CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW: LEARNING IN A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Whereas Chapter 2 presented a literature review on the concept of mentoring, this chapter contextualises learning within mentoring practice. The chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section defines learning. The second section reviews literature on organisational learning and links this concept to mentoring practice and to the field of Organisational Behaviour. The third section explores the notion of the learning organisation and its relevance to educators. The fourth section reviews literature on approaches to individual learning. Reflective practice, guided reflection, goal setting and mentoring conversations are discussed. The final section establishes the link between the learning process and mentoring practice.

3.1 Learning

The long standing tradition of mentoring is to pass the torch to the next generation of leaders, which means taking the accumulation of wisdom and knowledge that has evolved through the history of the organisation, mixing it with the best thinking of current times, and being open to the ideas and trends of the future. Hunt and Michael (1983:483) advance that it is this approach towards the practice of mentoring that results in the learning and development that makes up the practice of mentoring.

Kolb (1984:38) defines learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience'. Learning is a natural human behaviour and is a continuous and interactive process (Cassidy, 2004:430; Kolb, 1984:27) that begins at birth and continues through adulthood. It provides individuals with a powerful influence over their own lives and the lives of those they interact with (Franklin, et al., 1998:229). Kolb (1984:28) illustrates that in a learning process 'the learner is directly in touch with the reality being studied, rather than purely thinking about the encounter or only considering the possibility of doing something with it'. Learning occurs when as adults we make sense of our life experiences (Merriam and Clark, 2006:30). This means that for learning to occur we have to attend to the experience we have encountered and engage it in some way. Without this engagement, learning will not have taken place. Attempting to make sense of

our experiences transforms these episodes into a learning experience that fosters our personal and professional development. The essence of learning can therefore be deduced as the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which in turn results in the personal and professional development of the educator.

Learning and development leads to change. Huber (1991:89) contends that this change need not be observable behaviour. Learning will have taken place as long as new knowledge has been absorbed. In contrast to this view, Leroy and Ramanantsoa (1997:872) assert that effective learning will have occurred only when there is both cognitive as well as behavioural change. In their opinion, learning becomes ingrained in the learners when they can display observable behaviour of the new knowledge. Leroy and Ramanantsoa's (1997:872) view augurs well with the learning that takes place within a mentoring relationship. The interactive and observable nature of mentoring (Appelbaum et al., 1994:4) leads to change in behaviour that can quickly be assimilated into the daily processes of the organisation (Megginson et al., 2006:21).

The powerful influence of an individual's expectation on another's behaviour has been recognised by researchers. The idea that the expectation of an occurrence is instrumental in it becoming true is generally referred to as the Pygmalion effect (Murphy, Campbell and Garavan, 1999:249). Research on the Pygmalion effect demonstrates that when a trainer has a fundamental belief in the ability of the learner, these positive expectations impact strongly on the learner so that a high level of learning and development is attained (Murphy et al., 1999:249; Livingstone, 1988:4). The Pygmalion effect is an analogy for what is otherwise known as the self fulfilling prophesy (Murphy et al., 1999:249; Livingston, 1988:4) and is generally accepted in the education and training field as a method of exploring the self fulfilling nature of trainer expectations on learner behaviour. The concept demonstrates the impact and the mechanisms behind high or low belief in the learner's potential to achieve. This phenomenon resonates well with the learning that takes place within a mentoring relationship. It can be argued that mentors who believe their mentees can achieve desired goals, and frequently convey that belief to the mentees will culture in the mentees a high belief in their potential to achieve. Consequently, the mentees' self confidence will increase and they will demonstrate an achievement of their set goals.

As educators interact with one another in the organisation they acquire additional knowledge and skills, which influences their behaviour and changes the way they do things in their practice (Leroy and Ramanantsoa, 1997:872). Dixon (1997:24) suggests that learning takes place at three levels: individual level, collectively as a group, and organisationally. She also contends that 'hallway' conversations are essential for the transmission and assimilation of new tacit knowledge. A strategic intent of enhancing the individual knowledge of educators may encourage knowledge sharing and the transfer of knowledge between members of the organisation. A system of mentoring offers support for the learning process by providing educators with someone who can give feedback, question, share, discuss, challenge, confront and guide one through the learning cycle (Fibkins, 202:48) . The more educators attempt to improve personally and professionally, the more knowledge and skills are accrued by the organisation.

3.2   Organisational learning

Organisational learning is a process which culminates in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills or techniques for increased learning (Marks and Louis, 1999:711). An organisation learns when it adapts to deal competently with challenges through internal discoveries and knowledge obtained from external sources. This means that an organisation makes its employees capable of dealing with routine work, new challenges, procedures and organisational arrangements to incorporate both internal and external changes.

Marks and Louis (1999:711) define organisational learning as 'the *social process of knowledge* or the sharing of individually held knowledge or information in ways that construct a clear commonly held set of ideas'. Organisational learning goes beyond the learning of individual members of the organisation, by combining the collective learning of all members of the organisation (Dixon, 1999:59). Therefore, when educators collaborate in activities focused on personal or professional development, a culture forms reflecting the values, beliefs and norms of the group. Learning occurs as these educators mutually confront problems and develop solutions. This learning results in change in the behaviour of the educators. In response to these changes in behaviour, change comes to the organisation and organisational performances improve (Wood et al., 2004:200).

Organisational learning is intended as a top down and bottom up organisation wide phenomenon and, to be successful, it must be woven into the fabric of everyday organisational practices (Senge et al., 1997:48). How this weaving gets accomplished, however, is crucial. Literature suggests that to be successful in attaining a position where one can say that the organisation is learning, learning has to become such an integral part of the organisation that it is practiced at an unconscious level (Huber, 1991:94; Marks and Louis, 1999:711). This means that in an educational institution that embraces organisational learning, learning becomes a natural process and part of the normal behaviour of educators at work.

Research studies have established that knowledge and skills acquired from mentoring relationships do contribute to the learning of the organisation (Cunningham, 1999:445; Dymock, 1999:316; Lankau and Scandura, 2002:787; Sands et al., 1991:176; Singh et al., 2002:389). The fact that educators within mentoring relationships have developed implies that they have contributed to the learning of the organisation. Ortenbald (2004:130) claims that the terms 'learning organisation' and the term 'organisational learning' mean the same thing and should be used interchangeably. She insists that once an individual has stored 'knowledge in the mind of the organisation' while using this knowledge in practice, a learning organisation has been created. If mentoring becomes ingrained in the culture of the organisation it will continue to perpetuate itself. Leaders who were mentored, in turn mentor the next generation of leaders, and so on. This is the generative nature of mentoring, and the best catalyst for the organisation to become the environment of a learning organisation and to sustain such an environment.

3.3   The learning organisation

Gilley and Maycunich (2000:106) define a learning organisation as one that learns collectively, continuously empowering itself to manage knowledge more effectively and empowering its people to learn in their work environment. This is an organisation which facilitates the learning of all of its members and continuously transforms itself. Change becomes a routine process rather than an outcome or end state. Such organisations have a climate in which individual members are encouraged to learn and to develop to their full potential and have an ongoing process of organisational transformation through

encouraging and utilising the individual learning of its members (Hoyrup, 2004:443). As observed by Argyris and Schon (1996:16), a learning organisation expects its members to act as learning agents for the organisation, by responding effectively to changes in the internal and external environment of the organisation.

The educational institution needs to be socialised to turn towards continuous learning as a way of doing things (Elkjaer, 2001:439; Nyhan, Cressey, Tomassini, Kelleher, and Poell, 2004:73). It takes much collective learning from individuals in the organisation to develop a climate in which it can be said that organisational members learn (Franklin et al., 1998:228). Organisational learning will move towards a learning organisation if learning mechanisms are embedded in an environment where there are shared values and beliefs that shape how organisational members think, feel and behave (Garvin, 1993:80; Popper and Lipshitz, 2000:186). Therefore, the learning organisation leans on the fact that it is important to create continuous learning opportunities, to promote enquiry, dialogue and encourage diverse ways of learning.

Sharing and transfer of knowledge and skills is evidence of a learning organisation.
Learning on an organisational level means that a learning organisation makes use of each individual employee to facilitate collective learning. In this case, the organisation strives to create a work environment that supports learning. Bush and Middleton (2005:196) observe that educators as learners gain growth in confidence and self esteem that ultimately influence those around them. This individual learning can therefore be viewed as a social activity where we learn from the environment we are part of, and from the individuals we interact with (Antonacopoulou, 2006:456; Dixon, 1999:59; Huber, 1991:89; Leach, 1996:101).

Literature suggests that mentoring is a valuable resource for learning organisations (Kram and Hall, 1989:494; Lankau and Scandura, 2002:787; Senge, 1999:132). Mentoring has the ability to contribute to the development of a learning organisation by facilitating the sharing of organisational knowledge as well as encouraging the personal and professional development of employees. Educators engaging in mentoring relationships may promote an environment that encourages individual learning. This implies that mentoring may provide an opportunity where both the mentor and the mentee work together to contribute to the learning of the organisation.

The link between individual learning and organisational learning lies in the ability of the individual to synthesise the experiences that present themselves as learning opportunities, questioning them and using the ensuing capacity to change processes as different situations in the institution demand. To say that the organisation has changed due to learning, the organisation must put into use what has been learned. This may not be necessarily through observable change in behaviour (Huber, 1991:89) but through acquisition of new insight and awareness. The action of reflection then becomes the bridge between individual and organisational learning (Hoyrup, 2004:445). Although there is criticism in literature on the concept of the learning organisation indicating that it is extremely difficult to achieve such a notion (Nyhan et al., 2004:69; Ortenbald, 2002:213), it is clear that the journey towards creating such an environment begins with individual learning.

3.4 Approaches to individual learning

The learning approaches that are appropriate for individual learning should act as interventions that assist the learner to acquire knowledge and skills gathered through experiences. Transfer of knowledge is more likely to occur if the educator receives personal assistance with the application of learned knowledge and skills. Through the mentoring relationship, the mentor can support the mentees apply suitable learning approaches.

The learning approaches relevant to this study are those appropriate for a mentoring relationship, which tend to be close and personal one on one relationship. In the following section, I discuss reflective practice, guided reflection, goal setting, and mentoring conversations as learning approaches deemed most appropriate for learning within the context of a mentoring relationship. The aim of this exploration is to gain an understanding of the role of these learning styles in the learning process and their applicability and relevance to the mentoring process.

3.4.1 Reflective practice

Researchers have assigned the notion of reflection a wide array of meanings. It is a concept that is notorious for making intuitive sense, yet very difficult to define in specific terms (Hoyrup, 2004:446). However, most treatments of reflection in the existing literature trace their origins back to the work of two theorists: John Dewey (1933) and Donald Schon (1983). Thus, an examination of their framework for understanding reflection will clarify this individual learning approach better.

The work of Dewey (1933) who was essentially concerned with the cognitive processes involved in learning provides insight into the concept of reflective practice. Dewey writes:

> Reflective thinking, in distinction to other operations to which we apply the name of thought, involves (1) a state of doubt, hesitation, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, enquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the complexity (Dewey, 1933:12).

Dewey (1933:15) views reflection as having two dimensions as both an attribute and a skill. As an attribute, reflection implies that an individual is open minded, open to new ideas and thoughts; wholehearted, able to engage fully with new ideas and actively seek them out; and responsible, being aware of the meaning and consequences of one's actions. Reflection also requires the skills of keen observation and reasoned analysis (Dewey, 1933:18). These two dimensions play an important role in Dewey's understanding of reflective action. The process of reflection as presented by Dewey (1933) is initiated by a feeling of uncertainty that leads an individual to stop and analyse experiences. Once a problem is perceived, it is located and defined. Next, a potential solution is suggested, followed by a reasoned analysis of the implications and possible outcomes of the suggestion. After continued observation and experiment, the solution is either accepted or rejected.

Building on Dewey's work, Donald Schon (1983) based his model of reflective practice on a concept he terms knowing-in-action. Knowing-in-action involves the 'spontaneous, skilful execution' of an action 'which we are characteristically unable to make…verbally explicit' (Schon, 1987:25). Schon argues that practitioners gather their experiences through day to day practice. As they gather experience, educators come to know and

understand much more than they can articulate in words. Polanyi (1958:373) refers to this inability to describe thought processes clearly as tacit knowledge. Experienced educators' knowledge is often seen in their actions as they perform their daily tasks. Over time, accumulated experience forms a repertoire from which professionals draw during practice. In turn, reflection is the means by which tacit professional knowledge is surfaced (Schon, 1987:54). Schon speaks of two kinds of reflection: 'reflection-on-action' and 'reflection-in-action'.

3.4.1.1   Reflection-in-action

Reflection-in-action involves thinking about action while actually executing it.   The practitioners 'think on their feet'. As issues arise during practice, the practitioner reflects for a moment and applies what she knows from experience to her decision making (Schon, 1983:55). This is learning which occurs spontaneously and in the heat of the situation. Such reflection is a powerful learning medium, as it condenses several learning strategies into a matter of seconds or minutes which may end up affecting the outcome of the situation in hand. Through reflecting-in-action, educators can reshape what they are doing while performing the task.

3.4.1.2   Reflection-on-action

Reflection-on-action involves thinking back and talking about action. A practitioner looks back on a past project or situation to 'explore the understandings they have brought to the handling of the case' (Schon, 1983:54). This process allows them to use the knowledge they have accumulated through experience to 'reframe' their perception of the issue or problem (Schon, 1987:51). This type of reflection can provide a different perspective and significant supplementary information not available to the educator at the time the experience occurred. More importantly, reflection-on-action provides an opportunity for dialogue and a continuous reworking of ideas between the mentor and the mentee.

Cressy, Boud and Docherty (2006:18) introduce the notion of productive reflection. They see reflection as being not just an end in itself but a means to action, and mention that reflection occurs in the context of producing a learning outcome that can be applied to a real situation. This view of reflection is not different from that of Dewey (1933) or Schon

(1987). However, Cressy et al.'s (2006:18) view highlights the perspective of reflection resulting in knowledge generation and active learning in a congenial workplace. The authors see productive reflection as having an impact on work processes of the reflective individual as well as among other colleagues, and aims to produce a context that fosters learning which include those beyond the vicinity of one reflective practitioner. This means that individual reflection can result in the learning of others in the organisation. As educators become reflective practitioners, they influence their work processes and their work behaviour. Mentoring is one way through which educators can make the transition from reflection to learning.

3.4.1.3 Reflective practice and mentoring

Reflective practice has been linked to effective mentoring practice and found to be an effective way of transforming experience into learning (Cox, 2005:460). Mentoring stimulates individuals to self assess and reflect, thus becoming more conscious learners who are able to apply knowledge of their learning needs and styles to their own development (Hine, 2008:1). Reflection encourages more open minded and creative thinkers and effective educators, while developing an awareness of the self as a learner. Reflective practice enhances the educator's ability to monitor, assess and improve performance and thinking, and hence promote deeper learning (Hine, 2008:6). Mentoring encourages systematic reflection and can greatly enhance the process of making tacit knowledge explicit (Nicholls, 2002:139). Through the mentoring process, educators are able to interrogate their practice, reflect and then reappraise values and behaviours. Meaningful learning and development does not occur simply because one is in a mentoring relationship. It is what the educator can make of the experiences being gathered that will result in such learning and development. For information to become understanding in a conscious way the mentee needs to interpret and transform that knowledge into practice. This can effectively be done through critical reflective practice.

The value of reflection comes about when it provides rich material for later reflection-on-action when through journaling or dialogue, educators can re-run and mentally rehearses new ways of doing things. Cox (2005:460) argues that reflection-on-action promotes reflection-in-action. This leads to critical reflections that allow the educator to reach increased self awareness. As the educator becomes competent in the action of critical

reflection and gets used to reflecting on actions already experienced, it becomes easier and more natural for the educator to reflect as they perform the task. This self awareness results in the educator making better use of experiences encountered and thus learning more effectively at this individual level.

Mentoring is an experience where elements of information are gathered by the participants in different ways. Some aspects of the new knowledge being assimilated might be quite explicit and clear, while others may simply be inferred or not at all apparent at the time (Huber, 1991:89; Schon, 1983:54). A continuous cycle of action and reflection upon the action is appropriate for the internalisation of the knowledge and skills gathered. Kolb's (1984:28) well known concept of experiential learning aptly describes this cyclical pattern in which experience leads to reflection and then to conceptualisation and action. This action then results in further experience. To become a reflective educator, one has to question the status quo, and examine assumptions underlying practice. The action of reflection becomes a powerful learning approach that can be utilised by both mentors and mentees to assimilate learning experiences. As observed by Gough and Scott (2007:111), the combination of reflection and experience leads to 'deep learning'. Reflection is therefore a channel through which educators can acquire personal and professional development (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Day, 1999:223; Loughran, 2002:41; Merriam and Clark, 2006:39; Schon 1983: 54).

3.4.2   Guided reflection

In her study of adult learners learning for experience Cox (2005:471) found that guided reflection resulted in effective workplace learning. Within an effective mentoring relationship, the mentor guides the mentee through the process of reflection on the experiences that the mentee is undergoing (Barnett, 1995:54). Mezirow (1997:10) contends that for mentees to understand the experience fully, they require assistance to transform their frame of reference into meaningful learning. Guided reflection, when used within the context of a mentoring relationship, can help the participants channel their critical reflection in such a way that the experience under scrutiny is systematically and critically reflected upon. This approach towards reflection can result in structured learning that assists in individual learning.

Hogan (1995:7) presents the four-stage SAID model that she recommends for the process of guided reflective practice. The first stage is **S**ituation, where the individual reflects on the actual experience. The second stage is the **A**ffective domain. In this stage one reflects on the feelings evoked by the experience. The third stage is the **I**nterpretation of events. The individual probes within themselves to learn from the event. The fourth stage is the **D**ecision. In this last stage of the process, the individual draws up an action plan that results from the learning. Hogan (1995:7) clarifies that one should not reflect on only what they consider significant events. It is effective to reflect upon small incidences of everyday life, both positive and negative. Answering a number of questions as the experience is explored assists deeper reflection.

Maintaining a personal reflective journal during a mentoring relationship is an approach that assists guided reflection. Writing down one's reflections has the ability to result in a deep learning about oneself (Boud and Keogh, 1985:63; Coghlan and Brannick, 2001:33; Hogan, 1995:5). Maintaining a reflective journal is therefore recommended during reflective practice because it provides objectivity in relation to the initial learning experience. It could clarify the initial experience by removing it from the clouds of subjective feeling that may obscure it.

3.4.3   Goal setting

The exercise of setting measurable and realistic goals that can be achieved within a specified timeframe is an approach that may aid individual learning (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002:278). Such an activity prevents future misunderstandings and assists in time management. Scwiebert (2000:103) emphasises the importance of clarifying expectations and establishing goals for the mentoring relationship. It is important for the mentor to help mentees articulate what they want to achieve and how the relationship may help them do so. Setting goals is even more important where both the mentor and the mentee are learners in the relationship.

Mentoring has evolved beyond the traditional one-on-one relationship where the mentor is perceived as the all knowing senior, older, and powerful person, while the mentee is

perceived as being on the receiving end of what the mentor has to provide. This type of mentoring relationship is regarded as traditional mentoring (Geber, 2003a:4). In current educational institutions mentoring can be regarded as a relationship where the mentor and the mentees form a partnership, each going into the relationship with learning and developmental goals that they desire to achieve (Geber, 2003a:4). In this type of relationship mentors acknowledge that mentees possess some knowledge and expertise, but have some specific developmental needs that they would like assistance in enhancing. The mentees are also aware that they are not the only learners in the relationship and that the mentors have something to gain too. These two players commence the mentoring relationship within their work context and in the process of their interaction, make the organisation a beneficiary of their learning and development.

Success in mentoring is enhanced by viewing this phenomenon as a joint venture between the mentor and the mentee. The responsibility of learning needs to be shared. Kaye and Jacobson (1996:44) suggest that a contractual agreement between the mentor and the mentee assists in this case. This can take the form of a personal development plan (PDP). Helping the mentee construct a PDP is a critical task for the mentor (Megginson et al., 2006:17). Training in this area would typically involve explaining what a PDP consists of; filling out a self assessment to aid in the identification of developmental needs; and reflecting on work and/or personal life (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002:278). The role of the mentor in the exercise of constructing a PDP is to be passive and reactive to the aspirations of the mentee. The mentor needs to be careful not to impose his/her objectives on the mentee. Instances where the mentee is proactive in constructing the PDP will be the most likely to result in effective learning and goal achievement.

3.4.4 Mentoring conversations

A critical activity between mentors and mentees that guides the achievement of set goals is mentoring sessions. These sessions result in mentoring conversations that facilitate learning. During these conversations, the mentor guides mentees towards their goals and objectives. Cox (2003:11) acknowledges that mentoring conversations are an opportune time for mentors to share the knowledge they have with mentees. The time allocated for mentoring conversations provides the opportunity for mentors to share true life scenarios

with mentees. Huber (1991:91) contends that feedback is critical within the learning cycle and will result in positive learning outcomes. The real benefit from mentoring conversations will happen when mentors and mentees discuss issues of real significance that result in deep and meaningful dialogue and create room for effective feedback.

Researchers suggest that mentoring conversations that follow a structured format have more likelihood of obtaining positive learning outcomes (Mumford, 1995:4; Clutterbuck, 2004:85; Whitmore, 2002:53). Mumford (1995:4) presents a structured sequence that can be applied effectively when mentors conduct learning sessions with mentees. In this sequence learning is presented as an integrated process that begins with experiences followed by collection of data and observations about the experience. The process within the cycle assists the mentor to plan the learning sessions to make maximum use of the learning opportunity. Whitmore (2002:53) presents the four-step GROW model as a structure that may be used by mentors to guide a mentoring session. Whitmore (2002:53) developed the GROW model specifically for coaching in the sporting field. This model has however been adapted by mentors to guide mentoring sessions in varied fields (Taylor and Furnham, 2005:100).

Whitmore (2002:53) urges that the GROW model is most effective when mentors build awareness and responsibility in their mentees. The **G**oal phase first establishes what the mentee would like to achieve during the session. Second is the **R**eality phase during which the mentor ensures that the information and/or experiences that the mentee relates are realistic and current to the situation. During the **O**ption phase, the mentor guides the mentee through several options for consideration. In the **W**rap-up phase, the mentor concludes the session with a clear action plan and clarification of the support the mentee requires. At each phase, this model provides useful questions that the mentor can utilise to guide, probe or encourage the mentee to achieve the desired outcomes of the mentoring session. Obtaining optimum results from mentoring conversations will result in a mentoring relationship that makes full use of the inherent connection between mentoring practice and learning.

3.5   Linking mentoring and learning

In the field of Education, interest in the concept of organisational learning parallels the trend and subsequent growth of mentoring in educational institutions and the emphasis on the promotion and fostering of mentoring principles (Cohen and Galbraith, 1995:9). The learning organisation is based on the premise that it is important to create continuous learning opportunities, to promote enquiry, dialogue and encourage collaboration and team learning. This is the same concept that underlies the notion of organisational learning - the belief that organisations can be transformed by improving communication processes and techniques so as to enrich relationships among its members (Wood et al., 2004:200). This is an approach that fosters positive behavioural change in the organisation. The benefits of mentoring are enhanced growth and development of both educators who are mentored and those who serve as mentors. It follows that educational institutions that embrace the concept of mentoring and encourage the mentoring process in the workplace maximise the potential of their educators to learn and improve in their practice.

The mentoring process is best understood if viewed from the perspective of being a 'highly significant and productive interpersonal process of learning' (Cohen, 1995:1).
Cohen (1995:39) argues that mentoring and learning are synonymous with each other. In support of this relationship between mentoring and learning, researchers draw many comparisons between the two concepts by presenting learning as a function within the practice of mentoring (Alred and Garvey, 2000:267; Baker 2002:35; Cox, 2003:20; Hale, 2000:227; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005:459). Kerka, (1999:3) argues that mentoring is a practice that supports much of what is currently known about how individuals learn, including the socially constructed nature of learning and the importance of experiential, situated learning experiences. These comparisons assist in the conceptualisation of how learning and development within a mentoring relationship occurs. The link between learning and mentoring has long been a subject of research by those attempting to understand this relationship better. Consequently, it is recognised that there is much to be gained from a review of what researchers have advanced about the learning that takes place within a mentoring relationship.

Many positive outcomes have been accredited to mentoring relationships (Lankau and Scandura, 2002:787; Singh et al., 2002:389; Hale, 2000:223). Mentors and mentees go

into a relationship expecting beneficial gains. The educational institution that supports mentoring also expects it to result in learning outcomes that enhance the competency levels of the educators.

It has been established that the mentoring relationship results in the learning and development of mentees (Alred and Garvey, 2000:268; Baker, 2002:42, Cox, 2003:20; Eby and Lockwood, 2005:447; Hale, 2000:227; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005:458; Hezlett, 2005:520; Singh et al., 2002:389). Support and guidance offered within the mentoring relationship will result in the mentee improving not only professional, but also personal skills that they can use effectively in their day to day activities. Hezlett and Gibson (2005:458) assert that as mentees develop technical, interpersonal, time management, and self organisation skills, they also gain self confidence in their attitude towards the tasks that they perform, and generally adopt a positive attitude towards work. Such personal and profession development works positively for the educational institution that the educators are a part of. Mentees, however, are not the only learners with the mentoring relationship.

Although less attention has been devoted to understanding mentor's learning experience than that of mentees (Allen et al., 1997:70; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005:458), there are studies that suggest that learning is part of the experience of being a mentor. There is research that examines the learning of mentors through the mentoring process (Allen and Eby, 2003:481; Alred and Garvey, 2000:268; Hale, 2000:229; Healy and Welchert, 1990:19; Singh et al., 2002:389; Waxman, 1996:97).

Mullen and Noe (1999:240) obtained support for the idea that mentors seek information from their mentees. Mentoring is an opportunity for mentors to obtain different perspectives about varied issues. The action of obtaining information from the mentee presumes that the mentor will put this information to use. Being in the same field of Education may be an advantage in terms of the reciprocal learning that can take place within the relationship. In a study conducted by Allen and Eby (2003:480), mentors who perceived themselves as similar to their mentees reported learning more from their mentoring relationships. A developmental mentoring relationship with professional objectives that include improving teaching capacities will benefit not only the mentee, but the mentor as well. Mentoring becomes an opportunity where mentors can revisit their own

competencies and discuss refreshing ways of enhancing these competencies. This may result in mentors gaining perspectives on issues that they would not otherwise have been exposed to. Mentors participating in Hale's (2000:229) study reported that mentoring helped them gain insight into their developmental needs, refresh their skills, understand how others perceived their work, and develop their management style. Such learning can only come about in the process of sharing ideas between colleagues. It is clear that mentors, in the act of guiding and promoting others to develop different capacities, themselves learn and develop their own capacities.

The dual nature of the learning that takes place between the mentor and mentee as advanced in the preceding paragraphs suggests the existence of a strong bond between learning and the process of mentoring. Learning within mentoring practice appears inevitable. The mentoring relationship infers a dynamic learning and development process where the personal and professional capacity of both the mentor and mentee is enhanced. Functioning as guides, mentors provide authentic, experiential learning opportunities as well as an intense interpersonal relationship through which social learning takes place. Sharing of information is an effective way of ensuring the learning of the organisation (Huber, 1991:91). The changes that result from this learning can impact on the entire organisation (Huber, 1991:89; Leroy and Ramanantsoa, 1997:872; Megginson et al., 2006:14). The learning of individual educators accumulates to the learning of the organisation (Casey, 2005:131). As the organisation adds to its knowledge bank, positive changes in the way processes are carried out in the institution may result. The impact felt on improved organisational processes implies positive changes in the behaviour of members of the educational institution. Cleary, the mentoring process, organisational learning and organisational behaviour are intricately linked.

In educational institutions, where learning is the main purpose and product of the existence of the organisation, mentoring should be a concept that is easily assimilated into the very fabric of the organisation. Through the continued learning of their educators, the educational institutions can expect not only to improve the competency levels of their educators, but also improve the quality of education that they provide to society.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature review indicates that the learning process and mentoring practice are intertwined. It is suggested that the guidance and support that mentors provide mentees in the mentoring process results in learning and development. The literature reviewed suggests that those organisations that embrace practices that encourage learning can propel their organisations towards achieving the notion of the learning organisation, where knowledge sharing is encouraged through interpersonal interactions. Mentoring practice is an avenue that can be used effectively to encourage the individual learning of educators.

When the approaches to individual learning such as reflective practice, guided reflection, goal setting, and mentoring conversations are practiced in the mentoring process, learning is enhanced. These approaches can provide a structured framework in which the mentoring process can take place. Cumulative effects of such learning and development contributes to organisational learning. The change in behaviour that results as an outcome of learning may influence the way the organisation conducts certain processes or systems. This implies that mentoring practice and the behavioural changes that result in the educators who participate in this process will influence organisational behaviour.

In the next chapter, I outline the research methodology I have used in this exploratory study.

CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

This study is a mentoring journey that leads me through an exploration of the principles and practices of mentoring and how mentoring is used as a developmental intervention to assist in individual learning of educators in one Vocational Education and Training (VET) educational institution. The preceding chapters presented an overview of the study and a review of related literature. In this chapter the research methods and processes used to collect data are described.

The chapter looks at the research design, and begins by reviewing qualitative research methodology. Within this methodology, the action research approach that is used in this study is discussed. I also justify the self study approach I have utilised as an integral part of my study. This is followed by a comprehensive presentation of the study design in line with the action research approach and self study. The data sampling and data collection methods utilised is then presented and explained. This is followed by the description of the data analysis process and associated validity issues. The final section of the chapter presents background information on the mentees and myself as the participants in this mentoring journey. In this final section I outline the limitations of the study.

4.1 Research design

Mouton (2001:55) defines a research design as a 'blueprint of how you intend conducting the research'. Cooper and Schindler (2003:146) add that the research design outlines the strategies used for the collection, measurement and analysis of the data. In this exploration of the principles and practices of mentoring and how mentoring assists in learning and development of educators in a VET educational institution, action research was utilised as the orientation to enquiry. Action research falls into the orientation of qualitative research. Before embarking on an exploration of how action research was used as the orientation to enquiry, a brief overview of the qualitative research methodology is offered.

4.1.1 Qualitative research methodology

Qualitative research is 'any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:10). This includes many methods and approaches to enquiry such as case studies, participatory enquiry, participant observation and interpretive analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:2). Van Maanen (1983:9) describes qualitative analysis as an 'array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world'. Qualitative methods are often used for examining and developing theories that deal with the role of meanings and interpretations in naturally occurring situations (Collins and Hussey, 2003:13).

A qualitative research approach is used for this study. This is because description is an integral feature of qualitative research, and such description will provide depth and meaning to the outcomes of the study. The objective of this study aims to develop a deep and rich understanding of the principles and practices that impact on the mentoring process, and also to explore the journeys of the participants in the study living through their experiences. Therefore, to explore the principles and practices of mentoring effectively and achieve the objective of learning through mentoring, the qualitative, rather than quantitative approach to research was deemed most appropriate.

The methodological procedure that is applied in this study is action research. This action research approach incorporates self study as a method of enquiry. As the researcher, it is prudent for me to outline why I deemed action research to be the most appropriate research approach that could effectively be utilised in this study. Below, I will expand on action research as the research orientation and justify my choice of this approach.

4.1.2 Action research

Introduced by Kurt Lewin about fifty years ago, action research explores identified issues within practice through recurring cycles of action and reflection (Dickens and Watkins, 1999:127). Lewin's original formulation of the idea of action research was based on the

belief that in attempting to understand an organisation the best thing to do is to try and change the way things are done. Through employee participation organisations would improve their processes and learn to do new things. Reason and Bradbury (2001:1) define action research as:

> 'A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally to the flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:1).

Action research is usually characterised as having a cyclical process, being participative, being reflective, contributing to the development of the organisation and developing theory that contributes to new knowledge (Dick, 1993:12; Holly, Arhar and Kasten, 2005:5, Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981:8; Reason, 2006:188; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000:95). It is a research approach that aims to link theory and practice and can be utilised in solving practical problems for educators in their educational institution. This research method uses systematic enquiry 'carried out in order to understand, evaluate and change' the workplace for the better (Bassey, 1999:41). O'Hanlon (2003:23) observes that action research can help educators as individuals or groups, to understand better the nature of their assumptions about their practice. Action research that focuses on pedagogical issues encourages educators to become reflective practitioners (Holly et al., 2005:42). Therefore, through the process of action research, organisations can continuously learn to improve themselves.

Action research is cyclical, rather than linear, alternating between action and reflection, which recognises the need for action plans to be flexible and responsive to the environment in which the research is taking place. Dick (1993:31) asserts that action research provides the flexibility and responsiveness that are necessary for effective change, and at the same time provides a leeway through which adequate and reliable data can be collected and valid and reliable conclusions drawn. Kemmis and McTaggart (1981:8) outline the spiral nature of action research as plan, act and observe, reflect, then in the light of this reflection, plan for the next cycle (Figure 4.1). Action research works through this cyclical four step process of consciously and deliberately planning, taking action, observing the action and evaluating the action, leading to further action.

Figure 4.1:The action research spiral

PLAN

REFLECT

OBSERVE

ACT

REVISED
PLAN

REFLECT

OBSERVE

ACT
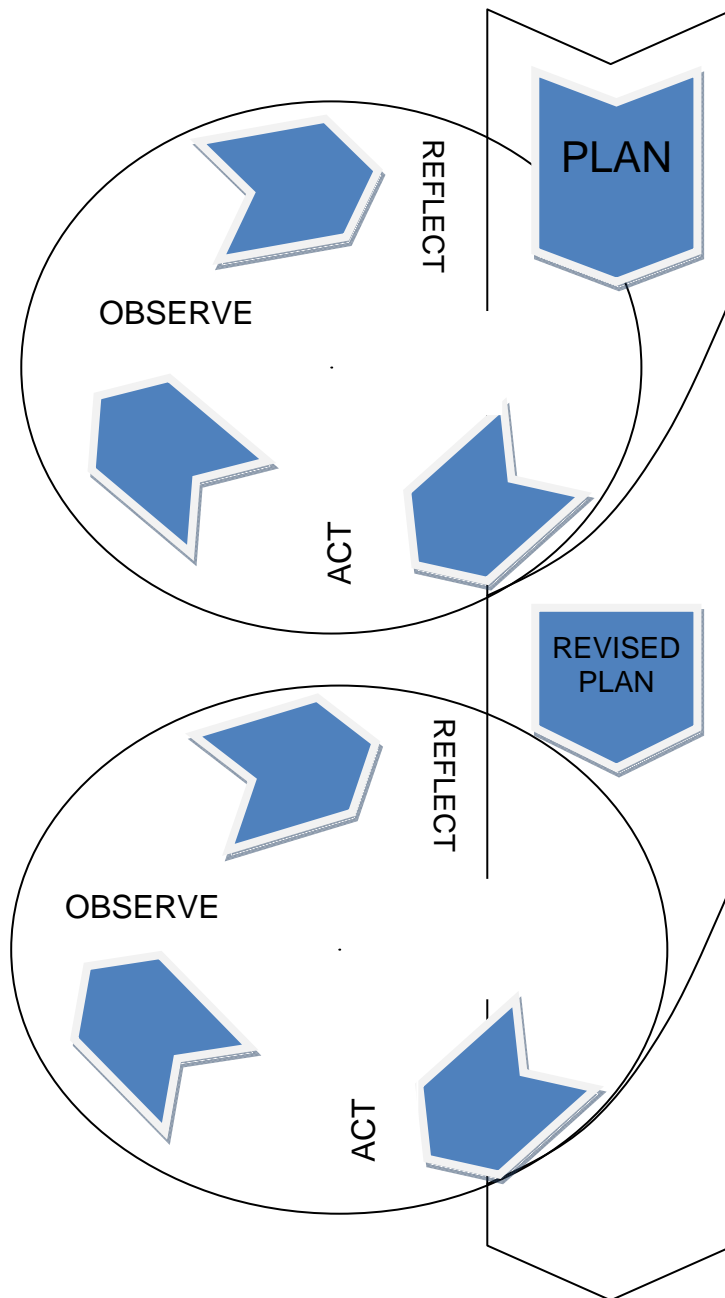
Source: Kemmis and McTaggart 1981. *The Action Research Planner*. Victoria, Australia: Deakin University Press p 8.

4.1.3   Self study

A major objective of this enquiry is a self study designed to enhance my mentoring capacity and improve my mentoring practice.   The action research design presented

incorporates the principles of self study (McNiff, 2002:20; Northfield, 1996:3; Taylor and Settelmaier, 2003:233; Whitehead, 1988:43). As the researcher I have the aim of improving my mentoring practice, by becoming a learner, and through the newly acquired knowledge, influencing others around me to learn as well, and change their practice (McNiff, 2002:6). My emphasis is professional self improvement by strategically and systematically collaborating with others (Freebody, 2003:87).

Dick (1993:15) observes that increasingly in qualitative research, it is being regarded as appropriate to discuss oneself and one's own learning as part of the study. In support of this view, Patton (1990:25) encourages the contextual engagement of the researcher in the issue being explored by stating that 'To understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method'. Self study is a way to develop practical theories that can be tested in practice (Whitehead, 1988:42). Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992:202) suggest that a self study cycle to enhance the reflections and learning of the researcher is critical for collaborative research approaches such as action research. The personal critical reflections inherent in self study result in professional development (Northfield, 1996:4).

The objectives of this enquiry will be met through the exploration of experiences emanating from mentoring practice in real time. Our experiences are anticipated to assist in effective change and realise the outcomes of learning and development. This requires a research approach that will need to be responsive to our experiences. Because of the emphasis on action, change, and critical analysis, the action research approach and self study is congruent with the subject of my enquiry.

4.2   Sampling design

The selection of the sample was based on a purposive sampling strategy. Merriam (1988:47) clarifies that sampling in natural settings involves the selection of research participants, a research site, time and events. These components of the sampling design will be explained below.

Purposive sampling is the selection of a sample based on the researcher's judgment regarding appropriate characteristics required of sample members (Ezzy, 2002:74; Patton, 1990:169). The selection of the research participants was not intended to be representative of the larger population. Rather, they were selected to allow for the generation of information rich data while exploring the principles and practices of mentoring within the context of the research. It was the experiences that the participants would undergo in the mentoring relationship and the themes that would emanate from these experiences which were deemed critical to the research.

Patton (1990:184) contends that the size of the sample depends on the objectives and purpose of the enquiry. Because the study was exploratory, and the outcome of the enquiry depended on the rich experiences the mentees and I would live through, a small sample was desired. This study had a sample size of three, comprising myself and two mentees.

This study was conducted in Gaborone Technical College (GTC) as the study environment. This educational institution was a natural choice due to the fact that both my mentees and I were employed as educators in this institution during the study period. The participants were expected to be an integral part of the action due to their ability to influence the desired change in the institution. It is from this context that the sample was drawn.

4.2.1   Background information on the participants

Providing the reader of a qualitative study a brief descriptive background of participants is important. This allows the reader to become more familiar with the participants in the study thereby helping to establish an identity and content from which to view the participants' comments. Below I present brief background information on the three participants in this study.

4.2.1.1   Information on the mentees

The first mentee is Wakwanza, a 40 year old educator working as a senior educator in the Hospitality and Tourism Department at GTC. Being a senior member of the institution,

Wakwanza has sole responsibility for, and is the programme team leader of, the Tourism programme. At this point in his career Wakwanza balances teaching with a growing load of administrative tasks. Wakwanza has fifteen years experience in teaching.

The second mentee is Mchana, a 29 year old female educator working as a lecturer in the Hairdressing Department at GTC. She has been associated with the mentor as a colleague working in the same educational institution, but in a different vocational area and department. Mchana has worked as an educator at GTC for five years. In comparison to Wakwanza, Mchana is young in industry and has only seven years of experience in her teaching career.

4.2.1.2   My role as mentor and researcher

In this study I am the mentor to Wakwanza and Mchana. During the period of the study, I was an educator administrator in GTC, employed as Head of the Hospitality and Tourism department. I have over twenty years experience in the teaching profession, ten of these years being directly involved in education administration and management.

In this study, I am a participant of the action research project, as well as a researcher. My aim is to learn and develop within the mentoring relationships that we will form, and improve my mentoring practice. As a researcher, my intention is to collect rigorous data by using action research cycles that will enable me address my research questions adequately.

4.3   Designing the action research mentoring project at GTC

This research was designed as an action research study (Dick, 1993:12; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981:8; Reason, 2006:188). The linking of 'action' and 'research' highlights the essential feature of this approach, which involves the testing out of ideas in practice as a means of bringing about change on the one hand and increasing knowledge and understanding on the other (Dick, 1993:12; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988:6). The design of this study was planned to take into account these two dimensions of action research.

I selected Benton's (2005:51) nine-step model to guide me through the 'action' component of the project. Utilising the Benton model ensured that the action research project was approached from a holistic view from the planning stages through to the evaluation and refection of the actual events. I then adapted Kemmis and McTaggart's (1981:8) model of action research cycles (Figure 4.1), comprising of the four elements of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting to guide me through the 'research' and data collection processes. The Kemmis and McTaggart model assisted in the articulation of the action research cycles involved in the mentoring process. These two action research dimensions are outlined in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 respectively.

4.3.1   The action research process for the research project

The action research cycle for the research project is adopted from Benton's (2005:51) nine-step model. I used this model to organise the research in a systematic way while still remaining an integral part of the process. Step 1 to 5 of Benton's (2005:51) model concerns the planning stages of the action research project. These stages are therefore explained in this section as part of the planning process. Steps 6 to 9 address the evaluation and reflection on the actual events of the action research. In this section, I explain what these four steps entail. I will however, evaluate and reflect on the actual events in Chapter 7 of this thesis.

Step 1: Identify the concern

My research journey began in July 2006 when I identified there was a need in GTC for a formal mentoring programme. This need was apparent to me because of the fundamental changes that were taking place in the institution as outlined in Chapter 1. My thoughts were that while resulting in positive developmental outcomes for educators at GTC, this project would also be an interesting doctoral research project for myself.

In July 2006, I carried out four preliminary interviews with educators from four different departments across the institution with varied years of teaching experience. The aim of the interviews was to identify pertinent issues of concern to the educators at GTC and provide me with baseline information about these concerns. Following these interviews, I

approached the GTC management with a proposal to implement a pilot mentoring programme. In this proposal, I targeted 10 mentoring pairs from different departments across the institution. My proposal however was rejected because GTC management was not ready to sponsor an institution wide formal mentoring programme at that time. The management however was willing to support a smaller scale mentoring project run by myself as a doctoral project.

I gave thought and consideration to the option of a smaller scale intervention. I considered that a smaller scale approach to mentoring at GTC would possibly also result in individual and organisational learning. The alternative plan I came up with involved participation in a mentoring project where I would be a mentor to two colleagues from two different departments in the institution.

I also investigated the stages of the mentoring process and how my design could incorporate these stages into the action research process. The stages of the mentoring process are explored in greater detail in Chapter 2. Basing her model on informal mentoring, Kram (1988:49) refers to these stages of mentoring as initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition. Basing their model on formal mentoring Megginson et al. (2006:18) refer to these stages as building rapport, direction setting, progression stage, winding up and moving on. In my design I chose to use Megginson et al.'s (2006) references to the stages of the mentoring process as they fit with the structured nature of the GTC mentoring project.

Step 2: Collect information about the concern

I began to read research papers and textbooks on the subject of mentoring and gathering background information about my concern. I also constructed research questions that would guide me through my research. The research questions were as follows:

1. How can the principles and practices of mentoring be explored to assist in individual learning in a VET educational institution as a 'learning organisation'?
2. How can mentees use their learning and development to contribute to the principles and practices of mentoring in a VET educational institution?

3.How can mentors use their learning and development to contribute to the principles and practices of mentoring in a VET educational institution?

I gained my understanding of action research by reading the works of Bob Dick (1993), Jack Whitehead (1988), Reason and Bradbury (2001), and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) among others. In November 2006, I took advantage of an opportunity to attend a workshop at the University of Pretoria, delivered by Ortun Zuber-Skerritt, on her action learning model. This workshop and my readings contributed significantly to my understanding of action research and clarified the activities that I was planning to undertake in my action research project.

Step 3: Design the intervention

Designing the mentoring project involved developing a complete plan of action. For mentoring to be effective, the goals and objectives of mentoring need to be articulated and clarified (Kram, 1988:155; Megginson et al., 2006:25). The awareness and articulation of these guidelines become more critical when the objectives of the mentoring relationship are clearly identified personal and professional goals. The recognition of this aspect of mentoring motivated me to initiate a structured approach to the mentoring project at GTC. The design process is outlined in the following paragraphs.

Duration of the mentoring project intervention

The mentoring project was designed for implementation over a period of six months. I was careful to select the six months to coincide with two complete terms in the academic calendar of GTC, the October-December term and the January-March term. The schedule in Table 4.1 below outlines the activities planned over this six month period, and includes activities that were planned prior to the commencement of the project. The timeline took into consideration the stages of mentoring so as to provide a guide when developmental objectives would be achieved through the mentoring process. It was planned that the stages of building rapport, direction setting, progression stage, winding up and moving on would each present an action research cycle in the mentoring process. These cycles are depicted in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: GTC mentoring project timeline

Stages of the mentoring process	Proposed date	Action
	July 2006	Preliminary interviews
Building rapport	Early September 2006	Selection of participants and signing of consent forms
	Mid September 2006	Training in developmental mentoring, reflective writing and other techniques
Direction setting	Late September 2006	Construction of PDPs; Practice in reflective writing
Progression stage	October 2006 to December 2006	Conduct weekly mentoring conversations with mentees
	October 2006 to December 2006	Collect personal reflective journal entries from mentees at end of every month for three months
	Mid December 2006	Conduct focus group interview
Progression stage	January 2007 to March 2007	Continue to conduct weekly mentoring conversations with mentees for a further three months
	January 2007 to March 2007	Continue to collect personal reflective journal entries from mentees at end of every month for further three months
Winding up and moving on	Late March 2007	Conduct final focus group interview
	Late March 2007	Closure meeting with the mentees

Key: Action research cycles in the GTC mentoring project

First action research cycle - Building rapport and Direction setting

Second action research cycle – Progression stage

Third action research cycle – Progression, Winding up and moving on

Selection of participants

I identified the two colleagues in GTC who would be willing to become participants in the project. In my selection, I chose two colleagues who worked in different departments in GTC. In September 2006 I approached the two colleagues in regard to their participation and outlined the objectives of the research. They both agreed to participate in the project and signed consent forms. This paved the way for the mentoring process to begin.

Training in the concept of developmental mentoring

In September 2006, I organised for my two colleagues and me to attend a workshop conducted by a mentoring specialist in South Africa. The workshop was designed to provide a comprehensive background to the concept of mentoring as a professional developmental intervention. The training included aspects such as definitions of mentoring, roles and functions in the mentoring process, and benefits of mentoring to mentees, mentors and the organisation. This training was instrumental in clarifying the concept of developmental mentoring and achieved the objective of providing us with some of the techniques used in the process. During the workshop participants learned how to construct personal developmental plans (PDPs), and were also taught several techniques in writing reflectively.

Following the workshop I offered the participants support and guidance in developing their PDPs and reflective journals. This support was necessary because reflective practice was an activity not normally engaged in by educators in GTC and was therefore a new practice for them. In addition, maintaining personal reflective journals was considered a significant source of data collection for the study.

Setting up structure

The mentoring project required a structure that would provide support to the achievement of learning and developmental goals. I planned that mentoring conversations, reflective journaling and focus group interviews, as detailed in section 4.5 of this chapter, would be part of the mentoring process.

We held a meeting in September 2006 where we discussed the structure of the project. We agreed to schedule face-to-face meetings between each mentee and the mentor once a week for the six month duration of the project. We also discussed and agreed that the mentees would submit their personal reflective journals, electronically via emails to me at the end of each month. We agreed on two focus group interviews: one at the end of the first three months to track our progress and the second at end of the six month period to conclude the study. The focus group interviews would be conducted by an independent third party in my absence and would be video taped. Information from these interviews would be used as a data collection source for the study.

Equipment and facilities

To complete the project, I required a digital recorder, a video camera and a private room where mentoring conversations could take place. The private room and the video camera would be requisitioned from GTC when necessary. I purchased a digital recorder to record the mentoring sessions for later transcription.

Planning for the action research cycles

I planned that the face-to-face mentoring conversations, notes and observations from the mentoring conversations, personal reflective journals, and the focus group interviews would provide data that would assist me to keep track of the activities during the mentoring process. These activities would provide pertinent information on the learning and development occurring in the mentoring process to feed back into the action research cycles.

Planning the closure of the project

The closing of the project was planned to coincide with the end of the second academic term in March 2007. Planned activities were the final focus group interview, and a final meeting between myself and the participants to wind up the mentoring project.

Step 4: Implement the intervention

The mentoring project as an organisational development intervention was planned to integrate with the flow of the usual duties of the educators such as teaching duties and classroom management activities, so that the mentoring process would be a normal and natural part of the educator's everyday activities. Planning took into account activities that would encourage learning at individual, group and organisational level. We planned lesson observations, and activities to enhance teaching techniques and classroom management. The mentees would get involved in these activities as a result of pursuing their developmental objectives and as outcomes of interactions in the mentoring process. Attempts were made to maintain a clear line between the mentoring process and the research activities. As the researcher, I would be the only one to monitor, evaluate and reflect upon the research component of the action research process. I made this decision in my endeavour to retain the normality of the mentoring relationships so that the research activities would not overly influence the mentoring process.

Step 5: Collect data from the results of the intervention

The main data collection methods planned were the face-to-face mentoring sessions, note taking and observations from the mentoring conversations, personal reflective journals to be maintained by the three participants, and the focus group interviews. As the researcher, I would also maintain a project diary where I would record daily incidences as the project progressed. These data collection strategies are explained in details in section 4.5 of this chapter.

Step 6: Evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the intervention

The periodic and continuous nature of the planned activities would provide opportunity for the beginning of reflection on the intervention and its effect on goal achievement. Comparisons of how the different data collection activities worked would result in the emergence of new issues that would inform more effective ways of gathering data, or different ways of enhancing achievement of developmental goals.

Step 7: Reflect on the implications of the intervention

This phase of the action research process was planned to allow me to focus on how educators are influenced by the intervention. At this point I would reflect critically on whether the intervention has brought about change, and the implications of this change.

Step 8: Reflect on the overall process

This phase of the action research process would allow me to critically reflect on the overall changes the action research project has brought in the educators, in myself and in the institution as a whole.

Step 9: Begin the cycle again by identifying a new or continuing area of concern

Depending on what issues emerge from the critical reflections, I would identify new issues that require feeding back into the study to result in achieving the desired learning and developmental goals.

4.3.2   The action research cycles for the mentoring process

The model I use for the mentees and mentor cycles is adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart (1988:11). I selected this model because it clarifies the action research cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect which are important steps for the mentees and mentor to experience to achieve the learning and developmental goals desired in the mentoring process. This model also allows for the mentoring project cycles to be integrated into and run concurrently with the Benton (2005:51) nine-step action research cycle presented in the previous section. In line with Kemmis and McTaggart's (1981:8) four element action research model, the design took into account the aspects of planning, acting, observing and reflecting in each action research cycle. In general, the action research cycles were grouped into three broad categories: The mentees' action research cycle, the mentor's action research cycle and my self study action research cycle.

4.3.2.1 The mentees' action research cycles

The mentees' action research cycle would be one week in duration as presented in Table 4.2. This was the typical cycle planned for the mentees during the six month period of the mentoring process. This cycle would be in line with the mentee driven nature of developmental mentoring, with the cycle beginning with the mentee's identified developmental objective and ending with the mentee's new learning, and what they would like to feed back into the next cycle.

Table 4.2: Mentees' action research cycle

Cycle	Action research step	Activity
1 week cycles over the six month period	Plan	Mentees identify developmental goal for the week
	Act	Mentees participate in the weekly session of mentoring conversation and discussion of the identified developmental goal
	Observe	Mentees take notes on outcomes and thoughts, execute any activities that came from the mentoring conversations such as a new teaching technique
	Reflect	Mentees reflect upon the week's learning in their personal reflective journals and identify issues to discuss with the mentor in the next mentoring session. Mentees use the SAID model (see appendix 2) as an aid to reflective writing.

Planning for the mentees would begin with the construction of PDPs. The initial cycles would involve planning how to achieve their developmental goals. The reviewed planning activities that the mentees would engage in subsequent cycles would emanate from the outcomes of their reflections. Planning would be an important activity for the mentees as

they would be setting the direction of the mentoring process depending on what they wanted to achieve.

Acting would involve participation in the mentoring conversations once a week for the duration of the six month mentoring period. In these face-to-face mentoring sessions the focus would be on the identified mentee developmental goal. During this time, the mentor's role would be to offer direction, provide guidance and support on the activities that would propel the mentees towards their desired goal. Because the action would be taking place in real time this part of the cycle was planned to be flexible and open to any changes in the light of circumstances at any particular time during the project.

Observing would involve the mentees taking into account issues and experiences gained from the action part of the cycle and putting them into a perspective that prepares them for reflection. From the mentoring sessions, activities in line with the mentees' duties as educators would result and form part of observation. For example, as they attempt new teaching techniques the mentees would observe the resulting student behaviour.

Reflecting was also designed to be a significant part of the cycle for the mentees. The mentees would reflect upon their experiences as they went through their weekly mentoring sessions and other activities to enhance their practice. The reflections would also assist the mentees in their learning as they would review their plan before their next action, taking into account new learning. Their reflections would include insight about student behaviour, mentor's feedback, and their own insights of their learning. The SAID model of reflective writing (see appendix 2) would assist the mentees to critically reflect on their progress.

4.3.2.2   The mentor's action research cycles

The design identified that there would be at least three action research cycles in my role as mentor as presented in Table 4.3. First would be one-week cycles to coincide with similar cycles of the mentees as described in the preceding section. Second would be four- week cycles beginning with the review of the mentees' personal reflective journals. Third would be a three-month cycle beginning with the planning for the focus group

interviews. I recognised that these were going to be cycles within cycles occurring at the same time for the six month duration of the mentoring project.

Table 4.3: Mentor's action research cycles

Cycle	Action research step	Activity
I week cycles over the six month period	Plan	Planning to offer direction, guidance and support to the mentees, guided by the GROW model (see appendix 4) Review of my own observations, notes and reflective journals
	Act	Conduct face-to-face mentoring conversations
	Observe	Note taking, observation of mentee behaviour and participation in other activities undertaken by mentees such as lesson observations
	Reflect	Reflections in my personal reflective journal on the progress of the mentees and identification of issues to incorporate in the revised plan.
4 week cycles	Plan	Review of personal reflective journals from the mentees Review of my own observations, notes and reflective journals Detail revised plan of action
	Act	Conduct face-to-face mentoring conversations
	Observe	Note taking, observation of mentee behaviour and participation in other activities undertaken by mentees
	Reflect	Reflections in my personal reflective journal Identification of items to feed back into revised planning
3 month cycles	Plan	Plan to conduct focus group interviews Review of personal reflective journals from the mentees Review of my own observations, notes and reflective journals Detail revised plan of action
	Act	Conduct focus group interviews Conduct face-to-face mentoring conversations
	Observe	Review focus group interviews, note taking, observation of mentee behaviour and participation in other activities undertaken by mentees
	Reflect	Reflections in my personal reflective journals on the outcomes of the focus group interviews Identification of items to feed back into revised planning

My **planning** as a mentor began with my arrangements of how I would conduct the mentoring conversations. This planning took into account the stages in the mentoring relationship (Megginson et al., 2006:18) as outlined in Table 4.1. The interactions with the mentees early in the mentoring project would focus on building rapport. Subsequent mentoring sessions would address the stages of direction setting, progress making stages, and finally the winding up stage. My planning as the mentoring process progressed, would be influenced and informed by the developmental goals identified by the mentees. I also planned to use different data sources to enhance my reviewed planning. This would include outcomes from the face-to-face mentoring conversations, reviewing my notes, my personal reflective journals, the reflective journals of the mentees and the outcomes of the focus group interviews.

Acting was designed to be captured by the scheduled weekly mentoring conversations. These mentoring sessions would be mentee driven, depending on what the mentee wanted to talk about. My role would be in guiding and supporting the process. I would also act out the stages of the mentoring process depending on which stage I observed the relationship to be. As depicted in Table 4.1, the earlier cycles in the mentoring process would concentrate on building rapport, followed by direction setting sessions. Cycles in the centre of the process would emphasise and encourage progress making. Towards the end of the project, the cycles would concentrate on winding up activities.

Observing would involve my taking notes during the mentoring sessions of what is going on and observing the behaviour of the mentees. My observation would concentrate on the learning of the mentees and what support and guidance they require to achieve their set objectives. Observation would also involve my participation in other activities that the mentees undertake as a consequence of our mentoring conversations such as lesson observations and classroom management activities. My observation would be keen so as to later provide constructive feedback to the mentees that would enhance further learning and development.

Reflecting would be a significant part of the action research design for me as a mentor. I planned that each mentoring activity would be followed by critical reflection on the experience. This would be deliberate and conscious reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart,

1988:11) to unravel what learning was taking place. My reflections would critically review the development of the mentees and the changes occurring within the mentoring relationship. Because my reflections would be a culmination of the planning, acting and observation stages of the cycle, this stage would feed back systematically into the next action research cycle with a revised plan.

4.3.2.3 My self study action research cycle

The self study component of the project features the action research cycle designed to increase my mentoring capacity and improve my practice. I had my own PDP detailing the mentoring capacities I desired to improve. These involved improving my listening technique, my questioning technique and my feedback technique. The cycles that I planned to experience took into account how I would improve these capacities in the mentoring process. My self study action research cycles would be shorter, spanning over two to three days. This is because the building of my mentoring abilities would take into account that I had two mentoring sessions per week, one with each mentee where I could put into practice any new learning.

Table 4.4: Self study action research cycle

Cycle	Action Research step	Activity
2-3 day cycles over the six month period	Plan	Identify my personal developmental goal
	Act	Participate in mentoring conversation
	Observe	Take notes, observe real time reactions and behaviour
	Reflect	Reflect in my personal reflective journal on the mentoring session Consider the mentees' journals and reflect on impact of our interactions Identification of new learning and issues to feed back into revised planning

My **planning** would involve identifying a developmental goal and target this goal for better understanding and improvement.

Acting would involve participating in the mentoring conversations with the specific personal developmental goal in mind. While offering guidance and support to the mentee during the mentoring conversation, I would attempt to practice and improve my identified mentoring technique.

Observing would involve my observation of the effect of my mentoring technique on the mentees when I listen to them, ask questions or provide feedback. During this time, I would also observe my own behaviour and gain insight from this observation.

Reflecting would involve critical reflection upon my experience to identify new learning, and new issues that require further planning and action. These identified issues would go into my reviewed panning for the next mentoring session.

In summary, I emphasise in my design the dynamic nature of action research to allow for responsiveness and continuous learning in our practice. The different cycles presented in the mentoring process are designed to fit into the larger nine-step action research project cycle. This approach would assist in bringing about improvements in our practice as educators systematically, responsively and reflectively in terms of improving teaching techniques and classroom management activities. The above design therefore targeted not only change at our individual level, but also at group and organisation level.

4.4   Ethical considerations

This study was designed to meet the ethical standards of the University of Pretoria. A consent form clearly articulated the processes relevant to participating in the study. This consent form was provided to the participants and adequate time was given for them to study the contents. The form served to assure the participants of their anonymity and to reinforce the agreement that any information obtained from the instruments used to gather data during the mentoring relationship would be used solely for the purposes of the research. A sample of the letter of informed consent is presented in Appendix 1.

In the consent form, issues of confidentiality were highlighted. In line with this consideration, pseudonyms have been used in the study to protect the privacy of the participants. The participants were also informed both verbally and in writing that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and signed the required consent forms.

4.5 Data collection

Merriam (1988:67) defines data as 'nothing more than ordinary bits and pieces of information found in the environment'. In this study, the three main data collection strategies were face-to-face mentoring conversations, personal reflective journals, and focus group interviews. These multiple sources of information were used to gather a detailed description that enabled a rich understanding of the complexity of the issues involved, and also to enable triangulation of different views that could create a deeper understanding of the mentoring relationship.

4.5.1 Mentoring sessions

Mentoring sessions were one of the main data collection strategies for the study. These were regular face-to-face conversations between myself and each of the mentees. During these sessions we related experiences we were going through, and discussed other issues where the mentees required support and guidance. Schedules of mentoring support and monitoring were drawn between the mentees and myself to reflect the frequency of meetings. Each participant was given a copy of the schedule. Alternative dates were organised wherever a scheduled session did not take place.

An activity we undertook as part of the mentoring project was constructing PDPs that would assist us to focus our developmental efforts in a specific way. Our mentoring conversations and sessions were then organised around these PDPs. Training was carried out on how to construct PDPs. A guide was also provided to the participants to facilitate this activity. A copy of this guide is included in Appendix 3.

To gain the most out of the mentoring sessions, I constructed a framework adapted from the GROW model (Whitmore, 2002:53). I have discussed the GROW model in greater detail in Chapter 3. The GROW model assists in structuring the mentoring session so that it is focused on the specific objectives planned for the particular session. A copy of the framework is included in Appendix 4. After utilising the GROW framework during our mentoring sessions a few times, my critical reflections on the meeting outcomes indicated to me that the framework needed reinforcement for two reasons. Firstly, informed by the cyclical process of action research, I realised that it was important for me to be clear about the learning I was obtaining from each mentoring session and what I was taking with me to the following session. The feeding back into sessions could be enhanced if I had an instrument to assist me in recording this critical information. Secondly, I realised that I needed an instrument that would assist me to reflect critically upon each mentoring session and focus on me as a learner rather than only on the mentee. Out of these reflections I constructed a pre-planning action sheet that followed the action research cycle of Reflect, Plan, Act and Observe, then Reflect again (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981:8). I called this the Action Research mentoring conversation guide. A copy of this guide is included in Appendix 5. Through this form I documented the analytical outcomes of my reflections on the previous mentoring session, and how I would run the next session. This data collection instrument ascertained that whatever was learned in the previous action research cycle was being fed back into the study. The instrument became integral to my synthesis of the mentoring sessions, and also provided a record of our learning. It provided a clear view of each session, and assisted me to critically reflect on our learning and development progress as participants, and articulate the next course of action. This instrument also assisted me to combine the outcomes of different action research cycles that were taking place concurrently into one document, and focus on a major course of action to feed back into the next action research cycle. Because of this action and reflection process, my learning and the learning of the participants in the study became continuous and systematic.

I made brief notes during the mentoring sessions, as I learned that attempts to make more detailed notes distracted both myself and the mentee. Immediately after each session I made detailed notes on the session, and reflected upon it. Where possible the sessions were taped (with the permission of the participants) and later transcribed. This proved to be a tremendous aid because it provided an opportunity to listen keenly to the

conversations and fully appreciate the sharing of experiences, without being distracted by note taking. Note taking was however a good strategy as it facilitated the development of early insights and interpretations, aided in immediate reflections upon the conversations, and captured the immediate essence and feelings of the conversation. Note taking also assisted in highlighting any significant body language that would not have been picked up by audio taping.

The PDPs, GROW frame work and the Action Research mentoring conversation guide assisted in maintaining structure and systematic control over the collection of data and the learning in the mentoring process. We were able to remain focused as well as collect adequate data to achieve the objectives of the research.

4.5.2 Personal reflective journals

Personal reflective journals were the second main data collection method. These journals were intended to provide data specifically focused on our experiences as participants as we went through the mentoring process. Each participant in the study kept a personal reflective journal outlining well remembered events concerning their mentoring experiences. These journals were maintained electronically. On a personal level, I also augmented the electronic journal with many pages of personal hand written notes. The participants were encouraged to do the same. However, neither of the other two participants submitted any reflective notes, other than the electronic versions of their reflective journals.

To make maximum use of journaling to reveal insight, great effort was made to guide the participants on reflection as a learning intervention. Hole and McEntree (1999:34) contend that when a guide or protocol is provided to aid the process of reflection, the reflection becomes more focused and meaning is identified in the experience being reflected upon. Support was provided to the participants in the form of a workshop on how to write reflectively. We then had one week of pre-study reflective writing exercises where we reflected upon everyday incidents and discussed our reflective notes. In addition, I prepared guiding notes detailing a format to aid reflection and gave this to the participants. This guide detailed a brief background on reflective journals, how to encourage reflective

writing and examples of the appropriate questions to ask oneself when reflecting upon an experience. The reflective process was adapted from the SAID model of reflective journaling (Hogan, 1995:7) discussed in Chapter 3. The SAID model of reflective writing has four main stages that guide one to explore experiences critically and turn them into learning episodes. A copy of the reflective journal writing guide is included in Appendix 2.

Holding the dual role of mentor and researcher, reflective journaling was something I systematically engaged in on a daily basis. I also made sure I reflected upon any strategic points throughout the mentoring period. I was particularly careful to be sure to reflect on those moments that I considered critical incidents. My reflections took into account not only the critical event, but also my feelings associated with that event. I did my journaling as soon as possible after the occurrence of the event, before the passage of time changed my perception of the event, to attempt to capture my reflection-in-action. In addition to this immediate reflection, I went back over my notes periodically, and reflected on my mentoring episodes some time after the event. The different perceptions that sometimes became apparent between these two different reflection times added to my learning and to the analysis of the events.

After the guidance and support on reflective writing, the participants were requested to start maintaining a reflective journal as a part of their ongoing development, and to use this to analyse their feelings and record learning points as they experienced the mentoring process. Participants were not required to adhere strictly to the SAID model. They were encouraged to write in ways that most encouraged reflection on an individual basis.

To assist memory retention, participants were requested to maintain diaries, write down their reflections as soon as possible after the event, and to use a model of reflection. These electronic reflective journals were submitted to me via email on a monthly basis for the duration of the study.

At the end of the study, participants were requested to review their reflective journals, and demarcate what would be placed in the public domain, and what would remain confidential. None of the participants identified any data they did not wish to be in the public domain.

4.5.3 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were the third source of data collection. During the course of the study two focus group interviews were carried out. The focus group interviews were scheduled at appropriate times to enable the mentees to recount their experiences during the preceding term. These interviews were carried out by my peers in my absence. The interviewer was provided with both a verbal and written brief of the study. The rationale behind bringing in those outside of the study to conduct these interviews was to provide the mentees with another perspective to their story. I also felt I was too close to the data to perform this task. These focus group interviews, where they would verbalise their experiences to a neutral person, were intended to explore the experiences of the mentees, and to make the experiences of the participants more public and believable.

The questions that were used as a framework for the interviews were open-ended and allowed both the interviewer and the participants to talk openly about what they wanted to say. Prior to its use, the interview instrument was shared with several colleagues in GTC and adjusted as a result of their feedback. A copy of the interview instrument is included in Appendix 6.

The focus group interviews were video-taped. I decided to use video because this method of capturing data conveys to the viewer perceptions beyond simple words. Other than capturing the opinions and reflections of the mentees, I also wanted to gain insight into a session where I was absent. This aspect of capturing data was important to me, both as the mentor and as the researcher. The video captured verbal information as well as nonverbal behaviour and cues. This enabled me to reflect critically upon the learning experiences of the mentees, while not influencing the feedback they provided to the interviewer.

4.5.4 Data arrangement and management

The data from the reflective journals, meeting sessions and focus group interviews served as a descriptive analytical framework. Taped sessions and reviews were transcribed so that each bit of data was analysed and categorised. Managing the data in a systematic

fashion enhanced my ability to base conclusions, interpretations and recommendations on the data obtained from each participant (Miles and Huberman, 1994:74).

Sorting the reflective journals and the transcribed data was the beginning of the interpretive process. The data was read to determine the emerging themes and patterns and then sorted accordingly. It was then coded and analysed with regard to identified themes and patterns. This was done electronically using the Microsoft Office Excel programme. The data was stored in two forms: hard copy and electronically on the computer.

4.6   Data analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data that has been collected (Merriam, 1988:127). Merriam (1988:123) emphasises the importance of data analysis being undertaken simultaneously with the gathering of data. Miles and Huberman (1994:43) concur with this view, suggesting that qualitative data analysis is a continuous process. The process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation resulting in the drawing of conclusions, is both interactive and cyclical in nature. This view is in line with the continuous analysis of data in action research (Dick, 1993:12; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981:8). Below I describe the procedures I employed to ensure credibility, transferability and rigour in the data analysis process.

4.6.1   Credibility

Credibility relates to the value of truth. When seeking credibility the researcher endeavours to convince the reader that what is being said is trustworthy. In order to gain credibility in the analysis of the data I employed a comparative method of data analysis.

Through the comparative method, a process of sorting out the descriptive data collected was used in arranging journal entries submitted and transcribed mentoring sessions and focus group interviews. This was broken further into manageable units of data to increase my understanding of the data.

The justification for choosing a comparative method of data analysis is that it provides a set of procedures for coding and analysing data which suits the interpretive approach since it would keep the analysis close to the data and provide for inductive discoveries about the phenomena being studied. The procedures and process of this comparative method introduces rigour and traceability in the theory development component of the action research study. This method provided a systematic and structured basis for developing and verifying the theory in a research process that was subjective in nature.

During my analysis, while comparing two or more sources of data, my attention was drawn to topics that are mentioned more than once. There are several episodes in our reflective journals that describe the same event, each from their own perspective and in their own words. These representations from each person's point of view provided a striking example of the significance and relativity of different modes of representing events.

4.6.2 Transferability

Transferability can be enhanced by presenting the collected data as rich description. The elaborate description of the collected data must contain as much relevant information as is gathered so that others may, given their context and time, make a decision about its usefulness to their purposes. The description in this study includes information relevant to the stated problem. The results of the study yield findings that similar educational institutions might apply to their particular situation.

4.6.3 Rigour

Rigour in the research process was maximised via the data collection and analysis procedures outlined above and adherence to the processes recommended for action research and self study (Dick, 1993:34; Holly et al., 2005:214; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1981:8). Multiple sources of data and methods of data collection were utilised to maximise rigour. Data was collected from face-to-face mentoring conversations, personal reflective journals maintained by the participants of the study, and focus group interviews. The focus

group interviews afforded the participants an opportunity to openly reveal their points of view about the mentoring relationships.

A second aspect of rigour in action research came into play with the cyclical or recurring stages of this enquiry. The research rigour is emphasised when there is planning before action followed by reflection, and then planning again emanating from the reflection which leads to action again (Dick, 1993:34). During the planning, the researcher needs to be critical of the actions. This is akin to standing away from the action and observing it from an outsider point of view. The result of the critical reflection informs the next action in the next cycle. In this study, I was careful to instil this kind of rigour in the research process. Each new cycle of research was informed by the one that preceded it. This was greatly enhanced by the Action Research mentoring conversation guide that I constructed to assist in the reflection and analysis of our learning. What was learned was reflected upon critically before the next cycle. This process of critical reflection was an essential part of each cycle.

Rigour in research is also facilitated by the presence of an audit trail. My audit trail primarily consisted of my personal reflective journal and the reflective journals of the mentees. In addition, I also maintained a hand written project diary where I documented the research process, such as the tasks I was undertaking, and the ongoing development of the study. Other documents that provided an audit trial for this research included the personal development plans of the participants, the schedules that were made and used for the mentoring sessions, and the video-recordings of the focus group interviews.

4.7   Conclusion

This chapter describes the methodology used to explore the principles and practices of mentoring in one VET educational institution in Botswana, and how these mentoring practices assist in the learning of individual educators. The chapter describes a set of guidelines followed in conducting the study. A qualitative research design chosen for this study, and more specifically action research incorporating a self study approach, is explained. Data was generated using face-to-face mentoring conversations, personal reflective journals, and focus group interviews. The data was analysed qualitatively for

emerging themes. The background of the participants in this study is presented. The chapter concludes by outlining the limitations of the study.

In the next two chapters, I present the findings of this study. Since this is a qualitative study utilising an action research and self study approach, I use the representation of the voices of the participants extensively to elucidate and share our experiences.

CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS: THE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF MENTEES

The purpose of the study was to explore and gain an understanding of the mentoring practices within the context of one Vocational Education and Training (VET) educational institution. My study attempts to explore two issues. Firstly, it examines how mentoring practice assisted three educators in their learning and development. Secondly, it explores how the learning and development contributed to the mentoring practice within the context of this VET educational institution.

This study explored the learning and development of educators in the mentoring process from two perspectives: from the perspective of the mentees, and from the perspective of the mentor. This chapter presents the findings from the perspective of the mentees, while the following chapter (Chapter 6) presents the findings from the perspective of the mentor.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section presents the descriptions of mentoring functions and roles that guided the data analysis. The second section connects the exploration of the findings with the action research design described in Chapter 4. The third section explores the learning and development of educators as mentees while undergoing the mentoring process. The fourth section explores how the mentees contributed to the mentoring process from their point of view, utilising their learning and development. The illustrative descriptions included provide significant detail, allowing readers to evaluate the transferability of the findings to their particular context.

5.1   Description of mentoring functions and roles

To explore the mentoring practice and the learning and development of educators, my study leaned towards developmental models of mentoring. In particular, the study drew themes from Geber's (2003a:5) developmental model which was adopted because it presented mentoring roles resonating with the field of Education, while taking into account the significantly important mentoring roles highlighted by Kram (1988). The table below provides a summary of the description of mentoring roles, and acts as a guide to the indications of how mentoring functions presented themselves in the data.

Table 5.1:   Descriptions of mentoring functions and roles

Theme	Description
1. Role modelling	The mentor's attitude, values and behaviour provide a model for the mentee to learn from and emulate (Kram, 1988:33) Mentees learning through observation (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005:459) Providing good examples to follow (Daloz, 1999:213)
2. Career development functions	
Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension	Exploring teaching Discussing own decisions about teaching (Cohen, 1995:74)
Exposure to opportunities	Providing the mentees with opportunities that prepare them for greater responsibility and authority (Kram, 1988:27)
Giving information	Providing tailored knowledge Learning facts about plans and progress (Cohen, 1995:75) Commenting on use of information (Cohen, 1995:75)
Coaching	Demonstrating difficult tasks (Clutterbuck, 2004:17)
Providing challenging work assignments	Providing mentees assignments Providing opportunities to work on activities that promote learning (Kram, 1988:31)
Advocacy	Nominating mentees for activities (Kram , 1988:25) Communicating to others the mentee's positive attributes (Kram, 1988:25)
Protection	Shielding the mentee from potentially damaging contact with others (Kram, 1988:29)
Giving political information	Providing information emanating from unwritten rules (Geber, 2003a:6)
3. Psychosocial functions	

Developing trust	Listening empathetically (Clutterbuck, 2004:41)
	Showing understanding and acceptance (Daloz, 1999:209)
Providing encouragement	Building confidence and hope (Clutterbuck, 2004:38)
Providing guidance	Offering advice
	Offering direction
	Sharing real life experiences (Daloz, 1999:213)
Showing acceptance and confirmation	Providing support (Kram, 1988:35)
	Instilling self confidence
Counselling	Discussing the mentee's internal conflicts (anxieties and fears) (Kram, 1988:36)
	Being a sounding board (Kram, 1988:36)
Providing friendship	Social interaction with mentee
	Discussion of issues that are not work related (Kram, 1988:38)
Engaging in constructive confrontation	Providing insight into unproductive strategies and behaviours (Cohen, 1995:75)
	Evaluating need and the capacity to change (Cohen, 1995:75)

The clarification of how the mentoring roles and functions could present themselves in the data provided the required guidance for proceeding with the exploration of the findings. The section below explores the roles and functions in the mentoring process as they occurred in the action research cycles.

5.2   The mentoring process and action research cycles

To create a platform for the exploration of my findings I first obtained a view of the mentoring process guided by my action research design. In Chapter 4 (Table 4.1) the action research cycles inherent in the GTC mentoring project were presented. There were three cycles. The first cycle included the building rapport and direction setting stage, the second cycle included the progression stage and the third cycle included the progression, winding up and moving on stages. These three cycles encompass Megginson et al.'s (2006:19) five-stage model of the stages in the mentoring process, which were discussed in Chapter 2.

The three cycles which form part of the action research process contains the entire mentoring process. As the mentoring process occurs, there are progressive and continuous feed back into the action research process. This concurs with Megginson et al.'s (2006:21) assertion that the stages of the mentoring process often do not have clearly defined phases, but rather has grey areas between them and tend to overlap. This tendency blends well with the cyclical nature of action research where it is apparent that the early cycles during the mentoring process feed progressively into the later ones.

Table 5.2 below provides a presentation of the roles and functions that emerged as the participants progressed through the mentoring process. The information in this table provides a distinct link between the action research cycles and the mentoring roles and functions which emerged during the mentoring process.

Table 5.2 Findings of the mentoring roles/functions in the GTC mentoring project

Stages of the mentoring process	Duration	Mentoring roles/functions that emerged at each stage
Building rapport Direction setting	September 2006	**Career development** Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension Coaching **Psychosocial functions** Develop trust Provide encouragement Provide guidance Counselling
Progression stage	October 2006 to December 2006	**Role modelling** **Career development** Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension Exposure to opportunities Give information Give political information Coaching Provide challenging work assignment **Psychosocial functions** Develop trust Provide encouragement Provide guidance Acceptance and confirmation Counselling Engage in constructive confrontation Provide friendship
Progression stage Winding up and moving on	January 2007 to March 2007	**Role modelling** **Career development** Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension Coaching Advocacy **Psychosocial functions** Develop trust Provide encouragement Provide guidance Counselling Provide friendship

Key
First action research cycle - Building rapport and Direction setting

The clarity provided by the presentation in Table 5.2 of the mentoring roles and functions in the action research cycles provides a view of our progress on the mentoring journey. The stages of mentoring integrate well with the learning and development that the mentees experienced during the mentoring process. In the section below, I have used the themes and corresponding descriptions highlighted in Table 5.1 to explore how the mentoring functions and roles presented themselves as the mentees and I journeyed through the mentoring process.

5.3   Learning and development through the mentoring process

In this section, I chose to explore the principles and practices of mentoring through the guidance of established mentoring functions and roles highlighted in mentoring literature (Clutterbuck, 2004; Cohen, 1995; Geber, 2003a; Kram, 1988). Basing my themes on established mentoring functions and roles assisted my understanding of how mentoring practices presented themselves in the context of one VET educational institution. How the educators employed the mentoring process for their learning and development was therefore explored through the role modelling, career and psychosocial functions.

5.3.1   Role modelling function

Role modelling occurs when a mentor's attitudes, values and behaviour provide a model for the mentee to learn from and emulate (Kram, 1988:33). Many researchers contend that role modelling is one of the main mentoring functions through which individual learning takes place in a mentoring relationship (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005:459; Kram, 1988:34; Lankau and Scandura, 2002:787). These researchers suggest that learning through observation may be a key part of mentoring relationships. My findings supported this view by suggesting that role modelling was important in the learning and development of educators at Gaborone Technical College (GTC).

The role modelling function was evidenced in the mentoring relationship from the mentees' point of view. The data from the mentees' reflective journals indicated that there were a

number of occasions where the mentees learned and achieved their desired developmental goals through the role modelling function. They learned through observation and through emulating me. The mentees often pondered how I could have acted or reacted in certain situations.

Observation of my actions took place at anytime while I carried out my daily tasks. As the mentor, I was not aware of many instances that the mentees highlight in their reflective journals. It is apparent that the mentees took any opportunity they could to observe my actions and use them for their individual learning. There were clearly situations where role modelling on my part as the mentor was unconsciously portrayed. Wakwanza illustrated the role modelling function by reflecting on his observation of me carrying out my daily duties. He commented on a situation where he observed me handling a dispute between colleagues in my department. Wakwanza writes:

> *I was impressed with the way in which my mentor handled the situation. She was calm and worked to isolate the facts from all parties of the matter before making any decision…*

Wakwanza confirmed his learning through the role modelling function, by indicating that he had improved professionally by observing how his mentor did things. He writes this in his reflective journal:

> *I have picked this up from my mentor through observation and my personal dealing with her…I am able to deal with people more effectively and I am also seeing that I can also be a leader, from what I am learning and through the experiences and watching…*

There are occasions where as a mentor I was not conscious of the mentee's observation and learning. This finding suggests that in the workplace mentees took any opportunity to observe me in action. The mentees used these observations to benefit their individual learning.

Emulating the mentor was another route through which the mentees used role modelling to learn. Through interaction with me, the mentees observed values and behaviour they deemed desirable, and attempted to imitate this behaviour. As they practiced this behaviour, learning and development took place. This was one indication that what was

perceived as good practice in me passed on to the mentees, and influenced the mentees' performance in their practice. The influence of the role modelling function featured in Wakwanza's actions when he carried out his daily tasks. He recounted how he carried out a performance appraisal of one of his subordinates. While performing the task he attempted to emulate his mentor. Wakwanza states:

> *I start the appraisal by putting him at ease, talking of general things before we start on what he has written in the documents earlier forwarded to me. This is a technique I have seen my mentor use...*

The role modelling function significantly assisted Mchana to achieve her desired goals. In Mchana's opinion, I set a positive example. Mchana admired, respected and looked up to me for positive values. Learning took place through observing my actions and reflection on how I would act in specific situations. Mchana was also influenced by the same gender relationship she had with me. Her learning was enhanced by the fact that she could relate to the roles she perceived me holding. Mchana expresses it like this in the following statement:

> *Apart from her being my mentor she's my role model because I look at her from my gender side and say, "This is a woman, she's a mother, a wife and a leader" and looking at her responsibility at work, she has so much to handle, yet outside here she still has to be able to handle what the family needs…*

The role modelling function worked to encourage the mentees in a way that they could aspire to achieve their own set goals. This highlights the benefit of having role models in the educational institution, who can pass on to other educators that essential feeling that one can achieve desired goals. Educators who strive to achieve something new in their practice will have the added benefit of continuous growth. At the winding up stage of the mentoring project, Mchana illustrated this point by articulating that she was aiming to equal her mentor's achievements. The role modelling influenced Mchana to strive to be better personally and professionally. Mchana explains it like this:

> *She's my role model, I'm learning from her and that's what encourages me and I keep on saying, "OK if she can do it I can also do it".*

The role modelling function appeared to contribute to the mentees' individual learning and development. The fact that the mentees could observe their mentor both at a professional

and personal level enabled them to learn by observation and more easily emulate her values and behaviour.

Role modelling proved to be a function that assisted the educators in their learning, by giving them the drive to reach professional levels they would not strive for without the aid of a mentoring process. The presence of somebody to look up to who was accessible for guidance and support in the work environment assisted in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for the educators.

5.3.2 Career development functions

Career development functions are those aspects of a relationship that enhance professional development (Kram, 1988:24). They are usually possible to execute due to the mentor's 'position, experience and organisational influence' (Kram, 1988:25). These functions include teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension, exposure to opportunities, giving information, coaching, and advocacy.

Career development functions are significantly important in a VET educational institution and more specifically in the context of GTC where educators need to acquire additional professional knowledge to support the changes taking place in the institution. Career development functions were instrumental in instilling the desired professional development that assisted the educators to improve their teaching, classroom management, and administrative skills. In the section below I explore how the career development functions emerged in the process of exploring the mentoring practice.

5.3.2.1 Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension

The function of teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension emerged from the findings of the data from the mentees. It presented itself in basically three dimensions, exploration of the mentees teaching style, the action of teaching in the classroom and support with classroom management activities.

The support that the mentees required to change their perspective of teaching styles was critical in the relationship. In GTC, the need for change in teaching style was fuelled by the move towards outcomes based approaches. Changes in the curriculum dictated that the teaching styles changed, without the requisite developmental support from the institution as a whole. This lack of support had made educators in the institution resentful and unwilling to modify their teaching styles. With this background, the behavioural change that I was requesting of the mentees did not come easily, since the mentees were used to a certain way of teaching. The change required effort and enthusiasm for learning to take place. This is a function that we emphasised from the direction setting stage through the progression stage of the mentoring process.

At the direction setting stage of the mentoring process, the mentees struggled to find the will to consider a different teaching style from the one they were used to. Mchana's insertion in her journal reflected the lack of enthusiasm that was apparent at the beginning of the mentoring relationship with regard to exploring her facilitative dimension. She states:

> *Worked on my next term units…thought that I should try and make the class different from my usual after I discussed with my mentor who advised that I should consider looking for different approaches to teaching…*

Mentoring conversations revealed that the mentees were interested in learning more about student centred approaches to teaching. Student centred learning had become a mantra that was used loosely around the institution, without the educators being clear about what it meant. Believing that the knowledge of student centred learning was vital to embracing new teaching methodologies, I decided to strengthen this area with the mentees. During our mentoring conversations we discussed various delivery approaches that supported student centred learning and how they could be deployed in the classroom. Gradually, as we went through the progressions stage of the mentoring process, the mentees began to see the difference between how they were currently teaching and how they could change their approach to styles that focused more on the student.

Through mentoring conversations and activities, I assigned Mchana tasks that started her thinking about different teaching approaches. During these discussions and activities, with encouragement, Mchana became more interested in changing her teaching approach and started to show improvement in her attitude towards her teaching strategies. She became

willing to attempt teaching techniques she had not tried before. Mchana identified alternative strategies that she could apply in her teaching to achieve her developmental goals. Progressively through the mentoring relationship, the mentees' teaching dimension was strengthened. The relationship created an enabling environment for the mentees to focus on achieving the teaching goals they had set for themselves.

The gradual change in thinking brought in another dimension to teaching. The mentees started to strengthen their classroom management skills to be more in line with the teaching styles. As Mchana became more enthusiastic, she showed improvement in classroom management activities such as lesson planning. As we continued to plan the initial lessons together, she improved her skills in organising her expectations of her classroom delivery. She illustrates this through the following statement:

> *I see that I have learned a lot and I've been able to achieve much in my teaching area… There has been some improvement, not only with class [room] management but also with the type of activities I am taking with my students…*

The mentees began to show a change in their way of thinking pertaining to teaching. Their teaching became more student centred, moving away from the 'talk and chalk' approach they were used to and going towards interactive and participative teaching. Wakwanza articulated these thoughts during the first focus group interview by recognising that the mentoring experience had contributed to his having a positive, holistic view of his teaching profession and feeling good about being an educator.

> *I think my most rewarding experience has been the fact that I'm able to look upon my working situation… I have been able to look at my experiences as a teacher more positively and therefore this has helped me to make adjustments in the way I approach my teaching.*

The mentees' learning is evidenced by the change in the way they used to do things before the mentoring relationship. This aspect of change influenced their learning, and made the achievement of their developmental goals much easier. Wakwanza highlighted this in his feedback, when he talked about the outcome of the changes he made his teaching. He states:

I have seen quite a number of changes, for example, the way I teach. I have been able to change it as a result of my relationship with my mentor… I was impressed to see the students working with confidence so well with minimal supervision as confirmation that learning had taken place.

The learning and development went beyond the classroom, and into the staff room. The administrative requirements by the Botswana Technical Educational Programme (BTEP) such as the quality assurance system of internal validation became more efficient. Evidence from the mentees' journals suggests that what they were learning was also rubbing off on their colleagues who were not directly involved in the mentoring process. Wakwanza reflects on these changes in his reflective journal:

I complete the file and I feel quite good as I present it to my assessor who is visibly quite impressed with the speed with which I have carried out the task. This event helps that particular assessor to beat her own previous speed of carrying out the same exercise that I was doing. It's also a turning point for me in the sense that I realise I can accomplish quite a lot once I put my mind to it.

As the mentor, seeing the change in behaviour and attitude that was coming through was gratifying and exciting. My enthusiasm became heightened and this naturally passed on to the mentees. I carried out direct observation of the mentees delivering their classes, and provided appropriate feedback of these lessons. The feedback provided the support and guidance needed by the mentees to continue to improve in their teaching. The activities we undertook such as discussions on lesson planning, classroom observation and constructive feedback on these activities was well received by the mentees and kept the enthusiastic momentum going.

5.3.2.2 Exposure to opportunities

Exposure to opportunity involves me assigning responsibilities that allow the mentee to develop relationships with other key figures in the organisation who may judge his or her potential for future advancement (Kram, 1988:27). The effect of exposure to opportunities was visible in the findings. There were occasions where the mentees were exposed to situations where they could display their skills and attributes to others. Taking advantage of opportunities to show the positive attributes of the mentee was easier in my relationship with Wakwanza. The indirect reporting lines that existed between us made it possible for him to represent me in certain activities in the department and the institution as a whole.

For example, I requested Wakwanza to attend a management meeting that he normally would not attend. Wakwanza reflects on the experience in his journal thus:

Feeling a little out of place but got used to it when the meeting got going. I am afraid that some may wonder why I am there but I realise that there are others like me also and that sort of makes me feel better…

Although such exposure evoked feelings of unease and uncertainty in the mentees, the learning that such opportunities presented was significant to the mentees' professional development. In the department, I had occasion to expose Wakwanza to others, by delegating to him roles that gave him opportunities to practice what he was learning. One such activity was the handling of meetings. Wakwanza was deliberate in his endeavour to learn and observed how I conducted meetings. He reflects on this experience like this:

My observation today is more purposeful and has a hidden agenda in that I need to learn as much as I can seeing that in the next meeting I would be the one chairing the departmental meeting.

Wakwanza's reflections on the experience of chairing a meeting indicated that exposure to such learning opportunities, while challenging, was effective for professional development. He recounts that experience in his journal:

I directed the meeting quite efficiently and effectively…From this meeting I see that it is important to be prepared for a meeting…In future meetings I resolve once prepared, to be more relaxed because in this particular meeting I tended to be somewhat uneasy…

My role as a mentor became significant in the occasions where I could observe how the mentees were taking up the challenges that the mentoring relationship was bringing to fore. Such direct observation made it possible for me to provide constructive feedback to the mentees on their performance.

5.3.2.3   Giving information

The findings indicate that as the mentor I had occasion to give the mentees information that assisted them synthesise their thoughts about specific tasks. The various pieces of information also gave the mentees leads to follow in their own research that assisted in

their daily planning or execution of activities. The information provided facilitated thoughts and reflections that were positive in developing deeper analysis of how tasks could have been carried out in a more efficient way.

Wakwanza reflected on information that he obtained from me on who would best be contacted to contribute to the development and conclusion of a certain task. He confirmed that information obtained from me assisted him think about better ways of doing things. Wakwanza states:

> *I got very valuable information that assisted me to review the way I should have handled [the task] and I discovered I could have done it in a more professional manner.*

During discussions with Mchana about future career options, I provided links to websites for her to search for course information about professional development. Mchana states the following:

> *I got a lot of advice from my mentor [that] helped me sort out a few questions I had about my plans for going back to school…I searched more about the qualifications…it was a very exciting moment to find that I can actually continue teaching here and still do a course…*

Often this giving of information was as a follow up on a task that had been assigned to the mentee. The role of giving information became a supportive role to other functions in the mentoring process such as in the execution of challenging assignments.

I found that giving information to the mentees was more spontaneous than planned. The occurrences emerged from the mentoring conversations that we held. I found that while we were having our mentoring meetings, occasions arose where I could provide information to assist in the positive progress of an activity. I was glad to provide information that could help the mentees in different ways.

5.3.2.4   Coaching

Coaching enhances the mentee's knowledge and understanding. The mentor can enhance the coaching process by challenging the mentee's assumptions, being a critical friend, and

demonstrating difficult or complicated tasks (Clutterbuck, 2004:17). Coaching was a visible function for the mentees. The coaching role was made more focused by the fact that each mentee had a PDP which we used as a guide. It proved helpful for the direction setting part of the mentoring process that the mentees had already identified their areas of weakness. My role as the mentor was to work with the mentees on strengthening areas they identified as requiring further personal and professional development. It is apparent from the findings that the mentees were quite deliberate in their quest to take advantage of the developmental mentoring relationship and quickly improve on the developmental areas they had identified in their PDPs.

One coaching activity involved the preparation of effective lesson plans. This was an activity undertaken with Mchana, who was an educator with less teaching experience than Wakwanza. It is worth noting that coaching activities depend on the level of experience each educator has in the profession. Mchana seemed to appreciate this activity, and it helped her to become more enthusiastic and confident in attempting new teaching approaches. In her reflective journal, Mchana reflects on this task achievement:

> *I took with me the drafts of the lesson plan I had done for my hair relaxing class. I was going to try out a new teaching approach, where I will involve more students to do more activities in class, and give them the opportunity to research on different topics before I discuss them…if I get my lesson plan right, I know the class will go according to plan…*

We discussed the lesson plan, and visualised how the lesson would be delivered. After these discussions, Mchana felt confident that she would deliver the lesson successfully.

An activity that we undertook with Wakwanza was the organisation of tasks with the aid of the computer software Microsoft Outlook. In his journal, Wakwanza highlights how the learning process took place in this particular activity:

> *I have learned from my mentor to keep an up to date appointment schedule and a to-do list that I follow throughout the day. I keep on crossing out my accomplished tasks as well as appointments that I have kept and those that need to be done again. Another useful technique learned from my mentor is to consolidate my tasks list at the end of the day and prepare tasks for the following day.*

The mastering of the task list appeared to enhance Wakwanza's organisational abilities in his practice. As we progressed in the relationship, Wakwanza continued to provide evidence in his reflective journal that he was benefiting from the coaching function. His reflections emphasised the strength he attributed to the coaching function in terms of professional growth. Wakwanza reflected on how he improved in managing his time through the application of the task organisation he learned. He writes:

> *My key insight here is that with direction, one can be able to achieve a lot. I certainly believe my discussions with my mentor have assisted me with structure which will be quite useful in helping me attain my departmental planning as well as long term time management.*

An interesting emergence is the manner in which the mentees consolidated role modelling and coaching to their learning benefit. Wakwanza referred to the coaching exercise we undertook of handling the processes and procedures of selecting candidates for a programme in the institution. He states the following in his reflective journal:

> *I have an admiration for the way my mentor handles the whole process [of candidate selection] and specifically how she ensures that each member is performing their allocated tasks to ensure smooth flow of the procedure. I am now confident that if I am to carry out this process in future I will be able to do it effectively. I also feel that because of the way my mentor was involving me in every step of the procedure, I will be able to coach someone. … some processes which seem daunting at first just are easily understood if one is instructed by those who have carried them out before.*

The coaching aspect of mentoring gave the required mechanism to the mentees to perform tasks more effectively. As a mentor, I felt that having opportunity to become one-on-one involved with the mentees created the required momentum to move to higher levels in the mentoring relationship. I was also grateful for the opportunity to share my knowledge with the mentees to a level where I could see results, where the knowledge the mentees acquired was being put into practice.

5.3.2.5   Providing challenging work assignments

The role of providing challenging work assignments allows the mentor to provide learning opportunities that direct the mentee towards achieving their desired developmental goals. Giving the mentees assignments that lead them to practice what has been discussed in mentoring conversations enhances the learning of the mentees.

The findings indicate that I assigned tasks to the mentees that led to growth and development. I directed the mentees to undertake assignments that encouraged their learning and propelled them towards their desired developmental goals. These assignments provided important learning opportunities for the mentees to accentuate the knowledge and skills they were acquiring through the mentoring relationship.

Some of the tasks Wakwanza undertook were challenging, exposing him to working with other people in the institution to get the job done. Through his reflections, Wakwanza displayed evidence of how he went through milestones of learning, and improvement on his previous performance, but at the same time, grappling with obstacles that came his way in attempting to achieve his tasks. He reflected on a task of compiling departmental timetables, which required him to learn how to use timetabling software, and collaborate with other departments to finalise the task. This was a task that had challenged Wakwanza before in the past and he felt he needed support. Wakwanza was able to handle the use of the software quite well, but became frustrated with his inability to depend on others to finalise the task of concluding and distributing the final timetable. He writes:

> *I feel frustrated in the sense that I have no control of the completion of this task even though I did my planning quite early as compared to previous terms. There are no good feelings here at all and my dilemma is that I am not even sure what to do if it happens in future.*

Depending on others to complete a task was unsettling for Wakwanza. He became frustrated and experienced feelings of helplessness and lack of control. We worked on these feelings, and the approaches he could take to ensure that he rolled out his timetables despite these obstacles. This was an assignment that resulted in his learning to deal with others when he completed it successfully.

Wakwanza's reflections provided evidence that he desired to change and grow to be a better professional. He reflected on a task where he was required to facilitate and direct the activities surrounding a student project for students in his section. As the programme team leader for Tourism, one of his responsibilities was to ensure the execution of projects carried out by students. The task required him to delegate this activity and work with the colleagues that come under his direct supervision. The challenges came about when his

colleagues did not perform the tasks to Wakwanza's standards. This challenge brought to the fore the need to strengthen the skill of working through others to fulfil obligations at work. It also brought in the component of conflicts that arise with delegation. I had occasion to work with the mentee on conflict resolution strategies, and how these conflicts could be diminished in the workplace to achieve set objectives. In executing the task successfully, Wakwanza reflected upon the challenges that he experienced and how the mentoring relationship contributed to his learning through this experience. His reflections highlight the link between learning through challenging work assignments and role modelling. He writes:

> *I realise that perhaps I could have coached the person who took the pictures in a better manner. This experience helps me conclude that even though people may not ask questions about the allocated tasks, it is always better to find out from them if they understand what is to be done. I have picked this from my mentor through observation and my personal dealings with her.*

The assignments arose from challenges that the mentees were facing in their departments and how they could handle them. For example, Mchana was experiencing challenges from the restructuring of her colleagues' positions. During mentoring conversations suggested ways were discussed to help Mchana overcome these challenges. The outcome of these discussions was that Mchana would analyse her job tasks and present her analysis to her line supervisor for discussion. Mchana found this task challenging and required help finalising it. Her journal entry reflected how she grappled with the issue, wondering how to execute it. Mchana writes in her journal:

> *So how do I go about it…I have to come up with an internal or departmental list…to make it clear to everyone of what other tasks they can do apart from the norm…*

During mentoring conversations, I often probed deeper to find out why the mentee was taking certain options and not others. I attempted to evaluate the thought process that went into finalising the task. An example of this is a task that Mchana carried out. Invariably, she had allocated lower level tasks to her colleagues and kept the higher level supervisory tasks for herself. Yet it was highly possible that her colleagues would be promoted to higher positions than the one Mchana was currently holding. This meant that these colleagues would soon be in a position to delegate to Mchana. In my journal entry, I recorded how I persuaded her to revise the task list in a more balanced way.

I commended her for a good job. I probed for the reasons why she distributed the tasks the way she did. She said, she would not mind doing any of the tasks, but she had selected for herself those she liked doing best…As we talked, I could see her thoughts drifting to what I was talking about, and her eyes opening up to new possibilities of the way she does things. I thought it was great. She decided that she would think about [the issue] more deeply.

The final task list that Mchana came up with was more impartial. After discussing the issue with her supervisor, she resolved to coach her colleagues on how to perform some of the tasks. This indicated that the benefits of the mentoring relationship were going beyond the two of us, and into the department. I was encouraged by this observation that indicated the power of mentoring in the workplace.

5.3.2.6 Advocacy

Advocacy is a role where the mentor can recommend the mentee wherever possible for opportunities that will assist the mentee achieve their desired developmental goals. The advocacy function was presented to the mentees when one of them requested support in applying for a professional development course. Mchana requested me to support her application for further professional development, by submission of a blind reference. It is apparent that the action of communicating positive attributes of the mentee to a third party made an impact on the mentee and was appreciated. Such an action contributed to the strengthening and positive development of the mentoring relationship. Mchana illustrates understanding of this function when she says:

I was confident to apply for the Post graduate course in Advanced Professional Studies because I knew my mentor would support me … I requested her to be my referee and she submitted the letter to the college…

Mchana was successful in getting into the desired programme and started in 2007. The positive outcome of achieving one of her professional development goals contributed significantly to the strengthening of the mentoring relationship. In contrast to Kram's (1988:25) assertion that advocacy is the most frequently observed career development function, it was not highly visible in our mentoring relationships at GTC.

5.3.3 Psychosocial functions

Psychosocial functions enhance the sense of competence, identity, and self worth for both the mentor and the mentee (Kram, 1988:32). The intensity of the functions depends on the quality of the interpersonal relationship. The benefits that accrue through psychosocial functions go beyond the professional life and influence the personal life as well. Psychosocial functions play an important role in the achievement of personal development objectives in the mentoring relationship.

The data from the mentees also evidenced psychosocial functions. These included developing trust, providing encouragement and guidance, acceptance and confirmation, counselling, and friendship. The way these functions presented themselves in the data is described below.

5.3.3.1 Developing trust

Developing trust was apparent in the mentoring relationships with the mentees. As the relationships progressed, it became clearer that trust was developing. It became easier to talk and exchange ideas with the mentees. In the case of Wakwanza, his reflections about the relationship, and contributions to the mentoring conversations became deeper and more meaningful. Wakwanza illustrated this function by exploring in his reflective journal his perception of mentoring:

> *To me, for one to become an effective educator they must have a mentor who should take them through the important aspects of the profession. I believe that mentoring helps in ensuring that the mentee is given the realistic perspective of the field that they are venturing into. It provides the opportunity for them to 'test-drive' what will become their future vehicle without risk to penalties…*

In the above description, Wakwanza found comfort and confidence in the ability of mentoring to provide a safe environment for the mentee to attempt new things without the fear of penalty. This was an important factor that contributed significantly to the building of trust in the mentoring relationship, which was also displayed by the deliberate way that Wakwanza set off to use the relationship to seek guidance and advice. He planned issues that affected his practice for discussion with me. Wakwanza states:

I also plan to ask my mentor how she handles such tasks, which she has not planned for but does have to be done…

Wakwanza also displayed evidence that he had trust in the mentoring relationship and used his mentor as a benchmark of what he wanted to achieve. The role modelling function was displayed within this psychosocial function as Wakwanza attempts to emulate his mentor. He states:

To ensure success I am trying to put myself in the shoes of my mentor…

The mentees gained sufficient confidence and trust in the mentoring process to confide in me about different issues affecting their personal and professional lives. It was apparent that I became the first person in their minds when they needed to consult about issues at both personal and professional levels.

5.3.3.2 Providing encouragement

The function of providing encouragement to the mentees was visible in the findings. The encouragement and support gave the mentees the self confidence and drive to push towards achieving their developmental goals. Mchana demonstrated how encouragement influenced her in her pursuit to gain entry into a professional development programme she wanted and how the mentoring relationship played a part in this. She writes:

My number one priority for this year is to get myself into school and get a qualification that can boost me further in my career. I talked to my mentor about it and she encouraged me…I got a lot of advice from her and it really helped me sort out a few questions that I had…

The mentees also required encouragement to gain the confidence to perform tasks in their practice. One incident that illustrated this function was where Wakwanza was apprehensive about conducting appraisals in his section and required encouragement. Wakwanza confirmed the he obtained encouragement from his mentor to perform this exercise. He writes:

I recall discussing [the task] with [my mentor] and her advice that once I get started I may find it easier than it looks so far.

After carrying out the task successfully, Wakwanza reflected thus:

> *My mentor was certainly right. The appraisals went well… My learning is that I should always prepare for these appraisals and carry them out without thinking too much about the encounter…*

I found that with encouragement from me as the mentor, the mentees grew more confident of the positive outcome of the achievement of their goals. This encouragement also became a way of drawing the mentee out and ascertaining that they owned the task which they were pursuing.

5.3.3.3 Providing guidance

The findings indicate that the guidance function emerged in the mentoring relationship. The mentees gained confidence in my ability to provide direction, support and advice on issues affecting them both personally and professionally. I became available to them as and when they needed my assistance, even outside of the scheduled mentoring meetings. Mchana often took advantage of these circumstances to seek me out for this guidance. She states:

> *Every time I needed to I went to the mentor for advice, support and encouragement…*

During the mentoring conversations, I had an opportunity to share true life scenarios that the mentees could relate to in the process of carrying out their daily duties with the hope of giving the mentees direction. Wakwanza took this function further by displaying that he was using this guidance to achieve set tasks. He says:

> *We have been exchanging in a very positive manner and the suggestions [my mentor] has given me, when I implement them, I see them working …*

As the mentor, I was encouraged with the feedback from the mentees that the guidance I was giving them was effective. I enjoyed sharing my stories of both successful and unsuccessful experiences with them, and was gratified that they found these guidance sessions useful in the fulfilment of their goals. The mentees' most important and rewarding impact from the mentoring relationship was the fact that I was available to encourage and

support them in their endeavours. They felt that they could depend on me for assistance or direction whenever the need arose.

5.3.3.4   Acceptance and confirmation

Acceptance and confirmation provides support and encouragement to mentees as they develop competence in the world of work (Kram, 1988:35). Through this function the mentor conveys to the mentee positive regard that gives the mentee the confidence to forge ahead with their developmental objectives. It enables the mentee to experiment with new behaviour by taking risks in the knowledge that mistakes while learning will not result in rejection.

Acceptance and confirmation was quite prevalent in the relationship with the mentees. At the beginning of the relationship, the mentees needed more support and encouragement to build their confidence. They were eager to confirm that their actions had my support. They seemed uncertain of the gains that could result from a mentoring relationship, assessing what benefits could accrue from their roles as mentees. Early in the relationship Wakwanza reflects in his journal:

> *I am beginning to realise that every meeting I have with my mentor is an opportunity for me to learn something that is beneficial to my PDPs.*

As the relationship progressed, the mentees began to display greater confidence in their own abilities, and the ability of the mentoring relationship to result in positive outcomes. Wakwanza started to display confirmation that he was attaining his projected goals. He began displaying feelings of self confidence which he attributed to the mentoring relationship. He provides the following feedback in the first focus group interview about his mentoring experiences:

> *I am seeing that I have the ability to do the job, so this has been something that has been coming out and I realise that I am capable of doing what is supposed to be done in the job environment. I also feel that the relationship is providing a lot of growth. I feel like most of the issues that I have been dealing with, most of them that we have been discussing have been growing better.*

Mchana's self confidence also continued to grow. My support and encouragement gave her the assurance to strive to achieve her professional and personal goals. As the mentoring relationship progressed, her dependence on me lessened. In her reflective journal, Mchana described the confidence she had in achieving her set goals. She writes:

> *I feel like I am becoming more independent. I used to run to [my mentor] to ask her how to do many things…but now…I keep telling myself, if [my mentor] notices that I can make it, then I know that from deep down in my heart I can do it and achieve it. I can achieve anything that I want to do in life.*

Towards the end of the project, during the winding up stage, Wakwanza confirmed that he had become totally comfortable and confident in his role as a mentee, and had taken advantage of the mentoring relationship to fulfil his developmental goals. The mentoring relationship had provided the required support, and he had gained the confidence that he could achieve his set goals. During the concluding focus group interview, Wakwanza states:

> *Personally I feel that my expectations have been met because when we started the relationship, I didn't have a lot of expectations, I didn't know what to expect with it, so as we went along I began to see this is a good thing. I began to feel it's more rewarding to me and therefore, I set some expectations which I think have already been met…I feel confident…*

Providing support and building the mentees' self confidence seemed to come naturally to me as our mentoring conversations became deeper and more meaningful. As the mentees opened up and we discussed issues that mattered most to them, it became easy to affirm the learning and development that was taking place. The affirmation directly to the mentees of the positive changes that were taking place in their behaviour contributed significantly to the achievement of my confidence as a mentor.

5.3.3.5 Counselling

When counselling, the mentor discusses internal conflicts that pose challenges to the mentee's learning and development (Kram, 1988:36). This is a context where the mentee can discuss any anxieties or fears that are detrimental to their productivity at work.

Counselling was a prevalent psychosocial function in the mentoring relationship. Through this function, I discussed with the mentees their anxieties and fears. These anxieties often came from the job environment as the mentees performed their day-to-day duties in their practice.

During the mentoring project, Mchana's department was going through structural changes that provided challenges to her. As an expatriate educator, she had been placed in a position to supervise her colleagues, a role that was in line with her abilities, but went beyond the scope of her administrative level. The department was going through the process of assigning higher responsibilities to educators who were nationals of Botswana, and Mchana found herself in a lower position than those she used to delegate tasks to. Mchana's reflections indicate that these structural issues were foremost in her mind and she needed my assistance to clarify them. Mchana reflects upon these anxieties in her reflective journal when she writes:

> *When I woke this morning, I tried to look for all reasons not to go to work...I didn't know that this appointment thing would really get into me like that. … Should I fight back and demand that I get the same position or just let it be…*

Mchana and I discussed these issues and Mchana's anxiety about these structural changes occurring in her department was relieved. She began to look at the situation more positively and started to find ways of working together with her colleagues. Mchana provides feedback on how the mentoring relationship helped her to deal with this challenge:

> *When the job I loved doing for the past four years was given to somebody else, I was glad that I was able to talk to [my mentor] and open up to her…she advised me of what I should do….by myself I couldn't have handled the situation…*

This counselling function was also apparent in the relationship with Wakwanza. During the direction setting stage of the mentoring relationship, Wakwanza required counselling support for fears and anxieties that he needed to talk about. The mentoring relationship was an avenue for the discussion of these anxieties. Wakwanza was at a stage in his career as an educator where he had been given the additional responsibility of heading the Tourism programme. He needed encouragement and somebody who could listen to his

experiences as he settled into his role. He reflects on these anxieties that he discussed with me as his mentor in his journal:

I feel my not carrying some of [my tasks] on time may impact negatively on others. I am also feeling disappointed by the fact that some staff members are not pulling their weight when it comes to set deadlines.

Issues that were taking place outside of the job environment were also highlighted as generating disturbance in the work environment. Issues that generated internal conflict or resulted in negative behaviour in the workplace were also discussed during the mentoring sessions. Wakwanza expounds on issues where he needed counselling. He states:

I have realised that my experiences… and the work is also affected by what I encounter outside. You know there are things that I didn't know that actually affect the way I work and the way I am handling situations. You know, you come across something at home that upsets you, you come to work and it's still there.

Wakwanza confirmed that counselling built his confidence, and he found his focus in carrying out his tasks. He states:

I felt a great sense of relief to discuss [these issues] with my mentor. It looked so easy after discussion that I feel quite confident if I ever come across the same situations in future, I will not be so anxious.

The counselling function was an avenue for me to empathise with the mentees and help them to build their confidence. I was a sounding board for their ideas and helped them to work out the best options for tackling different situations. I felt that their ability to bring these issues forward confirmed their belief that the mentoring relationship was one that could be of assistance in clarifying their thoughts so that it would be easier to handle situations in the work environment and outside it.

5.3.3.6 Providing friendship

The friendship function includes the social interaction that results in mutual liking and understanding (Kram, 1988:38). This role allows the mentee to feel like a peer with the mentor so that the relationship is not as distant as with an authority figure. The mentor interacts informally with the mentee and discusses issues that are not work related.

The findings indicate that friendship is a function that developed in the mentoring relationship. There were occasions where mentoring conversations between the mentees and I were on issues not connected to work. The friendship function was an element that contributed to the strengthening of the mentoring relationship, and paved a way for the achievement of personal and professional developmental goals. Wakwanza demonstrates his perception of the friendship function when he says:

> *She is a friend now because we discuss many things, not only to do with the mentoring experience but also with family issues you know, how we are dealing with situations outside work and such…*

The friendship function was also very apparent with Mchana. The closeness that developed between us seemed to come as a surprise to her. She expresses her appreciation of this function like this:

> *What I didn't expect is becoming a good friend to her. This is an extra reward that has come out of this mentoring relationship.*

These findings indicate that at the onset of the relationship friendship was not an outcome that was expected by the mentees. The function came as a result of the depth of the ensuing mentoring relationship and the activities that we undertook. As a mentor, I found that being considered a friend by the mentees assisted in positive outcomes from the developmental activities that we carried out.

5.3.4 Summary

In summary, the findings revealed from the data of the mentees suggest that educators in a VET educational institution could effectively utilise mentoring as an intervention for learning and development. Specifically, there is evidence that the mentees worked towards achieving what they highlighted in their PDPs. The areas where learning took place covered teaching methodologies, classroom management and administrative tasks that facilitate the organisation and coordination of teaching. The mentoring process assisted the mentees to improve their practice in terms of these learning areas. There are

also indications that the mentees shared their newly acquired knowledge and skills with others in their departments.

The findings also indicate that psychosocial functions played a significant role in strengthening the mentoring relationship on the interpersonal level. The mentoring roles of encouragement, guidance, trust and friendship assisted in instilling a sense of confidence in the mentees on the benefits that can accrue from the mentoring process. Because of the strong and healthy interpersonal relationship between the mentees and me, individual learning was enhanced. Positive feelings about mentoring led to the achievement of personal and professional goals in a relatively short period of time.

5.4   Contribution of learning to mentoring practice

In this section I look at how the mentees used their learning to contribute to the mentoring practice in the VET educational institution. The mentoring process afforded the mentees opportunities for individual learning and development. While undergoing the mentoring process, the mentees embraced specific learning techniques which they invariably used to enhance their development. These techniques became part of the way we carried out mentoring practice at GTC.

Three themes emerged from this exploration that could be viewed as techniques that the mentees used to enhance their learning and gave back into mentoring practice. These are learning through reflective practice, reciprocal learning and learning through goal setting. I discuss these three learning techniques below.

5.4.1   Learning through reflective practice

The findings suggest that the educators participating in the mentoring process learned through reflective practice. This finding is not exceptional in terms of general mentoring research. It has long been suggested that reflective practice is a beneficial technique in mentoring (Barnett, 1995:46; Clutterbuck, 2004:23). However, this finding is significant in terms of its contribution to mentoring practices at GTC.

The mentees highlight the benefits that accrued to them from reflective journal writing. They believed that the act of writing down their thoughts in the journal helped them to learn from the experiences they were living through. Reflective practice made the mentees focus on mentoring experiences and how they could learn from these experiences, assisting their learning and development. Given that the activity of maintaining a reflective journal was prescribed as part of data collection for the study, this finding becomes significant, indicating that reflection became an integral part of the mentoring process within our context. Mchana reflected on how reflective practice aided her learning. She states:

> *You came across an issue during the day and at the end of the day you reflect on [this issue]… makes you think of how you're able to tackle that particular situation in the future. So, for me it has changed me in that I am able to learn from my actions... the reflective journal has really changed the way I deal with issues.*

The evidence indicates that reflective practice was an activity the mentees had to learn. It was not a process that they readily accepted at the beginning. As observed by Cox (2005:461) there is often resistance to the process of reflection and initial difficulty in developing the reflective practice. The process of becoming effective in reflection and using the outcome of the reflection for personal and professional benefit was gradual. It was an area that the mentees needed encouragement, support and guidance to adopt. As a mentor I developed the skills of reflective practice with the mentees in two ways. Firstly, I developed reflective practice skills by employing the SAID framework presented in Chapter 3. To achieve this, I held several sessions with each mentee to discuss and explore effective and individualised ways of reflection. Each mentee gradually found his or her own way to make use of reflection to enhance their learning. Secondly, I developed reflective practice by using questioning techniques that encouraged reflection when discussing specific situations during our mentoring conversations. As we explored the learning of the mentees from their varied experiences this exploration resulted in my own self esteem and created a sense of growth and satisfaction in my endeavours as a mentor. More importantly, I felt that assisting the mentees to develop reflective practice improved my own critical reflection abilities.

As the mentoring relationship progressed, the mentees began to see the benefits of reflection in their practice. Wakwanza highlights how he used reflection for his own learning:

As I began to reflect and think about these things, I began to see that there is something in [reflection]. It's important as a way of learning. You begin to see where you went wrong, where you could have done better, how you could have done things differently…When you begin to reflect on yourself you see that there are some changes happening…you become better at tackling issues…

Writing the reflective journal challenged the mentees to examine their feelings and to question their assumptions. The mentees were able to reflect upon their experiences and learn from these reflections. Although it was a challenging task for them to learn how to reflect, it paid off as it became easier to turn mentoring experiences to learning episodes. It became easier for them to ask the right questions during mentoring conversations. Reflective practice became more powerful when we talked aloud about our learning experiences. As we became better at reflection, our conversations became deeper and more meaningful. We were able to discuss issues in depth, until I observed the satisfaction on the mentee's face indicating an awareness of where this journey was leading us.

Reflective practice also contributed to my own learning as a mentor. Helping the mentees to reflect on their practice made me question my own practice. In attempting to diagnose and analyse the issues presented by the mentees, I tended to relate their actions to my own experiences as I had to attempt to make sense of them before discussing alternatives with the mentees. Questioning my own practice led me to improve it. Reflective practice from the perspective of the mentees provided insight into my own developmental needs prompting me to become better at what I did.

5.4.2 Learning through goal setting

In this study the mentees enhanced their learning through setting clear goals for themselves before commencing on the mentoring process. The preparation of PDPs prepared the foundation for learning and development. The emphasis was on short term goals that could be achieved within a six month duration. Time was taken to articulate and clarify what the mentees expected from mentoring. However, it is clear that although these activities were carried out, it took time for the mentees to assimilate and internalise them. Shortly into the mentoring process, issues started to become clearer to the mentees. As the mentees participated in mentoring conversations, reflected upon their experiences,

and started participating in mentoring driven activities, they began to be clear about what to expect from the mentoring process. The positive feelings that they obtained from mentoring enabled them to accept the support and encouragement I provided. This made the attainment of the mentees developmental goals easier to achieve. The clarification within themselves of what to expect from mentoring assisted the mentees to focus on the goal of achieving their PDPs. Mchana expresses her thoughts on this during the first focus group interview:

> *I didn't have any [expectations at the beginning], I was just putting one foot after the other, because at first I didn't know what this was all about, but now I think my values, and attitude have been changed…. I have learned a lot, it's been a learning process where everything has just come together…for me.*

Goal setting made it easier for the mentees to make the transition from being dependant on me for their learning, to being self directed. The PDP became a contractual agreement which was used as a guide for the achievement of learning objectives. It was much easier for me to direct the mentees towards being proactive in achieving their goals. Wakwanza comments on this issue thus:

> *I thought it would be more of the mentor driven type of relationship, and to me I was looking for her to do a lot of things you know, like call me, tell me what to do…Then I realised its me to say what it is that I want from the relationship. So I think it is really a dynamic experience, you find that it changes with time and I think that what is most important is how finally it changes you and how you see yourself developing and what you see yourself gaining from it… it is really a good experience to go through.*

The achievement of goals was enhanced when the benefits of mentoring became clear to the mentees. Mchana expresses it like this:

> *I found somebody who could be there for me…when you have somebody who you are dealing with and who knows the type of job that you are doing or the tasks that you have been given, then they are able to support and advise you on those tasks…*

Goal setting positively influenced the mentees to assimilate what was being offered for learning that much faster. Their view of mentoring went beyond the mentoring relationship, and they started to realise that mentoring was a process that could work in other areas in the organisation. They began to see themselves as mentors and as change agents who could provide mentoring in the organisation. Mchana had this to say:

For me I think it was a really good experience. I would like to do it, either to someone or… even get a chance to tell somebody about it, just explain to them what mentoring is all about because people think when you are mentoring somebody you are like on their back to look if they are doing things the right way or not, but this [experience] has changed that perspective.

It appears that goal setting was an activity that assisted the mentees to achieve their learning objectives. The mentoring process was more focused and directed towards the achievement of set goals. It was easier for me as the mentor to offer my support and guidance to the mentee in a situation where both of us were aware of what we wanted to attain.

5.4.3   Awareness of reciprocal learning

Reciprocal learning accentuates the dual nature of learning. Mentors and mentees learn from one another as they participate in the mentoring process. The findings suggest that the mentees were aware of the reciprocal learning nature of mentoring. The knowledge that they were not the only learners in the mentoring process appeared to strengthen their trust in the relationship, and this appeared to enhance their learning. I explore this issue from the perspective of how the mentees viewed my learning within the relationship. In my opinion, this is one way of gauging what techniques the mentees would be taking back into the mentoring practice in the area of reciprocal learning.

Mentoring conversations, the main medium through which we exchanged information, offered opportunities for reciprocal learning. As the mentoring relationship progressed, and expectations were clarified, our conversations became more meaningful. We shared stories detailing true life scenarios, which led to learning. As the mentor, I benefited from these exchanges as much as the mentees. Wakwanza highlights his understanding of this dual learning in one of the feedback sessions:

I think, to me I think [the mentor] has also learned something out of this whole experience because of the way we deal with her and the way we interact.
I believe we are not the only ones learning…she will also benefit from [the mentoring process]. I believe even for her to be able to reflect on her mentoring role as a mentor is learning... If you don't have students then you can't really gauge how good you are, but when you have people that you are mentoring, then I believe you begin to see how you are developing, how they are gaining from the experience and that way

you can judge also how good you are as a mentor and what you have been able to impart to your mentees…

The mentees also appeared to realise and appreciate the fact that they were two people being mentored by one person. These were two educators from two different departments in the same institution. Their PDPs and related issues were different. The mentees' observation indicated to me that they were comfortable in their individual roles, and focused in the achievement of their individual goals. But they were also cognisant of the fact that as a mentor I may have found the situation challenging. I believe their view of me appreciating them as unique individuals enhanced their trust in the relationship. Mchana provides her feedback on this issue:

> *[The mentor] is able to analytically look at the both of us and see us as different individuals who have different personal goals to meet, even the way we just handle different situations or conflict within our working areas, I'm sure she is able to analyse and critically think that these two individuals, that both mentees are quite different and I think that's been a great benefit for her.*

Reciprocal learning is strengthened when the participants view each other with respect and trust. Learning is enhanced when the mentor and the mentee view each other as peers, going into a developmental relationship for the benefit of both parties. This is the view that the mentees held of this relationship. It is a view that must have enhanced their learning and development. Wakwanza comments on the dual nature of mentoring:

> *I have seen a lot of changes in myself in terms of this experience and therefore as a result, I would be happy to say that she must also be feeling good that I'm changing, and I believe that she has also experienced some of the changes that I am making in my career or profession because of our relationship….*

In this study, the mentees held strong views of the opportunity for reciprocal learning in the mentoring process. This view impacted positively on the relationship, and enhanced learning. It is a view that can be said to have contributed to the mentoring practice in the educational institution.

5.4.4   Summary

The findings indicate that the learning and development of the mentees through the mentoring process used different avenues. These avenues became the ways that the

mentees used their learning to contribute to mentoring practices in their context. Specific practices became second nature to the way we as participants approached and perceived mentoring practice. The mentees benefited from guided reflection and learned through reflective practice. The PDPs proved to be instruments that guided goal achievement. The fact that the mentees were aware that they were not the only learners in the relationship appears to have also encouraged learning and development on the part of the mentees. The practices and ways of thinking became part of the way educators at GTC practiced the mentoring process.

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the perspective of the mentees. Geber's (2003a:5) developmental model is used as a guide to explore the emerging themes from the data. The findings presented in this chapter indicate that the mentoring project at GTC resulted in the learning and development of the mentees. The guidance and support that I provided through role modelling, career and psychosocial functions had a positive impact and resulted in goal achievement. The findings also indicate that the mentees contributed to the mentoring practice within their context by utilising reflective practice, goal setting and awareness of reciprocal learning. These findings indicate that change did take place on the part of the mentees, and they improved their practice. The changes brought about by the learning and development of the mentees appear to have provided them with the ability to cope with the challenges being exerted by the internal and external environments of the VET educational institution. There are also indications that the mentees shared their newly acquired knowledge with others in their departments thus contributing to the learning of the organisation. This participatory nature of learning points to the group dynamics that influence organisational behaviour as it pertains to individual learning. It is apparent the learning of individual educators at GTC was contributing to the learning of other educators in the institution.