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Coaching of staff in schools: what can we learn from the new role of the MTL in-school coach for schools and the Higher Education tutors working alongside them?

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Introduction

The Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) is a new professional Masters course for teachers in schools in England, which typically began for most regions of the UK in spring 2010 (see TDA 2008a). Delivery of the MTL is centered on a tripartite relationship between the Higher Education Institute (HEI), a school based coach and the teachers who are studying the programme. This study looks to explore the role of the school based coach (hereafter called coach) and the experience of those in the Higher Education Institution (HEI) in working within this new Masters programme. These roles are new and therefore their development and progress are a matter of research interest.

This project sets out to explore how the role of the coach has developed within this MTL programme through two case studies. These case studies involved two coaches who were interviewed by one of the authors. The authors write from their perspective as HEI staff that lead and deliver an MTL programme. They have also been involved in ongoing development of the MTL at regional and national level. In addition to the views of the two coaches, the authors draw on MTL programme meetings, experiences and evaluations, to explore the relationships which have resulted from involvement with delivery of the MTL. In addition they have talked with MTL programme leads in various other HEIs across the UK. Coaches within the MTL are typically without a formal Masters qualification themselves so a second aim of this study is to explore any consequences of this.

The data from these two case studies, together with some additional interview data along with discussions with others involved in the MTL programme nationwide will inform the growing literature on both coaching in schools and also the MTL as an innovative master's degree . The results of this study together with the other evaluative exercises of MTL programmes both locally and nationally on which this study draws, will inform those looking to restructure and redevelop MTL programmes following the withdrawal of funding in 2011 by the coalition government. It will also inform the development of other kinds of in-school coaching for teachers and HEIs working in partnership.

The MTL– an overview

The MTL was introduced into schools in England in 2010 as part of the Labour government's ambition for teaching to become a masters level profession, as outlined in 'The Children's Plan' (DCSF, 2007). It is a practice-based, professional masters qualification, a level 7 programme designed to be based in a workplace context. It is designed to be tailored to a teachers' own professional learning needs (Holley, 2010) so can be considered part of the movement to ground teachers' professional learning in their own experiences and practice (Williams, 2011). This particular development in Masters level provision has received a mixed welcome by HEIs and schools (McBurnie, 2011). The MTL has been seen as having the possibility for positive development in the professional development of teachers (UCET, 2008), through the promotion of pedagogic partnership (Totterdell et al, 2011). It has also been seen as a threat to other postgraduate professional development (PPD) funding (Seaborne, 2010) and as an expansion of utilitarianism in teacher education (Frankham and Hiatt (2011),

The MTL grew out of the recommendations of the 2007 McKinsey report and was intended to develop and improve teacher quality. It can be seen to have been as a response to the evaluation of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programmes by newly qualified teachers (NQTs) (Seaborne, 2010). It can also be seen as part of the 'new professionalism agenda', where the state has the key role in defining professionalism (Whitty, 2002). Raising the standard of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) through developments such as the new masters qualification was a key priority for the Teaching Development Agency (TDA) 2008/9 (TDA 2008b). The CPD of teachers was also presented as key to the raising of standards in schools in the green paper, 'Being the best for our children: Releasing talent for teaching and learning' (DCSF, 2008). So the MTL was linked to the government's school improvement strategy, the National Challenge which aimed "to transform schools, raise results in English and maths, and tackle underachievement by young people" (Balls, 2008). The MTL was presented as a way to attract newly qualified teachers to schools facing challenging circumstances where staff turnover is high. The MTL was also to have a role in helping to improve outcomes for children and young people at these schools where attainment was very low (TDA 2008c). Thus funding to undertake the MTL programme was available only to National Challenge schools and all NQTs in the North West of the UK, the MTL pilot area schools where attainment was below a set standard and therefore received additional funding and support to enable them to raise pupil achievement.

The MTL programme was developed as a continuation of a teacher's Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course and subsequent induction year (in the pilot, the MTL was available to all newly qualified teachers from PGCE and BEd courses) and was to be a programme that all teachers eventually would follow early in their careers. This link with the UK's Professional Standards for Teachers Framework (TDA, 2007) can be seen in the language and style of the standards and assessment objectives of the MTL (Mc Ateer et al, 2010), which mirror those of the teaching core standards of the PGCE and induction year.

Coaching in schools

A key element of the delivery of the MTL in schools is a tripartite relationship of HEI tutor, coach and MTL teacher (hereafter called the MTL coach and the MTL teacher). The MTL coach–teacher relationship is framed in the MTL operations manuals in a similar way to the coaching relationship between the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) and induction mentor in schools.

Lord et al (2008) in their comprehensive review of research on the use of mentoring and coaching explore the use of the terms coaching and mentoring in professional learning. The terms can be used interchangeably and the use of the depends on the context (CUREE, 2005).

Coaching in the MTL is defined by the TDA in a similar way to that used by the National Coaching and Mentoring Framework (DCSF/CUREE, 2003) which states:–

Mentoring is a structured, sustained process for supporting professional learners through significant career transitions

And

Specialist coaching is a structured, sustained process for enabling the development of a specific aspect of a professional learner’s practice.

(National Coaching and Mentoring framework, DCSF/CUREE, 2003)

The TDA identifies this framework as its point of reference for the model of coaching espoused in the MTL, however the detailed definition of the coaching role in the MTL in the MTL manuals could be argued to be an overlap with mentoring and coaching (Lofthouse et al 2010).

In both the MTL manual and National Coaching and Mentoring framework, coaching is perceived as the key to good teacher development. The idea that coaching is a good idea for teachers goes back a long way (Hargreaves 2000). In English schools it has been more recently formalised through the ‘new professionalism agenda’(Lofthouse, 2010) and is presented as a way to raise the status and qualification of individuals in the teaching professions. Coaching and mentoring are seen as key elements in the strategy to raise standards in teachers’ practice and hence the achievement of students, based on the belief that coaching and mentoring are a ‘highly effective approach to improving the quality of teaching’ (DfE, 2010).

Coaching in education has gained significant attention in the UK through its promotion in for example the coaching materials in the National Secondary Strategy (DfES, 2003), the National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children’s services (see Creasy & Paterson, 2005), and the National Coaching and Mentoring framework developed by

CUREE for the DfES (2005). The established roles of the NQT induction tutor, ITE and CPD coordinator in schools, generally referred to as mentoring roles, could be said to include significant elements of coaching (Evans et al, 2007). In the literature, there is a general sense that coaching in the context of qualified teachers and their CPD is a good thing and generally warmly welcomed by teachers (Butcher and Mutton, 2005).

The coach/mentor/trainee relationship in ITE partnerships has the added complexity of HEI involvement and is considered by some to be more problematic (Zwozdiak-Myers, et al 2009). ITE coordinators have a role that demands relationships both within their own schools but also with HEI partners as they manage the work of trainee teachers together in schools. The research here suggests that elements of this role are again seen as rewarding— those elements that involve the direct support of trainees in school (Butcher, 2005). The difficulties can come from the added complexity of working with HEI partners (Zwozdiak-Myers, et al, 2009).

Lofthouse, et al (2010) suggest there is evidence that coaching is evaluated very positively as a face to face process and there are signs that it has a wider positive effect on other teachers at the school (Roberts & Henderson, 2005, Cordingley, et al., 2005, Leat et al 2006). The Professional Standards for Teachers (TDA, 2007) embed on-going professional development with its associated coaching, as an essential element of the professional profile. There is a tension here. The pressure of performativity agendas and performance management linked to attainment is at odds with the concept of coaching and there is evidence that most of the difficulties experienced in coaching in schools (and the confusion with mentoring), arise from making the coaching process part of school improvement system through the performance management of teachers (Arthur et al, 2009).

The coaching model used in the MTL (alongside the NQT and ITE models) was developed in a context explicitly about improvement in academic standards in schools through the development of teachers. This contextual space will continue to be a reality in schools (identified in the new coalition government education bill, DfE 2011) and so research that can inform and promote ways of working creatively, effectively and humanely within this space is critical.

Specific issues for the MTL in-school coach

The roles of the HEI, the in-school coach and the training of coaches are prescribed in detail in the MTL manuals. The role of the in-school coach is to include undertaking the majority of the delivery and support and the role of the HEI is detailed as being primarily that of Quality Assurance and participant assessment. The delivery of the MTL programme to the teacher was envisioned to be via the in-school coach and the government funding for each MTL teacher was to be divided so that 60% goes to the school and 40% to the HEI. An integral link between MTL in-school coaches and HEIs was envisaged by the TDA; in this way the coaches would be able to support

colleagues in school with Masters level study and practice-based research. In the early inceptions of the MTL, it was to be a requirement that all in-school coaches should have M level qualification. This was adjusted later to 'an expectation' that in-school coaches would be seeking to achieve this level of qualification –possibly through having their MTL coach training accredited at Master's level.

The training of MTL coaches is prescribed through a centrally produced (TDA) training programme (see TDA 2009), delivered by HEIs and the national MTL coaching strategy lists recent involvement with the induction of NQTs and the involvement with HEIs as essential prerequisites for becoming an MTL in-school coach. It has been recently argued that this level of prescription has led to a utilitarian approach to M level study (Frankham and Hiatt, 2011). Others (e.g. Burton and Goodman, 2011) see this approach as generally beneficial and argue that this MTL model has a specific benefit: 'with its prescribed in-school coach training, [the MTL] may be a way of finally getting hold of the whole issue of inconsistent mentoring in ITT, given that this has been a problem (or perhaps an inevitability) identified by Ofsted since the onset of school-based ITT in 1993' (Burton and Goodman, 2011 page 7). It is clear from the authors experiences that the practice of the different elements tripartite relationships of the MTL have developed in different ways through interpretations of the TDA framework in different localities; the practice of in-school coaches, the role of the HEI and the relationship between the teacher, their school and the HEI. This paper focuses on one element of this tripartite relationship– the practice of the in-school coach.

As a consequence of the withdrawal of TDA funding for the MTL in 2011, the MTL itself is now open to development .This moment offers the opportunity for close examination of its practice and which can inform development of coaching with teachers through ITE, NQT induction and Continuing and Post graduate Professional Development work

Research Design

The methodology was essentially mixed methods within case studies (Plowright, 2011), where observation and written data from students and coaches added to that gained from interviews. Our interest in the role of the MTL coach role had begun before the programme started but the formal case study interviews were conducted in July 2011. The two case studies reflect two different approaches from MTL coaches; one very enthusiastic about the role, the other more pragmatic, 'just another job to be done'.

The case study interviews were both held in an office or classroom on school premises during July, at the end of the school year, the coach having performed the role for approximately fifteen months. The additional interview data drawn upon in this study were undertaken earlier in the school year from spring to summer 2011. All were anonymised in line with established ethical guidelines (BERA, **** University Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee). Triangulation was used to offer reliability which included the findings on the case study interviews, observations by the authors through running the programme and knowledge gained from shared experiences from other

institutions doing the MTL as well as data from written documentation gathered via the Programme.

Methodology

In setting up the interviews, it was clear that there was a broad understanding between the researchers and the two coaches in both schools of what a case study approach to the research involved. We were all aware that “the defining characteristic... is its focus on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated” (Denscombe, 1998 p30). For us as researchers there would be the two school coaches but one key focus, that of their experience of working as coaches at Masters level with their teaching colleagues in school in the new tripartite relationship of this Masters programme.

We were aware that we would want to generate grounded theory, “theory that is grounded in the evidence that it turns up” (Gillham, 2000 p 12). We were also aware that the case study researcher must strike to keep an open mind, go on looking for data and defer analysis until the most appropriate time as agreed by all concerned (Gillham, 2000 p13). In addition, “It is a fine line between doing excellent research which enables the researcher and then her readers to see the world as the actors see it and becoming so over- identified with that view point that the others in the setting become stereotyped or are ignored” (Delamont, 2002 p 39).

Within the case study methodology, we chose to interview and were keen to adopt a “relatively unstructured, informal conversation – type” of interview (Gillham, 2000p28). There were a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, we the two authors and the two coaches in the school had all worked together for some time and had already built up a relationship, which meant that to revert to a formal structure would have seemed inappropriate.

A second reason was because, with the MTL programme being new, the researchers were aware of needing to promote a professional but flexible approach to working together with the schools. This was to allow for the fact that some issues within the programme may need development as it progressed. In effect none of us, either in the HEI or schools were expert practitioners regarding the MTL programme but needed to be open to issues that could arise as the programme and its attendant work progressed. This would include work in schools between the teachers (as MTL students) and their respective coaches - as well as the work between the schools and us in the HEI. The case study approach therefore served us well, allowing us “a holistic approach to the exploration of real life situations” (Cousin, 2011p 132) without necessarily having a history to draw on.

Also, and most importantly, both researchers as ex-teachers themselves were sensitive to the pressures of the programme on the school coach and were conscious that “too tight a structure and schedule.... and relevant information may be lost” (Gillham, 2000 p28).

The Interview Questions

The interview questions began by confirming current information known about the coach, their school and the MTL teachers they support. This included asking about prior roles that related to coaching, if any, and how they came to be the MTL in school coach. We also asked about their personal involvement with Masters level work, if any. They were also questioned about how they saw mentoring / coaching in school and the TDA in school coach development meetings/ training they has undertaken with the HEI. Lastly, they were asked about how exactly the coaching worked in their school and how the relationship with the University in their work as an MTL in-school coach worked in practice. Discussion around how their work as a coach could be developed was also raised if relevant.

The interviews were taped with a digital recorder so that the researcher and interviewee were free to talk without the restrictions that note taking can create. Both interviewees were given a copy of the semi structured questions at the time of the interview so that they could follow the line of questioning if they wished. However, neither did so and the resulting interviews were more of a conversation with the interviewee interjecting with additional information that they felt could be relevant before coming back to the next question.

We did the transcription ourselves, with follow up email/ conversations by phone or in person offered. In the event neither followed up the conversations although the transcriptions were sent via email for them to read and change if wanted. Analysis was therefore solely undertaken by the researchers who then again offered an opportunity for respondent validation for relevant sections of the story the “researcher and informant seek meaning and explanations together” (Goodson and Sikes, 2001 p 36). Coding was undertaken in a very straightforward manner, taking the key relevant sections of the interviews and cross referencing across the two transcripts looking mainly at keywords as well as themes where appropriate.

The Case Studies

We interviewed two coaches, known here as Chris and Jo. Both interviewees were in post as the in-school coach role when interviewed. The first, Chris, had been on the programme from the start and had received the MTL coach training. The other, Jo took over the role later when the former coach moved to another school.

The two coaches adopted different approaches to their role. Chris was enthusiastic and very involved with the teachers on the programme, proactive in arranging coaching meetings whereas Jo adopted a much more ‘hands off ‘ open door style, there if the teachers wanted support but otherwise very much content to leave them to get on with the work themselves.

Ethics protocol and information about the study was sent to the coach interviewees prior to the interviews and informed consent obtained.

Results

Both coaches had undertaken some Master's level credits but had not completed the degree to date - and did not expect to do so in the near future. Jo told us that "I think maybe two or three years down the line I'll pick it up but right now it is not a priority". This suggested to us that perhaps they did not value Masters work as particularly relevant within schools, something supported by some statements made within their interview. Chris would have liked to have gained the qualification but was not in a position to do so at this time.

As suggested above, Chris and Jo varied in their attitude towards the MTL. Both had some prior coaching experience, although Chris had considerably more - but whereas Jo seemed to essentially see it as just another role they had to take on when they accepted a more senior position within the school, Chris was much more positively disposed towards it. Chris had a background that was already "CPD, involved in the process of "developing people" which they believed they were good at: ".....I just find, and I don't want to blow my own trumpet" but [I am] "good at it, drawing skills out". Chris had always enjoyed it, exemplifying "that eureka moment" with people when they understood something for the first time. The need for a MTL in school coach ".fell under the umbrella of CPD" which they already ran in the school and it was something they wanted to do "working with people not sitting at a desk crunching data" so they volunteered. "It's that working with people. It's about working with people and developing their capacity".

The other coach, Jo, had a very different story and had certainly not volunteered. "There was no selection. They stated that as part of their assistant head role, they had to take over the CPD work. They explained that their predecessor "had been big on pushing the Master's so I had to pick that up. No selection."

This led us as the researchers to the conclusion that the success and enjoyment of the prior CPD and other coaching work for Chris had played a part in their more substantial engagement with the MTL as coach. They clearly took it on with some enthusiasm. On the other hand, for Jo, being required to take on the MTL coach work along with other jobs when they stepped up to a new more senior role in their school, there was no choice and they did the minimum.

Neither coach differentiated clearly between mentoring and coaching and we didn't investigate that aspect of the work, allowing the occasional interchanging of the vocabulary. This did not appear to be an issue for either coach.

Both though saw mentoring and coaching in a positive light and one particularly in terms of the form it took within the MTL. Chris stated that: "I see it as a brilliant activity that

stimulates me more intellectually, the MTL, than other coaching and mentoring with the NQTs or the ITTs”.

They continued: “Working with [named the teacher students on MTL in the school) this, their second academic year, they are doing this academic reading – they challenge me, I have to do some academic reading and so it helps my personal development and it is very very good and very challenging and because these two (referring to his colleagues, the MTL teachers) are not wet behind the ears as such they ask very, very challenging questions.”

Furthermore, Chris stated that: “The three way conversations we have had have been fantastic. I feel confident those sessions are less mentoring and very much more coaching; I feel the NQT are definitely, certainly at the beginning of the year, definitely more mentoring and these two on the MTL journey they are now just so much further forward and they co coach, they coach each other.”

This co coaching was an interesting development that Jo also thought happened in their school. They stated that: “Mentoring and coaching is invaluable; but it is only invaluable if both the person being mentored or coached wants it. They need to want it to get the most out of it. I don’t think it is something that you can impose onto someone but I do think it is invaluable and yes, sometimes we label it coaching and mentoring and actually it is just having someone to talk to, someone to give you guidance and I think that happens in teaching, on an incredibly informal basis and on a daily basis, frequently”.

Data from other sources backed this view. Another coach in the region had stated that because they already mentored the NQT’s on the MTL in their school, they knew them well. As a result they believed that they could anticipate and respond accordingly to what the NQT’s would be good at and what they would encounter difficulties with. They also noted that peer support was important and the NQT group worked together via regular meetings that were already in place as part of the NQT year arrangements. School therefore became a proactive resource in providing guidance and supporting academic work and the writing that these teachers undertook.

Jo didn’t have any formal coaching sessions with the MTL students in their school preferring to offer an “open door policy”. Chris however, as mentioned earlier, was more proactive. Chris had timetabled a fortnightly meeting with their MTL teachers which could be for twenty minutes or up to an hour, usually the three of them. “It is to go through, sometimes to question, to go through (the work).”

In addition, they may see them in their classrooms separately. Or there may be a longer time between meetings. Chris said that they may say: “Right, I will give you four weeks to really come up with some questions you are really unsure about and then we bounce ideas off each other; so that’s the way it works, we traditionally work in (names a student) her room; it’s quiet and a good environment and yes, it is very productive.”

Jo had already stated that their role was very administrative; initially rejecting the idea of being interviewed by us because they presumed it would not be of interest to us, being so administrative. Jo said: "I feel ultimately because the guys doing the MTL haven't needed that coaching. I have had an open door policy and I chat to all of them all on a daily basis and they never raise an issue so there hasn't really been that need and I think, you know, (names the school) is very good at staff engagement, staff talking to each other and thrashing out an issue and I imagine what has happened is that they have thrashed out issues with people who aren't labeled as MTL coach, so what I have tended to do is just be very functional in terms of booking rooms, tea and coffee and that..." (for when HEI tutors and other HE colleagues were attending the school for assessment or tutoring purposes).

They both had very different views on the interplay between themselves and the HEI/HE tutors. We were cognisant that of course it is unlikely that they interviewees would necessarily discuss if they had very serious concerns about the roles - but felt that it was worth posing the question.

Chris said that they saw it as: "very productive in the fact that I don't have that academic side necessarily and when I am challenged beyond my capability I can just say get (names the HEI tutors) in or whoever to challenge them (the teachers) and provide that subject knowledge that I don't have. Yes I do background reading but there's only so much background reading I can do and I think that what is very rewarding is just to listen to those two (the HEI tutors) articulate not just a PowerPoint but huge amounts of extra detail so they obviously have a very comprehensive understanding of it all [their subject]".

For Jo "because the coaching role hasn't really evolved into anything, my communication with (the HEI) has been very much practical level and not much more than administrative level and certainly sometimes I think it would be better for (the HEI) to liaise directly with the students because I think there is a difference, you know about the deadlines and that, hearing from (them) than there is coming from me".

Regarding the future of the role of MTL in school coach, neither could be sure how it would develop in the new academic year 2011/12 although both said they were happy to continue, with, as had become usual, Chris rather more enthusiastically than Jo. "Yes, just working with them[their MTL teachers], the confidence has grown there and I feel much more relaxed which is very positive and also because I have been doing additional academic reading yes its refreshed bits and pieces and ideas I had twenty years ago; it's been great, it's been good, it's been nice. I just wish all of us weren't so tired when we are sat down to do the work together".

Again, as referred to earlier, it appeared to us researchers that Chris was gaining some personal benefits from the coaching work whereas for Jo, it was just another box to be ticked.

The different attitudes towards the positive benefits of working with the MTL were perhaps most starkly illustrated by comments made by Chris and Jo about how they saw the relationship between the academic and school based practice. Chris stated that they would like to see the school based practice and theory of the MTL work even more closely linked. "I think the closer they are melded the better..."

However Jo said that "I am not someone for the theory and reading and the academic study. I am much more in the classroom and responding to the case studies you get every day rather than the ones you read about in a book". On being asked about not seeing them as connected they replied that: "I am sure they do connect but a lot of it comes down to time as well - and I am sure that if that was where my real interest lay then I would have probably embraced it a lot more..."

Jo seemed to prefer the more traditional HEI- student relationship and saw the coach as an unnecessary addition: "I mean I know they ([the MTL teachers]) are basing their studies on things in school but it is something they are choosing to do in their own time and I think involving someone from school is possibly confusing the issue and ... I think they have their HE tutor, why (can't) that tutor can't double up as a coach role as well and that ... would make it much more academic and focused without keeping the school in the picture. It's like three people but one is not really, not a key part of it."

Interview data from another coach elsewhere in the region offered the view that for them "the role of the MTL coach is perhaps less about assessment and more about guidance. I don't have a Master's [degree] and the view is that it is desirable but not necessary". Yet another coach, seeing the impact of doing a Masters on their colleagues work/ life balance stated that they would not want to pursue a Master's level award.

Findings/ status of the data

We accept that we have extrapolated for the purposes of this research what we hold to be the relevant research data when much that was told us and discussed could also be termed data. We chose to focus on what was directly relevant to the coach role and their views around Masters level working. We also explored their feelings around working with the university. However, that said, we also understood that what is told to us as a story will be shaped by the person relating it and to whom. As Joannou states "much will depend on how it is told and by whom" (Joannou as quoted by Goodson and Sikes, 2001 p41).

We would like to suggest that Chris and Jo have been as open as could be hoped whilst still possibly choosing not to mention things that could portray them in what they may consider a less flattering light. They will surely present "the image they want to present" in the context of how they judge their "hearers will respond" (Goodson and Sikes, 2001p41).

Discussion/ Conclusions

This study seeks to find how the experiences of the Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in-school coach can be used to inform the development of successful staff coaching models in schools and specifically those associated with support for staff engaged in Masters level study

It is clear that any mentoring, coaching and leadership role in a school leads to significant extra workload for the individual members of staff. In addition to the complexities and challenges of the coaching role, with which the in-school coaches are already familiar with the MTL, comes the additional dimension of supporting colleagues with Master's level study, with its demands of increased professional and academic knowledge and the challenge of developing criticality.

As reserachers we wanted to examine what could be learnt from this study that could usefully inform other coaching models in education settings .We propose that there are a number of issues.

Firstly, the school based coaches were being asked to work supporting colleagues at Masters Level when they didn't have that qualification themselves. They were also secondly being asked to work in a different way from the more usual in school mentor / coach relationship. Thirdly, they needed to develop an effective, quite close working relationship with HEI staff who as an additional complication could be understood to have an assessment role towards the coaching work. This would be because as the HEI colleagues assessed the MTL students in school, to some degree the coaching role that supported those same students would also therefore come under scrutiny.

The TDA clearly laid the responsibility of the assessment of the MTL with the HEI and in that way it could be argued it was never an equal tripartite relationship in terms of power relationships, as suggested earlier (Menter et al, 2010 and McIntyre, 2006).

The adjustment in requirement for in-school coaches not to necessarily have M level qualifications themselves has meant that the assessment (and Quality Assurance) role within the MTL is with the HEI, with the school coach only doing the delivery and support. This immediately for these researchers created an unequal partnership. We would have preferred to have jointly assessed the MTL students with the coaches. This change preferenced the HEI colleagues over the coaches since the power to pass or fail students' work now lay solely with them.

Concerns have been expressed by others about the MTL in-school coach not being included as a full assessment partner (Coombs, 2009). It is argued that there is a clear tension here with the weight of the MTL funding and a prescribed national framework suggesting a key role for the MTL in-school coach but then scaled down by the limitation of having in-school coaches without masters' qualifications, resulting in HEI control of QA and assessment. This imbalance in the tripartite relationship restricts the opportunity for real partnership – a situation recorded in other HEI and school partnerships including ITE (Menter et al 2010, McIntyre, 2006 and Chapman 2003). There has been little written to date about mentors without higher qualifications in

supporting M-level work (Seaborne, 2010), and this study confirms there are tensions here.

A second significant finding is that the school based coach had not necessarily chosen this role. Typically the Head Teacher or School principal had invited the HEI to work with their staff and the school based coach may then have been volunteered to offer the relevant support. Being a new programme no one knew exactly what that workload would entail. The coach could therefore find themselves overwhelmed with the workload and having to make difficult choices regarding making room in their busy schedule – or otherwise- for the MTL workload. With the schools that we worked with having relatively small numbers of MTL students, it perhaps was to be expected that the MTL work wasn't given the priority it needed at times. The significance for the HEI staff then was that they then were under increased pressure to make up the shortfall and put considerably more support into schools to help the MTK students than had been envisaged at the start. This could consequently put strain on the HEI /coach relationship.

Another key finding is that the attitude and approach of the in school coach was clearly a key issue. The individual personality and perhaps motivation for being involved at all was perhaps more important than their academic qualifications and time available. It was clear that all involved were short of time and under considerable pressure, especially those working at senior management level in schools as these coaches generally were. However, if they were enthusiastic about the possibilities the MTL offered their colleagues and perhaps even themselves, it seemed that they made time to support the students and work with the HEI tutors effectively. This could for example range from engaging in email or other dialogue in a timely manner to set up meetings between students, HEI tutors and themselves - to taking the time to explore HEI tutor feedback after assessment and help the MTL students develop their work in the light of it.

This is not to be critical of those who didn't undertake such engagement, but they had perhaps not seen the value of the MTL in the same way or were more confident that their teaching colleagues working as students on the MTL didn't need further support from themselves. This may have been a reflection of the fact that they didn't have Masters level qualifications themselves and therefore didn't see that they could offer anything additional.

Comments made by some of the MTL teachers could be said to support with this last assertion. Although we did not formally interview them for further case studies, inevitably in the course of working with them, they would comment on the MTL and its working practices. One student working on the MTL alongside a coaching colleague without a Masters qualification saw no reason to engage them in conversation about their MTL work preferring instead always to address any issues and concerns to us from the HEI. When asked, they said that they didn't see how they (the coach) could help when they were not Master's qualified themselves. This of course could be a valid point although the coach training offered at the start of the MTL programme had been

designed to help coaches support their colleagues on the MTL. However, the coach in question here had not taken up that training and so it was understandable that the student just turned to the HEI for any help needed.

However other students valued their coach even if they had no Masters qualification - and appreciated their support in making time for them around readings and assignment requirements. We were struck by comments from some MTL students with reference to what they saw as the significant help that being able to talk, albeit briefly, to the coach offered them in their MTL work. It often transpired that it supported them in keeping on track and encouraged when the idea of leaving the course could otherwise seem an attractive option. In addition, it helped support the actual academic work too, especially when the coach was quick to engage and with HEI colleagues and tutors if they themselves felt out of their depth. One example of this was a coach who regularly took the time to explore the readings provided in the MTL handbook ahead of scheduled meeting with the students. They then led discussions so that they all critically appraised the literature in relation to classroom and school practice.

The qualifications and arguably experience of the coach was proving to be important for a number of reasons. Firstly it could arguably lead to a lack of confidence within the coach him/herself, possibly being responsible for some reduction to merely an administrative role. Although, as the above suggests, this could be overcome if the coach was keen to be supportive as far as they could. It also, because of the shift of emphasis within the TDA guidelines away from the requirement for them to have Master's level qualifications, led to an adjustment of the original proposed assessment regime. Assessment became the entire responsibility of the HEI so that any attempt at an equal tripartite relationship was fundamentally undermined. The assessment has therefore defaulted back to the more traditional Master's route for teachers working with HEIs or HEIs / school relationships with the HEI assessing and also leading delivery. This is a significant issue for all HEI/ school relationships which are known to be tense due to the imbalance of power, as argued earlier in this paper in the case of ITE HEI relationships. This present research into the work of the MTL coach would suggest that this imbalance of power is inevitable unless the individuals involved are all suitably qualified. As M level qualifications become more common amongst teachers in schools, opportunities for more equal relationships will arise. Perhaps then the MTL model was ahead of its time; the vision for the equal relationship could not be fully realised at this time because too few coaches were appropriately qualified.

Having said that, an effective relationship between the HEI tutors, course leads and the in school coach was nevertheless something we all took trouble to develop where enabled and encouraged by the coach. We in the HEI took our lead from the school coaches and went out of our way to fit with their schedules and school needs. In our own HEI we put considerably more time than the TDA had funded into the work, but were glad to do it to support the excellent work in schools. This model may not have been sustainable in the long run but with the MTL funding being terminated, we have decided to restructure the MTL within our HEI. Taking the practice based elements and

innovative assessment from the MTL, we have validated new modules that will sit within our existing M level provision offering further choice to students.

The MTL tripartite model was fatally flawed when it was accepted that the in school coaches could not be involved in assessing their own teachers on the programme. We would argue that there was no valid reason that prevented them participating in the assessment process. They could readily have been partners in the formative assessments required - as well as part of a team assessment alongside the HEI tutors for summative assessment procedures. It would be understood that the HEI would always have to have overall responsibility because they are the expert practitioners and have responsibility to their university for the quality of the programme. However in order to realise the tripartite relationship originally envisaged for the programme, some sort of role in this aspect of the work could have been proposed.

A secondary benefit would have been the staff development of the coaches themselves most of whom had been unable to take up the TDA offer of further training. As long as coaches are prevented from participating in the programme in some way regarding assessment, the relationship with the HEI will always be perhaps more unequal than necessary.

The school coaches with whom the authors have talked either directly or more distantly were effective because of who they are as individuals and the position they adopted towards the MTL. This was clearly demonstrated when they left their posts, for their replacements like Jo were not able to sustain the same relationships with the MTL teachers and HEIs. Successes that have occurred within the MTL we would therefore argue have largely been achieved through the work of individuals – particularly the in school coaches, rather than the setup of the programme overall. The implications for coaching in general in schools therefore are that it is once again mostly about the persons involved rather than rigorous procedures and practices.

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