowledge and pedagogical skills, following on from their third level education. However, it is critical to note that it is more detrimental to have an inferior quality mentoring programme than to have none at all.

The absence of a universally accepted definition of a mentor only serves to facilitate the misunderstanding of the role, its link with coaching and the role which it plays in the induction process. This ambiguity can be addressed through the statement that coaching is one aspect of mentoring and mentoring may include coaching while mentoring is merely one aspect of induction and induction may include mentoring.
Key aspects of a successful mentoring programme include the personal attributes of the mentor, their pedagogical knowledge, modelling of teaching practice, conveying system requirements and providing regular feedback. However, a programme which is too structured and too rigid can overwhelm the mentoring process. The benefits of mentoring to the mentee, mentor and school are indisputable, based on the findings of the studies outlined in Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5. The learning curve of the NQT is drastically reduced with an increase in confidence and reflective abilities, owing to extra professional and personal support provided by the mentoring programme. The mentor’s motivation increases and a renewed passion for teaching and learning is developed, while the school benefits from increased communication and staff morale owing to the establishment of communities of practice and mutually beneficial relationships.

Research relating to the NIPT mentoring in Irish primary schools is scarce. Politis (2012) is one of only a small number of authors who have explored the programme outside of the Teaching Council of Ireland and the NIPT itself. To this end, research is required in order to acquire an in-depth insight into the mentoring programme currently in operation in Irish primary schools.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Methods

The main purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of the key stakeholders with regard to the NIPT school-based mentoring programme Irish primary schools. The research sought to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of the stakeholders towards the programme, in order to evaluate the effectiveness and benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme and to identify potential obstacles to expansion. This chapter outlines the methods of design, sample selection, data collection and analysis employed in researching this topic. Ethical considerations in relation to this research are also explored.

3.1 Research Questions

The research aimed to gather evidence on the NIPT mentoring programme currently in operation in Irish primary schools. To this end, the main research question is:

_What can be learned from the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools which could facilitate the enhancement and expansion of the programme?_

Within this question, the research sought to achieve the following objectives:

a) Explore current best practice in mentoring.

The research sourced and examined literature on the topic of mentoring, with particular reference to mentoring in educational institutions and schools. Further to this, literature on learning styles and learning cultures in organisation was explored. In this way, the opinions and findings of a wide range of authors was combined to produce an overall account of what is deemed to be best practice with regard to the mentoring process.
b) Investigate the source of motivation of the main stakeholders, with particular reference to the NIPT mentoring programme.

The research sought to establish the opinions and attitudes of those actively involved in the NIPT mentoring programme in order to gain an accurate insight into the perceptions of the main stakeholders. The study focused in particular on the manner in which teachers and mentors are motivated, particularly in light of the fact that mentoring is voluntary and thus, mentors are not obliged to receive any financial remuneration for their role in the mentoring process.

c) Identify the principal benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme for the main stakeholders.

Further to the review of literature which established the benefits to mentors, mentees and schools, this research established the benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme for the main stakeholders in Irish primary schools. The study focused on the perceived benefits for the NQT as a mentee, the veteran teacher as a mentor and the school as an organisation.

d) Evaluate the effectiveness of the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools.

This research evaluated the effectiveness of the mentoring programme in Irish primary schools with reference to the aims objectives originally outlined by the NIPT and based on the perceptions and attitudes of the main stakeholders. The research focused in particular on the objectives which addressed school-based mentoring as part of the National Induction Programme for Teachers.
e) Identify any significant obstacles to an expansion of the NIPT school-based mentoring programme.

From the data collected through interviews with the main stakeholders, the research explored whether the current mentoring programme is operating in an efficient manner and if there are any matters which need to be addressed in order to facilitate an expansion of the programme to all primary schools.

3.2. Research Methodology

Remenyi et al. (1998) define research methodology as the procedural framework within which research is conducted. The author adds that there are many factors to be considered when choosing an appropriate research methodology and identifies the topic to be researched and the specific research question as the primary drivers. Saunders et al. (2009) assert that the quality of research is significantly impacted by the selected methodology. To this end, practicalities such as what to research and how to research must be given careful consideration. This research intended to gain an in-depth analysis of the practices of, and attitudes towards, the mentoring of NQTs in Irish primary schools. Therefore, in conducting this research, the philosophy of interpretivism was adopted within an inductive approach, collecting qualitative data through in-depth interviews and the case study strategy.

3.2.1 Research Philosophy

According to the ‘research onion’ model by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), each layer of the onion is critical in the research process and must be peeled back one by one to reveal the core (see Figure 3.1). This process starts with the research philosophy which Saunders et al. say is related to the development of knowledge and the ‘the nature of that knowledge’
The authors assert that the research philosophy which is selected contains ‘important assumptions about the way in which you view the world’. They note that the researcher adopting an empathetic stance is ‘crucial to the interpretive philosophy’. The researcher's significant experience in the education field is, therefore, critical to the research.

According to Blaikie (1993) epistemology is concerned with the extract of knowledge, rather than belief. In conducting this research, the interpretivism approach was adopted. Interpretivism is an epistemology that advocates that it is necessary for the researcher to understand the differences between humans in our role as social actors according to Saunders et al (2009, p. 129). Regarding interpretivism within epistemology, focus is directed ‘upon the details of a situation, a reality behind these details and subjective meanings motivating actions’ according to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 119). The epistemological stance is of significance as the participants in the research are people who are individuals (members of the teaching profession) who view the world differently.
According to Saunders et al (2009, p.110), ontology is concerned with the nature of reality. This research demonstrated subjectivist ontology, highlighting the importance of the role of the ‘social actors’ in shaping the course of the research. This approach, according to Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2010, p. 61) sees interpretations of the social world as ‘culturally derived and historically situated’. These authors cite the works of Max Weber (1949) in their explanation that social sciences are ‘concerned with verstehen (understanding) rather than arklaren (explaining) which forms the basis of seeking casual explanations’. As this research aimed to develop an understanding of the current mentoring programme in Irish primary schools as perceived by the main stakeholders, it demonstrated an interpretive approach.

3.2.2. Research Approach:

The inductive approach, in which the researcher collects data and develops theory as a result of data analysis, is particularly concerned with the context in which events take place, according to Saunders et al (2009) and allows for general suggestion to be derived from specific examples. This approach was appropriate for the research topic as it emphasised a more flexible structure which permits changes of research emphasis as the research progresses and advocates the position that the researcher is part of the research process. A truly rich understanding of the operations of the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools would not have been accurately acquired through the deductive approach which, according to Robson (2002), necessitates rigorous testing consisting of five sequential process stages. These stages include the deduction of hypotheses from theory, expressing these hypotheses in operational terms, testing these operational terms, examining the enquiry outcome and modifying the theory in light of the findings. The inductive approach allowed for a ‘cause-effect link to be made between the variables of the subject with an understanding of human’s interpretation of their social world’ according to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 126)
and was, therefore, a more suitable approach than the deductive approach for this research topic.

3.2.3 Research Strategy:

According to Tellis (1997) case study is a form of research which satisfies the three tenets of the qualitative approach: describing, understanding and explaining. Saunders et al. (2009, p. 145) cite Robson's (2002) definition of a case study as ‘a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, using multiple sources of evidence’. Ghauri and Gronhaug (2005, p. 204) suggest that one must consider the ‘type of research questions, the control of the researcher on behavioural events, the focus on a current as opposed to historical phenomena, what information is needed and how this can be attained’ when deciding whether to select this research method.

The case study strategy is identified by Morris and Wood (1991) and cited by Saunders et al. (2009, p. 146) as holding particular importance in research which aims to ‘gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the processes being enacted’. Cohen et al. (2000, p. 185) suggest that the purpose of the observation undertaken through case studies is to ‘probe deeply’ and to ‘analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit’ under observation, in order to ‘establish generalisations about the wider population to which that unit belongs’. Yin (2003, p. 6) believes that case study is the preferred methodology to use when questions such as ‘how’ or ‘why’ are posed, considering that the essence of this method is its enquiry into real-life context.

As this research sought to gain a rich understanding of the mentoring processes being utilised informally and formally in Irish primary schools, case studies provided real life context from
which to draw this understanding. By selecting a range of stakeholders to use as case studies, the researcher was enabled to establish generalisations about the Irish primary school system.

3.2.4 Research Choice:

This research employed a single data collection technique and corresponding analysis procedures, engaging in mono-method research. According to Boyce and Neale (2006, p. 3), the qualitative research technique of in-depth interviewing should be conducted through individual interviews with a small number of respondents. The authors outline a significant benefit of this technique in the ability to acquire ‘much more detailed information than what is available through other data collection methods, such as surveys.’ Cicourel (1964) as cited by Bloor and Woods (2006, p. 104) summed up the central reasoning of in-depth interviewing as ‘the sacrifice of reliability in pursuit of validity’ with the interviewer ‘sacrificing standardisation and repeatability between interviews in order to grasp more fully the social meaning of the respondent's world’.

These interviews explored the perspectives of the main stakeholders on the issue of mentoring of NQTs in Irish primary schools. The participants included mentors, principals, mentees and former NQTs who were not afforded the opportunity to be mentored in their debut teaching year. As the research aims to develop an understanding of the current and potential mentoring strategies pertaining to Irish primary schools, the experience and opinions of the participants were of paramount importance. An analysis of mentoring best practice and teacher motivation, as well as an insight into possible benefits and drawbacks of the NIPT mentoring system was facilitated through the in-depth interview process. Interviews took a semi-structured format with predetermined questions intermingled with enquiries that arose from the interviewee’s answers.
3.2.5 Time Horizon

Due to the time restrictions associated with the completion of the dissertation, the research was carried out in the form of a cross-sectional study. While it would have been beneficial for the purposes of this research, the mentoring practices could therefore, not be observed and recorded over a long period of time. Instead, the data was collected at a ‘single point in time’. This provided a ‘snapshot of ideas, opinions and information’, as outlined by Walliman (2006, p. 43) with ‘patterns of association between variables’ then examined to ‘detect associations’. Had the research timetable permitted, data from more participants could have been collected and a much deeper insight into mentoring in Irish primary schools could have been garnered through methods other than interviewing alone.

3.2.6 Data Collection

Accurate data collection is of utmost importance, regardless of research choice, in order to reduce the potential of error occurrence when conducting research. Consequences of incorrectly collected data, according to Hair et al. (2006) include falsified findings, wasted resources, inability to provide accurate answers to research questions and a lack of validity with regard to the study.

The aim of this research was to investigate the understanding of and the attitudes towards the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools, by the main stakeholders. In addition to this, it sought to evaluate the observed benefits of the programme as well as the perceived obstacles to expansion. Therefore, new data was required. Following a review of literature and an examination of previous studies on the mentoring process, qualitative research was conducted and primary data was collected through in depth-interviews with three principal teachers, three mentors, four mentees and five non-mentored NQTs. The use of qualitative research was warranted as the research paper was more reliant on participant’s verbal
comments, rather than statistical figures and it aimed to explore and understand a context-dependent relationship, as outlined by Maxwell (2005).

Walliman (2006, p. 129) asserts that there is a ‘constant interplay between collection and analysis’ with qualitative studies, which ‘produces a gradual growth of understanding’. This requires clear thinking on the part of the analyst according to Robson (2002) which was essential in the quest to gain understanding or verstehen (Weber, 1949) in this research area. While weaknesses of the method may include possible biased responses, interviewee reflexivity and potential inaccuracies due to poor interviewer recall of information according to Saunders et al. (2009), the positive aspects of qualitative interviews include instant feedback on the research topic and the potential for deeper insight to be gained where a strong rapport between interviewer and interviewee persists.

Secondary data such as articles, conference speeches, reports and research papers also provided a useful source of information. Where applicable, participants were asked to provide their school’s official and Board of Management ratified policy on mentoring.

3.2.7. Population and Sample

Saunders et al. (2009) outline two sampling techniques; probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Bloor and Woods (2006, p. 154) define non-probability sampling as involving the selection of cases according to reasons other than mathematical probability. Non-probability sampling was employed in this research, more specifically – purposive sampling. Saunders et al. (2009) propose that purposive sampling enables the researcher to use their own judgment in the selection of cases which will best enable the research questions to be answered and objectives to be met. Due to limitations such as time and budget, it was not possible to collect data from all 3,300 primary schools in Ireland and accordingly, a sample was selected. The paper conducted a non-probability research sampling, a process in
which the characteristics of the elements were not randomly selected and cannot, therefore, be deemed to have been randomly distributed, as outlined by Riley et al. (2006)

A range of stakeholders, including mentees, mentors and principals, were interviewed in order to gather necessary data. These participants included representatives from large, medium and small schools ascribing to the Catholic, Church of Ireland or Educate Together ethos. In this way, the researcher engaged in homogenous sampling which, according to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 240), focuses on ‘one particular sub-group in which all the sample members are similar’ and thus enables more in-depth research. While non-probability sampling will result in less data, according to Saunders et al. (2009), the information collected and analysed is more detailed. This is significant for the purpose of this research as it sought to ascertain generalised perceptions which could pave the way for new and more in-depth research on the subject of mentoring in Irish primary schools.

3.2.8. Data Analysis

According to Saunders et al. (2009, p. 488) ‘the interactive nature of data collection and analysis allows you to recognise important themes, patterns and relationships’ as data is collected, ‘allowing these to emerge from the process of data collection and analysis’. Maylor and Blackmon (2005) assert that the core strength of qualitative data analysis is its ability to evolve during the course of the research, provided it is managed in a systematic manner. In order to achieve this, the researcher ensured that the collected data was traceable, reliable and complete.

Based on the recommendations of Saunders et al. (2009), the first step of qualitative data analysis was taken. Principal themes were identified and information gathered from the participants was grouped to form categories. Categorisation may be derived from the
theoretical framework as well as the data collected, however both need to be guided by the purpose of the research. These categories must then be amalgamated and structured for the conceptual framework through axial coding, whereby the relationships between the constituents of the conceptual framework are tested for the identification of the fit between them.

This research adhered to these steps within the process of data analysis. Once categories were summarised, their arrangement using a narrative structure was completed. The answers attained during the course of conducted interviews were then explored in order to analyse the significance of the events and narrate the final outcome. In this way, information gathered through qualitative interviews with fifteen participants was transformed into meaningful data. As Walliman (2006, p. 133) suggests, coding ‘provides a first step in conceptualisation’, helps to ‘prevent data overload resulting from mountains of unprocessed data in the form of unambiguous words’ and facilitates the establishing of ‘patters and themes and explanations of why and how these occur’.

The main categories of this research consisted of advantages and disadvantages of the mentoring programme, operational factors, motivational factors, personal attributes of a mentor, reflection and feedback, changes and alterations to the programme, line of sight and programme expansion. The fifteen individual interviews were notated and, in line with the aforementioned categories, grouped under the heading ‘mentor interview analysis’, ‘mentee interview analysis’, ‘principal interview analysis’ and ‘non-mentored NQT interview analysis’ to facilitate comparative examination.
3.3 Research Ethics

Ethical issues may arise throughout the course of any research. From situation ethics to respondent validation, a wide range of components in the research design carry an ethical weight which must be considered. Cohen et al. (2000) believe that the ethical concerns in educational research are extremely complex, and as such require special consideration.

In the designing of this research and gaining access to participants, the participants were fully informed as to the basis for the study in which they were being asked to participate. In order to gain access, the researcher contacted prospective participants by telephone, and followed up with a scheduled, face-to-face meeting or telephone interview. With respect to the collection of data for this specific research, it was not necessary for the participants to be named individually; however participants were informed that they may be identifiable by the size, ethos and location of their school. Bryman and Bell (2011, p. 142) state that ‘the right to privacy is a tenet that many of us hold dear, and transgressions of that right in the name of research are not regarded as acceptable’. To facilitate their privacy, participants were permitted to refrain from answering any question posed in the course of their interview. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, though none of the participants chose to do so.

With regard to the processing and storage of data, the provisions of the Data Protection Acts (1988, 2003) were strictly adhered to. Saunders et al. (2009) outline that all personal data must be processed fairly and lawfully, obtained for specific purposes, must be adequate, relevant, accurate, updated and stored securely. The researcher endeavoured to adhere to Diener and Crandall’s (1978) ethical principles, ensuring that there was no harm to participants; no deception occurred knowingly, the privacy of the participants was respected and the participant’s consent was sought after being fully informed of all aspects of their involvement in the study. When carrying out any form of research, Gillham (2000) advises
that researchers should constantly challenge and scrutinise themselves and the research question, thereby ensuring integrity, honesty and objectivity.
Chapter Four

Research Findings Analysis

4.1 Explore best practice in mentoring.

According to Armstrong (2012), the overall purpose of Human Resource Management is to ensure that the organisation is able to achieve success through people. HRM aims to increase organisational effectiveness and capability – the capacity of an organisation to achieve its goals by making the best use of the resources available to it. In the case of Irish primary schools, one of the most significant developments in HRM in recent years has been the introduction of a formal induction and mentoring programme – the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT).

This research sought to explore mentoring best practice. In order to establish this, a review of relevant literature is required. The pertinent academic reports on this subject include a multitude of advice as to the path to a successful implementation of a mentoring programme. In addition to relevant literature, the practices of the programme’s main stakeholders must be examined. For the purposes of this research, the main stakeholders were identified as those who have participated in the NIPT mentoring programmes in Irish primary schools. Participants were categorised into mentors, mentees, principals and former NQTs who did not engage in a formal mentoring process in their debut teaching year.

4.1.1 Learning Theories

It is imperative that the mentoring programme facilitates a range of learning theories and concepts in order to cater for each individual. This research focused in particular on the thoughts of Armstrong (2009) regarding a range of learning theories, including social learning theory, cognitive learning theory, experiential learning theory and reinforcement
theory as well as individual learning styles, the learning curve, communities of practice and the impact of feedback and reflection.

Social learning theory states that learning is most effective in a social setting with the individual’s understanding being shaped by active participation in real situations. As stated by Mentor B “…you get to see how it’s really done…” due to the opportunities afforded to mentees by the NIPT programme. NQTs are operating in the real-life situation of being the class teacher – not merely as observers. Armstrong notes that learning may be encouraged in communities of practice – groups of people who share a profession and who learn from each other in order to develop personally and professionally. This concept is promoted through the application of a mentoring programme, with Mentor C stating that from her experience, mentoring “…makes people more helpful…more appreciative of new teachers…everyone has something to offer…” Linked with cognitive learning theory, Armstrong (2009) suggests that the knowledge and understanding of learners can be enriched by presenting them with problem-solving activities.

The importance of the observation of other teachers and discussion of problems with the mentor is supported by the experiential learning theory, as outlined by David Kolb, which suggests that learning through experience can be enhanced by encouraging learners to reflect on and make better use of their own work and the work of others. In the course of this research, Mentor A proposed that self-reflection is, “…one of the biggest parts…” of the NIPT mentoring programme, adding that, “…a sign of a good teacher is when something goes wrong, they can turn around and say why it went wrong…”. Mentor C mirrors this opinion, adding that mentees, “…have to reflect on what they’re doing. They can’t keep doing the same thing [incorrectly]…”
Each person has his or her own learning style and Armstrong (2012) advocates learning programmes which can be adjusted to address different learning styles. In this regard, it is proposed that mentors should be flexible in the mentoring methods which they employ in order to best meet the needs of the mentee within the mentoring programme. As Principal B observes, mentors “...must be creative... [They] might need... a different approach to help different teachers...” By adjusting their methods to meet the needs of their mentee, the advancement of the mentee along the learning curve is hastened. The learning curve, according to Armstrong (2012) is the time required to reach an acceptable standard of skill or competence which varies between people. Principal A observed that the NIPT mentoring programme, “...speeds up the process of making NQTs better teachers...”

Armstrong (2009) promotes an approach to mentoring which enables learners to consolidate their learning and introduce reinforcement periods in training programmes. Reflective activities in the mentoring process are paramount to this approach and can be linked with reinforcement theory, whereby the learners’ behaviours can be strengthened by reinforcing them with positive feedback. As noted by Principal C,

“... too often teachers focus on what they are doing wrong or what they need to improve on...while these are important, it can lift a teacher’s spirits to receive positive comments on their work...sometimes that’s all it takes to reaffirm that they have come a long way and they are on the right road...”.

With regard to motivation, which will be discussed further in section 4.2 of this paper, Armstrong (2009) advocates a process whereby the mentee is assisted in developing learning goals and understanding the benefits to them of achieving these goals. This action plan should be incorporated into any mentoring programme in order to achieve the best chance of success. Armstrong (2009) suggests that learning effectiveness within an organisation
depends on the extent to which the organisation believes in and supports learning. Therefore, a school and its staff must be committed to the mentoring programme to ensure success. As Mentor B observed, “...no matter how small the gesture, all staff contribute to the successful induction of an NQT...” Armstrong (2009) asserts that mentoring is just one part of the learning and developing process, and must be supported by a range of other activities including self-directed learning and training (see Figure 4.1).

*Figure 4.1 Armstrong’s Views on Learning and Development (2009)*

4.1.2 The Relationship

Rymer (2002) discusses the core of mentoring as a close, developmental relationship based on mutual trust which relies on confidentiality, support, openness, and collegiality. Connor’s (1993) description of a synergetic relationship as one which involves common goals, interdependence and the ability to empower and to participate equally, is built upon by Mullins (1999) who posited that when a mentor and mentee collaborate, the interactive process is greater than the sum of its components. These authors, cited by Frels et al. (2013) echo the thoughts and opinions of many other authors with Haack (2006) suggesting that where participants have the wrong attitude, mentoring programmes can be counterproductive.
In his description of teaching as an interpersonal, emotional and social profession, Hudson (2011) notes that the same could be said of mentoring, stressing that the personal relationship between the mentor and mentee and timely interventions are pivotal. As regards the intricacies of matching mentors and mentees, Donnelly and McSweeney (2011) observe that mentors and mentees are often assigned to one another with the assumption that a common workplace will be enough to make the relationship work. An essential condition for successful mentoring, according to Crasborn et al. (2010) is a balance of support in the interpersonal relationship in conjunction with adequate opportunities for challenging student teachers to learn new things. Haack (2006) suggests that mentees must take care to avoid focusing on specific suggestions from a respected mentor to such a degree that they neglect other responsibilities. As this author succinctly states, when a mentor-mentee relationship is comfortable, mentees find that there is no question which they cannot ask.

Each interview conducted in the course of this research identified that the personal attributes of the mentor were perceived to impact directly on the relationship between the mentor and mentee - more so than any other factor. Teachers who had not been mentored as NQTs mooted the possibility of “personality clashes” between mismatched mentors and mentees, adding that should this occur, it would lead to undue stress and pressure for both teachers. Principal A recalled a personality clash between a mentee and mentor in his school which resulted in the relationship being detrimental to the emotional welfare of both teachers. The situation required the principal to ask a senior teacher to step in and assist the mentor and the mentee with their communication difficulties.

4.1.3 The Mentor

Frels et al. (2013) suggest that in order for mentoring to be effective, consideration should be given to mentor location, teaching area, mentor selection, and mentor experiences, basing
their findings on the investigations of Brown (2002), Thompson, Paek, Goe and Ponte (2005) and Wong (2002, 2003 & 2004). Ligadu (2012) cites Wang and Odelle (2002) who asserts that mentors who interact directly in helping and facilitating teaching processes, the construction of teaching and learning situations and the provision of emotional and professional learning support are most effective. Again, this supports the concept of school-based mentoring, rather than relying on visiting mentors, who may be unfamiliar with the character and ethos of the school.

With regard to the role of the mentor, Clutterbuck (1998) and Bell (2000), as cited by Smith (2007) suggest that a mentor must accept the mentee’s stage of development and provide a safe environment in which learning and development may occur. Mentee B supports this idea, stating that a mentor should be, “...open...easy-going...understanding...flexible...willing to do anything to help...” Smith (2007) further cites Baird (1993) who proposes that the mentor must take on the role of a partner who works alongside the mentee in order to foster learning and development in a variety of different ways. While Baird describes this role as “a solid amalgam of Helper + Sharer + Carer”, Crow and Matthews (1998) view the mentee as traveller and the mentor as guide. Mentee C suggested that a mentor should “...have patience, be a good listener, possess sense of humour and be able to empathise with others...” with Mentor A echoing the importance of patience and understanding.

Frels et al. (2013) cite the work of Gilles and Wilson (2004) who, in their examination of mentors’ approaches, claim that the most important attributes of mentors include relearning, seeing a bigger picture, expanding their roles, gaining insights about the process of mentoring, and understanding the impact of the programme on them, as mentors. Mentee D’s opinion reflects this, suggesting that a mentor should be “...friendly and approachable [and] possess a good work ethic”. Mentee D also emphasised the importance of the mentor not
being “…too preachy….” adding that they must be able to “…model what they say…” - a key aspect of Hudson’s (2010) Mentoring Model.

In his five-factor mentoring model (see Figure 4.2) which provides a theoretical framework for collecting qualitative data from mentors and mentees, Hudson (2010) established personal attributes of the mentor, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling of teaching practice and the provision of quality feedback as the five key aspects of a successful mentoring programme.

![Figure 4.2 Hudson’s Mentoring Model (2010)](image)

Hudson goes on to elaborate on each of these five aspects, listing key personal attributes as being supportive, comfortable talking about teaching practices and attentive listening as well as encouraging the mentee’s reflection on practices and instilling confidence and positive attitudes in the mentee. Regarding system requirements, Hudson (2010) suggests that the mentor needs to articulate the aims, policies and curricula required by an education system. However, Hudson further remarks that the complexities for implementing system
requirements may be noted in the pedagogical knowledge mentors need to articulate for effective teaching. Hudson (2010) claims that the mentor’s enthusiasm as a teacher can present desirable teaching traits and outlines that effective mentors articulate expectations and provide advice to the mentee, review lesson plans, observe the mentee teach, provide oral and written feedback and further feedback on the mentee’s evaluation of their teaching and the learning environment.

4.1.4 Learning Culture

Key to the establishment of a successful mentoring programme is the attainment of a learning culture within the organisation in question. Armstrong (2012) suggests that a learning organisation is one that promotes learning because it is recognised by top management, line managers and employees generally as an essential organisational process to which they are committed and in which they engage continuously. Pedler et al. (1991) define a learning organisation as one which facilitates the learning of all of its members and which also continually transforms itself. In the course of this research, policies from individual schools were attained which highlighted best practice with regard to induction and mentoring in the respective schools. The policy acquired from Mentor B’s school states that the programme “…has developed open lines of communication between experienced staff members and new staff members [and] facilitates the sharing of good practice, experience and ideas.”

According to Wenger (2006), communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Mentoring best practice suggests the establishment of these communities within organisations with a learning culture, to ensure a support network for teachers, particularly those who are newly qualified. According to the aforementioned policy acquired in the course of this research, the NIPT programme “…has helped to build a vibrant school environment, good staff relations and a positive working atmosphere…” in Mentor B’s school.
In summary, the interviews conducted during the course of this research identified the personal attributes of the mentor as the factor perceived to impact most heavily on the relationship between the mentor and mentee, with Hudson (2010) outlining system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modelling of teaching practice and the provision of quality feedback as the other key aspects of a successful mentoring programme.

This research found that a range of learning styles must be catered for in order for a mentoring programme to operate to an optimum level. Through the incorporation of social learning theory, cognitive learning theory, experiential learning theory, reinforcement theory, communities of practice, feedback and reflection, the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools attempts to facilitate learners with many different learning styles.

Further to this, the effectiveness of a mentoring programme depends greatly on the extent to which the organisation believes in learning and supports it with this research. A school and its staff must, therefore, be committed to the mentoring programme to ensure success. Through the attainment of a learning culture, this research established that mentoring programmes can encourage the development of open lines of communication between experienced staff members and new staff members and facilitate the sharing of good practice, experience and ideas.
4.2 Investigate the source of motivation of the main stakeholders, with particular reference to the current NIPT mentoring programme.

The success of mentoring systems depends on motivation (Cullingford, 2006). Those who seek to protect the best interests of their colleagues will make the systems work; however, mentoring system will not succeed where mentors use the system to satisfy their own interests and needs. Armstrong (2012) suggests that people are more likely to be motivated if they work in an environment in which they are valued for what they are and what they do.

4.2.1 Motivation: The Views of the Stakeholders

When asked to discuss the incentives for teachers to perform to a high standard, all participants in this research agreed that there was no financial reward to incentivise teachers to excel and therefore, all rewards were intrinsic with the main motivators being self-satisfaction and to benefit their students and colleagues.

Mentee A suggested that the quest to, “…be a better teacher and to produce kids who learn more and who enjoy learning…” was the main motivator for teachers, with all rewards being “intrinsic”. Mentee D claimed that they were motivated to seek “…the very best for the children and to be able to see what the children have learned…” The mentee proposed that teaching is a profession requiring self-motivation on the part of the teacher. Mentor A, and Mentor C proposed that the incentive and motivation to perform to a high standard was, “…for yourself ...you want to do well for yourself and the children.” with Mentor C adding that, “...you don’t want to let anyone down, including your colleagues.”

Mentor B similarly proposed that teachers are motivated to “…try to bring about the best possible outcome for children”, adding that, “…if all teachers perform to their best, all colleagues will do likewise.” Principal B posited that a teachers’ only motivator is for,
“...personal satisfaction [which] has to start from inside you”. Again, this participant mentioned the desire to ensure that the children are taught to the highest of standards, proposing that, “...teachers should have enough integrity to want their class to do well.”

Extrinsic motivation occurs when things are ‘done to or for people to motivate them’ according to Armstrong (2009, p. 318). Extrinsic motivation can have an immediate and powerful effect but will not necessarily last long. The intrinsic motivators, which are concerned with the ‘quality of working life’, are likely to have a deeper and longer-term effect because they are inherent in individuals and their work and are not imposed externally in forms such as incentive pay. When asked what incentivises teachers to perform to a high standard, Principal B noted that there was no financial incentive. Principal A agreed stating,

“... [There are no incentives] in terms of financial gain, very little in terms of short-term promotion as there are very few opportunities for promotion within the school. Most of it is intrinsic motivation - to be a good teacher, committed to making a difference in peoples' lives, [something] which is recognised in the long-term.”

Delving deeper into the concept of intrinsic motivation, Mentor C proposed that this kind of motivation is a characteristic of a personality type which can be identified in many teachers. “...Teachers are highly motivated...it is a common personality type...teachers share their skills...they realise their value...this incentivises them to help.” The mentor added that “...making use of teachers naturally incentivises them...it might be in their own time and a lot of extra work [but] when it goes well, they’ll repeat it.”

Interestingly, Principal A, Principal B and Principal C each opined that praise from a colleague, particularly a member of management, was a significant reward and motivator. Similarly, while Mentee B proposed that motivation comes from, “...rewards of some sort...to see that the class appreciates what you are doing and are interested...”, the
participant concluded that wanting to perform to their best of their ability was their primary motivation. This echoes a theory put forward by Haack (2006) who observes that recognition of professional competence, which is underpinned by selection to act as a mentor, can involve more than ego gratification – although this is necessary and appreciated.

4.2.2 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation can arise from the self-generated factors that influence people’s behaviour and is not created by external incentives (Armstrong, 2009). Individuals are motivated when they feel that their work is ‘important, interesting and challenging, provides them with a reasonable degree of autonomy, opportunities to achieve and advance, and scope to use and develop their skills and abilities’ according to Armstrong (2009, p. 318). This is reflective of Hackman and Oldham’s Job Characteristics Model (1980), which proposes that there are five core job characteristics which influence work outcomes: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback.

Armstrong (2009) proposes that motivation will be enhanced by leadership which sets the direction, encourages and stimulates achievement and provides support to employees in their efforts to reach goals and improve their performance generally. Therefore, in schools where distributive leadership and staff collaboration takes place in a manner which aims to achieve the best for the school as an organisation, motivation to engage in activities which do not provide financial rewards may be more readily accessible.

Intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by a particular job or role design, according to Katz (1964); however the job in question must provide sufficient variety, complexity, challenge and skill to engage the abilities of the worker. Three characteristics have been identified by Lawler (1969) as being required in professional roles, in order for intrinsic motivation to prevail; (i) individuals must receive meaningful feedback about their performance, preferably
in the form of self-evaluation and defining the feedback, (ii) the role must be perceived by individuals as requiring them to use skills which they value, in order to perform their role effectively and (iii) individuals must feel that they have a high degree of self-control in setting their own goals and in defining the paths to these goals. These three characteristics are of paramount importance to the mentoring programme. For a mentoring process to be successful, the mentee must be motivated. In order to achieve this, the mentee must receive meaningful feedback, use abilities which they value in the course of their work and have control over the setting of goals. Also of significance is Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (1959) which states that there are certain factors in the workplace which cause job satisfaction while a separate set of factors cause dissatisfaction. Herzberg theorises that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction act independently of each other.

![Figure 4.3 Porter and Lawler’s Motivation Model (1968)](image)

According to Porter and Lawler (1968) as cited by Armstrong (2010), ability, effort and role expectation are key to motivating employees to perform to a high standard. Porter and Lawler claim that effort relies on the value which the employee places on the reward and the likelihood that the reward actually depends on the amount of effort which each employee expends. Armstrong suggests that the HR contribution which may be made by an organisation’s HR function includes encouraging the development of performance
management processes. This will in turn provide opportunities to agree expectation and give positive feedback on accomplishments, as well as developing both financial and non-financial incentives which reward achievements. Armstrong (2009) nonetheless cautions that financial rewards are not necessarily appropriate in all instances and the lessons of expectancy and goal theory need to be taken into account in designing and operating these systems.

In summary, this research finds that financial rewards are not of significant relevance in the mentoring programme in Irish primary schools. The study identified that while a principal may request that a deputy-principal who is receiving a financial allowance for extra duties adopt a mentorship role, this is not necessarily the practice in all schools. Ultimately, the role of mentor is one which is voluntary.

This research identified that the absence of financial reward was significant only in the case of stakeholders who were not acting as the mentor in the mentoring programme. Principals and mentees felt that it was unfair for the mentor to engage in such a demanding role on a voluntary basis without reimbursement. However, this research identified that while the mentors also felt that it would be inappropriate to request that a teacher who was not already receiving an allowance for extra duties take on a mentoring role, financial gain was not a factor in their deciding to become a mentor.

This research established that the key factors in motivating teachers to become mentors and for teachers to perform to the best of their abilities included the quest to be a better teacher, to enable the children to learn and for personal satisfaction. The motivation to succeed is intrinsic, and is not reliant on financial rewards in order to produce high standards of professionalism.
4.3 Identify the principal benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme for the main stakeholders.

In an effort to ascertain the benefits provided by the NIPT mentoring programme for the main stakeholders in Irish primary schools, one must first examine the difficulties which NQTs face, operating without the aid of a mentor. The following responses were acquired from former NQTs who had not been mentored in their debut teaching year.

When asked to identify the most difficult aspects of their first year of teaching, there was a noticeable overlap among the responses from the participants. Overall, the respondents cited difficulties in handling stress, excessive workload, being observed by an inspector, the pressure experienced during impromptu visits from the inspector, the stress and pressure of being assessed for their diploma, large classes, an absence of information, a lack of familiarity regarding diagnoses and resources, in addition to difficulties with basic system requirements such as roll books and monthly reports, dealing with parents, adapting to the school culture and ethos and trying to assimilate to the ethos of the new school.

When asked what could have made these issues less difficult, the non-mentored NQTs gave responses which included a supportive staff environment, a positive learning culture more support structures, “…peace of mind that the principal was behind you 100%…”, “…a set of good plans aligned with the school plans from [a former NQT]”. While the above is a selection of responses from the participants, most notably, all respondents added that a mentor would have been beneficial in easing their difficulties.

When asked if they felt it would have been beneficial for them to have had access to a mentor, later in the questionnaire, NQT A was emphatic in her agreement, noting that her “…principal was not supportive [and she] didn’t find the Inspector approachable.” NQT E suggested it would prevent NQTs feeling as though they are “…bothering people [knowing
that] there’s someone designated to help you...” NQT B agreed, adding that they felt as though they had been “...unofficially mentored by the vice principal...”

An interesting idea was proposed by NQT D, who agreed that a mentor would have been beneficial. The respondent replied

“...I’d suggest maybe having two: one mentor relatively new to the profession who has recently completed their diploma, and one with more experience who can tell you about the realities of teaching: discipline, dealing with parents, writing reports and the like. In my vision, one mentor would help you with the entire inspection process: the folders, the paperwork, the displays, the timetabling etc. The second mentor would lend you their experience so to speak...”

This concept raises interesting questions about the current mentoring process. In the course of the research, it was suggested by Mentee C and Mentee A that a mentor who has recently completed their diploma and who is relatively new to teaching would possibly be more beneficial as a mentor than an older, more experienced teacher. Again, this raises the issue of selection of mentors, with many mentors being selected due to the fact that they hold a post of responsibility, generally that of deputy-principals. In general, these teachers are older and more experienced and therefore, as NQT D suggested, are perfectly positioned to “...lend you their experience...” however, they may be less familiar with the current thinking on the requirements for the diploma.

Regarding the advantages of each school having a mentor for NQTs, NQT A mooted benefits such as “...guidance, support, reassurance, samples, demonstrations, observations...” NQT E similarly proposed the advantage of having “...a designated person to go to and get help from...” while NQT B cited the ability to “...allay fears, offer guidance and encouragement and to support underperforming NQTs”. Like NQT A and NQT E, NQT C simply stated that
having “...someone to bounce ideas off...” would be a significant advantage which would come with having a mentor. Finally NQT D envisaged an improvement in “...staff camaraderie, learning about school procedures, advice on things which might have previously been taken for granted...”

While the above aimed to establish the views of those who had not had the opportunity to work with the aid of a mentor in their debut teaching year, this research sought primarily to establish the benefits of the NIPT mentoring system in Irish primary schools, as perceived by the main stakeholders – mentees, mentors and principals.

4.3.1 Benefits for the Mentee

Mentee A suggested that the mentoring programme, as operated by the NIPT, benefited them by providing “...someone designated to help you [and ensure] you didn’t feel like you were bothering other teachers outside of work hours. For Mentee B the programme benefitted them in the manner in which it provided them with opportunities for “...watching other teachers teach [and] to see how it’s done...” In a similar response to Mentee A, Mentee B also proposed that “...having someone to talk to, who can guide you in the right direction...” was significantly beneficial to them in their first year of teaching. Mentee D provided a similar response remarking that having someone approach for advice was the main benefit for them but also added that the mentor was a calming influence while awaiting a DES inspection.

Unlike the other respondents, Mentee C did not feel as though having a mentor was of huge benefit to them suggesting that while the mentor felt obliged to inform the mentees about NIPT courses and websites, overall he did not describe the experience as one which was overly beneficial for him, citing observation of other teachers as the only beneficial aspect to the programme.
4.3.2 Benefits for the Mentor

A key issue in this research was the motivation of teachers to volunteer to mentor NQTs. While there is no specific financial incentive to become a mentor, it is often placed within the duties of a post holder. However, as this research previously indicated, this is not always the case. Therefore, it was important to establish what personal and professional benefits current mentors identify in participation in the NIPT mentoring programme.

Mentor A noted that the benefits for her in being a mentor included the way in which one is enabled to “…form a good bond with other members of staff, particularly NQT…” which echoes Philips and Fragoulis' (2010) suggestion that mentoring allows a mentor to demonstrate professionalism and a commitment to personal and professional development of self and colleagues.

Mentor A proposed that “…sharing ideas is not just one-sided…you see interesting ideas and thought processes when you are discussing ideas you might not have heard of…” She added that allowing the mentee to see how valuable their contributions are to an experienced teacher is “…good for the mentee to boost confidence…” This reflects Holloway (2001) who proposes that veteran teachers may gain a renewed sense of worth as they take on a role that contributes to the overall success of another teacher with Hanson and Moir (2008) stating that in the course of their research mid-career teachers reported feeling replenished, having a renewed passion for teaching as a result of mentoring. Similarly, Mentor C found that acting as a mentor changed her “…attitudes to people…” She added that the process “…makes me reflect on the work I’m doing and keeps me up-to-date…”

For Mentor B the process was beneficial as it “…reaffirms your knowledge…” adding “…when someone comes to you, you realise how much you know that you had forgotten….” From a leadership point of view, Mentor B added that mentoring provides a mentor with
“...good experience in managing a team of people...” This reflects Hanson and Moir's (2008) assertion that mentoring cultures leadership development with the authors going on to add that leadership not only matters; it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning.

4.3.3 Benefits for the School

Regarding the benefits which the mentoring programme can provide for the school organisation, this research attained a wide range of responses. Mentor A cited “...cohesive planning among each group level...” as a significant benefit to the school with Mentor B witnessed that “...it makes your school a more open place [and] makes teachers more comfortable teaching in front of each other.... The level of professionalism increases...” As Haack (2006) suggests, formally organised mentoring programmes can encourage staff co-operation and interaction adding that enhanced communication and increased understanding of the school system are natural outgrowths of a new teacher’s interaction with an experienced member of the staff.

Mentoring “...reaffirms older teachers...they can take a sense of pride in how much they know...” according to Mentor C. This echoes Long (2010) who suggests that as a mentoring programme is integrated into a school’s wider professional learning networks as opposed to being perceived as a single autonomous strategy for the induction and development of beginning teachers, it becomes a vehicle for change and renewal. Mentor C supported this concept of change, observing that mentoring benefits the school in the manner in which it “...makes people more helpful [and] more appreciative of new teachers. It creates a “...nicer atmosphere in the school....”

According to Principal A, the NIPT mentoring programme “....introduces new teachers to systems in schools [and gives the NQTs] confidence to know what’s expected of them...”
which is a significant benefit to the school organisation. Principal A added that providing the mentee with the “…opportunity to access help from someone specifically designated to help them, increases their confidence…” which in turn is beneficial to the school. Principal B echoes these thoughts, commenting on the improvement of communication and openness in the school. As Hargreaves and Fink (2008) state, mentoring enables the school community engages in robust dialogue, in an evidence-informed and experience-grounded manner, about the best means to promote the goals of deep and broad student learning for all.

The implementation of a mentoring programme, “…establishes the notion of collegiality…” in a school, according to Principal C who observed that helps principals to be aware of the strengths and shortcomings of teachers. As Philips and Fragoulis (2010) suggest, mentoring promotes a more clear understanding of professional responsibilities and expectations. Mentoring, according to Principal A, “…speeds up the process of making NQTs better teachers…” This reflects the findings of research carried out by the Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) and cited by Long (2010), which established that participation in a comprehensive induction programme can accelerate the time it takes for an NQT to perform at the same level as an experienced teacher, reducing this time from an average of seven years to just three.

This research established that one of the most significant advantages to the mentee was the knowledge that by having a designated mentor to seek advice from, the NQT is not ‘bothering’ people. NQTs are in a very daunting position in their debut teaching year and the added pressure of finding someone to give advice in a busy working day may result in added stress and a decrease in confidence. This research found that the NIPT mentoring programme increases NQT confidence, enhances staff communications and facilitates the sharing of ideas. Furthermore, it encourages reflective practice, speeds up the learning process and reaffirms more experienced teachers. A more pleasant and helpful atmosphere is created in
schools with professionalism increasing through the reflective dialogue encouraged by the mentoring process. Furthermore, this research identified the benefit of the development of management potential, particularly amongst mentors.

During the course of this research a discrepancy between agreed best practice and the opinions of some stakeholders was uncovered, concerning the selection of a suitable mentor. While many authors and indeed interviewed stakeholders accepted that the mentor should be an experienced teacher, others suggest that there is merit in the appointment of a less experienced teacher who is more familiar with diploma requirements and has a fresher approach to the probation process.

The overall benefits of mentoring to mentee, mentor and school are evident. However, if best practice is not employed, problematic issues will arise. To this end, this research sought to assess if the mentoring programme in Irish primary schools is achieving the aims and objectives originally set out by the NIPT.
4.4 Evaluate the effectiveness of the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools.

In order to assess if the mentoring programme in Irish primary schools is effective, this research aims to establish what it is that the programme set out to achieve. To this end, the aims and objectives of the NIPT must be outlined.

According to the Teaching Council (2010), induction can be defined as a programme of teacher education which takes place during that critical period at the beginning of the newly qualified teacher's (NQT's) career, usually the first year after qualifying as a teacher. It is a professional development support programme for NQTs who are undertaking probation (see Section 1.1). Its purpose is to offer systematic professional and personal support to the NQT which is school-based and is given at school level by the mentor (an experienced teacher), in collaboration with colleagues and initial teacher education providers. According to Politis (2012), it lays the foundation for subsequent professional and personal growth and development. Induction, therefore, is a particularly significant phase in building a seamless continuum in teacher education, from initial teacher education to professional practice within the school system.

Politis (2012) suggests that induction is increasingly seen on a global level as an important element of the professional development of teachers. According to Politis, teacher training cannot rely solely on ITE but rather that increasingly ‘teacher induction is viewed as a necessary and critical element in any teacher education reform agenda and is an important element in retaining beginning teachers and assisting them to build productively on the early teaching foundations of ITE’ (Conway et al., 2004).
4.4.1 Aim of NIPT

According to the NIPT (2013), the general aim of the National Induction Programme for Teachers is to support NQTs in their first year of teaching by building on their learning at initial teacher education stage (ITE) and providing a high quality effective programme of induction. Politis (2012) expands further on this, stating that the induction programme is carefully tailored to the professional needs of the NQTs and is continuously reviewed, refined and improved based on research findings and on the feedback from all parties involved, particularly the NQTs. The NIPT outlines that the programme is undertaken as a partnership approach.

![Partnership approach](image)

*Figure 4.4 Partnership Approach of the NIPT*
4.4.2 Objectives of NIPT

The aims and objectives as set out by the NIPT, cited by Politis (2012), can be examined in more detail in Appendix 6. As this research is concerned only with school-based mentoring, the most significant of the NIPT objectives is that which states that in providing a high quality effective induction programme for NQTs the NIPT programme will provide opportunities for NQTs to engage in professional dialogue, peer learning, sharing of knowledge and practice, and reflection on practice. Therefore, this research sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools, based on the perceptions and attitudes of the mentees, mentors and principals and focusing in particular on the provision these aforementioned opportunities.

4.4.3 The Experiences of the Mentee

During the course of this research, mentees who had taken part in the NIPT mentoring programme during their debut teaching year were interviewed. When asked how they would describe the programme, there were varying answers. Mentee A spoke of the mentoring programme providing “…support for the teacher with regard to the [DES Diploma] requirements, lessons, classroom structure…” For her, it meant there was “…someone to chat to….” adding that the mentor provided “…more support of classroom teaching than emotional support…” Mentor A’s mentor modelled teaching in mentee’s class and facilitated the observation of other teachers. Mentee B reiterated the point that their mentor was “…always there to answer any questions….”, however this research found that all interactions were instigated by the mentee.

Mentee C had a similar experience to Mentor B regarding the involvement of the mentor, stating that “[the mentor] was there any time we wanted to find information about teaching, but in reality it was just a title for him. We asked all the other staff the same questions to get
a varied response and different opinions.” This is perhaps reflective of Hudson’s (2010) statement, which asserts that quite often, the quantity of mentoring is random and the quality of mentoring is variable. Mentee D summarised the mentoring experience as “…the mentor observing me in the classroom and meeting with me to see [if I was] ok…” This mentee however, felt that her mentor took the mentoring role “…a little too seriously…” with the mentor frequently calling into her class unannounced to assess her teaching.

This research, carried out through interviews of mentees, found that in all cases peer-learning was successfully and effectively facilitated through the medium of teacher observation. This also provided the opportunity to share knowledge and practice and to reflect on their own practice and as well as on the practice of others. Professional dialogue was facilitated in all cases, though in half of those mentored, it was noted that communication of a professional manner was typically instigated by the mentee rather than the mentor.

4.4.4 Mentees becoming Mentors

C.C. Colton (1829) stated that imitation is the greatest form of flattery. One could perhaps suggest that a key indicator of the success and effectiveness of the mentoring programme could be determined through the desire of former mentees to go on to become mentors themselves.

When asked to discuss the possibility of training to be a mentor, all participants agreed that it is something which they would like to pursue in the future for a variety of reasons. Mentee A stated that she “…had a tough time and feel I could help them as I was helped by mentor…” Mentee C hesitantly agreed that she would like to become a mentor, adding “…I think almost everyone is a mentor [by] offering new teachers help and support and telling them about routines and systems that work for you…” Mentor B “…would consider it…” while Mentee
D added that based on experience and having “... an understanding of what it was like...” they too would like to become a mentor.

While these responses do not endorse the view that these mentees received a ‘high quality effective programme of induction’, the positive response of all mentees suggest that this programme has inspired a younger generation to continue to mentor less experienced teachers in the future – providing them with a chance to ‘build on, develop and further enhance their learning experience’ (Teaching Council, 2013).

4.4.5 Mentors in Every School

Donnelly and McSweeney (2011) focus on mentoring in Irish third level institutions and conclude that mentoring should be approached from a position of strength and reserved for developing human potential rather than as a solution to a problem employee. While this isn’t directly applicable to the NIPT programme, it is important to note that in Irish primary schools where there is no school-based mentor, it is often perceived by stakeholders that a visiting mentor is only called in for a support visit when a teacher is experiencing significant problems. Based on their own experiences, mentors, mentees and principals were asked if they would support the expansion of the NIPT mentoring programme to ensure that every NQT had access to a school-based mentor. The affirmative response was significant.

Mentee A and Mentee C both agreed that every NQT should have the opportunity to be mentored by a colleague, with Mentee D adding that it would be important that the programme was well run and that the mentor had a certain level of experience. Principal B stated that “…every school should have someone that [the mentee] can go to – a designated person...I can definitely see the merits in a big school...” Principal A and Principal C emphatically agreed. Interestingly, Mentee D added that it must be made “…clear that they were not working in an inspector capacity – just as a support role...”
When asked if every NQT should be provided with a mentor from their own school to help them through their probationary year, Mentor B replied, “...Absolutely – I can’t see how schools function if it’s not happening informally. If you’re in a school without strong structures in place, the easiest way is mentoring...” Mentor A suggested that mentoring should be available in every school “...in bigger cities [but I’m] not sure if there’s a need to train a teacher in every small school...” The mentor maintained that there “...should be a support system...a teacher in the locality...a [mentoring] cluster post...” This notion was reiterated by Principal B who proposed that a cluster-post mentor would be very beneficial to smaller schools and felt that mentoring can be “...quite generic with regard to issues such as classroom management and note-keeping...” and didn’t feel that an awareness of school ethos was something which was required of a mentor.

In summary, the aim of the NIPT mentoring programme is to offer school-based professional and personal support to the NQT. This research found that the aforementioned aim is being achieved in most schools but notes the inequality of access to school-based mentors for NQTs teaching in schools which choose not to take part in the programme.

This research sought to examine the effectiveness of the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools, with particular reference to the objective regarding school-based mentoring. This objective outlined the provision of opportunities to engage in professional dialogue, peer learning, sharing of knowledge and practice and reflection on practice. From this research, peer learning is a clear strength of the NIPT mentoring programme, with all mentees having been afforded the opportunity to observe other professionals teaching and all mentors facilitating this process. Professional dialogue was evident in most cases with the exception of one mentee who suggested that in their experience, the mentoring role merely provided a title for the mentor and the mentee was solely responsible for instigating any dialogue and
knowledge sharing. The research also established that informal feedback was evident in most cases with all mentors promoting self-reflection amongst the mentees.

The research found that all mentees would be open to the idea of becoming a mentor to future NQTs, as a direct result of their mentoring experiences. The idea of the provision of school-based mentors in every school was widely supported with concerns raised for the practicalities of this with regard to smaller schools. It is with this in mind that the research explored the difficulties encountered in the NIPT mentoring programme and the various obstacles which need to be surmounted before expansion of school-based mentoring to all schools could be considered.
4.5 Identify any significant obstacles to an expansion of the NIPT school-based mentoring programme.

According to the literature, there are many difficulties involved in the implementation of a mentoring programme, particularly pertaining to schools. This literature discovered during the course of interviews with key stakeholders that there were several areas of concern regarding the operation of the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools.

4.5.1 Time

Time has proven to be an extremely controversial topic with regard to mentoring programmes. According to Hall (2008), time, or lack thereof, can be a major impediment to a strong mentoring programme while Haack (2006) agrees that insufficient time to work with mentees can detract from the effectiveness and satisfactions of a mentoring programme. Kilburg (2007) suggested that the greatest obstacles to successful mentoring often lie within the structure and organisation of the school; when NQTs and mentors can spend time together in informed conversations or in the working environment, and how physically accessible they are to one another. In the course of their research, Hanson and Moir (2008) noted that some of their participants were left frustrated due to time constraints, and in research conducted by Ligadu (2012) half of the mentees spoke of the inadequacy of time for necessary mentoring activities.

Mentee A would have liked to have had more time dedicated to the mentoring process and advocated the introduction of “set times for meetings”. Similarly Mentee B remarked that “...meetings were held after school, once a month or once every two months [but we] didn’t have enough time...” Mentee C and D also suggested that more time was needed in order for the mentoring process to operate to its full potential with Mentee D adding that the provision of extra time for the observation of other teachers would be particularly helpful.
Mentor A felt that time was a significantly problematic issue but added that “...if the student stayed late in school it was easier...otherwise it was hard to pin down a time....” For Mentor B, time was an extremely sensitive issue and in particular “...the removal of [substitute] cover for their classroom...” From a practical point of view, this issue results in learning support and special needs teachers being withdrawn from their roles and used to supervise mainstream classes. This has significant implications for children with learning difficulties and special needs who are deprived of their allotted learning support or resource time, even for a brief period of time. In Mentor B’s school, “all of the support team needs to be reallocated or classes need to be split. [Substitute] cover is provided for the mentor only...” She added that if the NIPT “...are serious, they need to reintroduce [substitute] cover... It suggests to me that they’re not very serious about...”

For Mentor C, much of her contact with NQTs is after school. As she is a deputy principal and therefore a post-holder, part of her post is to give up a certain amount of personal time. Mentee C stated,

“...it was one of the reasons why I was asked to be a mentor. You would need to have a post of responsibility in order to be a mentor. There is a lot of extra time involved...[A mentor] would need some remuneration... [as a mentor, you] have to scale it down to what suits your needs...a mentor needs to be flexible...”

Mentee A suggested that “...the full year and half of the second year ...” would be the perfect amount of time to allocate to the mentoring process, adding that “...support in the second year could... allow [further] reflection upon the first year...” Mentor A felt that the length of time allotted to the completion of the mentoring programme “...depends on the NQT and how they eased into school life...” Mentor C suggested that “...in an ideal world...” teachers would have access to a mentor, even after completion of their dip,
however she added that “…one year is reasonable [as] you’re going to have new people every year so you won’t have time...[former mentees] will always know that they can approach you....” if they need help. Like Mentor C, Mentor B opined that in an informal capacity, “…NQTs will approach the mentor for advice after their first year [so formal mentoring for] one year is fine...”

Principal A felt that a two-year system would be more suitable for the mentoring programme currently in operation in Irish primary schools, citing his positive experience of co-teaching which operated in two-year cycles. Co-teaching entails two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching all students in an assigned classroom, with equally distributed responsibility for planning, instruction and evaluation. Principal A added that having just one year to try to complete your diploma puts “...a huge amount of pressure...” on new teachers, giving examples of “...new school, new systems, new people, new class...” as some of the “...huge responsibility...” which new teachers must take on in a very short amount of time. Principal B and Principal C concurred, with Principal B stating that NQTs “… need informal mentoring after the [DES diploma] has been completed, especially if they are moving class level”. Interestingly, this principal added, “…I think we all need mentoring at certain times...”

Following research conducted by Desselle (2012), suggestions for improvement from participants included arranging more formal occasions for the mentor-mentee pairs to spend time with one another. Huling and Resta (2001) suggest that a mentor can sharpen their focus by scheduling time to provide feedback to their mentees, something which this research suggests is required in the current NIPT mentoring programme.
4.5.2 Mentor Training

According to Orland (2001, p. 86), learning to become a mentor is a conscious process of induction into a different teaching context and does not ‘emerge naturally from being a good teacher’ of children. Hall (2008) adds that poorly trained mentors can damage budding administrators and states that mentoring programmes which are unclear in their expectations are less likely to yield positive results.

In the course of this research, the main stakeholders were asked to outline any issues which they felt needed to be addressed with regard to the NIPT mentoring programme. Mentor A felt that “…more time needs to be given to the training of mentors…” an opinion strongly supported by Principal A and Principal C. Mentor A posited that “…part of their training should cover what NQTs are covering in the induction programme.” This mentor also called for an inspection of mentors, suggesting that “…visiting mentor should try to visit all schools, to see what can be changed, what can be fixed, if it is being implemented correctly…” While this may indeed be a good theory, it is highly unlikely to be workable in the current economic climate which has seen significant cutbacks in the education sector, resulting in substantial wage cuts and increased responsibilities and working hours.

4.5.3 Rewards

Having previously discussed the link between intrinsic motivation and the mentoring process, it remains pertinent to discuss the absence of financial rewards available to those who give of their time in order to act as mentor to NQTs. This research indicated that many mentors are being selected due to the fact that they currently hold a post of responsibility which comes with a financial allowance. However, literature shows that mentor selection is critical in the implementation of a successful mentoring programme and therefore the best candidate for mentor may not be a post-holder within the school.
According to Hall (2008), incentives such as stipends or professional recognition would make the time commitments more attractive, thereby encouraging sustained mentoring service. Haack (2006) similarly states that lack of substantial or concrete rewards may be a problem for some potential mentors, adding that many programmes offer little more than the intangibles of self-esteem and feeling helpful. Haack suggests that as much recognition and advanced status as possible should accompany the mentoring process, but these intangible rewards will not provide everyone with the necessary motivations required of effective mentors.

On the topic of mentor rewards, Mentee B proposed that “…if mentors are giving up their time, they should be paid. A lot of time and effort goes into the mentoring programme and they deserve to be rewarded…” Principal A suggested that a viable alternative could be found in the idea of “…promotion without pay to the role of mentor [which would] be a recognised middle management position…” adding that, “if someone has excelled in a particular field, it should be taken into account for promotion opportunities…” Principal B stated, with reference to the role of the mentor, that she “…would never give it to someone who didn’t have a post of responsibility [as] it’s not fair to give them extra work if they’re not being paid for it…”

The belief that mentors should be financially rewarded for their effort is one which is widely held, based on the findings of this research. However, in reality, this is not really an option in the current economic climate. With an embargo on the appointment of staff to posts of responsibility, schools cannot replace post-holders who retire or move to a different school. This research identifies a possible solution in the introduction of the role of mentor to middle management, as an unpaid position. While this would not provide any financial incentive, a promotion in kind would be beneficial for the mentor from a profession development point of view.
4.5.4 Mentoring in Smaller Schools

The provision of a mentor to all NQTs may seem like a perfectly practical idea, however with regard to smaller schools, it is quite an idealistic concept. While larger schools appoint NQTs regularly; in smaller schools, any change in staff can be quite a rare occurrence. As a result, the training of mentors in smaller schools occurs less frequently than in larger schools and thus, NQTs in smaller schools have a significantly reduced chance of being mentored in a formal capacity. This research found that the provision of mentors for NQTs in smaller schools poses a significant obstacle in the expansion of the current NIPT mentoring programme.

As previously discussed in section 4.4.5, the possibility of a cluster post could be a solution to this issue. Long (2010) advocates the reorganising of mentors into networked clusters of expertise, either within one school or across several schools within the same district. The author suggests that by establishing a pool of mentors, opportunities for a choice of mentoring partnerships may occur, with the added advantage of shared mentoring expertise. Long (2010) adds that this may need to be overseen by one key mentor who takes prime responsibility for the mentoring programme. Long further notes the benefits of having access to a pool of mentors who can address unexpected situations, adding that mentors could be drawn from outside of the school context as seen in New Zealand. Meiers (2009) suggests that mentoring networks recognise that schools are multi-layered social systems that are constantly experiencing change with Long (2010) adding that external mentors have the added advantage of not being a staff member of a particular school, therefore a culture of mutual trust can be quickly established. This supports the aforementioned views of Principal B who remarked that a cluster-post mentor would be very beneficial to smaller schools and felt that mentoring can be “…quite generic with regard to issues such as classroom
management and note-keeping...” and didn’t feel that an awareness of school character was something which was required of a mentor.

4.5.5 Droichead Programme

According to a paper written in 2013 by the Teaching Council, entitled ‘Droichead: Teaching Council policy on a new model of induction and probation for newly qualified teachers, following consultation with stakeholders’, as of September 1st 2012, the Teaching Council of Ireland has statutory responsibility for the induction of new teachers and procedures and criteria for their probation. According to the document the Teaching Council is proposing to implement a programme called Droichead, which would see a professional support team (PST) of school based colleagues replace the school inspector in the awarding of a diploma to a NQT.

“...The Council believes that the best approach is the establishment of PSTs. Such teams will be comprised of principals, mentors and other experienced teachers, each of whom may have distinct roles. Mentors support NQTs during the induction phase. Principals, deputy principals or other experienced teachers may work together to form a joint opinion and make a recommendation to the Teaching Council in relation to the NQT's practice...” - Teaching Council (2013)

Figure 4.5 Droichead Programme – Teaching Council (2013)
When asked to comment on the proposed Droichead pilot programme for the purposes of this research, a range of responses and recommendations were obtained. Mentee A proposed that mentoring should occur “...only as a support role – not in an assessment [capacity] as suggested by the Droichead pilot programme...” The mentee added that “...mentoring should be kept just as a support so that the mentor will be more approachable [and so that the NQT] can go to the mentor without being in fear of being assessed...” Mentee C suggested that the proposed changes to probation in the form of the implementation of Droichead “...would change the dynamics [of schools and] create a problem between staff members....an external and neutral person is required...” Mentor C agreed stating that she “...would prefer it to stay the way it is and to have an [external inspector] come it [as] it would change the whole atmosphere of the school. It would change the NQTs perception of the mentor and principal [and] would take a lot more time...”

The topic evoked a very negative reaction from Mentor B who stated that the concept of having to “...call the inspector if you’re having trouble would be really demoralising for the NQT...” adding that it “...makes it more stressful and difficult [for the mentee]...” In her experience, the “...Principal is [extremely busy] with work and is always happy for inspector to come in...” Interestingly the mentor suggested changing the role of inspector to make their role more open, enabling them to ask the principal about NQTs interactions in school adding that here would be no need for a drastic change like that proposed in the Droichead programme “...if the inspectorate took on a more holistic role....”

4.5.6 Other Obstacles

Kilburg and Hancock (2006) documented the need for school structures to be in place that encourage effective communication. The recurring problems for mentoring included lack of time, location, mentor and mentee not in the same grade level, multiple mentees to one
mentor, poor matches, ineffective communication, low emotional support, personality conflicts, and assessment. Kilburg (2007) later investigated regularly occurring problems for new teachers and ways to intervene directly, noting of particular importance the negative influence of institutional barriers, issues of time and poor interpersonal skills of mentors.

With regard to the issue of mentor selection, Kajs (2002) argues that even the most experienced teachers may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to serve as both a colleague and a supervisor of a novice teacher. Ganser (2002) states that a need for high quality teaching is understood when it is accepted that being a good teacher is a necessary but insufficient condition for being a good mentor. Mentor A suggested that her inexperience resulted in her advice being disregarded, stating that,

“...someone who didn’t know the students, with an outside perspective, might be able to give more firm feedback which would be listened to. When the visiting [NIPT] mentor came out, the advice was taken on board, even though it was the same advice as the mentor and principal had previously given. A more senior member of staff, with more teaching and life experience, would have been taken more seriously and feedback would have been taken on board...”

Non-mentored NQTs speculated that other obstacles may include extra pressure and strained relationships, the fact that some people may be happier to work alone, a difference of opinions, a possible clash of personalities and undue stress and pressure. Interestingly, NQT D suggested that there would be potential obstacle if “...a mentor focussed on getting [NQTs] through the inspection process rather than on enabling them to develop the skills they will need to become a capable and empowered teacher...”

Mentee D had the experience of incurring “...impromptu visits from the mentor and principal...” This practice could be a significant obstacle to the successful expansion of the
NIPT programme as it is not considered best practice. The mentee added, “[Mentors] are not your inspector, they are your mentor. You shouldn’t feel under pressure about your mentor coming in... It should be friendly guidance as opposed to a second inspection...” NQT E suggested that an issue which could act as an obstacle to the implementation of the NIPT mentoring programme in more schools would be the perception by the mentor that they are there to assess, rather than merely assist and support.

In summary, this research established that there are several obstacles which are impeding the operation of the NIPT mentoring programme; noting in particular, the issue of time, mentor training, rewards, and smaller school mentoring. This research established some courses of action which could address these issues, including the provision of designated mentoring time for mentors and mentees, increased mentor training, the reinstatement of substitute cover for mentees and mentors to facilitate the mentoring programme and the establishment of a mentoring cluster post for NQTs in smaller schools. With regard to the introduction of the Droichead pilot programme to Irish primary schools, this research finds that the programme is not perceived to be suitable or indeed warranted, with all stakeholders asserting the importance of mentoring and NQT assessment remaining as very separate entities.

In order for the NIPT mentoring programme to function at an optimal level and to facilitate the expansion of the programme to encompass a larger number of schools, these obstacles must be addressed in a timely and comprehensive manner.
Chapter Five

Conclusions

This research sought to investigate what can be learned from the NIPT school-based mentoring programme in Irish primary schools which could facilitate the enhancement and expansion of the programme.

In its exploration of current best practice within mentoring programmes, this research explored learning styles, learning culture, the importance of creating a successful relationship between mentor and mentee, the critical issue of selecting and training a suitable mentor and discussed the five-factor mentoring model, as outline by Hudson (2010). This research established that the NIPT mentoring programme attempts to facilitate learners with many different learning styles and found that the personal attributes of the mentor as the factor perceived to impact most significantly on the relationship between the mentor and mentee. Furthermore, this research found that through the creation of a learning culture within the school, mentoring programmes can encourage the development of open lines of communication between experienced staff members and new staff members and facilitate the sharing of good practice, experience and ideas.

This research sought to investigate the source of motivation of the main stakeholders of the NIPT mentoring programme, focusing in particular on the motivation theories of Vroom (1964) and Latham and Locke (1979). Based on the views of the main stakeholders - mentors, mentees and principals - this research established that the motivation to succeed is intrinsic, and is not reliant on financial rewards to produce high standards of professionalism. This research established that the key factors in motivating teachers to become mentors and for teachers to perform to the best of their abilities included the quest to be a better teacher, to enable the children to learn and for personal satisfaction.
Regarding the principal benefits of the NIPT mentoring programme for the main stakeholders, this research found that programme increases the confidence of NQTs, enhances staff communications, facilitates the sharing of ideas, encourages reflective practice, speeds up the learning process and reaffirms more experienced teachers. The research further established that a more pleasant and helpful atmosphere is created in schools due to the NIPT mentoring programme, with professionalism increasing through the reflective dialogue encouraged in the mentoring process. Furthermore, this research identified the benefit of the development of management potential, particularly amongst mentors.

The research sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the school-based mentoring programme in operation in Irish primary schools as per the objectives originally outlined by the NIPT and based on the perceptions and attitudes of the main stakeholders. From this research, it is clear that peer learning is a strength of the programme, with all mentees having been afforded the opportunity to observe other professionals teaching. The research also established that professional dialogue and informal feedback was evident in most cases with all mentors promoting self-reflection amongst the mentees. The research established that all mentees would be open to the idea of acting as mentor to future NQTs, as a direct result of their mentoring experiences. The idea of the provision of school-based mentors in every school was widely supported, with concerns raised for the practicalities of this with regard to smaller schools.

Finally, this research identified several obstacles to an expansion of the NIPT mentoring programme and which are currently impeding it from operating at an optimum level. The most significant obstacles included the lack of time afforded to mentors and mentees for the purposes of meeting to discuss their progress, the duration of the mentoring programme, the need for more training for mentors, the absence of financial remuneration for mentors and the issue of the provision of school-based mentors in smaller schools. A significantly negative
response was attained with regard to the prospect of the implementation of the Droichead programme which would see principals and colleagues taking over the role of assessing NQTs for their diploma from the DES Inspectorate. The research established that in order for this mentoring programme to function at an optimal level and to facilitate the expansion of the programme to encompass a larger number of schools, these obstacles must be addressed in a timely and comprehensive manner.
Chapter Six

Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered, based on the research carried out on the NIPT mentoring programme in Irish primary schools.

1. The NIPT programme should be expanded to ensure that every primary school in Ireland has a school-based mentor. In smaller schools, access to a cluster-post mentor should be provided.

2. More training should be provided for the mentors taking part in the NIPT mentoring programme and selection of suitable mentors should be examined with regard to both personal teaching experience and level of familiarity with current diploma requirements.

3. Substitute cover should be provided for mentors and mentees in order to facilitate adequate supervision during the observation of other teaching professionals and to ensure ease of meeting for mentors and mentees by alleviating time pressures.

4. The need for mentor rewards must be examined, if not with regard to financial remuneration then the introduction of a promotion to middle management as part of the mentoring post.

5. The reflection and feedback processes of the NIPT mentoring programme must be formalised, to ensure that the mentee is enabled to gain full benefit from their observations and experiences.

6. Further investigations must be completed into the Droichead pilot programme to establish the views of a wider number of stakeholders, including the DES Inspectorate.
Self-Reflection on Own Learning and Performance

Kolb’s (1984) learning cycle outlines key stages of learning as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. A new experience is encountered, reflection takes place upon the new experience, and this reflection may give rise to a new idea which the learner then applies to the world around them. Kolb’s learning theory (1975) sets out four distinct learning styles, which are fundamentally linked to the four-stage learning cycle. Kolb explains that different people naturally prefer a certain learning style. The ‘converging’ learning style is the one which best describes me and is concerned with ‘doing and thinking’. It suggests that ‘Abstract Conceptualization’ and ‘Active Experimentation’ are my dominant learning abilities. People with a converging learning style solve problems and use their learning to find solutions to practical issues.

Experiential learning theory, as outlined by Kolb (1984), proposes that learning through experience can be enhanced by encouraging learners to reflect on and make better use of their own work and the work of people. Rogers (1983) believes that experiential learning is enhanced by creating an environment in which people can be stimulated to think and act in ways that help them to make good use of their experience. This dissertation process facilitated my reflection on my own work and the work of others, putting skills which I had learnt throughout the MBA process, such as time management and assertiveness, to good use.

Following my completion of four semesters of MBA classes at Dublin Business School, I researched and wrote my dissertation in the summer of 2013. As I chose to specialise in Managing Resourcing Strategy and Performance Management within the Human Resource Management stream, it was there that the foundations for my dissertation lay. Being a primary school teacher, the management of people within the Irish education system was of
significant interest to me. With this in mind, I chose to look at performance management in the Irish primary school system.

According to the learning theories set out by Honey and Mumford (1982), I am a pragmatist with leanings towards theorist, also. Pragmatists struggle to learn when the content of the learning is not related to an immediate need which the learner recognise, when there are no clear guidelines, when the learner feels that people are taking an unnecessary amount of time in getting to the point and when there are political, organisational, managerial or personal obstacles to implementation.

Originally I was interested in establishing the performance management practices which were taking place in an informal capacity in Irish primary schools which could be developed upon further, with a view to the implementation of a formalised performance management and development system for teachers. However, as the weeks passed I realised that I wasn’t entirely comfortable with the topic. Clearly, as a pragmatist, I was wary that the learning would not be related to an immediate need, especially as there are no clear performance management guidelines in relation to primary schools. Similarly, as a researcher with a converging learning style, I was eager to use my learning to find solutions to practical issues. Following informal conversations with friends who are teachers and colleagues, I realised that the disparity between the attitude of professionals in the education sector and professionals working the HRM was something which was going to pose significant issues for me in my data collection. My studies into research methodology influenced my thinking greatly. I decided to explore another area which I had experience of, an interest in and which could be deemed more accessible to those in education sector - the process of mentoring for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in Irish primary schools.
According to Honey and Mumford (1982), pragmatists thrive when they have the chance to try out and practise techniques with coaching or feedback from a credible expert, when they are given techniques currently applicable to their own work and when they can concentrate on practical issues. Formal mentoring of NQTs is a relatively new concept in Irish primary schools. As a teacher who was an NQT in 2009, I did not have the opportunity to be formally mentored in my debut teaching year – something which I now deem to have been a major disadvantage to me. Therefore, I wanted to explore the opinions and attitudes of those involved in the new programme to assess its effectiveness.

I was optimistic about developing my own understanding of the process of mentoring and the impact it can have on teachers and perceived this as a valuable insight to hold. Pragmatists learn best from activities where there is an obvious link between the subject matter and a ‘real life’ problem. Being aware of several mentoring programmes which were being operated against NIPT guidelines, I was interested in using my knowledge of HRM and performance management to explore the reality of how mentoring programmes are operated in schools and establish best practice with regard to mentoring.

Coming from an education background, it was quite difficult not to be drawn into exploring the effects of mentoring on the learning of the child. At the same time, I had to remain cognisant of the fact that the focus of my research was mentoring from a HRM point of view, identifying the benefits for the organisation as a whole and the impact of mentoring on the efficiency and effectiveness of teachers. Being completely honest, during the course of this research, I discovered that I am able to think in ‘HRM mode’ when dealing with businesses and organisations but I realised that the educator in me comes to the fore when I mix business and education. It is this realisation which has prompted me to take a career break from my job as a teacher and pursue a career in HRM, outside of education. Interestingly, pragmatists are
the kind of people who return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in practice.

According to ‘The Index of Learning Styles’, a learning style model formulated by Richard M. Felder and Linda K. Silverman, I am more of a reflective learner than an active learner, more sensing than intuitive, a visual rather than a verbal learner and a sequential rather than a global learner (See Appendix 7). In short, brief summaries and notes enable me to retain knowledge more effectively and I remember and understand information best when I can see how it connects to the world using specific examples. Concept maps and colour-coding are hugely important for me when ordering my thoughts and I like to explore things in a sequential and step-by-step manner.

During this dissertation I kept a notebook which contained thoughts which occurred to me throughout the day regarding my research. In this way I was able to elaborate on them at a later stage but still capture the essence of that initial thought. My interviews required specific examples to be provided by the participants which enabled me to delve deeper and ask more probing questions. All interviews were colour coded once typed up. This enabled me to see at a glance the links between responses - to compare and contrast opinions - while being able to identify immediately each respondent based on the colour of the text. I followed a logical plan throughout my research, which proved to be quite restrictive at times. I naturally wanted to do things exactly according to my plan and often, this just wasn’t possible. Adapting my plans in light of situations outside of my control was one of the main skills which I developed over the course of this research.

The prospect of interviewing people whom I had never met previously was something which daunted me immensely. In order to overcome this, and to make the most effective use of both my time and the time of the interviewees, I arranged most of the interviews to take place by
telephone as opposed to face-to-face. In this way, I was more relaxed in my own environment and found it much easier to absorb what the interviewee was saying. While the face-to-face meetings were very beneficial, they took more time and I found it was easier for the interviewee to digress from the topic and harder to refocus them back to the task on hand. I still need to learn how to improve my interviewing skills to ensure the instances of interviewees straying off topic is kept to a minimum. However, I feel that through experiential learning and following this research assignment, I am far more confident and assertive when making first contact with people; something which improved with each request which was rejected or stone-walled. I am quite surprised at how adept I became at being persistent and following up any leads or contacts offered by friends, colleagues and professional acquaintances. I discovered that persistence pays off and I was able to gain access to fifteen participants for my research.

With regard to the macro environment, there are significant political, economic and legal pressures on schools, to name but a few. In the current climate there are cutbacks in the education sector which have seen significant wage cuts and increased responsibilities and working hours. The outcomes of my research surprised me somewhat as I expected that there would be a far more negative response to the mentoring programme due to the pressure on teachers to work more for less pay. Overall, the participants viewed the programme in a very positive light and gave insightful responses. On the other hand, while I had expected a generally positive reaction to the Droichead pilot programme, I actually received an overwhelmingly negative response from almost all participants. I realised that my expectations of receiving a positive response was highly influenced by the views of the person who had first informed me about the programme. In this way, I have learnt to actively endeavour to recognise when I am beginning to draw premature conclusions prior to establishing to a range of opinions.
If I had another chance to conduct my research, there is little I would change about the process. I would, perhaps, engage in some focus-group activity in order to better inform my interview questions, prior to conducting interviews. I found that with each interview I conducted, I learned something new which I was eager to discuss with other interviewees. Had I been able to establish some of these opinions earlier on in the research process, the interviews would have been more standardised from the initial interview through to the final interview. If my research had been conducted during term time rather than immediately preceding and during the school summer holidays, I would have had access to a more diverse range of participants, and in particular, a larger number of teaching principals from smaller schools. This would be particularly insightful with regard to the obstacle of providing school-based mentoring for NQTs in smaller schools.

On a whole, I am very pleased with my research. I enjoyed working on my own to produce a piece of work which I can be proud of. My findings are different to the literature in that my research focused directly on the attitudes of the stakeholders in Irish primary schools, taking into account not just the opinions of mentees, but mentors, principals and non-mentored teachers also. I feel I was able to combine my knowledge of HRM and the Irish primary education system effectively, to produce research which is of significant value to both disciplines.
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Appendices

Appendix 1

Mentee Interview Guide

1. For how long has there been a mentoring scheme in place in your school?
2. How are mentors selected in your school?
3. Does the mentor have a post of responsibility?
4. What training had your mentor undergone?
5. Can you talk me through the process of matching you with your mentor?
6. Outline the main activities which were undertaken by the mentor.
7. What were the advantages of having a mentor?
8. What were the disadvantages of having a mentor?
9. Do you feel you and your mentor had personalities which enhanced or lessened the effectiveness of the programme?
10. How many years” experience approx. did your mentor have?
11. What aspects of the programme do you feel should be altered?
12. What **Personal Attributes** of the mentor facilitated the mentoring process?
13. Mentoring about the essential education **System Requirements** – do you feel the NQT was familiar enough with the curriculum and its requirements? Filling in roll books, cuntas miosiuls etc. practical tasks.
14. Did the mentor demonstrate up-to-date and informed **Pedagogical Knowledge** – Qualification other than undergrad degree? Masters?
15. The mentor’s **Modelling** of teaching practices – did they model or did they facilitate observation of someone else?
16. Quality **Feedback** provided by the mentor – formal, informal, followed-up on?
17. Was there a clear plan-of-action?

18. Were goals set?

19. How were these goals identified and progress assessed?

20. How big a part does self-reflection on the part of the mentee play in the mentoring process?

21. Do you think it is suitable to have a mentor in every school for newly qualified and newly appointed teachers?

22. Would you consider becoming a mentor? Why or why not?

23. Do you feel enough time was given to the mentoring process?

24. Do you feel it was perceived as a whole school programme or just a mentor-mentee relationship, separate from the workings of the school.

25. Would you welcome the opportunity to implement formal development plans for teachers – what would you see as being the disadvantages?

26. Is there a need for promotion in schools other than deputy-principal and principal?

27. How many post holders are in your school?

28. Do you feel that a mentor should be a post holder with reference to the amount of work which mentoring entails?

29. Overall, what would you identify as being the most positive aspects of the mentoring programme?

30. Do you feel that you were provided with a clear line of sight between the objectives of a teacher, the aims of the school and the aims of the DES?

31. Do you feel one year is a suitable period of time over which to mentor a NQT?

32. What is the incentive for teachers to perform to a high level?

33. Do you feel it would be beneficial for every school to have a mentoring scheme in place for newly appointed or newly qualified teachers.
34. Bearing in mind that the Teaching Council is beginning a pilot programme (Droichead) to explore the idea of replacing the role of the school inspector in assessing a diploma student, what changes would you feel would be important to implement, based on your experience of the mentoring programme.

35. The Chief Inspector has said that he sees no reason why a formal teacher appraisal system, headed by the principal, cannot be introduced into Irish schools. In your opinion, should mentoring remain a separate entity to the assessment of teachers and kept solely as a support system or should mentoring and teacher appraisal be integrated?
Appendix 2

Mentor Interview Guide

1. What are the criteria for becoming a mentor in your school?
2. Can you talk me through the process of matching you with your mentee?
3. What training have you undergone in order to become a mentor?
4. How were you selected to become a mentor?
5. Are you the only mentor in your school?
6. Could you summarise the main activities which are undertaken by the mentor.
7. What Personal Attributes of the mentor facilitates the mentoring process
8. Is mentoring mainly about the essential education system requirements – do you feel the NQT was familiar enough with the curriculum and its requirements? Filling in roll books, cuntas miosiuls etc. practical tasks.
9. To what extend do you model good teaching practices for the mentee?
10. Feedback provided by the mentor – Formal, informal, follow-up on?
11. What aspects of the programme do you feel should be altered?
12. Do you feel enough time was given to the mentoring process?
13. Do you feel it was perceived as a whole school programme or just a mentor-mentee relationship, separate from the workings of the school?
14. How big a part does self-reflection on the part of the mentee play in the mentoring process?
15. To what extent is the principal involved in the mentoring process in your school?
16. To your knowledge, has your principal acted as a mentor to other principals? How has this impacted their perception of the mentoring process, in your opinion.
17. Would you welcome the opportunity to implement development plans for teachers? Formulating a formal plan, identifying goals, providing strategies and resources
needed to achieve these goals, observe the behaviours and assess if these goals have been reached before providing feedback.

18. Do you currently act as coach or mentor to staff members who are not NQTs either in a formal, or informal capacity – are these staff underperforming or high performing.

19. Does distributive leadership take place in the school with regard to policy making?

20. Is staff collaboration supported within the school – teams working on policies, planning with other teachers?

21. Posts of responsibility – how many post holders are currently in the school and how many posts are waiting to be filled.

22. Would you welcome the return of post holders to deal with the management of teachers’ performances or would you see that as being the job of the principal or vice principal.

23. In your opinion, should high performing teachers be promoted to a mentoring position which would be categorised as recognised post of responsibility?

24. As a mentor, do you feel adequately trained to appraise the teaching of your staff in a formal manner? What has helped? What more could be done?

25. What do you feel are the benefits of the mentoring process for you?

26. Are these benefits enough to compensate for a lack of financial reward?

27. Do you feel as though there is a clear line of sight between the job description of individual teachers, the aims of the schools and the objectives set out by the DES?

28. Do you feel one year is a suitable period of time over which to mentor a NQT?

29. In your opinion, what is the incentive for teachers to perform to a high level?

30. In your opinion, what is the incentive for underperforming teachers to try to improve?

31. Overall, what would you identify as being the most positive aspects of the mentoring programme which has taken place in your school?
32. Do you feel it would be beneficial for every school to have a mentoring scheme in place for newly appointed or newly qualified teachers.

33. Bearing in mind that the Teaching Council is beginning a pilot programme (Droichead) to explore the idea of replacing the role of the school inspector in assessing a diploma student, what changes would you feel would be important to implement, based on your experience of the mentoring programme.

34. The Chief Inspector has said that he sees no reason why a formal teacher appraisal system, headed by the principal, cannot be introduced into Irish schools. In your opinion, should mentoring remain a separate entity to the assessment of teachers and kept solely as a support system or should mentoring and teacher appraisal be integrated?
Appendix 3

Principal Interview Guide – Mentoring School

1. Is there a mentoring scheme in place in the school?
2. What do you see as being the advantages of the scheme?
3. What do you see as being the disadvantages of the scheme
4. Is it just for NQTs?
   • What do you see as being the advantages of this?
   • What do you see as being the disadvantages of this?
5. What are the criteria for becoming a mentor?
6. What is your understanding of the mentoring programme and how it occurs in your school?
7. Are goals clearly identified and progress assessed? How?
8. How many years teaching experience have you?
9. How many years have you been a principal for?
10. How many years have you been a mentor for?
11. When you were first appointed as principal did you have a mentor?
   • What do you see as being the advantages of this?
   • What do you see as being the disadvantages of this?
12. Have you acted as mentor to other teachers?
13. As a mentor, do you feel adequately trained to appraise the teaching of your staff in a formal manner? What has helped? What more could be done?
14. Have you acted as mentor to other principals? What were the benefits of that for you?
15. Would you welcome the opportunity to implement development plans for teachers? What would you see as being the advantages of this? What would you see as being the possible constraints?

16. Do you have staff members who they believe high performers who could potentially become mentors, not just for new staff but for all staff?

17. In your opinion, could high performing teachers be promoted to a mentoring position which would facilitate distributive leadership in taking on the role of overseeing developmental plans? What resources would help with this process?

18. Do you currently act as coaches or mentors to their staff – are these staff underperforming or high performing.

19. Does distributive leadership take place in the school?

20. Is staff collaboration supported within the school?

21. Posts of responsibility – how many post holders are currently in the school and how many posts are waiting to be filled.

22. In your opinion, should high performing teachers be promoted to a mentoring position which would be a recognised post of responsibility?

23. Would you welcome the return of post holders to deal with the management of teachers’ performances or would you see that as being the job of the principal or vice principal.

24. If you believed that a teacher was underperforming – what steps you would take to support the teacher. Has this occurred? What plans were put in place?

25. Do you feel adequately trained to appraise the teaching of your staff in a formal manner? What has helped? What more could be done?

26. Do you feel as though there is a clear line of sight between the job description of individual teachers, the aims of the schools and the objectives set out by the DES?
27. Do you feel one year is a suitable period of time over which to mentor a NQT?

28. What was it that inspired you to become a principal? Do you miss the teaching aspect? Would you have preferred to have received recognition and promotion while being able to remain in the classroom? Was money a significant issue?

29. If you could have been promoted, become more senior and remained teaching while acting as an advisor would you have chosen this ahead of being promoted to an administrative position with financial recognition? Was becoming a teaching principal in a smaller school an option? Had it been an option, would it have been preferable? If you were given the mentoring option without financial recognition and the option of trying to balance teaching and administrative duties of a principal with financial reward, which would you prefer.

30. In your opinion, what is the incentive for teachers to perform to a high level?

31. In your opinion, what is the incentive for underperforming teachers to try to improve?

32. Overall, what would you identify as being the most positive aspects of the mentoring programme which has taken place in your school?

33. How big a part does self-reflection on the part of the mentee play in the mentoring process?

34. Do you feel it would be beneficial for every school to have a mentoring scheme in place for newly appointed or newly qualified teachers.

35. Bearing in mind that the Teaching Council is beginning a pilot programme (Droichead) to explore the idea of replacing the role of the school inspector in assessing a diploma student, what changes would you feel would be important to implement, based on your experience of the mentoring programme.

36. The Chief Inspector has said that he sees no reason why a formal teacher appraisal system, headed by the principal, cannot be introduced into Irish schools. In your
opinion, should mentoring remain a separate entity to the assessment of teachers and kept solely as a support system or should mentoring and teacher appraisal be integrated?
Appendix 4

Principal Interview Guide – Non-Mentoring School

1. Is there a mentoring scheme in place in the school?
2. What do you see as being the advantages of the scheme?
3. What do you see as being the disadvantages of the scheme?
4. With regard to mentoring schemes only dealing with NQTs:
5. What do you see as being the advantages of this?
6. What do you see as being the disadvantages of this?
7. What is your understanding of the mentoring programme and how it operates in a school?
8. How many years teaching experience have you?
9. How many years have you been a principal for?
10. How many years have you been a mentor for?
11. When you were first appointed as principal did you have a mentor?
12. What do you see as being the advantages of this?
13. What do you see as being the disadvantages of this?
14. Have you ever acted as mentor to other teachers? Informally or Formally
15. Have you acted as mentor to other principals? Informally or Formally
16. What were the benefits of that for you?
17. Would you welcome the opportunity to implement development plans for teachers?
18. What would you see as being the advantages of this?
19. What would you see as being the possible constraints?
20. Do you have staff members who they believe high performers who could potentially become mentors, not just for new staff but for all staff?
21. In your opinion, could high performing teachers be promoted to a mentoring position which would facilitate distributive leadership in taking on the role of overseeing developmental plans?

22. What resources would help with this process?

23. Do you currently act as coaches or mentors to their staff – are these staff underperforming or high performing.

24. Does distributive leadership take place in the school?

25. Is staff collaboration supported within the school?

26. Posts of responsibility – how many post holders are currently in the school and how many posts are waiting to be filled.

27. In your opinion, should high performing teachers be promoted to a mentoring position which would be a recognised post of responsibility?

28. Would you welcome the return of post holders to deal with the management of teachers’ performances or would you see that as being the job of the principal or vice principal.

29. If you believed that a teacher was underperforming – what steps you would take to support the teacher. Has this occurred? What plans were put in place?

30. Do you feel adequately trained to appraise the teaching of your staff in a formal manner?

31. What has helped?

32. What more could be done?

33. Do you feel as though there is a clear line of sight between the job description of individual teachers, the aims of the schools and the objectives set out by the DES?

34. Do you feel one year is a suitable period of time over which to mentor a NQT?
35. What was it that inspired you to become a principal? Do you miss the teaching aspect? Would you have preferred to have received recognition and promotion while being able to remain in the classroom? Was money a significant issue?

36. If you could have been promoted, become more senior and remained teaching while acting as an advisor would you have chosen this ahead of being promoted to an administrative position with financial recognition? Was becoming a teaching principal in a smaller school an option? Had it been an option, would it have been preferable? If you were given the mentoring option without financial recognition and the option of trying to balance teaching and administrative duties of a principal with financial reward, which would you prefer.

37. In your opinion, what is the incentive for teachers to perform to a high level?

38. In your opinion, what is the incentive for underperforming teachers to try to improve?

39. To what extent is self-reflection practiced within your school?

40. Do you feel it would be beneficial for every school to have a mentoring scheme in place for newly appointed or newly qualified teachers.

41. Are you aware the Teaching Council is beginning a pilot programme (Droichead) to explore the idea of replacing the role of the school inspector in assessing a diploma student?

42. What are your thoughts on the prospect of being part of a team of teachers from your school or local schools which would be required to assess the competency of newly qualified teachers working in your school?

43. The Chief Inspector has said that he sees no reason why a formal teacher appraisal system, headed by the principal, cannot be introduced into Irish schools. In your opinion, should mentoring remain a separate entity to the assessment of teachers and
kept solely as a support system or should mentoring and teacher appraisal be integrated?
Appendix 5

NQT Interview Guide

1. What would you identify as being the most difficult aspects of your first year of teaching?

2. What could have made these issues less difficult?

3. Who did you seek support from in your first year of teaching?

4. Who helped you with basic system requirements e.g. filling in roll books, how to write up a cuntas miosuil, NEPS reports, report writing, meeting parents?

5. What feedback did you get in your first year and was it helpful?

6. Did you feel supported by the rest of the staff as you awaited your dip inspection?

7. Do you feel it would have been beneficial to have had a mentor in your first year teaching while doing your diploma? Please elaborate.

8. What advantages and disadvantages would you see in each school having a mentor for NQTs?
Appendix 6

NIPT Objectives

In providing a high quality effective induction programme for NQTs the NIPT programme will:

- Provide robust and high quality professional development opportunities for NQTs to build on, develop and further enhance their learning experienced during the ITE stage

- Involve, as appropriate, the partners in education, and especially the providers of ITE, the Inspectorate and the Teaching Council, in the design and on-going development of the NIPT

- **Provide opportunities for NQTs to engage in professional dialogue, peer learning, sharing of knowledge and practice, and reflection on practice**

- Provide a wide range of customised workshops on relevant topics based on identified priority needs of NQTs taking into account the varying contextual realities

- Provide school-based support for NQTs by trained mentors, principals, and other staff members, which include the development of an induction plan using a range of induction activities (e.g. observation, feedback, co-teaching, co-planning, peer support, meetings with relevant personnel etc.)

- Provide school-based individualised support, as required, enabling NQTs to access additional support from the NIPT national team

- Provide on-going additional support at Education Centre level in the form of professional support groups
• Promote the development of professional learning portfolios by NQTs, which build on, as appropriate, the portfolios initiated during the ITE stage.

• Provide a bilingual, continuously updated and well-serviced website with an emphasis on the development of appropriate resource materials in support of NQTs’ needs.

• Provide, as required, regular updates, feedback and reports to Teacher Education Section, DES and the Teaching Council.
Appendix 7

The Index of Learning Styles

The Index of Learning Styles is an on-line instrument used to assess preferences on four dimensions (active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and sequential/global) of a learning style model formulated by Richard M. Felder and Linda K. Silverman. The instrument was developed by Richard M. Felder and Barbara A. Solomon of North Carolina State University.

Results for: Ciara Stapleton

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Active or Reflective Learner: If you are a reflective learner in a class that allows little or no class time for thinking about new information, you should try to compensate for this lack when you study. Don’t simply read or memorize the material; stop periodically to review what you have read and to think of possible questions or applications. You might find it helpful to write short summaries of readings or class notes in your own words. Doing so may take extra time but will enable you to retain the material more effectively.

Sensing or Intuitive Learners: Sensors remember and understand information best if they can see how it connects to the real world. If you are in a class where most of the material is
abstract and theoretical, you may have difficulty. Ask your instructor for specific examples of concepts and procedures, and find out how the concepts apply in practice. If the teacher does not provide enough specifics, try to find some in your course text or other references or by brainstorming with friends or classmates.

**Visual or Verbal Learners:** If you are a visual learner, try to find diagrams, sketches, schematics, photographs, flow charts, or any other visual representation of course material that is predominantly verbal. Ask your instructor, consult reference books, and see if any videotapes or CD-ROM displays of the course material are available. Prepare a concept map by listing key points, enclosing them in boxes or circles, and drawing lines with arrows between concepts to show connections. Colour-code your notes with a highlighter so that everything relating to one topic is the same colour.

**Sequential or Global Learners:** Most college courses are taught in a sequential manner. However, if you are a sequential learner and you have an instructor who jumps around from topic to topic or skips steps, you may have difficulty following and remembering. Ask the instructor to fill in the skipped steps, or fill them in yourself by consulting references. When you are studying, take the time to outline the lecture material for yourself in logical order. In the long run doing so will save you time. You might also try to strengthen your global thinking skills by relating each new topic you study to things you already know. The more you can do so, the deeper your understanding of the topic is likely to be.
