CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS: MY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AS A MENTOR

The purpose of this study was to explore how educators in a vocational education and training (VET) educational institution can use the mentoring process to achieve learning and development. The participants in this study were my two mentees and myself as the mentor. I presented the findings extracted from the mentees' experiences in the previous chapter (Chapter 5). In this chapter, I present the findings from my self study perspective as the mentor.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section connects the exploration of the findings with the action research design described in Chapter 4. The second section presents the learning and development of the mentees from my perspective as a mentor. I explore how my mentoring role presented itself through the aspects of role modelling, career, and psychosocial functions as reviewed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The themes described in Table 5.1 guide my presentation. The third section explores how I improved my mentoring practice, thus contributing to the mentoring process in our VET educational institution. My exploration is guided by the mentoring skills of listening, questioning and providing feedback highlighted in mentoring literature (Cohen, 1995:28; Fibkins, 2002:48; Galbraith, 2003:12; Harrison et al., 2005:437; Scwiebert , 2000:103; Ramaswani and Dreher, 2007:225). In addition, I also highlight two significant issues which emerged from the data that contributed to the improvement of my mentoring capacity and consequently to the mentoring practices in the VET educational institution.

6.1 The mentoring process and action research cycles

The findings in this chapter are derived from data gathered from face-to-face interactions with the mentees, the personal reflective journals of the mentees, my personal reflections on the mentoring process, the focus group interviews, and notes from my project diary.

To guide the exploration of the learning of the mentees and my own learning I made reference to the three action research cycles presented in Table 4.2 (Chapter 4) which

highlight the stages of the mentoring process. These three cycles included the Megginson et al.'s (2006:19) five-stage model of building rapport, direction setting, progression, winding up and moving on.

Table 6.1 below is adapted from table 5.2 in the previous chapter. This table clarifies that my learning and the improvement of my mentoring practice was moving in tandem with the learning and development of the mentees as we journeyed through the mentoring process. During the rapport building and direction setting stage my listening, questioning and providing feedback technique were underdeveloped. As we progressed further with the mentoring project my mentoring techniques improved considerably to a stage where I could confirm that learning had taken place and I had improved my mentoring practice.

Table 6.1 presents a snapshot of how the mentoring roles and functions emerged during the mentoring process, and how the building of my mentoring capacity progressed at the same time. In the section below, I explore in detail the learning of the mentees from my perspective as a mentor, using these roles and functions.

Table 6.1 Findings of my learning from the GTC mentoring project

Stages of the mentoring process	Duration	Mentoring roles/functions that emerged at each stage	Progress in my learning
Building rapport Direction setting	September 2006	**Career development** Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension Coaching **Psychosocial functions** Develop trust Provide encouragement Provide guidance Counselling	Underdeveloped listening skills Underdeveloped questioning skills Underdeveloped providing feedback skills
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	Improving in listening skills Improving in questing skills Improving in providing feedback skills
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	Improved listening skills Improved questioning skills Improved providing feedback skills

Key

First action research cycle - Building rapport and Direction setting

Second action research cycle - Progression

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

6.2 Learning and development through the mentoring process

In this section, I follow the same format as in Chapter 5, where I explore our experiences in the mentoring process, and my learning and development from these 'lived experiences' (Whitehead, 1988:43). I therefore present the findings guided by the role modelling, career and psychosocial functions.

I provide excerpts of descriptions from my journal to provide significant detail and portray the richness of the data. In my exploration, I make reference to occurrences in my personal reflective journal that are similar to those highlighted by the mentees in Chapter 5. This is in line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985:288) assertion that cross referencing the occurrences within data for the same observations increases the validity and reliability of the findings across the different sets of data.

6.2.1 Role modelling function

The role modelling function presented itself as a key role in our learning and development as participants. As a mentor I was conscious that I needed to be a good role model. I enjoyed living my values and was happy that the mentees appeared willing to subscribe to the same values that I upheld.

My data reveals that being a positive role model to the mentees is something that I reflected upon, wishing to set them a good example. The fact that I reflected upon the notion of being a good role model during the mentoring period indicates that I was concerned about what the mentees thought of me and how they viewed me. In my journal I reflect on this issue like this:

> *I think the mentees have no idea what to expect from me as their mentor. I can only try to live up to their expectations by acting out my values….I want to be a good role model to my mentees*.

It is apparent that I was concerned about the values I uphold and whether I was exhibiting these values to the mentees. I struggled with my values and whether I was truly living them out (Whitehead, 1988:41) in my mentoring practice, and in particular whether I was

providing to the mentees the kind of support they needed to enable them develop and improve their practice to fulfil their developmental goals. While adjusting in my role as a mentor, I wondered how I could pass on what I considered my positive values to the mentees. This is something that I reflect about in my journal:

> *My values pass on to them through my mentoring sessions, and I can lead by example. The mentees hear about as well as see what it is that I do, and how I do it. Sometimes I think consciously about what is the right thing to do…*

From the mentees' reflective journals, data suggests that role modelling was a significant function that assisted them in their learning and development. The mentees could observe my values, and behaviour, and learn from these observations. As the more senior educator, I was regarded by the mentees as having the experience they aspired to. Observing me carrying out daily tasks gave the mentees the confidence that they could also perform these tasks.

The challenge of learning new ways of teaching diminished when we talked about them and shared experiences. Our conversations highlighted issues about teaching and problem solving. During our mentoring conversations I shared with the mentees stories from my past experiences, both successful and unsuccessful, to bring alive reactions to events in my practice. The mentees were able to relate these stories of my 'lived experiences' (Whitehead, 1988:43) to their current situations. Their learning was influenced by their perception of me as their role model. The data provides evidence that the role modelling function was intricately connected to the career and psychosocial functions.

Role modelling comes across as a strong and significant component through which learning took place in the mentoring relationship. Having a visible and approachable mentor in the educational institution gave the mentees the confidence that what they aspired to learn was achievable. The story sharing, and encouragement during mentoring conversations gave the mentees confidence to perform tasks that resulted in learning. Role modelling is a characteristic of mentoring that influenced and enhanced the intensity of learning through the other mentoring functions discussed earlier. It is interesting to note that the role modelling function is not one that I consciously focused on as a mentor, and that I was not consciously aware of the impact or influence of my attitude, values and

behaviour on the mentees. I was mainly not aware of the role modelling behaviour that I was displaying to the mentees. These findings support Kram's (1988:33) observation that role modelling in a mentoring relationship is both a conscious and an unconscious process.

6.2.2 Career development functions

The career development functions are visible where, as the mentor, I focused on providing to the mentees support on how to develop professionally.

6.2.2.1 Teaching and exploring the facilitative dimension

The findings reveal that the mentoring conversations we held on teaching prompted the mentees to explore how they could improve their teaching skills and become more effective for their own benefit and for the benefit of their students. To this end we explored how the mentees could improve their teaching methodologies and classroom management. These discussions were driven by the changes taking place in the institution due to the introduction of the new outcomes based programme, the Botswana Technical Education Programme (BTEP). This programme required that educators perform their teaching role, and also carry out administrative activities such as the quality assurance component of BTEP. A major part of BTEP was the Internal Verification process that involved the collection of student evidence as proof of the effectiveness of assessment decisions made by the educator.

It is important that there is a smooth and systematic internal verification system in the institution to ensure that the programme passes any quality assurance scrutiny. The internal verification system is one where each educator collects student evidence into a portfolio and submits this portfolio to peers for critical quality assurance review. Evidence is submitted in the form of a file, referred to as the student evidence file which contains all the evidence gathered by the educator, and when perused, should show clearly how the educator made judgements on the competency level of the student. A major issue in the institution is the planning, co-ordination and management skills of the educator in compiling these evidence files in such a way that they can withstand scrutiny by both

internal and external verifiers. Another major bottleneck is situations where educators delay handing their files to their peers. This internal verification process is a critical aspect of the educator's classroom management. Given the varied technical and administrative efficiency levels of the educators across the institution, the difficulties experienced with the internal verification system poses a major challenge to the successful implementation of BTEP. This was therefore an important aspect to tackle with the mentees.

Wakwanza, being the programme team leader for the Tourism programme, wished to improve his capacity to implement an effective and efficient internal verification process. This was an issue that we worked on together, which paid off. In one of my journal entries, I reflect on how we progressed on this issue.

> *The handing in of student evidence files [by Wakwanza] was on schedule, and he could see the response from his colleagues coming out positive. Previously he had been expecting them to hand in their files, yet he would be one of the last ones to hand in his. He was not being a good role model. Now, he felt that he was being a good role model, and he was encouraged to see that they were immediately reciprocating by also handing files back and forth amongst themselves in a timely manner.*

Delivery of lessons to students was another developmental area that I worked on with the mentees. Both mentees concentrated on how they could make their delivery to students more effective in their individual technical areas. The aim was to ensure that the planning and preparation of the mentees was in line with the ethos of outcomes based delivery strategies. I wanted to achieve this goal because I had in view what the institution had prescribed to in terms of the change in teaching methodology. The process of equipping the mentees with skills to approach their delivery with fresh and enthusiastic eyes went on for the duration of the mentorship. This approach dealt with another important challenge that has been introduced in BTEP and that is student centred learning. In this approach teaching is expected to be outcomes based, making the teacher more of a facilitator in the classroom. Assessment of students becomes focused on what the student can do, rather than what the student knows.

As a mentor, my focus was on changing the mindset of the mentees and pushing them towards attempting methods of teaching that were more interactive and supportive of student centred learning. The methods we tried out included presentations by students,

group activities, practical demonstrations, and class trips with follow up presentations and discussions on outcomes. An entry in my reflective journal indicates how I attempted to encourage Mchana to view her delivery methods differently.

> *Mchana wanted to do the same old lecture method for her class. She blamed the students for not understanding. She could not understand why the students found the theoretical aspect of the class difficult. I requested her to consider a more interactive method, and we explored them together, then I led her to consider reflecting on our session, and deciding what she would like to do. I am eager to talk about it with her next week to see what she has come up with…*

As the mentor, my aim was for the mentees to gain a level of insight which could enable them to apply any teaching skills they acquired regardless of what lesson they were delivering. Their ability to do this would ensure they could deploy these skills to meet new situations.

Mchana and tried out different approaches to delivery in one of her Hairdressing units. Where she used to be the only one to demonstrate techniques, she tried out student group activities that led the students on the path to learning by discovery (Boyer, 1997:103). She was gratified and encouraged by the positive response from the students and from myself. She found that when she made the class more interactive, the students achieved the desired outcomes more easily. Mchana makes the following comment that confirmed this improvement:

> *I have used new methods of approaching my teaching which has focussed more on the learner. The learners are becoming more interested in what I am doing and they have also gained a lot and I've seen the improvement through their performance in their assessments. ..*

Feedback from the mentees, coupled with the lesson observations I made of the mentees' classes, highlighted the positive changes that were resulting from our mentoring discussions. As we entered deeper into the progression stage of the mentoring process, the mentees could see that there were positive changes coming from the student centred interactive approaches to teaching. The more changes became apparent, the more the mentees became excited about their profession as educators. This achievement emphasised the importance of my role as a mentor to the educators.

6.2.2.2 Exposure to opportunities

The findings reveal that assignments the mentees carried out exposed them to people in the institution whose influence could further their career aspirations. Wakwanza's challenging tasks exposed him to others beyond the department he was in. He had the opportunity to attend meetings which he ordinarily would not have attended. These meetings exposed him to the more senior members of the organisation who had the ability to influence employment decisions, such as the renewal of employment contracts.

Mchana, on the other hand, performed tasks and submitted them to her immediate supervisor and discussed how to handle such tasks in her department. In one of my journal entries, I recount an incident where Mchana talks about a challenging situation in her department, and how she would go about tackling it. Mchana felt that her immediate supervisor was overloading her with tasks resulting in her colleagues having a much lighter workload. She was also being put in a situation where she had to delegate tasks to colleagues on the same level as her. She was being put in this situation without her supervisor explaining to others in the department about Mchana's changed role. I reflect in my journal thus:

> *I asked her what she thinks she would like to do about the situation. She said she had been thinking about writing out a task schedule, which she would then discuss with her supervisor, detailing what she handles at the moment that can be handled by her other colleagues. The schedule would indicate precisely who will handle what.*

The mentoring relationship highlighted to Mchana an avenue of dealing with this situation in her department. The exposure that was afforded to Mchana in this case was the opportunity to discuss her ideas with her line supervisor and initiate a way of working with her colleagues that was more transparent. All concerned would know her contribution to departmental tasks. Such knowledge could have an impact on positive performance reviews, which in turn could provide a positive career move in terms of promotion or renewal of contract.

An important theme highlighted here is the manner in which the mentoring process propelled Mchana to share her knowledge and experience with other educators in her

department. It is common in the VET educational institutions in Botswana that contract educators from countries other than Botswana are often positioned on the same structural level with indigenous educators who have less experience and knowledge. It is worthy to note that Mchana as a more knowledgeable and experienced educator in her department created an opportunity to share her knowledge with other educators in the department.

6.2.2.3 Giving information

There are findings that indicate that as the mentor, I shared information with the mentees on different issues we discussed. This information gave the mentees wider perspectives of their personal and professional environments. The information concerned their core duties of teaching as well as wider professional development plans. During our mentoring conversations, I provided information about specific issues to do with the professional advancement of the mentees. I provided guidance on how the mentees could go about obtaining more information on issues they wanted to pursue further. One topic where we spent a considerable amount of discussion time on was ideas of what the mentees were planning to do after the expiry of their current contracts. This was driven by the fact that the mentees were educators employed on three year contracts with GTC and therefore aware that at the end of contract they had to find other employment. They had to be ready in case their contract was not renewed. This was always a traumatic time especially for those educators who would have preferred to continue in their posts at GTC.

I realised that over time, especially on issues that negatively affected the mentees, I was becoming rather protective. I was concerned about whether the mentees had alternative plans for the end of their contracts. I felt a social responsibility to assist in this area and provided to them information that I thought could help them make progress with this concern. Mchana, for example, discussed with me as her mentor, her plans after leaving the institution. I wrote the following in my reflective journal:

> *Mchana also talked about a proposal that she had been grappling to write, on a dream she has about pioneering Hairdressing in technical schools in Kenya. I listened to what she had to say. I then suggested how she could start it off, by searching the net for leads…But I also cautioned her about how ministries in Kenya work, so that she could sharpen her focus on what exactly she wanted to do with such a proposal. I thought she was not being realistic with her dream, and suggested that she needed to think some more after doing some research on what she wants*.

Sharing information with the mentees on varied issues that were of interest to them gave me an opportunity to provide the mentees with direction. I felt that such conversations enhanced the mentoring relationship. This is because the mentees could take the opportunities to talk about their aspirations, and ways of improving their practice. And as the mentor, I assisted them in their research efforts to find information that could help them make informed decisions. It was a good opportunity to assist the mentees acquire strategies of seeking the information needed for decision making. I felt, however, that I had to be careful to give room to the mentees to discover their own answers for themselves and build their own personal maps of where they wanted to go, rather than imposing my own ideas and thoughts. This was a learning time for me as the mentor, as I had to know instinctively where to draw the line when sharing information with the mentees.

6.2.2.4 Giving political information

Giving political information is a function that emerged from my data as the mentor. There are instances when I gave the mentees information that would normally not form part of the policies and procedures of the institution, but awareness of such information could assist the mentees in their everyday dealings with their colleagues. One major reason for this finding was that the educational institution has different groups of educators comprising local educators as well as expatriate educators. Although the majority of the educators are Batswana (citizens of Botswana), there is a significant number of educators who are from outside Botswana. Both of the mentees were expatriates, and were viewed as outsiders and expected to be there for only a short time. Interpersonal relationships between themselves and their Batswana counterparts necessitated that they be made aware of information that caused conflict in the workplace. Educators from outside the country need to be aware of the culture of the people they work with. Providing the mentees with political inside information resulted in discussions on how to deal with potential conflict situations constructively.

One situation we discussed with Mchana was how to deal with discipline, what options would work better than others. She had a habit of writing memos to her colleagues concerning tasks not done, and this method had not been effective. It had resulted in interpersonal conflicts that usually ended up at the desk of her supervisor. She needed to understand why her method was not working. I wrote this in my reflective journal:

> *I shared with her my experience of how Batswana usually reacted to written memos. Their reaction to discipline through letters or memos is usually quite negative and needs to be selected as an option of last resort….*

My experience as an administrator in Gaborone Technical College (GTC) had shown me that understanding the people that we work with helped a great deal in creating a harmonious working environment. I was happy to share these thoughts with the mentees so that they could benefit from my experiences.

6.2.2.5 Coaching

The findings show that coaching was a prevalent career development function from my perspective as a mentor. This finding is consistent with that of the mentees, where it was revealed that the mentees benefited greatly from this function. The coaching centred around strengthening capacities on how to perform administrative tasks that support classroom management as well as daily administrative activities that formed part of the educator's duties. These activities involved tasks such as timetabling, lesson planning, and the general administration of lesson delivery. My technical expertise, experience and knowledge provided support to the mentees in the areas where they required developmental assistance. The coaching proved useful especially for incidental tasks that the mentees, in the roles as educators, would find beneficial. This function is highlighted in the following journal entry when Wakwanza and I explored how to go about creating an interactive task list:

> *I teased out of him what he could do to get a clearer picture, and so be confident that while he is doing a task well, he is aware of what else needs to be done. He suggested he could make a weekly list…or perhaps an annual task schedule. He mentioned that he had started to do an annual task list that would indicate to him what tasks need to be done at what time of the year but it proved to be complicated and so he never finished it…. so I asked him how he would continue with it, now that he had already started it. We tried out a few structures that could provide required information yet maintain some simplicity…*

My coaching style was hands on, depending on the assistance and support the mentee required. While coaching Wakwanza on his task list was collaborative and I spent time drawing him out, my coaching exercise with Mchana on the construction of an interactive lesson plan was more direct.

> *We talked about the procedure of how she was going to do it….I took her through a step-by-step procedure of what I perceived as a logical sequence…*

Data from my reflections, however, indicated that my coaching style changed depending on the stage of the mentoring relationship. While earlier in the relationship, in the rapport building and direction setting stages, I would be more directive as to what was to be done, later, during the progression stage, I started to attempt to tease out more options from the mentees and pass the ownership of the solutions to them. I express this coaching style in the following statement:

> *When we talk, I do not give her step-by-step procedure of how to perform the task. We talk it out, and through discussion suggestions flow on how to do things. She goes and tries it out, and she comes back with feedback of how the task went and how much of an understanding she now has of it…*

As the mentees advanced progressively in their personal and professional goals, I started to feel that we talked increasingly as peers discussing ideas of mutual interest, and we could deliberate on processes or procedures on equal footing.

For Wakwanza, task organisation was an issue that he desired to improve. Wakwanza explained to me that the lack of effective planning on his part affected his time management abilities. The task of preparing an annual task schedule was an assignment he carried out that he believed would help him to improve his planning and his time management. In my reflective journal, I reflect on how this assignment had a desirable effect on Wakwanza.

> *He indicated to me what he had done [on the schedule] and why he felt he had progressed. He presented to me the schedule he had done, the annual schedule he had promised to work on. He showed me where he had come from, what he used to do, and told me why it was inadequate for him, compared to this new schedule he had now prepared. He was sure that the schedule would make him more organised…We discussed how the schedule would improve his time management skills…*

This activity was the beginning of Wakwanza's working on an interactive task list with the aid of Microsoft outlook. The findings indicate that Wakwanza managed to improve his planning abilities. This shows how such challenging assignments from the mentoring relationship contributed to the mentees achieving their developmental goals.

6.2.2.6 Providing challenging work assignments

As the mentor, I challenged the capabilities of the mentees by suggesting tasks that they could perform to best enhance their learning. The findings indicate that the mentees welcomed these tasks and executed them willingly. These assignments emanated from mentoring conversations with the mentees, where suggested options made sense and the outcomes for the execution of the tasks had the potential to develop the mentee personally and professionally. As the mentor, I had the opportunity to discuss these assignments with the mentees, and provided support and guidance where it was needed.

For Wakwanza, conflict resolution was an area he wanted to improve. Wakwanza explained to me that he had difficulty resolving conflict that came up while he was dealing with his colleagues. Many times these disagreements came up when he attempted to complete tasks that were required of him within his daily duties. He wanted to resolve issues that come up when he was dealing with his colleagues amicably. Wakwanza put it this way in one of his reviews:

> *I deal with quite a number of staff, and there is an element of discipline which comes up more than once…you find that some of the people you deal with are just difficult…stubborn…so I have this problem of not knowing how to deal with these people, and how to handle the whole conflict issue….*

We handled this issue together with Wakwanza through conversations and follow up tasks. As the mentor, I shared my experiences with Wakwanza of how I have handled different conflict situations, and also where possible, included him in situations where I was handling such issues. From Wakwanza's point of view, role modelling played a big role in assisting him to deal with this challenging situation. He says:

> *I am beginning to get very good ideas on how to handle [conflict] situations…some of these ideas is from what [my mentor] is doing and watching her dealing with situations which are similar…and also I am reflecting on situations that I know I have handled before and have not done so well…the discussions with my mentor are helping me to learn how to deal with these situations…one thing I have learned is not to handle issues when I am upset rather wait until such a time that I can deal with it objectively…*

Wakwanza set himself a goal to improve his practice in this area. During our mentoring conversations, we discussed his progress, and I provided support and encouragement where necessary. Wakwanza began to change his approach to these situations, and with this change in approach came self improvement. Wakwanza put it like this:

> *I deal with people more effectively now…my attitude towards people is changing…Before I would assume they are against me… but now I tend to be more objective. If something needs to be resolved we talk about it and agree on the best way forward. My attitude is changing in this respect…*

The assignments that the mentees undertook assisted them in their learning, and improved the way they executed tasks they were handling in their practice. As a mentor, I gained insight into how I handled issues similar to those discussed with the mentees which provided me with different viewpoints for the improvement of aspects of my practice.

6.2.2.7 Advocacy

Advocacy presented as a function that was not highly visible in the mentoring relationships but emerged later in the mentoring relationship. There was occasion to describe Mchana's attributes to others when she requested a reference letter to be sent off for an opportunity for further professional training. This was a task easily accomplished as she was familiar to me on both a personal and professional level. I was happy and willing to assist her in such an endeavour. I recorded the following in my journal:

> *Mchana came to me excited about her success in identifying a school for her further studies. She requested that I support her application by submitting a reference letter to the school. This was easy for me to do…*

The efforts to get Mchana into this programme were successful. The function of being an advocate for my mentees was an action I took for granted as part of my role as a mentor. I realised that I found it natural that the mentee would come to me for such support, which revealed to me that I was comfortable with my role as a mentor.

6.2.3 Psychosocial functions

The psychosocial functions come through as those that assisted me as the mentor to instil self confidence and drive in the mentees to achieve their developmental goals. The challenge of improving the mentees' practice as educators required that I use my interpersonal skills effectively. Kram (1988) comments that for a mentoring relationship to have a higher chance of success, it is important for the mentor to have good interpersonal skills. My interpersonal skills become more critical in a situation where assisted informal mentoring was a new concept not previously tried in the context of GTC. I saw my role as being to provide the mentees with the overall objective of the mentoring process. It was important for the mentees to accept and internalise the benefits that can accrue from the mentoring process. I expand below how these functions were visible from my perspective as the mentor.

6.2.3.1 Developing trust

It is apparent from the findings that we developed deep trust in our mentoring relationship. This occurred progressively through all the stages of the mentoring process. As a mentor, I realised that trust is a component of the mentoring relationship that is very important for communication. I deliberately set out to be a better listener than I thought I was. Listening empathetically to the views of the mentees contributed to the development of trust between us. As the mentoring relationship progressed, I strengthened this function for the mutual benefit of the mentees and myself. Our conversations became deeper and more meaningful as the trust grew. An example is when the mentees opened up to me on issues that were not part of their personal development plans (PDPs). For example, Wakwanza started to open up to me about his plans for the future. This was surprising to me because he had not done this before, yet we had worked together in this institution for four years. Because of the mentoring relationship, as Wakwanza and I became closer, he trusted me with such information. He came to realise that I had his best interest at heart, and would provide him with guidance and direction where I could. My journal entry reveals such an incident.

> *Wakwanza talked to me for a long time about his future… he has been feeling acutely that he really does not want to be here [at the educational institution]. We spoke for some time about his thoughts on this.*

At the same time, Mchana was opening up to me as well. Similar to Wakwanza, I had worked with Mchana for some time but she had not talked to me about her private issues. It was clear that she accepted me as her mentor, and trusted that I would listen to her and provide the support she required. She derived comfort from this knowledge and it enhanced her trust in me. In my journal I reflect on this development of trust in our relationship:

> *Mchana was opening up to me more… and telling me more private things. I took this as a very positive development… I also saw it as an opportunity to continue to develop trust and commitment between us as mentor and mentee.*

On such occasions, as the mentor, I showed my understanding of their aspirations and passed no judgment on their ideas. These type of conversations usually happened outside of structured mentoring meetings, where the mentee had actually chosen to come to talk to me as the mentor. My reflections on these types of occurrences indicate that I felt useful, needed and closer to my mentees.

6.2.3.2 Providing encouragement

The role of providing encouragement was also quite visible in the findings. Especially early in the mentoring relationship, during the rapport building and direction setting stages, I encouraged the mentees to continue to pursue their developmental goals. These were stages where the mentees lacked the self confidence required to propel them to achieve their set goals. At times this encouragement went beyond what had previously been stipulated in the PDPs. The mentees required encouragement in others issues as well that affected their work life. This indicated to me as the mentor that my role was real and valued. It was not only focused on the agreed goals, but seemed to extend beyond the planned face-to-face formal meetings. This highlighted the developmental aspect of mentoring within the environment in which it was taking place. In my journal entry I highlight an incident where Mchana seeks me out to discuss a task she was handling, and how I encouraged her to continue to perform the way she was doing.

> *I encouraged her about pursuing this goal that she had set. From my perspective, the fact that she sees the problem is a good thing. The fact that she is doing something about it is even better. I could see she was proud of her achievement.*

From my data, it is quite visible that the confidence of the mentees increased as more encouragement and positive feedback came from me as their mentor. The learning of the mentees was visible as they took up the tasks that the mentoring relationship presented. They did this more readily because of the encouragement I gave them to pursue these tasks. A direction I took was to try and avoid situations where the mentees would look at me as the person with all the answers. The mentoring role I preferred was to encourage the mentees to arrive at the solutions by themselves. I wanted the mentees to focus on the process of learning and on the progress they were making rather than on their ability to accomplish the specific task. I reflect on this situation in my reflective journal:

> *[The mentees] seem to lean on me to provide the answers and tell them what to do. I would like to avoid this because I feel it will not enhance their learning within this mentoring relationship. I have to encourage the mentees to think for themselves about the options open to them in problem solving.*

Over time, the mentees relied less on me to provide answers and began to voluntarily offer solutions and use me as a sounding board. Evidence indicates that they became more self confident and began to consider alternative approaches to different situations. This was good for me as it indicated that my goal to make the mentees more self sufficient in decision making was working.

6.2.3.3 Providing guidance

The findings from my data as the mentor indicate that providing guidance to the mentees was a mentoring role that was clearly exhibited. In the mentoring relationship, I offered direction and provided advice on issues that were of interest to the mentees. In guiding the mentees, I encouraged them to look at a variety of different options when confronted with issues that needed to be resolved. As highlighted by the journal entry below, there were occasions where I shared my experiences with the mentees in an effort to provide different scenarios and examples of how to approach varied issues.

> *To clarify the issues I gave some scenarios, some experiences that I thought would bring home some learning, and how I had handled the situations. ..I liked sharing my experiences with the mentees, and discussing with them about what they could have done in the same situation…*

During these discussions I learned from the mentees as much as they learned from me. I probed for different ways in which the particular scenario could have been handled. I listened to them as we had healthy debates to enhance our learning. This was appreciated by the mentees, as reflected by Wakwanza in his feedback review:

> *In the mentoring meetings I learn a lot because we normally exchange experiences… we go over the whole experience and as we discuss I begin to see some things I could have done in a better way…sometimes I try to figure out how she could have [handled the issue], and then I find out [from her] whether it's true if she did handle it that way…*

The guidance I gave to the mentees was at times very specific to a problem that the mentee was encountering at work. The findings indicate that this guidance was influenced by my values as an educator. I was at times quite firm in my approach, especially where I felt that the mentee could benefit from exposure to values that I held. An example of such a situation is where Wakwanza and I discussed an issue where he wanted to exclude a student from progressing to a higher level programme because his team members considered the student to be a 'trouble maker'. I recorded the following in my journal about that incident.

> *I cautioned him about forming precedence in the way he is excluding the candidate. I made it clear to him that it still must be his decision, but he must be aware that this will be something that will be referred to next time such a situation arises. I also drew his attention to the fact that such students [who are perceived to be a handful] have passed through before. I felt that the candidate should not be discriminated against based on such perceptions.*

I enjoyed my role of providing guidance to the mentees. Given that I wanted them to take ownership of their learning I felt that providing guidance was a significant role for me as a mentor. I enjoyed the exchanges we had, how we talked openly about our successes and failures, and our learning from these exchanges.

6.2.3.4 Acceptance and confirmation

From the findings it is clear that one of my roles was to provide support to the endeavours of the mentees to the extent that they become comfortable with their learning process. The presence of a mentor in their work environment gave the mentees a feeling of contentment and they undertook their tasks without the fear of failure or ridicule. The mentoring relationship gave the mentees a safety net in which to operate. This built their self confidence which in turn promoted effective learning. In one of my journal entries, I reflect on how I provided support to Mchana on the attainment of her personal and professional development goals.

> *I was gratified that there had been some thought process on the goals, and that efforts were being put to improve and reach the set goals. I felt satisfied that at this early stage [of the mentoring relationship] I was already playing a role in assisting her to attain her set goals.*

I provided the mentees with the support they required through the mentoring process, and saw how they became confident in the benefits of the mentoring relationship. As they became more self confident, so my own confidence in my ability as a mentor grew. I wrote this in my journal:

> *Today I have a nice feeling inside about mentoring…I am proud of what I do and how I do it….*

These feelings of joy came to me especially when I could see that learning had taken place and this learning had resulted in change in the way the mentees or I myself performed our work in our practice. When the mentees achieved something we were working on together, they would be excited and I would be the first one they would call. The mentees realised that I would be happy for them, and more than anybody else, I would know how much they had achieved. I reflect upon one of these calls from Mchana in my journal:

> *When she called me all excited [about achieving her task] I was happy for her. I felt my heart swell with pride, that she felt that way about what she had done…*

These feelings confirmed to me that I had ability to handle the role of a mentor, and that the mentees could depend on me to provide them the support they required.

6.2.3.5 Counselling

The findings indicate that counselling was a noteworthy aspect of my role as mentor through all the stages of the mentoring process. Within the mentoring relationship, the mentees discussed their personal and professional anxieties with me. These anxieties mostly concerned task achievement, and how they could go about completing these tasks successfully. As the mentor, I was available to listen to their different views, and discuss their ideas openly. I often acted as a sounding board for ideas they wanted to implement. In the process of achieving some of his developmental goals, Wakwanza discussed with me his motivation of wanting to improve in task organisation. I wrote this in my reflective journal:

> *Wakwanza talked to me about the feelings that are evoked in him when he does not meet his deadlines, or when he totally forgets to do things. He also feels terrible when he has to be reminded of what he has to do…*

Mchana also had issues in her practice that she wanted to offload. She was in a situation where her boss was requesting her to delegate tasks to her colleagues, without clarifying her role to them. Some of the responsibilities that her supervisor placed on her made her feel uncomfortable and created negative interpersonal relations with her colleagues. I wrote the following in my journal about this situation:

> *Mchana talked to me about her relationship with one of her colleagues that had been bothering her. Her immediate supervisor was pushing her to discipline this colleague for non-performance. She was not happy about the situation…*

As a mentor, I found that listening to the mentees empathetically about such anxieties alleviated their fears, and made them realise that such feelings were not uncommon. I attempted to create an environment where the mentees were able to face and deal with the stresses that they were encountering at work. The counselling function also afforded me an opportunity to urge and encourage the mentees to work towards sorting out these issues by achieving their developmental goals.

The findings also indicate that on occasion I used the counselling function to expand the mind of the mentee to include the possibilities of exploring different options. One such

example is where Mchana found herself in a situation where colleagues that were previously junior to her were assigned to positions senior to hers without them having obtained the prerequisite qualifications in terms of technical knowhow and administrative experience. This was a situation that was common in the institution where Batswana educators were being promoted to more senior posts within the government structure. As the mentor, I listened to Mchana, but was also candid with her about how she should explore her options in such a situation. One of my journal entries describes my approach to Mchana's anxieties when she discussed these structural changes in her department with me:

> *Given the mixed feelings that Mchana was exhibiting I thought it was worth it to explore these feelings a little more deeply. So I painted for her some 'what-if' scenarios. What if the colleagues get the posts but they want to continue doing exactly what they were doing before, but with more pay? How will you handle that? What if you continue to do all the tasks that you enjoy doing, and they let you? What if they are not getting what it is they are supposed to do even after you walk them through, and the boss falls right back on you to do these tasks?*

From having many mixed feelings about this situation in her department, Mchana finally accepted it, and as we continued to work together, she found ways of working with her colleagues without conflict. She coached her colleagues on tasks they were to take over, rather than cling to these tasks as had been her intention. My role as the mentor was to listen and alleviate the anxieties of the mentees as much as I could. Where possible I offered direction and an opportunity to be a sounding board to ideas they had of handling the different situations.

6.2.3.6 Engaging in constructive confrontation

The findings indicate that the mentees and I engaged in constructive confrontation as we progressed through the mentoring process. My role as the mentor involved providing constructive feedback on the progress of the mentees towards achieving their goals. Our mentoring conversations involved the suggestions of strategies that could assist the mentees in attaining their goals. I often needed to give the mentees a little push where they were reluctant to follow through. During and after mentoring sessions I would seek progress reports or the tasks' deadlines.

An example of constructive confrontation is where I had issues with Mchana for being late for scheduled mentoring appointments. After several reminders, we had to reach an understanding of what procedures to follow when she could not make it for a meeting. I wrote in my reflective journal:

> *Mchana was late again for our planned mentoring session. I called her to remind her about it. I found she had a task with a deadline that she was working on. I requested her to let me know in time if she was not going to make it for a session. ..*

I could understand that Mchana took time to adhere to schedule because there were many times that she came to see me without it being a scheduled meeting. The fact that I encouraged those spontaneous occasions may have given her the impression that it was not necessary to stick to the scheduled time. Despite this reasoning on my part, I had to coach Mchana on how she could better meet her deadlines. Although I viewed confrontation as a necessary part of learning, I made concerted efforts not to let such an intervention negatively affect the foundations that we had formed in the mentoring relationship. I was conscious of my choice of words and my approach towards the mentee when handling the situation. We had conversations where I reiterated the importance of maintaining our scheduled times. Mchana finally settled down and made sure she attended our mentoring sessions on time.

6.2.3.7 Providing friendship

The findings from my perspective as the mentor indicate that in the mentoring relationship the friendship function contributed to the rapport that was built. The mentees became freer and more at ease with me as the mentoring relationship progressed. During our mentoring conversations, we discussed diverse issues beyond the scope of the structured mentoring guidelines. We also had social interactions outside the workplace. Although this function was apparent in both of the mentoring relationships, it appeared stronger in my relationship with Mchana. This can be attributed to the fact that Mchana and I were in a same gender relationship, as opposed to being in a cross gender relationship with Wakwanza. This finding concurs with Allen, Day and Lentz's (2005:165) study of the role of interpersonal comfort in mentoring relationships. Allen et al. (2005:165) report that same gender pairs in mentoring relationships find it much easier to relate to one another. I reflect upon the situation in a journal entry:

> *The mentoring relationships that I have been involved in have been presenting themselves in ways I never expected. Mchana has been a regular visitor in my house over the holidays…Our mentoring relationship has bypassed the professional levels and become personal. Wakwanza, being a man, has not become this close to me. But we have met several times and talked about other issues not related to work…So both these relationships have to me evolved to become much closer than I would have imagined in a work environment.*

Over time the mentees became more relaxed with me. They often sought me out and talked to me about varied issues not to do with work. They were not shy or reserved to call me or come to my office. Mchana especially became free in my home, popping in frequently. Once I accepted the direction of our relationships, I found that our mentoring conversations became richer and the mentees more confident of what they achieved from mentoring.

6.2.4 Summary

The findings indicate that as a mentor I provided guidance and support to the mentees through role modelling, career and psychosocial functions. The role modelling function appears to have been influenced by my values as an individual. I encouraged story telling to assist the mentees relate to their current situations. Sharing my experiences was a medium of portraying my values to the mentees. The mentoring roles in the career development functions were influential in imparting the skills and knowledge that assisted the mentees achieve their professional goals and improve their practice. As the mentor I also gained insight into our teaching practices and the operation of the different vocational areas that the mentees belonged to. The findings indicate that I used the mentoring roles in the psychosocial function to develop deep trust in the mentoring relationship. I provided encouragement and guidance to the mentees which resulted in building their self confidence and self direction competencies.

Through mentoring practice I became more aware of my ability to provide the required support and guidance. I watched with an element of surprise, pride and wonder at how the mentees were changing. I became more comfortable with my mentor role and felt a sense of satisfaction because of the part I had played in the educators' learning and

development. This realisation that I was growing and changing along with the mentees reinforced the mutual learning characteristic (Clutterbuck, 2005:4) of the practice of mentoring.

The next section focuses on my learning and development from the GTC Mentoring project, and how I progressed in improving my mentoring capacity.

6.3 Improving my practice as a mentor

As a self study, one main purpose of this exploration was to improve my practice as a mentor. Before embarking on the mentoring process I had to examine my skills and what I could bring into a mentoring relationship. As a senior educator administrator, my belief was that I could make a good mentor. I had the technical pedagogic knowledge and skills that the educators in my educational institution could benefit from, and I had good communication skills acquired dealing with daily administrative tasks that form part of running a department in an educational institution. I had acquired good interpersonal skills from working with different cultures in Botswana. I also had the desire to share my knowledge and experience with other educators in my educational institution, and the willingness to sacrifice the time. But I realised that for me, these qualities were not adequate. There was conflict between my role as an administrator and as a mentor. An administrator has a role that involves quick reactions, decision making and problem solving (Galbraith, 2003:9). Mentoring on the other hand, is a shared role that requires delicate and caring interventions and feedback (Clutterbuck, 2005:2). It is a supportive role carried out in a quiet and comfortable place, rather than the administrator's often crisis centred and chaotic office. Mentoring requires new, tactful approaches and skills (Barnett, 1995:49). To be successful in my role as a mentor, I had to critically reflect upon my mentoring role and my administrative role and find a way to harmonise them.

When I realised that being an administrator did not make me a mentor I reflected upon my abilities and realised what I lacked in my mentoring capacity. My intention was not to attempt to be skilled in every aspect of mentoring. My personal development plan detailed my learning objectives as targeting three areas: Listening, questioning, and providing feedback. These are the three areas that are predominately highlighted in mentoring as

forming the core of mentoring skills (Cohen, 1995:29; Fibkins, 2002:48; Galbraith, 2003:12; Harrison et al., 2005:437; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002:287; Scwiebert, 2000:103).

In the following section, I present evidence of my learning as I experienced the mentoring relationship. I offer descriptive analysis of how I improved my practice by improving my listening skills, my questioning skills, and my ability to provide constructive feedback. This evidence is presented as my personal contribution to mentoring practice as we experienced it at GTC.

6.3.1 My listening skills

The journal findings indicate that I perceived listening as my major challenge during the execution of the mentoring relationships. In a mentoring situation, the mentor can only effectively assist the mentees in their learning and development if they assess the mentees' developmental needs accurately. This assessment can only be carried out if the mentor has genuine concerns about the mentees, and shows this concern by listening empathetically to what the mentees have to say. During the earlier mentoring sessions, in the rapport building and direction setting stages, I would talk much more than I would listen. I highlight this issue in my reflective journal:

> *I have been grappling with the amount of talking I do during my mentoring meetings. I have worried that I talk too much and that perhaps I could reduce the amount of talking that I do. I have made a goal for myself to deliberately reduce the amount of talking I do. I need to listen more, and allow the mentee to do the talking.*

As a mentor, my realisation was that good listening skills would enable us to build trust in the mentoring relationship. I needed to encourage the mentees to share their thoughts and experiences with me and to assist them to reflect on their experiences. This necessitated listening to what they had to say. Monopolising the conversation during the mentoring sessions would not lead me to this goal. I deliberately set off to improve my listening skills. But even with this dedicated effort to improve, the findings indicate that it was not easy for me. I often talked more than I listened and made excuses for not rapidly gaining ground on my desired goal. I reflect on this issue in my journal:

> *How do I share it if I do not talk about them? How does the mentee get to learn from me if they do not hear what good or bad experiences I have gone through? Today, I feel that the talking I did was fine.*

It is apparent that I was driven by storytelling. I was too eager to share my experiences with the mentees. I understood that it was important for me to share real life stories with the mentees, as they could relate these stories to their actual current situations. However, these experiences needed to be relevant and appropriate to the mentees' varied situations. Listening to the mentees would make me more aware of the relevance of the stories to the mentees' situation.

Gradually, my reflections after the mentoring sessions revealed that my listening skills were improving. I noticed that I was talking at what I deemed to be appropriate times. This indicated to me that I was listening more. More importantly for me, I was gaining confidence in my ability to assess when to speak and when to listen. I realised that the mentees would not automatically start contributing more to our discussions without encouragement from me. The mentees would only respond to cues from me on how they should behave during the mentoring conversations. I therefore set off to draw the mentees out by providing the appropriate cues. I reflect upon this improvement in my journal:

> *I feel that sharing my experiences with Wakwanza was good. I feel that letting him ask me questions was good. I got to throw some questions back at him, to see how he is synthesising what he is hearing. Today, I did not feel inadequate to talk to the mentee.*

The opportunity of having two mentees also paid off in my development. I found after critical reflections of one mentoring session with one mentee, I would attempt to improve on my listening techniques with the other mentee, thus continuing to develop my capacities. In my journal, I reflect on my session with Wakwanza and how I used this session to improve on my listening technique during my next session with Mchana.

> *Even with the amount of information I got from Mchana today, I still felt I was talking too much and should have encouraged her to talk more…But I feel there was an improvement from the way my conversation with Wakwanza went in our last session. I was able to get more out of her than usual. To me, this is a step in the right direction for me.*

Gradually, I reached a point where I felt confident that I had developed my required listening techniques. I had improved to the point that I could focus on what the mentees had to say and respond appropriately to their questions and provide the required guidance and encouragement. I reflect on this improvement in my journal:

> *This time I had reflected on our previous meeting much more critically than ever before. I had studied my points of how I wanted this meeting to go. I had wanted this time to feel that I gave Wakwanza enough time to talk, and I wanted to listen more. I was able to do this. I feel that I was a much better listener. Although I did some talking, I felt it was in places that were appropriate for me to do this…*

This achievement on my listening technique is confirmed by Wakwanza in his data where he reflects about his perception of the amount of talking he does during our sessions. It is surprising and a confirmation of my improvement, when he observes that he does most of the talking during our sessions. He writes:

> *As I talk to her I seem to talk too much and perhaps give too much information than I need to…but she listens attentively to me, and this encourages me to share more of my plans with her…*

Reading this reflection from my mentee reminded me of how my listening skills were at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. It was however, a confirmation to me that I had reasonably improved in my listening technique to the benefit of the mentee and the mentoring process as a whole.

6.3.2 My questioning skills

My questioning technique was another area that I intended to strengthen as a mentor. At the beginning of the mentoring relationships, my mentees were passive. During the rapport building and direction setting stages, the mentees expected to be told what to do and how to do it. It took me time to realise that it was up to me to change this situation. Often, I took the easy way out by filling the gaps during mentoring conversations with my voice, so that there would be no awkward moments. However, mentoring is a relationship where the mentor acts as facilitator. The mentor is expected to engage the mentee in dialogue that brings out pertinent information from the mentee that would encourage individual learning.

Effective mentors ask questions that encourage critical thinking. By posing thought provoking and probing questions, the mentor challenges their mentee to consider different perspectives and implications. The realisation of this aspect of mentoring practice prompted me to focus on my questioning techniques to achieve this end. I deliberately set out to draw the mentees out, and put the onus on them to contribute to their personal and professional development. My technique was to ask questions and wait for the mentee to respond, rather than attempting to fill the silence. The findings reveal that this process was not easy for me. It was a challenge for me to give the mentees adequate room to realise that the answers must come from them. In my journal, I reflect on a session where I was trying out this technique:

> *In this session, I realised that I was still not totally comfortable with the silence. The silence after I have asked a question, and he is thinking it over, before providing a contribution. Although it was not an uncomfortable silence, I still felt that there was a void that needed to be filled. But I had already seen that in myself in earlier sessions, and set myself a target that I would attempt by all means to draw out the mentee more, for him to hear less of my voice.*

I wanted the mentees to own their learning. By this I mean they should be in a position to identify their concerns about where they wanted to develop and improve, and become more proactive in searching for their own solutions with support and guidance from me as the mentor. Such a position would put me in the role of a facilitator, which is what a mentor is. I practiced asking carefully phrased questions that required extended answers. I also became more comfortable in giving the mentee ample time to respond to questions without feeling an aura of discomfort. I managed to do this by asking follow up questions, or clarifying my question further.

Over time, the findings indicate that I started to see some improvement in my attempts to draw the mentees out, and get them to be participants in their own individual learning. I also started to become more comfortable with this role. It is clear that the developmental aspect of acquiring this value was apparent in both myself as the mentor, and to the mentees. I reflect on this issue thus:

> *I felt that this meeting went well, better than the previous one. I was more conscious of concentrating on Wakwanza. I tried very much to hold back a lot of my own opinions, and tried to get him to give me his view point. I could see that this was not*

> *easy for him…he was expecting me to provide the answers. But I was able to draw him out and listen to what he had to say…*

The findings show that I developed this aspect of mentoring practice as I held more sessions with the mentees. I continued to develop my questioning technique, and involved the mentee in the developmental process more fully. I developed a technique where I would throw back the mentee's requests for assistance if I felt that they should contribute to the solution, or offer an opinion. Gradually I observed the mentees' view of themselves changing, and they started to look at themselves as generators of knowledge rather than merely receivers of it. I recorded this in my journal:

> *I feel that I am improving in involving the mentees in the conversations. I am asking 'what do you think you should do?' more often, rather than offering a solution immediately. I am encouraging the mentee to think for him or herself about the options that are open. I can see that Mchana is getting it…our conversations are becoming richer and deeper. I think this is because she is contributing more of her thoughts to the conversation.*

The findings indicate that my development in this area was not linear and straight forward. There were times when I was quite convinced of my improvement, but upon reflecting on a mentoring session, I would realise that I acted contrary to my expectations. I reflect upon this situation in my journal after a mentoring session with Mchana :

> *Although I felt I was greatly improving on my questioning technique, to draw her out, I thought that maybe I had made a little too many suggestions that could have come from her? This is something I still want to work on, so that I am clear in my mind when to make suggestions, and when to tease them out of the mentee.*

I attempted to justify my reason for talking to my mentees:

> *If it is sharing of experiences, giving advice, telling stories that have happened to me that the mentee can learn from, I need to tell them, I need to talk. And the mentee needs to listen. It is of course important for the mentee to be heard, so that for me as the mentor, I can deduce whether the relationship is going, and what kind of learning is taking place.*

My reflections indicate that my questioning technique is one area in which I struggled to become more comfortable. However, as indicated by one of my mentees during the first

focus group interview, it was clear that I had made some improvements on encouraging the mentees to be active participants in the mentoring relationship. The mentee states:

> *At the beginning [of the mentoring relationship] I must say also, I was a bit vague in my expectations but 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… like call me, tell me what to do… Then I realised…it's me to talk to her to tell her what it is that I want from the relationship, and that sort of shook me up a bit. I have to do all the work…say what it is that I want from the relationship.*

I reached a point where my questioning technique improved to the extent that I drew out the mentees, and they became active participants in their own personal and professional development.

6.3.3 Providing feedback

The findings indicate that at the beginning of the mentoring relationships, I had issues with providing constructive feedback to the mentees. My approach to providing feedback was hampered by what I perceived as my authoritative approach. I felt that such an approach was not conducive to a good mentoring relationship, and at times contradicted my values. I wanted to come across to the mentees as being supportive, encouraging and nonjudgmental, yet I saw myself as controlling and wanting issues to proceed in a specific way. Megginson et al. (2006:18) mention that mentors tend to adopt this 'managerial, directive style' in the mentoring relationship where basic mentoring skills are lacking. This style tends to reduce benefits to the mentee and also inhibit the learning of the mentor. I can also attribute this approach to my role of being an educator administrator. It is probable that I went through a transition period where my approach to mentoring was influenced by my administrative approach.

Early in the mentoring process, I reflect on this issue in my journal:

> *During my conversation with Mchana, I was impatient at what I saw as her shortcoming. I was forthright and directive…I am beginning to wonder whether these are indications that I am too autocratic, and do not give people a chance to work out their ideas…or that I want them to think like me, or do it the way I want it to be done…rather than encouraging them to come up with their own solutions. As a*

> *mentor, I need to give Mchana more encouragement to come up with her own solutions. I would like to try this next time she comes to me for advice.*

This type of approach influenced the way I gave feedback to the mentees. Rather than having a two way learning dialogue in the session, I observed that my approach was a one way directive. I continued to monitor this type of approach in my style, and continued to make it an issue requiring development in order for me to improve my mentoring practices. My data shows that this process was not quick. I continued to reflect on my mentoring style before I started to feel comfortable. I recorded the following in my journal:

> *I feel that they have been doing this quite well [in participating in the conversations]...but I think it is an area where I am not totally comfortable that I have done my best, and I do need to get better at this...*

As the mentoring relationship progressed, the findings indicate that I became less 'autocratic' and more 'participative' in letting the mentees drive the mentoring relationship, rather than being the driver myself. The mentees participated more frequently in the options they were coming up with to further their development. With this change in my style, feedback to the mentees became more of a learning exchange. It became easier for the mentees to view the feedback positively, appreciate it, and learn from it. Although not overly confident that I had found a mentoring style that I was comfortable with, I felt that I had made some improvement. I recorded this in my reflective journal:

> *I am encouraging the mentees to think for themselves, and participate more actively in the conversations. When Mchana wanted to do the same old lecture method for her class, I gave her my opinion about the issue. I requested her to consider a more interactive teaching method. We explored different options together for her Relaxing class…I encouraged her to reflect on our conversation and decide which way she would like to go. She suggested she would think about it, then draft a lesson plan for our discussion during our next meeting…*

My data shows that I became more comfortable with my mentoring style indicating that I started to view the mentoring relationship as a partnership, where we were working together to achieve desired goals. This participative style was appreciated by the mentees as feedback to them became interactive discussions. I reflected thus in my journal:

> *We focused on the PDP item we were working on. By the end of the meeting we had reached a clear consensus on the status of this PDP. It was clear both to me and to*

the mentee that we were moving forward. … the mentee was confident of her improvement, and I was happy with her contribution to this outcome…

These findings indicate that ultimately I became more participative in my mentoring approach. I worked on the issue of encouraging the mentees to be more proactive and less passive. As a mentor, it became very important for me that my approach to mentoring should fulfil the needs of the mentees. While at the beginning of the mentoring relationship I came across as directive and controlling, I worked on the relationship becoming more participative and mentee driven. I had to bring into play a range of capabilities that were desired in different situations depending on the needs of the mentees. I found that I had to diagnose issues and find solutions, empathise, be ready to offer feedback and confront the mentees where necessary. This required that I draw from my experiences of dealing with similar issues before in my practice. Reflective practice resulted in my ability to change my mentoring practice. I began to recognise the process of enhancing my mentee's thinking. Consequently, I became more facilitative. Unlike at the beginning of the mentoring relationships, it now became apparent that rather than creating conflict, my administrative role complimented my mentoring role.

Giving constructive feedback became easier and second nature. It was gratifying each time the mentees received feedback positively. I enjoyed the turn around as the mentees became owners of the outcomes resulting from the mentoring relationships.

6.3.4 Demands of mentoring

In this section I present my reflections on how much time and effort the mentoring process required from me. I discuss this issue because it emerged from my data as a significant contribution to my learning and development within the mentoring process.

The demands of mentoring progressively dawned on me. Prior to the commencement of the mentoring relationships, I had not envisaged the demands that would be made on my time and on my 'emotional strength'. I had to increase my capacity in this area in order to feel that I was being of benefit to the mentees. The findings from my data indicate that I went through a learning process to come to grips with the demands mentoring made on

me, both in terms of time and emotionally. One example is when Mchana started to get closer to me, quite early in the mentoring relationship. When she started to seek me out, by dropping in at my office without an appointment, I felt uncomfortable and reluctant to spend time with her outside of the time I had already allocated. Although I did not turn her away, I was brief and to the point so that I could get back to the task on my desk. I recorded the following in my journal:

> *Mchana dropped by my office to say hello. I was busy…in the middle of doing something, and I thought it was not an appropriate time for her to come see me. I felt disturbed and wondered whether this would be the norm. I wondered whether I had the time to give to this mentoring outside of what I had already scheduled…*

Critical reflections on my feelings revealed the contradictions in my approach (Whitehead, 1988:42). I wanted to be a 'good' mentor, yet I was reluctant to pay the relationship the time and effort it needed to grow. Leonard and Swap (2005:188) advice that it is important to be aware of the preferences the mentee has in terms of the route they want to take in achieving their goals. Realising the mentoring relationship would strengthen if I took advantage of my mentee's leads to get closer to me, I decided to work on this situation and find a way to improve it. I knew that it was important for me to build a climate of trust as early as possible in our relationship, as this would be beneficial to the learning process. But it took time for me to come to terms with giving the mentoring relationship the time it needed to grow. I reflect on the efforts the mentee made to get close to me;

> *I had not realised the kind of demands this relationship would require of me. I remembered that the weekend before, Mchana had dropped in at my house just for a chat, which she had not done before…. Also she had dropped in at the office just to say hi again…all new …It looks like now the demands on me in this relationship will increase. I have to be ready to be a friend as well…*

Over time, my attitude towards the mentoring relationship started to change, and I began to want to improve the relationship, and give time to it. I also attempted to look at the relationship from the mentee's viewpoint. It is possible that the learning of the mentees increased as I became more comfortable with my role as a mentor. My reflections on mentoring practice changed my attitude towards my mentees. Gradually, my feelings became more welcoming and I felt less resistance to giving the time required to the mentoring process. I recorded my reflections like this:

> *I realised today, that she was probably more comfortable in her role as a mentee, than I was in my role as a mentor. This realisation makes me want to sit down and think about this role, the expectations that the mentees have or expect from me. I need to be ready for them at any time when I am needed…I am on call…*
> *I also want from this experience, to be ready to act as a mentor at a moment's notice. I am wearing the shoes of a mentor… that is how Mchana views me.*

Finally, there are indications that I began to accept the demands of the mentoring role, by admitting that my role is to be available for the personal and professional developmental needs of the mentee. I reflect in my journal about a conversation I carried out with Wakwanza when he came to talk to me about issues of concern to him:

> *I liked this conversation very much. The major reason why I liked it was because it was spontaneous, unplanned. This made me be aware that Wakwanza was seeing me more and more as his mentor, somebody he can turn on at any time, somebody he believes has time for him, and is always willing to talk to him…This conversation clarified for me my role as a mentor, my duty of being on call, being responsive to the needs of my mentees. The conversation brought home to me the responsibility of being a mentor.*

The findings indicate that over time, I came to terms with my role and responsibilities as a mentor in relation to the time mentoring practices require to result in beneficial outcomes. I found that unscheduled sessions are an important aspect of the mentoring relationship where mentees can articulate exactly where they need support and guidance. At these times, the mentees often talked about personal issues closer to their hearts. Although I endeavoured to accommodate these unscheduled sessions, I realised that the structure we had set for carrying out our mentoring conversations helped to keep such sessions at manageable levels.

6.3.5 Structured mentoring conversations

Another significant issue that emerged from my data as having influenced my learning and development in the mentoring process was how I carried out the mentoring sessions using a structured approach.

The structured format I introduced for carrying out the mentoring meetings was adapted from the GROW model presented in Appendix 4 and discussed in Chapter 3. Having

introduced this model, it became a challenge for me to implement it in a way that I was comfortable using it during the mentoring sessions. During meetings, I found myself feeling awkward and uncomfortable with the structure required by the GROW model. I was inclined towards a need for spontaneity and fluidity in exchange between myself and my mentees. I felt restricted when I tried to follow the rigour of a structured line of questioning. I reflect upon these feelings in my journal:

> *I tried to ask relevant questions at points I thought I should. I asked several 'why' questions to probe more deeply what the mentee was saying. Again I felt the restrictions of asking questions I had felt before. It did not feel normal to me…*

It crossed my mind that the reason for my discomfort was because this was a model that had been created for a different audience. Perhaps it would work better if I modified it to suit me as an individual educator in a VET educational institution in Africa. I continued to study this model and tried to find a fit in it that suited me and my unique mentoring style. Over time I introduced a fair amount of spontaneity into the structure and it evolved into a less rigid, more spontaneous arrangement, and the mentoring conversation was more mentee driven. This adjustment in structure allowed me to get the best out of each mentoring session, but also to continue to improve by practicing my targeted mentoring skills. I continued to plan for my mentoring sessions, yet leave room for spontaneity. I reflect on this issue in my journal:

> *What the planning of questions did, was that it prepared me, so that I felt confident that the meeting was going to go well. I was not apprehensive in any way. I think this is because I knew there was no chance I would dry up, as I had my set of questions. That is the advantage of preplanning.*

As time went on and the interactions between the three participants in the study continued, I felt a need to be more structured and focused in my endeavours to gather data. This was in terms of my reflective practice. Rather than attempting to only ask the right questions I found that I needed an instrument to guide my reflections on the meetings with the participants. I found that I needed to guide myself on my action and reflection cyclical process. This led me to construct a self questioning tracking sheet (Appendix 5) that would draw me out and assist me in thinking deeply about the mentoring processes that I was going through and thus aid my reflections. I called the instrument I developed the Action Research Mentoring Conversation Guide. This instrument took me through the whole

action research cycle, helping me and guiding me to focus on the situation at hand. The instrument also guided me on my learning, and what I would do as a result of this new learning. I was able to stand outside the scenario that I was so much a part of, so I could observe what occurred, while at the same time participating. As soon as possible after each mentoring session, I would record my learning and reflections on the action research mentoring conversation guide. I would then review this guide every time just before the next mentoring session. This meant that I was systematically building on my learning and experiences from the previous mentoring sessions and incorporating them into the current session.

The findings indicate that I soon became more comfortable with the structure that I had introduced into the mentoring sessions. Structure soon becomes a way of life and part of the mentoring process. I continued to reflect upon my experiences with it, and it began to be apparent that I could no longer differentiate between when I had structure in the sessions and when I did not. I recorded the following in my reflective journal:

> *This meeting went well. I had prepared for it as usual. I had looked at my instruments, and I knew exactly how I wanted the meeting to run. I was comfortable with the guiding questions. But overall, the meeting did not go any different than when I did not have the set of questions.*

This indicated to me that although the structured questions assisted me to guide our learning as participants, mentoring as a process went beyond this structure. I was keeping the mentoring conversations as spontaneous as possible, with the mentee as the driver. Using structure in the mentoring sessions ensured that I could obtain from the mentee adequate information to help me provide the required guidance and support for all of us to achieve our desired goals. Asking the required probing and leading questions became a natural way for me to run our mentoring sessions. However, the essence of our mentoring relationship went beyond the instruments that I was using as a guide. Structure did not change my approach towards the mentees or their responses to me. It did not change or adversely influence the rapport we had developed in the mentoring relationship. The structure augmented the mentoring conversations and provided essential direction and purpose.

On reflection, I realise that the mentees respected the structure of the mentoring sessions we set up, to guide and help us to achieve our goals. This is deduced from the fact that most of the conversations that had little to do with the mentees' developmental goals as stipulated on their PDPs were held outside of the mentoring meeting schedules, when the mentees would come to talk to me on a casual basis without an appointment. This indicated a healthy development of trust between us, but it also indicated to me that the mentees respected that the formal appointment time was allocated for the achievement of their identified developmental goals. Therefore, while we spent valuable time developing our relationships in terms of trust and friendship, we also recognised that the mentoring relationship was the primary reason for our association so we could develop ourselves personally and professionally as educators.

6.3.6 Summary

The deductions from my data indicate that improving my practice as a mentor was one of the most challenging activities for me in this study. However, there is evidence to suggest that I improved my mentoring capacity significantly. Throughout my mentoring journey, I valued the stimulus to my own reflection. The mentoring conversations afforded me an opportunity to clarify and sharpen my own processes and practices. I learned a lot about myself, my rescuer tendency, my level of questioning. I had the opportunity to practice my skills and get feedback from my mentees. I practiced and improved my active listening, questioning and my skills in giving feedback. Mentoring enhanced my self image, and I saw myself as competent and helpful.

The deliberate efforts I invested in the mentoring process invigorated my interest in mentoring and my reflective practice. This positive attitude passed on to the mentees who could sense my genuine willingness to support and guide them in their learning and development. The focus that I maintained on myself led to my learning and development in the mentoring process.

6.4 Conclusion

The chapter presents the findings that emerged from this study from my perspective as the mentor. The findings outlined above detailing the role modelling, career and the psychosocial functions indicate that I fulfilled the functions expected of a mentor as depicted in literature (Cohen, 1995:3; Geber, 2003a:5; Kram, 1988:23). Our relationships provided a good and healthy number of both career and psychosocial functions. This provided us with greater intimacy and a strong interpersonal bond which contributed to more effective learning on my part as the mentor as well as for the mentees. The mentoring relationships achieved the expectations both of the mentees and my own expectations. The mentees appear to have most valued those aspects which perform psychosocial and role modelling functions.

From my perspective as the mentor, the findings in this study show that I employed the principles and practices of mentoring to improve my mentoring practice in three ways. Firstly, I improved my listening, questioning and feedback skills. Secondly, I examined my values, changed my behaviour and accepted the demands that mentoring exerted on my time and emotions. Thirdly, I enhanced my mentoring practice through devising and making use of new structures which guided our journey through the mentoring process.

The findings indicate that reflective practice prompted both intrapersonal and intrapersonal awareness and understanding of the mentoring process. My ability to reflect on what I was learning on a constant basis made me progressively aware of my own development as a mentor. Reflective practice provided me with a channel for self critique and a useful way of recording my learning. I was able to think before, during and after the process, pondering on how to proceed and how to improve. My access to the mentees' journals also made it possible to draw together our experiences and make connections, thus promoting deeper learning. The benefits for combining reflective practice and mentoring were extensive as it enhanced transfer and application of knowledge and skills and resulted in behavioural change.

These findings indicate that my learning and development benefited not only myself but the mentees as well, as my strengthened mentoring techniques resulted in more effective developmental outcomes. The findings indicate that we were learning both at individual

level and as a group of educators. The changes in my behaviour influenced the way that we carried out the mentoring practice within our context at GTC and contributed to the mentoring process at organisational level.

A discussion of the research findings and conclusions is presented in Chapter 7. Implications of the study are drawn and recommendations suggested.

CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My research is an exploratory study of mentoring practice and how the mentoring process can contribute to the individual learning of educators. The study took place at Gaborone Technical College (GTC), a Vocational Education and Training (VET) educational institution in Botswana. The participants in the study were three educators working at GTC: myself as the mentor and two mentees. In this study, I argue that under certain circumstances an educator will take the initiative to intervene in the learning and development of other educators in the absence of sufficient organisational support. A developmental intervention utilising mentoring practice would equip all educators involved in the process with the capacity to cope with the changes influencing their internal processes and contribute to organisational learning. Mentoring practice as an organisational development intervention is supported by the fact that literature has acclaimed mentoring as an effective and viable option for personal and professional development.

Utilising action research and self study, this chapter discusses the significance of our exploration of mentoring practice and the implications of our growth and development to educators in VET educational institutions and to organisational learning.

In this final chapter, I summarise the findings and provide an overall discussion of the data and interpretations in view of the emerging themes presented in Chapters 5 and 6 and the literature highlighted in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. In the discussions I draw conclusions and recommendations from the findings. I present personal reflections regarding my learning and the research process. I outline the significance of the study. Finally, I suggest avenues for future research.

7.1 Summary of the findings

It was discussed in Chapter 1 that the arena of education continues to change as systems and processes are put in place to meet the objectives for which educational institutions exist. Educators are expected by their organisations to keep up with these changes. This

means that educators at all levels, whether new or veteran, have continuously to maintain their professional abilities to meet challenges facing them in their institutions. .The purpose of this research was to explore how mentoring could be utilised to support the individual learning and development of educators in the context of a VET educational institution. This study also explored how I could improve my practice as a mentor to increase my capacity to assist educators in their learning and development.

In our attempt to explore the principles and practices of mentoring my two mentees and I formed mentoring relationships that had the objective of learning and development. To provide a holistic view of mentoring and to enhance my understanding of mentoring practice, we embarked on a mentoring journey that explored the mentoring process through my perspective as a mentor as well as the perspective of the mentees. Attention was also given to the impact the mentoring process had on the organisation.

The study concludes that the mentoring process was an effective organisational development intervention that assisted educators at GTC to gain the capacity that helped them cope with the challenges facing them in the organisation. The educators grew in the mentoring relationship and achieved personal and professional development at their individual levels. Through their interaction with their colleagues, the educators shared their knowledge and skills, thus contributing to the learning of the organisation.

The study reveals that mentees benefit from individual learning in a mentoring relationship, and acquire this learning in different ways. The mentees in this study achieved their developmental goals by gaining new knowledge and skills. They were able to perform their jobs as educators more efficiently than before they entered into the mentoring relationship. The mentees reported receiving both support and guidance from their mentor and attributed their development to that support. The learning and development of the educators was enhanced by reflective practice and learning through goal setting. The study also shows that the mentees' awareness of being in a mutually beneficial relationship enhanced their learning.

This study has shown that the mentoring practice was helpful in assisting me improve my mentoring ability. The findings indicate that I improved my listening skills, my questioning techniques, and feedback skills. Findings also show that I became more comfortable with

my role as a mentor, received satisfaction and gained self confidence in supporting and guiding the mentees.

The above section summarises the findings from our exploration of the mentoring practice at GTC. The following section focuses on discussing these findings.

7.2 The learning and development of educators

The findings from this study show that the mentoring practice employed by educators at GTC helped to enhance their learning and development. This confirms what is found in pertinent literature, which maintains that mentoring in general will result in positive outcomes in the learning and development of both the mentor and the mentees. These findings are consistent with previous studies that investigated individual learning in formalised mentoring relationships. Hezlett (2005:521), in her study investigating the learning of entry level employees, confirmed that mentees acquired increased organisational knowledge and skills through the mentoring process. Hale (2000:227) also observed in his study that mentoring led to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which could then be used in the development of insight.

When learning through the mentoring process, mentees and mentors find different routes that enhance their individual learning. As participants in this mentoring journey we adopted learning styles that assisted our growth and contributed to mentoring practices within our context. The discussion below outlines the implications our individual learning on mentoring practice.

7.2.1 Mentoring practice and individual learning and development of mentees

The learning and development of educators is considered an important outcome of a quality mentoring relationship. It is with the objective of the mentees' professional development that mentoring relationships usually commence. The findings from this study confirm that the mentees' learning and development occurred within the mentoring process. Through the aid of reflective practice, the educators grew and changed by building abilities which helped them cope with the changes taking place in the

organisation. The newly acquired knowledge and skills resulted in a change in the behaviour and attitude of the educators, improving the processes in their workplace. They were able to perform their jobs as educators more efficiently than before they entered into the mentoring relationship. This change in behaviour was the most desired outcome for the mentoring relationship. It is through improvement of practice that educators can gain the capacity to keep up with the challenges facing them in their work situations.

The improvement of practice also leads to an appreciation of the learning process and reduces resistance to change. At the beginning of the mentoring process, the educators were reluctant to change their ways of teaching. I suggest that this is a normal reaction especially with educators that have been in the teaching vocation for a few years and are therefore set in their ways. Change requires effort and commitment. The role of the mentor in supporting and guiding mentees appears to be significant in overcoming this resistance to change, and encouraging the mentees to attempt new and challenging ways of doing things. Educators acting as mentors need to be aware of this tendency, and have strategies in place to bring about the desired change in mentees.

It can be concluded from this study that reflective practice enhanced the learning and development of the educators. It emerged from the findings that educators participating in this study used reflective practice as a method through which experiences encountered in the mentoring process were turned into learning episodes. While support offered by the mentoring process was quite important to the mentees, the process of reflecting upon their experiences and challenging their beliefs and values proved to be vital to learning, and to change in their educational thinking, values and practice. This is an important aspect of learning that has been reemphasised by this study. There are advantages to educators embracing the process of reflection and working towards becoming active reflective practitioners. Adopting reflective process is one way that educators can make their tacit knowledge explicit to both themselves and to others. Reflective practice will assist educators to find clarity in issues that pose challenges to their practice. The support and guidance provided by the mentoring process allows reflective practice to occur more meaningfully and systematically thereby facilitating a more directed and deliberate focus to identify goals that result in learning and development.

This study has shown that integrating reflective practice and the mentoring process can be an effective route to individual learning that can enhance the learning of educators in VET educational institutions. The mentoring process has the ability to expose mentees to numerous lived experiences from which mentees can draw their learning. Having undergone the experience mentees need assistance in transforming their frame of reference to understand this experience fully. Helping mentees in a systematic way enables them to develop processes by which they can interrogate their own practice through critical reflection and making explicit their tacit actions.

The study indicates that the mentees gradually achieved independence and self confidence as the mentoring relationship progressed. This is an expected and desirable outcome for a quality mentoring relationship. The feelings of satisfaction and wellbeing enhanced the learning and development of the individual educators. The mentoring relationship is an environment where the mentees gain confidence in their ability to achieve their goals and meet the challenges they face in their practice. The pride and self confidence the educators acquire works to the benefit of the organisation, creating educators who approach their work with confidence, knowing that they have the knowledge and skills to deliver effectively what is expected of them.

It is important for mentors to note that the achievement of this level of independence in mentees is a developmental process in itself. This awareness can assist mentors in working with mentees to get them to a stage where they are able to drive their own learning and development. The stages of the mentoring process inform the mentor when the required support and guidance decreases '…as learners rationalise the process and construct their own knowledge and understanding' (Kerka, 1999:3).

The findings indicate that there was mutual learning within the mentoring relationship. As we progressed through the mentoring project, the mentees became proactive and aggressive in achieving their set goals. They challenged me as their mentor as they stretched their limits pushing me to stretch along with them. This behavioural instinct is a facet of the mentoring relationship that reinforces the mutual learning component of mentoring (Clutterbuck, 2005:4). The mentees reported that they were aware that I was learning as well. This awareness appeared to enhance their learning. The realisation that

they were not only receiving from the mentor, but giving back as well added to their self confidence and pride of being professionals with knowledge to share.

7.2.2 Mentoring practice and individual learning and development of mentors

The learning and development of the mentor is no less important than the learning of the mentees. The ability of the mentor to provide quality support and guidance to the mentee contributes significantly to the learning that takes place within the mentoring relationship. The findings from this study confirm that I learned and developed in tandem with my mentees. The change in my behaviour resulted in an improvement of my mentoring ability.

This study has shown that it is possible for mentors with clear individual developmental goals to achieve learning and developmental objectives. It is quite clear that within a mentoring relationship, the developmental focus should be on the mentee. The mentor's sole purpose is to ensure that the mentee is set on the right path to run their race, and then provide the necessary support and guidance to facilitate the mentee's learning and development, recognising that mentoring is a relationship where both the mentee and the mentor are learners. Therefore, preparation for the role of the mentor is important in facilitating the learning of the mentee. It often happens that mentors are not trained adequately for the mentoring role. Mentors are frequently left to rely on their values and intuition to guide mentees. This study strongly suggests that mentors should have clearly articulated personal development plans that outline the goals they desire to achieve.

Healy and Welchert (1990:19) suggest that 'mentors, in the very act of guiding and promoting others, act to effect their own transformation'. However, from a general perspective, it may be that the learning of the mentor within the mentoring process is involuntary and unplanned. A strategic intent by the mentor to learn within the relationship could be beneficial to the mentor's development. Effective mentors need to acquire the skills of reflective practice and of helping others to reflect. I suggest that this is the critical competence o a mentor that compliments other mentoring functions.

Focusing on the importance and significance of the development of the mentor is an issue that can be of benefit to any educational institution. Capacity building in mentoring practice

will ensure that there is continuous feeding into the mentoring process to make it more effective. Firstly, such a focus can contribute to the creation of a mentoring culture within the organisation. Secondly, it is possible that such a culture of awareness of the benefits of mentoring will encourage willingness in other educators to mentor. Progressively, a pool of mentors with valuable mentoring skills could become part of the organisation. The challenge, however, is not to lose sight of the very essence of a mentoring relationship, which is to support and guide the mentee in their own learning and development.

7.2.3 Implication for practice

The findings relating to the learning and development of educators at an individual level has an important effect on practice. It is suggested that the onus is on educators to be proactive and pursue their professional development, continuously improving their knowledge and skills in their chosen vocation. Educators need to keep up to date with the changes occurring in the external environment. Understanding and acknowledging one's own abilities, strengths and weaknesses within the teaching-learning environment is a powerful form of professional development. Keeping abreast with new knowledge and skills provides opportunity to perform to the standards expected by the institution. Through mentoring, one can begin to identify and set one's own agenda for learning and development.

7.3 Learning and development from the organisational perspective

Viewing the mentoring process from the perspective of the organisation is critical to providing a holistic picture of developmental mentoring. As discussed in Chapter 1, organisations are open systems and are therefore influenced by external forces that demand internal changes in the organisation. Educators, along with their organisations, have little choice but to find avenues to embrace these changes. Where insufficient support is provided by the organisation to enable educators to face these challenges, they may use their own initiative to provide themselves with the capacity to tackle the challenges. The findings in this study show how I took the initiative to implement a developmental intervention that resulted in benefits for the mentees, myself as the mentor, and the organisation. These findings indicate our exploration of mentoring practice to

assist in our individual learning within our context contributed to the learning of the institution. Below I discuss the findings emanating from our exploration of mentoring and the implications on organisational learning.

7.3.1 Mentoring practice in the VET educational institution

The findings in this study indicate that I provided the mentees with the traditionally recognised mentoring functions of career, psychosocial and role modelling. The mentees reported receiving both support and guidance from me and attributed their development to that support. Ideally, a combination of all these functions best serves the benefits of a mentoring relationship (Kram, 1988:24). When mentoring is viewed as a holistic process, it is less important to consider the effects of single roles, but it becomes imperative to assess how the needs of the mentees are served and their satisfaction with the experience.

As been shown by this study, the psychosocial and role modelling dimensions should be viewed as key qualities of an effective developmental mentoring relationship, with the ability to support the career dimension strongly. I have found that the process of learning and development is unique to the context in which the mentoring relationship takes place. The role modelling, career and psychosocial roles presented themselves in different ways to facilitate our learning and development in our situation.

In this study, role modelling appears to have played an important part in influencing the mentees' learning. The study suggests that the presence of a role model to observe and emulate has a positive impact on the individual learning of the educator. Mentees who admire their mentors and view them as role models may be more attentive to their mentors' behaviour and more likely to attempt behaviour that they observe their mentors employing successfully.

This suggests that role modelling is a critical function for mentors to consider. The unconscious and conscious levels of role modelling are issues that mentors need to become aware of as they may influence the way mentors choose to support and guide mentees. Mentors should be aware that mentees can learn from them in a variety of ways.

In their role, mentors should be encouraged to provide opportunities for mentees to observe them, ranging from inviting mentees into their classroom to observe them teach, to giving mentees opportunities to watch them conducting meetings. Mentors may reinforce the conscious level at which they can utilise role modelling and diminish the unconscious and uncontrollable level through which this function is displayed, by devising a variety of opportunities for the mentee to learn. Such a strategy could impact positively on the individual learning of not only the mentee but the mentor as well. The role modelling function encourages mentors to think carefully about their practice before demonstrating it in the company of others. This is a learning opportunity of which mentors should take full advantage.

The career development function comes across as a significant technique that a mentor can use to impart required knowledge and skills to the mentee. The impact of this function is therefore critical for the professional development of educators in a VET educational institution. It is through this role that I worked with the mentees to help them obtain knowledge and skills in student centred learning that support outcomes based education (OBE). It is also through career development functions that we improved classroom management processes, and specific administrative skills.

The career development function becomes an important role, aligning the personal and professional developmental objective of the mentees to those of the organisation. Clutterbuck (2005:3) suggests that mentors can assist mentees perceive their developmental goals from the context of the organisation. Such a focus results in the highest impact for the educational institution. In developmental mentoring it is vital that the mentor has the ability to recognise where there may be conflict between the developmental goal of the mentee and those of the organisation. Where there is wide variance the mentor needs to have the ability to reconcile these differences. The participants in this mentoring project entered the relationship primarily to find mechanisms to assist them meet challenges brought about by the changes that were taking place within the organisation. The mentor envisioned a situation where the transition from the traditional modes of teaching to OBE would be smoother with the help of the mentoring process. However, the findings indicate that the developmental objectives of the mentees were varied and did not necessarily align with what could be considered most beneficial to the organisation. Time and effort was required from me as the mentor to shift the thinking

of the mentees to a developmental perspective that was more holistic in nature. In the mentoring relationship, we had to work on obtaining a balance between personal and professional goals.

The psychosocial function was instrumental in enhancing the relationship building aspect of our experience of the mentoring process. To enhance the quality of the relationship between mentors and mentees it is important to allow considerable time to build rapport and get to know one another, especially in a mentoring process with developmental aims. The mentoring relationship was enhanced by the activities we undertook together such as the face-to-face mentoring conversations and classroom observations. The mentoring conversations played an important role in building trust between us. When a mentor and mentee work in a supportive and trusting environment it is possible to make values and beliefs about teaching and learning explicit, both for the mentor and for their mentees. In this way, learning occurs through critical reflection by both mentor and mentee. In effect, learning is incrementally accrued by the organisation.

In my experience, friendship within the mentoring relationship was significant. I believe this is one of the reasons why we achieved such deep trust, which in turn enhanced our learning and development. At the onset of the relationship, the mentees seemed to equate the mentoring role to friendship. They reached out to me immediately in social ways. This kind of reaction to the commencement of a mentoring relationship may be attributed to our social interactions in the African context. When one reaches out to another, the boundaries between personal and professional relationships become blurred. I found that it was difficult for me to keep my distance from the mentees when they started reaching out. At the beginning my thinking was that the mentees would benefit more if I focused on their personal development plans (PDPs). I soon realised that the relationships would only grow stronger if I allowed them to evolve in their own unique ways. Mentors in educational institutions in Africa should take this fact into consideration. In our experience, a mentoring relationship with clear developmental objectives had social components that augmented our learning and development.

This study has highlighted the advantages of utilising structure in the mentoring process. It is recognised that a way of focusing the learning and development to the desired outcomes assists in achieving the desired goals. Our approach to mentoring practice in

this study has highlighted some interesting observations. While the mentoring project was not a formal mentoring programme, I utilised structure to emphasise and take advantage of the developmental focus of the mentoring process. Our mentoring process was augmented by the use of PDPs, training in reflective practice, and structuring of mentoring conversations. This structure is explained in detail in Chapter 4, section 4.5.

It can be said that our mentoring project at GTC was a hybrid type of mentoring. It may be described as facilitated partnerships (Flett, 2002:12) falling somewhere between formal and informal relationships, where aspects of structure were instilled into the mentoring process to assist in goal achievement, and there was no involvement by the management of the organisation. This study has shown that such facilitated partnerships can offer beneficial developmental options to educators in educational institutions, especially in VET educational institutions in Africa. Badsha (2001:3) asserts that the practice of mentoring in educational institutions in Africa should be channelled towards specific aims and should not be left to chance. Daloz (1999:211) states that structure in a mentoring relationship assists in learning. A facilitated mentoring process can achieve these two objectives, probably at a lower cost than the implementation of a formal mentoring programme. What my study has highlighted however, is that mentoring is a flexible intervention that can be utilised for the benefit of learning and development. As is evidenced by my study, mentoring can be successfully carried out as a personal initiative between educators who intrinsically desire to improve their practice. Educators are encouraged to consider different avenues to make use of mentoring as a developmental intervention, ensuring that a high quality of mentoring practice is maintained. However, the support of the organisation when mentoring is practiced cannot be overlooked. It is acknowledged that the impact of mentoring would be much greater if the educational institution supported such an endeavour.

The demands of mentoring are an aspect of mentoring practice that emerged from the data. It has been highlighted in literature that mentoring requires substantial time and commitment, for observations, follow-up face-to-face conversations, and ongoing support. In this study I had underestimated the amount of time and dedication mentoring would demand of me. My experience is similar to that of Speedy (2003:9), who, in an action research mentoring project in an educational institution in South Africa, found that the demands of time went beyond the expectations of the participating mentors. This

highlights the important fact of being aware of the effort required to culture a quality mentoring relationship. Mentoring is a powerful and beneficial relationship that requires work and commitment from both the mentee and the mentor. The benefits that are reaped from this relationship compensate for the work both have contributed to it.

7.3.2 Mentoring practice and organisational learning

The findings indicate that mentoring practice resulted in positive outcomes for the mentees, the mentor and the organisation. This is a significant finding for the objectives of this study. The mentoring intervention was initiated as a result of an external demand for change without a requisite system wide intervention to support educators to meet the challenges facing the organisation. It is important to note that the individual intervention resulted in changes in the behaviour of the educators to the extent of impacting on the learning of the organisation. This study adds to existing research in this area by finding that the mentoring process contributes to organisational learning. A study carried out by Singh et al. (2002:398) found similar results, where mentoring was perceived as assisting in knowledge sharing and interpersonal communication in the organisation. Cunningham (1999:441), through her study of educators in higher education, found that the personal and professional development emanating from mentoring benefited the mentees, the mentors and the organisation. Hale (2000:228), investigating the dynamics of mentoring as a route to personal and organisational learning, confirmed that the mentoring process resulted in the development of mentee insights which contributed to organisational learning.

The findings indicate that the mentoring process influenced the professional development of educators outside of the mentoring project. It is noted that one of the most important outcomes of mentoring is that it promotes professionalism within the organisation. The mentee becomes a better professional and the mentor, having contributed directly to this development, benefits from it. When mentoring results in improved practice, changes in behaviour and attitude are apparent in the way the educators go about their duties. It is through this observable behaviour, and from interactions with their colleagues that the professionalism that results from mentoring at individual level passes to others within the

organisation. This is a significant outcome of the mentoring process that links directly to organisational behaviour.

Interactions with other colleagues while participating in a mentoring relationship impacts on group dynamics of the organisation, and benefits the organisational knowledge bank. The findings from the study indicate that the mentees shared their learning with others in their departments. This came about because once the mentees obtained new knowledge they put this newly acquired knowledge into use immediately in their practice. The shared knowledge made it possible for those outside of the mentoring project to benefit from our association and acquire information that made it easier for them to face the challenges brought about by the external environment. The sharing of the information is one way of carrying new knowledge and skills into the knowledge bank of the organisation.

The discussion above infers that the mentoring intervention contributed to the learning of the organisation. It is suggested that as the educators learn at their individual level, they contribute to the knowledge bank of the institution through their learning. The interactions that the educators have with their colleagues highlight the group level knowledge sharing. Senge et al. (1997:41) suggest that when people are 'learning how to learn together' they are contributing to the learning of the organisation. The changes in behaviour that result from such collaborative learning influences the processes that makes up the daily activities of the educator's job. These changes in processes can result in the institution learning to perform tasks in a more efficient way.

It is noted that this study was not able to establish the extent of the transfer of the knowledge acquired by the individual educators to the organisation. Analysis of the extent and impact of the transfer of knowledge to others was beyond the scope of this exploration. Therefore, although findings show that mentees did share their knowledge with others in the sphere of their practice, the extent of this knowledge sharing and its overall impact on the organisational process was not established. This is an interesting area that may benefit from future research.

Another implication of the mentoring intervention was the creation of awareness about mentoring. This mentoring project has a sample of three educators. However, the impact of the action research operation influenced those beyond our sphere. Our growth and

development soon resulted in self confidence and wellbeing that immediately passed to those around us. Other educators could see what we were doing to meet the challenges that we were all facing in our common situation. This reaction to mentoring practice serves to create an awareness of the positive outcomes of mentoring in the institution and contributes positively to the attitude of the organisation towards mentoring practice. Demand for mentoring can have a multiplier effect. There will be increased interest in mentoring as the practice becomes more visible in the organisation. Especially as positive outcomes of mentoring become visible, people will seek mentoring as a way of developing themselves.

Our mentoring experience at GTC confirms that successful individual mentoring intervention is a reality that can be achieved by VET educators. As the external environment continues to influence the internal processes of VET educational institutions, educators must be encouraged to take charge of their own learning and development. To keep up with the rapidly changing times, educators must be encouraged to take steps to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Taking up such an initiative made a difference to the lives of those who participated directly in the intervention at GTC, to those who were closely associated with them, and to the organisation as a whole.

7.3.3 Implication for practice

The findings relating to learning and development within the mentoring process from an organisational perspective highlight a second implication for practice advanced by this study. This is the possibility of creating a pool of mentors within institution. The interaction with others as one experiences the mentoring relationship, and the awareness mentoring may create within the institution, means that other educators may aspire to become mentors. This contributes to the notion that the mentoring practice has the potential of extending to other educators in the institution. The individual intervention that I initiated created awareness in the institution about mentoring. Because we were all educators working towards similar organisational goals, my colleagues began to be aware that they also had knowledge and skills to share with others. The mentees in this study alluded to the fact that they desired to mentor others within the institution. They attributed this feeling to the positive mentoring experienced they had undergone. The experience of participating

in a mentoring relationship impressed upon the participants the full value of such a relationship, and as a result, they would consider taking the role on themselves. This indicates that there is a possibility that educators experiencing or becoming aware of positive outcomes of mentoring would be available and willing to mentor others.

7.4 My personal reflections on my experience as a mentor

This thesis is predominantly a self study of my reflections as a mentor and how I, with the collaboration of others, embraced the mentoring process in my workplace, learned from it and improved my mentoring practice. I find that the uniqueness of my study is the objective with which I went into the mentoring relationships that we formed. My PDP highlighted the fact that I aspired to improve my mentoring practice. This became my focus for the duration of the study. The culmination of my reflections, this study has highlighted that within the mentoring process the immense learning has been from two perspectives. One is my feelings of satisfaction and pride at the depth of learning and development that my mentees went through, and how they changed in this process. The second is the improvement of my mentoring practice.

My mentoring journey was not a straight forward process. My shortcomings became clearer to me through my relationship with my mentees. My attempts to assist them to achieve their goals highlighted the gap in my capacities that needed to be filled in order to help them achieve their objectives. A significant point to highlight is the role of the mentees' reflections of their learning and how I used them in my own learning. The mentees' reflective journals that I had access to contributed to my continuous self assessment. I found myself often asking the question 'why'. This enabled me to reflect on my thoughts, share my knowledge and collaborate with the mentees to improve teaching practice. As a mentor I gained a deeper understanding of my mentoring role through working with the mentees. In this role, it was pleasing to assume the role of teacher and guide. Discussions about teaching stimulated me and revitalised my appreciation of the teaching vocation. Sharing incidents from my past benefited not only the mentee but me as well. I was able to relive these experiences, reflect upon them, taking into consideration the views of the mentees. This became a learning experience for me. Listening to the mentees' voices and critically reflecting on their thoughts helped me to clarify my own

thoughts about my growing self awareness and the mentoring practice, without which I suggest it would not have been possible for me to gain such self awareness.

The mentoring journey that we embarked upon enriched and changed me. The experience surpassed my expectations. I had not envisaged how deep the changes within me would be. I improved the attributes I set out to improve. In the process of doing this, I directly participated in the learning and development of other educators within my institution. I grew in confidence, and became happy and satisfied with the outcomes emanating from the mentoring relationship. During the progression stage of the mentoring process it seemed to me that I watched from the sidelines as the mentees took charge of what they wanted to achieve from the relationship. I was proud of what we accomplished as a group, and the sense of achievement was uplifting.

The changes in me had a significant impact on the workplace. I acquired a sense of achievement at my individual level that changed my perspectives and the way I looked at my practice. I welcomed the opportunities that presented themselves where my mentoring capacity was required. Mentoring other educators gave me a sense of satisfaction and genuine fulfilment. It also re-energized my interest in teaching as we worked together with the mentees on different projects to enhance their pedagogic skills. The mentoring journey connected us to one another and renewed us individually and collectively as a group of educators. We developed a supportive network within the organisation. The growth and development taking place in me at my individual level was positively impacting the group and organisational levels of the institution, thus contributing to organisational learning.

This self study has enabled me to show how I have created knowledge in collaboration with others. I have now developed an understanding of my abilities in relation to mentoring, and how my values and behaviour are influenced by this understanding. What has been important for me is to find my own voice through my experience, as this has contributed significantly to my learning and afforded me an opportunity to share my learning with others.

I believe that in my practice I can now be a better mentor than when I started off on this ‘journey of awareness’ (Jousse, 2000:25). I also know that this does not mean that I have no other challenges or room to grow as a good mentor. My mentoring journey that

commenced at GTC is only the beginning of my continuous learning and development in my exploration of the principles and practices of mentoring. In retrospect, I realise that my 'lived experience' (Whitehead, 1988:43) has been, and continues to be a 'laboratory of awareness' (Jousse, 2000:25) where what I have intrinsically known was drawn out and enhanced by the mentoring engagement.

7.5 Reflections on action research approach used

The action research method used in this study suited the intention and purpose of the study. The three main participants in the study, employed as educators in GTC, entered into complex mentoring relationships over a period of two academic terms. Data was collected through various methods, including face-to-face mentoring conversations, reflective journals, and focus group interviews. Data from these sources was collected, organised and analysed.

By employing action research, the participants and I were able to live through our experience of mentoring and learn as we experienced the process. Action research follows a continuous improvement model, and therefore was an ideal choice for an exploratory study. I improved on the processes that I was employing, and this made it possible to change and implement systems and structures that best worked for our mentoring relationships. Action research is subjective, in that the researcher is a part of the action herself rather than detached from it and merely observing it. This is a strong point in action research. This strength was augmented by my self study approach to the enquiry. I was able to experience things directly and know them immediately. In this research, my bias towards the importance of subjective experience guided the focus of my research as well as challenged my subjective views through the process of reflection.

The cyclical process of action research gave more chances to learn from experience. The research process demanded responsiveness as the research progressed. At the design stage of the research process, I clarified the main action research cycle present in the study. This made the feeding back of information to the next cycle less abstract. At the beginning of the mentoring journey the number of cycles presenting themselves created a fuzzy ground (Dick, 1993:11) to work from. Gradually clarity found its way into the action

research process, especially after I introduced the action research mentoring conversation guide (Appendix 5). I was able to use information gained from each action research cycle to inform the next cycle of the process. This put me in a position to seek more understanding of the mentoring process, to critically reflect on my mentoring capability and to learn more about this phenomenon. Action research enabled me to integrate theory, research and practice, and to generate my own personal theory by living out my experiences and improving my practice (Whitehead, 1988:43). It offered us opportunity and flexibility as group, to break new ground, and do what had not been done before at GTC for the benefit of our learning and development. Action research was congruent with the field of Organisational Behaviour, as we continued to learn and develop at different levels, and contribute effectively to the learning of the organisation.

In our exploration of mentoring, we utilised reflective practice as a learning intervention. Incorporating action research and reflective practice necessitated that all of the participants learn how to reflect and how to keep a journal, a technique we needed to master before moving on to professional and personal development. Although this was a huge challenge, the benefits that accrued as a result of this learning were significant. The writing of the reflective journal challenged me and my mentees to examine our feelings and to question our assumptions helping us gain additional clarity about our learning and development. We generated rich descriptive accounts of our personal experiences. Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis portray our voices in the attempt to share our unique learning experience with others. Without the reflective journals it is probable that experiences and learning episodes may have been overlooked.

To illustrate the role of action research in the mentoring project as an organisational development intervention, I use Benton's (2005:51) nine-step model that was utilised as a framework. In Chapter 4 I explained the planning component of the research using steps 1 to 5 of the Benton model. I explained how steps 6 to 9 would involve evaluation and reflections of the actual events from the action research. The following steps are therefore an evaluation of the actual events.

Step 6: Evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the intervention

The mentoring process as an organisational development intervention was effective. Using reflective practice became a powerful means through which we articulated our learning and development. Reflecting on our everyday activities assisted in providing meaning and direction to our learning. The mentees were able to internalise their new teaching techniques and found it exciting to think through their classroom management and other ways of making their classes interesting. Action research confirmed its fitness for use and validated our practice. We felt empowered and in control of our learning and development. It was clear from our activities that we were making progress, learning new things and doing things differently. At the institutional level, the mentees were becoming confident and sharing their knowledge with others around them. The act of observation and recording may have distorted the 'natural' conduct of the mentoring relationship. As the researcher, I tried to maintain 'normality' by attempting to keep separate the research component of the action research study from the mentees. I found that the component that distorted this approach was the requirement that the mentees had to submit their reflective journals as required. However, the positive developmental outcomes and the friendship levels we attained indicate that the research component of the study did not adversely influence our mentoring relationship.

Step 7: Reflect on the implications of the intervention

The organisational development intervention brought about change to us as individuals. I found the intervention beneficial to both myself and my mentees. I was impressed with the progress of the mentees and how quickly they took charge of their own learning, indicating that people have untapped capacities that require no more than an invitation to demonstrate themselves. Mentees were eager to participate in discussions and contributed significantly to the outcomes.

Action research accelerated the achievement of our learning. It proved to be meaningful, relevant and useful. We became confident and the process enhanced our self esteem. The mentees were proud of their new knowledge and their colleagues commented on how they had changed and become more confident.

Step 8: Reflect on the overall process

The action research process provided a lot of insight. The process made it possible for us as educators to gain insight into what changes we needed to make. The mentees became closer to other colleagues and now looked at issues from a more developmental perspective.

The mentoring project proved successful, and showed me that this was an effective organisational development intervention for the educators. Other educators became interested in the process, and enquired how they could join such an endeavour. This indicated to me that the educators at GTC were ready to embrace mentoring as a way of learning and developing in their profession.

This process has brought a behavioural change in me and in the mentees. Our thought processes and our approach to our practice changed. We became more willing to participate in developmental activities, such as sharing information with other educators. We also became more open minded and willing to attempt new ideas in the classroom. While previously the mentees were reluctant to think out of the box, they were now going out of their way to find innovative ways to reach out to the students, and achieve a student centred approach to learning.

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

There were many issues that emerged from the action research process that indicated we had internalised the mentoring process and were effectively using it as an intervention for learning and development, and highlighting what we could carry with us to the next action research cycle.

7.6 Significance of the study

This study contributes three issues to the body of knowledge. Firstly, through an innovative action research learning experience, the mentoring process resulted in the educators at GTC improving their practice by developing personally and professionally. The

empowering and enriching effects of the mentoring experience resulted in the educators contributing to the learning of the organisation. The observable processes that the educators displayed as a result of their learning and the interactions they had with others extends the understanding that mentoring practice links to the field of Organisational Behaviour. Secondly, as a mentor I improved my mentoring capacities through my participation in the mentoring process utilising a self study approach. Thirdly, the study presents an innovative research design that serves as an example of how one can undertake action research in mentoring practice in the context of organisational behaviour.

The findings of this study have provided valuable insights into many aspects of mentoring, and particularly the presentation of mentoring practice in one VET educational institution in Botswana. My study has shown how the mentoring process resulted in the learning and development of educators. Our exploration of the principles and practices of mentoring positively impacted on the practice of the mentees, and helped them to cope with the changes brought about by the external forces. This study has accentuated the importance of mentoring in educational institutions, and for educators. The value of this study lies in the fact that it provides insight into the personal and professional development of educators in VET educational institutions through mentoring.

This study has had an impact on me as an educator and as a mentor because I was able to create my own personal theory through enhancing my mentoring practice. To facilitate our mentoring journey, we formed complex relationships within an action research approach that incorporated mentoring conversations and reflective practice. Going through numerous cycles of action and reflection culminated in our personal and professional development.

7.7 Limitations of the study

The findings and conclusions developed in this qualitative exploratory study are based on descriptive data collected from the research participants in one VET educational institution in Botswana. Consistent with studies focusing on a single case, rich descriptions are used to assist the readers in determining the extent to which the study contains elements that

match their own particular situations and circumstances (Merriam, 1988:20). The following limitations are however acknowledged.

This study concentrates on three people. There were two mentees and myself as the mentor. The data informing my study is based on intensive and subjective interaction between the three participants. The findings are therefore based on a very small sample.

This study was carried out in one VET educational institution situated in Botswana. The findings are therefore based on a single unit. Because the enquiry was concerned with one organisation it is not known what the implications are for other organisations.

This study was conducted over a period of two academic terms. At GTC this was equivalent to a period of six months. The time for such an investigation may therefore be considered relatively short. It is recognised that had the study been carried out over a much longer period of time, the results emanating from the study may have revealed greater impacts on the mentees, the mentor and the organisation.

Because of the small sample of participants in this study, and the fact that it was carried out in a single unit, the findings from this study cannot be generalised to other settings. The intent of this study was not to make generalisations for a large population of educators. Rather, these findings were intended to relate specifically to the context in which they were generated. Nevertheless, those educators working in other educational intuitions of higher learning may find the results of this study interesting and relevant. Ultimately, it will be up to the reader to determine the transferability of the study's findings and conclusions. I have attempted to provide sufficient description of our experiences so that readers can make decisions about the comparability of this setting to other settings.

7.8 Recommendations

Based on the discussions of the findings and the implications for practice, this study presents the following recommendations for consideration.

Vocational Education and Training educational institutions should focus on how mentoring can be encouraged in the educational institution in order to promote mentoring for all educators in the organisation. Encouraging an environment where mentoring can occur may require a cultural shift towards valuing mentoring, more specifically for educational institutions that have not previously been exposed to institutional mentoring. To encourage mentoring openly, it is important for the educational institution to create opportunities for mentoring relationships to flourish. Management would need to give thought to providing a dedicated meeting space in the institution for staff interactions. This may afford the less experienced educators the opportunity to interact frequently with their more experienced colleagues. Such meetings and discussions could identify developmental gaps that educators at different levels would like to fill.

Mentoring should be visibly supported by the educational institution in which it is present. The support of the organisation when mentoring is practiced within the VET educational institution is critical to the success of mentoring practice. Mentoring can be an organisational professional development strategy which management encourage. Overt support of mentoring would provide leverage to the organisation in terms of mentoring outcomes consistently meeting individual objectives aligned to organisational objectives. It is observed that the mentoring relationships in this study could have had greater impact on individual learning if it had the support of the educational institution. Mentoring can be an effective intervention to benefit educators when the relationship is based on mutual trust, mutual respect and open communication. However, it is also important to recognise that the lack of support from the organisation should not be a stumbling block for educators in VET educational institutions in Africa to commence mentoring relationships.

It is recommended that VET educational institutions should enhance individual learning of their educators which has the potential to result in organisational learning. To fulfil this professional development endeavour, the onus is on the educator as the person who is responsible for their own learning to pursue this objective. Educators must realise that their organisations have a bank of knowledge and skills in the form of their more knowledgeable and experienced colleagues within the institution. The advantage then is that mentees who make use of this available and untapped resource can put it to good use within their environment immediately it is transferred. Educators who desire to improve their practice to be in line with the changes occurring within the institution can make use of mentoring

and tap into this available knowledge bank. Mentors provide immense value to their mentees in the roles they undertake.

Vocational Education and Training educational institutions should consider the importance of training a pool of mentors. Training would build mentoring capacities within the institution and provide mentors with the confidence they need to share and transfer knowledge to their mentees. Such training would emphasise reflective practice as an essential competence that mentors should acquire. It is critical that mentors provide the guidance and support required for the mentee to effectively reflect upon their experiences. Mentees also need to embrace reflective practice and learn to make it a part of their daily routine as educators. The implication of incorporating reflective practice as part of mentor training in VET educational institutions is advantageous for educators. Once learnt and adopted, reflective practice is a powerful learning intervention that educators can employ to assist them in improving their practice, especially within a mentoring relationship.

Another recommendation concern VET educational institutions in Africa considering the provision of a framework for a mentoring programme for educators both in academic and administrative departments. As educational institutions are propelled towards a more systematic approach to learning and development, the power of mentoring can become an avenue through which mentees can gain knowledge, skills and abilities quickly. Whether the institutions decide to implement formally managed mentoring programmes, or institutionally encouraged informal mentoring, mentoring initiatives should include clearly stated purposes and goals with a focus on the professional growth and development of the educators. It is clear that mentoring can be effectively used as an alternative to professional development of educators within these institutions.

Finally, it is recommended that this enquiry be extended to other VET educational institutions in Africa and possibly compare the findings from such explorations.
This recommendation is valid when viewed from the perspective of the challenges facing VET educational institutions generally in Africa, and within GTC and other technical colleges in Botswana in particular. One such challenge is the implementation of OBE within these educational institutions. Comparative findings from similar studies will contribute to the strengthening and creation of awareness of the principles and practices of mentoring within educational institutions situated in Africa.

7.9 Suggestions for future research

This study examined mentoring as an intervention that could be utilised to enhance the individual learning and development of educators in one VET educational institution in Africa. This empirical investigation of mentoring and individual learning should result in some new and interesting directions in research on learning and development within the mentoring process. Based on the experiences from this study, the following suggestions for future research are presented for further debate and exploration.

Firstly, this study focused on the participants' involvement in mentoring and the way in which mentoring promoted their learning and development in their practice. An interesting study might investigate the extent to which knowledge is shared within the organisation as a result of mentoring practice, and how this relates to organisational behaviour.

Secondly, additional insights into the nature of mentor's learning may prove valuable for organisational development professionals responsible for fostering the development of potential mentors.

Thirdly, mentoring research may benefit from a closer examination of facilitated partnerships or a similar mentoring project as presented in this study, using a wider sample size, and over a longer period of time.

7.10 Conclusion

This fascinating mentoring journey had the broad aim of exploring mentoring practice and how this practice could contribute to the learning and development of educators in a VET educational institution. The mentoring process provided us with the capacity to cope with the changes brought about by the external environment. Our learning and development resulted in change in behaviour which impacted positively on us as educators and on the organisation. We contributed to the learning of the organisation and influenced behaviour within the organisation.

The findings from this study have significant implications for educational institutions in general, and VET educational institutions in Africa in particular, for considering strategies that would enhance individual learning and propel educators towards the achievement of desired developmental goals, through the practice of mentoring.

The learning of individual educators through the mentoring process helps the organisation adapt to changes brought about by the external environment. Educators who do not keep up could be disadvantaged, and not have the capacity to deal with the changes influencing their work life. Educators who find an avenue for professional development would have a better chance at performing to the standards expected by their institutions.

This study has confirmed that mentoring is a powerful intervention that can be strategically implemented in the institution to enhance individual and organisational learning. The mentoring intervention could be implemented and encouraged by management in the institution to foster a culture of continuous learning and development. Creating a mentoring culture can provide opportunity to interact with one another and share knowledge that will renew us individually and collectively as VET educational institutions. This has the potential to impact positively on the organisation, assist in the management of change, and encourage new and effective ways of doing things.

Mentoring is a dynamic professional development activity that requires systematic and careful thought to result in the benefits to mentees, mentors and educational institutions. This study was an exploratory examination of the principles and practices of mentoring in a VET educational institution in Botswana. Because mentoring does not occur as a systematic process in these institutions, this is an important study with practical implications. Although our mentoring experiences are specific to the context of Gaborone Technical College, the outcomes of this study are relevant to other VET educational institutions in Botswana, and many other institutions of higher learning situated in Africa.