# Levelling the playing field: Dialogic Mentoring in the CaBan Initial Teacher Education programme

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to examine the impact of the new CaBan Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme that has emerged in response to broader educational reform in Wales. More specifically, it aims to analyse the perceptions of mentors and Associate Teachers (ATs) to develop a more adequate understanding of the mentoring approach that has been adopted by CaBan. Questionnaires and group interviews were used to generate data from 15 mentors and 48 ATs – who took part in the study during the final phase of their one-year postgraduate programme. A process of thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse patterns in the data. The dialogic mentoring approach adopted by CaBan reframed the relationship between the mentor and AT. It encouraged a more democratic partnership that empowered the ATs to challenge some aspects of practice and engage in more creative acts. Regular feedback and discussions that were focused on shared learning helped reduce ATs' evaluation apprehension, but also created some tension as mentors' pedagogical beliefs were more likely to be challenged. These findings have implications for the CaBan programme and other providers of ITE, as adopting a dialogic approach led to desirable changes in mentoring strategies. These changes were perceived to be valuable, but they relied on the mentors devoting more time to the dialogic process and being fully invested in open conversations about learning.

## PRACTICAL ABSTRACT

The CaBan Initial Teacher Education programme was formed in partnership between Bangor University, the University of Chester, and other key stakeholders. The primary aim of the programme was to develop inspiring and highly skilled practitioners who would contribute to teaching a new curriculum for Wales. This article examines the experiences of the mentors and associate teachers involved in the partnership. More specifically, the study looks at how they engaged with the programme's dialogic approach to mentoring. The data from questionnaires and interviews with mentors and associate teachers showed that the dialogic approach led to desirable changes. It encouraged more collaborative and reciprocal relationships, reduced anxiety around assessment, and promoted greater innovation and shared learning.

**Keywords:** Dialogic Mentoring, CaBan, Associate Teachers, Informal Learning Conversations, Initial Teacher Education

### *Introduction*

The CaBan ITE partnership was formed between Bangor University, the University of Chester, and other key stakeholders. It was created in response to widespread reforms that occurred in Welsh education (Jones, et al., 2021), with the primary aim being the development of 'creative, inspiring and highly skilled teachers' who would contribute to the teaching of a new curriculum for Wales (Griffiths et al., 2020, p. 201). In addition, the partnership promoted a new collaborative model of provision centred on mentors and their adoption of a dialogic mentoring approach. The overarching aim of this study is to examine the impact of the mentoring approach adopted by the CaBan ITE programme by analysing the perceptions of the mentors and ATs (also known as student or trainee teachers) involved in the partnership.

Education in Wales is in a period of extensive change, with an accreditation process for ITE, professional standards for teachers and a new curriculum for schools, all being introduced within a few years of each other. The development of the new curriculum began with Graham Donaldson's independent review (Donaldson, 2015). The proposals in his report were incorporated in an action plan, *Education in Wales: Our National*

*Mission* (Welsh Government, 2017), that outlined the various objectives that needed to be achieved for the new curriculum to be implemented successfully. The new curriculum, *Curriculum for Wales Guidance* (Welsh Government, 2020), was finally published in 2020, and its development, as part of wider educational reform, had significant implications for ITE. The process of designing a new curriculum also coincided with the introduction of a new accreditation process for ITE and led to a new collaborative model of provision (Educational Workforce Council [EWC], 2017). Higher Education Institutions that provided ITE were expected to work with colleagues in partnership schools to design high-quality learning programmes (Furlong 2015, 2020; EWC, 2017).

The guidance from the EWC (2017) also placed greater emphasis on the role of the mentor and the need to develop more effective and consistent practice. The training of ATs had previously been criticised by different reviews in Wales (Estyn, 2018; Furlong, 2015; Tabberer, 2013). The general quality of mentoring within ITE was found to be deficient, with more specific findings relating to the varied and inconsistent professional practices of mentors. The new accreditation process sought to address these shortcomings by emphasising the need to select and train more experienced teachers to be mentors and adopt a whole-school approach that afforded them more support (EWC, 2017; Welsh Government, 2018a). In addition, effective mentoring was prioritised as it was thought to underpin the development of a high-quality teaching profession and, in turn, the successful implementation of the new curriculum (Bethell et al., 2020).

*Mentoring in ITE*

The most effective educational systems in the world routinely provide high-quality educational experiences for students. While these systems also share other features, they are characterised by high-quality ITE and high-quality mentoring (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The most effective educational systems help those entering the profession become knowledgeable and skilful teachers. They also provide established teachers with opportunities for ongoing professional development where they can share their expertise with one another.

Within ITE, mentoring typically takes place in the relationship between a relatively experienced teacher and a novice AT. The initial aim is to support the ATs' professional learning and their integration into the school

community (Hobson and van Nieuwerburgh, 2022; Malderez, 2001). In addition, mentoring is also viewed as a developmental activity, with the further aim of empowering the AT to take increasing responsibility for their learning (Clutterbuck, 2004)

Mentors can be powerful agents of growth and development, but the presence of a mentor is not sufficient to guarantee the progress of the AT. Mentors need to be prepared for and supported in their role, but this provision is often lacking in ITE (Clarke et al., 2014). Without adequate preparation, mentors rely on their own experiences of learning to teach and often replicate more traditional and hierarchical models. The power balance within traditional expert to novice hierarchies can inhibit collaborative learning. Mentors have greater experience and expertise and can use their relatively powerful position to direct dialogue, manage actions, and lead decision-making. Moreover, within an oppositional power relationship, where mentors are perceived as powerful and ATs relatively powerless, ATs can feel exposed and exploited. Ultimately, relationships can unravel and progress in teaching can break down (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2019; Mackie, 2020).

Power relationships characterise all learning environments, and mentoring is often portrayed as a relatively hierarchical association where novices are advised or directed to solutions by more knowledgeable experts (Hobson and van Nieuwerburgh, 2022; Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2019). That said, several approaches to mentoring claim to avoid such relationships and aim to be more equitable and empowering (Clutterbuck, 2004; Lofthouse, 2020). Indeed, the changing power dynamics within the nondirective mentoring approach adopted by the CaBan partnership was perceived by one mentor to be a levelling of the playing field. A nondirective mentoring approach is more 'developmental and empowering' as the ATs set the agenda and reach their own conclusions (Clutterbuck, 2004, p. 13). It depends on a level of trust and openness that is difficult to establish in a hierarchical relationship, where one person retains a more powerful position (Clutterbuck, 2004). Non-directive mentors help address ATs' immediate problems while also looking to the long term. They accept that there are different ways to improve pupil learning and that ATs need to be challenged and empowered to find their own path. As such, they help ATs to develop their teaching through reflective strategies that focus on pupil learning and, in doing so, introduce them to approaches that they can continue to explore as they progress in their teaching careers (Clarke et al., 2014; Guskey, 2002).

When mentoring relationships are more directive and instructional, traditional separations between the expert and novice prevail. In contrast, when ATs can collaborate and self-regulate, the culture is more participatory and non-directive (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2019; Mackie, 2020). One theoretical framework that begins to capture the complexity of the different approaches to mentoring in ITE is Bokeno and Gantts' (2000) monologic-dialogic model. This approach recognises the dynamic nature of the mentoring process and that the ATs' needs, expertise, and relative power change over time. The complexity of mentoring means that there is no one single way of mentoring successfully; instead, mentors need to provide a 'spectrum of learning and support behaviours' (Clutterbuck 2004, p. 3) as they move between monologic and dialogic approaches.

A monologic approach is based on explicit criteria where the expert mentor directs the novice AT towards clearly defined aims (Bokeno and Gantt, 2000; Nahmad-Williams and Taylor, 2015). In practice, a mentor that adopts a monologic approach frequently uses a standardised lesson observation form to formally assess the progress of the AT and judge their competence against the professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2018b). This model is thought to be helpful as it captures progress against the standards and directs the ATs towards solutions to their immediate problems (Wang and Odell, 2002). A monologic approach does offer some advantages, but it can also direct ATs to simply reproduce the dominant models of teaching without considering alternatives (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor, 2015). Furthermore, this approach situates the AT within a hierarchical expert-novice model as a more passive recipient of knowledge with fewer opportunities for reflection and innovation (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2019). This balance of power can also lead to what Hobson (2016) termed 'judgementoring', where one-way evaluative conversations about competence cause anxiety for the AT and lead to tension in their relationship with the mentor.

In contrast, a dialogic mentoring approach reframes the relationship between the mentor and the AT. It moves them away from an expert-novice model, where the mentor is positioned as the expert who delivers knowledge to the novice AT (Bokeno and Gantt, 2000). In a dialogic model, the AT is not a passive recipient of knowledge; instead, they work collaboratively with their mentor as part of a reciprocal partnership (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor, 2015). They are work together to develop their shared understanding through joint reflection, enquiry, and open two-way discussions about different aspects of teaching and learning

(Wang and Odell, 2002). The dialogue is more informal and less guarded as the mentor and AT are genuinely interested in developing new levels of insight by exploring ideas and thoughts together (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2018). According to Bokeno and Gantt (2000), the dialogic approach depends on the mentor and the AT having care and respect for each other. They are willing to expose their own thoughts and ideas while also being open to the views of the other. ATs and mentors are thought to value a dialogic approach as it is founded on authentic learning conversations that extend shared understanding while also strengthening relationships (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2019; Sheridan and Young, 2016). That said, adopting a dialogic approach can mean that the feedback provided to ATs about aspects of their teaching is more variable and inconsistent as there can be less clarity and focus to the dialogue (Hudson, 2015).

## Mentoring in the CaBan ITE Partnership

The CaBan partnership prioritised mentoring as educational reform in Wales had raised the importance of the role and identified it as a critical component in the professional development of all teachers (Bethell et al., 2020; Furlong, 2015). As such, a whole-school approach to mentoring was developed by the partnership. The network of support for the AT was centred on the class/subject mentor but worked over three levels, as it also included a principal mentor and a network led mentor. The class/subject mentor was selected by senior school leaders and trained in an approach that prioritised dialogue. The training and ongoing support were provided by a principal mentor, who led provision within the individual school. Finally, a network lead mentor was responsible for the mentoring pro-gramme across a network of schools. They hosted lead school days for ATs and worked with colleagues at the University to support mentor develop-ment and monitor the quality of provision.

The whole school approach adopted by the CaBan partnership recog-nised the importance of mentoring and provided different levels of support for the ATs. The importance of the role was also emphasised by the crea-tion of CaBan's mentor development group. The group, which consisted of University and school-based colleagues, engaged in research, undertook pilot studies and carried out a broader consultation about the role of the mentor. The CaBan model that emerged from this process is centred on the class/subject mentor and their use of dialogic approaches to promote

the professional learning of ATs (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2020). The introductory paragraph of the CaBan Mentor Handbook reflects these findings and notes that their vision for mentoring is dialogic at heart (CaBan, 2019). Indeed, it referred to successful mentoring as being a 'two-way process that develops a reflective approach to learning through the key processes of collaboration, dialogue, observation, critical reflection and enquiry' (Griffiths et al., 2020, p. 211).

Formal lesson observations still feature in the CaBan ITE programme. However, to combat the problems associated with what can become a 'judgementoring' approach, the ATs are only observed formally on eight occasions during their one-year postgraduate teacher education programme. Greater emphasis is also placed on dialogue during the feedback process that follows a formal lesson observation, with the Mentor Handbook (CaBan, 2019) stating that the ATs should have the time to reflect and share their own views rather than simply being directed to solutions by the mentor. The feedback provided through this more formal process is balanced by a wider range of methods such as informal lesson feedback, annotated lesson plans and reflective journals. These inform the AT's ongoing development and contribute to their overall assessment against the professional standards for teaching and leadership (Welsh Government, 2018b). The assessment of the ATs only occurs once in each of the two placements and is informed by a wide range of sources that collectively demonstrate their professional skills, knowledge, and behaviours.

In the CaBan programme, the mentor and AT meet regularly to review teaching, discuss progress and set targets (CaBan, 2019). Part of this ongoing professional dialogue is centred on developing new insights through critical reflection and enquiry. ATs are expected to question their own and others practices and seek improvements through joint reflections and discussions about new findings in pedagogical research (Griffiths et al., 2020). The CaBan programme includes different modes of professional learning such as lesson study, practitioner enquiry and learning rounds. These approaches promote collaboration and critical evaluation within small learning communities, where ATs and mentors are engaged in joint planning, teaching and reflection (Gore and Bowe 2015; Johannesson, 2020). These modes of professional learning are thought to provide regular opportunities for dialogue around teaching and learning. They can have an immediate impact on the ATs' teaching and prepare them for future professional learning through a process of collaborative enquiry.

Overall, the mentoring model that has been developed by the CaBan partnership places greater emphasis on informal dialogue. This is thought to move the process away from evaluative 'judgementoring' and towards a collaborative and reciprocal approach where mentors and ATs work together to extend their shared understanding (Hobson, 2016; Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2018; Sheridan and Young, 2017).

*Methods*

The overarching aim of this study was to review the impact of the approach adopted by the CaBan ITE programme by analysing the perceptions of the mentors and ATs that were involved in the first year of the partnership. A total of 15 mentors and 48 ATs were included in the study, with the data generation taking place during the final phase of the ATs' one-year post-graduate teacher education programme. All of the mentors and ATs were working in primary or secondary partnership schools located in the North of Wales. Of the 15 mentors, nine were working in primary education, and six were in secondary. The mentors also had different roles within the partnership; three were network lead mentors, five were principal mentors, while the remaining seven were class/subject mentors. The ATs were also working in different age phases; 23 were training to teach in primary education, while 24 were doing the same in the secondary phase.

The selection of both the mentors and the ATs was based on a purposive sample where participants were involved or omitted based on their significance to the purposes of the study (Roberts, 2009). In this research, the mentors were included as they were all established teachers who had been selected and trained to undertake a mentoring role within the CaBan ITE partnership. Similarly, the ATs were involved as they were all completing a postgraduate award and learning to teach within the same ITE partnership. All of the participants in the study were immersed in ITE. More specifically, they were all part of the CaBan partnership and were well placed to share their views on the approach to ITE that the programme had developed. Their inclusion in the study enabled the research team to develop an understanding from the participants perspective, with the sampling strategy providing a valuable means of interrogating the approach to mentoring that had been adopted by the CaBan programme (Bryman, 2015; Jones, 2015). All participants provided appropriate informed consent and ethical approval for the study was gained from the University of

Chester Faculty of Education and Children's Services Ethics Committee (Reference: 12220 CaBan Project) on the 12th of February 2020.

The research relied on questionnaires and focus group interviews to generate data. Focus group interviews were used with the mentors as this allowed the participants to share and discuss their different experiences and viewpoints and add valuable insights to the interpretation of the CaBan programme (Bryman, 2015). Questionnaires were initially used with the ATs, as this was a convenient method of generating data from a larger number of participants (Denscombe, 2017). The questionnaires were easy to administer, and the ATs could choose to respond in English or through the medium of Welsh. This may have been a convenient means of generating data, but it also allowed for more superficial responses that lacked detail or clarity (Denscombe, 2017; Jones, 2015). As such, focus group interviews were also used with 12 ATs to extend and confirm the previous analysis. Revisiting the same themes through focus group interviews allowed the ATs to reconsider their views and provide additional insights that may have otherwise remained hidden (Bryman, 2015). This iterative process enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings, but it also provided more complex additional data that was more difficult to analyse (Jones, 2015).

The transcribed data from the audio recorded group interviews with the mentors and ATs were organised alongside the ATs' initial responses to the interview questions. Thematic analysis was then used to identify and analyse patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2019). Thematic analysis is a flexible approach commonly used in qualitative research to highlight similarities and differences in the data (Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016). The data were initially read and coded by each research team member to identify features that were pertinent to the research questions. The codes were clustered into themes that were reviewed and revised independently to identify higher-level patterns. Finally, the themes were reviewed collaboratively to compare and clarify interpretations (Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016). The refined content of the themes was used to write up the analysis of the data, with the mentors (M1–M15) and ATs (AT1–AT48) recognised by a number code reflecting their position in the order of interviews or questionnaires.

### Creating a level playing field

Within the CaBan programme, the mentoring role is regarded as being more important, but the relative power of the mentor in their relationship

with their AT has been reduced. The CaBan programme is 'very much about moving to a more level playing field where the mentor and AT are colleagues that are working cooperatively together' (M5). The discussion of findings will analyse the reconceptualised mentor-AT relationship. More specifically, it will consider the changing balance of power, the emergence of a more democratic and collaborative approach, and the adoption of informal dialogic learning conversations.

Most mentors have noticed the positive impact of change; '*we need to develop a relationship where we are on a level because once it's established, the progress that the ATs make, it's far quicker. I feel it's a hugely important element of the new CaBan*' (M5). The ATs similarly noted the impact of a climate where their views were listened to; '*I was accepted into the school as a teacher, as a colleague who had the opportunity to input my thoughts and feelings on a professional level in order to provide the best for the class I was working within*' (AT20). The mentors who committed to a dialogic approach had seemingly accepted that pedagogical knowledge is socially constructed through the experiences of all participants (Coffield, 2008). As such, they asked for the views of their ATs and, in doing so, impacted on the ATs' school experience; '*I felt valued. My ideas and contributions were often taken on board and utilised which really made it a meaningful experience*' (AT2)

Adopting a dialogic approach placed greater emphasis on the need for the mentor to work with their AT in a mutually productive and respectful way; '*I put more time into it as I knew we'd working more closely and sharing ideas*' (M4). A trusting, reciprocal relationship can provide ATs with the support needed for more risk-taking (Hoffman et al., 2015). One AT noted that the encouragement and positive support '*made a space that allowed for mistakes to happen*' (AT31), while another explained that she '*felt confident to give things a go and not worry if they didn't go to plan*' (AT2). The dialogic approach seemingly reduced ATs' fear of failing and gave them the confidence to participate and share their ideas. The mentors who embraced the dialogic approach were sharing their own expertise while also enabling the AT to explore their own understanding of effective practice (Payne, 2018).

While mentors were overwhelmingly positive about the revised approach, implementing this change has been challenging. One network lead mentor noted that '*We just wanted to get the CaBan message out there, how mentoring has changed and moved away from a hierarchy to a level playing field. We'll have to continue to do that because they're not used to that style of mentoring and they don't maybe yet believe in that style of mentoring*' (M7). The ATs' responses similarly revealed some resistance to change, with a few mentors

being shown to be maintaining a monologic approach; '*I worked really hard during the placement to create new things and try new ideas; however, she had her way of doing things and she liked it done that way. This sometimes made it hard for me and meant I adopted her way of teaching rather than my own style*' (AT8).

The approach adopted by the Caban programme emphasises the need for a reciprocal relationship between the mentor and the AT, one that supports shared reflection and collaborative enquiry (Griffiths et al., 2020). In this sense, a dialogic approach is more democratic as it promotes a participatory and social approach to education (Coffield, 2008). It is not about simply replicating the mentor's existing ideas but allowing the AT to challenge some aspects of practice and engage in more creative acts (Jones, et al., 2021). It is perhaps not surprising then that some mentors are resistant to change as they may be more comfortable with monologic approaches where their views and opinions are seen to be the ones that count. A few ATs even experienced aspects of tension and conflict in their relationships with their mentors. One noted that '*they were not always helpful … I felt she was annoyed by me*' (AT26) while another similarly stated that '*my mentor was difficult and unsupportive from the start*' (AT32).

Adopting a dialogic approach may have exacerbated the tension in some of the relationships between mentors and ATs. The dialogic approach creates a more complex social relationship where a democratic partnership is formed to support joint enquiry and critical reflection. This may create a desirable level of conflict where both parties a challenged in their thinking. However, it can also produce feelings of discomfort when there is a deeper-rooted disagreement that is harder to resolve (Jones, et al., 2021). The dialogic approach emphasises the need for mentors and ATs to develop a disposition towards critical reflection (Griffiths et al., 2020). Developing this key democratic skill (Payne, 2018) is arguably more difficult for mentors as they must promote what they know to be effective teaching while also allowing ATs to challenge existing practices and philosophies. Mentors may need more support to develop these skills, as, without sufficient training, they are likely to revert to apparently less demanding monologic approaches where their view dominates.

One approach adopted by the CaBan partnership to promote collaborative critical enquiry is the inclusion of lesson study as an assessed part of the programme. The aim of lesson study is not for mentors and ATs to simply implement evidence-based practice; rather, it is to align research with practice so that they learn from an evaluation of their own teaching (Jones, 2021). In this instance, the mentor and the AT' *planned the same lesson*

*together and delivered it to our groups. I gave them feedback on their lesson and they gave me feedback on mine*' (M2). Working together in this way promoted the idea that 'it's *not a them and us, but that we are on the same level*' (M2). The mentors who fully participated in the process showed their willingness to develop a professional relationship that promoted shared learning; '*The mentor taught the lesson, we discussed it, made changes and I then taught the lesson. We improved the lesson together and both benefited from the process*' (AT14). Mentors who invested their time in this collaborative process noted its impact on professional relationships '*You get to know each other incredibly well. It's a really good step in establishing a relationship*' (M13). ATs similarly noted that '*lesson study was an effective strategy*' (AT14). It ostensibly promoted a reciprocal relationship centred on shared learning; '*It was good to be valued as an AT and helpful to think that it could be a learning experience for us both*' (AT12). Lesson study seemingly fits well within the CaBan approach as the mentor is encouraged to facilitate and model good practice through col-laborative planning, team teaching and ongoing professional dialogue (CaBan, 2019; Griffiths et al., 2020). It arguably embeds and adds to the dialogic approach, with one principal mentor noting that 'it's *been pivotal in changing the way we work with the AT. It's provided a new model on how you can support and work alongside an AT*' (M9).

Adopting a dialogic approach has seemingly created a more complex social relationship between the mentor and the AT. The '*levelling of the playing field*' (M5) has on the whole been well received, but in some cir-cumstances, it does create tension and the challenge of resolving differences. That said, successful mentors can adapt to the needs of the AT (Van Ginkel et al., 2016) and can draw on a range of strategies to promote their peda-gogical knowledge (Hudson, 2013). This was evident in the use of lesson study as the ATs valued working with mentors who were fully invested in the process of enquiry and provided opportunities to design, teach and review learning together.

*Learning from informal learning conversations; Lesson observation and feedback*

Mentors tended to associate more formal monologic approaches with the evaluative aspects of 'judgementoring' that caused anxiety for ATs (Hobson, 2016). One mentor noted that it used to be *'… you sit down, we'll formally tell you and half the time leave you in tears because you're upset because something's not gone well'* (M6). In contrast, the CaBan programme is

dialogic at heart (CaBan, 2019), with a greater emphasis being placed on ongoing informal conversations about teaching and learning (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2018). Adopting this approach has led to a significant change in the way that lesson feedback is provided to ATs; 'It's *not just telling the ATs anymore; it's engaging them and making sure they have their say'* (M5). Mentors favoured this approach as it alleviated some of the pressure that they associated with one-way evaluative conversations about competence; 'what's *quite nice about this, after every session you're there to give feedback in that informal way so that it's not all building up to that one-off observation'* (M1).

While the CaBan programme is considered to be dialogic (CaBan, 2019), it still includes some aspects of monologic mentoring as this approach is thought to be effective at directing novice ATs towards a clearly defined goal (Nahmad-Williams and Taylor, 2015). Formal lessons observations do still take place, although they occur less frequently and have been adapted to include an account of previous teaching; '*I think the observation forms are much better. I like how you give an overview of the past two weeks and what the AT has been doing and how it's gone'* (NL1). This approach meant that '*the formal observation can recognise that there's been an awful lot of good practice … and also vice versa … in the previous weeks'* (M12). This change was welcomed by mentors; '*I think it's a lot fairer because they don't feel as if they are being judged solely on one lesson. They were under less pressure because it wasn't all hinging on that one lesson'* (M4).

A further change to the formal lesson observation was the removal of grades. This divided opinions as one mentor noted that he '*was into getting rid of the grading system, but once you do, you realise that actually, it serves quite a useful purpose'* (M9). The same mentor noted that their AT' *found the formal quite ambiguous because there's no grading. He wanted me to rate it out of 10 to give an idea of how good it was'* (M9). In contrast, most mentors supported the change, with one explaining that '*The grades are limiting, it's better to look at the quality of the feedback and see that as a way of improvement'* (M11). Another mentor made the same point; '*Taking away the grading was so valuable. It becomes about the dialogue and reflection on how the teaching has gone and how they get better. It is so much more valuable for the AT rather than fixating on the grade'* (M5).

ATs also had contrasting views on formal observations. In the main, they supported the use of formal lesson observations, although not to the same degree as informal feedback methods. They were valued as they pro-vided clear feedback and targets for development; '*It was helpful to focus on a particular target and really work towards improving my practice in that area'* (AT12).

ATs did not experience the use of grades, but some did note that their feedback lacked a degree of clarity and detail;' *lesson observations and my placement report were fairly vague, and targets were often subjective to personal opinion rather than letting you know exactly where you were up to with the teaching standards*' (AT2). While some ATs accorded with more monologic mentoring approaches, a number were still troubled by formal lesson observations, which evidently have the potential to undermine the progress of ATs if they are not handled sympathetically (Hobson, 2016). One AT noted that they '*made me so anxious and stressed. I didn't find them helpful as I could not give my best*' (AT26). While another similarly claimed that the formal approach '*lowered my self-esteem and created a lot of anxiety issues*' (AT5).

The CaBan programme introduced reflective journals as one additional means of tracking the progress of the ATs without creating the same levels of anxiety. The journals allow the AT to document their learning and are generally valued by mentors; '*The journal is helpful as you're giving small targets daily and you can see how they've responded and that guides your response*' (M1). The ATs made fewer references to the journal but did note that it was not always used consistently; '*it sometimes became burdensome to write in the journal for every single lesson*' (AT13). That said, when the AT and mentor found the time to commit to the process of consistently using the journal, it was well–received; '*the daily feedback in my journal was a fantastic seamless way to continuously develop. It gave feedback and prompted more discussion*' (AT2).

When ATs were asked about informal learning conversations with their mentor, their responses were overwhelmingly positive. The professional dialogue helped foster productive relationships with one AT noting that the '*informal feedback made me feel more relaxed*' (AT18), while another stated that '*informal discussions were essential as they helped to develop a good relationship based on mutual respect and trust*' (AT16). The dialogic approach also ensured that the ATs were receiving more continuous informal feedback; '*we can focus on an area of teaching, and I can keep reminding and pushing until it's taken on board*' (M8). In addition, the ATs had more opportunities to discuss pupil learning; '*I took a lot more out of the informal conversations as I could ask more questions based upon the class and the ways in which I could improve my teaching*' (AT20). Overall, the emphasis on ongoing professional dialogue was thought to help the ATs to develop their pedagogical understanding; '*they become more aware of what they should do to teach a decent lesson. Their understanding and knowledge grows as the placement goes on*' (M3). Indeed, joint reflection on learning also heightened ATs' self–awareness and arguably

provided a greater level of agency; *'… towards the end, my AT was particularly good at identifying her strengths and her next steps. Being able to do that is so important for their future career'* (M14).

ATs typically consider teaching with their mentor's support as the most important learning experience during their training year (Clark et al., 2014). However, it is not simply teaching that informs their development but also how they gain feedback and reflect with their mentor. In this study, the ATs generally valued both approaches to feedback, but there was more support for the informal; '*This is where the learning happens. In relaxed, low stakes conversations about teaching. Enjoyable and informative'* (AT11). Informal learning conversations are thought to support successful mentoring programmes; indeed, Jones, Tones and Foulkes (2018) note that ATs often claim this type of dialogue to be where genuine learning takes place; *'I felt I was learning most about teaching when actually teaching and then reviewing with my mentor after. The day-to-day practical advice is what really helped' (AT12).*

## Conclusion

In the CaBan ITE programme, the mentor and the AT are asked to adopt a participatory and social approach to education (Coffield, 2008) where they work in partnership to develop their shared understanding (Bokeno and Gantt, 2000; Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2018). Repositioning the relationship in this way was seen to be more democratic as ATs were empowered to challenge some aspects of practice and engage in more creative acts (Jones, et al., 2021). The collaborative approach to learning was apparent in the use of lesson study, where the mentors who fully participated in the process showed their willingness to develop a professional relationship that promoted shared learning. Some aspects of monologic mentoring remain within the CaBan programme, but formal assessments have been adapted to largely avoid the evaluative aspects of 'judgementoring' that caused anxiety for ATs (Hobson, 2016). Instead, greater emphasis was placed on using the journal to track progress and promote the professional dialogue that supports successful mentoring programmes (Jones, Tones and Foulkes, 2018). In the CaBan programme, informal learning conversations were universally regarded as an effective way for mentors to support the ATs and develop their teaching.

The mentors' responses to the adoption of a dialogic approach were generally very positive, but there was still some resistance to change. The

CaBan programme places far greater demands on the mentor as they are asked to devote additional time and attention to the needs of their AT. Moreover, the dialogic approach may lead to more complex social relationships, where the AT and the mentor have to negotiate feelings of discomfort that can arise from holding different views and opinions on different aspects of teaching and learning (Jones, et al., 2021). As such, mentors may need additional training and support if they are expected to form a democratic partnership that promotes joint enquiry and critical reflection. There is also a need to resolve issues around the use of grades. Fixating on a grade was generally thought to promote anxiety and impede learning, but some mentors and ATs valued the clarity that they were thought to provide. This highlights the continued need to understand the nuanced way that ATs work with and learn from their mentor (Clarke et al., 2014). A more personalised approach may be appropriate here so that mentors have the flexibility to respond to the preferences of their ATs.

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