

# Associate Teachers as Successful Mentors; Associate Teachers' and Student Teachers' Perspectives

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Masters of Teaching and Learning.*

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## Abstract

This study investigated associate teachers and student teachers perspectives of ‘successful’ mentoring. It aimed to understand how a group of associate teachers, who had been identified as being successful, viewed their role, looking at what it was that they specifically did that they felt made them successful when mentoring student teachers. It then compared these perspectives with those of a group of student teachers. The aim of the comparison was to establish any agreements or contradictions between the associate teachers’ and the student teachers’ perspectives about ‘successful’ associate teachers. An additional aim was to establish knowledge of particular professional development experiences that the associate teachers of this study felt had positively impacted on their practice as mentors.

Four ‘successful’ associate teachers, as identified by their visiting lecturers from within the University of Canterbury, College of Education, and five student teachers who were enrolled at the same university in one of the primary programmes at the time of the study, were interviewed regarding their perspectives. The data revealed three conceptual themes as being relevant to ‘successful’ mentoring of student teachers: acquiring professional knowledge, becoming a professional through practice – teaching the student teacher, and building professional relationships.

Findings of this study suggest that pivotal to ‘successful’ mentoring is the establishment of a successful working relationship between the associate teacher and the student teacher. The study identified that the mentoring relationship is more likely to be viewed as being ‘successful’ if associate teachers demonstrate certain knowledge, dispositions and practices

when mentoring student teachers. Findings also highlighted the vital role that communication plays in supporting this relationship, not only between the associate teacher and the student teacher, but also the significant impact that effective communication on behalf of the initial teacher education provider has. The findings of this study calls for a review into the way that initial teacher education providers communicate with associate teachers, suggesting that providers should introduce a face to face element to communication.

What became apparent through this study was the conclusion that there were excellent examples of 'successful' associate teachers, including those that were interviewed for this study, who were mentoring student teachers. Initial teacher education providers need to draw from this wealth of knowledge by increasing the opportunities where they facilitate discussions between themselves and associate teachers, in order to ensure that they are supporting the professional growth of their student teachers.

It is my hope that the findings of this study will help to inform initial teacher education providers about the mentoring of their student teachers and hopefully result in improved outcomes for student teachers in the future.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Many students study each year at the University of Canterbury, College of Education to become a teacher. As part of their training student teachers are required to complete a number of Professional Practice placements in schools. On these placements a student teacher (ST) is mentored by an experienced teacher who takes on the role known by the university as an associate teacher (AT). STs are influenced hugely by the guidance and support that their ATs, as mentors, provide for them as they prepare to embark on their career. By the end of their study, they will have accumulated a range of experiences in a variety of classrooms, and will have been mentored by a wide range of associates, all of whom have different levels of experience, different philosophies, different conceptualisations of what the role entails, and who complete a range of different tasks in their role as mentor.

### **Context of Study**

I have been a teacher in the primary sector for the past twelve years. Over this time I have been an associate teacher, a tutor teacher, and a mentor for a number of student and beginning teachers. It was not until 2009, when I attended a paper as part of my Masters of Teaching and Learning course requirements that I came across a wealth of resources surrounding some of the models regarding the mentoring of student and newly qualified teachers and was introduced to some of the theoretical underpinnings of mentoring. Until this time, my own personal experiences of being mentored had helped to shape the way that I mentored others. I had not undergone any form of professional development

specifically for my roles and, if anything, had learnt about my role through an 'apprenticeship' approach, where I had learnt on the job. This newly acquired knowledge had a significant impact on my practice as a mentor. It also sparked my interest in finding out if the mentoring experiences of others were similar to my own, what supports there were out there for mentors and what resources were available to others in a similar situation to my own. I also wanted to establish if what I thought was 'successful' mentoring aligned with the views of both those doing the mentoring and of those being mentored. And so my journey began.

## **Rationale for this Study**

Research into the 'successful' mentoring of student teachers in the New Zealand primary school sector remains limited. The purpose of this study is to establish what associate teachers believe makes them a 'successful' mentor. This research aims to explore what it is specifically, that makes an AT into a 'successful' mentor, not only from an AT's perspective but also from the perspective of STs. It explores these perspectives on mentoring to establish if those mentoring and those being mentored have the same expectations and understandings of 'successful' mentoring.

## **Aims of Study**

My research focuses on exploring the range of specific tasks within the approaches and models that are used when mentoring student teachers and the features that promote 'successful' mentoring. In particular, this study explores which specific tasks the participants found to be the most 'successful' and why they were useful.

It also focuses on identifying those philosophies and beliefs about mentoring which the participants consider make them 'successful' in their roles as ATs. It will then compare them to see if these align with the STs' perceptions.

An additional aim was to identify any particular form of professional development that associates have found to have positively influenced their practice as an AT.

It is my hope that the findings of this study will help to inform initial teacher education programme providers, providing information for them to support the continued development or enhancement of professional development opportunities for ATs, regarding the important role of mentoring. This will in turn hopefully result in improved experiences of professional practices in schools and consequently outcomes for STs in the future.

### **Research Questions**

- What makes a 'successful' associate teacher?
- Are associate teachers' beliefs about what makes them successful aligned with the beliefs of student teachers?

### **Sub Questions**

- What specific tasks, techniques or models do associate teachers find successful when working with student teachers?
- What specific tasks, techniques or models that associates teachers use do student teachers find have a positive impact on their practice?
- In what ways has professional development influenced associate teacher's practice?

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### Successful

The purpose of this research is to go beyond a dictionary definition of successful as the attainment of a favourable or desired outcome, and discover what other actions, dispositions, and beliefs associate teachers have that make them successful.

For the purpose of this research learning that has occurred is being described to be successful if the AT or ST identifies it to have had a positive impact on their practice on professional placement.

### Mentoring

The term mentor is used to describe the learning relationship between a novice (student teacher) and an expert or someone more experienced (associate teacher). Fletcher (2000) defines mentoring as the “potential of a one-to-one professional relationship that can simultaneously empower and enhance practice” (p. 1). Mentoring has several different meanings or interpretations depending on the context however, in education the term mentoring “is often used to describe a combination of coaching, counselling and assessment, where a classroom teacher in a school is delegated responsibility for assisting pre-service or newly qualified teachers in their professional development” (Fletcher, 2000, p. 1). Mentoring also has a range of interpretations within the educational context, dependent on the country of origin of the research being discussed. This research aims to establish what ‘successful mentoring’ looks like in a ST/AT relationship, situated in a New Zealand primary school setting.

### Associate Teacher (AT)

An associate teacher must be a “registered or provisionally registered teacher (who) hold(s) a current practising certificate issued by the New Zealand Teachers Council” (Associate Teacher Registration, University of Canterbury College of Education, 2011) and registers with the University of Canterbury College of Education Professional Practice Office to hold associate teacher status. An AT hosts and supervises a ST for the duration of their Professional Practice placement.

### Student Teacher (ST)

In this study, student teachers are those enrolled and engaged in a range of primary initial teacher education programmes such as a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning, a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning (Honours), or Graduate Diploma of Teaching and Learning at the University of Canterbury, College of Education at the time of their Professional Practice placement.

### Pre-service Teacher (PST)

Pre-service teacher refers to any person/persons currently or previously enrolled in an initial teacher education programme, prior to their acquiring a job within a school. This term is used interchangeably with the term student teacher (ST) in much of the literature. For this study I will use the term student teacher, unless reporting on literature where the term pre-service teacher is used.

### Beginning Teacher (BT)

The term beginning teacher refers to any teacher who has completed their period of initial teacher education and is in the first two years of their teaching career, and who holds provisionally registered teacher status.

### Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programme

For this study, an Initial Teacher Education programme, also referred to as ITE programme, is any programme that offers a training programme for teaching and initial teacher education qualifications leading to teacher registration.

### Professional Practice (PP)

Professional Practice is a course requirement for enrolled student teachers at the University of Canterbury College of Education and is “carried out in school placements for block periods” (Professional Practice Associate Teacher Handbook, University of Canterbury College of Education, 2011). Student teachers conduct their Professional Practice within classrooms, “under the supervision of an associate teacher” who is the regular teacher of that classroom.

### Practicum

This is the United States of America’s equivalent of New Zealand’s Professional Practice. These two terms are used interchangeably, depending on the country of origin of the research being discussed. For this study I will use the term professional practice, unless reporting on literature where the term practicum is used.

### Full Control

Full control refers to the period of time where the student teacher resumes control of the class, taking sole responsibility for the teaching, including full class and group teaching, for planning, and for any assessment requirements, for a pre-determined period of time.

### Professional Development

For the purpose of this research professional development is defined as any type of professional learning that occurs, both formally and informally, that positively impacts the teacher's or student teacher's practice.

## **List of Abbreviations**

Associate Teacher	AT
Student Teacher	ST
Pre-service Teacher	PST
Beginning Teacher	BT
Initial Teacher Education	ITE
Professional Practice	PP
Higher Educational Institution	HEI



## **Chapter Two: Relevant Literature**

This literature review outlines the key themes in the literature that are implied by the research questions regarding associate teachers as 'successful' mentors. Initially I explore the broader topics of initial teacher education (ITE) and the place of the Professional Practice (PP) placement, in order to set the scene for that within which my research is located and provide a brief historical background to ITE. I then explore some of the literature focused on the mentoring of student teachers (STs) and beginning teachers (BTS), including models of mentoring and mentor preparation. I have included studies focused on BTs within my literature review as there are many similarities between the learning needs of BTs and STs and therefore generalisations can be made from their findings. Finally I have discussed specific examples of research around the mentoring of STs and BTs situated both in an international and the New Zealand contexts in order to show what research has already been conducted in my field and highlighting how my research will add to the literature.

### **Initial Teacher Education**

Every year a large number of high school graduates, undergraduate, post graduate, and mature (adult) students eagerly enrol in one of the initial teacher education (ITE) programmes on offer throughout New Zealand and around the world. Much has been written and many studies completed about the role that an ITE programme plays in the preparation of the pre-service or student teachers and how the programme is structured. The structure of ITE programmes varies greatly from country to country with each ITE

provider having their own method for educating STs. However, as Hagger and McIntyre (2006) suggest “internationally, there are as yet no satisfactory models of teacher education practice which meet the needs of the education system in which they are embedded” (p. 3), so therefore these programmes continue to be regularly reviewed and ongoing research is conducted into how best to provide a programme that prepares STs for the challenging task of teaching that lies ahead of them.

What is agreed is that the role of these institutions is to prepare the teachers of the future. With this they carry a huge responsibility as “any system of schooling that has an annual intake of thousands of committed, eager and able beginning teachers needs to give them the best possible preparation and start” (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006, p. 3). What follows is a brief historical overview of ITE in New Zealand.

For over a century initial teacher education in New Zealand took place within one of the six stand alone colleges located nationally. However, following a series of national reviews into ITE in the early stages of the twenty-first century (Cameron & Baker, 2004; Kane, R. G., Burke, P., Cullen, J., Davey, R., Jordan, B., McCurphy-Pilkington, C., Mansell, R., MacIntyre, L., Scrivens, C., & Simpson, M., 2005) there has been a major shift in how we educate our teachers. The last two decades have seen the deregulation of ITE with it being opened up to a wider group of providers. “As a result, it became a highly contestable and competitive area politically, undergoing structural and functional transformation and resulting in the proliferation of providers” (Davey, 2010, p. 14).

In the 1990’s, two of the historical stand alone colleges amalgamated with their local universities. This was then followed with mergers from the remaining four colleges

beginning in 2004, and culminating in 2007 with Dunedin and Canterbury Colleges of Education being the last to do so. These mergers saw a shift from the traditional “practice-based” (Davey, 2010, p. 16) models used within the colleges, where programmes were largely centred around acquiring the skill set and knowledge required to teach, to a programme which had a more “theory and research based” (Davey, 2010, p. 16) approach, a model aligned with the style of tertiary education used by universities (Davey, 2010). The move of ITE into universities introduced, for the first time, a degree qualification, overshadowing the previous diploma qualifications offered by the colleges. The Auckland College of Education was the first to offer a three year degree which was quickly followed by other colleges throughout New Zealand. This brought about a level of competition amongst institutions which resulted in their offering a range of qualifications including “three-year and four-year combined degree/teaching diplomas, degree upgrades for practitioners with diplomas, and even Master’s degrees” (Davey, 2010, p. 15).

By 2004, there were 31 providers offering 156 programmes of initial teacher education (Cameron & Baker, 2004). Although there was a significant increase in the number of programmes on offer throughout New Zealand, all ITE qualifications are governed by the requirements placed upon them by the Quality Assurance Bodies (QAB’s) and the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) who are responsible for approving these qualifications (Kane et al., 2005). As a result some distinct similarities between providers remained. These similarities include qualifications that “are organised into distinct papers, most have some form of conceptual framework, philosophy and/or statement of goals, and most articulate graduate profiles or outcome statements” (Kane et al., 2005, p. 220). However, these changes also meant that there was and still are, levels of variance between each ITE

programme. As Kane et al's (2005) research into ITE policy and practice found, despite there being levels of consistency, levels of variation across qualifications included "the breadth, depth, and length of each of the components that go to make up the qualification" (p. 220). This included a variation in the balance of how much time is spent within a higher educational institute (HEI) classroom or lecture hall learning the theory of education or curriculum studies, compared to the practical application of what has been learnt - teaching within a classroom.

As Davey (2010) suggests, the nature of these ITE programmes has been influenced over the years by studies that "have attempted to identify or define the knowledge base/s" (p. 170) required of teachers or "what teachers need to know and be able to do in order to teach students" (Davey, 2010, p. 170), in order to establish what it is that ITE programmes will encompass. Schulman (1987) identifies seven categories of knowledge that help to shape a teacher's knowledge base: *content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values and their philosophical and historical grounds*. The acquisition of some of these categories of knowledge is best located within the more structured courses and classrooms of the HEI or ITE institution. Others can only be learnt through the practice of being in the authentic setting of a classroom. This is often dependent on the source of knowledge. Schulman (1987) also suggests that there are four major sources of knowledge that help to shape the knowledge base of teachers which he describes as;

(1) scholarship in content disciplines, (2) the materials and settings of institutionalized educational processes (for example, curricula, textbooks, school organizations and finance, and the structure of the teaching profession), (3) research on schooling, social organizations, human learning, teaching and development, and the other social and cultural phenomena that affect what teachers can do, and (4) the wisdom of practice itself. (Shulman, 1987, p. 8)

Each of these sources of knowledge is vital to teacher education as both research or theory based learning, and practice based learning play an important role in initial teacher preparation. As Hope (1999) found, an “equal partnership between university and schools is widely supported both in the literature and the profession” (p. 189) as each play an important, yet very different role in developing the knowledge base of teachers.

What is interesting to note is just as New Zealand was making the move to align initial teacher education within the university setting, this model was under increasing scrutiny and debate in a number of countries throughout the world. English researchers Hagger and McIntyre (2006) examining the place of ITE in England, noted that “in many countries the nineteenth century was dominated by school based approaches to ITE while, in contrast, the twentieth century was dominated by higher education-based approaches” (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006, p. 5) a model which they did not believe adequately prepared their teachers for the reality of the classroom. They stated that “the many countries (including virtually all English-speaking countries) which had relied in the twentieth century on higher education institutes (HEIs) to prepare teachers have tended to identify the same central problem,

namely a lack of practical focus” (p. 4). This, along with findings from other ITE based research, saw a radical restructuring of ITE within the English setting, including the move to dramatically increase the role that schools played in initial teacher education, a shift that was, and still is taking place worldwide (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). Now, in the twenty-first century, school-based approaches, reminiscent of the apprenticeship models used within the historical colleges of New Zealand, are once again on the rise internationally.

International moves away from ITE in the HEI setting leaves some question regarding the more recent shift in New Zealand to locating it within the university settings. Despite this, what remains obvious is that there is still no worldwide consensus on how best to educate our student teachers.

## **Professional Practice Placement**

Although in New Zealand ITE courses vary in many different ways, most of them have two things in common. Firstly, they aim to provide a programme that successfully prepares their students for a career in teaching, giving them a strong pedagogical theory or knowledge base on which they can begin to build their own newly acquired knowledge. Secondly, each programme aims to provide a level of balance between learning the theory of teaching, and the practice of being in front of a class teaching the children. In order to do this, most programmes include an in-school placement or practicum where the student teacher will be supervised by a more experienced and qualified teacher (associate or supervising teacher) who often takes on the role of mentor.

As previously mentioned initial teacher learning takes place not only through the formalised courses and classes at the ITE institute in which the ST is enrolled, but also through the many interactions and experiences that the ST has working alongside experienced teachers in the natural setting of the classroom. This classroom experience is what can be known as the teaching experience, the practicum, or the Professional Practice. These terms are often used interchangeably, depending on the origin of the research or the ITE programme that is being discussed.

There has been a lot written about the value of the Professional Practice placement as part of the ITE programme. Wang and Odell (2002) view the practicum as “an occasion for mentors to help novices connect theories and ideas that they have learned in their teacher education programs to the actual practice of teaching children in the classrooms” (p. 533). Hagger & McIntyre (2006) say “this is where the relevant action is”. The practicum “is where expert professionals can be seen engaging in their expert practice and where the novice is most likely to have easy opportunities for informal but purposeful conversations with them” (p. 45). Kane, et al (2005) also identify the Professional Practice placement as being an important part of the ITE programme. “Practicum, either centre or school-based is typically heralded as one of the most rewarding aspects of initial teacher education” (p. 152), especially by the student teachers themselves. This is where the theory is put into practice, where ideas are trialled, theories tested, and philosophies are formed.

The Professional Practice placement often accounts for a large proportion of the ITE programme. Within New Zealand the New Zealand Teachers Council Guidelines for Approval (2005) require student teachers to complete a minimum of 14 weeks in classrooms, with

many institutions offering the recommended 20 weeks over a three year period, some even offering up to as many as 34 weeks (Kane et al., 2005). Although the range of time spent on placement varies greatly, researchers have identified that this is where a significant proportion of the learning takes place. “The student teaching period often accounts for about one third of the professional preparation of the beginning teacher” (Lemlech & Hertzog, 1999, p. 3). That the Professional Practice placement plays such a vital role in ITE, suggests that the associate teachers also play a significant role in the preparation of our teachers.

However, research has identified a number of issues surrounding the success of the practicum. One of these issues according to McDonald (2004), is “the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of supervision practice” (p. 90) on Professional Practice. McDonald (2004) suggests that many of these issues are attributed to the lack of training for mentors. This notion is widely supported in the international research on initial teacher education and beginning teachers (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Cameron, Dingle, & Brooking, 2007; Heller, 2004; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Villani, 2002).

Heller (2004) noted of the induction and mentoring of newly qualified teachers, “If we hope to retain our best teachers, then we have to assure them that they will receive quality supervision supporting their professional growth” (p. 70). This can also be applied to student teachers. We need to assure that STs receive high quality supervision while on placements from ‘successful’ ATs. McDonald (2004) suggested that there was strong evidence that “demonstrates the importance of positive practicum experiences along with excellence in supervision by associate teachers” (p. 93). Within New Zealand, most ITE



programmes leave AT selection up to the placement or host school and have little if any input as a provider (Kane et al., 2005). Of the 25 providers that Kane et al. (2005) researched, only one asked ATs to apply for the role, with one other soliciting their associates. One possible explanation for this is that the increase in the number of ITE providers throughout New Zealand has brought about a relative increase in the level of competition and with it added pressure to secure an adequate number of placements for their students (Hoben, 2006). Providers are therefore reluctant to place the added pressure of professional development requirements or the need to apply for the role, on potential ATs for fear they would no longer make themselves available (Hoben, 2006).

## **Mentoring**

Many associate teachers take on the role of 'mentor' to the student teacher on placement. It is for that reason that in studying the role of ATs it is important to firstly examine the role of mentors in initial teacher education.

“The word ‘mentor’ comes from the character Mentor, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, who was chosen to educate and support Telemachus while his father was fighting in the Trojan War.” (Villani, 2002, p. 7). When considering mentoring in education, the word now has many different meanings attached to it. In its simplest form it is described by Fletcher (2000) as being “where a classroom teacher in a school is delegated responsibility for assisting pre-service or newly qualified teachers in their professional development” (p. 1). Wang and Odell (2002) describe mentoring as part of pre-service training as “an occasion for mentors to help novices connect theories and ideas that they have learned in their teacher education

programs to the actual practice of teaching children in classrooms” (p. 533). According to Villani (2002), mentor now means “a wise and trusted friend” (p. 7). She suggests that mentoring has expanded to include several different roles: teacher, supporter, guide, protector, and sponsor (Villani, 2002).

Schein (1978) also identifies several kinds of roles that mentors may adopt. These are: teacher/coach, positive role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector (mother hen), sponsor, and successful leader. According to Schein (1978) each of these roles has its own set of distinguishing characteristics. He further identifies that the roles of opener of doors, protector, sponsor, and successful leader as roles that require “the mentor to be in a position of power” (Schein, 1978, p. 179) within the workplace setting. All of these are roles that an AT might take on.

As part of initial teacher education over the years, mentoring in education has taken many forms. School-based mentoring or the ‘apprenticeship’ model was at its high point in the nineteenth century (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006). Pre-service teachers learnt on the job where they were provided with extensive classroom experience, where the experienced and practising teachers were respected for their expertise. However, two weaknesses of this model were evident. Firstly “no attempt was made to connect the practical learning in schools with subsequent college-based learning” and secondly this model relied heavily on the competence of the “master-craftsperson to whom one is apprenticed” (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006, p. 9). Therefore, it was gradually phased out and replaced internationally by a higher education institution (HEI) based model in the twentieth century. This model saw the move of education into the academic setting of the colleges and universities where

emphasis was placed on “teachers’ knowledge of the subjects that they were to teach” (Hagger & McIntyre, 2006, p. 10). This model supported the idea that pre-service teachers should first learn about what it means to be a good teacher before they were able to apply this to the practice of teaching. However, as Hagger and McIntyre (2006) argue, “research thus gradually made clear how misguided it was to believe that teaching expertise could be learned effectively by using theoretical knowledge to shape classroom practice” (p. 10). As Shulman’s (1987) model of ‘sources of knowledge’ suggests, there are a variety of sources of knowledge. It is dependent upon the content of that knowledge as to how best it is learnt. Some aspects of teaching, such as content knowledge or curriculum knowledge, are best learnt within a HEI setting, while others can only be learnt by being in front of the children, actively teaching, supported by experienced colleagues as mentors.

According to Hobson et al. (2009), the worldwide rise of school-based mentoring began again in the 1980’s with an increase in the number of formal mentoring programmes being used for student and beginning teachers. This saw a shift in the emphasis of training student teachers from being located predominantly within the HEI’s, to being located back within a school or classroom setting. There were, however many variations to this model internationally that fell along the school-based/HEI based continuum of mentoring. One example of this is what occurred in England in the early 1990s as part of the university-school partnership initial teacher preparation programmes. It was mandated that STs would “spend at least two thirds of their postgraduate initial teacher preparation (ITP) courses in schools,” (Hobson et al., 2009, pp. 107-108) where they were supported by their more experienced peers in the pursuit of meeting a set of competencies. This model fell very heavily at the school-based end of the continuum with a large proportion of initial teacher

preparation being located within schools. This was later expanded to include mentoring support for BTs at the start of their careers. Similar initiatives were being developed internationally at the same time.

New Zealand has followed with the same range of models of mentoring being used for the education of student teachers. Historically, when ITE took place within one of the six stand-alone colleges, the apprenticeship model was used where experienced teachers acted as mentors providing classroom based experiences. This was then gradually phased out with the focus shifting to more of a college based approach, focusing on teaching the 'knowledge of teaching'. This aligned New Zealand's ITE programmes with the current research into initial teacher education and with what was happening internationally. The deregulation of teacher education in the 1990's saw the shift of ITE once again, this time to the private sector and opened up to a range of other providers (Davey, 2010) as discussed earlier, each with its own programmes and models of mentoring. This saw a great range in approaches to ITE including variations in the length of time that STs spent working alongside their more experienced colleagues in the classroom setting. Finally, the move in New Zealand to a university based approach, with the merging of many of the colleges of education with the universities, has seen the delivery of the programmes change again.

### **Models of Mentoring**

There have been many studies conducted on the role of mentors when mentoring beginning or provisionally registered teachers (Cameron, Dingle et al., 2007; Hobson et al., 2009; Langdon, Flint, Kormer, Ryde, & Karl, 2011; Renwick, 2001; Sankar, Brown, Teague, & Harding, 2011). Many of the studies into mentoring in education are focused on

provisionally registered teachers who are in the induction phase of their careers, often referred to as beginning teachers (BTs). I have called upon some of the literature around the mentoring of BTs within my literature review as there are many parallels that can be drawn between their experiences and those of STs. Therefore, findings are relevant to the mentoring of student teachers.

As previously discussed, the mentoring relationship has historically been viewed as an apprenticeship model where the AT is the 'expert' or 'master' and the ST is the 'novice'. In this model the student is expected to emulate the actions and beliefs of the 'expert' in order to demonstrate best practice. However, recently this view of mentoring has been challenged with the introduction of new models such as the concept of reciprocal teaching. Fletcher (2000) states that "mentoring is something that is done with a trainee not to a trainee. As a mentor, you will learn and you will teach – and so will your mentee" (p. xi). Lemlech and Hertzog (1999) identified a number of benefits for both the master (associate) teacher and student teacher within the Professional Practice setting. These included an increase in professionalism, pedagogy, and reflection (Lemlech & Hertzog, 1999). The authors viewed the unique opportunity provided by the practicum as being mutually beneficial, with the AT having just as much to learn from the student as the student did from them. However, this research did not focus on the explicit tasks that made the mentoring successful.

Alongside different models of mentoring, Wang and Odell (2002) also provided an overview of three main theoretical approaches to mentoring beginning teachers. These were that of

the humanistic perspective, the beginning teacher as a situated apprentice, and the critical constructive approach.

The 'humanistic perspective' (Wang & Odell, 2002) is based around induction programmes where psychological and emotional support are emphasised. This approach states that by "paying attention to the development of self-esteem, it is possible to enhance the learning of specific content as well as personal development" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 493). It views the role of the mentor as someone who has the required dispositions to provide support and who is able to take a very nurturing approach. Within this model strong mentor- novice relationships are developed. The most important knowledge and skills for mentors are the interpersonal skills such as "how to be a friend and a good listener for the novices, how to identify novices' personal needs and problems, and how to help novices develop their confidence" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 493). This approach to mentoring would allow novice teachers to feel both emotionally and psychologically supported in their new role. Gold (1990) suggests that programmes to prepare mentors for their roles aligned with the humanistic perspective should stress the importance of the mentor creating good relationships with the novice teacher, and select mentors who were open minded and willing to share their own personal philosophies.

The 'situated apprentice' model of mentoring describes the learning to teach process as a linear approach where the novice teacher moves from student to teacher. It "also assumes that the problem of novices' learning to teach is directly related to their lack of practical knowledge" (Wang & Odell, 2002, pp. 495-496). Therefore, it views the role of the mentor as one that provides and develops the practical knowledge of the novice teacher. Within

this model the mentor is seen to be the expert and plays a major role in developing the practical knowledge and skills of the student or beginning teacher (the novice), enabling them to become a competent, and eventually, expert teacher themselves.

In addition to offering practical teaching knowledge and knowledge of resources, mentors need to demonstrate and model teaching, give advice and suggestions when novices are struggling with immediate problems, and know how to decrease their influence as novice teachers gain the confidence to function independently as teachers (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 496).

This model heavily relies on the view that the mentor is the expert within the mentoring relationship and has an in-depth knowledge of teaching. It also assumes that the expert is very skilled in their role as a mentor.

The 'critical constructivist' approach is a merging combination of both a critical and a social-constructivist approach and comes from the perspective that "totally different kinds of knowledge need to be developed and constructed to teach for social justice" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 497). It therefore involves a model of mentoring that views both the novice teacher and the mentor as learners (Wang & Odell, 2002) who can learn from each other and who jointly develop new understandings and practices that inform their way of teaching. This approach to mentoring is based upon a combination of two assumptions. Firstly, that "the fundamental goal of learning is continuously to transform existing knowledge and practice", and secondly that "knowledge is actively built by learners through the process of active thinking" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 497). This approach requires mentors that are skilled at

posing questions for inquiry, and that are able to examine and develop new ideas that inform their teaching.

The authors argue that “each of the three assumptions has limitations in developing teacher mentoring into a substantial and effective support for novices’ learning” (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 533). Each of these models or approaches to mentoring requires a specific type of mentor, one who possesses the desired dispositions and skills required for that particular model, as well as one who has the same philosophical approach towards mentoring as the model requires. Mentors would therefore need to be carefully selected and potentially trained if they are to be effective, a practice that is not widely used in New Zealand.

## **Mentor Preparation**

Mentor preparation is widely discussed within the literature around mentoring. Much of the research suggests that mentors need to learn specifically about their role if they are to be successful (Cameron, Dingle et al., 2007; Hoben, 2006; Hope, 1999; McDonald, 2004; Timperley, 2001).

In the New Zealand setting, the Ministry of Education identifies a list of five priorities associated with achieving effective teaching. “Comprehensively preparing beginning teachers for their roles as effective teachers of diverse students through initial teacher induction” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 20) is identified as one of the priorities. It asks such questions as “How do we ensure teachers who support student teachers and beginning teachers are well prepared for their roles?” and “How do we strengthen the links between



initial teacher education (including school-based practica) and support for beginning teachers?" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 2).

According to Timperley (2001), the challenge for ITE programme providers is not only to "respect the unique opportunity that mentors have to promote student teacher's professional learning" (p. 122) by utilising them to their full potential within ITE programmes, but also to provide the mentors with the opportunities to develop the expertise that will ensure that they are confident, informed and therefore successful, in their mentoring role. Vallani (2002) also places the responsibility onto the initial teacher educational institution when she identifies that the ITE programme providers need to ensure that they offer mentoring programmes that could include;

Adequate training for the mentors and orientation for the site administrators, so that they can carry out their roles with skill. Ideally, the training for mentors engages them in important professional learning and a heightened awareness of their own practice (Villani, 2002, p. xi).

Hoben's (2006) study of school-based teachers working with student teachers in a secondary setting supported these findings. She found that ATs took on the role without any preparatory training and suggested that "given neither training nor a time allowance for carrying out the role, the associate teachers had neither the skills nor the time when it came to implementing what they believed to be good practice" (Hoben, 2006, p. 295). Provisions of time and training were also highlighted in a study looking at the supervision of provisionally registered teachers in New Zealand by Cameron et al. (2007) who found that

“mentors needed to be provided with time and ongoing professional development to develop their knowledge, and skills to support the PRT’s” (pp. 109-110).

The need for training for mentors was also highlighted by McDonald (2004) who states that “being a good classroom teacher doesn’t always guarantee a teacher will be an effective mentor or associate teacher” (p. 90). However, Timperley (2001) found that this can be achieved when mentors are given the opportunity to explicitly learn their role and are given training to do so. Villani (2002) agrees, suggesting that “Mentors are best able to do their work when they explicitly learn about their role” (p. 12). Yet, despite the extensive research that has occurred in this area, as Hope (1999) suggests, “the need for associate teacher training remains an issue” (p. 189).

In the New Zealand setting, most of the providers of ITE programmes offer some form of professional development for associate teachers (Kane et al., 2005). Nonetheless, this varies significantly. At the time that their research was conducted, Kane et al. (2005) found that only two of the seventeen providers within their study offered a university paper, ten held formal information meetings, workshops or training courses, and two distributed information booklets. This was not compulsory or a prerequisite for potential associates prior to taking on their roles.

## **International Studies on Mentoring Beginning and Student Teachers**

Much research has been conducted into the role of the mentor in education (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Hobsen, et al. 2009; Hope, 1999; McDonald, 2004; Timperley, 2001; Villani, 2002). In a review of international literature on mentored learning to teach, Wang and Odell (2002) found that effective mentoring relies on the realisation of several connections; the relationship between mentors' preparation, their knowledge of teaching and mentoring, their mentoring practice, and the quality of novices learning to teach.

They also found that:

the dominant role of mentors in the eyes of both pre-service and beginning teachers is to provide emotional and technical support; learning to teach, in their view, is to be left to their own accumulation of teaching experience and lessons based on trial and error (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 510) .

If the dominant role of mentors is to provide emotional and technical support then how do ITE providers ensure that their associates, as mentors, are capable of providing this type of support, along with learning experiences that are positive and give their students the best possible models of teaching and learning, which they will accumulate and draw from later in their careers? One suggestion is that careful mentor selection by ITE providers is required (Wang & Odell, 2002).

Hobson et al. (2009) also highlighted the importance of mentor selection in a review of international literature on the mentoring of beginning teachers. They identified a range of potential costs and benefits associated with mentoring. The costs included the potential to

do harm when there is an example of poor practice. Hobson et al. (2009) suggest that the selection of the mentors plays a significant part of this, “we strongly suspect that at least some examples of poor practice and other negative side effects of mentoring can be attributed, in part at least, to problems of mentor selection and preparation” (p. 214). The need for careful selection and preparation of mentors features significantly in other international research (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Cameron, Dingle et al., 2007; Hope, 1999; McDonald, 2004; Timperley, 2001; Villani, 2002).

As well as potential costs Hobson et al. (2009) also suggest a number of potential benefits for both the mentor and the mentee. The research stated that the key to successful mentoring and therefore optimum learning “lies in the realization of a number of conditions for successful mentoring” (Hobson et al., 2009, p. 207). These conditions include mentor preparation, mentor selection and pairing, mentoring strategies and contextual support for mentoring. They also found a need for research to further explore these conditions and the features that promote effective mentoring.

Along with Hobson et al (2009), Sudzina, Giebelhaus, and Coolican (1997) also identified potential costs related to the mentoring relationship. Their research, aimed at understanding the perceptions and expectations around the relationship between student teachers and their cooperating teachers, suggested that the mentoring relationship had the potential to do harm and that “personality and pedagogical conflicts between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher precipitated negative classroom interactions” (p. 29). Their findings suggest that when there was either a misunderstanding or miscommunication of or by either party, about the expectations of the role, the mentoring

relationship could be described as more of a “tormentor” relationship (Sudzina et al., 1997). Such a relationship would be unlikely to foster positive learning for a student teacher.

## **New Zealand Studies on Mentoring Beginning and Student Teachers**

Along with the international literature, significant research has also been conducted within the New Zealand setting looking at the mentoring experiences of beginning teachers within their initial induction period (Anthony, G., Kane, R. G., Bell, B., Butler, P., Davey, R., Fontaine, S., Haigh, M., Lovett, S., Mansell, R., Naidoo, K., 2008; Cameron, Dingle et al., 2007; Cameron, Lovett, & Garvey Berger, 2007; Langdon et al., 2011; Lovett & Davey, 2009; Lovett & Sinclair, 2005; Renwick, 2001). Research that has been focused on the experiences of student teachers had not been as widely available but it has become more of a focus over the last two decades (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Lovett & Sinclair, 2005; McDonald, 2004, 2009a; Timperley, 2001; Ussher, 2010). Some might argue this new focus is due to high interest in the extensive and recent restructuring of ITE programme delivery within New Zealand. I have drawn upon some of the literature of beginning teachers to support the literature on student teachers.

“Learning to teach” a research project by Cameron, Dingle and Brooking (2007), focused on the perceptions of provisionally registered teachers who were at the end of their second year of the induction period, regarding the nature and quality of their advice and guidance programmes. It was found that they rated emotional support and encouragement as the most important mentoring activities, along with the need for mentors to develop good working relationships with the mentee if they were to be responsive to the mentoring

process. They did not, however, specify what a good working relationship involved. It was also found that mentors needed to be specifically selected, ensuring that they had the necessary dispositions, personal qualities and relevant teaching experience required to support the beginning teacher.

A similar study by Cameron, Lovett and Garvey Berger (2007) followed a group of beginning teachers who were identified as being of 'particular promise' as they began their induction programmes. They found that those who thrived had "colleagues who offered emotional, logistical, and teaching support as well as individual tutor teachers who provided in-depth classroom mentoring" (Cameron, Lovett et al., 2007, p. 34). Like Cameron, Dingle et al. (2007) they also found that effective and successful mentoring depended on the development of a strong mentoring relationship, and mentor sensitivity to the developmental needs of the beginning teachers. They also indicated that the selection of tutor teacher was critical if the mentoring relationship was to be successful.

A study by Anthony et al.(2008) aimed to find out how mentors and supervising teachers worked in partnership with BTs located in a secondary context, and how this affected their perceptions of their preparedness to teach. They found that although participants' access to suitable mentors varied along with their quality of induction programmes, those that rated their induction experiences highly indicated that they felt as if their special needs as beginning teachers were recognised, and expressed feeling valued by their mentors.

Anthony et al. (2008) concluded that "more research into and dissemination of exemplary practice is needed".

In contrast, Lovett and Sinclair (2005) focused on beginning teacher's perceptions and understanding of assessment (assessment literacy) in their first six months of teaching under the guidance and support of their induction programme and tutor teacher. Four qualities and skills were identified as being of importance for effective tutor teachers. These were; "personality and personal skills, experience as a teacher and knowledge of the tutoring role; communication skills, and availability and time" (Lovett & Sinclair, 2005, p. 7).

It is interesting to note that in the studies discussed so far, none of them have compared the differences between the mentor's perceptions and those of the mentee, unlike Ferrier-Kerr (2009) and McDonald (2004) who both sought to understand mentoring from a comparative perspective and included the perceptions of the AT and that of the ST in their research.

Ferrier-Kerr (2009) for example, explored the relationships that were developed between the ST and the AT during the Professional Practice placement. Her findings focused on understanding the different relationships that were established and how these fell along an expert-novice continuum of professional relationships, from both the AT and the STs' perspectives. She found that establishing a professional relationship was crucial to a successful placement. However, this relationship could vary from a coach/quarterback model, a hierarchical model, to one where the associate is a support person.

In a similar study McDonald (2004) considered the perceptions of the student teacher, the associate (mentor) and the lecturer. She found that associate teachers needed to possess certain attitudes and characteristics as well as model particular practices for the practicum to be considered a successful experience by the ST. These practices included an ability to

motivate, give regular feedback, be supportive and reflective, and demonstrate a passion for teaching.

Although both of these studies compared the perceptions of ATs and STs in the mentor/mentee relationship, neither stated the specific tasks and activities that contribute to each of the themes, nor do they provide a comparison between the specific attributes that the ST identified with that of the mentor. My research aims to explore the perceptions of 'successful' associate teachers and then compare these with the perceptions of student teachers, looking for similarities and differences. It also provides a detailed view of what it is specifically that the ATs do that makes them so 'successful' from both perspectives.

Many of the research studies mentioned above also focused on beginning teacher's perceptions of mentoring. Although generalisations can be made between a BT's induction and mentoring experiences with that of a ST, there are still significant differences associated with the skill base, knowledge and teaching experience that STs bring to the mentoring relationship. For this reason my study focuses on the student teacher's experiences, as this is where the learning journey begins and the practices of the mentors that they encounter begin to have a significant impact on their initial development as student teachers.



## **Chapter Three: Methods and Sources of Data**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research was to investigate and compare different perspectives of what makes a 'successful' associate teacher. This was done by comparing the perspectives of a group of 'successful' ATs, as identified by lecturers from the University of Canterbury, College of Education, with the perspectives of a group of STs who were studying at the University of Canterbury, College of Education at the time that the research took place. In this chapter I discuss the methodology used within this study. Initially I provide the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodological design and a constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis. Then I describe the research design, including the participants, data collection methods and ethical considerations. Finally I describe the data analysis procedures for this research.

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

Qualitative research is defined as being a naturalistic and interpretative approach to research that aims to understand the meanings that people attach to their own social worlds. It explores the participants' "actions, decisions, beliefs and values within their social world" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). It is "concerned with understanding behaviour from the subject's own frame of reference" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2). Data gathered is "rich in description of people, places, and conversations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2) as the

researcher seeks to gain an “understanding, in considerable detail, how people think and how they came to develop the perspectives they hold” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 3).

The characteristics of qualitative methods of data collection, as described by Bogdan and Biklen (1998), have led me to collect data on my participants that was naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with the process, inductive and had meaning (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This, in turn, has allowed me to look directly at what the participants said to identify the key themes within the data, while still maintaining each of the participant’s voices throughout my study.

Qualitative data is “concerned with understanding behaviour from the subject’s own frame of reference” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 2). My research has set out to understand some of the behaviours of associate teachers that come from their beliefs about successful practice from their own frame of reference. It also looks at the student teachers’ beliefs, coming from a different perspective. This form of inquiry “can provide rich insight into human behaviour” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). In this instance it is the behaviour of ATs as ‘successful’ mentors that I was most interested in explaining.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

A constructivist grounded theory approach to data gathering and analysis was used in this research as it required theories that I developed to be grounded within the research.

Constructivist grounded theory, as described by Charmaz (2000), combines the use of Glaser and Strauss’ (1968) traditional grounded theory, where “methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data,” with a constructivist approach where the “mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510)

is recognised and aims toward developing an interpretative understanding of the subjects meanings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This approach to data analysis offers a “more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 510), where grounded theory methods are not as linear and prescriptive, and are more flexible in nature. “A grounded theory must work; it must provide a useful conceptual rendering and ordering of the data that explains the studied phenomena” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 511). Using a constructivist grounded theory approach required me to complete a thorough analysis of my data where theories were developed and grounded by the findings. The use of this approach is described throughout my research design.

## **Research Design**

### **Participants**

For this research I required two different groups of participants. Firstly I required a sample of associate teachers who were either currently or had recently hosted student teachers from the University of Canterbury, College of Education and had been identified as being ‘successful’ in their role by the visiting lecturer. This sample was limited to teachers working in primary schools in the wider Christchurch area. The second group of participants was a sample of student teachers who were, at the time of the research, studying to become primary teachers at the University of Canterbury, College of Education and were either currently on or had recently been on a Professional Practice placement as a ST. These placements were limited to those within a primary school in the wider Christchurch area. Participants were also limited to students who were either On Campus or enrolled in the

Flexible Learning Option (FLO) course, as this allowed for ease of access for face-to-face interviews.

### ***Participant Selection***

Associate teachers were selected using purposive sampling (Neuman, 1997). This is described by Stake (2003) as being a sample of participants that are selected because they fit the predetermined criteria. For the purpose of this research, the criteria for these participants were that they were currently working in a primary school within the wider Christchurch area and had recently or were currently hosting STs. As I was researching 'successful' ATs' perceptions, the criteria also included that they were identified as being 'successful' in their role as an AT by lecturers from the College of Education, based upon the lecturers' observations of the AT's practice when visiting to observe a student on their Professional Practice placement. Their success was also based on feedback that the visiting lecturers had received from STs. Initially I approached the Professional Practice Manager at the College of Education outlining my research and requirements for participants. She then approached lecturers on my behalf and together they developed a list of twelve ATs who fitted the predetermined criteria.

When selecting the sample of student teachers I only required a small number of participants from a large population of potential candidates. Once again, I approached the Professional Practice Manager at the College of Education who had a database of all the STs currently enrolled at the University of Canterbury, College of Education. The initial population of the sample was limited to those students who were enrolled in the On Campus or FLO courses and who had recently been or who were currently on a Professional

Practice placement within the wider Christchurch area. These criteria were used to create a pool of potential participants from which I could select for the face-to-face interviews. 177 students fitted the criteria. From this sample every third and then every fourth student alternatively on the alphabetised database were selected, until there was a sample size totalling 50 students.

### ***Invitation to Participants***

#### **Associate Teachers**

The Professional Practice Manager sent a letter by mail outlining the scope of my research (Appendix A) on my behalf to the twelve identified ATs and inviting them to be involved in this project. This was accompanied by a copy of the Associate Teacher Guidelines (Appendix B) and a consent form (Appendix C). As it was very important that details remained confidential to the Professional Practice Database, the Professional Practice Manager initially was the only person to view the contact details. These remained anonymous until participants had given written permission for their details to be passed on to me by returning the consent form, or until they had made contact with me personally by email or phone. Once they had received the letter and agreed to be a part of my research all participants were contacted and an interview time was arranged. Of the initial sample of twelve teachers, two declined to be involved, six did not respond, and four teachers agreed to be a part of my research.

## Student Teachers

A letter outlining my research (Appendix D) was sent by the Professional Practice Manager by mail to the sample of 50 randomly selected student teachers, inviting them to be involved in this research. The letter outlined the scope of my research and invited the STs to be participants. This letter was also accompanied by a consent form (Appendix E) and a copy of the Associate Teacher Guidelines (Appendix B).

Once again it was very important that all names and contact details remained confidential. The Professional Practice Manager was the only person to view the contact details until participants had given written permission for their details to be passed on to me by returning their consent forms, or when they had made contact with me personally by email or phone . Of the sample of 50 student teachers who were invited to participate, I received five responses all wanting to be involved. 44 students did not respond. After receiving consent forms, the five participants were contacted and an interview time and location was arranged.

### ***Associate Teacher Guidelines***

The Associate Teacher Guidelines found in the Professional Practice Associate Teacher Handbook (University of Canterbury internal publication) were given to both groups of participants prior to beginning the interview. This allowed the participants to be fully aware of the expected standards for ATs. This reinforced for the participants what the College of Education defined as best practice and the expectations of ATs. It therefore gave participants a guide as to what my interview was based around; finding examples of what makes a 'successful' mentor and how they define best practice.

## ***Participants***

All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. The participants were identified by their role ('AT' for associate teacher and 'ST' for student teacher) followed by a name that was randomly assigned to them and distinguished them from the other participants. Each participant is described using the pseudonyms below.

### Associate Teacher Amber

AT Amber is a female teacher who has been teaching in primary schools within the Christchurch area for just over five years. Over this time she has had between eight and eleven student teachers on Professional Practice placed in her classes.

### Associate Teacher Blake

AT Blake is a young male teacher who has been teaching in a primary school in Christchurch for five years. During his five year career he has had twelve student teachers in his classes.

### Associate Teacher Caroline

AT Caroline is a female teacher who has been teaching in a rural school for the four years. Over these four years she has had five student teachers on placement in her classes.

### Associate Teacher Daphne

AT Daphne is a female teacher who has been teaching for eleven years in primary schools in the Christchurch area. During these eleven years she has hosted three student teachers for the University of Canterbury, College of Education.

Three of the four associate teacher participants were female.

#### Student Teacher Adele

ST Adele is a Flexible Learning Option student from the University of Canterbury, College of Education who has been studying part time for two years at the time of the interview. Over these two years she has had two placements in primary schools.

#### Student Teacher Belinda

ST Belinda has been studying at the University of Canterbury, College of Education for three years. Initially she started in the Physical Education programme, spending six months there before transferring to the Primary programme. At the time of the interview she was a third year student studying 200 level papers. During these three years she had been on three Professional Practice placements. She described herself as a “mature student”.

#### Student Teacher Courtney

ST Courtney was enrolled in the Graduate Programme at the University of Canterbury, College of Education. Over the fifteen month course she completed three Professional Practice Placements.

#### Student Teacher Diane

ST Diane is a part time student at the University of Canterbury, College of Education enrolled in the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary Programme. At the time of the interview she was in her fourth year of a five year course. Over these four years she had been on three placements in primary schools.



Student Teacher Elizabeth

ST Elizabeth is a young full time student in her third and final year of her Primary teaching bachelor's degree at the University of Canterbury, College of Education. At the time of the interview she was into her second week of her fourth Professional Practice placement.

All student teacher participants were female.

## **Data Collection**

### ***Individual Interviews***

Wang and Odell (2002) found that most research into the mentoring of novice teachers was conducted through the use of surveys and questionnaires. This form of inquiry limited the scope of response from participants and perceptions and expectations "were often difficult to explore" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 510). For this reason I chose semi-structured interviews as my data collection method.

The research interview has been defined as 'a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him [sic] on content specified by research of systematic description, predication, or explanation (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, p. 527).

This research involved gathering data through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the four ATs and the five ST participants. Interviewing two groups of participants allowed me to collect comparable data that identified similarities and differences between the beliefs of ATs about what makes them 'successful', and the beliefs of the STs about 'successful' associates.

The semi structured format used eleven pre-determined questions for the associate teachers (Appendix F) and twelve for the student teachers (Appendix G), which provided a basic guide for the interviews. These questions allowed for the collection of specific data, while still giving me the flexibility to explore the participants' reflections and reactions to the questions. Not having a structured interview enabled me to explore in more depth particular responses to probing questions which were relevant to my research, allowing me to gather the rich data required for my research questions and enabling participants to extend their answers.

“By providing access to what is ‘inside a person’s head’, (it) makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)” (Tuckman, 1972, p. 173). The aim of my interview was to determine each participant’s perspectives, including their knowledge of the role of an AT, their likes and dislikes of how the role is carried out, and their thoughts and beliefs about what makes an AT ‘successful’ in this role.

Before beginning my data gathering I completed a pilot interview with a colleague to check whether there were any alternative interpretations of the questions, and to also ensure that the questions allowed me to gain the most useful data from participant’s responses. This process allowed me the opportunity to refine my questions prior to the interviews.

All interviews took place at a venue and a time that was negotiated with participants once consent forms had been received. Interviews were taped using a digital recorder. I checked with participants that they understood the consent process prior to the interview beginning.

Upon completion, each of the interviews was transcribed. Along with the interview transcription a short letter was sent thanking them for their participation and asking their approval to make contact with them at a later date if required to further explore any of the findings from their interview.

## **Ethics in Qualitative Research**

### **Addressing Ethical Issues**

Before beginning my research I ensured that I was aware of any ethical issues that could arise. I used the list of five key principles when conducting ethically accountable research as developed by Tolich and Davidson (1998) to ensure that my research was ethically sound. These key principles are: do no harm, voluntary participation, informed consent, avoid deceit, and confidentiality or anonymity. It was of vital importance that in order for my research to be ethically credible that I considered these issues and was able to ensure my participants of their rights in order for them to feel safe in the process. I also sought academic and ethical approval by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee prior to any data being collected.

### ***Informed and Voluntary Consent***

Once ethical approval was received, I sought written consent from all participants. Letters detailing the aims, objectives and methods of the research and inviting them to take part were sent to all potential participants (Appendices A and D) to ensure that they were well informed about the nature of the research. Consent forms (Appendices C and E) were then

completed and returned to me by email or post. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were made aware that if at any stage during the process they felt uncomfortable or changed their mind about being involved in the research, they may choose to withdraw. If they chose to withdraw then I would make all reasonable efforts to remove any data relating to them from the research.

### ***Anonymity and Confidentiality***

Confidentiality was always maintained. Participants have remained anonymous, as real names and other identifying information have not been used. Instead, each participant has been assigned a pseudonym, as previously discussed. All records, including transcripts have remained confidential to the participant, my supervisors, and me. Each interview was transcribed and then a copy of the transcript was sent to the participant for their approval before any data was drawn from it. Upon completion of my research a copy of the findings will be sent to all participants.

### ***Security of Data***

All copies of consent forms, transcripts, and data will be stored in a lockable filing cabinet on the University of Canterbury, College of Education campus for five years. After this time they will be destroyed.

### ***Triangulation***

Data triangulation is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2003), as being where the researcher uses a “variety of data sources” (p. 66) to inform their research, providing validity to the data that is gathered. Data triangulation, in this instance having two different data sources, enabled me to compare responses from the ATs with that of the STs. This helped me to

determine the credibility of the data by “using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 148), in this instance the perceptions of associate and student teachers, and their interpretations of ‘successful’ mentoring.

Triangulation is often thought of as a way of checking out insights gleaned from different informants or different sources of data. By drawing on other types and sources of data, observers also gain a deeper and clearer understanding of the setting and people being studied (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 80).

Gathering data from the two groups of participants would ensure that my research findings represented multiple perceptions around my research questions.

## **Data Analysis**

What is critical about data analysis is the process of examining the information collected and transforming it into a coherent account of what was found. It is, in other words, the route by which study conclusions are reached (Green et al., 2007, p. 545).

These authors identify four key steps to data analysis. They are: immersion in the data, coding, creating categories, and the identification in themes (Green et al., 2007). This, however, is not a linear process where steps are moved through systematically. Charmaz (2000) describes the process of data analysis using grounded theory as moving through each step towards the development, refinement, and interrelation of concepts. I found myself

continually revisiting each of these steps as the need occurred, re-coding and redefining themes several times before my final conclusions could be drawn. The processes that I used to analyse my data, enabling me to draw my conclusions, is outlined below.

### **Immersion in the Data - Transcribing Interviews**

As Green et al. (2007) suggest “data analysis starts and occurs alongside the interviews that generate the data” (p. 546). The process of me personally conducting the interviews, and then revisiting them again during the transcribing process, was an important part of my data analysis. It allowed my experiences to inform my analysis (Green et al., 2007). Transcribing the interviews myself enabled me to become fully immersed in my data, by not only being a part of the initial interview, but also by seeing what the participants said ‘on paper’, as well as hearing again their voices and intonation. This gave me a greater understanding of the participants perceptions.

Interviews were transcribed soon after they were completed. Upon completion of the transcriptions a copy was sent to the participants for their checking and approval. Not only did this ensure that my data was valid but it also made sure that what I had transcribed was accurate. They were also offered the opportunity to add any extra information that they may have omitted at the time of the interview that was relevant to the research question and that would add to the data, or to expand on or further explain any of their responses. I also offered participants the opportunity to remove any information that they no longer wanted to include. This was not necessary for any of the participants. I then sought permission to contact them in the future if I found clarification was needed for any of the

data during analysis. After alterations were made, transcripts were once again sent to participants for their approval before analysis began.

### **Coding Data**

Once a transcription was complete I began coding my emerging data. Green et al. (2007) describe coding as being the “process of examining and organising the information contained in each interview and the whole dataset” (p. 548). As I was using a grounded theory approach to data analysis I allowed the codes to emerge as I studied my data. I used two forms of coding for each transcript. The first stage of coding was done using In Vivo coding, as described by Saldaña (2009). In Vivo, as a code “refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). Using this process I coded transcripts by manually drawing out particular words, phrases or terms used by the participants themselves. This provided an overview of the key words and terms being used and referred to in the interviews, as well as providing me with an overview of the frequency of the use of these codes. It also allowed me to “prioritize and honour the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74).

The second stage of coding was done using Initial Coding. “Initial Coding is breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). This particular style of coding was well suited to my data as I was aiming to find similarities and differences between participants’ perceptions. This style of coding was also particularly suited to a grounded theory approach (Saldaña, 2009) as it required me “to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by (my) readings of the data” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 46). I also

chose this method of coding as its detailed line-by-line nature is particularly suitable for interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2009). The developing categories were pulled out and identified from the transcripts as they emerged. These categories also incorporated aspects of the In Vivo coding that I had coded previously.

Once both stages of coding were completed for each transcript, I was left with a series of codes and categories that were tentative and provisional. I revisited these categories on several occasions throughout the process and refined them as the coding continued. I began to identify some emerging themes and theories that were carried forward into the next stages of data analysis.

### **Creating Categories and Generating Themes from Data**

Many initial categories emerged as I began to look for links in the codes from the interviews.

This linking of codes aims to create coherent categories and is the third step in analysis of interview data. It is concerned with looking for a 'good fit' between codes that share a relationship (Green et al., 2007, p. 548).

As I was using a grounded theory approach, any theories or themes that I identified needed to be grounded in the data that I analysed. "Theoretical categories must be developed from analysis of the collected data and must fit them; these categories must explain the data they subsume" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 511). Therefore, using this approach to data analysis the categories could not be preconceived, I had to let the data define them. As Glaser (1968) implies, the researcher's existing preconceptions must 'earn' their way into the analysis.



I collated these categories upon completion of data gathering and coding, and they were revisited and analysed several times. As Charmaz (2000) suggests, the process of sampling theories was used to refine ideas and to develop categories continually until I had identified themes that best represented my data and the theories that emerged from it.

I then analysed the themes to identify any similarities or differences amongst the associate teachers and their views on their mentoring role. They were then compared to similar data gathered from the group of student teachers. I looked for any themes that emerged about mentoring and identified any consistencies or inconsistencies between the perceptions of the ATs and those of the STs. These became my key themes. The key themes will be discussed in the findings chapter and again in the discussion chapter in relation to the literature on mentoring.

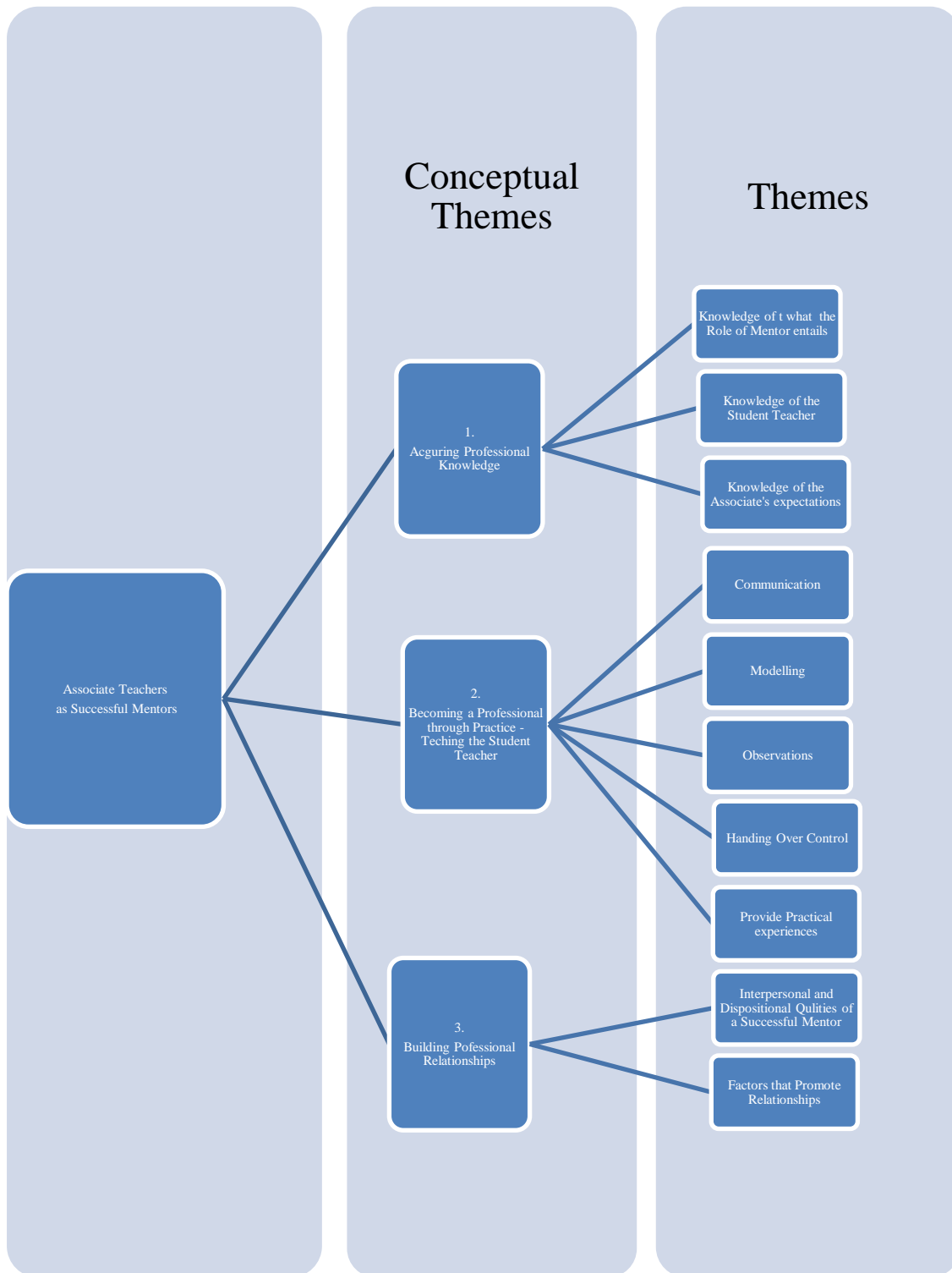
These findings have enabled me to make recommendations about approaches that seem to make a difference to the development of student teachers and what professional development assists or may be needed for associate teachers to support this.

## **Chapter Four: Results and Analysis**

Analysis of the data identified that the nine participants described 'successful' mentors within ten themes; these were grouped within three key conceptual themes: Acquiring Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice – Teaching the Student Teacher, and Building Professional Relationships.

Within each of these key conceptual themes lies several themes and sub themes. These can be seen in *Figure 1* and are as follows:

**Figure 1 – Overview of Conceptual Themes and Themes**



- Acquiring Professional Knowledge;
  - Knowledge of what the role of mentor entails
  - Knowledge of the student teacher
  - Knowledge of the associate's expectations
  
- Becoming a Professional through Practice – Teaching the Student Teacher;
  - Communication
  - Modelling
  - Observations
  - Handing over control
  - Providing practical experiences
  
- Building Professional Relationships;
  - Qualities of a successful mentor
  - Factors that promote relationships

The following chapter summarises these findings within the key conceptual themes, themes and sub themes.

## **Acquiring Professional Knowledge**

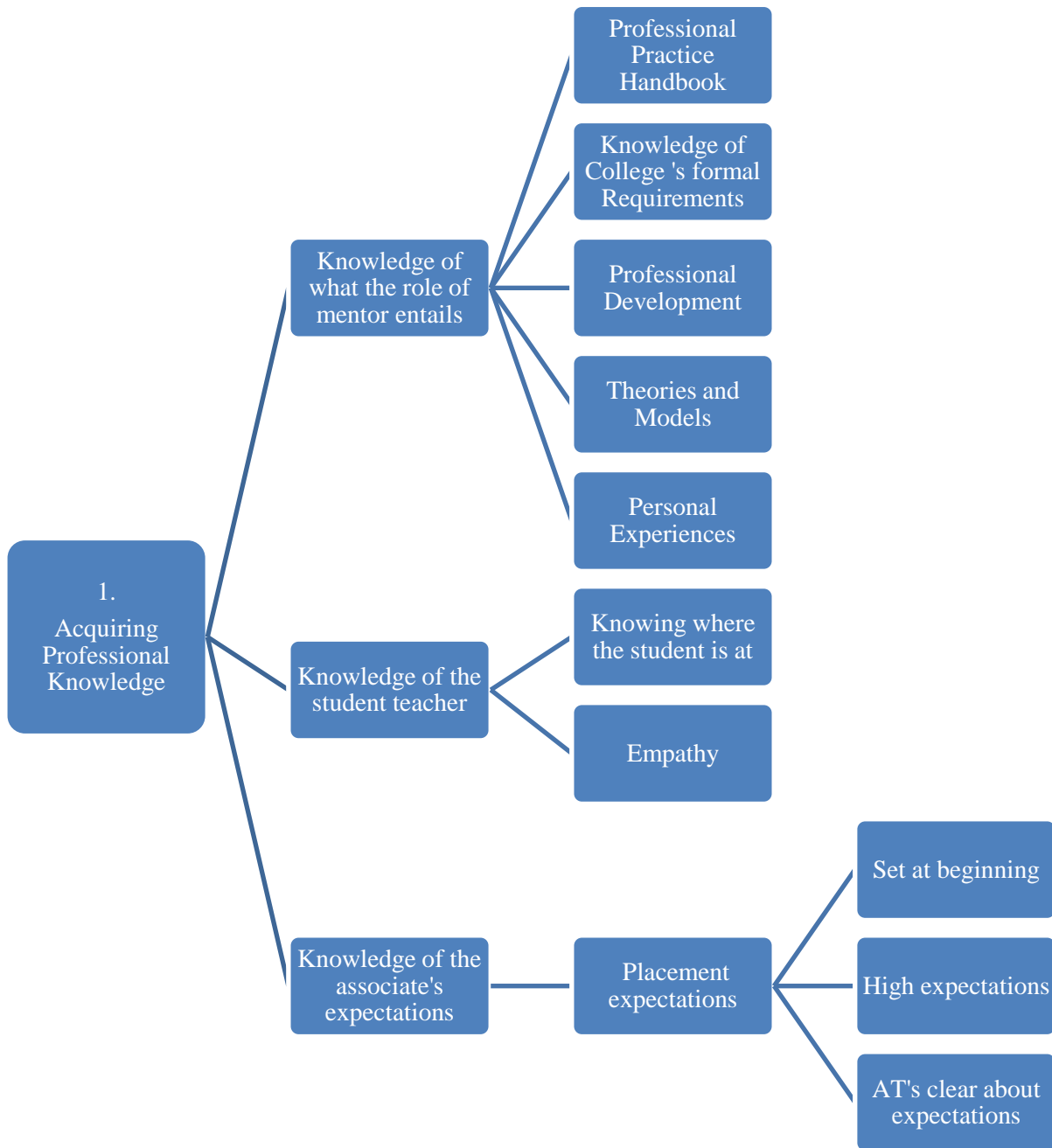
This first section of this chapter summarises the set of findings of this study within the first conceptual theme; Acquiring Professional Knowledge. Participants talked about the importance of the professional knowledge of ATs. They spoke of the relationship between the level of knowledge and the level of 'success'. The greater the associate's professional knowledge of the role of a mentor and all that it entailed, and the student's professional

knowledge of the associate including their requirements and expectations of the student teacher while working in their class, the more successful they were likely to be in their role.

This knowledge (*Figure 2*) was in the following areas;

- Knowledge of what the role of mentor entails
- Knowledge of the student teacher
- Knowledge of the associate's expectations

**Figure 2 – Overview of contributing factors to Theme 1 – Acquiring Professional Knowledge**



**Knowledge of What the Role of Mentor Entails.**

When asked what makes a ‘successful’ associate teacher three out of five student teachers described the importance of the associates having a good knowledge of what was entailed in their role as ATs and mentors.

They do really need to know their role. Sometimes I find I'm teaching them what to do. But that's ok to a certain extent, but they do also need to know what they're doing. And sometimes they're finding their way a bit themselves, because it's their first time round or whatever (ST Adele).

ST Adele's experiences demonstrate that this is not always the case. On her Professional Practice placements not all of her associates that she has been placed with were experienced or knowledgeable in their role. Although she found it "ok to a certain extent", being in a situation where a mentor is unclear of the expectations that are placed upon them or their requirements, is not helpful nor is it conducive to supporting student teacher learning.

ATs identified five sources that enabled them to learn about their role, not only about what the requirements were of an associate but also the "how to" part of being a mentor.

These were through:

- the Professional Practice Handbook that was made available to all associate teachers by the university
- knowledge of the College of Education's formal requirements
- professional development that was specific to or complemented the role
- theories or models that were consciously used or drawn upon when working with student teachers
- previous personal experiences

### ***Professional Practice Handbook***

The first source for ATs to learn about their role was through pre-placement contact made by the university. This was in the form of a Professional Practice Handbook that included the Associate Teacher Guidelines (Appendices B). This was sent to all ATs who were hosting students for that round of placements. It laid out the requirements of both the associates and students as well as providing the ATs with practical mentoring information aimed at supporting them. However, there was a concern from the students that not all ATs appear to receive or read these. ST Courtney had experienced a breakdown in communication surrounding her requirements on two of her three placements.

The other thing is that my first two associates didn't have any recollection of being sent, you know, the requirements for the course, which uni said they had been sent, but they never got it. So that connection.... Even though I gave it to them I don't think they actually read it (ST Courtney).

It was also interesting to note that only one of the four ATs interviewed made reference to the Associate Teacher Guidelines or handbook during their interviews although a copy of these guidelines were provided to each of the participants prior to the interviews taking place. However, they were not explicitly asked about this during the interviews.

### ***Knowledge of the College of Education's Formal Requirements***

A second method of learning about the role of an associate was through the associates ensuring they had an understanding of any formal requirements of STs while they were on



the placement. STs in particular valued this. ST Courtney noted, “I think that was really important. She actually understood what was required of me by the university and she was really aware of me meeting my requirements as well”.

Associates’ past experiences developed this awareness through conversations with the students, and through the information sent to associates by the ITE provider.

### ***Professional Development***

Both targeted and untargeted professional development also played a vital part in developing associate teachers’ professional knowledge of their role. Of the four ‘successful’ ATs who were interviewed none had undergone professional development specifically designed for, or related to being an AT. Two of the four had attended other courses, one had been part of whole school professional development, while one had not undergone any form of professional development related to her role.

AT Caroline had been on a Middle Management Course run by the local university. She recognised that some of the skills that she learnt were transferrable to her mentoring role.

I haven’t done anything specific for being an associate teacher. I did a course last year that was kind of linked around the study that I was doing and it was a middle management course and it was just how to lead people and relate to people. And I guess a lot of the study that I’ve been doing, because it’s based around leadership and working with different people, and recognising different people’s skills and things. One of the hardest things for a teacher is letting go and letting somebody have your class and take over from you and sit back and

try not to say anything. I think that that kind of opened my eyes a little bit more as to how to relate to people and relate to your colleagues as well (AT Caroline).

AT Daphne had attended a tutor teacher course that had impacted on the way she communicated with her students. She described how she changed the way she conducted feedback by “going though and turning things around and at the beginning of lessons rather than me doing all the talking... getting their thinking about it first before I say my bit” (AT Daphne). She described how the learning from the course had encouraged her to let the student lead some of the conversations through her questioning techniques, encouraging the students to share their thoughts.

AT Blake had undergone a series of school wide professional development sessions that looked at critiquing lessons. He also felt that the skills he learnt were transferrable to his role as an associate.

So I guess just the discussions that flowed from that were quite good because then you’re basically learning how to critique a lesson which directly relates to what you’re doing with student teachers (AT Blake).

Although AT Blake had not been part on any specific courses or undergone any training related specifically to being an AT, he had been seconded by another provider as an observing tutor which had given him the opportunity to stand back and consider his own practice.

AT Amber was the one teacher that had had no specific professional development.

I tend to use the same, I do the same thing that I do with the kids, just perhaps on a different level, obviously when you're talking to an adult (AT Amber).

### ***Models or Theories***

When asked about any theories that the ATs used or models they followed to support their practice as an associate, only one (AT Amber) used a model to base her current practice on. This model was a school wide approach to mentoring. However, she was unable to name it or describe it at the time of the interview.

Another, AT Caroline, felt that she incorporated a range of different theories and models that she had studied during her own pre-service training. However, she was not able to specifically refer to any one in particular.

### ***Previous Personal Experiences***

The most commonly mentioned way that the ATs learnt about the requirements of their role as mentors was through their own personal experiences of being a student or beginning teachers where they had been mentored by an experienced teacher.

AT Caroline shared her experiences as a ST being mentored on Professional Practice and how this impacted her in her role.

I kind of based it on what we did when we trained. Our training was quite different to what the college does from what I've seen. The training that I had was really intensive and it was pretty much sink or swim. And we used to have pretty harsh feedback, and they would tell us exactly what they thought and things like that (AT Caroline).

She then goes on to describe how she adopted strategies that had had a positive impact on her as a student, “I guess I took some of that, because it makes you a stronger person because you have to get a pretty thick skin” (AT Caroline). In this instance the ‘harsh feedback’ that she received helped her to develop a ‘thick skin’, a trait that she suggests is required as a student teacher.

Her experiences as a ST, alongside her experiences as a BT all helped to shape the way she mentored others.

I took some of what I saw and what I learnt when I was doing training and then also from when you’re in your first couple of years and you’re provisionally registered and you have your tutor teacher and the types of things that they did to guide you and the types of like observations and feedback and things. I just kind of based it on that (AT Caroline).

This highlights just how much influence past experiences can have on ATs’ practice.

Experiences not only as a ST being hosted by an AT, but also as a beginning teacher being mentored by a more experienced colleague all helped to shape the way that these ATs now mentor others.

### **Knowledge of the Student**

As well as acquiring knowledge of what the role of an associate encompasses, some associate and student teachers also felt it was important that their associates had a professional knowledge of the students’ individual learning needs. In this instance participants used the term ‘professional knowledge’ when they were describing having a

knowledge of the ST as a learner. 'Professional knowledge' differed from a 'personal knowledge' and included not only knowing "where the student is at" in regards to their professional learning journey but also recognising and showing empathy towards them and an understanding of their unique situation.

### ***Knowing 'Where the Student is At'***

'Successful' ATs needed to have a good knowledge of the student they were mentoring, according to two associates and two students. Knowing "where the student was at" in regards to their professional learning enabled associates to cater for the needs of the student and provide them with guidance relevant to their needs. ST Courtney showed particular insight here. "Hearing where I am at and seeing where I'm at and taking me from there to where she thought I needed to go" (ST Courtney).

This was achieved through discussions about placement requirements. These conversations occurred on two levels. First, there was the formal conversation that occurred prior to the placement beginning. This often occurred at what is known as the pre placement visit.

Normally before they come in they have that pre visit, you've gone through and given them your weekly plans, and then we sit down together and say, "OK, well, what are your requirements first of all?" (AT Daphne).

Two of the four ATs identified this visit as being important for establishing knowledge of the ST and their requirements prior to the placement beginning. It was also a way for the STs to gain an insight into some of the expectations of the AT.

Secondly knowledge was gained during the ongoing conversations that occurred throughout the placement.

I think when you have constant conversations, and of course it's a time thing, I think you can have quite a good idea about where they're at and what they're about to do (AT Amber).

Such conversations allowed the associates to continually reflect on the ST's learning and progress helping to guide them according to their ongoing needs. Developing a knowledge of 'where the student was at' included learning about strengths, weaknesses and placement requirements, enabling associates to successfully cater for the student as an individual.

### ***Empathy***

Demonstrating an understanding of the situation the student is in came across very strongly from not only three ATs but also two of the STs. AT Blake suggested:

So they need to have empathy. They'll need to be empathetic to the student and be able to think back to when they were a student teacher and what certain situations will be making them feel and the way that you approach them (AT Blake).

Knowing 'where the student teacher was at' was important. However, participants felt that this knowledge had to be coupled with the associate showing empathy towards the unique situation that the student was in before they could begin to work on developing them as a 'whole'. AT Caroline describes how she tries to recall what it was like being student teacher,

“I have to always think back and put myself in their shoes”, this enabled her to consider how the ST might be feeling in certain situations and informed the way that she mentored.

ST Elizabeth spoke of a need for empathy when she said that associates needed to “realise it’s the real world. That as much as we strive to be perfect and have the perfect plan planned and actually have all our planning or resources there at the correct time, things are going to go wrong and it happens to them”. Showing empathy meant that although associates were often able to demonstrate an understanding of the professional learning that needed to take place, they also needed to demonstrate an awareness of other aspects of the ‘student teacher experience’ so that the learning could occur.

### **Knowledge of Associate**

The student teachers believed that if the associate was to be a ‘successful’ mentor then they needed to allow the students to gain a level of insight into themselves as teachers and provide some clarity in terms of their expectations of the students.

### ***Placement Expectations***

The student teachers suggested that these expectations needed to be set at the beginning of placements and that they needed to be clear and be high.

Two of the four ATs and two of the STs mentioned the need to set up the expectations for the placement right from the beginning, either at the start of the placement or at the pre placement visit. “I just give them very, very clear expectations. I’ve just learnt that over time that you just need to be very black and white” (AT Caroline). This included looking at

planning and college assignment requirements, as well as setting out meeting days, including whole school and team meetings, and shared planning days.

I do my planning at the end of the week. I do it on the, normally a Thursday or a Friday because of meetings and things like that. I will set up with them in the beginning and say 'This is what I do' (AT Caroline).

By making her expectations clear at the beginning she felt that there was no room for misunderstandings or confusion later on.

It also included mapping out the placement with knowledge of the student's requirements, working out where such things as full control days were to be completed, "at the start of placement asking you what you need to have done and what you need from them, so obviously full control time, group work before that, anything extra" (ST Elizabeth). Laying out expectations at the start meant that both the AT and the student teacher were "on the same page" (ST Courtney).

Almost all of the STs and one AT identified the need for associates to be very clear about their expectations.

If you're giving a task to the student just be really clear about what it is, and specific about what it is that you want that student to do, so that the student doesn't go away and get it wrong. So don't set them up to fail (ST Belinda).

These expectations related not only to the AT's classroom and teaching expectations but also to the administration and day to day things at the school, as well as the school's expectations, such as dress codes, duty days and meetings.



AT Amber also commented on the need to set high expectations for her STs from the beginning. "I start off with quite high expectations". This also ensured that the student teachers were aware of what she expected of them.

## **Summary**

Although the importance of ATs having a good knowledge of their role came through strongly from the STs as a requirement for associates to be 'successful' mentors, this knowledge was acquired by the associates in several different ways. It was interesting to note the different levels of professional development that each of the 'successful' ATs had undergone in their own professional learning journey. Although none had undergone professional development specifically designed to enhance their skills as an AT, most had undergone a range of levels of training associated with some of the skills of being a mentor, that were transferrable to their role as an AT, and had impacted their practice. The most commonly adopted approach was one based around their personal experiences.

Knowing 'where the student is at' was also important for participants and was achieved through discussions that occurred at pre placement visits or through the ongoing conversations throughout the placement. These discussions allowed ATs to establish a good understanding of the learning needs of the ST, enabling them to cater for their leaning needs. Participants also felt that when this was accompanied with a level of empathy then the AT demonstrated a better understanding of the unique learning needs of the ST.

Pre placement visits were also an important forum for the associate teacher to establish expectations prior to the placement beginning. Clear and high expectations that were set out from the start of the placement allowed for a greater level of clarity and understanding from both the associate and student teacher's perspectives.

## **Becoming a Professional through Practice – Teaching the Student**

### **Teacher**

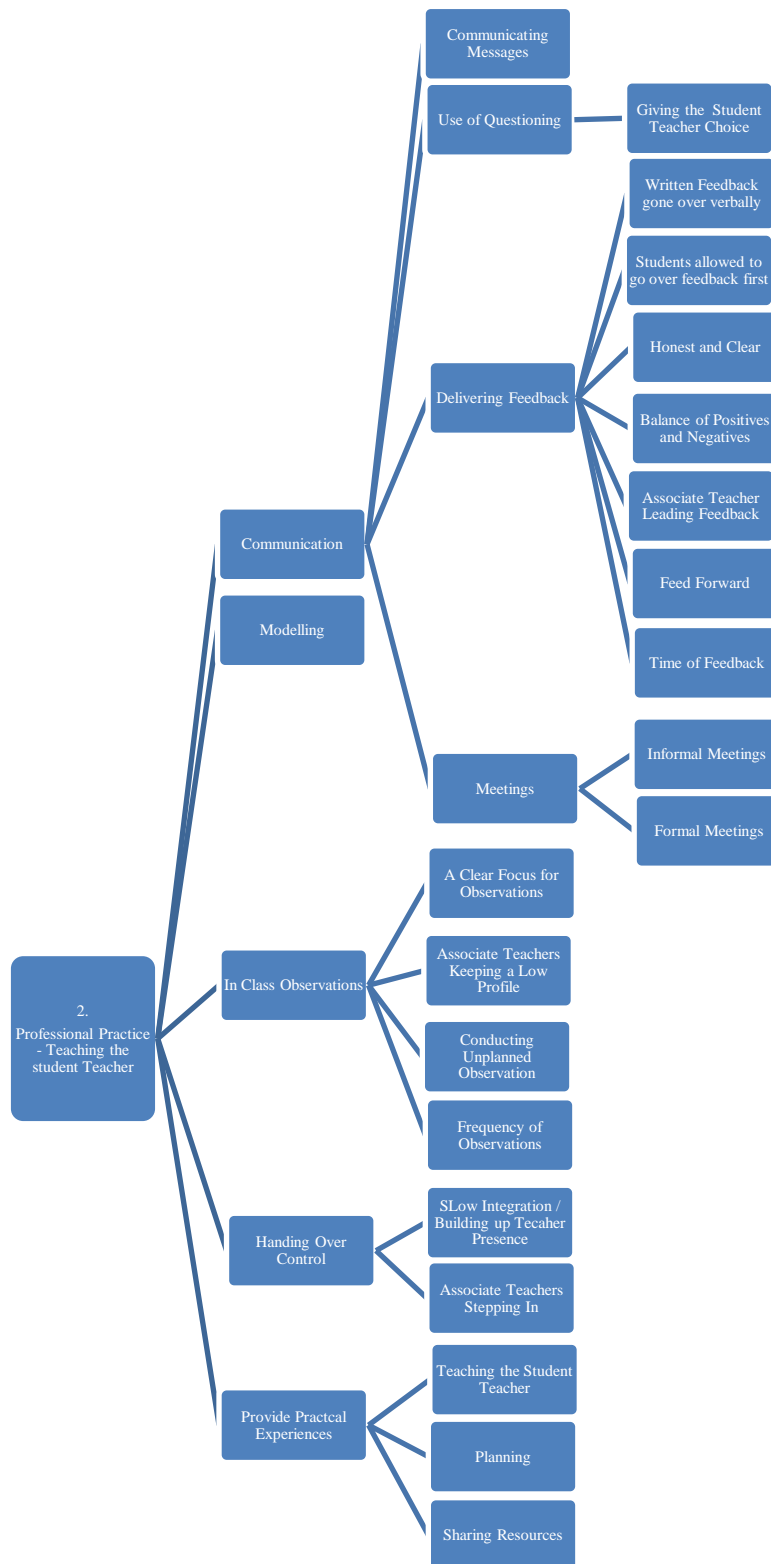
The second conceptual theme identified is Becoming a Professional through Practice. This theme encompasses all the things that the associate teachers do to teach the student teachers. For the purpose of this research it is important to distinguish the difference between the terms 'teaching' and 'mentoring'. The terms 'teaching' or 'teach' are used to describe the process of an associate actively setting out to verbalise, demonstrate, show, or model a new teaching activity or concept to the student in the hope that they will learn and use that newly acquired skill or concept in future lessons. The terms 'mentoring' or 'mentor' are used to describe the process of the experienced teacher sharing their knowledge of teaching and learning and their skills, through the on-going conversations, interactions and observations that occur with the student teacher. Unlike teaching, this form of learning may be either informal or formal.

A large part of the mentoring process involves teaching the students how to be classroom teachers, guiding them through the day to day tasks of teaching children. However, as AT Caroline expressed, it's "not just the teaching in the classroom, but the resources that you use and all the things that you do behind the scenes that they don't see because they don't need to see it at the moment" that are the important pieces of knowledge that need to be, and should be, passed on. It is the ability to share this knowledge, coupled with the modelling of more practical day to day classroom tasks that makes a 'successful' mentor.

The associate and student teachers identified five factors that contributed to 'successful' mentoring of student teachers, these were through:

- Communication
- Modelling
- In class observations
- Handing over control
- Providing practical experiences

**Figure 1 –Overview of contributing factors to Theme 2 = Professional Practice**



Each of these factors has then been broken down into sub themes, as seen in Figure 3, and is discussed below.

## **Communication**

All participants identified that communication skills were a vital factor of 'successful' mentoring. For the purpose of this study I have broken down communication into the four areas most frequently referred to. These included:

- Communicating messages
- Use of questioning
- Delivering feedback
- Meetings

### ***Communicating Messages***

The first aspect of good communication was how messages that were based around the administrative aspects of the placement were communicated. Three of the four associates identified this, making reference in particular, to how difficult messages were delivered. These messages included dealing with issues of punctuality, appropriate dress codes, or tasks surrounding planning and assessment requirements of student teachers. AT Amber felt that having good communication skills allowed her to deal with some of the difficult discussions that she needed to have while mentoring STs in a positive and effective way. "I think you need to be a really good communicator because there are times when you have to give across certain messages, and they're not always easy to give" (AT Amber).

As well as enabling effective channels of feedback, good communication also facilitated clarity about expectations and requirements. ST Belinda felt it was important that a 'successful' associate could clearly communicate important expectations around things such as what time to arrive at school, which meetings to attend, and when planning should be completed by or if it needed to be handed in for checking prior to teaching. "Being able to communicate effectively is really important because otherwise you can get lots of misunderstandings and misinterpretations" (ST Belinda).

There not only needed to be a focus on what was communicated but also on how these messages were communicated, if a positive relationship was to be developed. ST Courtney highlighted the importance of tone of voice:

I suppose the tone that they speak to you in is probably quite important too. So if they're not, like snappy. Because as soon as they snap you don't want to approach them and that can make it hard for the rest of the placement (ST Courtney).

### ***Use of Questioning***

All ATs highlighted the importance of questions when communicating with their STs, in particular using them to give the student some of the choice regarding their learning. The ATs described how they used effective questioning not only to establish the STs' knowledge and understandings, but also as a way of getting the student to take some control for their own learning by allowing them to make decisions. Giving the ST choice regarding what groups they wanted to take, when they would like to do full control, observations, or surrounding other important tasks, as well as selecting the focus for observation, all helped establish a sense of ownership or responsibility for the students according to the associates,

encouraging them to be more involved in the process. AT Amber described how she uses this technique:

I tend to go “What do you want to do?” like instead of saying “You only do three days.” or “You only do two hours here, or one group.” “What do you want to do? What could, what have you done?”, and “How can you make yourself go, right I want to do this because I need to learn more” (AT Amber).

ST Belinda endorsed this method when she described a ‘successful’ associate that she had worked with.

Rather than telling me to do something she sort of said to me, “How do you feel about doing this?”, and so that made me feel more valued as a student to a certain degree because I was being asked rather than told. That made me feel more encouraged to embark on the task because then I felt more encouraged to go out of my comfort zone (ST Belinda).

Although students were given some choice ST Adele expressed the need for this to still be accompanied by a level of guidance. For example two of the five STs interviewed also talked about the need for ATs to be prepared to answer the multitude of questions that STs came with regarding their placement.

### ***Delivering Feedback***

All participants indicated that communication in the form of feedback played a pivotal role in the mentoring process, with all participants making reference to the need for continuous feedback throughout the placement. This feedback occurred in two different forms, written



and verbal. Of equal importance to participants was how this feedback was delivered. If it was to have any significant impact participants felt that the following needed to be considered:

- Written feedback gone over verbally
- Students allowed the opportunity to read over feedback first
- Honesty and clarity
- Balance of positives and negatives
- Associate Teacher Leading feedback
- Feed forward
- Time of feedback

#### Written Feedback Gone Over Verbally

All associate and student teachers had used or received a form of written feedback when they conducted the required formal observations. However, they also identified the importance of the written feedback being accompanied by a discussion. According to many, going over written feedback verbally ensured that there was clarity around what was written and eliminated misunderstandings or misinterpretations that could occur if a discussion did not take place. ST Adele supported this by saying:

So they write it down. But it's good that they go over it verbally as well I think.

You definitely need that because sometimes, with one of them he said a lot of good things then I looked and it had been written slightly differently (ST Adele).

### Students Allowed the Opportunity to Read Over Feedback First

Associate Teachers Amber and Caroline felt that giving the students the opportunity to read over the written feedback before going over it together was a useful strategy which allowed the STs some time to reflect on what they had done and process the information contained within the feedback. It also allowed them the time to form questions that would drive the more formal conversation.

I usually have some written feedback and then when they've read it, I get them to come back, when they're ready and we just have a chat about it and if they've got any questions, or it might be that I've written something and they want some advice on how to go about it, so I always make sure I've followed up with what I've written, that they understand and they know how to move on from it, whether it be good or bad, whatever (AT Amber).

### Honesty and Clarity

AT Blake highlighted the importance of the feedback being honest and clear when he revealed that "you don't want to sugar coat anything. You want to say, 'Look this is what I've seen and this is the advice that I have for you'".

AT Caroline supported this by saying:

If they need some heavy guidance on where to go, and it's hard to give very critical feedback and I've had to do it in the past and you do feel really bad when you hurt their feelings. But I think that it's better to do it now than to do it when you're in a job and your job could be on the line because you haven't done something correctly (AT Caroline).

AT Blake mentioned that he not only provided feedback himself, but also got the children from within the lesson to provide the ST with some feedback. He felt that this gave another honest perspective on his observations.

### Balance of Positives and Negatives

All ATs and four STs described the importance of there being a balance between the number of positives and the number of points for development or negatives within the feedback. These participants expressed feeling that it was important for students to know what they were doing well, as well as the areas that needed to be worked on.

AT Caroline described the method she used when she gave feedback to STs saying:

I try to make it positive but in the same way of kind of writing a child's report, give them a few positive things. But the positive things aren't the ones they need to work on but they still need to hear them and then a couple of things that they could possibly work on. But leave on a good note (AT Caroline).

This associate has a clear model that she followed when giving the STs feedback, a model that is similar in structure to a child's report. Positive areas are identified, followed by points for development, with a final positive comment at the end. This method of reporting feedback ensured that the communication ended with the student teacher having 'a positive' at the forefront of their mind, while still being made aware of the areas that required work. It also built the ST's self esteem as they were made aware of areas that they were 'successful' in.

ST Diane also highlighted the importance of hearing encouragement from her associates when she was doing well.

Quite often at the end of an observation you still end up with more to work on rather than what's good. It's just remembering the balance of delivering back the information.....they're so busy concentrating on trying to improve you that they'll always look for something to work on...There's always something that can be improved on. So just remembering that we still need that bit of praise as well, or pointing out what we've done right (ST Diane).

Although she was aware that there were always areas to work on, hearing what she had done well, or the positives, was important to her development.

#### Associate Teacher Leading Feedback

AT Amber summed up a common idea among the associate teacher participants when she spoke of letting the student teachers lead the communication during feedback sessions. She remarked:

I'll ask them how their lesson went and what they think of it and what the good parts and the successful parts were. Then we'll reflect on it just to sort of show them that it's not me telling them what's good or bad, only they have to do it themselves, you have to start learning to be reflective yourself and I think from that you become a better teacher (AT Amber).

ATs Blake and Daphne both used the strategy of asking the student teachers for their opinions first. AT Daphne indicated that this strategy allowed her to "get their feedback". By questioning students about how they felt things went, it allowed an insight into their perspective, encouraging them to be reflective and take responsibility for their learning.

ST Courtney also agreed that this strategy gave her an opportunity to identify her own points of strength and points for improvement in a reflective manner before hearing the associate's perspective.

In contrast was AT Caroline's perspective on who should lead the feedback. Although she gave her students the written feedback to read prior to discussions and encouraged questioning and reflection, she preferred to lead the discussion allowing the student to take it all in.

It's hard to give feedback because sometimes when you are giving them the feedback they want to jump in and tell you why they have done and so it can be quite awkward sometimes to encourage them not to speak until the end just to kind of take it all in. I just go through and pretty much read out what I've done (AT Caroline).

She then encouraged the students to give her feedback and ask questions about what they have discussed and how they could improve.

### Feed Forward

A common idea that was identified by almost all the participants was the importance of feed forward being included within feedback sessions, as well as throughout the placement. ST Courtney described feed forward as being "the points to work on next time". She expressed how these points allowed her to "set goals for how to improve".

Both AT Blake and AT Caroline used a technique of highlighting two or three main pieces of advice from within their feedback for the ST to focus on and to incorporate into their next

lessons. They described this technique as making feed forward “manageable” and “relevant”. AT Blake would then “get them to think about a future lesson that is coming up and how can you incorporate that advice into that next lesson”.

### Time of Feedback

All participants indicated that feedback on a lesson was most beneficial when it was delivered as close to the lesson as possible. AT Amber expressed the perspectives of all the participants when she revealed how delivering feedback as close to the observation as possible “makes it instant teaching at that moment...they can learn from it straight away or use it straight away”. She felt that leaving the feedback too long was detrimental as “no one’s going to remember what happened” (AT Amber).

Although participants expressed the need for feedback to be immediately after the observation to have the greatest effect, they all recognised that this was not always possible due to the busy nature of teaching. They felt that feedback was often delivered at a time that was convenient, often at the end of the day or while on duty, rather than at a time that provided optimal learning opportunities.

What was important for ST Adele was that regardless of what time the feedback was given, there needed to be enough time to have a detailed discussion. She would prefer to wait rather than rush the feedback. “But you need the time to do it. It can’t just be brushed over. Sometimes it takes a bit of time just to discuss and for the student to give their views back as well” (ST Adele).

## ***Meetings***

Communication that occurred during meetings also played a significant role in the mentoring process. Two different types of meetings were referred to during the interviews. They were informal and formal meetings.

### **Informal Meetings**

For the purpose of this research, informal meetings included any meeting that was not a pre-planned, regular meeting, as well as the incidental on-going discussions that occurred on an on-going daily basis. Three out of four ATs and three out of five STs felt that informal meetings were more valuable than formal meetings. This was because they felt that regular ongoing dialogue allowed the AT to respond to what was happening at that time rather than waiting until a meeting was planned to have the discussion. ST Courtney captured the thoughts and perspectives of the other participants when she commented:

I think that as long as there is a communication line going between the student teacher and the associate. I think that is the main thing, and it's a lot easier if it is relaxed and ongoing rather than having a weekly meeting. I think it's better if (there's) a continual open communication line (ST Courtney).

AT Blake liked the idea that regular informal meetings and conversations allowed him to "react to what's going on" as he felt that to be 'successful' "you have to be quite fluid".

### **Formal Meetings**

Formal meetings were defined as meetings that were pre planned, scheduled to occur prior to happening, or those that happened on a regular basis at a regular time.

Although both groups felt that informal meetings and regular catch ups were more beneficial than scheduled meetings, some participants still felt there was a place for a more formal arrangement in particular when the regular on-going and open lines of communication were not there. ST Courtney spoke of one experience when she felt that a formal meeting time would have been more valuable.

It felt like I never had a chance to talk to her because she was always gone before I could actually catch her. And you're kind of thinking, I need to talk to you about when I can do my six days full control but I can't catch you. .... I think it would have been useful to have had a meeting time because then you know that you can bring it up in that time and you know that you're actually going to talk to her. And she's going to be available (ST Courtney).

Here she portrays a feeling of frustration due to the lack of communication which also appeared to lead to a level of anxiety around her completion of formal requirements. In this instance the AT was not a good communicator, therefore she felt that having a set time to meet would have been more beneficial.

It became clear during the interviews that both informal and formal meetings have their place in a 'successful' mentoring relationship; this was usually dependent on how good the AT was at establishing ongoing communication and also on the needs of the ST at that time. "We've had incidental sort of conversations throughout. And then if we need to talk more then we'll make time...It's (formal meetings) been as it's been needed" (ST Diane).



There was also a correlation between the effectiveness of communication and the type of meetings that were required became evident; the better the associate teacher was at establishing ongoing informal communication the less significant the need was for regular formal meetings.

The importance of on-going regular and constructive communication also featured in other areas of the Professional Practice placement. It was identified by both an AT and a ST as being an important component for establishing a positive relationship. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Modelling**

For the purpose of this study I have used the definition of modelling provided by Loughran's (2006) 'Follow me Model'. This describes modelling as the associate teacher 'being able to demonstrate and describe their pedagogical knowledge to the student-teachers' so that the student teacher can "attempt(s) to develop or imitate the use of that pedagogical knowledge" (p. 16) in their own practice. All ATs and three of the five STs indicated that modelling was an important strategy to use when mentoring student teachers. According to ST Courtney, 'successful' mentors use modelling as "it just helps you understand exactly how it works. It just gives you a better understanding" (ST Courtney).

There were three aspects to modelling identified by participants. These were the modelling of behaviour management, planning and teaching strategies, associates vocalising the modelling and modelling of reflection.

Behaviour management, planning and teaching strategies were all identified by participants as being key parts of the practice of teaching that needed to be modelled by ATs if they were expected to be successfully adopted and used by the students. Modelling and actually showing the STs how to use the strategies and techniques allowed for a better understanding. ST Courtney says of modelling:

I think that it's really important (to model) the teaching strategies that are talked about and (associates) expect you to use, actually modelling those, rather than just saying them and then never showing you, because it's really hard to understand what is required for effective behaviour management for example, when they're not modelling it. They tell you and then you have no idea of what they actually mean (ST Courtney).

AT Blake supports this perspective when he says, "before getting them to teach anything you've got to model either the routine you want them to take over or a lesson that's very similar". He views this as an important aspect of 'successful' mentoring.

Associates explicitly modelling key teaching tasks and strategies by vocalising what they were doing were a strong aspect of participant's perspectives of what makes a 'successful' mentor with two of the four ATs and three of the five STs making reference to this during their interviews. Vocalising when modelling is described by AT Caroline when she says, "I will always tell them exactly what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. I basically just give them a running commentary".

ST Courtney describes this strategy as being really important if she is to have a shared understanding of what her associate is doing and why.

The modelling is really important. Discussing thinking aloud is really useful as well. Really, really useful because the things that go on in a teachers head, as a non teacher coming in you have no idea what is going on and the thinking aloud is actually massively useful for understanding what we should be thinking. Like the things that we should be going through in our head (ST Courtney).

She goes on to describe an AT whom she worked with who she felt was successful.

The associate used vocalising what they were doing as a mentoring strategy.

I think also something that really worked was when she shared her thinking of what she was doing with me. So she was like “See I did that today but see how they didn’t quite respond to that. I’m going to change this because of this, this and this.” So it gives you a better understanding of what actually goes on in her head, and that was really helpful, it was like modelling the thinking that I should be going through as well (ST Courtney).

When associate teachers consciously and deliberately deconstructed their practices and actions and shared their thoughts aloud, they offered the student teachers more opportunities to understand what they were doing and why, allowing them a small insight into the thought processes of a teacher. The use of this strategy positively impacted the learning of the STs as they developed a better understanding of what was happening and could then recreate the steps in their own practice.

Modelling the act of being reflective was also identified by three participants who felt that being reflective was an important skill for all teachers to have. Reflection is defined as “coming to see a situation, being able to define it, to describe and account for its features, then being able to view that situation from different perspectives” (Loughran, 2006, p. 96). AT Blake felt that it was good to be reflective about his own practice and to model this for the STs as “it’s good for them to see you doing that and admitting that it wasn’t good and you could’ve done that better, because then they start to do the same thing”. This in turn will help them to develop their practice as teachers.

Modelling was identified as being an important part of ‘successful’ mentoring by several of the participants. However, there was a variance between participants as to what this meant. For all of the participants, the modelling of key teaching tasks such as planning, teaching and behaviour management was important. However, only two of the four ATs and three of the five STs made any reference as to how this was to be done. In these instances they spoke of ‘explicit modelling’ as the key to developing a clear understanding of new tasks with the ATs providing a “running commentary” for the student to follow.

## **In Class Observations**

For many student teachers and associate teachers observations play an integral part in the Professional Practice placement. When asked about 'successful' mentoring strategies during observations of the student teacher teaching, the participants identified that the following aspects were of importance:

- A clear focus for observations
- Associate teachers keeping a low profile
- Conducting unplanned observations
- Frequency of observations

### ***A Clear Focus for Observations***

All participants talked about the importance of setting a focus for the ST prior to the observation taking place. Participants felt that predetermining a focus allowed clarity for both parties relating to what was going to be observed and also provided a guide on which to centre feedback. Almost all of the participants believed that allowing the focus to be decided upon by the ST was an important strategy used by 'successful' mentors, as this provided the student with a sense of autonomy; the capacity to make an informed, un-coerced decision and to take responsibility of the observation.

Although ATs Amber, Blake and Daphne encouraged the STs to lead their learning by encouraging them to decide on their own observation focus by asking questions such as "what do you want me to observe first?" (AT Amber) or by asking them "what they want me to focus on" (AT Blake), they also felt that there were times when they needed to lead. This

could be when there was something that had been identified by the associate as needing to be worked on or when specific guidance was required. AT Blake describes this when he says:

Often you'll see something and then you run with it and you go "I really want to look at that. Oh, behaviours not going that well in this lesson, I'll really go with that." Or I'll say "I really want to see this in this lesson, this is what I'll be watching." and "These are the kinds of things I'll be looking out for (AT Blake).

ST Courtney also felt there was a place for ATs to choose the focus of the observation. This was more likely to be at the start of her placements when she was unsure of what to select.

Well on the first couple of placements I didn't really know what to choose as my focus because I felt that there were so many areas. So I think some direction from the associate is good because they obviously can identify things (ST Courtney).

### ***Associate Teachers Keeping a Low Profile***

Six of the participants indicated that it was important for 'successful' associate teachers to consider where they placed themselves during observations, allowing them to be unobtrusive when observing lessons. This was for two reasons. Firstly, it ensured that the ST was in 'full control' of the class and that the AT couldn't "influence them (the class) in any way" (AT Blake). Secondly, as described by ST Elizabeth, placing themselves out of view allowed students to be more natural with the class. She described this experience with one associate saying:

You're not nervous because you're getting observed because you don't feel like it because you can't see (them); they weren't in my eye view either. I wouldn't look up and there they were. They were behind me so it made it easier to forget about them too (ST Elizabeth).

### ***Conducting Unplanned Observations***

Although most participants talked about the need for observations to be planned in advance with a focus that was predetermined, two ATs felt that unplanned or spontaneous observations were beneficial for mentoring STs and often used this strategy alongside the more formal and planned observations.

I don't (always) tell them when I'm doing an observation either, because I think that they need to be prepared all the time. They know if I'm doing one because it's quite obvious (AT Caroline).

These informal, unplanned observations became part of the ongoing dialogue that ATs used to inform the STs' learning, often used as a quick way to give the student teacher feedback on an area that they were working on.

Two STs also identified the benefits of having observations done on them that were not planned for in advance.

I know that the grad students the lecturers just come in and out and it's not as staged if you know what I mean, like "Today you're doing an observation and this is all prepared." and away you go. It would be even better if they just said, "Today somewhere around the day I'll observe you and I'll let you know at the

end of the day.” I don’t know. That might put more pressure on some people but, it’s a bit more real then (ST Diane).

### ***Frequency of Observations***

ATs Amber, Blake and Caroline also felt it was important to do as many observations as possible. These were often unplanned observations. These observations sometimes included notes being written up on scrap paper, or as small notes that were handed to the student during their teaching.

Although there was a format provided by the University of Canterbury, College of Education for writing observation notes, two of the four ATs had developed their own system which they used when conducting the frequent observations. AT Caroline described her system saying:

So, I do my observations a little bit differently to some people. I don’t hand write them because I think that we are way beyond the carbon paper and I’m much, much faster at typing. So I just have two columns, running observation of what I see, and then I’ll have one of teaching points. Then at the bottom I’ll just have a suggestion and comments so that when the student reads it back later on, hopefully the running commentary will jog their memory of exactly what they did during the day (AT Caroline).

AT Blake also used his own system for recording feedback, which involved recording his notes on a piece of paper then highlighting the important features for the student



to focus on. He felt that this system provided more of a focus for the student making the advice manageable.

After I've written those positives and advice I tend to box out maybe two pieces of advice. So I'll highlight them in some way and then they are the key things I want them to take away from it.... even though they get this piece of paper and it's got lots of writing on it, I found that if you just give that to them it can be overwhelming and they don't know what to work on. But if you highlight a few key areas, like "Next time work on that thing, and that thing right there." then I think that's manageable (AT Blake).

### **Handing Over Control**

The willingness for associate teachers to hand over some of the control of their class was identified as another contributing factor. All five student teachers identified this during their interviews. ST Belinda described how having some control of the teaching and the class, enabled her to feel as if she made the most of the learning opportunity when she said:

For me it's really important to have some autonomy because I don't like feeling like they're in control all the time, especially when I'm the one that's trying to teach. I mean I know I'm there to learn but if someone else is trying to take control of my learning then I don't learn as well. I like to make mistakes because that's what I learn from. If I'm having that taken away from me all the time then I don't feel like I'm getting that balance of learning (ST Belinda).

Two ATs also identified this as an important aspect of 'successful' mentoring.

However, they recognised the potential difficulties that this has for some ATs. "One of the hardest things for a teacher is letting go and letting somebody have your class and take over from you. Sit back and try not to say anything" (AT Caroline). Handing over a class to a ST who is viewed as not being as experienced, or who may not have the same style of management or teaching, can prove problematic for many ATs.

Two factors appeared to affect how successfully the control was relinquished to the student teacher. These were:

- Allowing for a slow integration into class programmes / building up teacher presence
- Associate teachers stepping in

#### ***Allowing for Slow Integration into Class Programmes / Building up Teacher Presence***

Participants indicated that an associate teacher's ability to successfully integrate the student teacher into classroom life and to slowly build up their 'teacher presence' significantly impacted the outcomes of the placement. Strategies such as letting students do detailed observations of routines, take the roll, lead games, read books, and work with groups, were identified by participants as being used by 'successful' associates to help students develop an understanding of how the class worked, and helped to establish them as a teacher up in front of the class, before allowing them to take full control.

ST Diane describes the use of slow integration as:

Just doing other things apart from lessons to start with just so you're in there, so you're not just in the background then all of a sudden, wallop you're in full

control. So I guess the tasks that bring you in front of the class have been really important (ST Diane).

AT Caroline says “I encourage them not to just sit, but get up and walk around and have a look”. She also uses Team Teaching as a way of developing teacher presence before full control.

### ***Associate Teachers Stepping In***

Allowing the student teacher to have control of the class also requires the associate teacher to not ‘step in’ when they are teaching. I define ‘stepping in’ as when the AT takes control back of the class by speaking to them, giving them instructions or directions, or dealing with children’s behaviours while the ST is on full control. Participants felt that not stepping in and allowing the students to manage all potential situations allowed for more opportunities for the students to establish themselves as the classroom teacher when on full control. ST Elizabeth felt that ‘successful’ ATs were those who were “just basically letting you have a go as well. Not jumping in or over riding you.”

AT Blake felt that it was best not to step in when student teachers were teaching. However, he did ensure that his students felt supported by letting them know that they could ask for help if needed.

I make a real point of not stepping in, not interrupting the lesson in any way. I say this to the student teachers; if they ever want me to step in then just tell me and I will, but otherwise I don’t like doing it because that will mean that I undermine them as a teacher (AT Blake).

ST Diane shared about one of her experiences of an associate stepping in:

There is one incidence where she asked me a question during a lesson and it just really threw me. It was good that she did it though, for the benefit of the lesson, but from being a learning student I was just totally like, “Oh, where am I at now?” You know it totally threw me (ST Diane).

Others had a different view. One AT and two of the STs felt that there were times when it was appropriate for the associate to step in: when something of importance was forgotten during a lesson, or if the lesson was not going well.

If I’m up there teaching they might sort of step in every now and again and just offer some words of wisdom or words of advice along the way from time to time. I find that quite good because sometimes for me I get so engrossed in my teaching that I might forget something or leave something out (ST Belinda).

Although AT Caroline believes that the ST should maintain control of the class, there are times when she feels she needs to step in for the safety of her children. “I will only jump in if I feel that I need to and it’s getting out of hand or if they ask for help because I think that it needs to be as real as possible” (AT Caroline).

### **Provide Practical Experiences**

When asked what the role of a ‘successful’ associate teacher was, all participants indicated that a large part of the role involved providing the student teacher with as many examples of practical experiences associated with being a classroom teacher as possible. These practical experiences included not only the day to day teaching of the class, but also aspects

of administration associated with teaching, as well as extracurricular activities such as attending camps or coaching sport teams. These opportunities enabled the STs to learn about the realities of being a teacher, which often involved far more than teaching inside a classroom, but all the ‘behind the scenes’ tasks that occurred.

(An associate teacher’s) purpose is to provide the practical of teaching, so they get a lot of the theory based stuff at college and then the role of their associate teacher, or supervising teacher is to provide the student teachers with as many learning experiences as they can but in a practical way. So you approach everything from a practical point of view (AT Blake).

These practical experiences have been organised into the following three areas:

- Teaching the student teacher
- Planning
- Sharing resources

### ***Teaching the Student Teacher***

For two of the ATs and one of the STs, ‘successful’ associate teachers needed to be willing to demonstrate and teach the student more than just the day to day tasks of teaching children.

AT Caroline, as a ‘successful’ associate, says that her role is to “just try to show them as much as I can”. For AT Daphne the important things to teach and pass on included “those things that are not so obvious as a teacher”.

ST Elizabeth defined this by saying that a 'successful' associate is someone who is:

Willing to share all their personal knowledge, basically not just their notes but their personal philosophy, how they got that philosophy, the different experiences that they've had throughout the years, the pros and the cons (ST Elizabeth).

### ***Planning***

One form of practical experience that featured significantly in the interviews as being of importance were experiences involving planning. These experiences included the planning of lessons and units that were to be taught, as well as the planning for and of activities that were featured on the daily timetable and the term overview. All of the participants made some reference to planning when speaking about 'successful' associates. However, there were differing opinions as to how planning should be discussed with or taught to the ST, with ATs taking different philosophical positions on planning.

Two ATs liked the idea that planning should be done together and used this as a strategy for teaching and mentoring their STs.

I do my planning and I show them what I'm doing and I help and guide them to plan and, especially if they are in their very early stages, by the end they're doing quite a lot of it by themselves. But I do go through step by step of what they need to do with each lesson, and try to check all their plans and ask to see them and just give them any feedback and things (AT Caroline).

This method of planning initially provided scaffolding for the student teacher to follow that was gradually decreased and control gradually relinquished with ideas being co-constructed as the student became more familiar with planning expectations.

This view of planning differed to one associate and three student teacher's perspectives who felt that viewing and reading the ST's planning was an important aspect of being a 'successful' associate. They all indicated that if learning were to occur then ATs needed to be involved with the students planning, regularly viewing it, reading it, and providing feedback to the student.

Many of the students spoke of feelings of frustration or confusion when their planning was not looked at in detail by their associates, or in some instance not looked at, at all. ST Courtney spoke of her own experiences with different associates and their attitudes towards planning, one where her AT took the time to go over her planning and provided her with feedback, compared to her previous two experiences where planning was not a priority, and how this affected her.

My last associate who was really, really involved with my learning she actually went through it and she'd be like "You need to change this." Or like "this will work but you've actually got too much in here." So she actually gave me feedback on my planning whereas the last two had not given me any feedback at all, and it was kind of like "Oh yeah that looks good." but they didn't actually tell me, they didn't show me that they'd actually looked at it or considered anything in it, and I knew that there were gaps and holes and stuff like that but they didn't pick up on it (ST Courtney).

The more recent positive experience not only left her feeling valued and as if the associate wanted to be involved with her learning but also proved to be a good teaching experience where she received feedback that she could take away and learn from.

Two ATs and three STs identified that looking at or being involved with the AT's planning was a valuable practical learning experience.

ST Courtney endorsed how important this process was stating:

Well the planning modelling was really useful... (It had) a massive impact on me, seeing it actually being used because before that I hadn't seen any point to the planning because it was never looked at (ST Courtney).

There are varying perspectives on the way that planning should be taught or viewed during a placement. It is interesting to note that two ATs identified that planning together was an important part of the mentoring process. However, this did not feature in the interviews with the STs. Their main focus for planning was ensuring that the ATs took the time to view the ST's planning or share their own plans with the student teacher. Once again this results in the students feeling 'valued', a theme that has emerged within several different aspects of mentoring from the student teachers' perspectives.

### ***Sharing Resources***

Two of the associate teachers and three of the student teachers described sharing resources as a positive practical experience that was used to mentor student teachers. AT Amber described how she supported her student's learning and their use of resources when she



commented, “I start them off together just to show them where the resources are, which are the ones I use, which ones they might want to use, and stuff like that. Then I let them loose” (AT Amber).

As well as sharing resources some of the STs identified that there was a need for ATs to show the students where the resources were stored within the school.

Because when you are new to the school you can’t be expected to just find it. And you feel a bit weird just walking around wandering because you don’t know where you are allowed to go and where you’re not (ST Courtney).

From the student teacher’s perspectives, the task of showing STs where resources are appears to have been overlooked by some of their ATs, yet this simple act has had a significant impact on the STs, so much so that it featured in their interviews as being a task that ‘successful’ associate teachers do. The ATs did not mention this during their interviews. This could be for several reasons including the fact that it is not something that they do, or what is more likely to suggest is that it is something that they do so naturally therefore, they take it for granted that other ATs do it too. The act is not limited to just ‘successful’ associates. What is agreed by both groups of participants is that the sharing of the resources is an important part in the role of being an AT.

## **Summary**

Communication was identified as playing a very significant part of ‘successful’ mentoring, with all of the participants making reference to it during their interviews on several occasions and in many different contexts. The four main contexts identified were those of communicating messages, the use of questioning, delivering feedback, and meetings. Within

these contexts there was a range of perceptions between, as well as within, the two groups of participants.

Participants felt that the use of questioning as a mentoring strategy was very effective as it allowed student teachers to feel as if they had some of the control of the placement.

Both the ATs and the STs made reference to the importance of communication during feedback, throughout their interviews. For the ATs, allowing the STs to read over the feedback prior to any discussions, being honest and clear with written and verbal feedback, and allowing the student teacher to lead the feedback sessions, were all aspects of communication that they felt supported them in being a 'successful' associate teacher. The ATs and the STs both identified that written feedback should be gone over verbally with the student teachers to ensure that there were no misunderstandings. The content of feedback was also identified as being important for the mentors to consider by both the AT and ST participants, with a balance of positive and negative comments as well as an element of feed forward being included within the feedback. All participants also identified that, although it was not always possible, feedback should be delivered to the students immediately after the observations if it was to be relevant for the student.

Communication during meetings was also identified as being important, where the majority of participants felt that informal meetings were more valuable than formal meetings, as long as there was an effective line of communication established between the student teacher and the associate. In the instance that there was not ongoing communication then a more formalised arrangement was needed.

Modelling was also identified as an important strategy for ATs to use when working with STs. Participants felt that modelling behaviour management strategies, planning and teaching strategies, and the act of being reflective were all important aspects of being an AT. Vocalising the modelling was identified by most of the participants as having a significant impact on the student teachers' practice as it provided them with clarity and a deeper level of understanding than simply observing the associates' teaching.

Observation of the students was another key aspect of the ST becoming a professional through the practice of teaching. This was identified as impacting significantly on the successfulness of ATs as mentors, with the focus of observations, ATs being unobtrusive, and observations being unplanned and frequent, all being mentioned as being of importance.

Although all participants felt that the focus for an observation needed to be set prior to the observation, there was some variance between the perceptions of the participants as to who should set this focus. Although the majority of participants felt that it was important for the student to select their own focus, two ATs and one ST also recognised that there were specific times that this was not appropriate and more guidance from the AT was required. A 'successful' mentor needed the ability to recognise when this was necessary for the benefit of the student.

Perceptions varied regarding the pre planning of observations with two ATs and two STs stating that there were some benefits to observations occurring spontaneously, where teaching could be viewed 'more naturally' within the classroom setting. There

was also some variance between the perceptions of participants regarding the frequency of observations. Three ATs felt that frequent observations were required, and two of these had developed their own system for recording observation notes, on a format that suited them.

## **Building Professional Relationships**

The third conceptual theme that was identified revolved around the building of professional relationships. A professional relationship is defined for the purpose of this research as being the interaction and mutual dealings that occur between the associate teacher (the mentor) and the student teacher (the mentee) during the placement. These interactions focused on the role of teaching and the tasks associated with being a teacher.

This conceptual theme is broken into two main themes:

- Interpersonal and dispositional qualities
- Factors that promote the relationship

Each of these themes has then been broken down into sub themes as can be seen in *Figure*

4. The significance of these is outlined below.

### **Interpersonal and Dispositional Qualities**

The participants identified a total of fifteen dispositional qualities that they felt an associate teacher needed to possess to ensure that they built professional relationships which allowed them to work effectively with their student teachers. For the purpose of this research the terms dispositional qualities, qualities and dispositions are used interchangeably, as all terms were used by participants. They are defined as the natural aspect of one's mind as shown in one's behaviour and relationships with others and are the distinguishing characteristics or personal traits that are portrayed by the AT. Seven of these qualities were identified by both participants from the group of associate teachers and student teachers. These were:

- Good communicator
- Empathetic
- Respectfulness
- Friendly, warm , welcoming, and approachable
- Willingness to be an associate teacher
- Professionalism

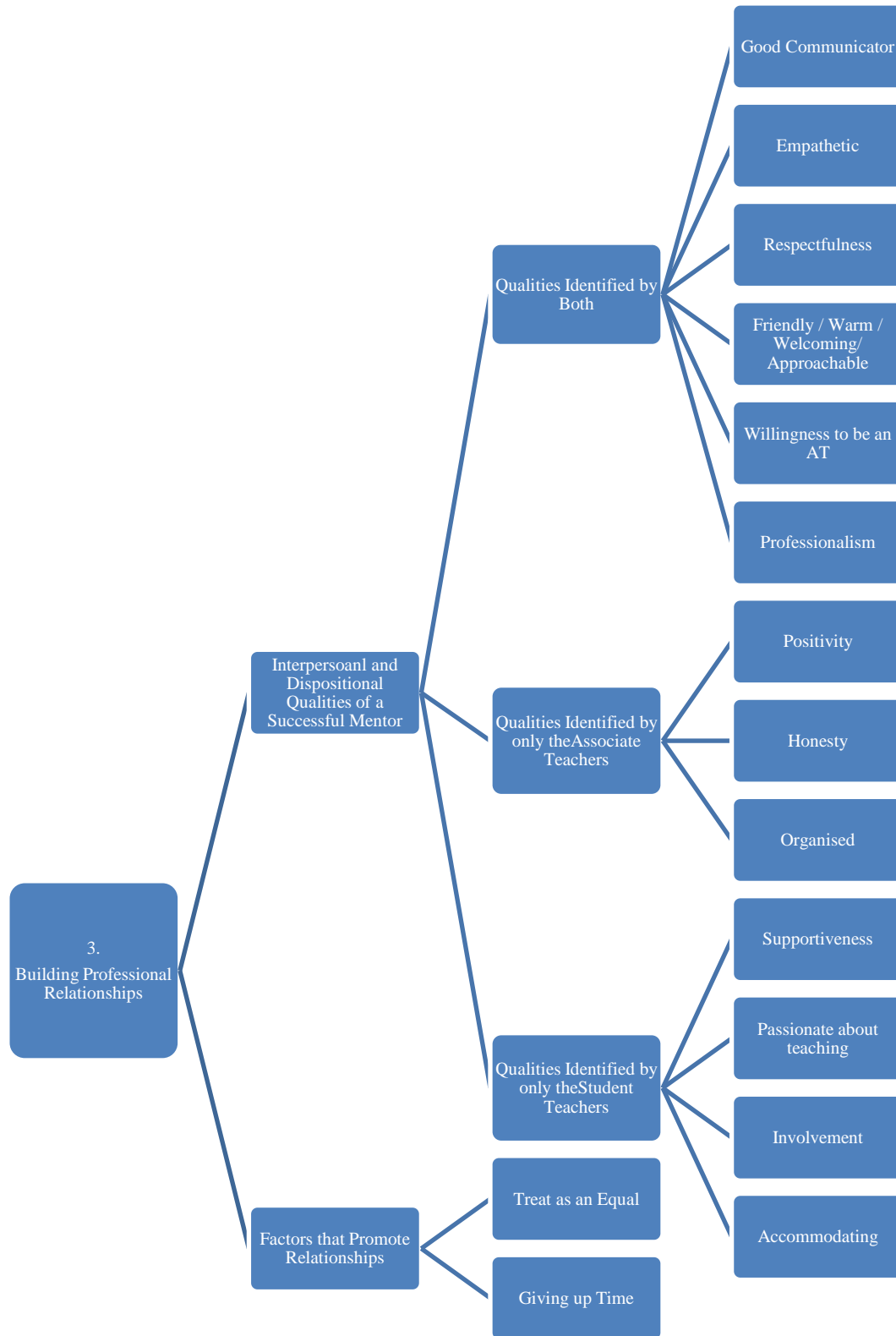
Three qualities were identified by only the associate teachers. These were:

- Positivity
- Honesty
- Organised

Another five were identified by only the students. These were:

- Supportiveness
- Passionate about teaching
- Involvement
- Accommodating

**Figure 2 – Overview of sub themes for Theme 3 – Building Professional Relationships**



I have included all of these qualities irrespective of the number of participants who made reference to them. Some were identified by all the participants while others were only identified by one or two members of these groups. It is important to note that although a participant may not have identified a quality it does not necessarily mean that they did not feel it was of importance, instead it may not have been at the forefront of their mind during the interview, or it may have been referred to by another term.

### ***Dispositional Qualities Identified by both the ATs and STs***

#### **Good communicator**

The quality that was most commonly referred to by both the associate teachers and the student teachers as being a vital contributing factor in establishing a positive and 'successful' mentoring relationship was that of being a good communicator. However, good communication was discussed earlier in this chapter where it was used to describe the need for ATs to be able to effectively communicate with STs, both through the written and verbal feedback and through the discussions that took place. What was interesting to note here is that although all of the participants identified this as an important quality for 'successful' associates, each participant focused on different aspects of good communication.

AT Blake summed up the need for him to communicate well if a positive working relationship was to be developed when he said that he felt that as an associate it was important that he made sure that the student teachers felt comfortable approaching him with their questions or for guidance and did this by always ensuring he maintained open communication. "Yeah I just think that open lines of communication. That they can come to



you, any time” (AT Blake). This also demonstrated that for there to be good communication then associates needed to be willing to make themselves available to their student teachers.

Both the associate teachers and student teachers felt that good communication was vital in developing a positive working relationship. There were a number of contributing factors identified by the participants. Although all participants discussed the need to be a good communicator, not all participants identified the same factors that contributed to this.

### Empathetic

Another key quality that was highlighted by both the ATs and the STs was empathy. For the purpose of this research empathy is described as the associate teacher having an understanding and sense of compassion towards the position or situation that the ST is in, often based upon their own experiences. Demonstrating a sense of empathy or understanding towards what the ST may be experiencing or feeling led to ATs having a greater understanding of the student as a learner, and ultimately helping to develop the mentoring relationship.

So they need to have empathy. They'll need to be empathetic to the student and be able to think back to when they were a student teacher and what certain situations will be making them feel and the way that you approach them (AT Blake).

AT Blake demonstrates here his awareness of the feelings of uncertainty or anxiety that a ST may experience when faced with new and challenging situations on the placement. This understanding may come from his personal experiences as a ST or his

experience of working with a range of different STs. By demonstrating this understanding he felt it helped to enhance the mentor/mentee relationship.

Likewise the STs felt it was important that the ATs were able to recognise how the student felt and be empathetic towards them. “We’re still learners as well. We don’t know everything and we want to learn. We realise that we are not going to know everything” (ST Elizabeth).

They need to be warm to the other person basically and appreciate their position. I feel really strongly coming from a student perspective that they need to understand that we don’t necessarily enjoy tailing after them everywhere...  
Be accepting of the student’s position (ST Adele).

For the participants, empathy encompassed many things including demonstrating an understanding of the STs’ vulnerability or uncertainty as well as showing a sense of sympathy or compassion towards the ST. It is interesting to note that both the associate and the student teachers felt there was a need for empathy and understanding towards the unique and often challenging position that the ST was in. The ability for an AT to ‘put themselves in the STs’ shoes’ appeared to allow ATs and STs to foster positive working relationships.

### Respectfulness

For the purpose of this research respect is defined as the willingness of the associate and student teachers to show consideration and politeness towards each other, demonstrating a regard for their feelings, rights or opinions. The need for ‘successful’ ATs to be respectful towards STs was also highlighted by one of the ATs and two of the STs. For AT Daphne,

respecting her STs meant that in turn she would gain respect. “I think they know that you value them. And I think you can do that by just being friendly and being respectful as well, and then you’re going to get that respect back” (AT Daphne).

ST Adele also described respect as being reciprocal.

Treat your student with respect is the other big thing for me, because you’re tailing them around all the time and I’m a fully grown adult. And they need to treat you with respect and treat you as an equal. You are learning, obviously, and you’ve got to be respectful of their position, but they also need to be respectful of your position (ST Adele).

For these participants mutual respect, where ATs demonstrated politeness and courtesy towards the STs, and therefore gained the same level of respect back, was an important aspect of ‘successful’ mentoring. This respect needed to be irrespective of any ‘power position’ associated to the roles.

For ST Courtney, being respected by her associate led to a feeling of trust and comfort when approaching her associate. “I felt like she respected my teaching enough that I could actually bring stuff to her and she wouldn’t come down on me” (ST Courtney). Mutual respect helped to develop a positive working relationship where student STs felt safe and valued.

### Friendly, Warm, Welcoming, and Approachable

For the purpose of this research, being friendly, warm, and welcoming have all been grouped together as the terms were often used interchangeably or in conjunction with each other by the participants. When describing a 'successful' associate teacher that ST Courtney had worked with, she said "she was welcoming and really friendly" (ST Courtney).

This reference to 'successful' ATs being friendly or welcoming was repeated five times throughout her interview highlighting its importance to her.

As well as participants identifying 'successful' associates as being friendly, warm or welcoming, ST Adele demonstrated a concrete way in which one of her ATs built the working relationship with her as a student and the rest of the staff at that school.

In the last place they were very welcoming when they introduce(d) you to all the staff in the staffroom. And I did like that. That was quite good, so everybody knew why you were there and they would come up and speak to you, and that was a good way of including you (ST Adele).

Most of the STs spoke about these qualities as being important for establishing a positive relationship. However, only one of the four associate ATs identified this in their interview.

The term 'approachable' was also a quality that was specifically mentioned by three of the participants, two of whom were ATs and one a ST. "I think you need to be very approachable" (AT Caroline). This implies that the AT encompassed the dispositions of friendly, warm and welcoming for them to be considered to be approachable.

### Willingness to be an AT

One disposition that came across very strongly from the student teachers' perspectives was that associate teachers needed to demonstrate a desire to be an AT as opposed to reluctance. When asked what qualities a 'successful' AT needed, ST Diane replied, "a willingness to do it really".

ST Elizabeth agreed. "Not just doing it for the lack of, the little bit of money they get. They've got to be doing it because they enjoy it". This student teacher appeared to want to know that ATs had taken on the role for the right purposes and were committed to the training of the next generation of teachers. Although not stated, these ST comments imply that they have been in situations where this was not always the case.

One AT also identified the importance of wanting to take on the role.

I think it's not easy (being) an associate teacher when you've got all these other things going on but I think for some people you don't have to have one (student teacher), and I just hear some really horrible stories, I think that's what makes me careful is that I know that for some people their last associate teacher didn't want them (AT Amber).

AT Amber demonstrated her clear moral purpose for being an AT and suggested that not all of her colleagues in this role felt the same way. For her, the role required a level of professional commitment as it added to the already busy work load of a classroom teacher, a role that she felt not all experienced teachers should be taking on, or are taking on for the right reasons.

It was interesting to note that four out of the five STs identified this as being an important quality.

### Professionalism

The need for associate teachers to see the role as 'professional' was referred to by one AT who said, "You need to be quite professional and almost business like the whole time because you don't want them to think that they're your friend" (AT Caroline). This suggests that she approached the mentoring role from a very 'professional' mentoring stance, establishing a clear line between her role as the 'expert' or 'holder of knowledge' and the student teacher as a 'novice'. Here she clearly separated the role of being a mentor from the role of being a friend. This was in contrast to the STs who all felt that being friendly was essential if a positive working relationship was to develop. However, being friendly did not necessarily mean the same as being a friend.

ST Courtney also identified 'professional' as an important quality for associates when providing a model for the student teachers. "But also professional. Just thinking about other associates I've had, seeing a professional teaching model I think is really important as well" (ST Courtney). For her a 'professional teaching model' was more than just the AT being professional in the way that they interacted with others, treating them with courtesy and respect. It was also around the way they conducted themselves within the classroom, being organised, planned and committed to the children's learning, and the model that this provided for the ST with respect to being a 'professional' within the classroom.

It was interesting to note that only one associate and one student teacher identified being professional as an important quality to possess when mentoring.

### ***Dispositional Qualities Identified by Associate Teachers***

As well as the qualities that both the associate and student teachers identified, there were also those qualities that were only referred to by the AT participants. These were being positive, honest, and organised.

The most significant of these for the ATs was the need to be positive, with three out of the four participants identifying this as a quality that played a significant part in their role as mentors.

I think you actually need to be positive. It can be quite easy to criticise someone new coming in, and they're not managing it correctly. It can, I think you need to be quite positive and look at the things they do, and build them up, because it's very hard to walk into a class and expect those children to do what they are supposed to be doing with a new person (AT Amber).

For the ATs, being positive required them to identify and comment on the good things that the ST was doing, ensuring that they made them aware of areas that they were making progress in or achieving good outcomes. AT Blake describes this as "talking up the good things that they have done". These ATs all made a conscious effort to identify the positives and share these with the STs, alongside areas where further development was needed.

Honesty was identified by some of the AT's as an important quality to possess when mentoring. AT Caroline suggested that honesty allowed the students to know how they were doing.

I think that you have to be very honest. I think that you have to be, at times, quite critical. But you also have to provide the opportunity for the students to teach as much as they can and to make their own mistakes. But I do believe that you shouldn't tell them that they are doing a good job if they're not doing a good job and you need to steer them in the right direction (AT Caroline).

Being organised was also mentioned by AT Caroline who said, "you need to have very good time management, because having a student teacher makes you be very organised and very well prepared".

It is interesting to note that none of the student teachers interviewed identified being positive, honest, or organised as important qualities for 'successful' mentors to possess.

### ***Dispositional qualities identified by student teachers***

There were four other specific qualities that were only identified by the student teachers. These were supportive, passionate about teaching, involved, and accommodating.

The first of these, supportive, was the most significant for three of the five STs, as ST Adele suggests, "For me, if they are going to be successful they need to be supportive of what the student needs for a start".

According to the STs, ATs demonstrated their support in a variety of ways with supportiveness encompassing many different factors. ST Adele identified associates who



“back me up with the kids if something goes wrong”, “offer advice”, and “just getting alongside” as being supportive, while ST Elizabeth described being supportive as “someone willing to give you a hand you know when you muck up”. What became apparent was that all of these factors helped contribute to the STs’ sense of identity. For ST Courtney feeling supported helped to foster her sense of self worth:

I think the most useful thing was knowing that she was there to help me and that she was supportive of me. So I didn’t feel like a complete nuisance (ST Courtney).

Showing support towards her made her feel as if she had something to contribute to the relationship and in turn developed her identity as a learning teacher.

Being non judgemental was also identified by one ST as being important if an AT was to show that they were supportive. Of the three placements that she had been on she considered that one of the ATs was more ‘successful’ than the other two because:

I felt like she respected my teaching enough that I could actually bring stuff to her and she wouldn’t come down on me. So I suppose in a couple of words, non judgemental and supportive (ST Courtney).

ST Courtney did not state whether her previous two associates had been judgemental towards her in any way or not.

Although this quality was only referred to by three of the participants it rated repeated mentions from those who did highlight it.

For ST Diane, portraying a sense of dedication towards the job was an important quality to possess. “So their passion sort of comes through. Their passion for teaching

and they're wanting to sort of share it". This 'passion' was demonstrated through the associate's enthusiastic actions and behaviours, such as the way that they communicated with the children as well as with other colleagues including the student teacher. The two STs who identified being passionate about teaching as an important quality felt that if ATs were enthusiastic then this was reflected in the way that the STs behaved and felt about themselves.

Someone that really knows their job quite well and is passionate about it really helps as well because that then rubs off on you as well, because you get stressed through placements and someone who loves their job helps you. It gives you motivation to keep on going through (ST Elizabeth).

For the purpose of this study I have used the term 'involved' to refer to the AT's ability to be engaged in the learning of the ST, and their commitment towards fostering this learning. ST Courtney spoke of her experiences working with an AT who she felt was involved in her learning. This fostered a positive feeling towards their working relationship.

She was also the only associate that ripped out the pages for her. So yeah it meant that she was much more involved. It showed me that she was involved because she was actually keeping things on record for me and taking an interest in what I was learning and in my professional development. Like I really felt like she cared about me being a good teacher (ST Courtney).

ST Adele identified the need for associate teachers to be accommodating. When asked what qualities a 'successful' AT required her response was "obviously accommodating" she then supported this later by saying, "I don't think they should take them on board if they can't accommodate what they have to do". Here she expressed her opinion that not all teachers have the right dispositions to take on the role. She implied that ATs need to be fully aware of what is required by the ST before agreeing to be an associate, and be able to accommodate them within their programme and provide them with the required opportunities to meet the requirements of the ITE provider.

Once again she did not identify whether or not she had had experiences where the associates had been unaccommodating, however as this was mentioned three times during her interview it was obviously a disposition that she felt strongly about.

None of the ATs identified the qualities of being supportive, passionate about teaching, involved, or accommodating as being important.

## **Summary**

In summary, a very wide range of qualities and dispositions were identified as being important to possess if associates were to build positive relationships with their students. Although seven of the thirteen qualities identified were done so by some of the associates and some of the students, it is important to note that there were a further eight that were not. This shows that ATs' opinions about important qualities may differ from those of the STs. It is also important to note that each quality identified has a different level of significance, ranging from only one participant, right up to the majority of participants mentioning it during the interview for some of the qualities. Some qualities were also

mentioned on several occasions during an interview which also shows the level of significance that this quality has for that participant.

Along with identifying qualities that allowed the associate teachers to work effectively with the student teachers and to build the working relationships, participants also identified two factors that promoted effective relationships between a mentor and mentee. These were:

- Treating student teachers as an equal colleague or as an adult
- The associate teachers being prepared to give up their time

The factor that featured most frequently was treating the student teacher as an equal; either recognising the fact that they were an adult who was a student, or treating them as a colleague or member of staff. This was identified as crucial by two ATs and three STs. In total there were nine references made during the interviews with ST Elizabeth making reference to it four times during her interview. When speaking about wanting to be treated as an equal she commented, “We’re going to be in their back pocket for five weeks so, you know, treat us like another adult” (ST Elizabeth).

ST Courtney also talked about how one of her experiences with an AT made her feel valued and helped develop her relationship with her associate. “She was involved with me as a student teacher not as a student or as a teacher; she was involved with me as a student teacher like a learning teacher” (ST Courtney).

AT Daphne said, "I think it's just the way you talk to them, and treat them as they are a teacher as well".

All of these participants felt that it was important that the unique position that the student teacher was in was recognised, and that associates treated them as an adult, a colleague, or a member of staff, rather than as a student from their class.

The willingness for associate teachers to give up their time was identified by three of the four ATs as being an important factor that promoted a positive working relationship and a necessity if an AT was to be a 'successful' mentor. "I think you've got to be willing to give them the time, when they do come in" (AT Daphne).

It was acknowledged that as a teacher, associates were often already very busy in their own teaching roles; however they needed to be prepared to allow some of this time to be focused towards the ST. Being a 'successful' mentor required devoting a lot of time.

Both of these factors helped promote positive working relationships and fostered 'successful' mentoring.

# Chapter Five: Discussion – Associate Teacher versus Student Teacher Perspectives

This chapter is written in three sections. Each section discusses one of the three conceptual themes that have been identified within this study. Initially I highlight the key factors within each theme that contributes to building associate teachers as ‘successful’ mentors, discussing the key findings and how these address each of my research questions. This is followed by a discussion of the significance of each of these factors and the role it plays to supporting the future of associate teachers as mentors.

## Acquiring Professional Knowledge

The initial focus for this chapter is on the first conceptual theme – *Acquiring professional knowledge*. I begin by discussing the student teachers’ perspectives forming their expectations of associate teacher’s knowledge of what their role entails (*Table 1*). This includes a knowledge of placement and course requirements set by the ITE provider. I then compare these expectations with those of the associate teachers, looking at their perspectives and experiences (*Table 2*). In particular I have focused on how they gained their knowledge, and what their professional development experiences have been in relation to their role as an AT. These two perspectives allowed me to begin to answer my main research question - *What makes a ‘successful’ associate teacher?* I have also addressed one of my research sub questions – *In what ways has professional development influenced associate teachers’ practice?*

**Table 1 – Summary of ST expectations of AT knowledge**

<b>Student teachers' expectations of ATs</b>
Knowledge required; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge of assignments</li><li>• Knowledge of full control requirements</li><li>• Understanding of the ITE providers expectations</li><li>•</li></ul> Knowledge gained through; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AT Handbook</li><li>• AT Guidelines</li><li>• Pre placement meetings</li></ul>

**Table 2 – Summary of AT acquisition of knowledge and professional development**

<b>Associate teachers' professional development experiences</b>
Knowledge of the role gained through; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Other courses where information was relevant to the role of an AT</li><li>• Leadership courses</li><li>• Whole school PD or approaches to mentoring</li><li>• Own experiences as a mentee</li><li>• Experiences gained whilst mentoring</li></ul>

### ***What makes a 'successful' associate teacher?***

The student teachers shared a similar perspective on one aspect of associates as 'successful' mentors when they spoke about the need for them to have a good knowledge and understanding of their role. This involved demonstrating a knowledge and understanding of the STs requirements, including course and assignment work and full control requirements, as well as an understanding of the ITE providers' expectations of the AT for that placement. Unfortunately, some of the STs shared experiences indicated that this was not always the reality. Situations where ATs did not have a good understanding of their role or of the formal requirements for that placement were common amongst the students. One ST in particular, shared her experiences of feeling as if she was 'teaching' the associate what he

needed to know to fulfil his role. Although it was not stated, it became apparent that this experience had led to feelings of increasing frustration and anxiety as she was unable to gain any clarity or direction around when she would complete course requirements throughout the placement. In this instance the associate clearly did not meet her expectations.

Others spoke of times when ATs had not seen or adequately read the guidelines or handbook even though they were made available by the ITE provider at the beginning of each placement. Student teachers considered that the Professional Practice Associate Teacher Handbook was an important document that all ATs should have read as it was used by the university to communicate vital information to the AT regarding many aspects of the placement. This information included the purpose of the placement, a code of conduct for STs on the placement, information regarding assignments and assessment, as well guidelines for the AT. In one instance it was given directly to the associate by the student teacher herself, yet it appeared to the student that the associate had no interest in reading it and remained uninformed. In these instances it appears that the ATs were unaware of what was specifically required or expected of the student, or of themselves. The student teachers also reported that they were often relied upon by associates to inform them of vital details regarding placement requirements. These experiences all demonstrate examples of ATs who were unprepared or inadequately informed about their role, even though they had been provided with written communication and guidelines from the ITE who placed the STs.



### Significance of these findings

These findings support those of Hoben (2006) who found that despite containing detailed explanations of AT requirements, including expectations surrounding specific provisions for the ST for that placement, “associates made very limited use of these guides” (p. 293).

However, it is not clear within her research as to what is actually contained within these guides and why they were not used more. She also found that even though the ITE providers gave each associate specific support material “there was significant resistance to reading it and that much of what was sent was not read” (Hoben, 2006, p. 292).

As the need for associate teachers to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of their role, including knowledge of the requirements of both the AT and ST, featured so frequently throughout the student teacher’s interviews, then it would appear that being placed within classrooms where the ATs are unprepared or uninformed is not conducive to fostering a positive mentoring relationship between the ST and the AT, nor to supporting the learning needs of STs. In some instances these circumstances could have potentially had a detrimental effect on the student teacher’s learning, leaving them feeling unsupported or frustrated with the situation, or even unable to meet placement or course requirements.

As the Associate Teacher Handbook is relied upon as the main, and sometimes the only form of communication between the ITE provider and the associate, then one would assume that this would be a tool that ‘successful’ associates would use to inform their practice. Despite this, only one of the four ATs made reference to using the guidelines to support them in their roles during the interviews. Although the other three did not make mention of the guidelines, this does not necessarily mean that they had not referred to

them or used them as a supporting document. What this does suggest however, is that this is not a document that is at the forefront of their minds while working with STs. I suggest two possible explanations for this. The first is that as 'successful' associate teachers who have previously hosted a number of student teachers, may already be very aware of the document along with the expectations and requirements placed upon them. Having used it in the past to inform their practice they may see no need to continue to make reference to the documents during our interviews as it has become a part of the instinctive way they mentor.

Another possible explanation is that this was a document that, in its current form, was not seen as important to read or needed, since communication that only occurs in written form can be very easily overlooked. As Hoben (2006) suggests, when universities rely solely upon written communication, it often results in "poor communication" between the "partners in a practicum relationship" (p. 291). As it stands, the handbook is currently provided to hosting schools and associates in written form, prior to a placement beginning via mail.

Written communication, in this instance in the form of Associate Teacher Guidelines or an Associate Teacher Handbook, can be easily misplaced or lost amongst the numerous pieces of paper that adorn a busy school office or a teacher's desk each day. In some cases this written communication therefore, may never have reached the intended recipient, or if in fact it reached them, it may not have been read as it was not seen as a priority in the list of tasks that a busy teacher often needs to complete. Relying solely on a written form also means that there is an absence of any human element to the communication, leaving no room for questioning or clarification on the part of the AT. Hoben (2006) identified some of the issues associated to the absence of face to face communication when she argued that;

This is problematic because there is no personal dimension that comes with face-to-face communication and questions are often difficult to answer fully in written communication. Written communication and telephone calls are satisfactory for establishing many organizational details, but woefully inadequate when elaborating on expectations of a role as complex as that of associate teacher (p. 291).

If ITE providers want associates who are 'successful' in their role of supporting the learning needs of student teachers, they need to ensure that the ATs are well informed and therefore well prepared. To achieve this, ITE providers need to ensure that there are effective lines of communication established between them and the host school or the AT. As Hoben (2006) suggests "effective communication between partners in a practicum relationship is essential if practicum is to prepare pre-service teachers successfully for classroom teaching" (p. 291).

I suggest three potential ways of establishing improved levels of communication between the ITE and the AT. Firstly, by providing the handbook or guidelines in more than the one current (written) form, the information would potentially reach a greater proportion of the attended audience. Presently in education, many teachers rely on the use of emails as a major form of communication. ITE providers could take advantage of this, providing both a written and an electronic version to intended ATs, ensuring that the opportunity to receive and read the information is significantly increased.

Secondly, ITE providers could improve communication by ensuring that there is an element of face to face contact made between the AT and the Professional Practice coordinator or supervising lecturer prior to the placement beginning. If this was to occur then important

information could be delivered directly and questions or concerns immediately addressed. Currently there are meetings held by the providers which ATs are invited to attend. Taking these meetings to the schools, either to individual host schools or to a cluster of host schools, would increase the accessibility to interested ATs. The issues pertinent to this suggestion are once again associated with cost and time. Face to face contact would require a significant increase in the funding allocated towards supporting ATs, as well as to the time allocated for Professional Practice coordinators or supervising lecturers to meet with ATs in what is already a very time demanding role, which in today's economic climate would have considerable implications.

Finally, there is the option of providing STs with the required knowledge and skills to have an introductory professional discussion with their ATs themselves prior to the Professional Practice placement. As part of the current ITE courses, STs could be given the skills required to conduct a conversation within which information regarding expectations and assignment work could be delivered directly to the AT. This could also include the sharing of the Associate Teacher Handbook and Associate Teacher Guidelines. If this was to occur then clarity surrounding course requirements and expectations of both the AT and ST could be achieved during the meeting, and any issues could be addressed prior to placements beginning. This option could be easily achieved by ITE providers as it is not demanding of others' time and requires little to no financial support as these meetings already take place in the form of pre placement visits, as part of a student teachers placement requirements. The student teachers who participated in this study held expectations that their associates would have adequate knowledge to support them while on Professional Practice placement,

grounded in the requirements and the expectations of the university. However, in reality some ATs were inadequately informed to successfully perform in their role. This revealed a level of discrepancy between the expectations of the STs and the reality of what support they are actually receiving from their associates at such a critical stage in their own professional development. From the perspectives of these STs, successful ATs are those who are well informed, well prepared, and well aware of the expectations placed upon them by ITE providers. This can be achieved if associates are supported by effective communication in the form of detailed and specific guidelines, as well as face to face meetings with all parties involved in the placement including the ST, the AT, supervising lecturers, and the ITE provider. Of course, the ITE providers could also provide opportunities for more formal learning about mentoring, either as short courses or as part of advanced qualifications.

***In what ways has professional development influenced associate teacher's practice?***

If associate teachers are not relying on the materials provided by the ITE providers to support them, how do our 'successful' associates learn about their roles? It became very apparent that each of the ATs had a personal 'story' about how they acquired the skills and knowledge of mentoring that they drew upon when hosting STs. These included: attending or being part of other forms of professional development, through their own personal experiences of being mentored, or through an 'on the job' approach.

Currently there is professional development on offer through ITE providers ranging from pre-placement information meetings, one day courses, and university papers all of which are designed for and target ATs. Despite this, none of this group of ATs had undergone any formal professional development for their role. This trend is reflective of a number of

studies into the mentoring of student teachers (Cameron, Lovett et al., 2007; Hoben, 2006; McDonald, 2004) who found that very few participants had attended any formal professional development for ATs. Instead, the ATs made reference to various forms of professional development where they had used aspects of knowledge gained to influence the way they mentored student teachers. Professional development included courses aimed at developing mentoring, such as leadership courses run through professional development providers within the education sector, or using a whole school approach to observing others during whole school professional development to inform their practice.

With such a range of professional development opportunities available, it was interesting to note that the two most common methods of learning to mentor described by the participants were not through 'professional development' courses or papers, but instead were experiential. They were almost entirely influenced by their own personal experiences of being mentored as a student or as a beginning teacher, or through an 'on the job' approach where skills were learnt as they went whilst in the role. In both these instances, experiences, whether positive or negative, that had an impact on their practice either as mentees or mentors, were later recreated or cautiously avoided.

What this highlights is the significant impact that an AT's professional or personal background and experiences has on the way that they mentor others, helping to define and shape their practice. If this is the case then ITE providers face the challenge of finding ways to ensure that their STs, who will undoubtedly be their future mentors, receive high quality experiences as mentees while on Professional Practice placements if they are to go on to

share with the next generation of STs, and more importantly the next generation of mentors.

### Significance of these findings

What most studies have identified, and is confirmed by my research, is that this method of learning how to mentor can be problematic for those who have not experienced 'high quality' mentoring themselves. As Cameron, Lovett, & Garvey Berger (2007) found of the mentoring experiences of a group of newly qualified teachers, many of the teachers who had received negative mentoring experiences had gone on to become mentors themselves and "sadly, only a small number (have) had additional professional development to equip them for these roles" (p. 36). This study emphasises the findings of my study; without the proper preparation mentoring is often based on assumptions rather than evidence and can be haphazard and partial. Cameron et al (2007) suggested that, without any compulsory formal training for the role, those associates who had not received their own 'high quality' mentoring experiences were left to rely on their negative experiences to inform their practice, and therefore were potentially passing on undesirable mentoring practices.

These findings also highlight just how varied ATs' knowledge can be. No two experiences were the same or based upon the same theories, models or understandings of mentoring, a scenario which may be replicated by other ATs. With this in mind then, we would expect that the mentoring experiences STs are receiving on Professional Practice placements to be as varied and as ranging in quality or theoretical underpinnings as our associates' knowledge bases, and hence limited by the experiences of our ATs as mentees. Lovett (2002) suggests that "adults bring a variety of pertinent backgrounds to their learning. These include

personal factors such as knowledge, academic experiences and qualifications, level of intrinsic motivation and attitude towards learning, and the impact of previous learning experiences” (p. 71). All of these influences have an impact on the way we mentor.

As I discussed in chapter two, much of the research into the mentoring of student and beginning teachers suggests that learning about the role, in the form of professional development, is a key aspect of ‘successful’ mentoring, and makes recommendations for the introduction of professional development for mentors (Hoben, 2006; Hobson et al., 2009; Hope, 1999). Villani (2002) argued that “mentors are best able to do their work when they explicitly learn about their roles”(p. 14). Yet there are several issues and challenges regarding the introduction or requirement for compulsory professional development for ATs, as discussed in chapter two. The high level of competition amongst ITE providers to secure sufficient placements has made providers reluctant to place too many requirements on potential ATs for fear that there would not be enough placements to host their students (Hoben, 2006). As Hoben (2006) found:

The pressure for practicum places for students means that the university is reluctant to be seen to be ‘too pushy’ or demanding of coordinators and associates lest schools decline to accept their pre-service teachers (p. 291).

If universities were to introduce compulsory professional development for ATs then this could potentially have a detrimental effect on the number of associates willing to host.

I suggest that the challenge then is for ITE providers to develop professional development opportunities that are achievable or manageable for potential ATs. As we have seen, there is reluctance for ATs to attend whole day courses already on offer through the ITE institutions.



This reluctance is partially due to the costs associated with attending the courses both in terms of time out of class away from the teaching of already busy classroom programmes and a demanding curriculum, as well as the financial costs associated with attending, such as course costs, travel costs as well as paying for relievers to cover classes.

In order to make professional development more easily accessible for ATs, I suggest that one solution could be to take the training to them. This could occur through a 'cluster school' approach where several local schools come together to participate in the professional development on site at a time that is convenient to the schools and teachers involved. This approach would also support my earlier suggestion regarding the delivery of face to face communication surrounding Professional Practice requirements to ATs. The dual purpose of these meetings would go some way to alleviate some of the financial costs associated.

Another possible solution would be to provide new ATs with release time to attend professional development. This method however, would require significant levels of financial support from the ITE provider in the form of release teacher funding.

Both of these suggestions would involve a significant amount of expenditure on behalf of the ITE provider, both in terms of money and time. What is clear, however, is that there needs to be an increased emphasis placed on making professional development more easily accessible to ATs, allowing them to be more skilled and better prepared to support the learning of our STs, which will ultimately lead to better outcomes for our children.

Recently the New Zealand Teachers' Council has released to schools the "Professional learning journeys. Guidelines for induction and mentoring and mentor teachers handbook"

(New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011). This is a set of guidelines that were formed based on the findings of research conducted into the induction of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching (Cameron, Dingle et al., 2007). These guidelines are aimed at supporting the induction and mentoring of beginning teachers and their mentors. With there being several similarities between the mentoring of BTs and STs, I would suggest that this could be a good starting place for ITE providers to establish their own guidelines for the mentoring of student teachers.

Although these views are limited to the experiences and opinions expressed by my participants, I would suggest also that, based on other literature in this area as discussed earlier in this chapter, there are other associate teachers and student teachers who share similar views and have had experiences reminiscent of these participants. Valuable lessons can be learnt from these participants to ensure that our associate teachers are well informed about their role and have had sufficient professional development made available to them to support them in their role ensuring that they are 'successful' associate teachers.

## **Becoming a Professional through Practice – Teaching the Student Teacher**

This section discusses the second conceptual theme, *Becoming a professional through practice – Teaching the student teacher*, outlining what it is that associate teachers do as mentors, to 'teach' student teachers how to be classroom teachers. These are the tasks, techniques or models that ATs use to guide student teachers, which are affiliated with teaching children and running a classroom.

I have organised the discussion into three areas, as can be seen below in *Table 3*. These are: agreements in perspectives, the associate teachers' perspectives, and the student teachers' perspectives. These areas allow me to address my main research question – *Are associate teachers' beliefs about what makes them successful aligned with the beliefs of student teachers?* They also allow me to address two of my research sub-questions – *What specific tasks, techniques or models do associate teachers find successful when working with student teachers?*, and *What specific tasks, techniques or models that associates teachers use do student teachers find have a positive impact on their practice?*

Initially I discuss certain aspects of this conceptual theme, suggesting areas where the ATs and STs agreed, showing how the two perspectives aligned in this area. I then look at the areas highlighted by the perspectives of the ATs. Finally I discuss the areas specific to the perspectives of the STs. This comparison highlights the similarities and differences in the perspectives of my two groups of participants.

**Table 3 – Summary of AT and ST perspectives on tasks, techniques and models used to mentor**

<b>What specific tasks, techniques or models positively impact student teachers practice?</b>		
<b>Agreements in perspectives</b>	<b>Associate teachers' perspectives</b>	<b>Student teachers' perspectives</b>
<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written or verbal feedback needs to contain a balance of positive and negative comments</li> <li>• Written or verbal feedback needs to contain feed forward</li> <li>• Feedback should be delivered as soon as possible after the observation</li> <li>• Regular, ongoing, informal communication was the most beneficial</li> <li>• Formal scheduled meetings were only required if effective ongoing communication was not established</li> </ul> <p>Modelling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate teachers should first model teaching tasks and strategies that they wanted students to emulate</li> <li>• Vocalising when modelling had the most significant impact on student teacher learning</li> </ul> <p>Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a predetermined focus</li> <li>• Focus should be guided by the student teacher</li> </ul>	<p>Observations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation format was modified including making it digital and modifying to suit the needs of the associate and student teacher</li> </ul> <p>Student teacher led learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student teacher to lead the feedback sessions</li> <li>• Effective use of questioning to prompt student led learning</li> </ul>	<p>Handing over control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate teachers' ability to effectively hand over some of the control of the class to the student teacher.</li> </ul> <p>Associate teachers looking at student planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting students with their planning</li> <li>• Regular viewing of planning</li> <li>• Providing feedback on planning</li> </ul> <p>Sharing resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guiding students on which resources to use</li> <li>• Showing students where the resources are kept</li> </ul>

## **Agreements in Perspectives**

### ***Are associate teachers' beliefs about what makes them successful aligned with the beliefs of student teachers?***

There were several areas within this conceptual theme where a level of agreement was apparent between the two groups of participants. These areas include: aspects of establishing communication, modelling, and observations. This suggests that there is some alignment in the perspectives of what makes associate teachers 'successful' mentors.

The first area where perspectives were aligned was within the very broad area of communication. Communication came across as the most commonly referred to factor contributing towards 'successful' mentoring amongst participants, both from the perspective of the ATs and the STs. This highlights the important role that good communication plays when mentoring others. The term itself is one that is very problematic as it is such a vast term that covers many aspects associated to mentoring, and was a term that was used by participants to cover several skill sets associated to teaching and mentoring. Assumptions were given by participants of an agreed understanding of the term, yet their understandings were often varied and never explained in great detail, nor was the term fully unpacked. However, there were elements of communication that were agreed upon by participants. Participants identified that there were two areas of communication that they felt contributed to the successfulness of ATs. These were the way feedback was delivered and the communication surrounding meetings.

When communicating in the form of either written or verbal feedback post observations, both groups of participants agreed that there were three key elements that needed to be

included. The first of these was the need for the inclusion of both positive and negative (points for development) comments within the feedback. ATs and STs in this study felt that it was of equal importance for STs to hear what they were doing well, along with receiving the comments regarding the areas where improvements needed to be made, which was often a substantial part of the feedback given. In the participants' view, effective feedback from ATs provided a balance of both types of comments. My findings parallel those of McDonald (2009b) who also found that "associate teachers who gave regular and frequent feedback which was both constructive and positive" (p. 43) were more frequently viewed by student teachers as contributing towards establishing a positive placement.

Including positive comments in feedback gave STs recognition for what they achieved, highlighting aspects where there was an opportunity to take pride in their work and opportunities to celebrate their successes with their mentors. Identifying positives also helped students to develop a positive sense of identity as a 'teacher'. These findings are supported by those of Zembylas (2003), who states "that identity is linked to the recognition by others, therefore, if teachers are denied recognition, this may cause them to internalize a demeaning image of themselves"(p. 223). Giving STs recognition for what they have done well, in the form of written feedback, where positive aspects of their practice are highlighted alongside the points for development, contributes to a positive sense of self worth, feelings of satisfaction, or of accomplishment, all of which contribute to establishing a positive identity of themselves as a 'teacher'.

The second key element that participants felt needed to be included within feedback was feed forward. Participants identified that feed forward provided STs with a focus for future

development and often guided them on subsequent lessons or observations. This study added to the findings of McDonald (2009b) who suggested that including feed forward within written feedback was “a powerful tool for looking back on teaching practice, and forward into planning learning experiences” (p. 26). Participants of this study identified feed forward as being most useful when it complemented the areas for development that were mentioned earlier. Both the ATs and STs felt that when a student was made aware of areas where improvements were needed to be made, it was most beneficial when information on ‘how to’ improve were clear and direct.

Participants’ perspectives also aligned on the topic of the timing of the delivery, the third key element required for successful feedback. The time when feedback was delivered to STs, post observations, was identified as being an important aspect for ATs to consider. Participants felt that ‘successful’ associates ensured feedback was given as close to observations as possible, as then it had the most significant impact on ST learning. When feedback was delivered immediately after an observation, while the lesson was still fresh in the minds of both the observer and the person being observed, ideas, details, and suggestions were more readily recalled and more applicable to the current situation. These findings support those of McDonald (2009b) who claimed that “some student teachers said that it (feedback) should be given immediately or as soon as possible after teaching” (p. 26). However, her research did not take into account the likelihood of this being achieved. Within this research participants acknowledged that this was not often the reality, nor was it always possible to achieve. This was due to the busy nature of teaching and the associates’ other commitments, not only as classroom teachers but often as teachers with

additional responsibilities within the school. Delivering feedback at a time that was convenient to them was more often the reality.

In summary then, this study found that both associate teachers and student teachers agreed that when communicating in the form of written or verbal feedback, 'successful' associate teachers were those that included a balance of positive and negative points (points for development), as well as feed forward that was accompanied with some practical advice. Participants also considered the timing of the delivery of feedback as an important aspect, ensuring that it was delivered as soon as possible after the completion of the observation. If these three key elements were addressed then participants identified that feedback would have the most significant impact on the learning and development of STs. This was not always easy, however. As Hoben (2006) states "providing constructive feedback to pre-service teachers is challenging and requires an understanding of the goals for the practicum, the objectives for the lesson observed, and some understanding of how to deliver feedback" (p. 181). The findings of this research support those of Hoben (2006) which suggests that training in providing feedback, in the form of conducting learning conversations (Timperley, 2001), would enhance the outcomes of ST learning and ultimately the learning of children in the classrooms.

The second area of communication where the perceptions of both groups aligned concerned the type of meetings that were required as part of 'successful' mentoring. Most participants suggested that the ongoing day to day conversations that occurred (also referred to in chapter four as informal meetings) as part of the mentoring relationship were a more beneficial form of communication than that which occurred within the scheduled or



more formalised meetings. Regular communication in the form of ongoing conversations, informal 'chats', or 'catch ups' before or after school were viewed as being the most effective form of communication, as they addressed any questions or concerns with a 'here and now' approach. This ensured that communication was relevant to what was going on at that particular time, rather than waiting until a meeting was scheduled when important learning opportunities were often missed or forgotten. Such regular informal communication channels also allowed for greater levels of ST learning as advice could be acted upon and areas of concern addressed immediately. Hoben's (2006) doctoral study of STs working alongside ATs in a secondary setting, also found that although some ATs did not make a "fixed time each week to meet" their mentoring approach was still considered by the student teachers to be of 'high quality' if they made themselves "very accessible" allowing for many opportunities to talk together during the practicum (Hoben, 2006, p. 263). What was not stated by Hoben (2006) and is key to remember, however, is that this is only applicable if effective and ongoing communications are established between the mentor and the mentee in the first place. This form of communication relies heavily upon the ability of the AT and the ST to develop a positive working relationship where regular and ongoing communication takes place. If this does not occur, or the associate or student teacher is unable to engage in this form of communication, then regular scheduled meetings are still required, and are the preferred form of communication in these instances. As I mentioned earlier in chapter four, there appears to be a significant correlation between the effectiveness of communication and the type of meetings that were required by the ST. In other words, the better the AT was at establishing ongoing informal communication the less significant the need was for regular formal meetings.

Perspectives were also aligned concerning modelling. Most participants identified that ATs' use of modelling as a key strategy had a significant and positive impact on the STs' practice when learning new concepts. In particular, the student teachers found that associates vocalising their thought processes while explicitly modelling the actions was most useful. Associate teachers 'thinking aloud' as described by Loughran (2006), provides a valuable way for STs to see into the ATs' practice. This is because hearing the thoughts of the associate at that time provides 'access into their heads', allowing them to gain a better understanding of the thinking that formed the foundation of their actions.

Explicitly modelling, vocalising, and carefully explaining the steps also gave STs a clearer understanding of what the ATs were doing and their intentions. This allowed them to more easily emulate actions when using them in their own lessons. This form of modelling however, does not come without its complications. As Loughran (2006) explains, "choosing an appropriate time to explain that I would be 'thinking out loud' and (the) purpose for doing so was important" (p. 47) so that the ST and the class would know what was occurring. Also having "trust in the class" and knowing that they would not see this form of behaviour as "peculiar rather than purposeful" (Loughran, 2006, p. 47) was pertinent if this strategy was to be effective. Although seen as beneficial for the STs, this form of modelling is not always able to be used, as it is reliant on cooperation and understanding from the class as well as the right conditions being present during lessons.

The final aspect agreed upon by both groups of what associate teacher's do that makes them 'successful' concerned observations. Participants of this study identified that beneficial observations had to have a clear, predetermined focus decided upon prior to the

observation which was guided by the ST. However, this area was not as significant as the two other areas previously mentioned.

## **Associate Teachers' Perspectives**

### ***What specific tasks, techniques or models do associate teachers find successful when working with student teachers?***

Although perceptions were aligned in some areas, there were also areas where associate teachers held very different perspectives from those of the student teachers, as can be seen in *Table 3*. The most significant of these was in the area of observation notes and how these were recorded by the AT.

Although the ITE provider supplied ATs with a book that included several carbon copies of an observation form to complete when conducting observations, two of the AT participants identified that they used their own format, where they had modified and adapted the form to suit themselves. For one participant having her own format, saved to her computer, meant that she could type up her observation notes, her preferred method of recording. As well as the format being made digital, it was also modifiable by participants in terms of the contents of the notes. These two ATs preferred to change the layout of the observation form so that it suited the way that they wanted to present the contents of feedback to their STs.

Having a digital format for the observation forms also meant that ATs were not bound by the number of formats that were provided in the book. This allowed for observations to be completed more frequently, an aspect mentioned by three of the ATs as supporting the learning of the STs. The ability and flexibility for ATs to do frequent observations, more than

what was required, and often unplanned, were identified by ATs as being of importance to 'successful' mentoring. With the increasing levels of reliance on technology within the classroom, this appears to be a natural progression for the observation format and a path that ITE providers should consider taking.

### Significance of these findings

Findings would suggest that there needs to be the opportunity for a discussion to take place between the ITE provider and current ATs regarding the content of feedback forms and observation notes. A level of renegotiation needs to take place in order to best meet the needs of the different models that ATs use when conducting observations and feedback, whilst still maintaining high quality outcomes that fulfil the expectations of the ITE provider and meet course requirements, ensuring that high level learning is occurring. Once again this calls for more dialogue to occur between ITE providers and ATs, and for a need for ITE providers to reach out and ask for guidance from those who are using their models and formats.

A second component identified by the ATs was the ability for associate teachers to step back to let the STs lead some of their learning. For the ATs this meant allowing the STs to lead some of the feedback sessions by sharing their own thoughts on what went well or areas that needed development prior to the AT speaking. This also included the use of effective questioning to engage the ST as the learner, and the ability of the associate to give the student a level of choice, when it came to some of the decision making around what they were going to teach, the resources they were to use, as well as the focus for observations (as mentioned earlier). These findings parallel McDonald (2004) who also found that there

had been a “move over recent years from a teacher-dominated approach by associate teachers to a more learner-dominated approach of enquiry and investigation by student teachers” (p. 85). McDonald’s (2004) report into effective mentoring of student teachers identified that this shift in approaches had led to associate teachers adopting a “collaborative, problem solving” approach where the focus was on “joint decision making” rather than the associate teacher being “the problem-solver, decision maker and goal setter” (McDonald, 2004, p. 85).

Although the ATs of this study identified these skills as important when mentoring student teachers, Hoben (2006) would argue that the level to which the AT would ‘step back’ relies heavily on the AT’s awareness of the student teacher’s developmental stage in their ITE programme and in terms of their individual professional growth. She suggests that;

The key to successful mentoring rests on the ability of the mentor to align his or her style of mentoring with the stage of development that the pre-service teacher appears to have reached and to change and modify that style as the pre-service teacher develops both in confidence and competence (Hoben, 2006, p. 249).

Hoben (2006) also suggests that as STs move through their ITE training they require different levels of support, so the ATs’ mentoring model or stance would be heavily dependent on the level of support required by the ST at that time.

#### Significance of these findings

This ability to adapt and change mentoring stances or approaches would require a significant level of knowledge or understanding of the many different models of mentoring or mentoring stances on behalf of the associate teacher, as well as a heightened awareness

of the learning needs of the student teachers. Without adequate knowledge or training in this area, I would suggest that many ATs would not have the ability to successfully cater to the specific mentoring needs of the student teacher at that time. Hoben (2006) too found that the absence of training in mentoring meant that the ATs used models of mentoring that did not necessarily suit the STs' needs, resulting in 'low quality' experiences for the latter. As discussed in section one of this chapter, I suggest that professional development that included a focus on mentoring models would once again support ATs to work more successfully with STs as well as enhancing their understanding of their learning needs.

### **Student Teachers' Perspectives**

***What specific tasks, techniques or models that associates teachers use do student teachers find have a positive impact on their practice?***

The perspectives of the student teachers differed significantly from those of the associate teachers in three key areas. Where the ATs identified the use of observation notes and forms as well as the ability to let the STs lead some of their learning as significant aspects of 'successful' mentoring, the STs tended to be more focused on some of the practical day-to-day tasks. These included tasks associated with teaching the children and getting up in front of the class, and with establishing themselves as a 'teacher'. These included also, the ability of the AT to hand over control of their class, their willingness to share resources, and also to look at the ST's planning.

The practical tasks of sharing resources and viewing and commenting on ST planning were considered important by the STs in this study. However, the task where the two groups contrasted the most concerned that of handing over control. All STs in this study identified

that 'successful' ATs were those who were able to step back and let them assume control and management of the class for the period of time that they were teaching. This autonomy helped to establish the student teacher as a 'teacher' and contributed towards their positive sense of identity (Zembylas, 2003), an important aspect of a developing teacher. However, there were very conflicting opinions regarding this. Although they felt there were times when this was appropriate, two ATs expressed concerns with handing over management to STs who did not have the necessary skills or strategies to successfully manage the class. McDonald's (2004) study of effective mentoring found similar concerns "about having to hand over (their) class to a student teacher and then have him/her lose control and management of it" (p. 90). In these instances regaining control or picking up and re-teaching lessons that were taught incorrectly or inadequately were viewed as creating more work for associates. The cost of losing the class outweighed the cost of not handing over control and allowing student teachers those experiences.

Although student teachers expect to have these experiences, it is currently up to the professional judgement of the associate teacher to ensure that they are managed correctly ensuring that the ST has the necessary skills and knowledge to do so successfully.

#### Significance of these findings

I suggest that there needs to be clarity for both parties surrounding the prerequisites required to assume full control, and the conditions under which an AT may choose to resume management. STs need to be confident in the knowledge that if they possess the skills and attitudes required, then they will be given the opportunity to have full control of the class, just as ATs need to be confident in the fact that they will be supported if they

judge the ST not to be 'adequately prepared' to do so. Once again this would require there to be honest and clear communication established between all parties involved in the placement, including the Professional Practice lecturers. The ITE provider would need to ensure that STs were adequately informed about prerequisites and felt supported, and that there was a level of ongoing communication between ATs and Professional Practice lecturers if a problem was to arise, ensuring that ATs felt supported in the decision making surrounding resuming control of the class.

## **Building Professional Relationships**

This section discusses the third conceptual theme of *building professional relationships*, and describes the dispositions that associate teachers need to possess to make them successful. It also looks at the factors that promote effective mentoring relationships.

For the purpose of this section I have organised the discussion into two main areas; dispositions both groups agree on, and dispositions from an associate teachers' and student teachers' perspectives (as summarised in *Table 4*). These areas allowed me to address my two main research questions – *What makes a 'successful' associate teacher?* and *Are associate teachers' beliefs about what makes them successful aligned with the beliefs of student teachers?*

Initially, I discuss the dispositions that I am suggesting the associate teachers and student teachers are in agreement over. I then examine and highlight any differences in their views separately.



**Table 4 –Summary of AT and ST perspectives on dispositions of a mentor**

<b>What dispositions contribute to success as an associate teacher?</b>		
<b>Agreements in perspectives</b>	<b>Associate teachers’ perspectives</b>	<b>Student teachers’ perspectives</b>
Ability to establish a positive working relationship Good communicator Empathetic Approachable Respectful Professional	Positive Honest Organised	Supportive Friendly, warm and welcoming Involved Non judgemental Accommodating

***What makes a ‘successful’ associate teacher?***

One of the dominant messages conveyed by the participants interviewed for this project was the need for there to be a positive working relationship established before ‘successful’ mentoring could occur. Much research has been conducted into the importance of establishing a positive working relationship between mentors and the mentees (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; McDonald, 2009b), in this case the ATs and the STs. As Ferrier-Kerr (2009) states, “a professional relationship comprises a kind of reciprocal commitment to each other’s development and professional learning” (p. 790). This professional commitment can be portrayed through the interactions as well as the actions of the associate and student teachers, and is enhanced by the AT exhibiting certain dispositions or qualities when working with STs.

Participants in this project identified several qualities associated to ‘successful’ ATs (Table 4). Five of these dispositions were identified by both groups of participants; these included being a good communicator, empathetic, approachable, respectful and professional.

These dispositions align with one of the mentoring roles that Schein (1978) suggests a mentor can adopt, that of the “positive role model” (p. 178). This model of mentoring establishes the AT as the ‘positive role model’ in this relationship. As a ‘positive role model’ the mentor “sets a good example” (Schein, 1978, p. 178) for the mentee, in this instance by being a good communicator, empathetic, approachable, respectful, and professional, all qualities that the ST may strive to possess as teachers themselves.

The most significant of these qualities was that of demonstrating clear interpersonal skills, with all participants making some reference to this during their interviews. Participants identified that ‘successful’ ATs were those who were able to effectively communicate important as well as difficult messages to their STs, in a way that was seen as being positive and supportive of the ST’s learning. These findings support those of McDonald (2009b) who found that the ability to be a good communicator contributed significantly towards establishing a positive working relationship – one in which “open and frank communication, where constructive criticism can be given and received more easily” occurred between STs and ATs, a vital aspect in supporting the development and learning of the ST. These findings also support those of a study of beginning teachers and their mentors conducted by Lovett and Sinclair (2005), who rated good communication skills as one of the four most important qualities for a mentor to possess.

As well as the need for associates to be good communicators, the ability to convey a sense of empathy towards their student teachers was also expressed by both groups of participants. Zembylas (2003) argues that “empathy allows us to understand the emotions of other individuals. For it is the presence of our emotions that we bring in mind as we try to

understand others' emotions" (p. 230). Associate teachers demonstrating empathy allowed for there to be a sense of understanding fostered in the relationship, leading to a personal connection between the AT and the ST. This also contributed to the establishment of a positive working relationship. Ferrier-Kerr (2009) suggested that:

A personal connection can empower both the AT and the ST in the practicum, providing the foundation on which they can establish and sustain a sound professional relationship and develop greater understanding of their own and each other's beliefs (p. 792).

Although both groups identified empathy, it emerged as being of greater importance for STs. Interestingly, this supports the findings of Ferrier-Kerr (2009) who stated that "while identified as important by associate teachers, it was perhaps more so for the student teachers" (p. 792).

***Are associate teachers' beliefs about what makes them successful aligned with the beliefs of student teachers?***

As well as there being a level of agreement when it came to dispositions that supported a positive working relationship, there was also a degree of discrepancy between the two groups of participants. Along with the dispositions described above, the ATs also highlighted the importance of 'successful' mentors being positive, honest and organised. It is interesting to note that these dispositions are all very 'professional' dispositions associated with the skills of teaching.

There are many different models of mentoring described within the literature each of which requires mentors to possess a set of specific skills and dispositions. These particular

dispositions align with the 'situated apprentice' approach to mentoring of Wang and Odell (2002), discussed in chapter 2, where the approach suggests that mentors provide "practical teaching knowledge and knowledge of resources, mentors need to demonstrate and model teaching, give advice and suggestions when novices are struggling with immediate problems" (p. 496) all very practical aspects of mentoring. They also fall into Schein's (1978) role of the mentor as a "teacher, coach, or trainer" who imparts knowledge and teaches the mentee "how to do things" (p. 178).

These dispositions differ significantly from those deemed important by student teachers. In this instance, the STs highlighted the importance of interpersonal skills and the need for ATs to be supportive, friendly, warm and welcoming, involved, non judgemental, and accommodating. These dispositions were also accompanied by ATs demonstrating a passion for teaching and a willingness to be an AT. These dispositions are more aligned with the 'emotional' aspects of mentoring (Zembylas, 2003), and with the 'humanistic perspective' (Wang & Odell, 2002) of teacher learning, which suggests that rather than focusing on learning content, the student teacher's

competence in relating to the environment is greatly affected by the stance that they take toward themselves...thus it is assumed that by placing the learner at the centre and paying attention to the development of self-esteem, it is possible to enhance the learning of specific content as well as personal development (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 493).

Schein (1978) identifies this role of a mentor as that of “protector (mother hen)” (p. 178). If a mentor is to take on this role then they protect the mentee, watching over them and allowing them to make mistakes in order to learn.

These distinct differences between the two groups’ perspectives support the findings of Ferrier-Kerr (2009) who stated that “associate teachers were more focused on the student teacher’s professional needs and the need for them to learn as much as possible in the practicum, the student teachers more often identified needs that were specifically linked to personal relationships” (p. 792).

#### Significance of these findings

Responses of the participants in this study suggest that associate teachers do need to possess certain dispositions and attributes that are conducive to establishing a positive working relationship as a mentor. However, there is a level of discrepancy between what ATs think these attributes should be and what the STs in this group see as vital to possess. Although being a good communicator and demonstrating empathy were considered important by both groups of participants, along with being approachable, respectful and professional, this is where the alignment in perspectives ended. The ATs then had a very ‘practical’ approach to identifying important dispositions, whereas STs had a more ‘emotional’ approach.

This level of discrepancy suggests that there needs to be a balance established between the two perspectives. While ‘successful’ associate teachers need to continue to be practical in their approach to mentoring as suggested by the ‘situated apprentice’ approach (Wang & Odell, 2002) or the “teacher, coach, or trainer” role of mentoring (Schein, 1978), this study

would suggest that they might also need to adopt more elements of 'humanistic approach' (Wang & Odell, 2002) in some cases, showing a 'nurturing' side and providing "whatever personal support novices need" (p. 494).

## Chapter Six: Conclusions and Implications

### Introduction

This study investigated associate teachers' and student teachers' perspectives of 'successful' mentoring. It aimed to use semi-structured interviews to develop an understanding of how ATs, who had been identified as being 'successful', viewed their role. It identified what it was that ATs specifically did that they felt made them 'successful' when mentoring STs. It then compared these perspectives with the perspectives of a group of student teachers. The aim of the comparison was to establish any agreements or contradictions between the ATs' and the STs' perspectives about 'successful' associate teachers in order to enable initial teacher education institutions to align the way they informed the practice of associate teachers and student teachers in the future. An additional aim was to establish knowledge of particular professional development that the ATs of this study felt positively impacted their practice as mentors.

Four 'successful' associate teachers, as identified by their visiting lecturers from within the University of Canterbury, College of Education, and five student teachers who were enrolled at the same university in one of the primary programmes at the time of the study, were interviewed regarding their perspectives. The data collected was analysed using a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000) and revealed three conceptual themes as being relevant to 'successful' mentoring of student teachers: Acquiring professional knowledge, Becoming a professional through practice – Teaching the student teacher, and Building professional relationships.

What became apparent through this study was the conclusion that there were many excellent examples of 'successful' associate teachers who were currently mentoring student teachers, using a variety of knowledge, skills and strategies to do so. Although many of these skills and strategies were identified as being required by 'successful' associates by both groups of participants, there were still however, a number of areas of mentoring where the perceptions of ATs differed significantly to those of the STs.

It is my hope that the findings of this study will help to inform initial teacher education programme providers, supporting them with the continued development or enhancement of professional development opportunities for ATs, regarding the important role of mentoring. This will in turn hopefully result in improved outcomes for STs in the future.

### **Towards Successful Mentoring and the Implications for Associate Teachers and Initial Teacher Education Providers.**

Although there have been many studies into mentoring conducted both nationally and internationally, to date very few of those have focused on the unique mentoring relationship established between the associate teacher and the student teacher in an initial teacher education primary setting. The literature surrounding mentoring often focuses on providing mentors with a range of models to base their practice on, or provides descriptions of mentoring stances that mentors can adopt. All of these are aimed at supporting the mentors in their roles. Yet this study identified that it is not these models or stances provided in the literature that guide our ATs in their roles as mentors. It is in fact their own personal experiences of being mentored that are the guiding light for the way that these ATs



mentored others. With this in mind, then it is vital that ITE providers do their best to ensure that the experiences that STs have on Professional Practice placements are positive and are examples of good mentoring practices that lead to 'successful' outcomes for both the student teachers and the children. Having these positive experiences will in turn ensure that these student teachers as our future associates, go on to provide their own mentees with experiences of a similar quality.

This study revealed that 'successful' mentoring is directly concerned with the ability of the AT to establish positive relationships with student teachers. This supports the findings of Cameron et al. (2007) who identified that mentees were more receptive to the mentoring relationship if mentors demonstrated certain dispositions, however, not all of the factors that contributed to the establishment of this relationship were identified. This study identified that positive relationships are those built around good communication, mutual respect, empathy, and a sense of professionalism. For the STs however, the ability to establish a positive relationship also focused on the presence of emotional characteristics, where feelings of being welcomed and supported, as well as identifying ATs as being friendly, showing a passion for teaching, and displaying a willingness to be in the role of associate all featured significantly. The need for an 'emotional' element to be present in the mentoring relationship is reflective of the learning needs of the ST at this stage in their career. For the ATs, 'successful' mentoring was more focused around the practical aspects of mentoring, being organised, honest and positive towards the ST.

The requirement for either emotional or practical elements to be present in the working relationship highlights the different learning needs and requirements from the relationship

of the expert and the novice. The STs are still at a place in their careers where feelings of safety, inclusion, and fitting in are of the greatest importance, where, for the more experienced teacher, the focus shifts to the learning that occurs as a result of the relationship. It also demonstrates the importance of developing a shared understanding between the AT and the ST, where both the mentors and mentees have an understanding and are acutely aware of each other's needs and expectations of the relationship. Cameron, Lovett et al. (2007) identified that the mentoring of BTs was also more successful when mentors were acutely aware of the developmental needs of the BTs. This highlights some of the similarities between the mentoring needs of STs and BTs. To ensure that a positive working relationship can be established then there must be a way developed by ITE providers to help support and foster this shared understanding between the two invested parties so that the delicate balance that is required can be achieved.

Central to the notion of developing a positive relationship and to 'successful' mentoring is the concept of communication. This is a term referred to throughout this study and one that is inter-linked in several key areas of the findings, therefore playing a very significant role in the establishment of ATs as 'successful' mentors. The concept of communication is one that can have several meanings and understanding attached to it. The perceptions surrounding 'successful' mentoring identified within this study nearly always linked back to the establishment of effective communication on one of two levels; communication that occurred between the ITE provider and the AT, and that which occurred between the AT and the ST. These two levels demonstrate just how pivotal effective communication between all parties involved in the Professional Practice placement is to 'successful' mentoring.

The first of these is the communication that occurs between the ITE provider and the host school or associate teacher. The findings of this study indicated the need for there to be provisions for increased levels of communication, including reviewing the way that important information is currently shared with ATs, and providing accessible and ongoing face to face communication between the ITE provider and the AT. Increased communication would contribute to greater levels of clarity around the ITE providers' expectations of ATs, and a shared understanding of course requirements, or of Professional Practice placement needs. As well as clarity for ATs, it would also allow the ITE provider to have a greater sense of understanding surrounding those expectations held by the ATs of the ITE provider and of the ST. For this to occur there needs to be greater emphasis placed on providing ATs and ITE providers with opportunities to come together, share information, and establish a collaborative approach to support student teachers.

This study supports the findings of Hoben (2006) who suggests that "universities must embrace a new way of working in partnership with school based teachers if they want them to mentor pre-service teachers" (p. 160) and will hopefully encourage ITE providers to examine their current methods for informing associate teachers of the information that they require, as well as encourage them to examine how they seek to understand what it is that the ATs require from them as the provider. It may also influence ITE providers to rethink the way that they interact with ATs and to consider new ways to ensure that all parties are well informed and have a shared understanding. This ability to foster a shared understanding and a collaborative approach to mentoring would in turn contribute to ensuring that Professional Practice placements were positive experiences for all involved,

providing improved outcomes for STs, and ultimately improved outcomes for the children in the classrooms.

Participants felt that 'successful' associate teachers also demonstrated the ability to communicate effectively with the student teacher. This communication occurred in several forms: written and verbal, formal and informal. In particular, participants identified that ATs needed to possess the skills and strategies to effectively communicate important messages that supported the ST's learning and professional development through their observations, feedback, and modelling. Effective communication in the form of regular feedback and informal 'chats' was also identified as leading to a reduction in the need for regular meetings, as the ST's learning and development, as well as any questions or concerns, were addressed as they occurred. For this to be achievable ATs need professional opportunities to develop communication skills applicable to all of these situations.

All of the skills, characteristics and tasks associated with 'successful' mentoring are best learnt through professional development opportunities that are specifically designed and targeted at ATs working with STs. Some ITE providers have already taken initial steps to address the development and support of the skills associated with 'successful' mentoring, by offering professional development opportunities. These have been in the form of workshops, courses, or one off meetings located within the ITE institution. The concern that remains, however, is that these opportunities are not easily accessible to the majority of ATs. There is a need for this support to be extended and developed beyond the current form, making professional development more readily accessible to a greater proportion of

those experienced teachers who are considering taking on the role, or are already acting in the role, of an associate teacher.

Recently findings of Learning to Teach (Cameron, Dingle et al., 2007), a research project into the mentoring and induction of beginning teachers, has led to the creation and development of Guidelines for Induction and Mentoring and Mentor Teachers (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011). These guidelines are an attempt to get a national approach and understanding of mentoring and support a shift of “policy and practices towards an ‘educative mentoring’ approach” (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011). The purpose of these guidelines is to support “a shift away from a view of induction as ‘advice and guidance’ to one of skilled facilitation of ‘learning conversations’ focusing on evidence of teachers’ practice”(New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011). At a time in education when guidelines aimed at supporting the development of ‘successful’ mentoring practices of beginning teachers have just recently been released to schools, it would appear that now is the time to address the mentoring of student teachers. I would suggest that synergies can be made between the mentoring of beginning and student teachers and that important lessons can be learnt from the introduction of these guidelines, perhaps using them as a starting place for the development of a similar set of guidelines for ATs.

There are several parallels between the findings of this research and those of research previously conducted into the area of mentoring students or beginning teachers. Much of the historical research suggests that mentors need to explicitly learn about their role if they are to be ‘successful’ and calls for there to be a review into the professional development opportunities available to teachers acting as mentors. Yet the issues surrounding

professional development for associate teachers still remain, even decades on. The same concerns regarding the need to provide accessible opportunities for professional development still have not been sufficiently addressed, and are once again supported by the findings of this study. This study suggests that the challenge lies with the ITE providers. If they are to ensure that our STs are receiving 'high quality' Professional Practice placement experiences that are supported by 'successful' mentors then it cannot be left to chance. Action needs to be taken by the ITE provider to ensure that the mentors they rely so heavily on to support their student teachers, have the skills, characteristics and knowledge required of a 'successful' associate teacher, similar to those referred to in this study.

## **Limitations**

This research was located within one of the many initial teacher education providers in New Zealand, drawing participants from those associate teachers who currently acted as hosts to students from this one provider. Student teacher participants were also limited to those who were enrolled at this ITE institution. Therefore these findings are limited to the perceptions and opinions of those affiliated to this ITE provider. Further research could be conducted drawing upon participants from within a range of ITE providers across New Zealand. This would establish if these findings are limited to the nature of this particular provider and how their Professional Practice placements are conducted. Though this study is limited to the perspectives and opinions of its participants, I have identified several links with national and international literature of the mentoring of beginning and student teachers.

The concept of communication was significantly indicated by all participants of this study. However, further research needs to be conducted in order to completely understand this very broad concept, in order to identify all possible meanings and understanding that can be attached, and what it specifically means and looks like to each of the associate teachers and the student teachers.

Reference was made to the Associate Teacher Guidelines during this study, however this was not a document that was explored in depth. I would suggest that further research needs to be conducted into these guidelines in order to establish the effectiveness of the content and how associate teachers interpret and use them to support their mentoring practices. This research could then support a review and potentially the redevelopment of these guidelines.

# **Appendices**

Appendix A: Associate Teacher Information Letter

Appendix B: Associate Teacher Guidelines

Appendix C: Associate Teacher Consent Form

Appendix D: Student Teacher Information Letter

Appendix E: Student Teacher Consent Form

Appendix F: Associate Teacher Semi Structured Interview Questions

Appendix G: Student Teacher Semi Structured Interview Questions



## Appendix A: Associate Teacher Information Letter

69 Gayhurst Rd

Dallington

8061

1 August 2011



### **Associate Teachers as Successful Mentors– Associate Teachers’ and Student Teachers’ Perspectives.**

#### **Information Sheet for Associate Teachers**

I am currently a Masters student at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. You have been identified by a lecturer at the College of Education as being an effective associate teacher. I am interested in finding out about your perspective of what makes you and your role as an associate teacher effective. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. If you agree to take part you will be asked to do the following:

- Return the completed consent letter to the address stated above, or email me a completed copy of the consent letter. By emailing me you will be providing me with your contact details and indicating your consent to be part of this study.
- Complete a short interview that focuses on your role as an Associate Teacher. I have attached a copy of the Associate Teacher Guidelines form the Associate Teacher Handbook. You will be asked about your perceptions of what makes your role effective in relation to the guidelines, with the aim of my research identifying best practice as an Associate Teacher. This will take approximately 45 minutes.
- This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of the transcription the interview transcription notes will be sent to you. Here you will have the chance to ensure that the transcription is correct and that you agree with everything that has been recorded.

Please note that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw, I will remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable. I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality

of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

All participants will receive a report on the study which may be used to inform future practice. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact either Lindsey Conner or Ronnie Davey at the College of Education, or the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me at the address stated above or email me a completed consent form at the above email address.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

Megan Murray

Telephone: +64 3 3856903

Email: [megcroucher@hotmail.com](mailto:megcroucher@hotmail.com)

## Appendix B: Associate Teacher Guidelines

### Associate Teacher Guidelines

- The student will need the opportunity early in the placement to observe the programme, routines, documentation, planning and organisation. Late in the placement opportunities may arise for observation in other classes and at other activities.
- The student must not be left responsible for a class without the associate teacher (or another staff member) present in a supervisory role. During full responsibility by the student, the associate teacher should be in the classroom frequently enough to be able to observe that the student's classroom programme and action is acceptable. Associate teachers should also make themselves available for teaching within the programmes as necessary, desired or planned for in negotiation with the student.
- **The needs of the children in the class remain paramount and must be taken into account when associate teachers allocate, monitor and evaluate teaching tasks undertaken by students. Should any concerns develop about a student's performance, contact should be made with the Professional Practice lecturer promptly.**
- **If full management by the student teacher is not maintaining high quality learning and teaching, the associate teacher should resume management for the class. Immediate contact should be made with the Professional Practice lecturer to implement appropriate strategies for the student to return to full management.**
- Each student is expected to complete the same playground and other duties as his/her associate teacher and to contribute to school-wide activities as seems appropriate. Time spent on any out-of-class activities (other than normal playground duty) by the student must not affect the quality of their classroom preparation and planning.
- During the times that Professional Practice lecturers are in school, associate teachers are encouraged to:
  - discuss the role of an associate teacher
  - seek advice and guidance about the role from the lecturer
  - clarify the documentation relating to Professional Practice
  - share any reflections of a general or specific nature.
- Assignments may request the students to "use the design process...". This terminology simply refers to the planning model that is the foundation or scaffolding for the Professional Studies programme.

Students will be required to:

**Research** gather information - Skills: questioning

**Decide** on the basis of needs, resources, time - Skills: making judgements, analysing

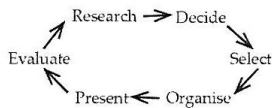
**Select** ways of working, resources, groupings, meeting needs, physical environment - Skills: making judgements, analysing

**Organise** planning - Skills: long term planning, lesson planning

**Present** teaching, implementing, facilitating - Skills: pacing, delivery, and presence

**Evaluation** review, reflect - Skills: self-evaluation, questioning, interaction

- No planning - no teaching.



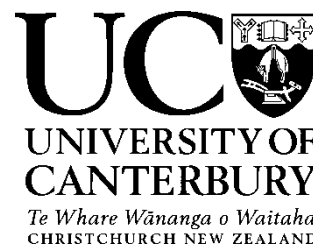
## Appendix C: Associate Teacher Consent Form

69 Gayhurst Rd

Dallington

8061

1 August 2011



### Associate Teachers as Successful Mentors– Associate Teachers’ and Student Teachers’ Perspectives.

#### Consent Form for Associate Teachers

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.
- I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Megan Murray. If I have any complaints, I can contact Lindsey Conner, [lindsey.conner@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:lindsey.conner@canterbury.ac.nz) or Ronnie Davey, [ronnie.davey@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:ronnie.davey@canterbury.ac.nz) at the University of Canterbury, College of Education, or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Nicola Surtees, [nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz).

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to Megan Murray at the address above or by email by

1<sup>st</sup> September 2011.

Telephone: +64 3 3856903

Email: [megcroucher@hotmail.com](mailto:megcroucher@hotmail.com)

## Appendix D: Student Teacher Information Letter

69 Gayhurst Rd

Dallington

8061

1 August 2011



### **Associate Teachers as Successful Mentors – Associate Teachers’ and Student Teachers’ Perspectives.**

#### **Information Sheet for Student Teachers**

I am currently a Masters student at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. You have been identified by the College of Education as being a current student that has had a Professional Practice placement in a primary classroom. I am interested in finding out about your perspectives of what makes or has made your associate teachers effective. I would like to invite you to participate in my study.

If you agree to take part you will be asked to do the following:

- Return the completed consent letter to the address stated above, or email me a completed copy of the consent letter. By emailing me you will be providing me with your contact details and indicating your consent to be part of this study.
- Complete a short interview that focuses on the role of an Associate Teacher. I have attached a copy of the Associate Teacher Guidelines form the Associate Teacher Handbook. You will be asked about your perceptions of what makes an effective Associate Teacher in relation to the guidelines, with the aim of my research identifying best practice. This will take approximately 45 minutes.
- This interview will be recorded and transcribed. Upon completion of the transcription the interview transcription notes will be sent to you. Here you will have the chance to ensure that the transcription is correct and that you agree with everything that has been recorded.

Please note that participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw, I will remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable. I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality

of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. All the data will be securely stored in password protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

All participants will receive a report on the study which may be used to inform future practice. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact either Lindsey Conner or Ronnie Davey at the College of Education, or the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch ([human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me at the address stated above or email me a completed consent form at the above email address.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

Megan Murray

Telephone: +64 3 3856903

Email: [megcroucher@hotmail.com](mailto:megcroucher@hotmail.com)

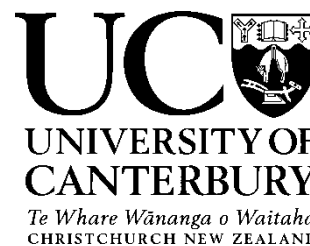
## Appendix E: Student Teacher Consent Form

69 Gayhurst Rd

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8061

1 August 2011



### Associate Teachers as Successful Mentors– Associate Teachers’ and Student Teachers’ Perspectives.

#### Consent Form for Student Teachers

- I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this project.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty.
- I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me.
- I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.
- I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.
- I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Megan Murray. If I have any complaints, I can contact Lindsey Conner, [lindsey.conner@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:lindsey.conner@canterbury.ac.nz) or Ronnie Davey, [ronnie.davey@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:ronnie.davey@canterbury.ac.nz) at the University of Canterbury College of Education, or the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, Nicola Surtees, [nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz).

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to Megan Murray at the address above or by email by  
1<sup>st</sup> September 2011.

Telephone: +64 3 3856903

Email: [megcroucher@hotmail.com](mailto:megcroucher@hotmail.com)

## **Appendix F: Associate Teacher Interview Guide Questions.**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How many STs have you had in your teaching career?
3. Can you describe for me what you believe a successful AT means in practice?
4. What qualities or interpersonal skills do you think are important for an AT?
5. You have been identified as being a successful AT. Can you describe for me some of the tasks that you carry out with student teachers that have a positive impact on your practice as an AT?
6. Can you describe for me how you go about the process of setting up observations?
7. Can you describe for me how you carry out observations?
8. Can you tell me how you go about giving feedback to STs?
9. Are there any specific strategies that you use when working with your STs?
10. Are there any particular theories or models that inform you ways of working with STs?
11. What forms of professional development have you undergone that directly impact your role as an AT?

## **Appendix G: Student Teacher Interview Guide Questions.**

1. How long have you been studying to be a teacher?
2. How many placements have you been on?
3. Can you describe for me what you believe a successful AT means?
4. What qualities do you think are important for an AT to have?
5. What interpersonal skills do you think are important?
6. Can you describe for me some of the specific tasks that an AT has carried out with you that have had a positive impact on your practice?
7. Can you describe for me how a successful observation would be set up and carried out?
8. How would a successful AT set up and carry out a feedback session?
9. Are there any other tasks that are essential for a successful placement?
10. Are you aware of any specific mentoring strategies that your ATs uses that has had a positive impact on your practice?
11. Thinking of a successful AT that you have worked with can you describe for me some of the things that that ATs did that you have found to be most useful when on Professional Practice?
12. If you could give advice to ATs, what would you consider would be the most useful advice?

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