

# A 'Rough Guide' to the history of mentoring from a marxist feminist perspective

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**ABSTRACT** *Mentoring is now a favoured policy initiative in a number of countries, including Britain and North America, both as an element of professional development, and in addressing social exclusion. The former is of direct relevance to teacher education. The latter is a key issue affecting teachers today, as they have to liaise with mentors allocated to pupils and students. Yet the concept of mentoring remains confused. This paper reviews the literature, deconstructing its mythical representations and its celebratory bias. It applies, from a feminist perspective, the dialectical materialist method to the inter-relationships between essence and appearance in mentoring. It identifies four distinct historical stages in its development. These reveal that official concepts of mentoring have shifted from dominant groupings reproducing their own power, to subordinate groupings reproducing their own oppression. The conclusion suggests a research agenda for more detailed empirical investigation of mentoring in the field of teacher education.*

## ***Mentoring is highly popular...***

Mentoring is the 'in' thing. It has become highly popular in a number of (mainly Anglophone) advanced capitalist countries over the last two decades, and is increasingly de rigueur as an element of policy solutions in a wide range of contexts. It is now a key feature of initial training in public service professions, for example in the fields of teaching, nursing, and career guidance, as well as in the development of business managers. Mentoring has also moved to centre stage in many of the US and UK governments' initiatives, in both compulsory and post-compulsory education, to address social exclusion among young people.

In the US, the two largest national programmes of this latter kind, Big Brothers Big Sisters and GEAR-UP, were using over a million volunteer mentors in 2000, and both are targeted to double in size in the next few years (Miller, 2002). Similar projects abound at state level, and this growth is reflected in Canada, Israel, Sweden and Australia. In England, youth mentoring emerged in the mid-1990s in localised schemes, funded through short-term, non-core sources which swam against the tide of Conservative government policies in education and guidance (Ford, 1999). Now, embraced enthusiastically by the New Labour government elected in 1997, it has appeared as a major ingredient of every new youth transition programme, such as the New Deal and the Learning Gateway. The new Connexions inter-agency support service for 16-19 year olds represents the culmination of this trend, creating a new profession of Learning Mentors (for young people in school) and Personal Advisers (for those in post-16 transition). Almost 3,000 such mentors are now in post, and a total of 20,000 are to be trained for Connexions. In all of these initiatives, thousands of additional volunteer mentors are also being used. Since mentoring first appeared in academic literature in the late 1970s, noticed then as a sporadic and usually informal phenomenon, these developments show that it has now been elevated to an unprecedented degree of systematic and official organisation.

This paper draws on a recently completed research project into the power dynamics of mentor-mentee relationships in the context of mentoring for 'disaffected' youth (Colley, 2001

[1]). Since so many teachers now have to liaise with such mentors, and work with them in inter-agency partnerships, this context may be of intrinsic interest in itself for initial and continuing teacher education. Teachers need to understand the way in which mentoring is being used with their pupils, and the perspective that mentors bring into schools and colleges. However, broader issues for teacher education are also posed by a closer examination of the ways in which mentoring is currently conceived and implemented, and by commonalities that arise in a range of contexts.

Firstly, although there has been little research as yet of the relations between teachers and the new mentors entering their classrooms, my own experience of conducting in-service training on mentoring confirms the findings of one English study that misunderstandings and frictions may well arise (McNamara & Rogers, 2000). Secondly, a recent article in this journal (Maguire, 2001) reported findings from another English study of student teachers' experiences in their school placements, which revealed that a substantial number of students felt bullied by their school-based mentors. This raises a further, as yet uninvestigated, question about the way in which some school mentors themselves are obliged to undertake this responsibility without any negotiation, training, teaching remission, or pay enhancement. It is a situation in which resentment might understandably arise and rebound on the student teachers in their care. Finally, teacher education is one of the fields in which some, albeit as yet limited, progress has been made in undertaking more critical analyses of mentoring, including in previous issues of this journal (see Stones, 1997). As another JET contributor has recently pointed out, more understanding is needed of the ways in which school-based mentors themselves construct their roles in working with student teachers (Harrison, 2001). This paper aims to contribute a critical perspective to these much-needed investigations and debates.

### ***...but weakly conceptualised***

Given the positive policy stance towards the use of mentoring, and the overwhelmingly favourable, even celebratory, regard in which the practice is held, we might expect that the last 20 years would have produced clear theoretical and practical frameworks for its implementation. However, the meteoric rise of mentoring has not been matched by similar progress in its conceptualisation. An early literature review noted the uncritical nature of the available work on mentoring, which even then was described as reaching 'mania' proportions:

The literature on mentoring is biased in favor of the phenomenon...it warrants neither the enthusiasm about its value, nor the exhortations to go out and find one...[M]entoring is not clearly conceptualised... The majority of published articles consists of testimonials or opinions...[T]here are no studies...of the negative effects of mentoring, or [its] absence... (Merriam, 1983, pp.169-170).

Almost 20 years later, and after an exponential increase in the volume of literature, the same complaint was still being raised:

The concept of mentoring remains elusive and in relevant literature its discussion and evaluation has tended to be programmatic and anecdotal...with relatively slight coverage in formal publications and journals (Piper & Piper, 2000, p.84).

A review of the first few years of the journal Mentoring and Tutoring reported that, with the exception of two articles:

there was nowhere any real critique of ideology, the political economy or prevailing social constructs surrounding mentoring and education (Gulam & Zulfiqar, 1998, p.41).

It is perhaps the way in which mentoring is routinely disembodied from its social, economic and political context that makes it difficult to understand or to critique clearly. Consequently, attempts at its definition have become a ‘quagmire’ (Haggerty, 1986).

Given the plethora of ways in which mentoring is defined as a practice, it may be seen as an ‘essentially contested concept’, about which a clear consensus may never be reached (Gallie, 1956). The available definitions of mentoring are too numerous to recount here (see Roberts, 2000 for a comprehensive review), but their very multiplicity reflects the way in which political and social contexts determine meaning differentially as those contexts themselves change (Gilroy, 1997). Trying to grapple with this multiplicity began to raise a number of questions for me as I reviewed the literature. Is there something essential about mentoring *per se*, which defines it apart from other activities such as coaching, guidance, tutoring, pastoral work and so on? Does mentoring have a distinctive essence which unites its diverse appearances in various contexts? In the first part of this paper, I wish to explore a thread of meaning which is common to all contexts of mentoring, in pursuit of some kind of answer to these questions. In the second part, the conclusions drawn will be applied to the practice of mentoring, to provide a genealogical account of its history.

### ***The mentor role is defined by myths...***

In academic literature, practitioner journals and promotional literature aiming to attract volunteers to mentoring schemes, Homer’s *Odyssey* (Butcher and Lang, 1890 [2]), an epic poem from Ancient Greece thought to date back at least 3,000 years, is frequently cited as the original source for the concept of mentoring. The *Odyssey* tells the story of the king Odysseus’ lengthy return from the Trojan war. During his absence, he had entrusted the care of his kingdom, Ithaca, and of his then infant son, Telemachus, to an old friend, Mentor. The better-known heart of the poem is Odysseus’ account of the arduous wanderings visited upon him after he incurred the wrath of the sea-god Poseidon. But this account is framed at the start and end by a sub-plot, in which the goddess Athene assures his return home, prepares his son for their reunion, and assists them to regain the throne of Ithaca from usurpers who have created chaos there. Contemporary references to this myth in the literature on mentoring usually appear at the start of a work, or as the introduction to a chapter or section on the mentor’s role. They are used to convey a particular definition of the practice, often in a highly rhetorical manner, drawing on the myth in one of two ways.

Some accounts focus on the figure of Mentor himself (e.g. Anderson & Lucasse Shannon, 1995). He is referred to as a wise and kindly elder, a surrogate parent, a trusted adviser, an educator and guide. His role is described variously as nurturing, supporting, protecting, role modelling, and possessing a visionary perception of his ward’s true potential. This is seen as demanding integrity, personal investment, and the development of a relationship with the young Telemachus based on deep mutual affection and respect. However, most descriptions of the character of Mentor reflect the way in which early literature on mentoring, as it emerged in the late 1970s and through the 1980s, tended to define mentoring in terms of the functions performed by the mentor (see for example the ‘nine functions of a mentor’ outlined by Alleman, 1986).

Other authors identify that it is not Mentor himself, but the goddess Athene, albeit at times disguised as Mentor, who represents the active mentoring role in the *Odyssey* (e.g. Stammers, 1992). As befitting a deity, most of these accounts focus on Athene’s ‘specialness’ and her inspirational character. They also tend to evoke notions of ‘selfless caring’ (Ford, 1999, p.8) and self-sacrificing commitment ‘beyond the call of duty’ (Ford, 1999, p.13) or ‘above and beyond’ the existing work role (Shea, 1992, p.21). Such evocations, usually highly rhetorical, go beyond a definition based merely on functions. They prescribe the attitudes and emotional dispositions that mentors are supposed to display.

Some feminist critiques of mentoring have also used reference to the Odyssey within their arguments. Arising in the fields of teacher and nurse education, they seek to challenge a dominant concept of mentoring as hierarchical and directive, based on assumptions of paternalism and models of male development, even in all-female dyads. DeMarco (1993) appeals to the vision of Athene as a 'feminine archetype' of an alternative paradigm of mentoring based on 'reciprocity, empowerment and solidarity' (p.1243), 'authentically sharing her voice with ours, while we mutually listen for answers' (p.1249). Cochran-Smith and Paris (1995) argue likewise that mentoring should be based on 'women's ways of collaborating' (p.182). Standing (1999) objects that Athene's appearance in male disguise presents mentoring as a controlling rather than nurturing process (pp.4-5), although paradoxically she appeals to the (male) character of Mentor as the original archetype embodying both aspects. In a similar argument for combining (male) power with (female) nurture, Roberts (1998) uses the image of (female) Athene disguised as (male) Mentor to advocate the ideal of mentorship as 'psychological androgyny' which can provide both instrumental and emotional support for mentees. Interestingly, of these critiques it is only Standing who alludes, albeit briefly, to the often unrecognised burden that falls upon the mentor in addition to her normal duties (1999, p.15).

### ***...but these are modern re-writings***

However, the Odyssey tells a very different story from any of these versions. As the action of Homer's epic opens, the royal household of Ithaca is in utter disarray, the prince Telemachus is in personal crisis, and Mentor, responsible for this debacle, is a public laughing stock – a far cry from the wise and nurturing adviser portrayed in some modern renditions. Athene has to step into the breach – an omniscient and omnipotent goddess, but not a typically female figure. She had no mother, but sprang forth, fully formed, from her father Zeus's head, and as such, in her role as the god of wisdom, represents the embodiment of male rationality (Thomson, 1950, cited in Reed, 1975). She is also the god of war.

Athene does indeed carry out a number of the functions that have been variously ascribed to mentoring – advising, role modelling, advocating, raising the young man's self-esteem. Yet there is no sense of any emotional bond between them, and the outcome of her mentorship is that Odysseus and Telemachus reunite in a bloody battle to regain the throne of Ithaca and annihilate their enemies. They brutally re-establish their military, economic, and political rule. Thus the myth of kindly nurture and self-sacrificing devotion, whether by Mentor or Athene, is a modern creation, contrasting starkly with the brutal processes of the ancient myth. It is a simulacrum, 'an identical copy for which no original has ever existed' (Jameson, 1984, p.68) – the present according to a past we never had. The present is presented as filtering down from the past – yet this 'past' is itself a social construction filtered through the prism of the specific socio-historical context of the present, the past(iche) of a 'prequel'. How can we analyse this historical transformation of the myth of Mentor to help us understand better the contemporary meanings given to mentoring?

### ***Taking a dialectical materialist view...***

In a previous paper analysing in greater detail the contrast between modern and Homeric accounts of mentoring (Colley, 2001), I drew on arguments from Marxist, feminist, anti-racist and other critical theorists to discuss the ways in which myths are commonly used to legitimise and secure consensus for dominant discourses. In doing so, they obscure and simultaneously reinforce unequal social relations in our patriarchal, Eurocentric, capitalist society. Myths deny the influence of context upon meaning, and conflate form and substance, as they represent historical phenomena as natural, and their contingent appearance as an eternal and immutable essence.

Feminist educational research is not a universal approach, but can be seen as composed of at least three different strands (Gaskell, 1992). Liberal feminism accepts the status quo in general, but seeks a more equal fit within it. Radical feminism avoids issues of class, seeing the world in terms of male dominance over oppressed women, privileging the articulation of women's voices and lived experiences, and arguing for ways to give power to women to transform social institutions. It has to be noted that this strand of feminism arose in part in reaction to corruptions of Marxism which subordinated gender issues to those of class. Feminist models of mentoring to date have tended to draw on these two strands. Marxist feminism, by contrast, rejects any unitary notion of 'women's' ways of knowing and doing, and argues that class, race and gender all shape the social world in complex, interdependent ways. Unfashionable though marxist theory has been in educational research in recent years, it is experiencing a significant resurgence (Rikowski, 2002), and in particular its dialectical materialist approach may be helpful in understanding the historical development of social phenomena.

Marxist philosophy suggests that any social phenomenon has both an essence and an appearance, and is interested in the dialectical relationship and interplay between social relations, the material world and the evolution of thought (reflected in cultural elements, human consciousness and agency for transformation). The notion unique to dialectical philosophy is that essences are neither eternal nor immutable, expressed in Hegel's dictum that that 'In essence, all things are relative'. Marx took up this philosophical revolution, while standing Hegel's idealism on its head, and created a radically different form of materialism, in which essences are neither absolute nor foundational, and in which anything can be transformed, under given conditions, into its opposite. Essence maintains a complex relationship with appearances, which are themselves immediate and absolute when considered in abstraction from essences:

The essence of a thing never comes into existence by itself and as itself alone. It always manifests itself along with and by means of its own opposite. This opposite is what we designate by the logical term appearance. It is through a series of relatively accidental appearances that essence unfolds its inner content and acquires more and more reality until it exhibits itself as fully and perfectly as it can under the given material conditions (Novack, 1986, p.113, original emphasis).

This is, however, a purely logical construction of opposition. As Novack goes on to argue, the complexity of the relationship between essence and appearance raises two necessities. The first is to avoid superficial assumptions that the essence of a thing is one and the same as its particular appearance at any time. We therefore need to distinguish essence from appearance.

The second is more difficult, in that at the same time appearances will change and even contradict each other as the relative essence of a thing shifts and develops. In doing so they may coincide, interplay or overlap with essence. There is therefore also an 'equally urgent need to see their unity, their interconnections, and their conversion – under certain conditions – into one another' (Novack, 1986, p.114). This identification and opposition between essence and appearance throughout the development of a phenomenon is described as an iterative process moving from an initial point of unity, at which the appearance subordinates the essence, through a phase of divergence, to the apogee of development at which essence and appearance are re-united, but in which the essential nature of the phenomenon becomes transparent and dominates all of its particular appearances.

In considering the practice of mentoring, where mythical representations lay claim to the transformatory power of intimate human bonds, questions are already raised by Marx's original analysis of human relationships under capitalism. In a society where exchange-value has replaced use-value, there is 'no other nexus between man and man than...callous "cash

payment” (Marx & Engels, 1977, p. 44). Social bonds have become reified. They appear as independent things. Direct personal relationships implied by the concept of ‘community’ are ruptured, becoming impersonal and economic. In mentoring, this can be seen in relation to its increasing institutionalisation. Supposedly dyadic relationships have become dominated by externally determined goals and agendas, for example, by policy prescriptions about the criteria for teaching practices deemed acceptable or necessary for entry into the profession (Gay & Stephenson, 1998). Mentors are cast not only as the devoted supporter of the student teacher, but also as gatekeepers to the profession – a dual role that clearly poses potential conflicts of interest and disruption to the mentor-mentee bond. A relationship that is traditionally understood as dyadic is thus covertly transformed into a triad, with the invisible but powerful insertion of agendas determined outside the dyad by dominant groupings.

In my own study of mentoring for ‘disaffected’ youth, similar conflicts were posed by the way in which such mentoring has become geared to employment-related outcomes desirable to policy-makers, and to the production in young people of personal dispositions that are desirable to employers. The philosophical approach outlined above leads me to ask: how can we consider the historical development of mentoring in terms of the shifting relationship between its various appearances and its developing essence?

### ***...reveals significant re-definitions in the concept of mentoring***

Four stages can be distinguished in the history of mentoring, all marked by temporal, spatial, and contextual transformations in its meaning, which might be termed ‘significant redefinitions’ (Gilroy, 1997). Significant redefinitions are those which are not only influenced by changes in the socio-economic and cultural context, but which in turn act reflexively upon that context to alter it in new directions. These stages of mentoring are presented here not in strictly chronological order, but one which reflects the way in which the concept of mentoring itself has oscillated back and forth across boundaries.

### ***It begins with the Homeric stage...***

Reed, through a marxist feminist approach to anthropology, argues that Greek mythology reflects the turbulence of the struggle of patriarchal forms of society to defeat the earlier matriarchy: ‘In patriarchal terms a man without a son is not fully a man, and to die sonless is to suffer the annihilation of the line’ (1975, p.451). Greek myths are:

a reflection of the enormous difficulties involved in consolidating the father-family and the line of descent from fathers to sons...Ignorance of a man’s kinship and family ties at this critical juncture, when the father-family must win supremacy over the matriarchal divided family, can result only in disaster (Reed, 1975, p.457).

This allows a more emic interpretation of the original story. Unless Odysseus has a worthy son and heir, he cannot be a worthy king, and his kingdom will be destroyed. Thus the stakes involved in the successful mentoring of Telemachus relate to the survival of the state on a vital cusp of the social order, at which gender relations and political power have become intertwined. The role of the gods in Greek myth is to intervene to prevent disorder. In this instance, Athene intervenes not only to end the chaos that has reigned in Odysseus’ absence, but also to ensure that his wife does not re-marry any of the usurpers who are demanding her hand. Such a marriage would re-instate the matrilineage – anathema to a goddess whose own birth represents the absolute rupture of matrilineal society.

A distinction can therefore be made between the appearance and the essence of mentoring in Homer’s Odyssey. Its appearance is relatively weak. Mentor himself has made a poor job of taking care of household and ward. Athene intervenes in Telemachus’ fate in diverse and contradictory ways, only in order to further her central purpose (the restoration of

his father to the throne). This reveals the essence of her actions: the (all-)powerful mentoring the powerful to ensure the continuation of the nascent patriarchy and the suppression of matrilineal social forms .

**...then the 'classical' stage...**

Despite the tendency to portray mentoring as some kind of innate human function which has endured thousands of years since Homer's time, as in Stammers' article The Greeks had a Word for it...(Five Millennia of Mentoring) (1992), it can be seen as almost disappearing for a very long period. Many types of relationship which might be compared to mentoring were based in important practices in certain cultures and historical eras, such as that of religious master-disciple, or trade craftsman-apprentice (Gay & Stephenson, 1998). Representations of mentoring itself, however, became chiefly characterised as a quasi-parental relationship between exceptional individuals, such as Socrates and Plato, or Haydn and Beethoven, and contain an element of emotional bonding that is entirely absent from the highly impersonal relationship portrayed in the Odyssey:

From the legacy of famous mentoring relationships comes the sense of mentoring as a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person, a relationship in which the older member is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger. The mentor helps shape the growth and development of the protégé (Merriam, 1983, p.162).

As Levinson et al. (1978) have argued, this may be seen as the classical archetype of mentoring, a form of platonic love. Its appearance is an ideal image that holds a strong romantic attraction. Yet Levinson's own study reveals contradictions within this ideal appearance. He cites Erikson's (1950) theory of generativity to show the self-interest in self-reproduction that may motivate older people to mentor the younger. This in turn is shown to create conflict and bitterness in the ending of relationships as the mentor may find themselves in competition with their mentee, and the mentee may come to find the relationship no longer developmental but restrictive. Levinson's (1978) own evidence indicates that only the wealthier members of his sample described successful mentoring relationships as crucial to their career and life development – the one in-depth case study of a working-class man reveals his failure, despite considerable efforts on his own part, to secure the support of an effective mentor.

In this respect, there is some continuity with Homer's tale, in essence if not in appearance. Mentoring appears to continue to operate as an activity carried out by the powerful on behalf of the powerful, in order to preserve their dominant social status. Of course, this works not just in favour of certain class interests, but also of white males, against the interests of oppressed groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Its essence is thus an intra-class and gendered reproductive function, the transmission of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), including through the competition that it stimulates as members vie for dominance and status. The latter effect, in turn, belies its romantically benign appearance.

Levinson's (1978) work stimulated an interest in the United States in the phenomenon of mentoring, and it is from this point that we begin to see the emergence of a body of literature focused on mentoring within US business management. Influential articles, notably Roche's report Much ado about mentors (1979), claimed to have 'discovered' the phenomenon of mentoring as an important but usually informal element of successful business managers' careers, and Megginson and Clutterbuck (1995) note that in Britain in recent years, the increasing use of mentoring has been seen as an 'American import' which has required adaptation to British cultural contexts. However, as Strathern (1997) argues, such imports often consist in the unrecognised return of earlier exports. She points to 'borrowings and

crossings of domains' (p.306), 'extension and return, or loop through another area of activity...[as v]alues cross from one domain of cultural life to another and then, in altered form, back again' (p.308), oscillations through which 'practices both return with new meanings form this other domain, to reinvigorate the old, while in another sense they never come back to their original source'(p.309). Such a description seems to key into the shifting relationship between essence and appearance that a dialectical materialist approach provides, and affirms the importance of context to conceptualisation.

### ***...and the Victorian stage***

If we consider the historical, geographical and social travels of the concept of mentoring, we can trace just such a process. Freedman (1995, 1999) comments on the explosion of fervour for mentoring disadvantaged young people in the US in the 1990s with the growth of the Big Brothers Big Sisters movement there. He identifies its roots in the 'Friendly Visiting' movement a century earlier. Friendly Visiting was itself a direct export from England, and was based on the ideology and activity of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) during the Industrial Revolution. Novak (1988) describes how wide-scale poverty and destitution affected the English working class in this period, causing ruling-class concerns about levels of public spending on Poor Law relief, and about the control of social unrest in recurrent crises of mass unemployment and starvation. Initially, the bourgeoisie attempted to respond to these problems by dispensing money through charity. However, it became increasingly evident that this was unsatisfactory in the longer term, for both economic and ideological reasons. The philosophy of the COS, whose influence was 'pervasive and significant' (Novak, 1988, p.97), was that poverty was caused not by material conditions, but by the moral turpitude of the poor themselves:

...the poverty of the working classes is due, not to their circumstances...but to their own improvident habits and thriftlessness. If they are ever to be more prosperous, it must be through self-denial, temperance and forethought. (Charity Organisation Review in Jones, 1978, p.50, cited in Novak, 1988, p.97)

Indiscriminate charitable donations were therefore seen as simply exacerbating the problem, obscuring the need for a moral response by the middle and upper classes.

Accordingly, the activity of the COS was to organise a massive, nation-wide programme of voluntary work. The overt purpose of this work – its appearance – was for middle class mentors to befriend working class families in order to improve them by presenting a moral example of the worth of diligence, self-discipline and thrift. Its more covert purpose was to control the dispensing of alms. The role of volunteers therefore included reporting weekly on the progress of their 'mentees'. These reports were then used by the COS to determine who were the deserving poor (to whom charity would be given with the goal of re-educating them back to independence), and who the undeserving poor (who would be dealt with through the Poor Law system and dispatched to the workhouse). Interestingly, both Freedman and Novak ascribe the fairly rapid demise of these initially powerful movements primarily to vigorous resistance on the part of working people (see Colley, 2000 for evidence about individual processes of resistance from my research into the mentoring of 'disaffected' young people).

From this perspective, the model I have termed 'Victorian' transformed the essence of mentoring from an intra-class mechanism to a direct instrument of domination of one class over another – yet with the same essential goal as the classical mentoring model, namely the preservation of the status and power of the ruling class. The appearance of mentoring remains the bonding of relationship and individual development thereby. Yet its essential functions become surveillance and control. What is generally assumed to be essential to mentoring in



both the classical and the Homeric models – the dyadic nature of the relationship, and the identity of purpose shared by mentor and mentee – is reduced to appearance only. The dyad is in fact disrupted by the intrusion of third-party, institutional goals which determine its essence. Thus we see how the process of divergence between essence and appearance has further taken place.

### ***The modern stage...***

The most recent English voyage made by mentoring has found it sailing into the high seas of the New Labour government’s social exclusion agenda. Although I will return to the significant developments which have also taken place in other fields, as I highlighted in the introduction to this paper, mentoring is currently developing most rapidly as an intervention among socially excluded youth.

Freedman (1999) refers to the similarities between the economic and social context which prevail for the present growth in mentoring and that of Victorian times: unemployment and poverty caused by technological change, large-scale migration of working people, and capitalist economic competition on a global scale, all contributing to governmental concerns to reduce public expenditure, particularly on welfare, and to combat the attendant threat of social unrest. A critical stance towards mentoring of socially excluded youth today identifies further parallels. The targeting of mentoring for those variously identified as ‘disaffected’, ‘disengaged’, ‘non-participating’, or ‘hardest to help’ could be compared with the investigation, sifting and categorisation of the poor by the volunteers of the COS.

Moreover, mentoring of this kind has become openly associated with the moral aim of altering the attitudes, beliefs, values and behaviour of the targeted group in line with employment-related goals determined by welfare-to-work policies (e.g. Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) [3], 1999). As in the Victorian COS, mentors are often expected to compile a log of their meetings with mentees, which are then reviewed by project staff to determine the mentee’s progress towards employability. While voluntary participation in mentoring is recognised as being crucial (e.g. Benioff, 1997), indirect compulsion is often a feature. If unemployed young people miss meetings or refuse to engage with personal advisers in the Connexions service, those advisers are legally obliged to inform benefit agencies, and benefits are withdrawn. Similarly, mentoring through the youth justice system often makes probation orders (in lieu of imprisonment) dependent on engaging with a mentor. As such, mentoring has been criticised both as stigmatising, and as a form of social or ideological control (Piper & Piper, 2000). The essence of Victorian mentoring is more nakedly apparent in this model of mentoring, perhaps suggesting the re-unification of essence and appearance, with essence dominating particular appearances at the height of a phenomenon’s development.

However, the story, unsurprisingly, is more complicated. As noted previously, the proliferation of different definitions of mentoring point to a fragmentation of its appearances in multiple and at times contradictory directions. Government guidelines advocate that personal advisers need to adopt a more directive and controlling approach to mentoring socially excluded young people (DfEE, 1999). They explicitly argue against the counselling-type intervention exemplified by Rogerian, person-centred approaches which have underpinned guidance practice since the 1970s. On the other hand, it has been argued that directive methods are counterproductive, and that notions of empowerment through less directive styles of mentoring should be emphasised (Freedman, 1999). Some recognise the tensions involved in balancing the befriending role of the mentor with the contracted goals of institutional mentoring projects (e.g. Skinner & Fleming, 1999); while others point to the very limited and individualistic concept of empowerment in such a context, as mentoring aims to ‘fit’ young people into society as it exists, rather than equipping them with a critical understanding of society or of any means by which they themselves might seek to change it (Merton & Parrott, 1999). In instances too numerous to reference here, there are endless disputes about the

appropriate functions of a mentor: professional or voluntary, to act as role-model or not, to challenge barriers presented by the young people or by the institutions that confront them, to target mentoring to specific groups (if so, which?) or not to target at all...

A distinctive element in modern mentoring, however, is a shift in one aspect of its essence. Homeric and classical mentoring were instances of the powerful mentoring the powerful, while Victorian mentoring represented the powerful mentoring the weak and oppressed. Modern mentoring, in contrast, might demonstrate a trend towards the weak mentoring the weak. As the mentoring of socially excluded youth expands rapidly to unprecedented proportions, with concerns being raised about the allocation of resources to match this expansion (Institute of Careers Guidance, n.d.), non-professional staff, with less qualifications and training *and* lower pay, are increasingly being used for this work (GHK Economics & Management, 2000). So too are volunteers, with some reports indicating that almost half of these receive no initial training at all, while minimal in-puts are provided for the majority in comparison with the lengthy education and training undergone by, for example, professionally qualified careers advisers or counsellors (Skinner & Fleming, 1999). Even for those professional staff engaged in mentoring, the resource-intensive nature of the work, and the emotional demands it places upon mentors, risk creating high levels of stress (Hulbert, 2000). As Philip (Philip & Hendry, 2000) has perceptively noted, the seeds of this shift were already apparent in the Victorian model, in its use of middle women as mentors. Their contact with poor families must have served as a cautionary reminder to middle class women of the fate that awaited them if they did not uphold the ideal model of wife and mother they were supposed to embody. Mentoring has thus become a double-edged sword, with disciplinary implications for both mentor and mentee alike (Colley, 2002).

### **... promotes a stereotype of feminised caring**

It is this shift in the essence of mentoring which returns us to the modern simulacra of the myth of Mentor. If the appearance of mentoring is weak in terms of its functions, fragmented by myriad definitions which lack consensus, it is strong in terms of the emotional disposition it demands of mentors through rhetorical and mythic representations. Great emphasis is placed in evaluation reports upon the quality of the mentoring relationship, and upon the achievement of empathy with young people:

Mentors befriend the young people by getting to know them and trying to understand their world view... (Employment Support Unit, 2000, p.3)

A mentor may offer advice, but has first to earn... the client's trust and respect. This normally means standing alongside the client, and being prepared to share the client's burdens (at the least in terms of empathy, which is genuinely experienced by the mentor, and transparent in its genuineness to the client). (Ford, 1999, p.8)

As we have seen, defining mentoring according to a high level of emotional commitment staked by the mentor is characteristic of those more recent accounts which refer to Athene's role in the *Odyssey*. These figure not only in the literature on mentoring socially excluded young people, but also in the field of professional training. Moreover, one element that specifically distinguishes these modern myths from Homer's original is their completely erroneous portrayal of the goddess. Sainly devotion and intimate bonding replaces Homer's impersonal and ruthless efficacy, and a stereotypically feminine construct of care, epitomised by self-sacrifice, replaces Athene's aggressively androcentric allegiances. As I have argued in more detail elsewhere (Colley, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c), from this point of view, the essence of mentoring may be seen as directed not so much towards the surveillance and control of the mentees (as in the Victorian model), but towards (self-)surveillance and control of the mentors

themselves. The covert outcome sought in this case might be the intensified productivity, worsened working conditions and post-Fordist super-exploitation of public service workers, internalised and self-imposed through dedication to an idealised image of client care. As emotional disposition has come to dominate over multiple and fragmented definitions, mentoring no longer has meaning as a function, but only as a slogan instead. That slogan might be read as ‘Love will win the day’, a slogan that Walkerdine (1992) has analysed as an ‘impossible fiction’ that is both pervasive and deeply oppressive for those within the teaching profession, especially for women. I argue here that her critique may apply equally well to mentors too.

There is one further contradiction at the heart of modern representations of the Mentor myth. The denial of self in such feminine, rather than feminist, paradigms of care may actually serve to undermine the possibility of interpersonal connection and bonding (Gilligan, 1995), negating the very essence of mentoring that such evocative appearances seek to convey. This indicates inadequacies in the liberal and radical feminist critiques of mentoring considered earlier in this paper, because they continue to buy into that very myth of feminine care. They counterpose control to nurture without any recognition that nurture itself may represent a form of control over those who do the nurturing. They only re-frame the modern myth in utopian ways, and fail, fundamentally, to challenge its enslaving essence.

### ***A research agenda for mentoring in teacher education is needed***

I have undertaken here an historical analysis of the concept of mentoring through its official representations in academic literature, policy statements and documents aimed at practitioners. This analysis has portrayed mentoring as travelling through different stages in a series of oscillations which have transformed both its formal appearances and its essential meanings.

I have not attempted to address specific instances of mentoring in practice. Through my research into individual case studies of mentoring ‘disaffected’ young people, there is already evidence of yet more ‘oscillations’, which pose other questions about the essence and appearance of mentoring, in particular the power dynamics of mentoring, and the ways in which mentees may themselves exercise agency rather than act as passive recipients of the process (see Colley, 2000, 2001a). Nonetheless, my argument here is that the appearance of mentoring – in the form of its official discursive representations – is shaping and strengthening its essence, in ways that work against both mentors and mentees in current implementations of policies for education, training and youth transition.

The possibility that mentoring also exhibits a similar essence within initial teacher education is, I believe, worthy of further investigation. Critical analysis could challenge further the easy currency which the term has gained in such contexts of professional development, and explore more deeply the mechanisms by which it is legitimated and made powerful. Qualitative empirical research might remove the discussion of mentoring from the abstract level to which it is so often confined, to an experiential level that is typically hidden from view beneath the rose-tinted aura of celebration that usually surrounds it. We need to know more about the specific contexts of mentoring for student teachers, and about the ways in which mentors and mentees construct their roles. Finally, such material needs to be brought together with rigorous attempts to theorise it in the context of broader critical analyses of early 21<sup>st</sup> century society. My own research has undertaken these challenges in relation to youth mentoring. It is only through further similar work that we will be able to go beyond the sketch of this ‘Rough Guide’ to understand the historical impact of the mentoring phenomenon in education for teaching.

**Notes:**

1. The research was funded by a PhD studentship provided by the Manchester Metropolitan University from 1998-2001.
2. All references to Homer's Odyssey are to this text. This translation is used, despite its rather archaic literary style, because of its attempt to convey the original with the greatest possible degree of historical accuracy, rather than more poetic translations which often lead to radical misinterpretations of the content (Butcher & Lang, 1890, p.vii-viii).
3. The Department for Education and Employment was the English government ministry responsible for policy and legislation relating to education, training and employment, and to guidance and support for young people in their school-to-work transitions. It has recently been renamed the Department for Education and Skills.

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