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Hoa Thi Mai Nguyen

Models of Mentoring in Language Teacher Education

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Hoa Thi Mai Nguyen

Models of Mentoring in Language Teacher Education

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In honor of the late
Professor Richard B. Baldauf Jr. (The
University of Queensland, Australia)

Preface

As professionals, who have developed our academic skills within a Western educational tradition, but who have lived and worked in Asian cultures, we have had the experience of being mentored at various times in our careers. Much of our experience in being mentored has been informal, through degree supervision experiences, or through working with more senior colleagues. Sometimes, it has occurred within groups of peers, or in more organized training programs, laboratory work groups, through formal workplace support or from journal editors. For the authors, working with mentors – some of whom may not have seen themselves in this role – and subsequently being mentors ourselves has had a major positive impact on our careers. But, beyond this anecdotal evidence, what do we really know about mentoring/peer mentoring as a process and its impact on our professional development as educators and that of others?

This research monograph examines this question and its related issues from the perspective of English language teachers. In most educational institutes and schools today, teachers in general and language teachers in particular are expected to maintain and continuously upgrade their professional standards. For this to occur, they need to be provided with conditions and opportunities that allow them to reflect on and develop their teaching. Mentoring provides a possible avenue for this to occur both in teacher education and teacher professional development. This need for effective mentoring for preservice and in-service teachers has been an emerging theme in language teaching circles in recent years. However, the field of mentoring for language teachers is relatively unexplored in both of these language teacher education contexts, and the literature on mentoring language teachers is limited when compared with that of other teacher development issues such as teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) methodology.

This volume provides a research-based, practice-oriented introduction and guide for teachers, teacher educators, and coordinators who wish to understand and implement a mentoring approach to preservice and in-service teacher development programs. The book focuses on the two main themes: (1) mentoring and (2) peer mentoring in English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education with specific research findings related to each theme.

This volume, which is framed by the disciplines of ESL/EFL and teacher training, draws on the broader literature to provide insights into issues related to mentoring/peer mentoring, which has been under-researched in ESL/EFL teacher education in general and in Asia in particular. This book provides teacher educators, practitioners, researchers, and policy makers with informed, empirically_based, yet practical information about the implementation of mentoring models that can be used for developing beneficial language teaching outcomes in Asian-specific contexts.

Although this volume reflects our findings from a series of related research studies conducted in the Vietnamese context, it is designed to allow readers to consider how they might apply a mentoring approach in their own situations. As the following chapter summaries indicate, the volume covers a wide range of topics related to mentoring and peer mentoring for language teachers both at preservice and in-service levels.

Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the current situation of English as a foreign language teaching in Vietnam and stresses the need for reforms in in-service and preservice teacher education. It argues that many of the issues found in language education in Vietnam are also common to other Asian contexts.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of teacher learning theories which underpin the concept of mentoring and peer mentoring and frameworks of mentoring and peer mentoring. It highlights the use of the mentoring/peer approach in teacher education. This chapter then describes different forms of mentoring, formal and informal with their main features, and provides an example of teacher reflective feedback.

Chapter 3 critically reviews the use of mentoring for preservice teachers during the preservice practicum. Then, it examines an example which reports findings from a study which investigated the situation of mentoring preservice language teachers during the practicum in Vietnam.

Chapter 4 describes the major components in the design for a formal mentoring program and covers such topics as training mentors, attributes of mentors, and mentor-mentee matching. For each section, there is a more general theoretical discussion, and then a specific research-related example from an Asian context is provided, e.g., research is discussed which explores what personal attributes preservice teachers expect from their mentors.

Chapter 5 introduces the use of an integrated mode of mentoring (group mentoring) for preservice teachers during the practicum as an approach to facilitating teacher reflection. The chapter reports findings from a qualitative study which explored how this model of mentoring fostered preservice teachers' reflection. It describes in detail the implementation of this model and its effectiveness in developing preservice teachers' reflective skills using data from interviews and recordings of mentoring conversations.

Chapter 6 provides a comprehensive research example that investigates how a peer-mentoring model has influenced preservice EFL teachers' professional practice. A mixed method design that included both qualitative and quasi-experimental techniques was used to investigate the impact of a formal peer-mentoring intervention program on participants' professional practice during the practicum. The study

sheds light on the use of peer mentoring as a model for developing beginning teachers' professional practice and its effectiveness in a specific Asian context.

Chapter 7 reports on a comprehensive research study whose aims were to investigate how a peer-mentoring model might influence preservice EFL teachers' perceptions of the amount of support they receive from their peers. The study sheds light on the use of peer mentoring as a model for supporting beginning teachers and its effectiveness in a specific Asian context.

Chapter 8 reports a case study which explores the experience of groups of Vietnamese EFL teachers toward their participation in a formal peer-mentoring model over one semester. Through observations and interviews, this study offers insights into the participants' experiences as well as the application of formal peer mentoring as a model of EFL teacher professional development. This study offers insights into the participants' experiences with this model in Vietnam as well as how this model could be appropriately used as a model of teacher professional development in a particular Asian context.

Chapter 9 examines the issues of implementation of peer mentoring for preservice and in-service teachers.

Chapter 10 summarizes the main argument of the book and makes suggestions about future practice.

Throughout the book, there is an emphasis on:

- A developmental approach to assist and support preservice and in-service language teachers to advance their professional practice
- A focus on findings from research studies in Vietnamese settings and implications for the wider implementation in other contexts
- Implications for practice

I believe this volume provides an important addition to the literature on mentoring for EFL language teachers and to our understanding of the implementation of mentoring in a specific context in Asia. The volume offers a stimulating and thorough examination of mentoring and peer mentoring, integrating theory and practice throughout. The volume should be of interest to language teacher educators, teachers, and policy makers. The findings from these studies, which are discussed in the light of previous research and in the context of teacher learning theories, are a useful source of information for a variety of educational groups interested in finding ways to improve the quality of teacher education programs and for carrying out teacher development activities in their own settings.

Kensington, NSW, Australia — Hoa Thi Mai Nguyen
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My deep gratitude and appreciation also go to my husband, Dr Nam Nguyen, and my lovely daughters, Mira and Maya. Their love, support, and constant encouragement gave me a great deal of strength and determination that helped me during the

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Contents

1 The EFL Context in Vietnam and East Asia 1
1.1 English Language Teaching in Vietnam 1
1.1.1 Historical Background 1
1.1.2 The Quality of ELT 4
1.1.3 In-service EFL Teacher Professional Development 8
1.1.4 Pre-service EFL Teacher Education in Vietnam 10
1.2 EFL/ESL in Asian Contexts 13
1.2.1 Issues in In-service EFL Teacher Education 15
1.2.2 Issues in Pre-service Teacher Education 16
1.3 The Use of Mentoring 18
1.4 Summary 20
References 20

2 Theories of Mentoring 29
2.1 Underlying Theories of Peer Mentoring/Mentoring in Teacher Education 29
2.1.1 Social Constructivism 30
2.1.2 Collaborative Reflection 31
2.2 Mentoring: A Theoretical Framework 33
2.3 Peer Mentoring: A Theoretical Framework 36
2.3.1 Career-Related Functions 36
2.3.2 Psychosocial Functions 39
2.4 Summary and Conclusions 42
References 42

3 TESOL Practicum Mentoring for Pre-service Teachers: The Vision Versus the Reality 47
3.1 Introduction 47
3.2 Practicum in Pre-service Language Teacher Education 47
3.2.1 Pre-service Teacher Education 47
3.2.2 Role of the Practicum 49

3.3 Mentoring in Pre-service Teacher Education 51
3.3.1 Mentoring 51
3.3.2 Limitations of School-Based Mentoring 52
3.4 Examining an EFL Pre-service Mentoring Context 54
3.4.1 Findings from the Pre-practicum Interviews 55
3.4.2 Findings from Post-practicum Interviews 57
3.5 Discussion 62
3.6 Implications and Conclusions 64
Endnote 65
References 66

4 The Design of Mentoring Programs 71
4.1 Introduction 71
4.2 Informal Versus Formal Mentoring 71
4.3 Formal Mentoring 73
4.3.1 Mentoring Attributes 73
4.3.2 Matching in the Formal Mentoring System 74
4.3.3 Mentor Training and/or Orientation 76
4.4 Conclusion 79
References 79

5 Group Mentoring: Facilitating Teacher Reflection 83
5.1 Introduction 83
5.2 Teacher Reflection 83
5.3 Group Mentoring 84
5.4 The Study 87
5.4.1 Research Approach 87
5.4.2 Research Participants 87
5.4.3 Research Implementation 88
5.4.4 Methods of Data Collection 89
5.5 The Theoretical Framework for Reflection 89
5.6 Findings 90
5.6.1 Level of Reflection 90
5.6.2 Patterns of Reflections 92
5.6.3 Factors Fostering Reflection 93
5.7 Discussion 96
5.8 Conclusion 99
References 99

6 Peer Mentoring for Pre-service Teachers: Developing Professional Practice 103
6.1 Introduction 103
6.2 Peer Mentoring for Pre-service Language Teachers 103
6.3 Peer Mentoring as a Strategy for Developing Professional Practice 104
6.3.1 Professional Practice 104
6.3.2 Peer Impact on Developing Teachers' Professional Practice 106

6.4 Research Methodology ... 109
6.4.1 Research Question ... 109
6.4.2 Design ... 109
6.4.3 Research Participants ... 110
6.4.4 Intervention ... 111
6.4.5 Data Analysis ... 113
6.5 Findings ... 114
6.5.1 Comparing Groups on Professional Practice over Time ... 114
6.5.2 Overall Professional Practice ... 126
6.5.3 Violations of Assumptions ... 129
6.5.4 Professional Practice Comparison Summary ... 130
6.6 A Comparison of Perceived Changes in Professional Practice Across Groups ... 131
6.7 Discussion and Conclusion ... 134
6.7.1 Domain 1: Planning and Preparation ... 134
6.7.2 Domain 2: The Classroom Environment ... 135
6.7.3 Domain 3: Instruction ... 136
6.7.4 Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities ... 137
6.8 Conclusion ... 138
References ... 139

7 Peer Mentoring: A Source of Support for Pre-service EFL Teachers ... 143
7.1 Introduction ... 143
7.2 The Study ... 143
7.3 Findings from the Experimental Group ... 145
7.3.1 Psychosocial Support ... 145
7.3.2 Career-Related Support ... 152
7.4 Control Group Findings ... 160
7.4.1 Psychosocial Support ... 161
7.4.2 Career-Related Support ... 164
7.5 Discussion ... 170
7.6 Conclusion and Implications ... 172
References ... 173

8 Peer Mentoring with Beginning EFL Teachers ... 175
8.1 Introduction ... 175
8.2 Beginning EFL Teachers ... 176
8.3 Theoretical Background ... 178
8.4 The Study ... 179
8.4.1 Research Design ... 179
8.4.2 Research Context ... 179
8.4.3 Setting and Implementation of the Peer Mentoring Program ... 180
8.4.4 Data Collection and Analysis ... 181

8.5 Results and Discussion 182
8.5.1 Engagement Between Beginning Teachers and Their Peer Mentors 182
8.5.2 Mentoring Programs Increased the Participants' Self-Reflection on Their Teaching Practice 184
8.5.3 Psychological Support 187
8.5.4 Tensions 189
8.6 Conclusion 190
References 192

9 Issues of Implementation of Peer Mentoring for Pre-service/Inservice Teachers 197
9.1 Peer Mentoring Attributes 197
9.2 Peer Mentoring Matching 201
9.3 Peer Mentoring Training 202
9.4 Peer Mentoring Problems 206
9.5 Conclusion 207
References 207

10 Whether Mentoring in Teacher Education: Final Thoughts 209
10.1 Introduction 209
10.2 Models of Mentoring 210
10.3 Conditions for Effective Mentoring 211
10.4 Move Forward 212
References 214

Chapter 1
The EFL Context in Vietnam and East Asia

Abstract This chapter provides a brief overview of the current situation of English as a foreign language teaching in Vietnam and stresses the need for reforms in in-service and pre-service teacher education. It argues that many of the issues found in language education in Vietnam are also common to other Asian contexts.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the current situation of English as foreign language (EFL) teaching in Vietnam. Then, I identify the central role that pre-service and in-service EFL teacher education play in English language development in Vietnam, followed by a discussion of the need for changes in pre-service teacher education, and in-service teacher professional development. The discussion of these issues and of mentoring is then widened to the Asian EFL context and the recurring themes found in the region are highlighted.

1.1 English Language Teaching in Vietnam

1.1.1 Historical Background

Given that language is highly socio-political, economically, and ideologically bounded, the position of foreign languages in Vietnam has been treated differently at different historical stages. It depends much on the government's priority in political relations. In the 1880s, for example, French was popular in Vietnam education system as a result of the French colonial establishment (K. T. Bui, 2003; Do, 2006, September). Post 1954 when the French withdrew from Vietnam, the Vietnamese language flourished throughout the North because the government implemented national campaigns called "Giao Duc La Quoc Sach Hang Dau" (education is the national priority) and " Xa Hoi Hoa Giao Duc" (socialization of education). During the years of the American War (1954–1975), French and English were mostly taught in the educational system in South Vietnam. This period saw a shift from French to English language usage as the impact of the American political influence. However, French still played a role in the administration (Wright, 2002). The two foreign

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languages were considered to be the language of the invaders in the north, a notion that was dramatically supported by Russia and China. Chinese and Russian involvement in the North impacted on the government's policies regarding the teaching and learning of Russian and Chinese. Thus, during this period, Chinese and Russian replaced French in secondary and tertiary colleges and English language teaching did not receive much attention in the North. In 1975, when the Communist Party won the right to unify the country following the complete withdrawal of the American forces in the South, "the dominance of Russian as the main foreign language, and the decline of English as well as other languages in the educational system" (Do, 2006, p. 1) was marked. Denham (1992) notes that a long period after reunification after 1975, different foreign languages had different roles in the language education. At high school, 15 % students studied French, 25 % English; and 60 % students studied Russian. Although English and French were taught to some degree, Russian was the most powerful and popular foreign language during this period when Vietnam was politically influenced by Soviet. In 1979, diplomatic relations between Vietnam and China deteriorated as a result of the border dispute between the two countries. Consequently, the Chinese language together with French and English almost completely disappeared (Wright, 2002). Some years later, Russian language usage started declining with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. In 1986 Vietnam enacted its open-door policy, finally stopping the long period of isolation.

Beginning in 1986 with 'Doi Moi', Vietnam began to open up its economy and its relationships with the West. The role of English has been dramatically increasing (T. T. N. Bui & Nguyen, 2016; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2012). The 1990s saw the growing realization that foreign languages were a key factor in the facilitation of change. In particular, the teaching and learning of English was increasingly being seen as a 'world language' (Brutt-Griffler, 2002) and as such, was becoming more popular and widespread. Over time, English language teaching and learning has gained in status and in domains of use.

Over the past decade, English teaching has been used as the main foreign language in the education system. This contrasts with the pre 'DoiMoi' language policies which considered Russian the preferred language. Thus, the positions of English, and the attitudes toward it, have changed greatly over the last 30 years. Of the major foreign languages taught in the Vietnamese education system, the government has emphasized the role of English as integral to sustain Vietnam's socio-economic development. This leads to a growing recognition of English as the preferred foreign language in Vietnam nowadays (H. Bui, 2005; Denham, 1992; Do, 2006, September; V. C. Le, 2007a; X. V. Nguyen, 2003; Wright, 2002). As a result, the teaching and learning of English as a compulsory school subject has increased at all levels. English language proficiency has become a prerequisite for further study and employment. Primary English was introduced as an elective subject in 1996. Starting from the second semester of Year 3, teachers take two 40-min periods a week (H. T. M. Nguyen & Nguyen, 2007). According to 2013 statistics from MOET (MOET, 2013a, 2013b), there are an estimated 22 million English language learners in school of all types and levels of education in Vietnam

(MOET, 2013a, 2013b). In a nutshell, English is the most popular foreign language in the educational system in Vietnam.

In response to the changes in the political and socioeconomic policy, in 2000, the Vietnamese government launched general curriculum and English language policy reforms (Decrees Nos. 40/2000/QH 10 and 14/2001/CT-TTg) to "urgently develop and implement the curriculum nationwide to meet the needs of the country's modern development." As a result, a new series of English textbooks was designed and put in practice in 2006 for nationwide use by all students irrespective of the differences in their educational and socio-economic backgrounds. This change was assumed to have had a profound impact on the teaching and learning of English in the country. However, its impacts were questionable (V. C. Le, 2015)

In 2008, the Vietnamese ministry of Education and Training initiated a new policy (called the National Foreign Language Project 2020) with the aim of promoting English education in Vietnam. This project was expected to make substantial changes to language education in Vietnam. The government stressed that the need to promote foreign languages, especially English, is critically vital for the nation's social and economic development and political integration. The goal of the project was "to renovate thoroughly the tasks of teaching and learning foreign languages within the national educational system" (Toan, 2013). In 2010–2011, a pilot English (as a compulsory subject) primary program was implemented from Grade 3 in a number of regions in Vietnam. In the country's big cities, English is even being taught in kindergartens and Grade 1. There has been a popular tendency that kids go to English centres to learn English as early as possible. The demands for bilingual kindergartens and private primary schools are increasing. At primary level, English is taught from grade 3 to grade 5. At secondary schools, English teaching hours can be used as a medium of instruction at a number of schools in big cities. According to Le (2015), around 30 % of secondary schools in economically developed cities can study mathematics and science through English as a medium of instruction in 2015.

At higher education, English is also the most preferred foreign language in comparison with French, Chinese and Russian (K. V. Nguyen, 2009). The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has piloted the teaching of mathematics, physics, and chemistry in English in a number of universities in the country's large cities in preparation for its future expansion. For example, 30 Advanced Programs were released by MOET at a number of higher education institutions over the country from 2008 to 2015 (MOET, 2008). In 2014, MOET initiated Foreign Education Programmes (MOET, 2014) in which English is used as a medium of instruction. Accordingly, a number of higher education institutes in Vietnam designed and launched their own EMI programmes and joint programmes with their foreign partner HEIs. To date, 21 Vietnamese HEIs are offering 55 High Quality Programmes (Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2016).

Under the project 2020, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has been employed to measure its outcomes. The Project 2020s guidelines stated that the CEFR would be used as a national reference framework to access language proficiency, design curriculum, course materials development and

syllabus, teaching and learning plans, and evaluation to ensure the compatibility of different stages of foreign language teaching and learning in the education system (MOET, 2008). All secondary school graduates are expected to reach B1 level of proficiency on the scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Concurrently, English teachers are expected to reach B2 level of proficiency on the CEFR to teach at the primary and lower secondary school and C1 for upper secondary and tertiary level. Furthermore, in an attempt to ensure this standard by 2020, under the Decision 1400/QD-TTg more than 80,000 English teachers in public schools will have been re-training intensively. The project aims to address the issues of teacher development and language teaching quality throughout the country.

This brief overview indicates that English language teaching has become a major focus of educational reforms in Vietnam because of the increasingly important roles it plays in the economy and international communication. In Vietnam, as with many other countries across Asia, English education has changed considerably. The development of English education may be seen as reflecting the growth of Vietnamese society and economy in response to the global world, similar to what has happened elsewhere. However, the rapid rise in the popularity of English has led to concern about the quality of teaching and learning that occurs in the educational system.

1.1.2 The Quality of ELT

There is increasing concern about the quality of English language education (e.g., T. M. H. Bui, 2006; V. L. Nguyen, 2012; T. T. Tran, 2013). Available studies indicate that both the learning and teaching of the language are fraught with many problems. For instance, after years of learning English, secondary school students in particular, and learners in general, fail to acquire English with sufficient competence which students may seem structurally competent, the reality is that they are communicatively incompetent (T. M. H. Bui, 2006; V. C. Le, 2007a; V C Le, 2015; V. C. Le & Barnard, 2009; T. T. Tran, 2013). On a standardized assessment test for Intel'IT staff recruitment in Ho Chi Minh City, out of 2,000 Vietnamese IT students, only 5 % met the required standards of the English language. And, "of this group only 40 individuals were sufficiently proficient in English to be hired. Intel confirms that this is the worst result they have encountered in any country they invest in" (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008, p. 3). After more than a decade of efforts in terms of resources and changes, the English proficiency of university graduates is still of major concern (T. M. H. Bui, 2006; Stephen, Doughty, Gray, Hopcroft, & Silvera, 2006; T. T. Tran, 2013). As Tran (2013) observed: "When leaving universities, many graduates could not communicate in English in some simple situations, they could not understand general news in English either" (p. 143).

The situation is even worse in remote areas in Vietnam where the teaching and learning conditions are limited. Bui (2013) who doubts the impact of the current

English language policy reform in Vietnam claims that most minority students "cannot speak a simple sentence in English after 7 years of learning" (p. 215). Teaching English to minority students is fraught with a number of issues such as teacher quality, irrelevant curriculum, mismatch between the curriculum requirements and students' proficiency, and irrelevant learning material (T. T. N. Bui & Nguyen, 2016; Davis, Phyak, & Bui, 2012; H. T. M. Nguyen & Bui, 2016). In a recent study on language identity of ethnic minority students in Vietnam (H. T. M. Nguyen et al., 2016), we found that these students faced many language obstacles in learning English when they needed to double their efforts in order to keep pace with their Kinh counterparts. There is no differentiation in terms of the EFL curriculum for those whose are already struggling with learning Vietnamese. A similar story has been found in rural areas in Vietnam, where the students do not have sufficient teaching and learning support (Nguyen, Le, Tran, & Nguyen, 2014).

This raises a serious question on the issue of equity in language policy.

In addition, many students exhibit a high level of anxiety about EFL learning (Tran, Baldauf, & Moni, 2012; T. T. T. Tran & Baldauf, 2007). Evidence suggests that in general teaching English in Vietnam does not meet the current communicative needs expected for the language despite the changes made to English language teaching methodology in recent years. In a study of how Vietnamese students learning English, To (2007) found that they tend to "learn by heart" (p. 11). More specifically, she found that Vietnamese students "learn by heart some prefabricated expressions and patterns then adjust them to suit the relevant context" (p. 9). She further argues that this may be due to their particular learning experiences which are embedded in the audio-lingual teaching methodology widely employed in Vietnam. The findings from her study support previous studies (T. M. H. Bui, 2006; V. C. Le, 2001; Pham, 2000, 2005) which claim that Vietnamese students of English do not seem to be provided with opportunities to communicate in English or to use English in meaningful contexts.

Although there have been a number of changes in ELT in Vietnam, for example technology integration (M. X. Le & Harbon, 2013; V. L. Nguyen, 2012), learner autonomy (Dang, 2010; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014), communicative language teaching (Pham, 2007; Toh, 2003; Tomlinson & Dat, 2004), intercultural communicative competence (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2008a),cooperative learning (Nguyen-Phuong-Mai, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2012), problem posing skills (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2009), strategy training (Ngo, 2015), the quality of language teaching in Vietnam is still a major concern. Many teachers, who learned the language using the old system, were taught to teach using that system as well. Thus, lack of systematic training has meant that the methodology used in English language teaching in Vietnam has been described as a knowledge–imparting process, i.e., a teacher-centered approach (Kam, 2002; V. C. Le, 2007a; X. V. Nguyen, 2003). Vietnam's educational institutions adopted the grammar-translation approach during the 1950s, and it is still used in language teaching today, particularly in teaching English to non-English major college students and to students in secondary schools (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2012; Pham, 2000). The teacher begins by introducing rules, knowledge of rules being seen as more important than their application; and practice in translating texts

of increasing difficulty from English into Vietnamese and vice versa in order to ensure that the students have understood the English text (Nguyen, 2001). Pham (2000) claims that Vietnamese language learners would become disappointed and confused if their teachers did not explain the vocabulary and grammatical rules in an English lesson. Grammatical and lexical accuracy and attention to form rather than to meaning are obvious outcomes of this kind of teaching approach (V. C. Le, 2001; V. C. Le & Barnard, 2009). In a recent study of teachers' attitudes towards teaching grammar, Le and Barnard (2009) also found that the common teaching practice in Vietnam still focused on the correction of grammatical errors. The result of such teaching is that after a certain period of learning English, while students may have attained a good knowledge of English, their ability to use the language remains limited. This approach is really little more than telling the students more about the language, rather than giving them practice and experience in the use of the language. Thus, adoption of the grammar-translation approach makes the class a knowledge-imparting process.

It seems that many teachers in Vietnam see English language teaching as a knowledge-banking process, and language learning as a knowledge-receiving process (V. C. Le, 2001; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2009) where English is viewed as a subject, not a real-world language (Stockton, 2001) or communicative tool. Hours are spent upon explaining, reading aloud, and imitating, an approach that treats learners as passive recipients. In this process, the teacher has the role of imparting knowledge to the students. Tran's (2001) study supports this premise by claiming that a writing activity in an EFL classroom in Vietnam is regarded as an individual activity with teachers as the sole audience and the students remaining quiet. In a more recent study (T. L. Tran, 2007), she reemphasizes the fact that "grammar translation method has dominated the language teaching and learning reality in Vietnam for decades" (p. 152). The situation is not brighter in the listening lessons which also focus too much on the right answers to the questions, contributing to the decrease in listening motivation and listening development of the students (Ngo & Nguyen, 2016).

In Vietnam, most classrooms have traditionally been teacher-centred or teacher-fronted, evident in the physical set up of the classroom. Having conducted research into Vietnamese classes, Sullivan (2000) observes that in Vietnamese classes:

> the teacher generally sits in front of his/her students. This physical set-up is most conducive to a teacher-fronted class, with the teacher guiding and leading all students as a whole class (p. 124).

In an ELT classroom, the teacher, rather than being a facilitator or scaffolder of learning, has complete control. The teacher has to prepare a lecture for every class and supply the correct answers to every exercise undertaken by the students. Most of the communication flows through the teacher who makes most of the decisions pertinent to the learning process including what will be done, where it will be done, how it will be done, and by whom it will be done. The teacher resembles an actor who performs a live "show" on stage, while the students watch and listen like a theatre audience. Because of the teacher-as-dominator, student-as-submissive role

relationship, students are accustomed to remaining silent: there is often little interaction between teacher and students. It is a class where many activities are organized as whole-class activities directed by the teacher. However, in Vietnam, this approach has been to some degree affected by the country's Confucian heritage which has "emphasized dependency and nurture rather than independence; it emphasized hierarchy rather than equality" (Sullivan, 2000, p. 121). After years of entrenchment, it is difficult to change these learning and teaching habits (Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2009). In their recent study, Tran and Baldauf (2007) foregrounded the role of Vietnamese teachers of English by providing strong evidence that the principal source of the demotivation of students is related to teachers and their teaching methods which appear to greatly influence students' motivation. This study provides further evidence of the need for the reform of teaching methods in Vietnam. In another recent study, Nguyen (2012), who investigated the implementation of current language policy reform in rural settings, found that teachers in her study still adopted the traditional approaches when teaching English to primary students. The teachers in the research still preferred teacher-centred teaching and the use of choral drilling and repetition. Tran (2013) who recently studied EFL learning at the tertiary level reaffirmed that grammar-structure teaching focus is still popular in Vietnam. And, teachers are not empowered to introduce new ideas into their classes. Humphreys and Wyatt (2014) argue that with the support of teachers, learners can develop their autonomy and much benefit can be gained. However, a recent study by Nguyen, Tangen, and Beutel (2014) reveals that the teachers need more support and power to develop the learners' autonomy in their existing pedagogy in the context of Vietnam.

According to Nunan (2003), ELT in Vietnam does not reflect "the prevailing rhetoric which is claimed to be 'communicative'" (p. 604). But, a number of changes have occurred including attempts to implement communicative language teaching (CLT) resulting a trend towards its increased use in Vietnam. One important project among the reforms introduced into the system has been the debut of a new series of textbooks, titled *New Tieng Anh* (English). They advocate adopting a learner-centred approach and the communicative approach with task-based teaching being the central principle of teaching methodology. These textbooks, which are written by Vietnamese authors, are officially used for lower and upper secondary students throughout the country, the aim being to equip "students with communicative ability and competence to perform basic language functions receptively and productively, using correct language forms and structures" (V. C. Le, 2007a, p. 4). There is an expectation that dramatic changes in English language education will occur when the new series of textbooks is implemented, and followed by the upgrading of workshops for secondary teachers. However, it has been observed that classroom teaching remains grammar and vocabulary-focused, teacher-centred, and textbook-dependent. This is may be variously due to "teachers' inadequacy of required proficiency in English and teaching skills, as well as to the traditional image of the teacher as a type of omniscient authority figure and a holder of all knowledge" (V. C. Le, 2007a, p. 174). This reality remains problematic for teacher educators in Vietnam.

In a recent study of teachers' beliefs and the implementation of CLT in Vietnam, Pham (2007) found that teachers subscribe the goal and the practical value of CLT for their students. However, when it comes to the reality, they face many challenges (Moon, 2009; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2011; Pham, 2007; Sullivan, 2000) for as Pham (2007) has argued that CLT is not a "one-fits-all" approach. For this reason, teachers in Vietnam "need to make further efforts to develop and generate, within the communicative approach, classroom techniques appropriate to their teaching condition" (p. 200). The results of this study provide ample support for the notion that teachers may be able to exercise their autonomy to find the best way to teach when "they are empowered, encouraged, and helped to do so" (Bax, 2005, p. 90). While the government initiative taken in response to globalization to create opportunities for Vietnam in a globalized economy is laudable, it is unclear whether the policy will succeed in creating an army of qualified English teachers to cater for the English learning population (V. C. Le & Do, 2012; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2012; T. T. T. Nguyen, 2012). Despite the government's tremendous efforts in revolutionizing the English education in Vietnam, there are still many concerns about its effectiveness and success, especially in terms of teacher quality. This issue is further explored in the next section.

1.1.3 In-service EFL Teacher Professional Development

Vietnam has a centralised system of teacher education and certification. EFL primary, secondary, and tertiary education programs are offered by both universities and colleges of education. When a teacher receives their certificate/degree to teach, it is valid for life. Once certified and teaching, most of the in-service teachers take aims to meet certain specific requirements, e.g., to become tenured teachers at public schools where at primary and secondary level prospective teachers with teaching certificates need to pass the "teachers' employment test" set by their local educational department. However, in general, once EFL primary and secondary teachers at public schools in Vietnam are officially employed, their status as professional educators is relatively stable. There are few ongoing requirements. However, in Vietnam today, there are few tenured positions for EFL primary teachers in the public systems.

Research suggests that teachers play a key role in changes to teaching methodology, and contribute to the improvement of quality in English language education in Vietnam (Duong, 2003; Humphreys & Wyatt, 2014; Moon, 2009; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2011; Pham, 2007). However, the quantity and quality of EFL teachers are far from the expected standard. A recent report (Nguyen, N.H. (September, 2013) on English language teacher evaluation revealed an alarming number of teachers who did not meet the requirements of language proficiency as follows

- 44.6 % of tertiary English teachers.
- 55.5 % of English specialized teachers.

- 83 % of primary English teachers,
- 87.1 % of lower secondary English teachers,
- 91.8 % of senior secondary English teachers,

This alarming number is actually not surprising in Vietnam because a number of scholars have expressed their concern about the mismatch between the requirements of the teachers and the teachers' language proficiency. The findings of a recent study by Le (2015), revealed that most of the participant teachers doubted the effectiveness of Project 2020. They identified a number of constraints experienced by the teachers such as low proficiency, students' low motivation, and teachers' low salaries and support mechanisms. Similarly, in a recent review of language planning policy in Vietnam, Bui and Nguyen (2016) had raised the issue of the shortage of qualified teachers at all levels. These factors had together contributed to the failure of language policy implementation. Their findings support Kaplan, Kaplan, Baldauf, and Kamwangamalu (2011), argument that factors concerning teachers played a critical role in education reform.

Teacher beliefs play a vital part in exercising their agency to make changes and justify how they decide to teach a foreign language. Yet, teachers' poor English skills, inadequate teacher preparation, and contextual difficulties can make it very difficult for many teachers to implement changes (Bock, 2000; Kam, 2002; V. C. Le, 2007c; V C Le, 2015; H. T. M. Nguyen & Bui, 2016; Pham, 2007). Thus, although Vietnamese teachers of English struggle with heavy teaching workloads, poor working conditions, and everyday life burdens (Gorsuch, 2006; V. C. Le, 2007b; V C Le, 2015; Pham, 2006) they still have the ability to play a pivotal role in determining the quality of teaching (H. T. M. Nguyen & Bui, 2016). This echoes the need for developing their agency for change through quality professional development for teachers.

Under this context, several researchers (e.g., Duong, 2003; V C Le, 2015; H. T. M. Nguyen, 2011; Nunan, 2003; Pham, 2001) reached the conclusion that a lack of sound teacher training and teacher professional development are among the main barriers to the quality of English language teaching. Pham (2001) found the notion of teacher collaboration was missing in this context. Professional development activities such as sharing, reflection, and collaboration among peers are not popular in the daily activities of most EFL teachers (Ha, 2003; V. C. Le, 2007a; Saito, Tsukui, & Tanaka, 2008). They seem to work in isolation from one another. According to Gemmell (2003), "teachers who work in isolation often resort to familiar methods rather than approaching concerns from a problem-solving perspective in attempting to meet the diverse instructional needs of today's students" (p. 10). Other types of reform professional development such as mentoring and teacher support groups are not popular in EFL language teacher professional development in Vietnam (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2008b, 2016; L. C. Nguyen, 2008; Vo & Nguyen, 2010). In her study of teacher professional development, Nguyen (2008) found that while collaboration among EFL teachers exists, it is limited to the sharing and scanning of ideas. This, she argues, is not enough to bring about change in teacher professional practice and the working community. In addition, the current

focus on in-service EFL teachers' professional development required to address Project 2020s urgent need has shown a number of limitations. Thus, the available evidence advocates the reform of teacher education, both at the in-service and the pre-service levels. The issues of pre-service EFL teacher education, are discussed in the next section.

1.1.4 Pre-service EFL Teacher Education in Vietnam

The need for reform in English teaching methodology in Vietnam foregrounds the critical role of pre-service EFL teacher education. In Vietnam, teachers of English are officially trained at the major institutes for training foreign language teachers. The first of these institutes was set up in Hanoi in July 1956, when the Foreign Language School was first established to train foreign language teachers and interpreters in Russian, Chinese, English and French. "This school was the predecessor of the now leading institution of foreign language teacher education in Vietnam – the Hanoi National University, College of Foreign languages" (V. C. Le, 2007a, p. 169). Recently, it changed its name into the University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Most of the early EFL teachers in the north of Vietnam graduated from this College. Vietnamese teachers of English are also trained at various other major foreign language training institutes throughout the country, e.g., the University of Education, Hue University, Da Nang University, Thai Nguyen University, Tay Bac University, Colleges of Social Sciences and Humanity-VNU, and Ho Chi Minh University. Basically, the intensive programs for prospective EFL teachers in Vietnam follow the framework for training foreign language teachers as regulated by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training. Similar to programs in other countries, these programs aim to equip students with a comprehensive knowledge of English language and linguistics, English culture and literature, a good command of English, and adequate knowledge and skills for the English teaching profession. English teaching methodology is undertaken in the third academic year along with some components of microteaching. The teaching practicum is scheduled to take place during the last semester. For example, at ULIS, the practicum runs for 6 weeks at a number of secondary schools during their last semester. However, the question is: are these content-oriented skills along with limited end-on practice sufficient? In a recent study, Nguyen (2013) found that the current language teacher education program in Vietnam over focused on English proficiency and subject matter knowledge, leading to sufficient attention to practical knowledge of teaching in contexts.

Some scholars have argued that the current situation of English language education in Vietnam calls for reform of pre-service EFL teacher education and more focus on teaching practice (T. P. A. Le, 2007; V. C. Le, 2013; Pham, 2001). In a recent movement to improve the quality of teacher education, first English language teacher competencies framework (ETCF) was approved by MOET in December 2012. It has been applied and implemented in late 2013 and early 2014 (Dudzik &

Nguyen, 2015; MOET, 2014). The ETCF encompasses five domains: "(a) knowledge of English subject matter and curriculum, (b) knowledge of teaching, (c) knowledge of learners, (d) professional attitudes and values embedded across knowledge domain, and (e) learning in and from practice and being informed by context" (p. 14). An increasing number of English teacher education institutes have begun to adopt these frameworks (the ETCF and the CEFR) to design, redesign, evaluate and improve both pre-service and in-service teacher English education curriculum, programs, course materials and evaluation and assessment (Dudzik & Nguyen, 2015). ULIS is one of the pioneers to use this competency-based framework to design and improve its teacher education program in which all the course-level objectives are required to align with the competencies framework. However, the adoption and application of this framework are at the early stage and reveals a number of barriers such as lack of communication, innovation and independence in using this framework in their teaching (V. H. Nguyen & Hamid, 2015). In addition, most of the English teacher education programs in Vietnam focus much on the subject knowledge and theory without sufficiently providing the pre-service teachers with teaching skills. The EFL teaching methodology component is an indispensable part of any program for training foreign language teachers. Teacher trainees seem to have little chance of studying EFL teaching methodology-related subjects and to practice their learning-to-teach processes. The number of credits related to teaching methodology and practice is limited.

More seriously, prospective teachers in Vietnam seem to learn to teach English through transmissive and prescriptive methods (Ha, 2003; Le, 2007c). The common practices in teacher training processes in Vietnam seem not to provide pre-service EFL teachers with opportunities to work together and collectively reflect on their individual language learning, teaching experiences and situations. This failure partly explains the fact that even though current pre-service EFL teacher training programs in Vietnam prescribe an introduction to the current trends in language teaching and learning with a major focus on communicative language teaching, when "they return home from these courses, they continue teaching in their own way, using traditional methods" (V. C. Le, 2001, p. 34). This may in part have resulted from the fact that their undergraduate courses were often based on subject knowledge, and have very little opportunity to practice teaching. This reinforces the view that foreign language teacher training puts inadequate emphasis on teaching skills and professional development. This may lead to "the teachers continual pedagogical uncertainty about implementing change" (Humphries & Burns, 2015).

Programs for training foreign language teachers need to move beyond the provision of subject knowledge to the development of teacher development processes. In essence, many professionals strongly believe that "the core of language teacher education must centre on the activity of teaching itself, the teacher who does it, the context in which it is done, and the pedagogy by which it is done" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 397). Sharing a similar view, Le (2001) claims that pre-service teacher education programmes in Vietnam need to provide pre-service teachers with more hands-on experience in how to teach English communicatively in the local context through more teaching practice opportunities. This advocates the recogni-

tion of language teaching practice in real life contexts. One practical learning-to-teach opportunity that many EFL teacher education programs in Vietnam include is the teaching practicum. However, practicum in pre-service EFL teacher programs in Vietnam seems to be insufficient to respond to the reforms of EFL pre-service language teacher education that are required.

The practicum or field experience appears to be severely limited in Vietnamese education in general, and in EFL teacher education in particular. The duration and content of the teaching practicum varies across the country: it often lasts between 6 and 10 weeks in local schools. Institutes, which specialize in the training of foreign language teachers, reserve a small number of the total study hours over a 4-year period for teaching methodology and teaching practice. At the ULIS,VNU, the 6-week practicum accounts for only five credits for training EFL teachers. These five credits do not count toward the students' overall results, although they must pass the practicum in order to graduate. Thus, it can be argued that concern about the practicum duration is not as great an issue as the quality of practicum. The practicum for foreign language teacher trainees in Vietnam usually follows the craft model. During the practicum, the teacher trainees are "apprenticed" to "master" teachers (school mentors) at local schools. They are expected to learn from these teachers by observing their lessons, getting feedback, and working with them (H. T. M. Nguyen & Hudson, 2012). However, the reality is different. In a recent study of TESOL practicum in Vietnam, Le (2013) found that pre-service teachers tended to show their alignment with their cooperating teachers rather than pursuing their own teaching philosophy. The process of learning to teach can be seen as a process of transferring knowledge and experience from experienced teachers to novice teachers. This strongly reflects the teaching and training styles found in most of East and Southeast Asian countries which position and locate supervising teachers in positions of authority (Brownrigg, 2001; V. C. Le, 2004; H. T. M. Nguyen & Hudson, 2012; N. T. T. Phan & Locke, 2016).

During practicum experiences, pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam usually engage in individual planning and teaching. With a few exceptions, assignments and evaluation are individual efforts. This, to some extent, makes pre-service EFL teachers' practicum experience less educative in that the pre-service EFL teachers seldom have opportunities to work in a collegial manner in their practicum (V. C. Le, 2013; Nguyen & Luong, 2007), and implies that teaching is normally an isolated activity. Thus, these teachers may embark upon their careers ill-prepared to engage in reflective practice with others. They may also be unaware of the important role that collegiality can play in their future professional development. It would seem logical that if EFL pre-service teachers lack training in practice habits of reflection and collegiality, or at least to recognise the role that these habits play in their professional practice, they may not have acquired them by the time they enter their profession. This raises the issue of whether it is possible to structure the practicum in a manner that fosters an atmosphere of collegiality and reflection rather than one of educative isolation (See, e.g., Zeichner, 2010). The impetus should thus be on teacher education programs designed to introduce collaborative professional practice at the pre-service level.

There is still a need for more qualified teachers to be trained and more opportunities for in-service teacher professional development to improve the quality of English language education programs in Vietnam. Among a number of professional development strategies, mentoring and peer mentoring have emerged as effective and efficient models for improving the quality of teacher education and teacher professional development. These approaches reflect the current trends in teacher education and utilise in-house sources of learning. However, mentoring seems to be a missing link in the prescribed activities for EFL pre-service and in-service teachers in Vietnam.

The policy of Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training is to support teacher professional development. However, the initial training of teachers has become more school-based. At the school level, it seems that informal mentoring is occurring due to social and professional contact between more experienced teachers and their less-experienced counterparts. Generally speaking, it appears that formal mentoring does not occur (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2008b; L. C. Nguyen, 2008). Few formal mentoring programs exist for early career beginning teachers, and this leads to shortages of teachers in terms of both quality and quantity. Thus, this volume argues that there is a need to apply different models of mentoring in pre-service and in-service teacher education in Vietnam, and elsewhere in Asia to raise the English teaching standards there as well. However, I want to stress here that the EFL situation described in this section is not unique to Vietnam. Many of the same issues arise in a number of polities in Asia. I discuss this broader context in the next section.

1.2 EFL/ESL in Asian Contexts

While the current volume focuses on research into mentoring and peer mentoring in the Vietnamese context, the lessons learned from that research may be more widely applicable in a number of EFL Asian contexts. The EFL teaching and learning situation in general, and the issue of pre-service and in-service teacher education and teacher professional development in particular, are major issues of common concern for most non-English speaking countries in Asia.

All across Asia, the English language seems to have become more important than ever before due to its increasing role in globalization. For most of the countries in Asia, English has been recognized as a valuable resource for the country's development and integration. English as a global language is playing an increasing role in many fields including communication, economics, tourism, and science. In many Asian countries, the learning of English is considered "as a national mission" (L. H. Phan, 2013, p. 162). Most governments in Asia have recently initiated reforms in English language education to improve the language proficiency of the learners (Hamid, 2010; Johnstone, 2010; Kam, 2002). In many countries, English is being introduced as a compulsory subject at an increasingly younger age. For example, in China, and Korea, English is taught in Grade 3, while in Indonesia it can start in

Grade 4, or in Taiwan in Grade 1. But while this demand for English offers opportunities to the TESOL profession at the same time it creates tremendous challenges. Qi (2009) believes that:

> Governments around the world are introducing English as compulsory subjects at younger and younger ages, often without adequate funding, teacher education for elementary school teachers, or the development of curricula and materials for young learners (p. 115).

It becomes evident that if such programs are not properly resourced, it may result in massive failures and an unfortunate waste of resources (See, e.g. Ali, Hamid, & Moni, 2011; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Kaplan et al., 2011).

Despite efforts to improve the current quality of ELT by most of the governments in the region, a number of scholars (Kam, 2002; Nunan, 2003; Qi, 2009; Wedell, 2008) have argued that there has been a mismatch between what EFL curriculum reforms in those countries hope to achieve and the reality of EFL teaching and learning. Kam (2002) identifies three major challenges to English education that East Asian countries currently face: "“quantitative versus qualitative” (p. 19) (lack of English teachers vs. need for high quality), “traditional versus modern” (traditional vs. new teaching methods), and “continuity versus change” (continuity between the past and present vs. change for application of modern technology)” (p. 19–20). Consequently, there are increasing concerns about the quality of English language education. In many polities, after a long period of studying English, the level of students' communicative competence remains a major concern. For example, in China, despite a large governmental investment in English education at the university level, students' level of English proficiency is “still quite low when it comes to communicative use” (Qi, 2009, p. 117). In Indonesia, “the students' achievement to the stated objectives is still far from satisfaction [sic]” (Mistar, 2005, p. 76). In addition, the situation is similar in more developed polities such as Hong Kong. Despite a considerable amount of money being invested in English language teachers, and the increasing use of English as a means of instruction in a number of schools in Hong Kong, the secondary and university students' communication skills remain far from satisfactory (Nunan, 2003; Wedell, 2008).

Studies conducted in the region provide evidence that both the learning and teaching of English in a number of EFL Asian contexts entails many problems. Among them are the curriculum, teacher competency, textbooks, motivation of the students, and support facilities (Kam & Wong, 2000; Oda, 2005; Qi, 2009; Zhan, 2008). In most curriculum reform in the region, communicative ability is one of the ultimate aims explicitly stated in the curriculum. However, what actually may be occurring in many English language classrooms in the region is quite the opposite (Humphries & Burns, 2015). Nunan (2003), Wedell (2008), and Kam and Wong (2000), in their examinations of English education in East Asian contexts, note that the practice of teaching English in classrooms in the region is still mainly teacher fronted, grammar and written text focused and examination-oriented, by extension creating a less communicative learning environment for the students. This situation not only emphasizes the role of teachers as implementers of the teaching and learning process, but evokes a need to provide teachers with appropriate support. The

changes in the curriculum need to be supported by appropriate socialization, quality teacher training, and development opportunities.

While there have many challenges to the polities in the region, the issues of teacher training and professional development remain critical. The roles of teachers as change agents in EFL education, as implementers of new education policies and of curriculum reform are central if reforms are to take place as intended. However, because these issues consistently fail to be adequately dealt with, they have become of increasing concern to most English language education programs in the region.

1.2.1 Issues in In-service EFL Teacher Education

Many have argued that the shortage of teachers and in-service teachers' limited language proficiency and knowledge of teaching methodology are common problems found in Asian ESL/EFL contexts (e.g., Fung & Norton; Hayes, 2008, March; Kam, 2002; Kang, 2008; Moon, 2009; Oda, 2005; Pit & Roth, 2004; Qi, 2009). Yet, it is also the case that the role of language teachers is critical in improving the quality of EFL teaching and learning. Thus, inadequate teacher training and teacher professional development are among the most common problems found in many non-English speaking countries in Asia (Kam, 2002). According to Nunan (2003), EFL teacher education in many countries in Asia is "inadequate". Although many attempts have been made to improve the quality of teachers in specific contexts, many concerns remain. For example, in Bangladesh, Hamid (2010) is alarmed by the problems attributable to inadequately trained teachers, a result of "inadequate infrastructure and limited institutional capacity for English teacher education" (p. 290).

Similar situations were noted in more developed countries such as in Malaysia, China and Hong Kong. Although more funding was invested in teacher education and professional development in these regions, issues of quality teachers and the decline in the number of qualified English teachers in public schools were still called into question (Nunan, 2003; Ting, 2010). In China, He and Prater (2013) emphasize that "the demand for highly qualified ESL teachers in K-12 public school settings has been increasing in the last decade" (p. 32). In Malaysia, survey results show that two-thirds of the 70,000 Malaysian school English teachers (as well as students) lack proficiency in their English (StraightTimes, 2012). The effectiveness of English as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level in Malaysia has been affected by degree of the teacher proficiency (Ali, 2013; Ali et al., 2011). In Indonesia, where English apparently has a less dominant role than in Malaysia and Brunei, teacher quality is of major concern (Joni, 2000; Lie, 2007; Madya, 2007). "In terms of teachers' competency, such teachers have still not mastered English very well and lack adequate teaching methodologies. They ask their students to read English texts but they themselves rarely read them" (Sunggingwati, 2009, p. 5). Their teaching methodology depends much on the text book (Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). There is some intentions to equip English teachers with adequate

levels of English proficiency and pedagogical skills (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2007). In Cambodia, the situation is even worse. The country is experiencing a serious shortage of English teachers; and, many current teachers "are not trained or inadequately trained" (Pit & Roth, 2004, p. 115). Some more developed countries such as Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong look for native teachers as a source of teacher supply for their educational programs. However, this cannot be considered a long term solution as teachers from different cultures may not be aware of the local problems and ways of teaching.

In a number of developing countries, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam, for example, teachers have opportunities to attend in-service teacher training programs offered by foreign-aid agencies (e.g., AusAid, the British Council or the World Bank). While on the one hand, there is the potential for these projects to facilitate teacher training and professional development, on the other hand, this type of donor-funded project has been revealed to have a number of problems. Hamid (2010) who examined donor-funded projects in Bangladesh identifies some limitations of these types of projects including their aims, lifespan, and their coverage, thus questioning the significance of their overall impact on Bangladesh ELT. Baldauf, Kaplan, and Kamwangamalu (2010) argue that these donor-funded projects often fail to "recognise the problems inherent in the polity" (p. 433). Their view is shared by Hamid (2010), who claims that overdependence on these donor funded projects "may not be beneficial in the longer terms" (p. 307). This type of support does not provide a long-term solution, thus, more effort should be made locally. Governments in developing countries need to develop an on-going system for in-service teachers that pays more attention to the context where the teachers work, as well, a specialized subset of language skills required to prepare and teach lessons (Freeman, Katz, Garcia Gomez, & Burns, 2015).

In these circumstances, priority should be placed on providing quality teacher education and professional development programs to help teachers to implement reforms. However, opportunities at the in-service level, beyond initial teacher education programs in a number of Asian countries have been limited; i.e., there have been limited opportunities available to help in-service teachers to acquire and develop necessary skills and competence to implement the educational reforms (e.g., Moon, 2009; P. Wang, 2010) . For in-service EFL teacher education, the notion of organizing in-service development in the form of class observations, negotiation and reflection seems uncommon in China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. (e.g., H. T. M. Nguyen, 2008b; Pham, 2001; Zhan, 2008).

1.2.2 Issues in Pre-service Teacher Education

At the pre-service level, those interested in EFL teacher education programs in the above countries have called for reform because the programs in place have not met the expectations held for them regarding either the number or quality of teachers (Luo, 2003; Nunan, 2003). The need for more attention to teaching practice in these

programs is crucial. In a study of EFL teacher education programs in Taiwan, Luo (2003) identifies a gap between theory and practice in EFL teacher education programs. This concern was shared by Sunga (2004) who suggests that the pre-service teacher programs in the Philippines need to provide a stronger link between theory and practice. Hu (2005)maintains that many of the instructional practices of pre-service teacher education programs need to be critically examined and changed (p. 637). Thus, field experience or practicum, where pre-service teachers are challenged to learn to teach in a meaningful context, has become a central issue in pre-service teacher education reforms (Norman, 2001; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005).

At the pre-service level, the practicum for EFL teachers in a number of polities in Asia has remained problematic (e.g., Farrell, 2001, Farrell, 2008; Hu, 2005; H. T. M. Nguyen & Baldauf, 2010). For example, in China, a number of researchers have indicated the need for reform of the pre-service teachers' practicum (e.g., Campbell & Hu, 2010; Rodgers & Keil, 2007; Yan & He, 2010). More specifically, the lack of support from the supervisor and mentors during the TESOL practicum has been identified as a problem in many countries. For example, Hu (2005) expressed his concern about the unsatisfactory quality of mentoring, supervision, and guidance available for TESOL students in a teacher education program in China. Even in Singapore, where English language teaching is considered to be a success story (Chandrasegaran, 2005) there is a need for more support for pre-service teachers during the practicum. Farrell (2007, 2008) who studied the TESOL practicum for pre-service English teachers in Singapore, confirmed the need for more effective mentoring programs for EFL pre-service teachers during the practicum. Consequently, there is a need for a more effective mentoring process to be developed a complementary source of support.

Quantity and quality problems constitute further obstacles for the teaching force in a number of countries in the Asian region. Substantial teacher development work is required to solve these problems at both the pre-service and in-service levels. A number of scholars (e.g., Kam & Wong, 2000; Nunan, 2003; Qi, 2009) have argued that teacher education needs to undergo radical change. Qi (2009) stresses for the need to "ensure that teachers [in East Asia] are adequately trained in language teaching methodology appropriate to a range of learner ages and stages that teachers' own language skills are significantly enhanced…" (p. 119). Over the past decade, language education in the EFL Asian contexts has been dominated by quality-related concerns. Among these concerns, teacher education and teacher professional development have been key points of focus. However, because teacher education attracts limited resources, it is imperative that any resources invested in teacher development yield maximum returns. Therefore, within this climate of limited resources, mentoring and peer mentoring may well be considered as effective methods for enhancing pre-service/in-service teachers' teaching practice. As well, they will provide much needed support, especially in situations where there are limited numbers of experienced teachers and mentors.

Among the different approaches to teacher professional development, mentoring is valued as effective for enhancing teachers' professional development. It can utilise in-house resources for in-service and pre-service teacher

development. Yet, mentoring models seem not to have been given enough attention in these contexts.

1.3 The Use of Mentoring

Mentoring has been the focus of teacher education and approaches to professional development for beginning and veteran teachers for over a considerable period of time. The current enthusiasm for the mentoring of new teachers has drawn a great considerable attention from teacher employing authorities around the world. Mentoring is now being recognised as an important strategy providing strong support for helping teachers retain them and for further development of the teaching profession (Long et al., 2012). The use of mentoring during the induction phrase for beginning teachers has been well-documented in some Western countries, especially in Australia, UK, Canada, the United States and some countries in the European Union. It has received widespread attention in the literature for its importance in developing teaching profession. However, the emergence of mentoring as a professional development strategy has yet to be due attention in some EFL Asian contexts, for example, China, Indonesia and Vietnam. Moreover, very few empirical studies explore the mentoring of EFL in-service and pre-service teachers in these countries.

Formal mentoring seems to be a missing component in Asian professional development activities. Some countries in Asia, for example, China and Singapore, have a tradition of experienced teachers helping beginning teachers; and, some schools initiate and establish appropriate formal systems. Inexperienced teachers, who are often regarded as those who have less than 5 years teaching experience always struggle for survival early in their career. It may suggest that without help, many first-year teachers risk “lose their enthusiasm, ambition, and idealism and start getting lost in the flurry of a challenging beginning” (Saban, 2002, p. 33). Therefore, providing some kind of support to them through a mentoring process is not only essential to retain them within the profession but to develop their potential as professionals. However, as I have already suggested, few studies have documented the practice. In addition, the implementation of this model has revealed some problems which may leave it open to misuse. For example, in China, the mentoring EFL novice teachers has been limited to lesson observation during which experienced and novice teachers observe each other. The former provides feedback with a view to improving the latter’s teaching practice (Hu, 2005). When used in this context, mentoring is not a supporting strategy but an evaluation tool that could hinder the teachers’ development. Furthermore, teacher mentors, who lack familiarity with the foreign language, the culture of the language, and recent trends in foreign language pedagogy, are likely to cause misunderstandings resulting in conflict between teacher mentors and their mentees (Liu, 2005). This could result in some teacher mentors unable to provide in-service teachers with sufficient assistance to develop

their teaching practice skills. Thus a greater understanding of this process is essential to the maximising of the professionalism of EFL in-service teachers in the region.

Similar problems may be found at the pre-service level where models of mentoring are more frequently mentioned in reference to the TESOL practicum. The school-based practicum experience is one of the most critical and important components for preparing future teachers. In most Asian EFL teacher education programs, EFL student teachers have a teaching practicum of variable length at schools followed by initial university-based course work that focuses on teaching theory. At the pre-service level, mentoring is sometimes employed as part of EFL student teachers experience during the practicum. However, in EFL Asian contexts, the ESL/EFL practicum continues to be very challenging. On the one hand, it plays a vital role in developing pre-service teachers' professionalism, on the other hand, it faces many difficulties, including getting quality placements and improving the quality of teacher mentoring and supervision (See Chap. 3). In general, EFL pre-service teacher education programs in the Asian region seem to experience similar problems related to mentoring pre-service teachers during the practicum as those experienced in Vietnam.

In conclusion, the results of this brief review of literature in the region suggest that many of the problems identified are commonly found in the Vietnamese context. In Asia, as in Vietnam, language education has recently witnessed nation-wide reform. Most countries are putting in place new innovation schemes which aim to improve students' communicative competence.

If the intent of these programs is to be realized, quality teachers are needed. Also required will be excellence in professional development programs for both pre-service and in-service teachers. There is a growing widespread recognition that mentoring is an effective approach to teacher education and teacher professional development. However, this approach has yet to be given due attention in the Asian context. Wang (2002) observes:

> More studies with different teacher mentoring relationships in the contrived context are necessary… The research on the relationship between mentoring practice, what novices claim that they learn, and what they are able to do in teaching is still an important area of teacher mentoring that is worthy of further exploration (p. 368).

Very little is known about the conceptual differences and practical strategies of mentoring/peer mentoring in different contexts. The mentoring approach that may appear to be taken for granted in western teacher education cannot be assumed to have relevance for or be effective in other cultures (J. Wang, 2001). Given this dearth of empirical studies on mentoring/peer mentoring for EFL teachers and the need for effective implementation of these approaches, in this volume we argue that if teachers brought a more reflective and collegial set of components to their EFL teaching, their practice would improve markedly. Although Vietnam was chosen as the site for this research, the findings from research in this volume can be replicated and applied to other Asian contexts. The diverse problems facing Vietnam's teacher education in general and teacher mentoring in particular resonate with common educational problems in the Asia-Pacific region.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter, discussion has centered on the specific context of the research studies in this volume. While focus has largely been upon on mentoring and peer mentoring in the Vietnamese education system, the lessons learned from that research may be valuable and applicable in a number of EFL Asian contexts. Within these contexts, the application of a variety of mentoring models for in-service and pre-service teachers could provide an alternative means of improving the current situation. Mentoring, which is based on on-going relationships and support systems in the local working place, can bring optimum returns. I will suggest that if teachers were taught a more reflective and collegial set of habits during their EFL teacher preparation, their practice would show marked improvement. One way of doing this would be to involve teachers' learning, developing and practicing mentoring skills. In the chapters, which follow, I examine some research studies which suggest how this might occur.

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Chapter 2
Theories of Mentoring

Abstract This chapter provides an overview of teacher learning theories which underpin the concept of mentoring and peer mentoring, and frameworks of mentoring and peer mentoring. It highlights the use of the mentoring/peer approach in teacher education. This chapter then describes different forms of mentoring: formal and informal with their main features, and provides an example of teacher reflective feedback.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of teacher learning theories, which underpin the concept of mentoring and peer mentoring, and a framework for mentoring and peer mentoring. As well, I provide empirical evidence to support these frameworks in teacher education. The chapter then describes different forms of mentoring, that is, formal and informal, and distinguishes their main features.

Some readers may wonder why a chapter on theory is included in a volume that seeks to influence practice. As practitioners, they may be more interested in learning how to improve their own practice. There is an assumption that all teachers and teacher educators are "small t theorists", although they may not realise it. That is, they hold understandings of how teaching and learning works and that these understandings (also called **t** heories) influence how they teach and learn. Having this theoretical basis for what one does allows one to generalise their knowledge and skills to new situations. Thus, this review of "big T **T** heories", that is, theories that are more broadly held and more widely discussed, aims to provide background information that may help individuals who are trying to develop their own "**t** heories" to improve their own practice.

2.1 Underlying Theories of Peer Mentoring/Mentoring in Teacher Education

Although the concept of peer mentoring/mentoring has been applied in different ways in different contexts, in this volume, peer mentoring/mentoring is viewed as a process whereby teachers/more capable teachers help each other to learn by

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providing each other with professional and emotional support. As such, social constructionist notions of learning provide a theoretical foundation for mentoring and peer mentoring in most of the studies discussed in this volume.

2.1.1 Social Constructivism

A key proponent of social constructivism was Vygotsky, whose perspective of the notions of joint activity and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) are useful when considering the theoretical rationale for the peer mentoring/mentoring process. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the majority of learning is not obtained in isolation, but rather through interaction with others in socially-embedded contexts. However, such interaction needs to occur within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), defined as "the distance between the present everyday actions of the individuals and the historically new form of societal activity that can be collectively generated" (Engeström, 1987, p. 74). According to Vygotsky, the ZPD pivots around three key aspects. First, it can be seen that learning involves more than an individual person trying to construct it individually, highlighting the dialogic nature of the interaction. This emphasizes the value of providing learners with opportunities to work with other capable peers, teachers, and /or adults. Second, it emphasises the active roles of an individual in sharing and constructing knowledge. And third, the interaction between participants is viewed as being dynamic and dialectical (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006).

Vygotsky's theory emphasises the importance of the ZPD within the context of the specific and socio-cultural environments in which the individuals engage with each other through a web of social interaction, communication and relations. As such, it seems that learning in the ZPD leads not only to cognitive development but also to the development of appropriate aspects of practice. The notion of ZPD means that in the contexts of social engagement and interaction, peers/more capable peers can contribute to individual learning.

The notion of a ZPD provides a useful conceptual understanding of how teacher education programs can benefit from cooperative learning for those who are considered to be adult learners in the process of learning how to teach. This idea of social constructivism underpins the need for opportunities for collaboration and support, and for learning. Individuals are required to construct self-knowledge and develop new perspectives, by engaging in hands-on activities rather than using structured information (Lubic, 2000). Although Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD posits the role of capable peers/teachers in adult guidance and collaboration, this would not exclude peer mentoring involving peers of equal status because when two people are working together, one may well be more advanced in his or her thinking and can be considered a more competent peer. For instance, Tudge (1992) who examined research on peer collaboration using a Piagetian approach rather than a Vygotsky

framework, emphasised that "social interaction between peers who bring different perspectives to bear upon a problem is a highly effective means of inducing cognitive development" (Tudge, 1992, p. 159). A number of teacher education studies (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Cosh, 1999; Hauserman, 1993; Hawkey, 1995) have found that peers offer support that leads to cognitive development. And, that even low levels of support from a peer can assist an individual's growth. According to Goos, Gailbraith, and Renshaw (2002), when this view is applied to educational settings, "there is learning potential in peer groups where [partners] have incomplete but relatively equal expertise—each partner possessing some knowledge and skill but requiring the others' contribution in order to make progress" (p. 195). In a study on how pre-service teachers negotiate their problems through conversing with each other, Miller (2008) emphasised the role that problem-based conversation played among pre-service teachers themselves in their initial professional development. His study supports Vygotsky's (1978) theory by highlighting the importance of talk in social interaction as a prerequisite for increasing teachers' teaching effectiveness.

The peer mentoring/mentoring process is underlined by the Vygotskyian notion of joint activity. Peer mentoring involves two or more than two equal participants working together and having the opportunity to socially construct knowledge together. Mentoring occurs in a hierarchical relationship where a more experienced teacher provides career related support and psychological support to less experienced teachers. Miller (2008) claims that conversations among peers created contexts and opportunities to explore overlapping ZPDs that exist in any peer group. The role of each participant is to guide the other to move through their ZPD. Thus, in peer mentoring/mentoring for teachers, collaborative learning through interaction with others actively engages teachers as adult learners in the exchange of ideas and experiences, and negotiates meaning from multiple perspectives.

Peer mentoring/mentoring can create opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching practice in order to facilitate knowledge construction. From a social constructivist perspective, knowledge must be created by being actively engaged in and self-constructed by interaction and negotiation of meaning within communities of practitioners. It also involves the process of active reflection (Sanford & Hopper, 2000). In the next section, focus is upon this issue.

2.1.2 Collaborative Reflection

Peer mentoring/mentoring is rooted in the reflective practitioner tradition. Reflective practice is increasingly being recognised as important in teacher education. It is assumed that teachers learn from experience through continuous reflection on their teaching experience (Dewey, 1933; Schon, 1983) and from the formal knowledge acquired through study with each informing the other (Buysse, Sparkman, &

Wesley, 2003). Thus, learning to teach becomes much more of an exploratory exercise shaped in and through experience rather than through a transmission model. In such situations, reflection on practice is part of the process of reducing or minimising the transmission of stereotypical applications of knowledge.

Dewey (1933) one of the first educationalist to recognise the usefulness of reflection, argued the importance of linking reflection to teacher education by suggesting that reflection "emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity" (p. 7) and championing the need for doubting reality, and searching for solutions to the doubt. Dewey's (1933) definition of reflection emphasised the state of doubts or uncertainty and called for careful and continued consideration of the subject of reflection and the resultant solutions.

Building on the work of Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983) developed the term "reflective practice" and applied this approach to teacher education. Schon (1983) found that two types of reflection play an important role in the thinking and practices of teachers: reflection-on-action (i.e., after the event) and reflection-in-action (i.e., during the event). Reflective practice does not advocate the application of any particular scientific theories and concepts to practice situations, but, following Schon (1983), holds that teachers or professionals should develop their understanding and modify actions accordingly through framing and reframing their own beliefs and practices. Costa and Kallick (2000) state that collective reflection provides opportunities for

> … amplifying the meaning of one's work through the insight of others; applying meaning beyond the situation in which it was learned; making a commitment to modifications, plans, and experimentation, and documenting, learning and providing a rich base of shared knowledge (p. 60).

Although the term reflection has been used rather loosely to cover different aspects of reflection, there is a common consensus that it refers to the ongoing process of critically evaluate and re-evaluating past and present professional practices in order to enhance future practice (Hatton & Smith, 1995, Hatton & Smith, 2006; Rhodes, Stokes, & Hampton, 2004; Ward & McCotter, 2004). Based on their review of the literature, Hatton and Smith (1995, 2006) specify four distinct forms of reflection: technical reflection, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection.

Ideally, participants in the peer mentoring/mentoring process can apply one or more of these forms of reflection during their interaction with other teachers through a variety of mentoring strategies such as conversations, observation, discussions, lesson plan reviews, or collaborative work. Ongoing reflection with others about professional knowledge and practice is one of the critical components of peer mentoring/mentoring. In the peer mentoring/mentoring process, one channel of knowledge construction is through collaborative reflection. Hatton and Smith (2006) argue that

> A powerful strategy for fostering reflective action is to engage with another person in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, even confronting, the trusted other, in order to examine planning for teaching, implementing and its evaluation (p. 15).

Peer mentoring/mentoring is assumed to serve as a safe place where teachers may apply any form of reflection in collaboration with other teachers through engagement with each others' mentoring processes. This assumption is supported by Kurtts and Levin (2000), who studied a model of peer-based relationships for pre-service teachers. They assert that the structure of pre-service teachers working together "encourage[s] reflective practices of pre-service teachers by engaging them in interpersonal interactions and self-analysis" (p. 308). Similarly, Fairley (2003) suggests that "reflecting on specific problems and successes is important and can become a major focus of peer mentoring" (p. 4). The interaction and interchange between teachers in these processes facilitates deeper reflection because they introduce "contrasting perspectives and engenders a sense of reciprocity and accountability" (Fairley, 2003, p. 5).

Peer mentoring/mentoring is supportive in nature. In other words, teachers are not isolated and do not have to struggle with difficulties on their own. Therefore, it provides increased support on the job. The process encourages observation of practice, identification of areas for improvement through feedback and reflection, planning changes, enacting them, and then observing them again in order to reflect upon further change. This aligns with reflective practice. In essence, the core of peer mentoring/mentoring is reflection on the process.

These two key theoretical understandings – social constructivism and collaborative reflection – are key principles that facilitate understanding of the basis for how peer mentoring/mentoring works in educational situations and as such underpin the mentoring issues addressed in this volume.

2.2 Mentoring: A Theoretical Framework

Kram's (1983) open systems perspective on mentoring provides the general theoretical framework for research conducted by the authors that is reported in this volume. Based on the results of an interview study of 18 developmental relationships in a corporate setting, Kram (1983) created a four phase conceptual model through which mentoring relationships progress: (1) initiation (6 months to 1 year) "during which time the relationship is started"; (2) cultivation (2–5 years), "during which time the range of functions provided expands to maximum"; (3) separation (6 months to 2 years), "during which time the established nature of the relationship is substantially altered by structured changes in the organisational context and/or by psychological changes within one or both individuals"; and, (4) redefintion (indefinite), "during which time the relationship evolves a new form that is significantly different from the past, or the relationship ends entirely" (p. 614). Movement from one phase to the next is marked by Turning Points "characterised by particular effective experiences, developmental functions, and interaction patterns that are shaped by individuals' needs and surrounding organisational circumstances" (p. 621). According to mentoring theory, mentors perform career -related functions including sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection, and

challenging assignments. They also provide psychosocial functions, including role modelling, acceptance-and-confirmation, counselling, and friendship (Kram, 1983). A number of other research studies argue that mentors also function as role models to their mentees by demonstrating appropriate behaviour either implicitly or explicitly (Ensher, Heun, & Blanchard, 2003; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Scandura, 1992). However, whereas Kram (1983) characterized role modelling as a psychosocial function, others consider it a discrete third component of mentoring. Kram (1985) posits that the more supportive strategies the mentor employs in the mentoring process, the more beneficial the relationship will be for the mentee. A mentor is expected to provide all or some of these functions.

Although these types of traditional mentoring functions have been found in informal mentorship, they have also been identified in research in formal mentoring relationships. Noe's (1988) study of formal mentoring found that mentors provide career functions and psychological functions which are almost identical to those reported in Kram's (1983) work. The sole difference is that in Noe's (1988) research, coaching behaviours "share more common variance with the psychosocial functions" (Noe, 1988, p. 473). In studies of formal mentoring, formal mentors have been found to fulfil more psychological functions than career-related functions (Chao, 1992; Noe, 1988).

Given that this framework was developed in a business setting, a number of teacher education research studies, which investigate issues of mentoring, provide evidence that the framework is applicable to most aspects of mentoring in teacher education. This appears to confirm that teachers can benefit from the career and psychosocial dimension through the interaction with mentors in educational settings.

In teacher education, psychological aspects of mentoring include providing social and emotional support (Hew & Knapczyk, 2007), and valuing mentees' contributions (Hew & Knapczyk, 2007). Glatthorn (1995) relates this type of support to the "cultivation of the protégé's positive self-esteem, confidence and development of feelings of effectiveness" (p. 561). Learning the ability to overcome their problems and to self reflect develops both mentee's confidence and their job satisfaction. This has a very valuable tool for a teacher's continual professional growth (Saban, 2002; Wang, 2001). The latter has also been demonstrated in several studies, which emphasise the fact that mentoring improves teachers' job satisfaction (Burke & McKeen, 1997). It may also be argued that when mentees' confidence increases they enjoy their job more, i.e., working more effectively. In Hew and Knapczyk's (2007) study, mentors tend to use more career-related types of functions than psychological functions in the study context, "mentors were awarded points for their grades based on the quality of suggestions and feedback they gave to practicum teachers" (p. 32).

Most of the career- related functions in Kram's (1983) framework have been identified in teacher mentoring studies. Career-related functions of mentoring involve providing direct career-enhancing support by modelling effective teaching

methods (e.g., Ensher et al., 2003; P. Hudson, 2004; Watana, 1993; Wood & Geddis, 1999), providing coaching and directing feedback (e.g., Ensher et al., 2003; P. Hudson, 2010; Le & Vásquez, 2011; Malderez & Bodoczky, 1999; Zachary, 2002), facilitating access to resources, and suggesting problem- solving strategies (Hew & Knapczyk, 2007). In the process of mentoring, mentees have been provided with opportunities to learn, thrive, shape and reshape life's professional and psychological pathways (Crasborn, Hennissen, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2011; He, Prater, & Steed, 2011). Studies of mentoring in a variety of contexts, including in schools, colleges, and universities have revealed that mentoring facilitates learning. It occurs in the school context where the teaching and learning activities happen daily (Meyer, 2002).

In the mentoring process, beginning teachers seek the support and assistance of more experienced colleagues as they initially socialised in the profession as new teachers (P. B. Hudson, 2012a, 2012b; Kent, Feldman, & Hayes, 2009), especially when they encounter the tensions and contradictions of their teaching career (Jenkins, Smith, & Maxwell, 2009; Johnson, 1996; Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004). This is when they seek help and support from their mentor teachers. Mentors provide information and opportunities that will assist the beginning teachers to survive and thrive in their current situation. In effect, beginning teachers are learning to become teachers through their experience of the mentoring relationship. In recent studies (e.g., Crasborn et al., 2011; Weinberg & Lankau, 2010; Zeichner, 2010) researchers have shown that mentoring new teachers assists the latter's teacher learning. More specifically, research has shown that different model of mentoring programs provide effective support to beginning teachers so that they can develop a higher level of teaching skills, and pedagogical knowledge (Crasborn et al., 2011; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Saban, 2002; Spezzini, Austin, Abbott, & Littleton, 2009) and teaching efficacy (Yost, 2002). Moreover, the current research suggests that mentoring also serves as an important strategy for the beginning teachers' professional development. Mentoring is different from other approach such as tutoring, training and coaching in the sense that it has strongly based on the supportive relationship which also helps to develop mutual respect and collaboration between both participants (Gaskin, Lumpkin & Tennant, 2003).

From the research, it becomes evident that Kram's (1983) framework may be considered a comprehensive model to investigate issues of mentoring in teacher education. This framework serves as a basis for the analysis of mentoring occurring in a number of studies found in chapters in this volume. Yet, whatever effort the traditional mentor makes to develop an open relationship with her/her mentee, there is always an awareness of the mentor's authority due to status, age, wisdom and experience (see Chap. 3 for a discussion of these issues). Therefore, it may be argued that the career-enhancing support provided by mentors should be different from that provided by peer mentors due to these differences in status. The chapter now turns to describe the theoretical framework for peer mentoring.

2.3 Peer Mentoring: A Theoretical Framework

The importance of peer support has been recognised in the literature and the diverse types of support that peer mentoring offers are well documented. Like traditional mentoring, peer mentorships depend on a strong learning relationship of mutual trust and benefit. However, peer mentoring differs sharply from traditional mentoring in the sense that equality replaces hierarchy in the mentoring relationship.

Peer support is defined as being provided by someone who is in a similar position to the recipient. There are three widely used frameworks for describing the basic support functions peers can offer to others, namely those developed by Kram (1983), Kram and Isabella (1985), and McDougall and Beattie's (1997) peer mentoring models. All three frameworks are based on findings regarding long term peer developmental relationships and each has revealed some interesting aspects pertaining to peer-based relationships. All three frameworks support the findings of others regarding the benefits that individuals involved in peer-based relationships can offer each other. However, Kram and Isabella's (1985) framework is the most comprehensive. It is based upon findings from a long-term peer-based relationship and explicitly details the support outcomes of this process.

Parallel to the mentoring literature, the functions of peer mentors may be categorised under two broad headings, namely those related to career enhancement and psychosocial support for peers or colleagues. The chapter now turns to a detailed description of these support outcomes and discusses the empirical evidence, focusing in particular upon Kram and Isabella's (1985) findings, regarding management in order to examine the support outcomes of peer-based relationships which shape the field of teacher education. This section provides a brief overview of these frameworks and argues for the appropriateness of Kram and Isabella's (1985) model as the best available synthesis of career enhancing and psychosocial support outcomes related to peer-based relationships.

2.3.1 Career-Related Functions

According to Kram (1985), career functions "are those aspects of a relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organization" (p. 22). What follows are the three most prominent career-related functions, which are synthesised in the frameworks, and that have been empirically investigated in the teacher education literature.

2.3.1.1 Information Sharing

According to Kram and Isabella (1985), "information sharing gives both individuals technical knowledge and perspectives on the organization that better enables them to get their work done" (p. 117). McDougall and Beattie (1997) argue that information sharing may be considered a learning behaviour because, by being engaged as utilitarian and holistic peer mentors, individuals can learn from each other through a free exchange of information and ideas, sharing their work issues as a result of mutual work interests while adopting different professional perspectives. Mumford's (1993) classification of peer relationships also emphasises that information sharing about organisational changes and difficulties is one type of peer relationship evidenced among colleagues at work. It is apparent that within organisational settings, peers can learn from each other through information exchange.

In the teaching contexts, information exchange is believed to occur widely because teachers consider each other important sources of useful ideas and clarification (Collinson & Cook, 2004; Rymer, 2002). When two teachers work together, informally or formally, they are involved in a circle of exchanging information about their teaching job, school policies, and students. This exchanging of information helps them do their job better. During the practicum when pre-service teachers are generally unaware of the teaching situations at their school (Crookes, 2003; Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005; Turner, 2006), they tend to seek others' help. As such, sharing or exchanging information and experiences of their teaching and their schools seems to occur naturally because they tend to find peers more accessible in terms of information provision (Walsh, Elmslie, & Tayler, 2002). Harnish and Wild (1994) found that information and materials sharing and exchange still occurrs through participants' informal interactions even after their peer mentoring project had ended. These findings align with Kurtts and Levin's (2000) study, and with that of Walsh et al., (2002), both of which confirm that a peer-based structure creates opportunities for pre-service teachers to share thoughts, experiences, and teaching resources. Information sharing, albeit limited due to their lack of wisdom and expertise, allows pre-service teachers to assist each other in teaching at a higher standard; or, at least it provides positive confirmation of their practice for one another. In a study of a peer-based model (learning circles) for pre-service teachers during their practicum, Le Cornu (2007) found that peer support was perceived to be associated with the sharing of ideas, advice, and different strategies, and the sharing of resources in a non-judgemental environment.

2.3.1.2 Career Strategising

The career strategising functions used by peers can engage individuals in discussions about career-related problems, career options, and ways to explore their personal career development (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Mumford (1993) suggests that colleagues often seek each other out to discuss particular problems and to learn from each other. This is because they have different degrees of knowledge, skills,

expertise and may have different perspectives. Based on their findings, McDougall and Beattie (1997) argue that peer mentors are involved in sharing and discussing work issues as a result of their mutual work situation and different professional perspectives. These results suggest that peers can see each other as sources of advice in the development of their careers.

In the field of teacher education, there has been little evidence to show that teachers provide career strategies to other teachers in their schools. Few studies foreground the role of peers in offering each other strategies to deal with career-related problems through discussion of each other's career-related problems or career options. For example, Harnish and Wild's (1994) study revealed that the peer mentoring process created opportunities for discussion with peers on "teaching philosophy and methodologies, assumptions about learning styles and teaching effectiveness, and the many decisions that confront teaching faculty daily" (p. 200). This study emphasises that such discussions may lead to instructional and curriculum changes and improvement on the part of the teachers. In another peer-based study in a pre-service EFL teachers' teaching context, Vacilotto and Cummings (2007) explore at the benefits of peer coaching in a TEFL/TESL program. Pre-service EFL teacher research participants reported that they developed their teaching skills through discussion of teaching practice with their peers.

Although the evidence available is limited, it appears that pre-service teachers may see each other as persons with whom they can freely discuss their teaching concerns or their career options during their practicum experiences, whether or not these peer mentoring relationships are formally or informally arranged. The discussions that occur in peer based relationships make them aware of their own work as teachers, and in many cases, they may perceive their peers as resources in the process of learning how to teach.

2.3.1.3 Job Related Feedback

In addition to the functions of information sharing and career strategising, Kram and Isabella's (1985) peer mentoring function framework examines situations where individuals can develop their professionalism. Through giving and receiving non-evaluative feedback concerning their professional practices, they can identify their own strengths and become aware of their weaknesses. In McDougall and Beattie's (1997) study, job- related feedback is embedded in coaching where peers can give feedback to others. Feedback is also identified as a mentoring function in Kram's (1983) framework, although it should be non-evaluative and reciprocal (as previously discussed).

Concerning job-related feedback in peer-based relationships in teacher education, most of the research has shown the value of the job related feedback that peers can offer to each other (e.g., Dang, 2013; Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009; Slater & Simmons, 2001; Walsh et al., 2002). The majority of studies have focused on the use of peer coaching in pre-service teachers' teaching practice, and identified feedback as one indispensable element in post-observation

conferences. Teaching related feedback can occur informally or formally as a tool for teachers' personal development as well as for their professional development. Goos et al. (2002) found that peer feedback encourages a peer to critique or reflect on his or her partner's teaching. In such circumstances, a peer's function is to provide an extra pair of eyes to see the strengths and weaknesses of each other's teaching practices. In this way, they help the other to improve their teaching skills and to see their own teaching styles from another perspective (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; Bell, 2001; Benedetti, 1999; Goodnough et al., 2009). Kurtts and Levin (2000) assert that peer coaching gives pre-service teachers opportunities for feedback from peers in a collegial support environment, which facilitates their reflective practices.

2.3.1.4 Summary

It is likely that in any peer-based relationships between teachers, both formal and informal feedback on any or all aspects of teaching such as lesson planning, curriculum design, classroom instruction, or classroom management occurs as a result of their mutually experienced teaching context and their involvement in a professional relationship. As the previous discussion shows, these career enhancement functions derived from Kram and Isabella's (1985) peer mentoring framework are based upon organizational settings that exist in the field of teacher education. There is evidence that during teaching practice, through peer-based relationships, teachers are likely to provide some or all of these career enhancing functions to support each other through the experience, and to facilitate professional and personal development. However, peer mentoring is also defined by its psychosocial functions. It is to this subject that this chapter now turns.

2.3.2 Psychosocial Functions

According to Kram and Isabella (1985), psychosocial functions support "an individual's sense of competence and confidence in a professional role" (p. 117), providing such features as "confirmation", "emotional support", "personal feedback", and "friendship" (Kram, 1985, p. 136). These four types of support were also found to some degree within McDougall and Beattie's (1997) framework on peer mentoring relationships. Thus they are used as the basis for the discussion in the four sections which follow.

2.3.2.1 Confirmation

Through peer-based relationships, confirmation functions are grounded in "sharing perceptions, values, and beliefs related to their lives at work and through discovering important commonalities in their viewpoints" without risking exposure to others in the work place (Kram & Isabella, 1985, p. 118). This function deemed seen to be supportive for individuals in developing their confidence in their professional work. Peer mentoring differs from mentoring in the sense that the former fosters a more equal relationship than traditional expert-novice mentoring. The peer mentoring relationship tends to be relatively stress-free and enjoyable because peer collaboration occurs in a non-threatening and non-evaluative environment. Participants in a peer mentoring process can gain confidence in each other through sharing their beliefs and points of view without fear of losing face or risking exposure to others.

When examining this function in peer-based relationships in teacher education, several studies (Forbes, 2004; Goodnough et al., 2009) provide evidence to show that teachers can help their colleagues to develop confidence in their teaching. For example, Forbes (2004) found that apart from professional growth, participation in peer mentoring provided beginning teachers with a support mechanism through which they developed confidence in risk-taking. Similarly, Goodnough et al. (2009) assert that working with another pre-service teacher helped the participating teachers to build up more confidence in teaching and presenting their ideas to their school mentors. In another study, McCarthy and Youens (2005) found the critical role of peer interaction in supporting beginning teachers to take risks and reduce their deficiencies in their teaching practice as they did not feel being judged and assessed by more superior teachers.

2.3.2.2 Emotional Support

Peers provide the psychosocial function of emotional support by listening to and counselling each other during periods of transition and stress. As a result of confronting similar problems at work or based on their own immediate experiences, peer mentors "may more readily offer empathetic emotional support rather than just sympathetic support" (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002, p. 119). Mumford (1993), who supports Kram and Isabella's (1985) descriptions of psychosocial peer functions, adds that peers or colleagues can go to each other for information or work related discussions as well as for emotional support (Mumford, 1993).

A number of other studies (Bullough et al., 2003; Cosh, 1999; Forbes, 2004; e.g.,Goodnough et al., 2009; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Le Cornu, 2007; Nokes, Bullough, Egan, Birrell, & Merrell Hansen, 2008; Slater & Simmons, 2001; Walsh et al., 2002) has confirmed the role of peers in lessening stress, burnouts, intimidation, and isolation. Working in pairs or groups of peers makes them feel supported and committed to shared responsibility for their situation (Campbell-Evans & Maloney, 1997; Maloney & Campbell-Evans, 1998; Walsh et al., 2002).

2.3.2.3 Personal Feedback

In addition, peers are likely to give and receive "personal feedback" on personal problems or non-teaching related issues. Being of equal status, peers may not feel constrained when discussing issues with each other arising from their teaching jobs. Thus, they are more likely to offer each other personal feedback concerning a wide range of topics including those related to personal relationships and family.

Providing personal feedback on personal problems or non- teaching related issues can occur naturally during the teaching practice when relationships develop further as a result of trust and respect. A study of a cohort-model teacher preparation program by Dinsmore and Wenger (2006) show that peer relationships foster a sense of community within the cohort in informal social situations as well as in class. This function is supported by findings which suggest that apart from teachers helping each other to develop their profession, they reported that they found others to be a source of personal support in all areas of their lives (Hsu, 2005; Nguyen & Luong, 2008). Teachers reported a release of feelings when they shared their personal problems and received feedback from their peers.

2.3.2.4 Friendship

Kram and Isabella (1985) also found that peers can provide friendship, enabling individuals to become confidants. Psychosocial functions are more personal: they rely on an emotional bond between individuals. Angelique et al. (2002) emphasise that "because of the relative equality, participants may more readily offer confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship than participants in traditional mentoring relationships" (p. 199).

Such evidence indicates that peer relationships at work can reach the level of friendship. Rymer (2002) posits that non-traditional mentoring needs to engage individuals in open-ended dialogue about a wide range of issues, including personal matters such as sharing parental experiences. Similarly, Walsh et al. (2002) reported one of the benefits of their peer-pairing model was that their student teachers developed new friendships as a result of pairs working together during the practicum. The participants in the research stressed that they did not feel alone. This is confirmed in Hsu's (2005) study which revealed that student teachers served as supportive friends and often asked their peers for assistance with both professional and personal issues.

Such psychosocial functions have only been studied to a limited extent in teacher education at both pre-service and in-service levels. Although limited, overall, research studies at both the pre-service and in-service levels suggest that peers can support each other, both emotionally and personally.

2.3.2.5 Summary

Kram and Isabella's (1985) framework for peer-based relationships serves a platform for explaining most of the aspects of support that peers can offer each other.

Literature has shown that interactions with peers in any kinds of forms either formally or informally provide some or all of these types of support (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Dang, 2013; Hawkey, 1995; Laker, Laker, & Lea, 2008; Le Cornu, 2008; Nokes et al., 2008; Piraino Jr, 2006). There is a dearth of research into how these types of peer support work in teacher education and whether these functions can be fulfilled by peers in a formal peer mentoring relationship. These issues merit further investigation. This is particularly the case since peer support has been recognised as being highly valuable for pre-service teachers as there are often limited resources and opportunities to support their professional practice during the practicum. The support their pre-service teachers received from their peers may be critical for them to apply new knowledge, methods, and techniques in the classroom.

2.4 Summary and Conclusions

From the discussion of research in this chapter, what have we learned from "big T Theory" that can offer ways of understanding how it might be applied to "small t theory" situations? First, the research reviewed was undertaken primarily in the United States and Western countries. Thus, it may, or may not, t translate readily to the Asian context. The use of such an array of different models of mentoring suggests that there is no universal agreement about what is meant by peer mentoring/mentoring. As revealed in the literature, mentoring/peer mentoring has been applied in different ways in different contexts. Yet, this chapter argues for the use of mentoring/peer mentoring for psychological and career enhancement support underscored by social constructivism and collective reflection. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation for the implementation of mentoring/peer mentoring in teacher education. Drawing on Kram' s (1983) and Kram and Isabella's (1985) theories on mentoring, peer mentoring and teacher education, in the next chapter, this volume investigates the practices and the implementation of different models of mentoring in a particular Asian context.

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Chapter 3
TESOL Practicum Mentoring for Pre-service Teachers: The Vision Versus the Reality

Abstract This chapter critically reviews the use of mentoring for pre-service teachers during the pre-service practicum. Then, it examines an example which reports findings from a study which investigated the situation of mentoring pre-service language teachers during the practicum in Vietnam.

3.1 Introduction

Although the research literature recommends the use of effective mentoring as part of teacher education programs, it seems that to date, there is a dearth of research into the particular place and usefulness of mentoring as part of teacher education programs. This chapter reviews the current literature regarding teacher education, practicum provision, and mentoring, and its benefit and limitations. Then I report the findings from a research study into the vision and reality of mentoring for pre-service EFL teachers during their TESOL practicum in a context of Vietnam. Some information of this chapter was drawn from the following conference papers.

Hudson, P., & Nguyen, H. T. M. (2008). *What do EFL pre-service teachers expect from their mentors*? . Paper presented at the AARE conference: Changing climates: Education for Sustainable futures, Brisbane, Australia Brisbane

Nguyen, T.M.H. (2007). Peer mentoring for pre-service EFL teachers during their practicum. In J. Kiggins and L. Kervin (Eds) *Quality in Teacher Education*: *Considering Different Perspectives and Agenda* (Proceedings of 2007 ATEA Conference) (pp 391–404), Australia: Australian Teacher Education Association

3.2 Practicum in Pre-service Language Teacher Education

3.2.1 Pre-service Teacher Education

There is currently an upsurge of interest in the preparation of teachers in general and EFL teachers in particular, the impact of educational reform in a number of places throughout the world. Without question, the results of the extant studies provide

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ample support for the critical role of pre-service teacher education in the pre-service teacher's long life of professional development, and on the teaching practices they bring to their future careers (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005; Price & Valli, 2005; Toomey et al., 2005). Since pre-service teachers bring many of the skills they have acquired during their pre-service education programs to their teaching, it follows that the quality of a teacher depends substantially upon the quality of their pre-service teacher education programs. A current trend in pre-service teacher education for the twenty-first century is a shift from a transmission to a transformative training model. The latter aims to develop the pre-service teachers' inquiry skills as well as a critical approach to teaching as a reflective practice. Thus, pre-service teacher education programs are expected to move pre-service teachers beyond the conventional emphasis on knowledge to programs that develop "theory, skills, and knowledge about teaching" (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Pre-service teachers are engaged through inquiry to construct "their own professional knowledge"(Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2000, p. 252) about teaching and learning to teach, and about promoting critical reflection in a context of collaboration.

Despite the importance of pre-service teacher education programs, and the considerable effort that has been made to improve their quality, they have become the subject of increasing criticism (e.g., Farrell, 2001; Luo, 2003; Wideen et al., 1998). For example, some pre-service teacher education programs have been referred to as "a weak intervention layered between the life history of being a student and the socialization of the school" (Wideen et al., 1998, p. 144). Furthermore, Sim (2006) argues that it has always been the case that there are limited opportunities for pre-service teacher socialization into their future careers.

Similar concerns have been raised about pre-service EFL teacher education which has been critiqued as requiring considerable development (e.g., D Freeman, 1994; Nunan, 2003) as it has not reached the expectations held for it regarding either the number or quality of teachers (Luo, 2003; Nalliah & Thiyagarajah, 2000; Rotarwut, 2006). Indeed, during the last 10 years, research centered upon language teacher education has suggested that pre-service teacher education may not have sufficiently prepared these teachers for "real life" teaching (e.g., Farrell, 2001; Nieme, 2002; Rotarwut, 2006). In a recent study of EFL teacher education programs in Taiwan, Luo (2003) identified a gap between theory and practice in EFL teacher education programs. Pre-service EFL teachers in the study claimed that they were not adequately provided with everything that they needed for teaching EFL in actual teaching settings; and, that the provision of teaching experience was needed. Johnson (2000) argues to the effect that TESOL teacher education programs do not provide teachers with enough practice. The sum of the things findings suggest that pre-service teacher education programs need to be increasingly linked with real world professional experience. Furthermore, a particular problem may well occur when teacher preparation programs pay too much attention to theory and not enough to professional practice. Many studies (e.g., Farrell, 2001; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Nunan, 2003) that document the need for the reform of EFL teacher education recommend a greater attention to enhancing the effectiveness of pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice. In response to the call for reconceptualizing the

knowledge base for language teacher education, Freeman and Johnson (1998) suggest that teacher education should focus more on teaching as it is learned and practiced rather than on the transmission of a body of teaching content to student teachers. Thus, the field experience or practicum, where pre-service teachers are challenged to learn to teach in a meaningful context, has become central to pre-service teacher education reform.

3.2.2 Role of the Practicum

Practicum has been valued as one of the most critically important components for preparing prospective teachers (e.g., Crookes, 2003; Dobbins, 1994; Farrell, 2001). The practicum may be considered the initial chance to enhance the effectiveness of the pre-service teacher's professional practice. It seems, almost without exception, that pre-service teachers themselves highly value their practical experiences during their practicum (Bullough et al., 2002; Burant & Kirby, 2002). Research undertaken by many researchers (including, for example, Aiken & Day, 1999; Gimbert, 2001) indicates that student teaching experiences exert a great influence on pre-service teachers.

The literature has documented the benefits that most pre-service teachers have gained from their initial field experiences. The practicum offers the pre-service teacher a site in which to observe and work with real students, teachers, and current curricula in authentic settings. During their practicum, pre-service teachers are socialized into their profession (Carter, 1997; Farrell, 2001). For the great majority of pre-service teachers, their practicum offer a unique opportunity to apply what they have learned at the university in real life language classrooms, and to experience handling a variety of practical issues and demands that teachers typically encounter.

The school-based practicum experience is valued as an authentic and meaningful context for pre-service teachers to prepare for and practice their teaching skills, by extension improving their teaching performance (Morton, 2004; Vibulphol, 2004). It influences the pre-service teacher's attitude towards and impressions of the nature of learning to teach (Farrell, 2001). Gebhard (1990) argues that interaction during their practicum can help EFL student teachers change their teaching behavior, especially when they are provided with opportunities to talk about their experiences of their practicum with other stakeholders. This practical experience also allows pre-service teachers to receive feedback on their teaching performance from their colleagues and/or supervisors or mentors. The provision of feedback from mentor teachers has been found to be of practical value in shaping their teaching directions (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Hudson, 2002; Turnbull, 2005) and/or "developing strategies for handling different dimensions of a language lesson" (Richards & Nunan, 1990, p. 101). Indeed, the practicum is a powerful influence on pre-service teacher education as it not only "provides an arena where knowledge and skills can be developed" (Richards & Nunan, 1990,

p. 101) and bridges "the gap between theory and practice in the learning of teaching" (Smith & Lev-Ari, 2005, p. 291), but also prepares student teachers to learn how to continue learning towards a more relevant engagement with professional learning about their work (Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2000; Groundwater-Smith, Deer, Sharp, & March, 1996; Hastings, 2010)

As part of the responses to the aforesaid criticisms of teacher education, several institutions managing pre-service teacher education programs have increased the time that student teachers spend in the field (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999). However, simply extending their practicum may not be the solution. The literature centered on issues related to the practicum in teacher education shows that not all of the learning experiences from the practicum are necessarily educative and/or desirable (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Dobbins, 1994; Lange, 1990; Zeichner, 2010). Poor quality teaching experience has been found to adversely affect pre-service teachers' motivation and professional development. This, in addition to poor preparation for the reality of teaching in real school settings, suggests that lack of support may be the keys to ineffective induction into the profession. Furthermore, several studies have shown that pre-service teachers' initial field experiences during their practicum sometimes "contribute to the development of what has been termed a 'utilitarian teaching perspective' (Dobbins, 1994, p. 30). Ditfurthand and Legutke (2002) suggest that one of the reasons why teacher education programs are increasingly being criticized is the lack coherence between the curriculum framework and the practicum which is often seen as "an alien element among university courses" (p. 163).

Field experience has been criticized for simply driving pre-service teachers to imitate or model the teaching behavior of school mentors rather than cultivating and experimenting with new ideas of their own (Myers, 1996). In Dobbins's (1994) research into student teachers' perceptions of their experiences during their final year practicum, he concluded that the traditional practicum in which the pre-service teacher, is involved was not viewed as a "learning journey" (p. 1) but rather seen as a "series of hurdles to be got over" or as a "test to be passed" (p. 1). Dobbins (1994) advocates that reflection should be an essential component of the practicum to enhance its values. Glisan's (1993) summary of the status of many teacher training programs in foreign language education still holds some validity:

> (1) the teacher training programs belong to the university;(2) the university provides the theory behind the practice; and (3) the public school provides the hands-on practice. In this linear model, the responsibilities between higher education and basic education are clearly delineated and efforts at collaboration are often given lip service only (p. 219).

More recent studies (e.g., Arnold, 2006; Farrell, 2008; Hudson, 2010; Leslie, Sandra, David, Andrew, & Becky, 2008; Yan & He, 2010; Zeegers, 2005) have provided further information on this topic. For example, Liu's (2005) research found that the pre-service EFL teachers in her study tended to follow their mentors' English teaching method. Focus was upon vocabulary and grammar rather than on their students' communicative competence. It appeared that pre-service teachers tended to either accept or deviate from the practices they observed in their assigned

school despite the school mentors' practices not matching the pre-service teachers' university education and currently advocated practices. In Dobbins' words, they "are absorbed with the present- with 'surviving' rather than learning for the future" (1994, p. 30). This is confirmed in a number of studies (e.g., T. P. A. Le, 2007; V. C. Le, 2013) which show that pre-service EFL teachers tend to be concerned with their appropriation of their teacher mentors rather than learning for the future.

During the practicum, although two stakeholders (university supervisors and teacher mentors) play a vital role in developing pre-service teachers' professional practice, the role of university supervisors is limited as they are often perceived as being "out of touch with school" (Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009, p. 305). This is coupled with their limited authority over student teachers while the latter are at their practicum schools (Zeichner, 2010). In addition, their workload leaves them limited time to spend during their infrequent visits to pre-service teachers' classrooms (Hsu, 2005; Slick, 1995). Thus, teacher mentoring has been considered the more critical component in developing pre-service teachers' teaching practice and in providing them with support (Farrell, 2008; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Hsu, 2005; Petersen, 2007). In the next section, the use of mentoring in school-based field experience for pre-service teachers is discussed.

3.3 Mentoring in Pre-service Teacher Education

3.3.1 Mentoring

As suggested in Chap. 2, mentoring is typically described as a process in which a more experienced teacher support a less experienced teacher both professionally and psychosocially. During the practicum, a pre-service teacher is normally assigned to an experienced teacher at the practicum school. The school-based teacher mentor is expected to develop the pre-service teachers' learning to teach by modeling their teaching practice, guidance and helping them to overcome context-specific difficulties.

Mentoring research has proliferated over the past year, providing ample evidence of the benefits of school mentoring for preservice teachers during their practicum (Ambrosetti, Knight, & Dekkers, 2014; Mann & Tang, 2012; Wang & Odell, 2002; Woullard & Coats, 2004). There is a substantial body of literature documenting the numerous benefits of mentoring for pre-service teachers (See Chap. 2 for more reviews). There is also strong empirical evidence that pre-service teachers receive psychosocial and professional support from their mentors (See Chap. 2). In addition, the relationship that the pre-service teacher establishes with their mentor can increase the former confidence (Mau, 1997), self-awareness and self-esteem. And, it may reduce their stress level (Chow, Tang, & So, 2004). Mentoring can also help mentees to engage in and become part of the school community through the network of relations at school. Pre-service teachers in numerous studies report that the benefits of field-based

mentoring are among some of the most influential aspects of their teacher education experience. However, mentoring does not always follow the pattern expected.

3.3.2 Limitations of School-Based Mentoring

While the literature on effective mentoring has grown dramatically, research into mentoring practices has also revealed some less positive effects (Long, 1997). Such situations have been attributed to several factors such as lack of resources to do the mentoring job effectively (Farrell, 2001; Hudson, Nguyen, & Hudson, 2009; Reid, 1999; Slick, 1995), lack of time (e.g.,Bush & Coleman, 1995; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Evans, Abbott, Goodyear, & Pritchard, 1996; Farrell, 2001), and lack of appropriately trained mentors (Campbell & Brummett, 2007; Ehrich et al., 2004; Peterman, 2003). According to Zeichner (1996, p. 219), one of the more serious problems is that student teachers throughout the world are often "placed in classrooms where the teaching they are exposed to contradicts what they are taught in the colleges". In a study into pre-service teachers' professional practice, Sim (2006) showed that pre-service teachers and school-based teachers can develop particular tensions as a result of conflicting teaching approaches. This is illustrated by a case study which reported the frustrating teaching practices a student teacher experienced with her cooperating teachers during her school-based field experience as a result of conflict in the practice of constructivism. In this case study, the student teacher had little opportunity to reflect and experience new teaching methods but to accommodate her cooperating teacher in order to satisfy their cooperating teachers (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004).

Another important constraint on the traditional mentoring process is the availability of teachers as role models and mentors for their junior teachers (Kadar, 2005; Long, 1997; McGuire & Reger, 2003; Thomas, 2000). Mentoring a pre-service teacher involves increased responsibility for mentor teachers, increasing their daily workloads. A danger related to this is that teacher mentors may become overwhelmed by the task of mentoring pre-service teachers and their increased workloads at their schools (Ehrich et al., 2004; Ewell, 2004; McGee, 2001; Zeichner, 1996). In keeping with these findings, Wynn &Kromrey (2000) suggest that school-based teachers may be unable to guide student teachers effectively because of their school responsibilities. Some mentor teachers may well see the process of mentoring pre-service teachers as a burden (Farrell, 2001). Mentors may not feel that they have sufficient time to work with their mentees. A possible consequence is that mentees may feel hesitant to share their personal and professional concerns with their mentors, particularly "if there is high competition for a mentor's time" (McGuire & Reger, 2003, p. 58). Even more seriously, if the mentors do not perform their roles as expected, some pre-service teachers may receive insufficient feedback from their mentors during their practicum or internships (Edmundson, 1990). These problems may well affect the quality of the mentoring process. In such cases pre-

service teachers may feel that their school-based practicum experiences were ineffectively mentored or supervised (Morton, 2004).

Moreover, traditional mentoring has been criticized on the basis of its being a hierarchical relationship. Several research studies have documented the socalled "misused power" in the mentoring relationship between the students and their teachers (Kopp & Hinkle, 2006; Mau, 1997). In a mentoring relationship, the mentor has more power and status than the mentee (pre-service teacher). In other words, the traditional mentoring relationship fosters an unequal balance of power (Eisen, 2001; Le Cornu, 2005; Maguire, 2001; McGuire & Reger, 2003). At times, as a result of this uneasy relationship, mentees may become overly dependent on their mentors and the authority lying with said mentors (Halai, 2006; Woodd, 1997). The hierarchical structure of mentorship may well diminish pre-service teachers' opportunities to speak openly, and may make them "vulnerable to exploitation", or make it difficult for them to "find their own intellectual niche" (McGuire & Reger, 2003, p. 57). Stanulis and Russell (2000) found that as a result of this hierarchical status in mentorship during student teachers' teaching practice, student teachers offer became reluctant to admit to gaps in their knowledge and to ask for help due to fear of being evaluated detrimentally by their mentors. More specifically, the unequal relationship between mentors and mentees may put pre-service teachers in situations where they are reluctant to question what their mentors tell them to do (Liu, 2005; McGuire & Reger, 2003), even if the new teachers' teaching philosophies conflict with those of their mentors. It also becomes hard to "refuse her/his mentor's non-work related requests" (McGuire & Reger, 2003, p. 57). In a recent case study of the failure of a pre-service teacher during her practicum, Farrell (2007) found that observation by the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher can cause pre-service teacher nervousness. Indeed, in some cases, mentoring sessions with teacher mentors have been found to result in face-threatening situations for the mentees (Hyland & Lo, 2006; Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999).

An additional hindrance to the process of mentoring has been found in the field of foreign language pre-service teacher mentoring. This particular hindrance is related to language shift. Many pre-service foreign language teachers who use a foreign language as a means of instruction, especially as the current trend is towards moving away from traditional grammar-based foreign language teaching to a communicative language teaching methodology. Cooperating teachers (mentors) are expected to be at a particular level of foreign language competence and to have specific foreign language pedagogy so that they can successfully mentor pre-service teachers to reach the required level of professionalism during the practicum. However, the reality may well be different. For example, Nunan (2003) found the English language proficiency of teachers in public schools to be very poor in the Asia Pacific countries surveyed. It seems that there was a lack of adequate teacher preparation programs to assist in implementing communicative language teaching into their classroom practice. Furthermore, new teachers' frequent lack of familiarity with the foreign language, language culture, and new trends in foreign language specific pedagogy were likely to cause misunderstandings (Benedetti, 1999), resulting in conflict between many school mentors and the mentees (Johnson, 1996; V. C.

Le, 2013; Liu, 2005). This could result in the fact that some mentor-teachers being unable to provide pre-service teachers with the necessary assistance to develop their teaching practice skills. In such circumstances, pre-service teachers may not see the relevance of their learning-to-teach experience. Instead, some tend to apply survival strategies that will help them survive their experiences rather than seeking ways to be more flexible and reflective when teaching. In such cases, pre-service teachers are less likely to make full use of their early field experience.

In sum, although it is impossible to deny the crucial role that mentors play in providing personal and professional assistance to pre-service teachers, this traditional form of mentorship seems limited in a variety of ways. Limitations, which are particularly problematic, include, for example, the hierarchical structure and issues with limited availability. These can to some extent affect the quality of the pre-service teacher's practicum experiences. The research reviewed in this section has investigated effective teacher mentoring practices and its limitations. However, very little of the research in the field of mentoring is related to EFL teacher education; and, no research studies are available that investigate what EFL mentees need or expect from their mentors before they become involved in the process. As well, there is a paucity of research into how EFL mentees actually perceive their mentoring experience. The next section reports on a study, which fills this gap by investigating Vietnamese pre-service teachers' expectations of their mentoring in the EFL classroom and discussing their actual experiences of mentoring practices.

3.4 Examining an EFL Pre-service Mentoring Context

In an attempt to explore the issue of EFL mentoring practices, I researched the mentoring pre-service teachers during the practicum. My research conducted in two stages: in the first, I investigated what a group of pre-service trainees expected from their mentors. This was done before the practicum. In the second stage, I investigated the pre-service teachers' perceptions of their mentoring experiences during the practicum.

This research investigates the needs of a group of Vietnamese pre-service teachers' for mentoring in their EFL practicum classrooms. In particular, it examined the mentors' attributes and practices that the mentees believed would be required to assist their development as EFL teachers. All of the participants were completing a 4-year undergraduate degree. Semi-structured interviews conducted to gather data from the students before they commenced their final 6-week field experience in upper secondary schools in Hanoi. The interview questions focused on these pre-service teachers' perceived need for mentoring during their practicum. For example, one question asked about the ideal personal attributes they expected from their school mentors.

After the practicum, the pre-service teachers were invited to participate in focus group interviews. Semi-structured interviews with four to six participants in each group were conducted. The six 90 min focus group interviews allowed me, a the

researcher, to gather in-depth information that would reveal the feelings and thoughts of the participants about their experiences of working with their school mentors during their practicum.

3.4.1 Findings from the Pre-practicum Interviews

The results of the pre-practicum interviews provided an understanding of these Vietnamese pre-service teachers' needs and expectations for mentoring in their EFL teaching context. They highlighted the attributes and practices that pre-service teachers claimed they needed for a satisfactory mentoring experience. More details of these findings were presented at a conference in Australia in 2008 (See Hudson & Nguyen, 2008). Below is a summary of what the pre-service teachers expected from their mentors prior to their practicum.

In regard to the qualities of the mentors, there was a list of personal attributes which was expected from a mentor, including "enthusiastic, helpful, friendly, and knowledgeable about communicative competence, sympathetic, devoted, flexible, creative, caring and good listeners". There were also a number of less commonly desired qualities, including "serious, humorous, easy-going, strict, and devoted".

As reported in Hudson and Nguyen (2008), these preservice teachers expected their mentors to provide constructive guidance such as sharing teaching experiences, giving clear advice, observation, and provide feedback on both lesson plans and lessons. Modeling EFL teaching and discussing pre-service teachers' lesson plans before they taught their EFL lessons were highly required by the preservice teachers. In our study (Hudson & Nguyen, 2008), most of the participants' comments indicated that they expected to receive professional support in the form of their mentors' feedback on their lessons. As well as the participants considered mentors' feedback on lessons important. The general positive feeling in this regard is summarized below in one participant's comment:

> I hope we will receive a lot of mentor's feedback on our lesson and learn from that because they had experience when giving feedback, they will always suggest the methods in dealing with different teaching issues. Ideas from more experienced teachers definitely will help me a lot[1] (G03-Co05).

Mentors' feedback on lesson plans was another category commented on by the participants. Their most commonly shared feeling among these individuals was that they believed that their school mentors' feedback on their lesson plans would help them to understand how to design their lessons, thus improving their lesson planning skills. One pre-service teacher supported this position:

> Regarding lesson planning, I hope after receiving feedback from our school mentor, we will figure out how to do it and it becomes easier for us to design a lesson plan because we will know how to do it … by ourselves (G02-Co03).

As reported in Hudson and Nguyen (2008), the provision of the Vietnamese education system requirements was expected from preservice teachers, including

knowledge of the curriculum, assessment requirements, and school policies. As well, mentors should have knowledge of the students in the class. In addition, these pre-service teachers needed to have effective modeling of EFL teaching practices from their mentors. This included the method and manner of delivery, pronunciation and grammar, and writing lesson plans. The pre-service teachers also alluded to other needs including modeling the presentation of a stimulus to introduce a lesson, time management, dealing with student errors, and general classroom organisation. If mentors have knowledge of modeling practices required by the mentees then there may be greater opportunities for the latter to observe such practices.

These pre-service EFL teachers also discussed the importance of mentors providing particular pedagogical knowledge. In essence, "they wanted their mentors to articulate pedagogical knowledge such as teaching strategies for EFL classes, classroom management, motivating EFL students, and dealing with unexpected situations. They also indicated their need to know about blackboard writing skills, assessment and marking students' work, how to develop a rapport with students, and non-verbal communication. While, many of these pre-service teachers expressed concern about survival in the EFL classroom, there was also recognition that particular pedagogical knowledge would assist them to survive and lead them towards becoming effective teachers". (p. 5)

Finally, these pre-service teachers expressed their need for the feedback they expected to receive, and how that feedback should be given by their school mentors. They mainly focused on their mentors' provision of direct and detailed feedback about EFL teaching performance, lesson planning and preparation, English pronunciation and grammar, and content knowledge. In addition, classroom management and teaching strategies were consistent themes that emerged from the pre-service teachers interviews; hence, it was not surprising to find connections between system requirements, modeling of practices, pedagogical knowledge, and feedback. The preservice teacher reported in this study that they expected the feedback to be immediate, practical, detailed and frequent. These participants said that they wished to learn from the feedback and to make improvements in their teaching by avoiding previous mistakes and paying more attention to other issues suggested by their mentors.

Based on the interview data it seems that what pre-service EFL teachers in this study expected their mentors to provide paralleled the insights gained from examination of the literature on the mentoring process and the qualities expected of a mentor. However, the literature also raised the question of how effective mentoring actually was during the practicum, and the fact that effectiveness is a great concern for pre-service EFL teacher education. In the next section, I discuss the participants' perceptions of their actual mentoring experiences during their practicum.

3.4.2 Findings from Post-practicum Interviews

The participants in the six focus groups reported both on the positive support they received from their school mentors, and the problems they faced during their practicum. They expressed a mixture of concern and praise for the level of support they received.

3.4.2.1 Positive Support

Thirty two individual references were found in the data that related to positive support from school mentors. Mentors supported the pre-service teachers by providing them with feedback on their lessons and lesson plans, with guidance on teaching issues, and by being open to engage in discussion with them. Two of the participants expressed passionate feelings about how their school mentors commented on their lesson plans and lessons.

> She is enthusiastic in giving feedback on my lesson. She commented on teaching issues such as "writing on (the) blackboard", "teaching manner", "giving instruction", "teaching know-how, giving feedback on students", "communication", "time management" (G1-EP01).

Another added:

> I felt I got improvement in my teaching as (a) result of my school mentors' feedback after each lesson (G1-EP03).

One of the participants said that she felt motivated and supported when her school mentor allowed her to be innovative when teaching and was always open to discussion. This was praised by other group members who thought that this practice was not normally well-accepted by most of the school mentors at the practicum school. This argument also prompted discussion of some related negative experiences (See next section). Two of the participants detailed the motivational techniques they had learned and successfully applied in their classrooms. Three of the groups also discussed the requirements mentors set for them. Two participants in one group discussion said that their mentors' requirements for meetings, observation and lesson plans helped them to improve their teaching practice. They added:

> At the beginning, I felt stressful because we had to meet her before and after the lesson, later on, I felt like to listening to her feedback and suggestions for future lessons. It was absolutely helpful for me (G4-EP05).

> Although she required us to write lesson plans a lot, but she gave feedback and we could learn a lot from that. I think it was a tough requirement because we were busy doing a lot of school activities but it was worthy (G4-EP03).

In another group interview, there were varied opinions regarding whether the mentors' requirements for lesson plans were appropriate. One participant said that the mentors' requirements for lesson plans were reasonable and enabled the students to be well-prepared for the lesson should unexpected incidents occurred (for example, if one student teacher was too sick take a class, they could substitute immediately). However, two participants disagreed. One said that "We were too

tired to write lesson plans. It took us a lot of time. You know, she asked us to correct many times, creating unnecessary pressure on us" (G2-EP04). Heated discussion of this issue ensured during which the former tried to persuade her fellow interviewees that the school mentors' requirements for lesson plans were worthwhile. However, two other members dissented. The prevalent group viewpoint tended to converge on school mentors' unnecessary lesson planning requirements.

Despite limited professional support, some participants reported that their school mentors were emotionally supportive, a characteristics mostly attributed to the particular school mentor's personality. There were up to 20 instances that related to the positive personality attributes of the mentors. Among these, school mentors were perceived to be "sensible, trivial" (G1), "enthusiastic", "emotional" (G6) "psychological" (G4), "easy going", "open- minded" (G5), "kind", "understanding" "approachable" (G3), "respectful", and "sharing and caring" (G2). Other mentees offered other insights into their mentors' personalities; for example:

> If I have un-solved problems, I come to talk to her. I feel she is really there for me (G6-EP05).

> She is easy going, so we feel comfortable, therefore, less stressful. It can relieve stress when we teach in the class (G5-EP03).

> She is very kind. After a camping trip, she thought I was tired, so she even asked me to relax and she could be in charge of the class. The truth was I was too tired to teach the next lesson. Lucky me (G4-EP03).

3.4.2.2 Problems Encountered

Although all focus groups expressed positive feelings about the school mentors' support, they also described the negative experiences they had encountered during the mentoring process. Up to 43 references were found from the focus group interviews alluded to the participants' negative mentoring experiences, i.e., occasions upon which they felt less well supported. One of the most important negative mentoring experiences among these identified by several participants was the lack of feedback to develop their professional expertise.

The qualitative data suggested that the participants sought specific feedback from their school mentors and expected their school mentors to provided them with guidance and support during their practicum experience. However, often their experiences did not fully live up to their expectations. There were 15 references to negative opinions regarding their school mentors' observations and feedback, and 13 negative references about feedback on lesson plans. Most of respondents would have preferred more feedback. They recommended that there was not enough mentor-mentee interaction in terms of observing and giving feedback on lesson plans and lessons.

One of the participants showed his anger when he commented, "He did not give any comments on my lesson plan, even did not return my lesson plan" (G5-EP01). Another added, "She did not give much feedback, we taught what we had prepared in our lesson plan" (G2-EP01). Another said "she did not care what we wrote in the lesson plan, she said 'go ahead and teach'" (G5-EP03). One reason given for this

lack of feedback was "she is too busy to give feedback on our lesson plan" (G5-EP05). This opinion was further supported by active group interaction in the four groups which raised this issue, where one participant's opinion prompted further discussion by others. They raised their voices, expressing their feelings. They seemed to have had shared a common negative experience.

From the discussion, it seems that the school mentors' level of feedback on lesson plans was not acceptable to the pre-service teachers in four of the focus groups. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers really wanted more substantial mentor feedback which moved beyond correcting trivial grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes to providing direction on methodology and further discussion of lesson-related teaching matters. This was evident in the following participant's comments:

> The first two week she gave comments on some trivial grammar and punctuation mistakes only, for the next weeks she just saw it and signed for approval without reading and giving feedback" (G1-EP04).

This particular sub-theme was supported by gestures of agreement from other group members such as head nodding and excited facial expressions. This issue was clearly strongly felt. In most of my group interviews, the group members tended to interrupt each other's description of their experiences. They seemed to impatient vent their suppressed feelings on this issue. Their collective experience of this phenomenon is demonstrated in the following typical extract from one of the focus groups (See Textbox 3.1). This extract followed on from the statement of the positive opinions on school mentors' feedback by other members in the group.

Textbox 3.1: Focus Group Discussion of Lack of Mentor Input

G2-EP01: You are lucky but my mentors DID NOT correct anything in my lesson plan

G2-EP04: Yes, the same to me. In general, she gave very general feedback and had a quick look on my lesson plan and asked to us to correct our own lesson plans and when we teach, we teach what we want without any guidance and comments from my school mentors.

G2-EP01: He never returned my lesson plan as well (laugh)

All others: laugh

G2-EP03: My mentor just saw it and signed without any comments. She only gave feedback on the grammar, not teaching methodology or other teaching issues on the first week. Later, no working on this. (interrupted by G2-EP01: yes, nothing at all). In general, we did not learn anything from our mentor.

G2-EP01 and G2EP 04 nodded their heads both said "I am, too."

G2-EP05: further added: my mentor asked me to hand in my lesson plans, but she did not give comments or returned it to us (laugh).

Participants' opinions of their mentors' observation and feedback on their teaching were not much more positive. Fifty references were counted on this sub-theme. When this issue arose during the focus group interviews, the group interaction in three of the six focus groups became animated, and was marked by a lack of formal turn taking by group members. They interrupted each other to talk about their feelings: others kept nodding their heads in strong agreement. It seemed that they felt the need to stress the negative aspects of their mentoring experiences on this issue. Most of participants felt that they did not receive enough support from their school mentor in terms of observation and feedback. The following quotes illustrate the level of frustration some participants experienced:

> Mrs Giang observed me only the first and the last week, she only saw my lesson plan without any comments and correction. If we teach, she is there for about 5–10 minutes. Without her presence, we felt comfortable, but we did not receive any feedback or support from her. I felt disappointed (G2-EP05).

> We talked with her only few times, we did not meet regularly as others. She came to observe me but she just sat there or did her own work or marked her students' paper. After the lesson, she did not give any feedback (G2-EP04).

> We felt less supported because our mentor is very busy. We never met before and after the lesson. When we taught well, we expected praise from her, but she did not even say anything about our lesson we made great efforts to prepare and teach well (G4-EP02).

One of the groups burst out laughing and agreed when one participant said:

> Mr Hung is our mentor. He merely attended our class. After the lesson, we thought he gave comments on our lesson but it turned out that he asked us to mark students' papers. This is not make use of but abused us(sic)" (G2-EP01).

The focus group data suggests that there were limited opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore, discuss, and reflect on their teaching with their school mentors.

Apart from insufficient support for observation and feedback, ten references were found that related to expressions of conflict with their mentors. Most of this conflict stemmed from differences in teaching methods. While school mentors tended to focus on grammar and vocabulary, the pre-service teachers did not think this was the current emphasis in language teaching. Some even felt that the mentors' teaching methods were less innovative and creative than their own. Further conflicts arose when the school mentors wanted pre-service teachers to follow the mentor's model. The pre-service teachers the wanted to develop their own teaching styles. Owing to limited authority in the classroom, some student teachers failed to implement what they personally saw as effective teaching in their classrooms. Overall, they felt that there was little space for freedom and experience. As one participant said:

> I did not want to strictly follow the textbook, but my mentor did not want me to go beyond the textbook. I think it is not innovative. The lesson is very boring and demotivating to students (G3-EP04).

In addition, it seemed that some mentees did not agree with the way their mentors taught in class. On the one hand, some among them valued their mentors' teaching experience, but they were concerned about their teaching methods. The general feeling reported was that the school mentors' teaching methods were very traditional and not in line with current syllabus requirements.

Mentees claimed that their mentors did not value new teaching methods. They said they were unhappy with the prevailing hierarchical relationship, which limited their freedom to develop their own teaching styles. Their experience brought issues of hierarchical and inequitable relationships in mentoring into question. As one of them put it, "When I wanted to do something interesting, my teacher said 'Let them learn'. I wanted to do something … like career directions for students … but I was limited on principle" (G01-Co01). That mentee's sentiments were echoed by two others who said, "Yes, we felt limited" (G01-Co04, G01-Co05). And, another mentioned, "We were student teachers. We thought this skill or activity was Ok [and] suitable for our students but the school mentor was not happy or she wanted us to teach in accordance with her ways. We were limited. Sometimes we felt uncomfortable" (G01-Co03). These quotes illustrate the tension that existed between what the trainee teachers believed was effective teaching and what they needed to do to please their mentors.

Finally, two participants expressed negative opinions about their mentors' respective personalities. One said that her school mentor was disappointed when she did not remember her birthday. It is ridiculous. Why do I have to do that? She is not a nice person" (G01-Co03). Another pre-service teacher reported that she was not happy with the way her mentor treated students in class. She further explained that her school mentor used words that should not be said by a decent teacher.

Another problem that led to negative mentoring experiences for participants was that they felt that their mentors expected unreasonable requirements from them. Seven references were identified in three focus group interviews related to this issue. Most of these responses centered on the issue of mentors asking them to mark too many papers, design tests, and do jobs for their mentors. Interestingly, one participant revealed that her mentor asked her and her peer to mark the national competition examination which is supposed to be confidential. One said that her mentor did not "help" them but "abused" (G4-EP04) them. There was obvious agreement by other group members: they laughed and gave gestures of support, nodding their heads and making eye contact. It seems that they had all had experiences such as those just described.

The interviews revealed that most of participants valued some aspects of the role that their mentors played during their practicum. Some school mentors unarguably provided their student teachers with active support. However, negative mentoring experiences were more frequently articulated in the focus group interviews than positive experiences. While the mentees valued the role of their mentors, they did not feel that they received adequate personal and professional support.

3.5 Discussion

This study also highlights the wide range of personality traits that were highly valued by the EFL pre-service teachers. These include being enthusiastic, helpful, and knowledgeable about communicative competence. Often the personal attributes that pre-service teachers sought in their mentors appeared conflicting (e.g., an easy-going mentor who is serious). But, the main attributes they desired were consistent with those found in the literature (Brooks, Sikes, & Husbands, 1997; Hudson, 2005). Their acquisition would be a means for mentors to enhance their own interpersonal skills. In practice, most of their mentors could be considered emotionally supportive of the pre-service teachers. Most of them were reported to have very positive personalities. Other personality traits that were reported as valued included being open-minded, kind, understanding, approachable, and sharing and caring. In general, the pre-service teachers valued their mentor's personalities and teaching experience. Although the pre-service teachers were not in position to select their mentors, most of them believed that their mentor' personalities were supportive.

Regarding supportive mentoring practices, there seemed to be a mismatch between what mentees expected from mentoring and what actually happened in their practicum. Lack of professional support emerged as the strongest predicator of negative mentoring experience. This lack of support was manifested in various forms during the mentoring experience.

The findings from pre-practicum interviews showed that there was broad agreement among the interviewees that providing feedback was the most important aspect of the mentoring process. However, apart from a few comments on some positive experiences related to this issue, most of pre-service teachers agreed that their school mentor's observation and feedback on lessons and lesson plans were of low quality. Some even expressed doubt about their mentors' ability to provide appropriate and relevant feedback. The mentors and pre-service teachers did not have a scheduled time to meet: nor was there any commitment to specific activities. This lack of interaction inevitably weakened the relationship and the quality of the mentoring. These findings, which are consistent with reports of studies in the extant literature (e.g., Farrell, 2001; Hsu, 2005; V. C. Le, 2013; Petersen, 2007), can be partly explained by the fact that frequently school mentors were overwhelmed by their teaching and mentoring responsibilities (McGee, 2001). For example, they may have enough time to mentor the pre-service teachers and/or may not fully committed to the mentoring process. There may be cases where lack mentoring skills such as providing feedback, due to the fact that the university does not provide school mentors with a statement of their responsibilities or of mentoring training for the practicum.

The pre-practicum sessions clearly indicated that articulating pedagogical knowledge such as teaching strategies, classroom management, motivating students, and dealing with unexpected situations was high on the pre-service teachers' list of needs. In reality, pre-service teachers do not have much opportunity to converse with mentors on these issues. The way in which the practicum is structured

provided limited opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore, discuss, and reflect on their teaching with their school mentors. The findings from the post-practicum interviews stressed the trainees' need to have more opportunities to converse with their mentors.

The need to provide an understanding of the system requirements was not met. Although the pre-service teachers were new to the system, information about system requirements such as students' levels, were not available to them on a timely basis. This meant that most of pre-service teachers were not given sufficient support in this area. As well, this reflected the "sink or swim" situation that many student teachers found themselves in during their practicum. It may be that the mentors felt unclear about their roles and responsibilities, as they were not adequately trained in this area. But does this provide at least a partial explanation for the less than optimal mentoring process. Farrell (2008) notes that the mere assignment of mentors does not guarantee successful mentorship. This strongly suggests the need for schools and/or universities to have procedures in place for the selection, orientation, and training of mentors.

Complaints about the mentors' teaching methods echoed those found in previous studies (e.g., Benedetti, 1999; V. C. Le, 2013; Nguyen & Hudson, 2012) which raised concern about school teachers' out-of-date teaching methods. It also supports the views of others (e.g., Dyer & Nguyen, 1999; Hudson et al., 2009; Mai, 2007) who claimed that there is a lack of a pool of qualified English teachers at secondary schools who are suitable as mentors. Some of the mentors have inadequate backgrounds. For example, some are former Russian language teachers, graduates from in-service programs, or did their training when different methods of teaching were in use. Most practicum schools involved in pre-service EFL teacher programs are selected based upon their proximity to the university and their availability. Sites are rarely chosen on the basis of the effectiveness of the cooperating teachers or the compatibility of the teacher's teaching methods with the university-based methodology course. This reflects the current situation worldwide where pre-service teacher practicum schools are chosen "on the basis of administrative convenience and political advantages rather than on the basis of which settings can provide the best learning experience for student teachers" (Zeichner, 1996, p. 219).

In their case study of a practicum for pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam, Dyer and Nguyen (1999) found that most school mentors have little exposure to current University training programs. For this reason, they feel under-confident when speaking English in front of a trainee class. According to Mai (2007), there is still the paradox that non-Bachelor's degree secondary teacher mentor student teachers enrolled in Bachelor's degree programs. In other words, not only are some school mentors not as well qualified as their mentees: some are nor as well-trained in current teaching methodology. A combination of these conditions has given rise to the dilemma that some mentor-teachers may be unable to provide pre-service teachers with sufficient or effective assistance to develop their teaching practice skills. As such, they are not equipped to play a sustained role in the professional development of the trainees, a situation that can lead to conflict between mentors and mentees. Conflict of teaching methods was the most dominant topic in mentees' description

of their mentoring experiences. These findings are congruent with those of other studies (e.g., Johnson, 1996; V. C. Le, 2013; Liu, 2005; Sim, 2011; Smagorinsky et al., 2004) which contend that pre-service teachers experience conflict with school mentors as a result of differences in teaching methods and practice.

Unequal relationships were reported to be another reason for the conflicts alluded to by pre-service teachers. The results of the interviews revealed some of the situations in which student teachers had limited chances to raise their voices. As a result of this prevailing hierarchical relationship, pre-service teachers are sometimes faced with unreasonable demands. This type of conflict typically occurs in Asian cultures including Vietnam where teachers are considered as models, experts who have authority in the classroom (Simpson, 2008). This mismatch between pre-service teacher expectations and the mentoring practices employed during their practicum can result in significant negative emotional experiences for the pre-service teachers.

3.6 Implications and Conclusions

This chapter has explored the literature and examined studies that examine EFL pre-service teachers' perceptions of their mentoring experiences during an EFL practicum. The aim is to understand what might be done to improve the quality of the practicum and support available in a pre-service teacher education program. Setting up mentoring support strategies to assist trainees to enter the teaching profession is becoming a necessary feature of teacher education institutions. This study is supported by other researchers who call for greater investment in mentoring (e.g., Farrell, 2008; Johnson, 1996; Morton, 2004; Wynn & Kromrey, 2000). There is a dive need for teacher education institutions to provide quality mentoring that will better assist EFL pre-service teachers' teaching and learning during their practicum. Quality mentoring is crucial to assisting EFL pre-service teachers to overcome their difficulties and to develop their own professional identities as part of becoming teachers.

This study highlights a number of issues pertinent to mentoring EFL pre-service teachers, issues associated with need analysis, mentor selection, and mentor training. Universities could provide better assistance to their pre-service teachers if they conducted a needs analysis to determine the trainees' teaching and mentoring requirements, and how they relate to their specific contexts. The mentor's involvement in facilitating the mentee's learning of more effective English language teaching cannot be without purpose or direction; rather it must be sequentially organised with specific and clear objectives for mentors. Pre-service teachers' perceptions of their mentoring during the TEFL practicum seem to be clouded by tensions generated by lack of mentoring skills and insufficient support for their learning-to-teach process. The negative mentoring experienced by pre-service teachers may be due, in part, to the fact that many school mentors lack the required knowledge and skills critical to mentoring and the learning-to-teach process. This research stresses the

need to educate mentors in effective mentoring practices. These include constructive and motivating feedback and communicative strategies. Regarding this issue, Le (2007) suggests that the training should emphasis the verbal contribution in interaction and language choice. She found in her research that Vietnamese mentoring "feedback had a lot of evaluation and supervisors did not often encourage student teachers to talk about the lessons" (p. 213). Based on these desirable mentoring attributes and practices, the university and practicum school should work together to establish clear criteria for mentor selection, including a commitment to ongoing mentor training and required mentor attributes and practices. As mentors have overwhelming workloads, the training should be brief and informative.

In this chapter I have highlighted the mismatch between what the EFL preservice teachers expect from their practicum mentoring practices and what they actually experience. One of the issues that this study highlights is that EFL preservice teachers as adult learners may be too dependent upon the expertise of their mentors. Preservice teachers need to take more responsibility for their own learning. Being empowered with self-mentoring expectations may assist the preservice teachers to facilitate their own mentoring. This could occur as part of their orientation towards the major issues they will face during their practicum.

The findings of this study strongly suggest the need for cooperation between the three major stakeholders in the TEFL practicum, i.e., the university supervisors, school mentors, and pre-service teachers. When pre-service teachers are unclear about the practicum requirements and school mentors know little about the mentoring process, it is valuable to have lecturers from the institutes in the school to be able to collaborate to provide clarity and participate in the mentoring process with school mentors and pre-service teachers.

The mentoring process in the TEFL practicum plays a vital role in developing effective second language teachers. As well, it provides a better understanding of pre-service teachers' perceptions of their vision; and, their actual experience can effectively help enhance the process of learning to teach. Regarding the practicum, this research suggests a need to look for alternative mentoring opportunities, perhaps involving the pre-service teachers themselves. This idea is explored in the chapters that follow.

Endnote

1. The discussions were held in the Vietnamese language. In these examples I have used literal translations of what the participants said in order to represent as closely as possible the intended meanings and feelings being expressed.

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Chapter 4
The Design of Mentoring Programs

Abstract This chapter describes the major components in the design for a formal mentoring program and covers such topics as training mentors, attributes of mentors, and mentor-mentee matching. For each section, there is a more general theoretical discussion and then a specific research-related example from an Asian context is provided, e.g., research is discussed which explores what personal attributes pre-service teachers expect from their mentors.

4.1 Introduction

The need for a well-structured mentoring process is a critical factor in enhancing the effectiveness of mentoring. This chapter describes the major components in the design of a formal mentoring program. It covers such topics as attributes of mentors, mentor-mentee matching and mentor training. For each section, there is a more general theoretical discussion and followed by reflection on the practice of these issues in the research site.

4.2 Informal Versus Formal Mentoring

Mentoring can take different forms, both formal and informal. There is a wide range of mentoring relationships from the largely informal to highly- structured mentoring relationships. Formal and informal mentoring differ in intentionality of design.

Informal mentoring may be seen as a relationship that can be created spontaneously, informally, and randomly without any planning, structure or administration. Such a relationship may or may not happen, or it may be initiated by the self-selection of individuals naturally over time based on a special interest and/or a shared wish to work together professionally and personally (Armstrong, Allinson, & Hayes, 2002; McDougall & Beattie, 1997). Informal mentorships are customarily developed as a natural match that often results in a lasting friendship. Discussions between mentors and mentees often go beyond professional issues to a more personal sharing of current personal problems and interests.

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In contrast, formal mentoring involves having some formal administrative structures to maximize its potential for serving as a powerful interventional approach to enhance the effectiveness of instruction in educational settings. Such arrangements may be referred to as initiated efforts facilitated and supported by a third party for mentor matching by the intentionality of the design and for a specified duration (e.g., Armstrong et al., 2002; Chao, 1992; Douglas, 1997; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Klug & Salzman, 1991; Weinberg & Lankau, 2010), while the degree of structure varies but organizations can facilitate the establishment and sustainment of a fruitful mentoring relationship by a program coordinator, an orientation session for participants, peer mentors, mentor-mentee matching, a schedule of activities to be completed, or mentor skills training (e.g., L. T. Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Morton-Cooper & Palmer, 2000; Sullivan, 2004). A formal mentoring program is identified by "clear proposes, function, defined aims" (Morton-Cooper & Palmer, 2000, p. 46) with its specific time line as well as guidelines for the program.

It can be seen that formal and informal mentoring differs in the matching of mentor and mentee. Formal mentorship is initiated through a matching process by a third party rather than by mutual interpersonal attraction between mentor and mentee. This can make it difficult for the mentor and mentee to develop a trusty relationship. The degree of motivation for the participant is another difference between formal and informal mentoring. Informal mentorship arises from a mentee's desire to seek the advice and assistance of a mentor. Or, there may be a willingness on the part of a mentor to help a mentee. In such circumstances, the relationship is free of pressure. In formal mentorship, mentors may be less motivated than the mentees at the beginning of this relationship because they may participate in the mentoring program as the requirement of their organization.

Clearly, there are differences between formal and informal mentoring. Irrespective of whether it is formal or informal, mentoring is at its best when it strengthens the skills and competence of the institutional work force. In this way, adds in competitive advantages to today's market place. Formal mentoring involves having some formal administrative structures to maximize its potential for serving as a powerful interventional approach to enhance the effectiveness of instruction in educational settings. Some researchers suggest that formal mentoring relationships may occur less than informal mentoring relationships (Chao, 1992; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Weinberg & Lankau, 2010). However, it may be argued that formal mentoring accounts for the greatest amount of mentoring (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003; Weinberg & Lankau, 2010).

From my own experience as an EFL teacher educator, I have found that beginning teachers tend to ask senior teachers for help with all forms of works. Doubtless informal mentoring has its benefits; but, this particular kind of help is limited to spontaneous and voluntary support. While on the one hand it is perceived to benefit the teachers' careers (Armstrong et al., 2002; Nguyen, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1999), on the other hand, it rarely maintains continuous support. During their teaching practice or induction, the teachers themselves are naturally and informally involved in so-called mentoring relationships as a result of a helping situation in

which they find others as a source of support, such helping relationships can be strengthened by the introduction of a formal mentoring program. In the context of Asia in general and Vietnam in particular, where the teachers were always stressed with workloads and busy teaching schedules, the need for a formal mentoring program is echoed for creating the continuum of support for teachers' learning and teacher professional development. Thus, the focus of this volume is on the mentoring issues occurring around formal mentoring.

4.3 Formal Mentoring

Effective mentoring processes should be framed by a strong conceptual foundation, which includes the essential functions of the role of the mentor (described in Chap. 3), attributes that have been found to be effective in mentoring, mentor-mentee matching, mentoring activities, and mentoring training/orientation.

4.3.1 Mentoring Attributes

Effective mentoring attributes are also important in implementing the formal mentoring process. Understanding the basic attributes of mentoring relationships helps participants employ it more effectively, and teacher educators can thus improve the quality of mentoring programs.

There have been a wide range of attributes of mentors which were identified as effective to enhance the quality of mentoring. Mentors are defined as a more experienced/senior person who provides career enhanced support and psychosocial support for mentees. First attribute which has been frequently mentioned in the literature is the mentor's professional knowledge in the chosen field. In a study to compare the role of a cooperating teacher and a mentor, Ganser (2002) found that the mentors were expected to be an experienced, intellectually and socially valued mentor passing on their knowledge and experience to a less experienced teacher (Ganser, 2002). This is aligned with arguments from a number of scholars that mentors should be highly accomplished teachers with well-established pedagogical knowledge and well-recognised teaching experiences (Blank & Sindelar, 1992; Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Gray & Smith, 2000; Kay & Hinds, 2002).

The personal attributes of a mentor has been considered a critical factor to professionally develop a mentee (Hudson, 2007). Interpersonal skills and communication skills are among the most frequently mentioned expectations of the mentor (Hudson, 2005a; Sinclair, 2003). There has been an endless list of the personal attributes for an effective mentor such as sharing, motivating, listening, influencing, counselling, being trustworthy (Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, & Ballou, 2002; Kay & Hinds, 2002), approachable, patient, and understanding (Gray & Smith, 2000). Another list of ideal attributes drawn from empirical data compiled by Hudson

(Hudson, 2002, 2004) includes feeling comfortable talking, e, enthusiasm, instilling confidence and positive attitudes, encouraging reflection on practice and, most importantly, being supportive. Among these personal attribute, being supportive is a core attribute of an effective mentor as mentoring is highly regarded as a supportive process. In a number of studies in this context, it becomes clear that most of pre-service teachers expect their mentors to be supportive and constructive. These findings are consistent with current references to effective mentor attributes in the literature (Hudson, 2005b; Malderez & Bodoczky, 1999). The research also confirms the critical role of commitment in enhancing the quality of mentoring (Anglin, Sanchez, & Ballou, 2002; Wang, 2002). Hobson (2002) argues that mentors must be able to find time to provide support that is purposeful, constructive, and pro-active. Without commitments, the mentoring process could not reap fruitful outcomes as expected.

In sum, there is an endless list of mentor's attributes identified in a vast array of mentoring research. In my view, mentoring is not a transmission process of knowledge and skills, but a process of facilitating another's development. Thus, being supportive and committed are vital to developing fruitful and respectful relationships.

In a number of studies in this context, it becomes clear that most of pre-service teachers expect their mentors to be supportive and constructive. These findings are consistent with current references to effective mentor attributes in the literature (Hudson, 2005b; Malderez & Bodoczky, 1999). However, in reality, in a number of places, mentees struggle with their mentors as a result of relationship breakdowns (See Chap. 3).

In their interviews, pre-service teachers claimed that due to these personality traits in their mentors, their stress was reduced; and, they felt emotionally supported. Many comments centred on the notion of "not being conservative and putting pressure on us", highlighting the nature of the school context where the school mentors act as superiors and pre-service teachers as inferiors. This indicates a lack of understanding of the nature of mentoring. The literature indicates that mentoring is a caring relationship in which two participants sensitively show their respect, concern, love, empathy and unconditional regard for the needs of others. Mentoring also needs high levels of trust, support, encouragement, and caring between the mentor and the mentee if it is to be effective. I do not claim the list to be exhaustive, however, this list of mentoring attributes should be taken into consideration and communicated to those involved in this process as it is critical to enhancing the effectiveness of the mentoring process.

4.3.2 Matching in the Formal Mentoring System

Matching participants is important issue to ensure the success of mentoring programs. The mentoring literature shows a salient cluster of variables for matching participants in the mentoring process, including: personality traits; gender; social skills; personal values; work ethic; career goals; experience; and, work-related

interests (Johnson & Ridley, 2004; Kutilek & Earnest, 2001). Among these variables, compatibility of personalities seems to be the most critical factor. As already demonstrated personality clashes and differences that are a result from unsuccessful matching culminate in an ineffective mentoring program (Lacey, 1999).

Regarding the issue of how to match participants, there has been wide agreement among that the matching or the pairing process needs to be carried out carefully to ensure that the participants have time to get to know and get on with each other (Sampson & Cohen, 2001). Several researchers (e.g., Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009; Harnish & Wild, 1994; Walsh & Elmslie, 2005) argue that the pairing of mentors can work effectively if the participants are given both time and opportunities to work together toward their mutual goals. Sharing bio-data between mentor and mentee is a strategy recommended for the successful initiation of the relationship (Mincemoyer & Thomson, 1998; Thomas, 2000). Kutilek and Earnest (2001), who provide more detail, state that in order to "help create mentoring pairs, each potential mentor and mentee should be asked to complete a bio-sketch form that includes information about background, experience, work-related interests, specialisations, hobbies, non-work interests, and family" (p. 3). This is critical as both social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and mentoring research suggest that matching similar characteristics and interests may be useful for mentor matching. However, it is not an easy task to identify compatible participants as desirable as this may be for the success of the program. In other words, good matching depends heavily on the context of mentoring and mentoring tasks. The issue of similarity is important because research indicates that the more the participants in the mentoring process consider themselves similar, the greater the perceived benefits of the mentorship (Allen & Eby, 2003; Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2007). Both Lacey (1999) and Armstrong et al. (2002), who support the need for self-selection of partners, argue that regardless of the type of mentoring relationship, the participants should have the freedom to choose their partners to successfully enhance the outcome of the relationship and to avoid the superficial groups created by assigned relationships.

In 2008, I investigated the practice of mentoring for pre-service teachers during the practicum (See Chap. 3). During this program, the pre-service teacher was randomly assigned a mentor at their school. I, in my role of a university supervisor, was not given the choice of doing the matching as much depended on the availability of the mentors. This reflects the common issues of mentoring in other places where the mentors are chosen according to their availability. The study confirms a mismatch between the expectation and the reality (See Chap. 3). One of the contributing problems is the mismatch between mentors and mentees. Later in this year, I implemented an integrated pre-service mentoring model (Chap. 5) for pre-service teachers and school mentors during the practicum. In this model, two pre-service teachers were assigned to work with a school mentor during their practicum. The two pre-service teachers were matched in accordance with their preferences and similarities (timetable, practicum class, and university class). Then, they were matched with their school mentor. Generally speaking, there was one school mentor for two classes, and, each pre-service teacher was in charge of one class. There was no formal process of matching between the pre-service teachers and the school mentor in this

model. But, they worked with the same classes and committed to the same program. This type of matching to some extent can enhance the quality of the program (as reported in Chap. 5).

In 2008, I implemented a peer mentoring program (reported in Part 2) for pre-service EFL teachers. In this program, participant preservice teachers were matched as closely as possible with their preferences, time tabling, age, and similarity. Pre-service teachers were provided opportunities to choose their peer mentor partner from among those in the school in which they were placed for their practicum. Pre-service teachers who worked together in the peer mentoring process were assigned to work with the same school mentor. Teaching the same classes during their 6 week practicum, provided them with opportunities to interact with each other, and to work cooperatively to solve common classroom-based problems. It was anticipated that such matching would maximise the participants' ability to relate closely to each other and improve their ability to develop their professional practice. Thus, based on the information on the participation forms which was distributed among the participants prior to their training, the participants in the research project grouped into mentoring pairs. Although some problems arose (See Chap. 9), the pre-service EFL teachers reported that they reaped the benefits (Chaps. 6 and 7) and that their pairs worked well together (Chap. 9). This emphasizes the need for matching in mentoring programs.

4.3.3 Mentor Training and/or Orientation

Apart from the selection and matching of mentors, one of the most important elements for ensuring the effectiveness of mentoring programs relates to the training or preparation of mentors. As Evertson and Smithey (2000) found that

> Protégés of trained mentors showed increased evidence of developing and sustaining more workable classroom routines, managed instruction more smoothly, and gained student cooperation in academic tasks more effectively. (p. 301)

In similar vein, a number of scholars (Carter & Francis, 2001; Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Hudson, 2007) argue that equipping mentors with effective mentoring skills through mentor skills training enables them to be more successful in their mentoring role. Accordingly, it is recommended that mentoring programs place more emphasis on the training of mentors. However, Wang and Odell (2002) found that mentor training was a missing link in many mentoring programs.

Wang and Odell (2002) identify and describe three basic models for mentoring preparation, namely the knowledge transmission model, the theory-and-practice connection model, and the collaborative inquiry model, each of which I examined in the following sections. However, rather than adopting any particular model for mentor training, it may be more effective to select strategies from various models according to the particular context in which the mentoring occurs.

4.3.3.1 The Knowledge Transmission Model

The knowledge transmission model is typically provided in the form of workshops offered prior to mentors participating in their mentoring process. It foregrounds the transmission of mentoring skills and knowledge about mentoring "in the form of discrete concepts, skills, and techniques" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 525). Much research (e.g., Evertson & Smithey, 2000; Freemyer, 1999; Herndon & Fauske, 1996; Stallion & Zimpher, 1991) has suggested that such mentoring training positively enhances the effectiveness of mentoring practices. This is important because perceptions of the role and functions of mentors and mentees are often somewhat ambiguous (Gold, 1996).

It is apparent that the knowledge transmission model is popular for its practicality and efficiency in equipping mentors with the necessary research-based information about mentoring in a limited time (Wang & Odell, 2002). Also, where inexperienced or beginning mentors are concerned, it is an efficient way of developing their awareness and understanding of mentoring and mentoring practice. While this model does not require a lot of time and resources from the mentor educators, it has been shown to have some pitfalls. First, it seems to provide little or no opportunity for the development of or experimentation with mentoring practices. It seems likely that if there is too much reliance on mentors applying the knowledge and skills of mentoring practice without ongoing support, there will not be any guarantee of the success of their mentoring practice. Furthermore, this model lacks the integration of the specific context of mentoring in the training workshop. It is hard to apply universally research-based information about mentoring knowledge and skills to different mentoring and teaching contexts because each context has its own features related to the subject matter, students, or schools. I will now explore aspects of the theory and practice connection model.

4.3.3.2 Theory-and-Practice Connection Model

This model fills the gaps in the knowledge transmission model. It is generally based on the assumption that

> mentoring skills and knowledge of mentoring should be actively constructed by mentors and then modified through integration of their practical knowledge of teaching and learning, with the support of university educators and staff developers (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 528)

Mentoring knowledge stems from both research and from mentor's mentoring practices. In this model, mentors construct and reconstruct their knowledge and skills in their specific mentoring practice context while the mentor trainers play key roles as sounding boards. It appears that this model can help mentors to deal effectively with issues or problems in their current work context with their mentees through participation in dialogues with the mentor trainers or university teacher educators. Several studies at both pre-service and in-service levels have demon-

strated the effectiveness of this model for developing effective mentoring practice. This includes such issues as enhancing their mentoring techniques, and generating a sustainable impact on mentoring practices (Tang & Chow, 2007; Wilson, McClelland, & Banaszak, 1995). Although this model addresses problems arising from the one-way knowledge transmission model, it is limited to the provision of mentoring knowledge by the mentor educator who is "still distant from actual mentoring practice" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 529). Thus, it may be hard for mentor educators to deal with the actual issues of mentoring practice. In addition, this model requires substantial effort from the mentor educators who play key roles in developing the knowledge and skills that mentors need to support mentees learning to teach.

4.3.3.3 Collaborative Inquiry Model

Sharing the same assumption as the theory-and-practice connection model, the collaborative inquiry model also "stresses mentors' active construction of mentoring knowledge through the integration of their practical knowledge of teaching and experience of learning [and] constant dialogue with teacher educators and staff developers [who] work with mentors and their novices side by side in the context of teaching and mentored learning to teach" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 529).

In the collaborative inquiry model, mentors, novices, and teacher educators are involved in a learning community with a shared vision of teaching and mentoring practice. Their understanding and acquisition of mentoring knowledge and skills are "constructed through practice-centered conversation and collaborative inquiry with a community of learners in the context of teaching, learning to teach, and mentoring" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 531). Regarding the application of this model for mentor training, Higgins and Cohen's (1997) study explored university teacher educators, school mentors, and interns who were working together in the context of teaching and learning. Through practice-centred conversations among three parties, mutual trust and understanding were developed to facilitate the novices' learning to teach, the mentors' learning to mentor, and the university teacher educators' learning about teachers working in the context of school practice. It may be seen from this model that both mentors and mentor educators are considered to be active learners involved in the actual context and process of mentoring the novices. Mentor educators can provide immediate support for the mentoring process. However, this type of mentor training requires great effort, time, and resources. It is not an easy task to implement this model on a grand scale (Wang & Odell, 2002).

In sum, each model has its own potential effects and limitations. Although each makes different assumptions about what mentoring knowledge and skills are and how to acquire them effectively, each can complement the other, to some extent, in the provision of effective mentor training. All of these models for mentor preparation have the potential to create a foundation for the type of mentor training needed for teachers to develop effective professional practice.

4.4 Conclusion

The fact that many mentors who have not been trained to be mentors are incorporated into the system is a factor that works against the quality of support offered to the mentees. In this chapter, I emphasize the issues of mentor attributes, mentor-mentee matching, and mentor training/orientation as critical issues in implementing a formal mentoring program. This chapter takes the debate further by suggesting that in Asian contexts in general and in Vietnam in particular, these issues should be taken into greater consideration. This lends growing support to the literature expressing the need for training and orientation sessions for mentors and mentees prior to the program.

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Chapter 5
Group Mentoring: Facilitating Teacher Reflection

Abstract This chapter introduces the use of an integrated mode of mentoring (group mentoring) for pre-service teachers during the practicum as an approach to facilitating teacher reflection. The chapter reports findings from a qualitative study which explored how this model of mentoring fostered pre-service teachers' reflection. It describes in detail the implementation of this model and its effectiveness in developing pre-service teachers' reflective skills using data from interviews and recordings of mentoring conversations.

5.1 Introduction

Over the past decade, there have been calls for change and reform of student teaching. A wide variety of models of student teaching have been employed in attempts to provide student teachers with meaningful ways to develop their profession, fostering reflection in teachers. However, not all models seem to be effective for stimulating reflection, hence, there is a call for more evidence to show how effective they really are (Farrell, 2016; Hatton & Smith, 1995, 2006). In response to this call, this chapter introduces a group mentoring model that can be used by pre-service teachers during the practicum as an approach to facilitating teacher reflection. The chapter reports the findings from a qualitative study which explored how this model of mentoring fostered pre-service teachers' reflection. It describes in detail the implementation of this model and its effectiveness for developing pre-service teachers' reflection through reflective reports, interviews and recordings of mentoring conversations.

5.2 Teacher Reflection

Research into effective teaching practice has stresses the important role of reflection, and continuous professional development in developing effective teaching practice. How pre-service teachers are trained will impact on how they will develop their professions in the future. Thus, research into this field suggests that teacher preparation should provide opportunities for collaboration (Bullough et al., 2003; Knezevic & Scholl, 1996), reflection (Farrell, 2016; Harris, Keogh, & Jervis-Tracey,

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2013; Le Cornu, 2010; Richards, 2008b; Stillisano, 2004) and inquiry. As Howey and Zimpher (1999) argue, “most fundamental to the improvement of teacher education is addressing how all teachers are prepared to work with one another” (p. 294). According to Dewey (1904), being critically reflective has a long run benefits for preparing future teachers. The terms “reflection or “critical reflection” refers to “an activity or process in which an experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose” (Richards, 2008b, p.1). A critically reflective approach to teacher education has been advocated as an integral part of the process of teacher learning and development. This approach is supported by Richards (2008a) who emphasizes that the teacher learning should centre around the sharing of professional thinking, examining and reexamining the teaching practice within a community of practice. Critical reflection may trigger positive changes. As Kullman (1998) points out, “reflection … will lead to a greater awareness among student teachers of what constitutes appropriate pedagogic practice and will lay the foundations for development, a process which will be ongoing throughout their teaching careers” (pp.471–472).

A number of scholar (e.g., Feldman, 1997a; Harris et al., 2013; Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001; Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011) suggest that reflection is best developed and sustained in collaborative activity. Feldman (1997b) further explains this claim by arguing that

> They [teachers] begin with a cooperative process in which one of the teachers starts to talk and the others listen. As they listen, they think about what is being said and relate it to their own histories, their intentions, and their relations to others. Reflection occurs, and the ones who have listened, respond. The responses are answers to questions, related anecdotes or bits of narrative, or questions, which act in the evolution of the conversant’ direction (p. 11).

Although reflection activity can occur individually such as reflect for oneself, reflection capacity will be most benefited when student teachers reflect with others. Hatton and Smith (1995) argue to the effect that “a powerful strategy for fostering reflective action is to engage with another person in a way which encourages talking with, questioning, even confronting, the trusted other, in order to examine planning for teaching, implementing and its evaluation”(p. 41). Group mentoring may serve as a forum for teachers to engage with one another in a way which encourages dialogue among teacher mentors and the student teachers. Reflective processes themselves are substantially fostered when they take place in the community of practice where peers, colleagues, and “critical friends” contribute to and scrutinize ideas, thoughts, practices and beliefs.

5.3 Group Mentoring

In pre-service teacher education, school-based mentoring in which a pre-service teacher (mentee) is normally assigned to an experienced mentor (supervising or cooperating teacher) in the school for the period of the practicum, has been

advocated as an approach to promote the reflective practice of pre-service teachers. However, research into mentoring practices has also revealed some less positive effects (Long, 1997). It seems that if mentoring relationships are not fruitful, both mentors and mentees may be driven into "stressful, conflict-laden situations" (Stokes & Stewart, 1994, p. 34) (See Chap. 3). In such cases, pre-service teachers may feel that their practicum experiences were ineffectively mentored or supervised (Morton, 2004). One of the suggestions that have been specified in the teacher education literature is the use of more collaborative or collegial relationships to create more chances for teacher reflection and negotiation of their teaching practice. Group mentoring is one of such strategies used to develop pre-service teachers' reflection. Group mentoring may serve as a model that utilizes both pre-service teachers and school mentors as valuable sources of learning. This type of mentoring has more potential for enhancing learning than the more traditional one-to-one mentoring as it can be viewed as more collaborative and supportive when compared with the dyad mentoring relationship (Nguyen & Hudson, 2012; Petersen, 2007).

Group peer mentoring is underpinned by social constructivism which emphasizes that the majority of learning is not achieved in isolation, but rather through interaction that takes place in communication and collaboration with other people in a social setting (Vygotsky, 1978) (See Chap. 2). Participation in a group peer mentoring model may serve as a safe place where teachers can apply various forms of reflection in collaboration with peers through engaging in one another's mentoring process and with school mentors.

Huizing (2012), who has reviewed theories of group mentoring since the mid-1990s, claims that theories of group mentoring are underlined by a combination of the strengths of one-to-one mentoring and group learning. According to Huizing, group mentoring refers to "a polyad mentoring relationship of more than two people in which the interactions were simultaneous and collaborative" (p. 28). This definition implies that group mentoring is a general term which refers to all different types of group mentoring. Huizing identifies four main types of group mentoring: peer group mentoring, one-to-many mentoring, many-to- one mentoring, and many-to-many mentoring. His thorough review of these group mentoring models, in which he recognized a number of its benefits including personal and professional growth, concludes that group mentoring is not always fruitful.

Among a number of initiatives involving student teachers, group mentoring has emerged as a the potentially practical strategy in developing pre-service teachers' teaching practice (Beck & Kosnik, 2001; Eriksson, 2013; Le Cornu, 2005b, 2007; Nguyen & Hudson, 2012). Nguyen and Hudson (2012) have documented the favourable outcomes and benefits of pre-service teachers working together and supporting one another throughout a practicum. In their study, peer group mentoring refers to the supportive process in which a group of peers are involved in mentoring one another. This type of intervention was reported to have positive effects on pre-service EFL teachers' teaching practices, including the provision of professional and emotional support and enhancement of reflection on practices. Le Cornu (2005a, 2005b, 2007) advocates practicum based on the notions of critical friends in which pairs and groups of peers were assigned to work together to develop reflection skills

and support. However, all of these studies were limited to the use of peers in mentoring without the presence of school mentors who were directly involved in the pre-service teachers' learning process. Although we are aware of the value of peer mentoring in helping pre-service teachers develop the capacity to take on new perspectives (See Chaps. 6 and 7), their developmental process cannot be detached from their school mentors during their practicum. Therefore, a number of researchers (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Eriksson, 2013; Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009) advocate the use of a one-to-many mentoring model for student teachers in which a group of pre-service teachers work with a school mentor during their practicum. Although the terms used are not identical, these strategies (Bullough et al., 2002; 2003; Eriksson, 2013; Goodnough et al., 2009) all address commonly found characteristics in group mentoring identified by Huizing (2012). Bullough et al. (2003) compare two models of student teaching: the traditional one-to-one mentoring model and a group mentoring model where two student teachers are assigned to work with one mentor. The latter model is reported to have more positive outcomes from the perspective of mentors and student teachers. The above studies explored the outcome of this model for pre-service teachers in the USA and Canada. Using a case study research design, Goodnough et al. (2009) document the benefits and challenges for pre-service teachers and teacher mentors who participated in the group mentoring model. They noted that considerable learning occurred in all participants, although there were some limitations to the model. This kind of model has the potential to offer "a variety of structured learning experiences that will allow a gradual transition from being on the periphery of the teaching community to becoming full members of that community" (p. 296). Similarly, Eriksson (2013) investigates the positive and negative aspects of formal group mentoring in which the mentor was matched with a group of pre-service teachers (6–10) to support pre-service teachers. The study reported the benefits of this model including pre-service teachers' socialization, the development of a teacher identity/role, and competence and knowledge enhancement. The study also stresses the importance of the structure, organization of the model, and the role of mentors in enhancing the effectiveness of group mentoring.

In this chapter, I examined a one-to-many group mentoring model in which a group of peers (from two to three EFL pre-service teachers) works with a cooperating teacher/school mentor during a 6-week practicum. A major advantage of this model is that it brings together all teachers (beginning and experienced) to work and learn together. As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) argue, the most fundamental way to improve teacher education is to prepare pre-service teachers to work together. The existing research addressing the one-to-many group mentoring method has reported positive outcomes for participants (Eriksson, 2013; Huizing, 2012). However, there is a dearth of research related to this model in the practicum for EFL pre-service teachers in non-western contexts. To date, limited research has been undertaken into the impact of this model on pre-service teachers' reflection. Although collaboration among teachers is very often evoked as a necessary element for teacher reflection, change and development, very few studies actually explore how these processes happen, to what extent the group peer mentoring facilitates

pre-service teacher reflection, or what levels of reflection they obtain as a result of group peer mentoring. In addition, little research has explored the use of group peer mentoring as a strategy for developing pre-service teachers' reflection during their field experience in Vietnam. Therefore, this research project aims to explore how the experience of participating in a specific model of group peer mentoring can assist teachers reflection process. What is of interest in this study is whether participation in group mentoring helps to facilitate the reflective process.

5.4 The Study

5.4.1 Research Approach

A qualitative case study approach is adopted to explore the participants' experiences of their group peer mentoring process that contributed to their reflection. This particular approach allows the researcher to study a selected issue in depth and detail (Bell, 1999; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 2008) and "can be used to obtain the intricate detail about the phenomena such as feelings, thoughts, processes, and emotions that are difficult to enact or learn from more conventional methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). As Creswell (2003, p. 19) points out, "the focus of qualitative research is on participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives". Therefore, using a qualitative approach provides the researcher with an appropriate tool to elicit the participants' perceptions of their mentoring experiences.

Research design: This study uses a case study research design to explore the experience of how participation in a group peer mentoring model facilitates participant reflection. Yin (2003) argues that case study research design is suitable for an in-depth exploration of a research inquiries in a specific context. For the purpose of this study, I intend to conduct a thorough and intensive exploration of the impact of a group mentoring model on teacher reflection within the contexts of pre-service teacher programs in Vietnam.

5.4.2 Research Participants

The participants included 16 voluntary pre-service teachers participating in an EFL teacher education program at a foreign language training university in Vietnam, and 7 school mentors in a local school where this group of pre-service teachers did their 6 week practicum. These groups were asked to participate during a group mentoring program to be undertaken in their practicum.

5.4.3 Research Implementation

The implementation of a group mentoring program involves three distinct phases. First, prior to the practicum, information about the model's implementation is publicised, informed consent and school permission gained, participants selected and orientated, mentor training provided, and pair/group matching undertaken. These steps are conducted in accordance with best practice based on the literature review. The researcher plays the role of university supervisor. The researcher implements the group mentoring model where two-to-three pre-service teachers are assigned with one school mentor. Two-to-three pre-service teachers are assigned on the basis of their preference. In this mentoring intervention program, pre-service teacher participants were grouped as closely as possible to their preferences, time tabling, age, and similarity (see Chaps. 4 and 9). This group of pre-service teachers was assigned to work with one school mentor during their 6-week practicum.

At the beginning of the 6-week practicum, the pre-service teachers ($n=6$) and their teacher mentors attended one-hour orientation meeting where they self allocated into groups of two or three. The orientation included an explanation of the program's goals, philosophy, requirements, and expectations. The process was intended to encourage observation of practice, feedback on areas that appeared successful and those requiring improvement, amendments to future planning, implementation of changes, and peers observing this implementation for further feedback. The participants were required to observe their peers' teaching with their school mentors. During each feedback session, the pre-service teachers discussed what they had learnt from each other's teaching performances, and what they thought should be improved. Then, they listened to feedback from the school mentor on the observed lesson. An information package detailing the group mentoring model was given to school mentors and explained the model explained in detail. Mentors were assigned to work with two-three pre-service teachers.

Phase two, the intervention phase, lasts for the period of the practicum in both contexts. Groups of pre-service teachers in a Vietnamese pre-service teacher program participate in the group mentoring intervention as an integrated part of their practicum. These pre-service teachers were invited to become involved in group mentoring: two-to- three pre-service teachers were expected to provide each other with career-related psychosocial support functions to work with one mentor. More specifically, in this model, basic group mentoring activities centre on two sets of activities: observation and feedback and support meetings. Pre-service teachers observed each other's lessons with their mentors, provided feedback, and attended regular support meetings at which they could share their experiences, raise any issues associated with their practicums and discuss possible solutions. The meetings followed the guidelines provided to all of the participants. Every week, each participant was required to write a mentoring reflective report, a process designed to encourage the participants to reflect on their mentoring experiences. As well, it served the purpose of providing a focus for program implementation. Phase three includes interviews recording the mentoring experience.

5.4.4 Methods of Data Collection

Data were collected from multiple sources: interviews; feedback mentoring conversations; and, mentoring reflective reports.

5.4.4.1 Individual Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the study. The opened-ended questions aimed to explore the participants' experiences of the model and how they thought it would facilitate their reflection. The interviews, which lasted approximately 60 min, included ten interview questions.

5.4.4.2 Mentoring Reflective Reports

The prompts for the reflective report included the activities in which the participants, their peer(s) and mentor had been involved, how those activities influenced their teaching practice, and if any changes in their teaching had resulted from these mentoring activities. One part of the reflective reports required the participants to write their concerns (if any) regarding the mentoring process. These reports were collected every week by the university supervisors, allowing them to respond quickly to the needs expressed in the reports.

5.4.4.3 Feedback Mentoring Conversations

After each lesson, the participants (both the pre-service teachers and the school mentors) were expected to provide feedback on their peer's lesson. These feedback mentoring conversations were recorded for data analysis.

5.5 The Theoretical Framework for Reflection

The conceptual framework that guides the analysis of the data is based on Jay and Johnson's (2002, p. 76) definition of reflection, which "..is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others. One evaluates insights gained from that process with reference to: "(1) additional perspectives; (2) one's own values, experiences, and beliefs; and, (3) the larger context within which the

questions are raised" (p.76). A typology of reflection was introduced to profile three dimensions of reflective thought: descriptive, comparative, and critical. According to Jay and Johnson, whereas descriptive reflection "describes the matter of reflection: (p. 77); comparative reflection "reframe[s] the matter for reflection in light of alternative views, others' perspectives, research, etc"(p. 77). Critical reflection "considered the implications of the matter, establish a renewed perspective"(p. 77).

For the purpose of the study, qualitative data were analysed and discussed according to how the pre-service teachers developed their reflection as a result of interacting with other pre-service teachers and their mentor. This was done according to the three levels of "reflectivity" as conceptualized by Jay and Johnson (2002).

Reflective journals and post observation conversation transcripts were analysed. Units of reflection related to interaction with other peers and teacher mentors were identified, then categorised according to the three levels of reflection. To analyse the levels of reflection, my research assistant and I read the transcripts a second time and coded the data independently. Jay and Johnson's (2002) categories of reflection were used to code all of the extracts.

5.6 Findings

5.6.1 Level of Reflection

To facilitate analysis of post conversations with mentors, pre-service teachers, other peers and reflective mentoring journals, I utilized a coding method based on the work of Jay and Johnson (2002). All journal entries that contained reflective instances were carefully analysed to ascertain if there was any evidence in pre-service teachers of indicators of reflection. The reflective records were divided into the three categories of reflection described previously. The findings of the interviews provided further insight into reflection.

The findings in Fig. 5.1 shows that levels of reflection among EFL pre-service teachers as a result of their mentoring experience were fairly high. Every week, pre-service teachers reported on relevant issues with reference to descriptive reflection, increasing their awareness and understanding of the issues. According to Jay and Johnson (2002), descriptive reflection "involves describing a matter, such as a classroom concern, a recognized bias, an interesting theory, or a feeling" (p. 78). In terms of descriptive reflection, most of the reflective instances were related to what the pre-service teachers were concerned about and their feelings. For instance, Trang admitted in her mentoring report that "When I went to Van's class, I realized that her students were very naughty. I don't think I can teach them. However, I admired the way she managed her class. She used carrot and stick technique very effectively. It is amazing". Another pre-service teacher recounted in her mentoring report that she

became more aware of different ways to warm up the lessons: "From my mentor's lesson, I have learned how to draw students' attention at the beginning of the lesson. I do not always have to use a game to motivate them. She just asked some questions and related them to the lessons. She has a great sense of humor". During the post observation conferences, pre-service teachers had opportunities to develop their descriptive reflection as they were always asked to comment on their peers' lessons first. During their observation of their peer's lesson, they were naturally aware of the question "what's happening?" as Jay and Johnson observed, descriptive reflection is more than just reporting the fact but included recognizing the salient features. The illustrations below were selected from the post observation conference between a school mentor and pre-service teachers to illustrate how they identified problems in their peers' lessons.

School mentor: Lan, what do you think about Trang's lesson?
Lan: I think she did well. I like the way she gave feedback to students.
School mentor: How was that?
Lan: Very friendly, supportive, encouraging and she did not interrupt them even when they made mistakes. However, sometimes I think she speaks too fast. Some students may not catch it.

From this excerpt, it becomes evident that the pre-service teacher was aware of the salient feature and might envision changes in her future class. To quote Jay and Johnson (2002), this type of reflection is believed to mark the transition from descriptive to comparative reflection.

Overall, extensive evidence of comparative instances was identified in pre-service teachers' reports (seen Fig. 5.1). The utterances and dialogues have been chosen to provide a real picture of the content of these reflections; thus, they are representative of said reflections. Great enthusiasm was demonstrated among the pre-service teachers as they compared their impressions and their practice with their peers and their mentors' lessons during and after the observed lessons. Most of the participants indicated that throughout observations with their peers and their school mentors they could reconsider their own practice and opinions in light of others' perspectives. Interestingly, this type of reflection was dominant through the 6 weeks of practicum.

Participating in the group mentoring model, pre-service teachers benefited from bringing multiple perspectives including those of their mentors and their peers into their teaching practice. The following comments appeared in their mentoring reports:

> I can see how my mentor taught vocabulary and how Hoa (her peer) taught it. It is interesting that Hoa applied what we had been taught at the university including meaningful and communicative activities for teaching vocabulary while our mentor always introduced new words by writing down and translating them in English without any meaningful practice. She also commented that the way Hoa taught vocabulary took too much time. I see her way was very interesting but I agree that we don't have time to conduct all the activities.

Some of them explored others' points of view which may have seemed incongruent with them. In her mentoring report, Trang said "I think the way she[her mentor] taught Grammar is very traditional and not communicative. She always provided

them with exercises, not the opportunities to communicate in English." Another said during the post observation conference when asked to comment on her peer's lesson, "I think you (their peer) talked too much during the lesson. I believe that if we provided them with opportunities to talk with one another, we can save our energy and encourage them to talk more in class. They can benefit from that".

Some of the pre-service teachers mentioned how observation had influenced their thinking about their teaching practice and how the mentoring experience impulsed their comparative reflection after seeing their peers and mentor teach in class.

> I never think that I can design a post reading activity as Huong. She involved the whole class in a competition. It is very motivating.
>
> The way my mentor managed student behavior changed my view on students. I think we need to talk with them. But sometimes talk doesn't help. We can deal with them by giving credits for their participation.
>
> I think we can draw student's attention by providing them with some interesting tasks. I find the way my mentor started her lesson is very boring. She always called students to go to blackboard to revise the previous lesson.

As Dewey (1933) observed, this type of reflection entails a kind of open-mindedness and wholeheartedness.

5.6.2 Patterns of Reflections

Reflection changed over the 6 week period. The number of reflective incidents generally increased from week 1 (255 instances) to week 6 (356 instances) of the practicum. Regarding this issue, a number of pre-service teachers said that the more they knew each other, the more they felt confident to share their ideas with each other and with their mentors. One pre-service teacher said: "for the first few weeks, I felt reluctant to observe my peers, but later I liked it and I went to observe Trang and Huong's lesson whenever I had time. I have more ideas for my own teaching and learn from them". A comparison of three levels of reflections in each week (see Fig. 5.1) revealed an increasing tendency towards reflective evidence by the pre-service teachers. Evidence of descriptive reflection which was identified in post observation and mentoring reports gradually reduced from week 1 to week 6 while instances of comparative and critical reflection increased.

Overall, the most common type of reflection identified was comparative reflection: next came descriptive and critical reflection. It may be seen from Figure 5.1 that comparative reflection ranked highest among the three levels of reflection every week. Regarding this issue, most of the pre-service teachers reported that they had a number of conversations with other peers and their mentors during the practicum. During the interviews, most of the pre-service teachers emphasized the role of their mentors and peers' lessons in helping them reflect on their own teaching. They further stated that they observed their peers, identified their strengths and weaknesses, and tried to either avoid them or adapt for use in their own lessons. Descriptive reflection then led to comparative and critical reflection. As one of the pre-service

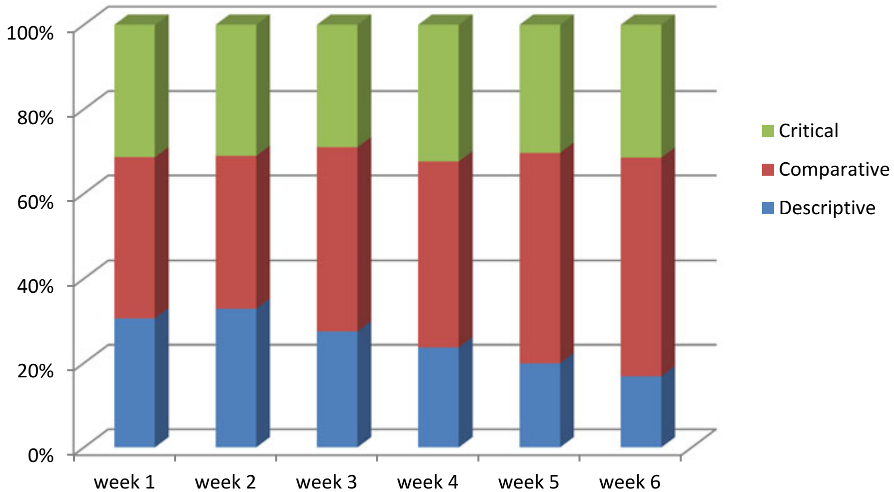

Fig. 5.1 Summary of analyse of reflection excerpts at each level of reflection

teacher said, "Yes, when I observed my peers, I compared myself with my peers, asking how I would teach in the same situation. It definitely helped me to reflect on my own teaching. I actually use one of my friend's techniques in my classroom" (Trang). Here it becomes clear that for the first few weeks, the pre-service teachers spent considerable time in observing their peers and mentors; and, this led to varied instances of descriptive reflection. The longer they interacted with their peers and mentors, the more critical they became. Therefore, they could incorporate what they had witnessed and discussed with their peers and mentor into their lessons.

Findings in Fig. 5.1 show the level of reflection among pre-service teachers (n = 16) as a result of participating in the mentoring model throughout the six-week practicum.

5.6.3 Factors Fostering Reflection

5.6.3.1 Observation

Most of the pre-service teachers thought highly of observation in fostering reflection. It became evident that observing their mentors and peers provided the participants with opportunities to reflect on practice by identifying their mentors' and their peer(s)' strong points and weak points. For the first few weeks, most of the reflections which came from this activity for the first few weeks were at the descriptive level of reflection, i.e., "additional perspectives". Through observation, the pre-service teachers developed a deeper understanding of the relevant issues and a better awareness of other possible ways to teach and deal with different issues in the classroom. For example, Trang, admitted in her mentoring reports that "after

observing my mentor's first lesson, I have realized that at secondary school, students are not provided many opportunities to communicate in class. My mentor always used grammar translation methods to teach English in class". Another participant reflected "when I observed Lan's lesson, I realised her students were very naughty. She was very strict and consistent. Whenever they talked, she stopped talking. It worked". Interestingly, later in the practicum when the interactions were more frequent, most of the pre-service teachers not only described their experiences of other people's observations, but also made claims about the experience. This triggered higher levels of reflection as "critical reflection often involves making a judgment" (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 79). For example, one teacher reflected "Vân tried to use a lot of warm-up games in class. I agree that it is motivating and interesting. However, if everyday we spend more than 15 min on warm-up, we won't have enough time for the lesson. We are in a hurry at the end of the lesson. I think we don't need to use the games for every lesson. Sometimes we may only ask how they are today". It can be seen that observation not only enables them to effectively consider their teaching practice from multiple viewpoints, but also helps them to identify the ways in which their friends may improve their practice. Commitment to observation provided them with the frequent habit of reflecting on others' lessons.

5.6.3.2 Tailored Questions in Post-observation Feedback Sessions

Examination of the post-observation conversations, transcripts from the interviews, and reflective journals, revealed that post-observation conversation among mentors and peers were considered helpful for facilitating pre-service teachers' reflective thinking about their lessons and reflective action on their future lessons. Most of the pre-service teachers valued their peers and mentor's feedback on their lessons provided in the post-observation conversations. Two examples, Lan and Ngoc's reflective reports, illustrate this.

> After each lesson, we had a conversation with my friend and my mentor for about 15 minutes. I actually can learn a lot from their opinions.
>
> During the post observation conversation, I listened to the opinions of my friend and my mentor. I realised many teaching issues that I face, for example, I speak too fast, I don't move around the class. I think the feedback was very helpful for me as I could see it while teaching.

In addition, the post observation conversations were reported to create opportunities for pre-service teachers to be challenged to think about their experiences and others experiences.

Most of the conversations shifted from simple storytelling, i.e., their feelings about the lessons and what they liked most about the lessons to more reflective contributors such as changes in their teaching practice. During each feedback session, the pre-service teachers discussed what they had learnt from each other's teaching

performances, and what they thought should be improved. They then listened to feedback from the school mentor on the observed lesson.

The transcripts revealed that during the post observation conversation, specific questions posed by the mentor evoked the pre-service teachers' reflective thinking, triggering many of high level discussions among the pre-service teachers and the mentor themselves. Examples of questions that led to higher levels of reflection included "How would you handle that situation in the future?" and "what improvement do you want to make to the next lesson?".

Reflective action was perceived to be bound up with persistent and continuous framing and reframing of their practice in knowledge and beliefs. Some of the participants' quotes support this point:

> During the feedback session, my mentor commented that I should speak Vietnamese in class, otherwise students don't understand. I think if I speak Vietnamese, it is not good for our students; they need to learn in English. However, when I observed Trang's lesson, I realized that some of the students may not understand the lesson as she used English. In a post observation conversation, we came up with a decision that we would speak Vietnamese if the terms were too difficult to understand or ask other students to translate what we said in class. It may be more effective?

Their conversations with their peers and mentors both challenged and supported them to shape and reshape their thinking about their teaching issues. The structure of the mentoring conversation which was introduced in the training package to both mentors and mentees was strictly followed and helped to enhance the quality of their learning by engaging all of the participants in collective reflection on their practice. In addition, the pre-service teachers were asked questions and made their voices heard during the conversations.

5.6.3.3 Time

Time emerged as one of the more critical factors in facilitating pre-service teachers' reflection. Most of the comments in the interviews revealed that they would like to spend more time with their peers and their mentor after each observed lesson. Some claimed that 15 min after each lesson was not sufficient time for them to give and receive feedback from their teachers and peers. Some pre-service teachers stressed the importance of having sufficient time to discuss issues with their teacher and peers as this enabled deeper reflections:

> Sometimes, we don't have enough time to have a proper discussion with the teachers and my peer. We are in a hurry. I really prefer the time after school hours. I remember one day, I taught the last period and we had a lot of time for feedback and discussion.
>
> I know everyone is busy at school so sometimes I felt bad if we took a lot of time from my teacher. I think it would be more effective if we focus on some lessons and have in-depth conversations afterward.
>
> I wish we had more time for reflection after each lesson as I really valued the conversation with my teacher and my friends. It helped me to develop my teaching practice

Although all of the teachers and pre-service teachers were committed to spending time after each lesson, the reality of school sometimes did not impeded their effects to achieve this effectively. Lack of time to reflect on practice is one of challenges facing teachers nowadays.

5.6.3.4 A Supportive Environment

Most of the pre-service teachers said that they felt comfortable in the feedback sessions with their teachers and peers. They said that most of the time, especially toward the end of the practicum, they did not feel the pressure of being observed or judged by others. As one participant said "I like feedback from my teachers and my friends after each lesson. I learned a lot from that. Everyone can make mistakes. I know that their feedback is good and constructive for me. I am not afraid of constructive criticism". Creating trusted spaces for reflection, feedback and professional discussion enabled the preservice teachers to continuously reflect on their practice and others' teaching practice free from fear of judgment. As one said "Van and I are friends, we know each other and work very well with each other. It feels very easy to share all teaching ideas with Van as well as giving and receiving her feedback on my lessons". "I can talk with my peers about everything and in the post observation feedback, I am not afraid of being silly if I ask questions. My teachers are very friendly". In addition, their teachers assigned them shared tasks and asked them to write lesson plans together and to do team teaching. This gave them opportunities to interact with each other, work with each other more effectively, understand each other, and trust each other. Therefore, this type of organization enables students to take risks in a secure environment in which and do not feel isolated. Evidence reveals that this placement gave the pre-service teachers opportunities to engage with each other in social discourse about daily practice at school, leading to reflection, affirmation and transformation of their thoughts and practices. Collaboration with peers during the practicum and maintenance of a trusting environment can render the reflection process more effective.

5.7 Discussion

The practicum is not only a place where pre-service teachers learn to improve their teaching practice. It is also a place where they learn to become teachers who continuously learn through reflection on their practice individually and collectively. Thus reflective practice is critically important for preparing future teachers. This group mentoring model showed the benefit of facilitating pre-service teachers' engagement in different levels of reflection.

The research findings shows that the pre-service teachers who were involved in the group mentoring had opportunities to reflect on their practice to develop their

professional knowledge of teaching and to transfer it to new situations. All of the evidence shows that they went beyond simply focusing on descriptive reflection, to comparative reflection and critical reflection. The pre-service teachers valued their opportunities to work with their school mentors and other peers in facilitating their own reflection. The development of the pre-service teachers' reflection was facilitated through collaborative work with peers and reflective dialogues with peers and teacher mentors. This study suggests further consideration of this model in the practicum and its value in developing pre-service teachers' reflection. The model described in this chapter is unique in as much as one teacher mentor was assigned with two/three pre-service teachers contrasting to most mentoring model that pairs one teacher mentor with one pre-service teacher. Whipp (2003) posits that future teachers can develop their critical reflection on their practice when they have opportunities to have discussions with other teachers at different level of expertise and experience. The importance of having others to foster reflection was affirmed though the evidence from this study. The emerging evidence demonstrates that group peer mentoring enables pre-service teachers to reflect on their practice at all levels of reflection. Mentoring groups created opportunities to communicate and interact with senior teachers and peers on a regular basis. In response to the call for critical reflection (Burton, 2009) during pre-service and in-service training, this study has stressed the role of group mentoring in making sense of pre-service teachers and in-service teachers' experiences and practice. This study contributes to the existing literature by identifying the value of fostering pre-service teachers' reflection on their teaching practice during the practicum. The findings of this study support those of others (Bullough et al., 2002, 2003; Eriksson, 2013; Goodnough et al., 2009; Parsons & Stephenson, 2005) who suggest application of this model in the pre-service teacher practicum.

This study shows that creating opportunities for pre-service teachers to observe other pre-service teachers is a critical factor in ensuring the frequency and quality of reflection. A number of scholars (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; He & Prater, 2013; Le Cornu, 2005b; Newell, 1996; Nguyen & Hudson, 2012) stressed the importance of peers in developing social support and reflection. Mutual observation is a form of collegial activity which helps pre-service teachers to think, question and make changes in their habits and skills. In other words, it facilitates reflective enquiry. As the data show more critical reflection was identified in the later weeks of the practicum as the result of more frequent observation and dialogues with teachers and friends. Commitment to observation is a critical factor in sustaining reflection. In some ways, this mirrored the socialization of pre-service teachers in that they become less influential as they progress through more frequent interaction with other peers and mentors. This level of reflection increased from descriptive to critical.

Time is a big obstacle in ensuring the quality of this model as teaching during the practicum is always pressured and time hungry. This study aligns with others (Eriksson, 2013; Parsons & Stephenson, 2005) in saying that time is one of the barriers to pre-service teachers developing as reflective practitioners. According to Parsons and Stephenson (2005), "danger [is] that getting through the placement

becomes simply a matter of survival and it is unsurprising that the focus of a student's attention becomes 'what should I do next?' rather than 'why am I doing it'?"(p. 103). The finding suggests that teacher educators and pre-service teachers must also examine the post lesson conference as opportunities for reflection. As some of the pre-service teachers stated in the interview they did not have time to express their ideas about the lesson. Their school mentors and peers tended to talk most of the time during the post- observation conference. This emphasized the need for the provision of time to engage in conversation with others. It suggests that pre-service teachers should be provided with more quality time that will allow them to step back from the pressure of teaching and engage more with others in critically thinking about their teaching practices. Offering more time for reflection is a critical issue in ensuring the quality of learning during the practicum.

Different from other studies which claim that pre-service teachers' voices were not often heard during the feedback sessions (Eriksson, 2013; Harris et al., 2013; Le, 2007), analyses of these feedback sessions revealed that pre-service teachers were given opportunities to reflect on the lesson and to express their own ideas even though sometimes they did not have enough time to do this satisfactorily. Fostering pre-service teachers' reflection requires far more than asking people to work together and reflect on their practice. It should be scaffolded. In this study, most of the teacher mentors usually followed the instructions. They asked the key questions which were suggested in the orientation, thus creating opportunities for the pre-service teachers to express their opinions. This procedure aligned with a number of scholars (Jones & Ryan, 2014; Richards & Farrell, 2011; Szabo & Schwartz, 2011) who argue that asking appropriate questions could deepen reflection and learning. This study confirms the findings of the previous studies (Le, 2007; Timperley, 2001) of teacher education which maintain that mentoring conversations need to be carefully structured. Integrating reflection questions into mentoring conversations benefit pre-service teachers. It provides them with opportunities to develop the capacity to identify their practice and to alter their teaching based on hints from teachers.

The findings suggest careful scaffolding and practicing reflective thinking strategies (Le Cornu, 2005a; Maor, 2006) for both pre-service teachers and school mentors. If reflection is guided, more positive outcomes will result. This aligns with Hatton and Smith's (1995) findings. These two scholars reviewed 16 research studies in an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of approaches employed to develop student teachers' capacity for reflection, and to reinforce the role of careful pedagogical planning for students to learn strategies. This echoes the need for training both mentors and pre-service teachers on skills and strategies for reflection. This study suggests additional ideas on how to structure the mentoring conversation to provide mentees with meaningful learning experiences and how to use it as powerful scaffolding for critical reflection. It may be helpful in that it offers mentors and mentees a framework for critical reflection.

This study emphasizes the need for an environment of support and trust as a facilitator for open and honest reflection. The study shows that most of the teacher mentors and pre-service teachers enjoyed good relationships, which by extension

created a trusting an supportive environment in which they could share ideas with one another openly and reflect upon their practice frankly. This aligns with a number of studies (Beverley, 2007; Eriksson, 2013; Le, 2007) which stress the importance of a trusting environment in facilitating the quality of mentoring conversations. Regarding this issue, in a study of positive and negative facets of formal group mentoring, Eriksson (Eriksson, 2013) emphasizes that creating an open and respectful atmosphere in the mentoring group is critically important in engaging pre-service teachers to talk about their practice. As Beverley (2007) observed, a trusting atmosphere allows the participants to ask all kinds of questions and to discuss sensitive topics and experiences.

5.8 Conclusion

The results of this study, while based on a small sample size, point to the value of using group mentoring as a means of fostering meaningful and engaged reflection. The above evidence demonstrates that the pre-service teachers become more reflective through their interaction with their peers and school mentor, developing insights from their teaching practice with reference to descriptive, comparative, and critical reflection. This study, which provides important insight into teacher educators, informs how group mentoring models can be utilized as a means of facilitating reflections and discussions among pre-service and in-service teachers in the future. The pre-service teachers in this study found great value in having both experienced teachers and peers as part of their conversation. Teacher education programs cannot adequately prepare teachers for their entire career. Thus, developing reflective skills and reflection is critical in life-long learning for teachers. This study offers ways to better incorporate the group mentoring model in the practicum. Four factors, i.e., time, commitment to observations, tailored questions and supportive environment should be taken into consideration in implementing this model. Reflection training for pre-service teachers may need to be incorporated into teacher education programs to foster reflection habits and to ensure the quality of reflection. In Vietnam, EFL teacher education programs pay too much attention to English proficiency and pedagogy; they completely ignore the role of teachers as reflective practitioners. To this end, I hope that this model will contribute to the better preparing of prospective teachers for the work place.

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Chapter 6
Peer Mentoring for Pre-service Teachers: Developing Professional Practice

Abstract This chapter provides a comprehensive research example that investigates how a peer-mentoring model has influenced pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice. A mixed method design, that included both qualitative and quasi-experimental techniques, was used to investigate the impact of a formal peer mentoring intervention program on participants' professional practice during the practicum. The study sheds light on the use of peer mentoring as a model for developing beginning teachers' professional practice and its effectiveness in a specific Asian context.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the use of the formal peer mentoring process for pre-service EFL teachers in a TESOL practicum in Vietnam. It provides a comprehensive research example that investigates the impact of a peer-mentoring model on pre-service teachers' professional practice. A quasi-experimental design was used to investigate the impact of this formal peer mentoring intervention program on the practicum participants' professional practice. The study sheds light on the use of peer mentoring as a model for developing beginning teachers' professional practice and its effectiveness in a specific Asian context.

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6.2 Peer Mentoring for Pre-service Language Teachers

During practicum experiences, pre-service EFL teachers usually engage in individual planning and teaching. With few exceptions, assignments and evaluation are individual efforts. This, to some extent, makes pre-service EFL teachers' practicum experience less educative in that pre-service EFL teachers seldom have opportunities to work in a collegial manner during their practicum (Le, 2013; Nguyen & Luong,

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2007). Their practicum experiences are marked by individual teaching and observation. This implies not only that teaching is an isolated activity, but that their experience may mean that teachers enter their careers unprepared to engage in reflective practice with others. In addition, they may be unaware of the important role that collegiality will play in their future professional development. This induction practice, to some degree, could explain the current isolated situation that some EFL teachers find themselves in. This raises the issue of structuring the practicum to foster an atmosphere of collegiality rather than one of educative isolation. With reference to this issue, Zeichner (1996) says there is a need for "reflection about teaching in collaborative settings so as not to contribute further to the isolation of teachers from their colleagues" (p. 225). The impetus should be on teacher education programs designed to introduce collaborative professional practice at the pre-service level.

The formal use of peers as a reform in the EFL pre-service teacher practicum has been examined from a number of perspectives including paired placement (e.g., Dang, 2013; Walsh, Elmslie, & Tayler, 2002), peer supervision (e.g., Hale, 1997; Miller, 1989), peer observation (Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005), peer tutoring and peer coaching (Benedetti, 1999; Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007). Given the increasing problems surrounding and restrictions on mentoring and university supervision, the focus of the present investigation is upon the application of peer mentoring within an EFL teacher training program. In addition to school-based mentoring by their school practicum mentors, pre-service teachers could extend their learning opportunities by mentoring and supporting one another in the development of their teaching practices. I will suggest that as adult learners, pre-service EFL teachers could explore knowledge and develop strong repertoires of teaching together with their peers in a friendly, supportive and trusting atmosphere. The research discussed in this chapter examines the supposition that formal peer mentoring by pre-service EFL teachers during their practicum could have an impact on their practicum-based professional practice.

6.3 Peer Mentoring as a Strategy for Developing Professional Practice

Peer-based relationships provide support. This enables teachers to develop different areas of their professional practice. In this section, the notion of professional practice is explicitly examined and peer-based studies of the impact of peers on developing pre-service teacher professional practice are reviewed.

6.3.1 Professional Practice

Professional practice is a term with a wide range of meanings in different contexts, but generally, in an educational context; but, it refers to teaching practice. In most pre-service teacher education programs, professional practice focuses on

instruction in the classroom. However, professional practice should be seen in a broader context, that is, as related to other aspects of teaching which enable pre-service teachers to become organisationally and professionally socialised into their teaching profession.

There are many different areas of professional practice to which teachers must pay attention, areas that pre-service teacher education programs aim to develop. And, they can be slightly different in different contexts. For example, according to the Hong Kong Education Bureau, the practices of professional teachers encompass the following five domains: teaching and learning; professional relationships and services; school development; personal growth and development; and student development (Cheung, 2008). In New Zealand, the professional practice of student teachers during the practicum has been assessed by five general dimensions of good teaching: contextual knowledge for teaching, planning and organising for teaching, communicating to enhance learning, managing learning, promoting positive outcomes, and assessing learning (Haigh & Tuck, 1999). In Vogt and Rogalla's (2009) study, the major areas including subject knowledge, diagnosis, teaching methods and classroom management are used to conceptualise aspects of teacher's competencies which aim to develop students' learning.

As the term "professional practice" has been subjected to multiple interpretations in different contexts, there was a need to adopt a framework suitable for the context of the study. Exploration of the literature revealed that Danielson's (1996) conceptualisation of professional practice for teaching provided a theoretically grounded, empirically tested, and comprehensive basis for analysing aspects of teachers' responsibility that pre-service or in-service teachers needed to develop as part of their effective professional practice. The framework divides the act of teaching into the following four domains: planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instruction; and, professional responsibility with each domain consisting of five or six components.

The practicum for pre-service teachers aims to develop these components as basic standards for teachers. As noted earlier in this chapter, teacher educators have advocated reforming and developing some or all of these components in pre-service teacher education programs. Research related to the peer-based models to be discussed in the following section has shown that such models can provide career enhancing and psychosocial support for pre-service teachers during their practicum. The support that teachers receive from their peers should facilitate their ability to apply new knowledge, methods, and techniques in the classroom, by extension contributing to their professional development. The chapter now turns to a discussion of peer-based studies that provide empirical evidence of the impact of peers on their colleagues' professional practice.

6.3.2 Peer Impact on Developing Teachers' Professional Practice

This section reviews the empirical studies specifically related to the use of peer-based relationship in teacher education. As suggested previously, the term 'peer mentoring' has been used rather loosely to cover a wide range of peer-based concepts and strategies. Thus, the literature on peer mentoring for pre-service and in-service teachers tends to build on the many forms of teacher collaboration that have emerged and been applied to support the pre-service teachers' initial field experience.

In view of the value of peer-based relationships, different studies have been undertaken to investigate their usage and impact. But while most of the studies reviewed investigated the impact of peer-based models on instruction, little research was found addressing to Danielson's (1996) three other areas of professional practice.

Several studies of pre-service teachers' experiences or self-perceptions regarding the impact of peer coaching and peer observation on their teaching practice found that participation in peer-based strategies positively influenced the teachers' instructional practice (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Gemmell, 2003; Munson, 1998; Piraino, 2006; Rauch & Whittaker, 1999), including improvement in teaching skills (Hasbrouck, 1997; Wynn & Kromrey, 2000), knowledge about the teaching process (Bowman, 1995), pedagogical content knowledge (Jenkins, Garn, & Jenkins, 2005; Jenkins & Veal, 2002), development of clarity skills and pedagogical reasoning (Benedetti, 1999; Bowman & McCormick, 2000), greater clarity of behaviour in teaching (Bowman, 1995) and/or learning specific pedagogical methods (Anderson et al., 2005). In addition, gains were found in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values (Walsh et al., 2002). Peer-based models created a useful context for those involved to talk about their teaching. In addition, peer observation and feedback were perceived help in improve pre-service teachers' teaching practices. The participants reported that they felt comfortable both being observed by their peers and being observers, and that they valued their peers as useful resources for improving their teaching.

The review of the literature regarding this form of teacher collaboration only yielded a limited number of studies in the field of pre-service EFL teacher education related to teaching practice. In the first, Benedetti (1999) studied pre-service teachers' pedagogical reasoning in a peer coaching program where pre-service teachers received training in clarity skills during their practicum. Half of the participants received an added peer-coaching component. Data were collected from multiple sources including teaching videos, weekly journals, satisfaction questionnaires, pre- and post-observation conference transcripts, focus-group interviews, and follow-up interviews. The data demonstrated that the group of peer-coached teachers used clarity skills to a greater extent, exhibited more in-depth discussion of the use of clarity skills for L2 teaching, and showed more pedagogical reasoning in post-observation conferences than the group of non-peer coached teachers. These

findings provide evidence of the value of peer coaching as a vehicle for skills acquisition and teacher reflection.

In a second study, Vacilotto and Cummings (2007) investigated the effectiveness of a peer coaching model embedded in a reflective approach as a professional development tool for pre-service ESL/EFL teachers. As well, they evaluated its possible application in ESL/EFL teacher education and teacher development programs in general. The findings showed the positive impact of the peer coaching model on the participant teachers' critical reflection and improvement in their teaching skills. Recently, Dang (2013) explored the impact of a paired-placement teaching practicum on the teaching identity of a group of EFL pre-service teachers in a TESOL context in Vietnam. Using case study research design, the study investigated only two pairs of pre-service teachers during their TESOL practicum. Despite the conflicts they encountered, all of the participants "experienced qualitative development in their teaching identities" (p. 47).

Additional indirect support for the hypothesis that peer-based relationships promote pre-service teachers' instruction can be derived from peer-based studies of in-service teacher education (Dang, 2013; Forbes, 2004; Slater & Simmons, 2001; Zwart, Wubbels, Bolhuis, & Bergen, 2008). For example, Harnish and Wild (1994), who studied the use of peer mentoring as an intentional professional development strategy for in-service teachers, claimed that formal peer mentoring can result in the "dissemination of information and materials to peers though informal interaction" (p. 201). The value of peer-based relationships was also reported by Eisen (1999), who examined the role of peer learning partnerships in teacher professional development. From an analysis of the written and spoken texts of 20 college faculty members, Eisen (1999) found the key benefit to be the promotion of teachers' professional growth. Specifically, it helped them to develop their critical reflection skills and provided practice in specific classroom context, thus advancing their teaching effectiveness. St Clair (1994) confirms the benefit of peer mentoring in the field of education by showing that informal interaction among faculty peers can greatly facilitate their creation and dissemination of instructional innovation. This emphasizes the need for the use of peer mentoring in pedagogical innovation.

Apart from the impact of peers on instruction, other benefits of peer-based strategies in a few peer-based studies have been identified in the areas of lesson planning and preparation and classroom environment. For example, Hasbrouck (1997) investigated the utility and feasibility of training pre-service special educators using a form of mediated peer coaching with 11 pairs of pre-service teachers across a 4-week practicum. He found that peer coaching improved pre-service teachers' teaching skills: planning and organization; instruction; and classroom management. This improvement in lesson planning and preparation is confirmed in Wynn and Kromrey's (1999) study, which examines the numerous benefits of peer coaching. Pierce and Miller (1994), whose work compares the traditional supervision model with the peer coaching model, found that the participant pre-service teachers in the peer-coaching model showed more thorough and detailed lesson planning than the traditional group. Anderson et al. (2005), who investigated the value of students' observations of both peers and cooperating teachers in elementary classrooms

during their early field experience, found that peer observation contributed to develop learning specific management skills.

In the area of teacher responsibility, there is evidence that the peer-based model encourages reflective practice. Interaction with peers not only provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to reflect on their teaching (Gemmell, 2003), but also allows them to develop their skills of critical reflection (Eisen, 1999), one of the essential components of teachers' professional practice. McAllister and Neubert's (1995) longitudinal study also lends support to the use of peer coaching as an effective strategy for fostering reflective thinking. More importantly, this model makes a contribution to increasing the level of pre-service teachers' reflections, such as from non-reflective to reflective. This was supported by Kurtts and Levin's (2000) and Wynn and Kromrey's (2000, 1999) work regarding the value of peer coaching for developing reflective practice.

In addition, the value of peer-based relationships was also reported to develop a culture of collaboration (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Munson, 1998) and a sense of professionalism (Hasbrouck, 1997). Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, and Stevens (2009) explored a model in which pairs of pre-service teachers worked collaboratively with a cooperating teacher during the practicum. Their findings indicate that working with peers enabled pre-service teachers to develop more confidence in teaching, and to develop their abilities and skills to collaborate with other professionals. This may encourage pre-service teachers to continue such collaborative practice with colleagues as their teaching careers continue to develop (Kettle & Sellars, 1996).

While substantial research has been undertaken, the literature exploring the impact of peers on areas of professional practice remains somewhat limited in its scope. Most peer-based studies of pre-service teacher education have investigated the impacts or benefits of the peer-based approach, particularly peer coaching and peer observation, for developing pre-service teachers' professional practice during their in-service field experience. Since few studies explore and advocate the peer-based models for developing preservice teachers' professional practice, the review has had to examine the more general literature related to pre-service and in-service teacher education.

A study has yet to be published that thoroughly investigates the relationship of a peer mentoring model with the four components of Danielson's (1996) professional practice. The one exception may be Forbes (2004), who evaluates the effectiveness of a reflective model of peer mentoring on the professional growth of early-career science teachers over one academic year with three beginning secondary science teachers. The study, albeit limited by its exploratory focus, indicates that participation in a peer mentoring model provides a support system through which participant teachers develop confidence in risk-taking and enhance their professional growth by gaining insight into four domains of professional practice: planning and preparation; classroom environment; instruction; and, professional responsibility.

Evidence from research such as that described in this section has shown the advantages of formalising the use of peers in developing teachers' professional practice. But, empirical studies of the association between a peer-based approach and pre-service teachers' professional practice during the TESOL practicum have yet to be conducted. Furthermore, there are gaps in the literature regarding peer-based strategies that need to be addressed. This study is, therefore, designed to address these issues.

6.4 Research Methodology

6.4.1 Research Question

The research discussed in this chapter examines the impact, if any, that participation in a peer mentoring intervention has on pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice in the following four broad areas according to Danielson's framework: planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instruction; and, professional responsibilities.

6.4.2 Design

The study employed a two group (treatment and control) quasi-experimental pre-post-test design to examine the effect of participation/non-participation in a peer mentoring program. The focus was on pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice during their practicum. Quasi-experiments use non-random treatment and control groups (Campbell & Riecken, 2006; Creswell, 2003) which allow the researchers to identify the effect of the formal peer mentoring intervention on the participants' professional practice.

In this study, the participants completed questionnaires that sought information about their professional practice prior to and at the conclusion of the intervention as self-report measures, and parallel questionnaires were completed by school teacher mentors and their university supervisor to evaluate the pre-service EFL teachers' professional practices. A separate survey was distributed at the end of the study to ascertain the value that the participants attributed to their peer mentoring experiences. Thus, the effect of the intervention was examined through perceived changes in the participants' instruction as measured by their school mentors, their supervisors, and through self evaluation. The effects of peer mentoring on the participants' professional practice were also examined by participants' evaluation of their peer assistance during their professional practice.

6.4.3 Research Participants

The volunteer research participants were all students in the final year of their pre-service teacher education program at a teacher training university in Hanoi. During the program, they studied a variety of courses including: language enhancement, linguistics, cultural studies; and, TESOL methodology. Before they commenced the practicum they studied TESOL methodology courses. During the research project, they undertook a 6-week practicum at two secondary schools (School A and School B). The key criteria for the selection of volunteer participants were their availability, their capacity and their desire to commit time to the research. From this cohort, a group of 32 pre-service teachers at School A constituted the treatment group, and 33 at School B formed the control group. Groups of this size are typical of a group of pre-service teachers placed at a school for their practicum, and provided an adequate sample for quantitative data analysis purposes.

The treatment group of 32 and the control group of 33 consisted of pre-service EFL teachers who were enrolled in and had completed EFL Methodology Courses in a pre-service EFL teacher education program at CFL, VNU in Vietnam. They had undertaken their practicum at a secondary school in Hanoi, completed both pre- and post-questionnaires, and consented to participate in the study. The treatment group participated in a peer mentoring program which was integrated into their practicum. The control group did not participate in this formal peer mentoring intervention.

The use of a quasi-experimental design yielded comparable information about the two groups as it was necessary to both describe and to allow for conditions that might influence the outcomes. The participants in the control group included 30 females and 3 males, accounting for 90.9 % and 9.1 % of the sample respectively. The participants in the treatment group included 31 females and 1 male, accounting for 96.9 % and 3.1 % respectively. Most of the pre-service teachers in both groups were female, reflecting the common gender pattern in language teacher education. The average age in both groups was approximately 22 years. More specifically, in the experimental group, 46.9 % of the participants (n = 32) were aged 22, 40.6 % aged 23, and the remainder aged 24. In comparison, 81.8 % of the participants (n = 33) in the control group were aged 22, 15.2 % aged 23, and the remainder aged 24. In general, in terms of gender and age, these two groups were similar.

In terms of their academic background, three indicators (the average score for their previous years' course, average score for their TESOL courses, and the score for their micro teaching in their undergraduate course) were used to provide more information about the individual participants. As seen in Table 6.1, the mean scores of these indicators for the participants in the control group were 7.1 (SD = 0.8), 7.8 (SD = 0.5), and 8.3 (SD = 0.7) out of 10 respectively. Similarly, the mean scores of the participants in the experimental group were 7.2 (SD = 0.8), 7.9 (SD = 0.4), and 8.3 (SD = 0.7) out of 10.0 respectively. An independent-samples *T*-test conducted to compare these indicators across the two groups found no significant difference in the mean scores of these three measures.

Table 6.1 Comparison of academic background and teaching experience for treatment and control groups

	Treatment group (N = 32)		Control group (N = 33)		*T*-test for equality of means	
Characteristics	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig (2-tailed)
Academic records	7.21	0.80	7.15	0.82	−0.308	0.759
TESOL course scores	7.94	0.48	7.89	0.59	−0.370	0.731
Microteaching scores	8.34	0.73	8.30	0.70	−0.228	0.820
Years of tutor experience	1.94	1.15	2.33	1.02	1.46	0.148
Years of teacher experience	0.25	0.62	0.15	0.56	−0.668	0.507

In addition, the participants' teaching experience was examined using two indicators: their years of teaching experience as a tutor and their years of teaching as a teacher of a large class. The data in Table 6.1 shows that participants in both groups indicated previous teaching experiences of working as tutors in private classes averaging about 2 years. Some among them had teaching experience as teachers of large classes at language centres; but, the maximum teaching experience was 3 years. For most of the research participants, this practicum was their first experience of teaching groups of students. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted between the two groups to compare their years of teaching experience as tutors and teachers of large classes in two groups. No significant differences were found for either variable (see Table 6.1).

These analyses of the background information regarding participants in the two groups did not show any significant differences between the groups in terms of their academic backgrounds. As such, the two groups were initially deemed to be equivalent for the purposes of the research design. The next section describes how the experiences of the groups of participants were studied.

6.4.4 Intervention

The intervention started at the beginning of the practicum when the participants went to a secondary school in Hanoi for their teaching practice. At the very beginning of the practicum, the participants' professional practices were evaluated by their teacher mentors and university supervisors.

6.4.4.1 Pre-measurement

After the first day of the practicum, when the students had been involved in some activities in the school or had taught at least one lesson, the university supervisor and school mentors were given the professional practice questionnaire to evaluate the pre-service EFL teachers in both groups. After the intervention program started, during the first week of their practicum, the pre-service EFL teachers familiarised themselves with the school. During this time, the pre-service teachers did little other than observe; and, they undertook a few profession-related activities. The university supervisor and the school mentors evaluated the participants' progress during the latter's time in the school.

All of the school mentors and university supervisors, who were invited to participate in the study, were scheduled to receive 2 h of training using the Professional Practice Measurement Questionnaire administered at the beginning of the practicum. I personally conducted this session. This minimal training was determined to be sufficient to begin the study. The meeting focused on training the evaluators in the use of the Professional Practice Measurement Questionnaire, so that they were equipped to measure the participants' professional practice in both groups. This was done to ensure that they understood all of the terms and how to measure each component in the framework. The pre-measurement questionnaires were returned to the researcher immediately after they had evaluated the participants.

6.4.4.2 Intervention

The formal peer mentoring intervention program took place over a 6-week period. The aim of the program was to provide the pre-service EFL teachers with an additional strategy for developing their professional practice during their practicum and to provide support. Pre-service EFL teachers were paired to work as peer mentors for each other. Before the practicum, the pre-service teachers self-selected their peers and attended a mentoring training program (see Chap. 4 for more details). During the practicum, peers were expected to provide career-related support and psychosocial support through frequent contact. How they did this was negotiable. It could happen whenever they felt the need, for example, when facing the challenges and dilemmas associated with being a student teacher. Although in person contact was preferred, telephone and email contacts was also encouraged and sometimes used as a direct result of time and other constraints such as, for example, clashing class schedules and distant geographic locations.

Peer mentors were required to conduct two major activities each week: peer observation and support meetings. The purpose of the support meetings was to gather peer mentors together to examine their learning-to-teaching process. Apart from informal meetings that could last from 5 min to 1 h and occur in a variety of locations both at the school and outside of the school, formal weekly meetings with each other were both necessary and important. These meetings were organised to create opportunities for pre-service teachers to promote regular dialogue, inquiry,

and reflection on their field-based experiences. Each pair was required to sit together for approximately 1 h per week to discuss their observed lesson, to review the completed work, to discuss both the professional and non- professional issues of the week and to negotiate an action plan for the following week. The weekly meetings, which included structured activities that were detailed in the peer mentoring training section, were expected to last approximately 1 h.

Upon completion of the first week when they had helped each other to become familiar with the school, the participants continued with their weekly peer mentoring program schedule. Every week, each one of the pair was expected to observe and be observed at least once. Peer observation was conducted using a three – step process: pre-conference observation, actual observation, and post-conference observation. In the pre-conference observation the pre-service teacher reviewed the lesson plan and provided feedback on it before the lesson so that if necessary the observed teacher could make some changes. Post-conference, the pair reflected upon the strengths and limitations of the observed lesson, using the peer observation sheet. For each classroom observation, the pair engaged in a pre-conference and a post-conference meeting, scheduled at their convenience. If they did not have enough time to have a post- conference meeting immediately after the lesson, they were able to discuss it at their weekly meeting.

Each week, the participants were asked to write up a reflective peer mentoring report documenting what they had done and what they learned during the week. The intervention finished on the last day of their practicum. However, during the last days at their practicum schools, the participants did not participate in much professional practice. They spent time organising farewell activities before leaving the school.

6.4.4.3 Post-intervention

Generally, post-intervention included post-intervention data collection. Two post-measurement questionnaires (Self-evaluation Professional Practice Questionnaire and the Peer Assistance Questionnaire) were distributed among the participants in both groups during the last meeting and collected immediately after completion.

Evaluation of the participants' professional practice was conducted by the university supervisors and school mentors during the last week of the practicum. All of the questionnaires were returned to the researcher after completion.

6.4.5 Data Analysis

Mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the two groups. One of the research aims was to investigate the impact of peer mentoring intervention on the participants' professional practices in four domains between the two groups. As described in the previous section, the scores were

compared from three perspectives; that is, those of the participants, their school mentors, and their university supervisors. The interaction results (i.e., treatment and control at the pre- and post–intervention stages) provided the basis for the discussion in this analysis as the aim of the study was to investigate the degree of change in scores over time for the two groups.

6.5 Findings

6.5.1 Comparing Groups on Professional Practice over Time

In the following four sections, I report the findings from the analysis of the participants' scores as judged by themselves, their school mentors, and their university supervisors for each of Danielson's four domains: planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instructions; and, professional responsibilities.

6.5.1.1 Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

Table 6.2 provides the mean scores from the planning and preparation section of the questionnaire for the treatment and control groups across the pre-intervention and post-intervention period based on their self-evaluation.

Results from the ANOVA showed a significant interaction in the score for planning and preparation over time for the two groups, Wilks Lambda = 0.90, $F(1,63) = 6.63$, $p = 0.01$, partial eta squared = 0.09. The large effect size of 0.09 indicates the practical significance of the results. A graph of this significant interaction, shown in Fig. 6.1, indicates that although over time there was an increase in the scores for both groups from the pre- to post-intervention stage, the degree of change

Table 6.2 Self, mentor and supervisor perspectives on Danielson's (1996) domains of professional practice: planning and preparation for treatment and control groups at pre- and post-intervention

Evaluation from 3 perspectives	Treatment group (n = 32)		Control group (n = 33)		Pre- post- group Wilks' Lambda		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value	p	Partial Eta squared
Self: pre	2.82	0.33	2.73	0.28	0.90	0.01	0.09
Self: post	3.15	0.36	2.78	0.37			
Mentor: pre	2.34	0.18	2.24	0.37	0.95	0.09	0.04
Mentor: post	3.16	0.42	2.88	0.33			
Supervisor: pre	2.18	0.29	2.15	0.34	0.72	0.00	0.27
Supervisor: post	2.71	0.29	2.16	0.32			

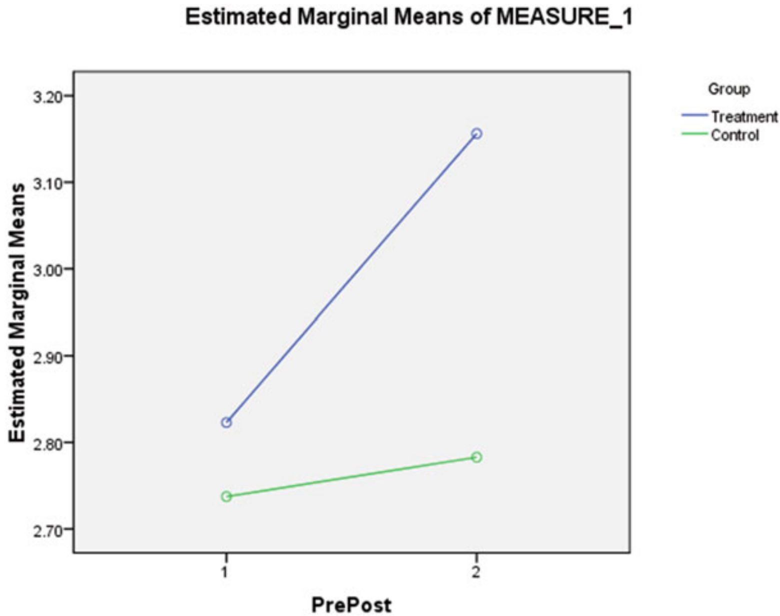

Fig. 6.1 Self-evaluated pre-and post- scores of the planning and preparation domain for treatment and control groups

was different for the two groups. While both groups had similar scores at the pre-intervention stage, there was a much greater difference between their scores post intervention.

A different pattern of results was found for school mentors. Table 6.2 shows the mean scores from the planning and preparation domain of the questionnaire for both groups across the pre-intervention and post-intervention period based on their school mentors' evaluation. ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on participants' scores for the planning and preparation component between the treatment group and control group at pre-intervention and post-intervention based on their school mentors' evaluation. ANOVA results suggested that there were no statistically significant interactions in the scores for planning and preparation across pre-intervention and post-intervention for both groups, with a Wilks Lambda of 0.95, $F(1,63)=2.88$, $p=0.09$, partial eta squared = 0.04. However, there was a change in the scores for this component across pre-intervention and post-intervention periods, Wilks Lambda of 0.24, $F(1,63)=197.6$, $p=0.000<0.05$, partial eta squared = 0.75. The plot depicted in Fig. 6.2 shows that the school mentors believed that all students (regardless of group) improved their planning and preparation domain of professional practice from the pre- to post-measure period although the changes in the scores were not significantly different for the treatment group and the control group.

In addition, the university supervisor's evaluation of the participants in the two groups differentiated from those of the mentors. Table 6.2 contains mean scores

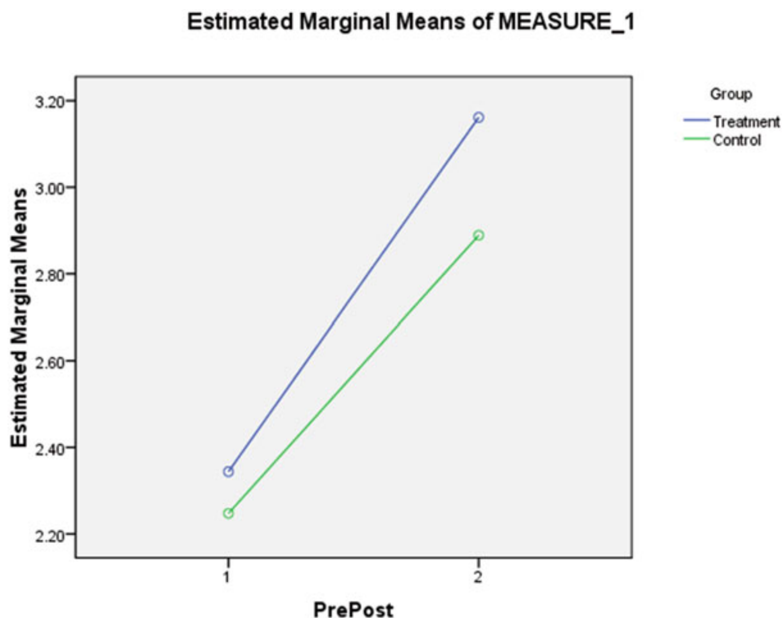

Fig. 6.2 Mentor evaluation pre- and post- scores of the planning and preparation domain for treatment and control groups

from the planning and preparation section of the questionnaire for both groups across the pre-measure and post-measure period based on their university supervisors' evaluation. An ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on the participants' scores for the planning and preparation component between the treatment group and control group at pre-intervention and post-intervention based on the university supervisors' measurements. The results of the ANOVA suggested that there was a statistically significant interaction in the scores for planning and preparation across the pre-intervention and post-intervention period for both groups, with a Wilks Lambda = 0.72, $F(1,63) = 23.80$, $p = 0.00$, partial eta squared = 0.27. This finding suggests an interaction difference in the scores for this component between two groups. The plot (Fig. 6.3) confirms the result. While the control group did not change much, the results of the treatment group improved dramatically.

In sum, the participants and university supervisors judged the participants' planning and preparation domain of professional practice differently from the mentors. While the participants and the university supervisors opined that the treatment group had made a significantly greater improvement in their score for this component than had the control group, the mentors did not note much difference in the changes in the score between the two groups. This, despite their observation that both groups had made progress in domain one from the pre-intervention period to the post-intervention period.

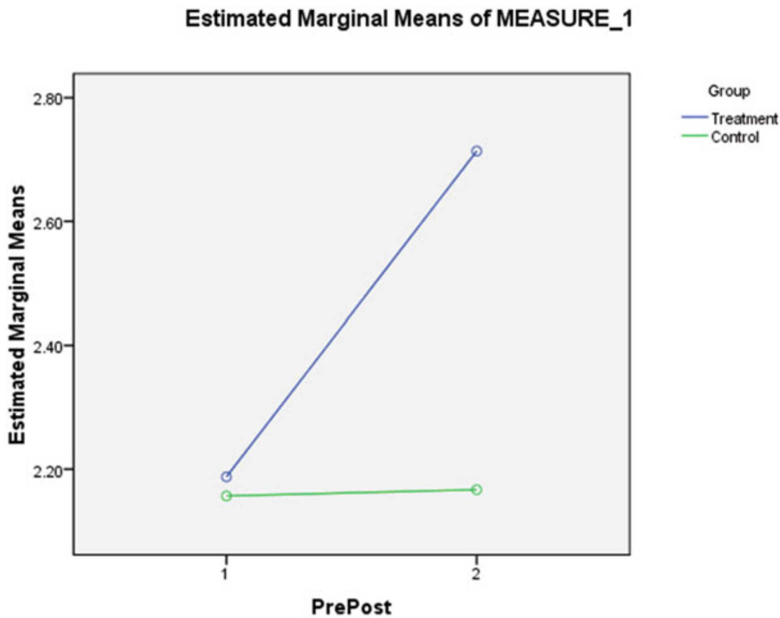

Fig. 6.3 University supervisor evaluation pre- and post- scores of the planning and preparation domain for treatment and control groups

6.5.1.2 Domain 2: Classroom Environment

A pattern of results similar to that found for planning and preparation was found for the classroom environment domain. Table 6.3 contains mean scores from the classroom environment section of the questionnaire for both groups across the pre-intervention and post-intervention period based on their self-evaluation. The ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on participants' scores for the classroom environment component between the treatment group and control group across pre-intervention and post-intervention periods based on their self-evaluation. The results showed a significant interaction in the scores for this component over time across both groups, with a Wilks Lambda of 0.86, $F(1,63) = 9.96$, $p = 0.02$. The partial eta squared of 0.14 indicated the strong effect of size. The plot (Fig. 6.4) shows the significant interaction where the difference between the two groups at pre-intervention is not pronounced, but there is a self-assessed discrepancy in the scores at post-intervention period for the two groups. The scores for the treatment group increased while those of the control group decreased.

Taking a different view of the participants' self-evaluation. Their school mentors did not see much difference between the two groups in the scores for this domain. Table 6.3 shows the mean scores for the classroom environment section of the questionnaire for both groups based on the school mentors' evaluations.

Table 6.3 Self, mentor and supervisor perspectives on Danielson's (1996) domain of professional practice: classroom environment for treatment and control groups at pre- and post-intervention

Evaluation from 3 perspectives	Treatment group (n = 32)		Control group (n = 33)		Pre- post- group Wilks' Lambda		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value	p	Partial Eta squared
Self: pre	2.88	0.43	2.93	0.44	0.86	0.002	0.13
Self: post	3.16	0.40	2.78	0.37			
Mentor: pre	2.36	0.22	2.41	0.37	0.94	0.053	0.05
Mentor: post	3.11	0.47	2.96	0.30			
Supervisor: pre	2.32	0.28	2.20	0.30	0.90	0.01	0.09
Supervisor: post	3.83	0.34	2.43	0.47			

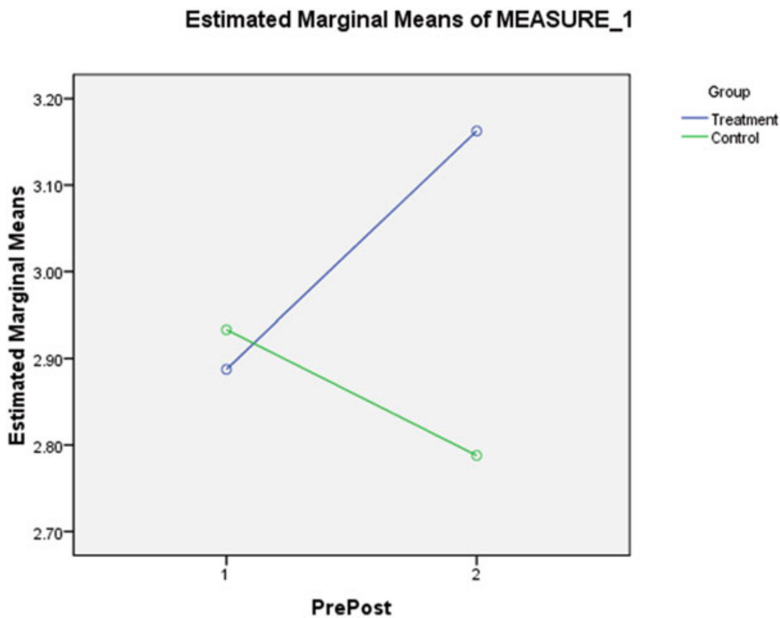

Fig. 6.4 Self-evaluated pre- and post- scores of the classroom environment domain for treatment and control groups

A mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on the participants' scores for the classroom environment component between the treatment group and control group at pre- and post-intervention based on their school mentors' evaluation. The results of the mixed between-within ANOVA show that there was no statistically significant interaction in the scores for classroom environment across pre- and post-intervention for

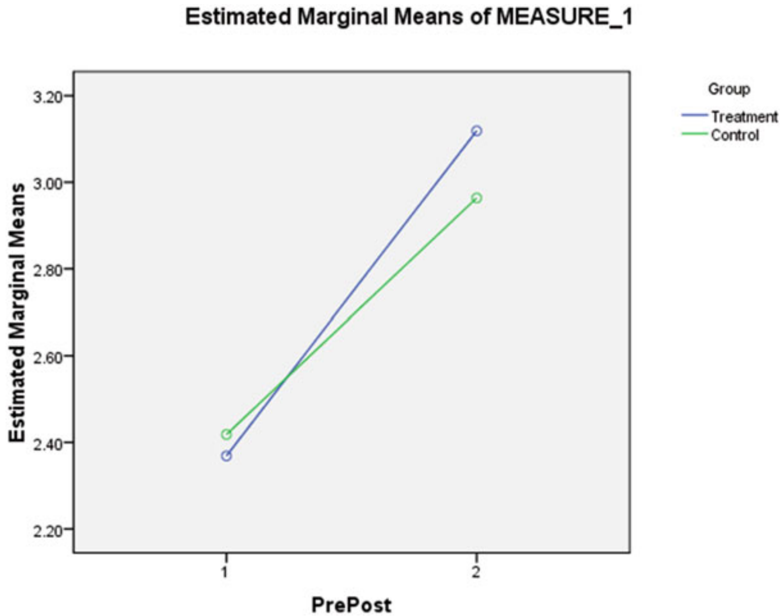

Fig. 6.5 Mentor evaluation pre- and post- scores of the classroom environment domain for the treatment and control groups

both groups, with a Wilks Lambda=0.94, F(1,63)=3.89, p=0.053, partial eta squared=0.05. The plot shown in Fig. 6.5 shows that there was a perceived increase in the scores for this component across the pre-intervention period and post-intervention period from the perspective of the mentors. At pre-measure, there was not much difference in the scores provided by the mentors. And even though the school mentors believed that the treatment group scored higher for the classroom environment domain during the post-intervention period, these implied score changes were not significantly different.

The pattern of the findings was different for the scores reported for this domain based on the university supervisors' evaluation. Table 6.3 contains mean scores for the classroom environment section of the questionnaire for both groups based on the university supervisors' evaluation. The ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on participants' scores for the classroom environment component between the treatment group and control group at pre- and post-intervention from their university supervisors' evaluations. The results from the mixed between-within ANOVA showed that there was a statistically significant interaction in the scores for classroom environment across pre-intervention and post-intervention for both groups, with Wilks Lambda=0.90, F(1,63)=6.88, p=0.01 with a large size effect (partial eta squared=0.09).

The plot seen in Fig. 6.6 shows that while there was little difference in the scores for this component in the pre-intervention period, the treatment group achieved higher scores than the control group in the post-intervention stage. This shows the

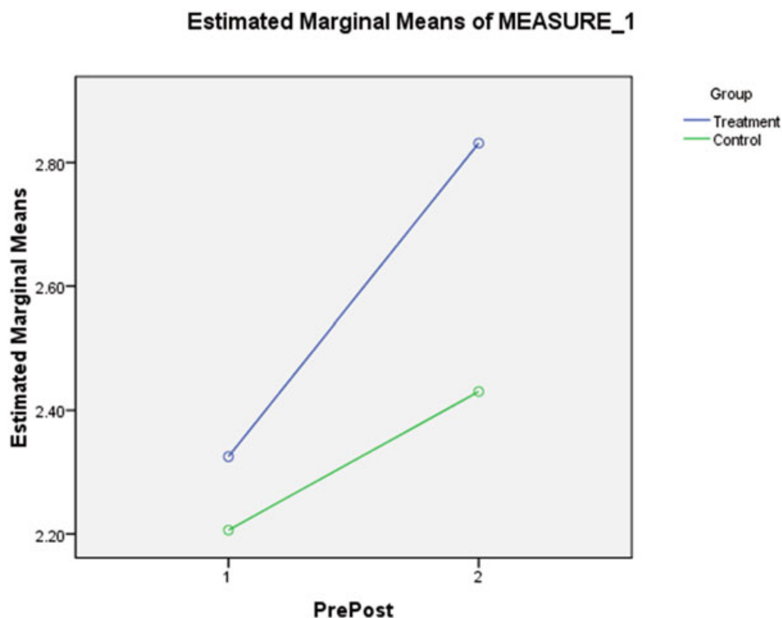

Fig. 6.6 University supervisor's evaluation pre- and post- scores of the classroom environment domain for treatment and control groups

university supervisors' assessed results for the treatment group and the control group both increasing.

In conclusion, results of the scores for the classroom environment domain based on the participants' self-evaluation and university supervisors' evaluation indicated that the treatment group made a significantly greater gain in their scores than the control groups across the pre- and post-intervention periods. And, although the school mentors saw positive changes in the scores of both groups over the research period, the changes were not significantly different between the two groups. Interestingly, the participants in the control group believed that their performance in the classroom environment domain actually decreased across the pre- and post-intervention period.

6.5.1.3 Domain 3: Instruction

(This part was published in Nguyen, H.T.M. & Baldauf Jr, R. (2010). Effective Peer Mentoring for EFL Pre-service Teachers Instructional Practicum Practice. *Asian EFL Journal*, 12(3), 40–61). Used with the permission of the editor of *Asian EFL Journal*,

The third section of the professional practice questionnaire was related to instruction and the mean score. Table 6.4 shows both groups' progress across the pre- and post-intervention periods based on their self-evaluation, mentors' evaluations, and

Table 6.4 Self, mentor and supervisor perspectives of Danielson's (1996) domain of professional practice: professional responsibilities for treatment and control groups at pre- and post-intervention

Evaluation from 3 perspectives	Treatment group (n=32)		Control group (n=33)		Pre- post- group Wilks' Lambda		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value	p	Partial Eta squared
Self: pre	2.73	0.31	2.57	0.38	0.89	0.007	0.11
Self: post	2.98	0.32	2.52	0.36			
Mentor: pre	2.16	0.20	2.09	0.27	0.85	0.002	0.14
Mentor: post	3.17	0.55	2.67	0.38			
Supervisor: pre	2.27	0.32	2.15	0.32	0.69	0.000	0.30
Supervisor: post	2.83	0.32	2.16	0.35			

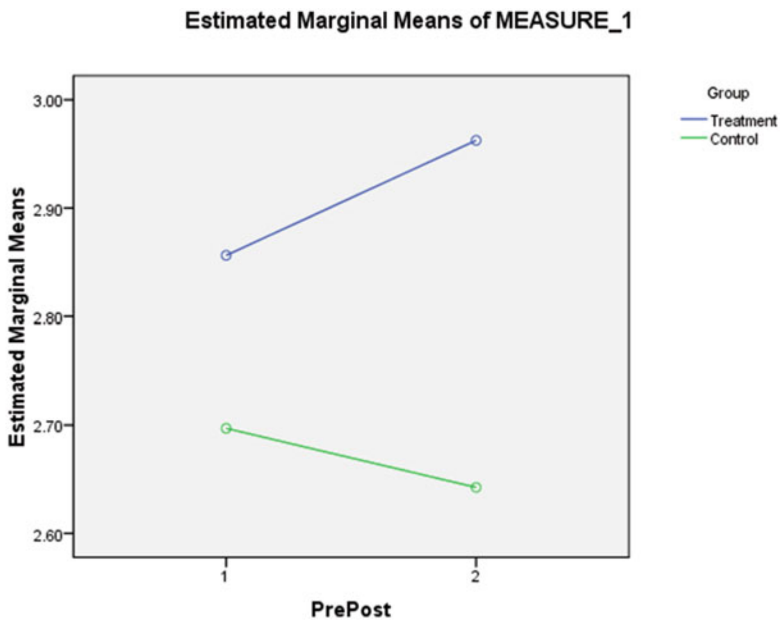

Fig. 6.7 Self-evaluated pre- and post- scores of the instruction component for treatment and control groups

university supervisors' evaluations. The ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on the participants' scores for the instruction domain between the treatment group and control group at pre-intervention and post-intervention from the three perspectives. The results of this analysis of the self-assessed scores indicated that there was no significant interaction in the scores for the instruction component between groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.98, $F(1,63) = 1.48$, $p = 0.22$, although this was considered a weak effect (eta squared = 0.02). The plot (Fig. 6.7) confirms this result, showing that, although the treatment group achieved

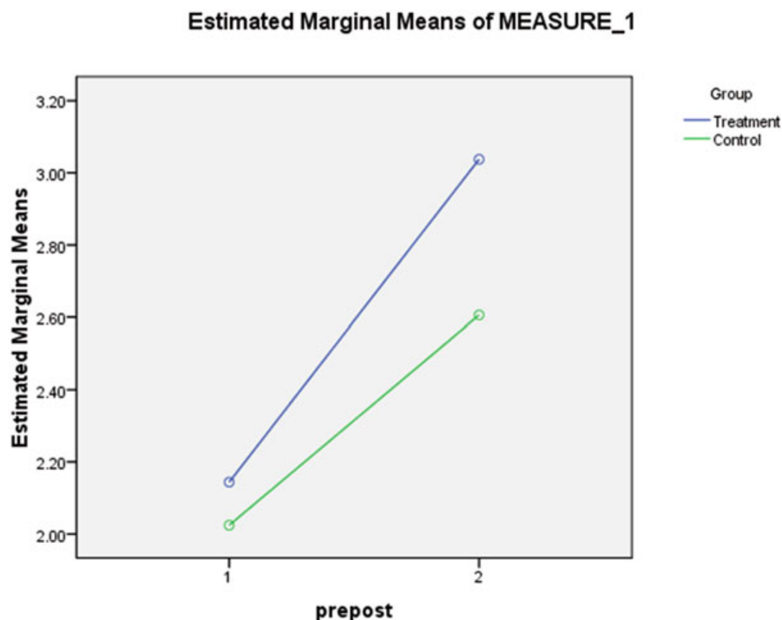

Fig. 6.8 Mentor evaluation of the treatment and control groups pre- and post- scores for the instruction domain

a higher score for this domain in the post-intervention period, the changes differed little from those of the control group. Surprisingly, the control group believed that the standard of their performance in this domain had declined.

A different pattern of results emerged in the instruction domain scores of both groups based on the school mentors' evaluations. The ANOVA results showed a statistically significant interaction in the scores for instruction across the pre-post-intervention period for the both groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.87, F(1,63) = 9.35, p = 0.003, partial eta squared = 0.12. This significant interaction is shown in the plot in Fig. 6.8. Looking at the two lines, one clearly see that there was an increase in the scores for both the treatment and control groups; however, the treatment group showed a significantly greater improvement in the scores for the instruction domain.

A similar pattern of results was found for the instruction domain scores based on the university supervisors' evaluations. Results from the ANOVA showed a statistically significant interaction in the scores for instruction across the pre-intervention and post-intervention periods for both groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.80, F(1,63) = 15.23, p = 0.000. The large size effect (partial eta squared = 0.19) supports the notion of practical significance between the two groups. The plot in Fig. 6.9 shows that in the pre-intervention period, the university supervisor evaluated all of the participants' scores for the instruction domain similarly. However, in the post-intervention period, the university supervisor observed that the treatment group's significant improvement scores for the instruction component showed there was,

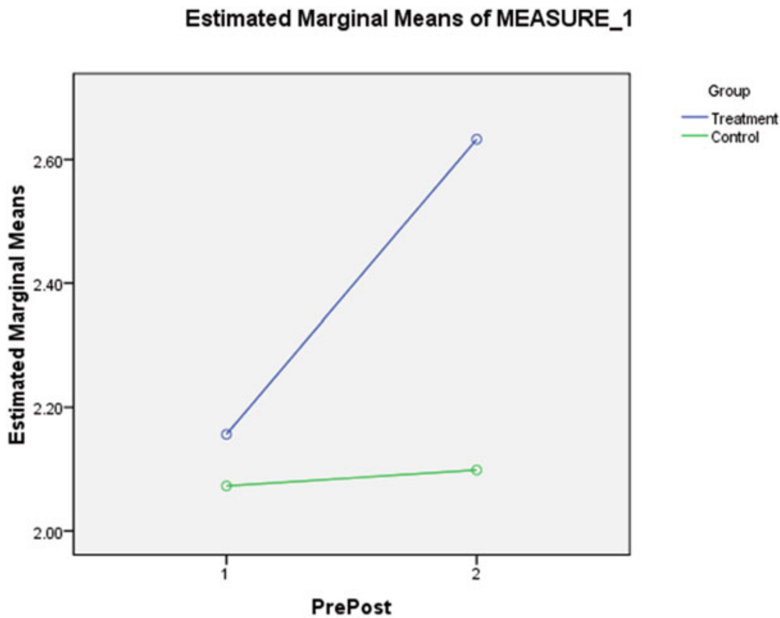

Fig. 6.9 University supervisors' evaluation of the treatment and control groups' pre- and post-scores for the instruction domain

however, little difference in the control group's scores. The results suggest differences in the scores for the instruction component across the pre-post-measure period between the group which participated in the intervention and the group which did not.

In conclusion, although the control group opined that their performance in this domain had declined, there was no significant difference in the two groups' self-evaluation scores for the pre- and post-measure period. The school mentors and university supervisors suggested that although the two groups had shown improvement in their scores for instructional domain, there was a significant difference in the two groups' scores. This suggests that there were score differences between the group who took part in the intervention training and the group who did not.

6.5.1.4 Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

Table 6.4 summarises the descriptive statistics for the scores for the professional responsibilities based on their self-evaluation, school mentors' evaluation, and university supervisors' evaluations. The ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on participants' scores for the instruction domain between the treatment group and control group at pre- and post-intervention from three perspectives. The results from the ANOVA for the self-assessed scores indicated that there was significant interaction in the scores for the professional

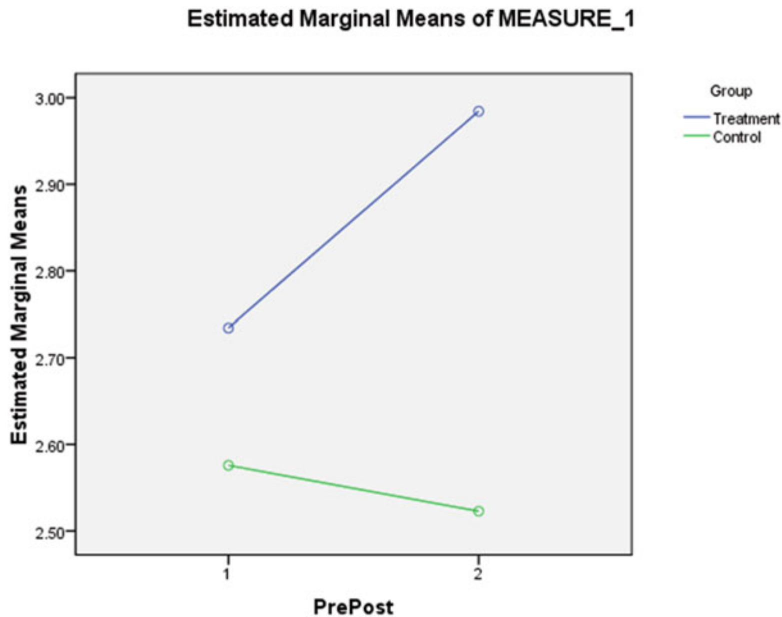

Fig. 6.10 Self-evaluated pre- and post- scores of the treatment and control groups for the professional responsibilities domain

responsibilities component across pre- and post-intervention for the two groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.89 F(1,63) = 7.78, p = 007 with strong size effect of partial eta squared = 0.11. This significant interaction is shown in the plot seen in Fig. 6.10, which shows that the treatment group achieved higher scores for teacher responsibilities than the control group at both the pre- and post-intervention stages. While there was little difference in the scores of this domain for the control and the treatment groups at the pre-intervention period, the treatment group evaluated themselves much higher before than after the intervention.

Regarding the score for the professional responsibilities domain as judged by the mentors, the results from the ANOVA indicated that there was statistically significant interaction in the scores across the pre-intervention and post-intervention period for both groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.85, F(1,63) = 10.56, p = 0.002. The large size effect (partial eta squared = 0.14) supported the notion that there would be a practical difference. In other words, there were significant differences in scores for this component over the pre-intervention and post-measurement periods for the treatment and the control group. The plot depicted in Fig. 6.11 reveals that while the control group showed improvement in their scores for this component over the pre-post-measurement period, their results differed markedly from those of the treatment group. These findings suggest that participation in the intervention might lead to greater gains in the participants' scores for the professional responsibilities component as measured by their school mentors.

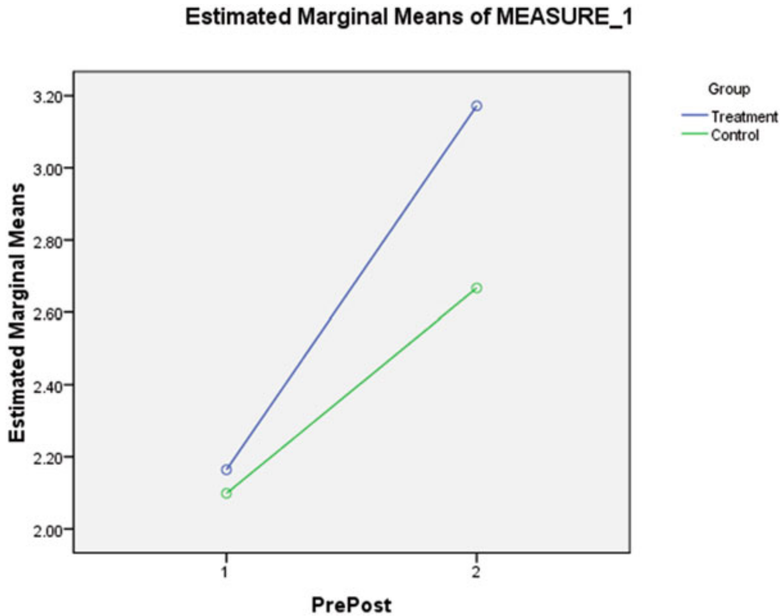

Fig. 6.11 Mentors' evaluation of the treatment and control groups for the pre- and post- scores for the professional responsibilities component

A similar pattern of findings occurred among the scores for the professional responsibilities domain between the treatment group and the control group based on the university supervisors' evaluation. The results from the ANOVA indicated a statistically significant interaction in the scores for professional responsibilities across the pre- and post-measure period of both groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.69, F(1,63) = 27.49, p = 0.00. The large size effect (partial eta squared = 0.30) supports the practical significance of the two groups. The plot shown in Fig. 6.12 confirms the result. While the control group did not show much improvement in their scores for this component over the pre-measurement and post-measurement period, their results based on their university supervisors' evaluations were very different from those of the treatment group. These findings suggest different change in the scores for this domain over the pre-intervention and post-measurement periods for the treatment and control groups. Participation in the intervention might lead to greater gains in the participants' scores for the professional responsibilities components as measured by their university supervisor.

In conclusion, the participants, school mentors, and university supervisors believed that the treatment group achieved significant gains in their scores for the professional responsibilities domain across the pre- and post-intervention period. Only the mentors saw changes in the score for the control group across the intervention period. Whereas the university supervisor did not see much change in the control group's scores, the participants in the control group thought that their professional practice performance in terms of professional responsibilities had

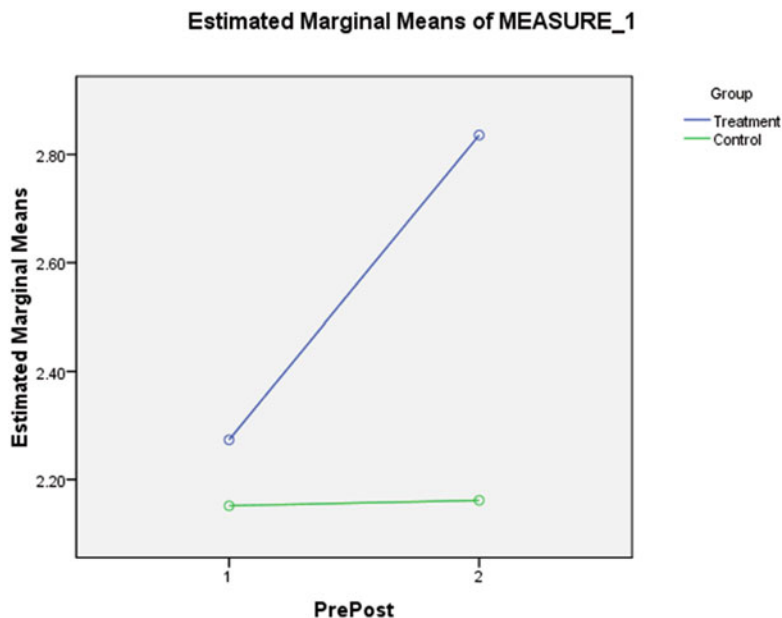

Fig. 6.12 University supervisor evaluations of the treatment and control groups for the pre-post scores for professional responsibilities domain

declined over the course of the practicum. The findings revealed the differences in the score for this component based on self-evaluation, school mentors' evaluation, and university supervisors' evaluation between the control group and the treatment group across the pre- and post-intervention period.

6.5.2 Overall Professional Practice

In this research, the participants' professional practice scores consisted of the following four domains: planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instruction; and, teacher responsibilities. The mean scores across the four domains to provide overall professional practice measures for the participants were calculated and appears in Table 6.5.

In order to test whether there were any perceived overall differences between the two groups, the ANOVA was conducted to investigate the impact of peer intervention on the participants' scores in total mean scores for professional practice at the pre-intervention and post-intervention periods. This involved self-evaluation, mentors' evaluations, and university supervisors' evaluations. The results, which were based on self-assessed scores, show a statistically significant interaction in the scores of professional practice across the pre- and post-intervention period for the two groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.87, $F(1,63) = 9.58$, $p = 0.003$. This large size

Table 6.5 Self, mentor and supervisor perspectives on Danielson's (1996) domains of professional practice: overall for treatment and control groups at pre- and post-intervention

Evaluation from 3 perspectives	Treatment group (n = 32)		Control group (n = 33)		Pre- post- group Wilks' Lambda		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t-value	p	Partial Eta squared
Self: pre	2.82	0.24	2.73	0.29	0.87	0.003	0.12
Self: post	3.06	0.31	2.68	0.29			
Mentor: pre	2.25	0.13	2.19	0.22	0.85	0.002	0.04
Mentor: post	3.12	0.40	2.78	0.23			
Supervisor: pre	2.23	0.20	2.14	0.18	0.61	0.000	0.38
Supervisor: post	2.75	0.27	2.21	0.32			

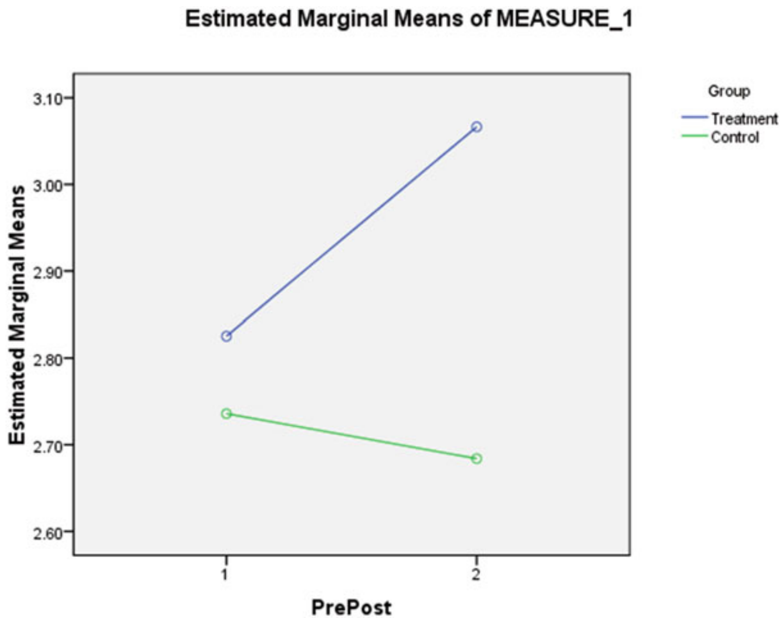

Fig. 6.13 Self-evaluated of treatment and control groups for pre- and post- scores the professional practice domain

effect (partial eta squared = 0.12) confirms the practical significance of the difference between the two groups. It can be seen in Fig. 6.13 that the treatment group had higher overall scores on professional practice than the control group at both the pre- and post-intervention stages with the self-assessed results for the treatment group dramatically increasing while the control group results decreased. These results suggest the impact of the intervention.

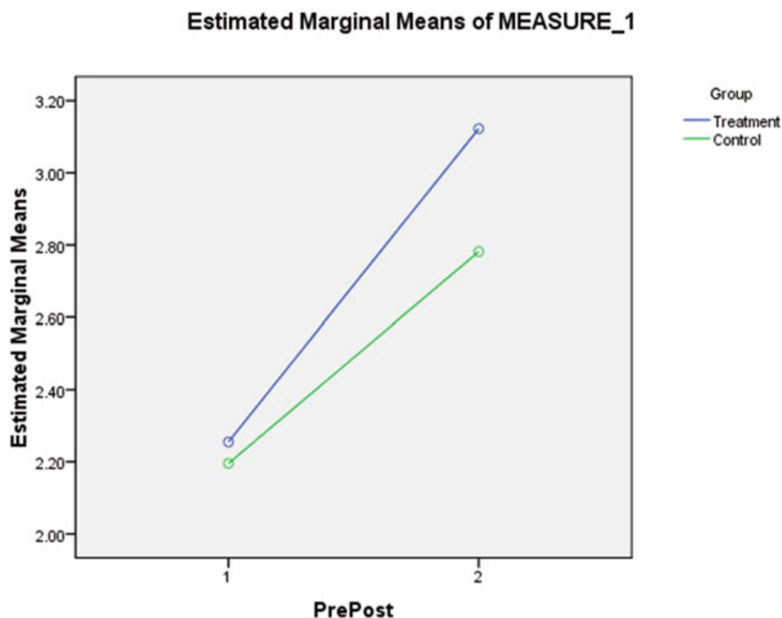

Fig. 6.14 School mentors' evaluation of treatment and control groups for pre and post-scores total professional practice

A similar pattern of results was found for the scores based on the school mentors' evaluations. The results from the ANOVA indicated that there was also significant interaction in the scores of total professional practice across pre-post-intervention period for the two groups, with Wilks Lambda = 0.85, $F(1,63) = 10.93$, $p = 0.002$. The partial eta squared of 0.12 supports the practical significance between the two groups. The plot (Fig. 6.14) indicates that there was not much difference in the scores at the pre-measurement period; but, over the period, the treatment groups' scores improved greatly according to the evaluations of the mentors. This supports the difference in the scores between the group who attended the intervention and the group who did not.

Similarly, the results from the mixed between-within ANOVA based on the university supervisors' evaluations indicate a significant interaction difference in the two groups' scores for total professional practice across pre-post-measure period, with Wilks Lambda = 0.61, $F(1,63) = 38.76$, $p = 0.00$, partial eta squared = 0.38. The plot depicted in Fig. 6.15 indicates that there was not much difference in the scores at the pre-measurement period but over the period of the study, although both groups made progress, the treatment group made greater improvement in their scores as evaluated by the university supervisor.

In conclusion, in terms of the total score for professional practice, there were significant differences in the treatment and control groups' scores based on the participants' evaluations, mentors' evaluations, and university supervisors' evaluations across the pre- and post-intervention period. School mentors and university supervi-

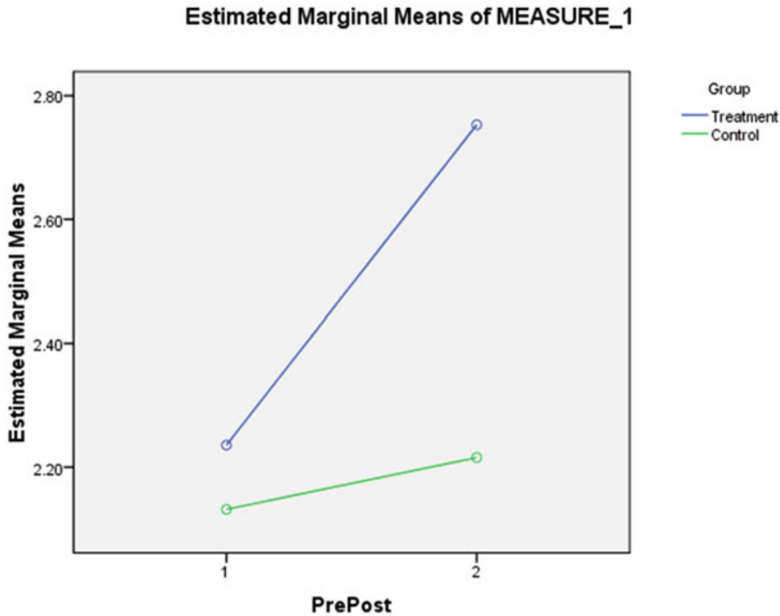

Fig. 6.15 University supervisor evaluation pre- and post- scores of total professional practice for treatment and control groups

sors observed that while the treatment group and the control group generally made improvement across the practicum, the treatment group made significantly greater gains. And while participants in the treatment group perceived some improvement in their professional practice, the control group suggested that the standard of their performance diminished.

6.5.3 Violations of Assumptions

The test for violations of assumptions for each of the mixed between-within analysis variance of tests was conducted in order to check the validity of the analysis. The results of a mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance showed almost no violations of the required assumptions for the analysis (see Table 6.6). No violations were found for the Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices. Three results of Levene's Test of Equality for Error Variances for the scores suggested that the variances for the two groups were not equal (*). However, according to Pallant (2007), analysis of variance is reasonably robust to violations of these assumptions when the size of the groups is similar (which was the case in this research).

Table 6.6 Summary of violation of tests of ANOVA assumptions

	Domain	Levene's test of equality for error variance	Box's test of equality of covariance matrices
Planning and preparation	Self evaluation	No	No
	Mentor evaluation	Yes (p = 0.001)[a] (pre)	No
	Supervision evaluation	No	No
Classroom environment	Self evaluation	No	No
	Mentor evaluation	Yes (p = 0.002)[a] (post)	No
	Supervision evaluation	Yes (p = 0.01)[a] (post)	No
Instruction	Self evaluation	No	No
	Mentor evaluation	No	No
	Supervision evaluation	No	No
Professional responsibilities	Self evaluation	No	No
	Mentor evaluation	No	No
	Supervision evaluation	No	No
Total	Self evaluation	No	No
	Mentor evaluation	No	No
	Supervision evaluation	No	No

[a]Pallant (2007) that maintains ANOVA is reasonably robust regarding violation of assumptions when then group size is similar

6.5.4 Professional Practice Comparison Summary

In this section of the chapter, I describe the changes in the scores of the participants from the two different groups over the pre- and post-intervention period based on self-evaluation and mentors' and university supervisors' evaluations of the participants' professional practice. The findings from ANOVA's comparison the two groups indicated statistically significant interactions in the scores for planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, in the professional responsibilities components and in the total mean scores for professional practice across the study time for the treatment group and the control groups. More specifically, in terms of the planning and preparation of the domain score, the participants and university supervisors perceived that the treatment group had significantly greater score gains than the control group. The school mentors did not see much difference. Regarding the classroom environment score, a similar pattern of findings was reported.

In terms of instruction domain score, while the participants themselves did not note many changes between the two groups over time, the mentors and university supervisors evaluated the participants in the treatment group as achieving a

significantly greater score than the control group. In terms of professional responsibilities, the treatment group made a significantly greater improvement from three perspectives. A similar pattern of results was found for the total score for professional practice. In general, the findings suggested that there were significant increases in the professional practice domain scores between those in the group who attended the intervention compared to those who did not attend. The next section compares the participants' perceptions of the contribution of their peer mentoring to their professional practice during the practicum.

6.6 A Comparison of Perceived Changes in Professional Practice Across Groups

Another way to determine whether peer mentoring was effect was to investigate the participants' opinions regarding professional practice improvements that they attributed to the peer mentoring process. Given the group nature of the practicum, it was assumed that the control group were informally involved in the peer mentoring process when they were assigned to work in the same class, or with the same school mentor in the practicum school. The first question in Section B of the questionnaire asked the participants to nominate the person whom they considered to be of most help to them in regard to support with their professional practice during the practicum. The second question required the participants to respond to 20 statements related to their perceptions of their peer mentoring experiences in making improvements in the four major areas of their professional practice. The scale for their answers for the 24 items ranged from: 1 = "Strongly disagree"; 2 = "disagree"; 3 = "Undecided"; 4 = "agree"; to 5 = "Strongly agree". Third, Section B asked the participants to evaluate the degree of which their peer- based relationship help to develop their professional practice. The scale for their answers for this item ranged from: 1 = "no help at all"; 2 = "very little help"; 3 = "moderate help"; 4 = "helpful"; to 5 = "very helpful".

Independent samples t-tests were used to make comparisons between the treatment group and control group regarding the extent to which they attributed their improvement in the four professional practice domains to their peer mentoring. Table 6.7 summarises the descriptive statistics and findings from the t-tests. None of the required assumptions was violated. An effect size (eta squared) was calculated to determine the practical significance of the results. According to Cohen (1988), the guidelines for interpreting this value are 0.01 = small effect, 0.06 = moderate effect, 0.14 = large effect.

Regarding the question about who provided to be the most helpful person during the practicum, all of the participants chose someone from among three significant groups: peers, school mentors, and university supervisors. The participants in the treatment control group tended to choose their peers as the most helpful persons (71 % choosing them only). Conversely, the control group did not consider their

Table 6.7 Treatment and control groups' responses to the attribution of peer mentoring to their professional practice improvement scale

	Group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	*T*-test		
					t-value	p	eta squared
Domain one (planning and preparation)	Treatment	32	3.036	0.633	2.93	0.005	0.11
	Control	33	2.596	0.576			
Domain two (classroom environment)	Treatment	32	2.800	0.614	2.79	0.007	0.10
	Control	33	2.424	0.463			
Domain three (instruction)	Treatment	32	2.969	0.686	2.35	0.021	0.08
	Control	33	2.582	0.637			
Domain four (professional responsibilities)	Treatment	32	2.930	0.565	2.91	0.005	0.11
	Control	33	2.546	0.498			
Total professional practice	Treatment	32	2.934	0.565	3.26	0.002	0.14
	Control	33	2.537	0.404			

peers the most helpful persons. This supports the effect of formal peer mentoring intervention for the treatment group in the sense that the participants in the treatment group valued the support of their peers during their practicum.

In regard to their perceptions of their improvement in the four domains of professional practice attributed to their interaction with their peers, independent-sample t-tests were performed to compare the mean scores of the perceptions of the two different groups. Table 6.7 shows a significant difference in the participants' responses regarding the value of peer mentoring to their improvement in lesson planning and preparation (domain one), t (63) = 2.93, p = 0.005. That is, the average answer scores of the treatment group (M = 3.03, SD = 0.63) significantly differed from those of the control group (M = 2.59, SD = 0.57). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 0.44, 95 % CI: 0.74–0.14) was large (eta squared = 0.11). A similar pattern of findings occurred for participants' perceptions of the value of their peer interaction to their improvements in the classroom environment domain (domain two). The results suggest that the treatment group's responses (M = 2.80, SD = 0.61) differed significantly from those of the control group (M = 2.42, SD = 0.46), t (63) =2.79, p = 0.007. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = −0.37, 95 % CI: 0.64–0.10) was large (eta squared = 0.10). The mean scores of the participants' answers show that the participants in the treatment group tended to agree that their interactions with their peer(s) during the practicum helped them improve their professional practice in terms of the classroom environment domain. The participants in the control group did not report the same results.

As regards the instruction domain, Table 5.7 shows that the average answer scores of the participants' perceptions of the value of peer interaction to their improvement in this domain differed significantly between the group who were part of the intervention (M = 2.96, SD = 0.68) and the group who were not (M = 2.58, SD = 0.63), t(63) = 2.35, p = 0.021 with an effect size that is moderate (eta

squared = 0.08). The participants in the treatment group tended to perceive that their peer interaction helped them improve their professional practice in terms of the instruction domain. The control group seemed less sure about this. A similar finding was noted with the *t*-test for the professional responsibilities component. The findings indicated a significant difference between the responses of the treatment group (M = 2.92, SD = 0.56) and the control group (M = 2.54, SD = 0.49), t(63) = 2.90, p = 0.005. An effect size of 0.11 for the independent sample t-tests was calculated. This large size effect suggested confirmation of the practical significance of the difference between the two groups.

An independent sample *t*-test was performed to compare the total mean answer scores of professional practice between the two groups. The mean answer scores of the participants in the treatment group (M = 2.93, SD = 0.56) differed significantly from those of the control group (M = 2.53, SD = 0.40), t(630) = 3.26, p = 0.002. 95 % confidence interval for the difference was between the lower (0.63) and upper boundary (0.15).

An effect size for the independent sample t-tests was calculated and resulted in an effect size of 0.14. This large size effect confirms the practical significance of the difference found between the two groups. In general, the treatment group participants tended to acknowledge a change in their professional responsibilities which they attributed to their peer interactions, while the control group seemed less sure of this.

In response to the question which asking the participants to evaluate their peer -based relationship's contribution to developing their professional practice (1 = no help at all, 2 = very little help, 3 = moderate help, 4 = helpful, 5 = very helpful), the independent sample *t*-test findings showed a statistically significant difference between the control group (M = 2.30, SD = 0.58) and the treatment group (M = 3.00, SD = 1.01), t(63) = 3.40, p = 0.001. The large effect size of 0.15 (eta squared) supports the practical significance of the difference between the two groups. Each member of the treatment group said that their peer -based relationship supported the development of their professional practice during the practicum. Members of the control group, however, seemed less certain.

In conclusion, while the treatment group considered their peer(s) to be the most helpful person during their practicum, few members of the control group considered the role of their peers particularly helpful. This outcome was supported by the findings from the independent-samples *t*-tests, which indicated a statistically significant difference in the participants' responses. They claimed that peer interaction improved their professional practice in terms of the following four components: planning and preparation; classroom environment; instruction; and, professional responsibility. It is noteworthy that more members of the treatment group saw value in their peer- based relationships in developing their professional practice during the practicum than those of the control group. These results strengthened the finding in the previous section which suggested that the significant differences in the score for the four professional practice domains between the two groups were attributable to their participation in the peer mentoring intervention. In next section, I seek to determine the degree to which participation in the peer mentoring intervention

impacted on the participants' perceptions of the support they received from their peer(s) during the practicum.

6.7 Discussion and Conclusion

Independent samples t-tests were used to analyse the scores based on the self-assessment reports, school mentors-evaluated reports, and the university supervisor-evaluated reports during the pre-measure period. The results showed that at the pre-measure stage, there were no significant differences, neither in the scores for the four components nor in the total scores for professional practice. The results further indicated that both groups' score were comparable at the pre-intervention. It was noted, however, that members of the treatment group showed significant improvements during the study period. In the following sections, I discuss in detail the findings for each of the four areas of professional practice.

6.7.1 Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

The planning and preparation domain in Danielson's (1996) schema for professional practice has six components: demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy, demonstrating knowledge of students, selecting instructional goals, demonstrating knowledge of resources, designing coherent instruction, and assessing student learning. In this study, these components were combined into a single scale as measured by Danielson's survey questionnaire. In terms of the planning and preparation domain, the results of the questionnaire showed that while the formally peer mentored and non-formally peer- mentored groups achieved similar average scores at the pre-intervention stage, there was significant difference between the scores of the two groups post the intervention.

The changes in the planning and preparation scores as rated by the participants themselves and by their university supervisors were significantly higher for the formally peer mentored group compared to the non-formally peer mentored group. However, there was no significant difference in the scores when this domain was evaluated by the school mentors. Despite the lack of consistent statistical evidence across all three groups of raters, the findings from the focus group interviews supported the argument that different areas of the lesson planning and preparation improved as a result of their participation in the formal peer mentoring intervention.

The findings of this study support and extend other peer-based research (Hasbrouck, 1997; Jenkins et al., 2005; Jenkins & Veal, 2002; Pierce & Miller, 1994; Wynn & Kromrey, 2000) which claimed that the introduction of a formal peer-based strategy (mostly in the form of peer coaching) helped those involved to develop their knowledge of lesson planning and preparation. Peer observation

allowed them to interpret what they had observed during their peers' lessons, and to make decisions about or adjustment to their conduct of future lessons. However, because most of the previous peer-based studies were based on a single group non-experimental design, attribution was limited to the impact of peer observation. The comparative mixed method design of this research indicated that the changes were due to the intervention.

The findings from this part of the study, which are strongly aligned with the peer mentoring work of Forbes (2004) emphasise the value of peer interaction through discussion, the provision of feedback, and the exchanging if lesson plans among pre-service EFL teachers. While time constraints were numbered among the obstacles faced by teachers during the planning and preparation process (Forbes, 2004), evidence from the current study suggests that the process of formal peer mentoring actually contributed to saving pre-service EFL teachers' time and reducing their workload.

6.7.2 Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

The classroom environment domain in Danielson's (1996) framework for professional practice includes creating an environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, managing student behaviours, and organizing physical space. Danielson's questionnaire which I used for the purpose of this study, combines these components in a single scale.

A similar pattern of findings to those for planning and preparation from the questionnaire data analysis were found for the classroom environment domain. The participants and their university supervisors assessed that participation in the peer mentoring intervention had a noticeable impact on the pre-service EFL teachers' proficiency scores in the domain of classroom environment in their professional practice in the TESOL practicum. However, although the mentors agreed that the formally peer-mentored group achieved a higher score for the classroom environment domain at the post-intervention period, subsequent score changes did not reach the required level of significance between the groups. It may be that the mentors' evaluation based on the notion that classroom management is one of greatest concerns for pre-service teachers. The latter "often know little and have a great deal of anxiety" (Day, 1990, p. 53) as well as "tension" (Johnson, 1996). Their mentors, who have experience in the classroom environment, may have been exceeding critical in their evaluations of the pre-service teachers' performance in this domain. Although there is a lack of consistent statistical evidence across the three sets of raters on the differences between the two groups, the differences that were found in the participants' proficiency scores in this domain may be attributed in part to their participation in the peer mentoring intervention program in this study.

This research findings are congruent with prior research into peer-based strategies conducted by Hasbrouck (1997), Anderson et al. (2005), Wynn and Kromrey (1999), and Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, and Stevens (2009) which

provide some evidence that peer coaching contributes to the improvement of some aspects of the classroom environment. However, these above findings were based on single group self-reported data related principally to classroom management, not on other aspects of the classroom environment. The current study's quasi-experimental design provides convincing evidence of the impact that formal peer -mentoring intervention programs have on pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice. It extends across a number of different areas of the classroom environment, including managing student behaviour, classroom procedures, group organisation, and classroom atmosphere. In other words, in this work, the concept of classroom environment as documented by the impact of peer interaction is extended beyond the notion of mere classroom management.

6.7.3 Domain 3: Instruction

The instruction domain in Danielson's (1996) framework consists of five components at the very heart of teaching. These include: communicating clearly and accurately; using questioning and discussion techniques; engaging students in learning; providing feedback to students; and, demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness. These components were combined into a single scale, and measured by Danielson's questionnaire (the latter was used in this study).

Analysis of the questionnaire responses has provided evidence of a significant change in scores related to the instruction domain. The scores of the formally peer mentored group and the non-formally peer mentored group were evaluated by the mentors and the university supervisors between the two groups. Mentors in both groups saw an increase in performance from basic to proficient; but, the formally peer mentored group was rated as significantly more proficient than the non-formally peer mentored group. The university supervisors noted a significant discrepancy in this domain between the two groups. Those working with the non-formally peer mentored group reported little improvement in the pre-service teachers' performances in the instruction domain from the beginning to the end of the practicum. However, significant improvements appeared to have occurred in the formally peer mentored group.

When it came to the views of the participants themselves, both groups admitted to little change in their instructional practice, both felt they had brought "proficient" skills to the practicum from their university studies and that these skills had changed very little over the 6 week period. This may have been due to the "shattered feeling" reported by Johnson (1996), that may have been generated by the intensity of the practicum. The challenges that the participants faced during the practicum may have caused them to feel less confident. It may have occurred to someone among them that they needed more experience in the classroom if they were to improve their practice.

The findings from this study are consistent with the research into teacher education that indicates that formal peer-based strategies such as peer observation

(Anderson et al., 2005; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Lasater, 1994; Morgan, Gustafson, Hudson, & Sazberg, 1992; Munson, 1998; Rauch & Whittaker, 1999), peer coaching (Hasbrouck, 1997; McAllister & Neubert, 1995; Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007) or peer learning partnerships (Eisen, 1999) contribute to improvement of teachers instructional practice. However, most of these studies have emphasised the value of peer observation and feedback for improving instruction where participants were assigned to take part in such activities during peer coaching oriented teaching practice. In contrast, the current study, which is organised around a variety of activities beyond peer observation and feedback, is more aligned with the findings of a broader study by Forbes (2004). The current study provides convincing evidence of the impact of participation in a formal peer mentoring intervention on major aspects of instruction as specified (see Danielson's (1999) framework). This framework includes communication, questioning techniques, engaging students in learning, and feedback to students, flexibilities and responsibilities. In addition, it includes other areas that arose from the interviews, such as creating teaching activities, mistakes in identification, using the blackboard, teaching manner, and time management. The findings indicate that participation in a formal peer mentoring process can contribute relatively broadly to improvement of different aspects of instruction.

6.7.4 Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

The professional responsibilities domain in Danielson's (1996) framework includes reflecting on teaching, maintaining accurate records, contributing to the school, growing and developing professionally, and showing professionalism. For the purpose of my research, these components were combined into a single scale and measured by Danielson's survey questionnaire.

A comparison of the ratings by mentors, university supervisors, and participants indicated that the members of formally peer -mentored group made significant gains in their scores for the professional responsibilities domain over the pre- and post-intervention period. Such significantly improved ratings suggest that their involvement in the formal peer -mentoring model seems to have effectively increased the pre-service EFL teachers' proficiency in the professional responsibilities domain.

These findings are congruent with those of other studies (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Bullough et al., 2003; Goodnough et al., 2009; Jenkins & Veal, 2002; Wynn & Kromrey, 1999) which contend that involvement in formal peer-based relationships develops a culture of collaboration and reflection (Benedetti, 1999; Walsh et al., 2002). The findings of this study parallel those of other studies (Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Rauch & Whittaker, 1999; Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007) which report changes in attitudes toward working collaboratively with one's peers. This resonates with the argument that peer interaction among teachers has the potential to develop a community of practice.

Furthermore, while Forbes's (2004) findings in this domain were limited to peer support in dealing with different stakeholders in the educational context, the current study provides evidence of the impact of peers on other areas of professional responsibilities aspects such as reflection, contributing to school activities, developing positive working relationships, growing professionally and maintaining students' records.

6.8 Conclusion

In general, analysis of the questionnaires has shown that participation in formal peer mentoring intervention during the practicum impacted on these pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice. More specifically, it impacted on the four domains, which were directly examined: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. These results suggest that participation in formal peer mentoring provided pre-service EFL teachers with opportunities to work with and to learn from their peers, by extension increasing their performance in the four domains cited. Clearly, these are areas of challenge for pre-service teachers during their professional practice. The unique nature of this formal peer mentoring intervention, which utilises pre-service teachers as peer mentors of each other in a supportive and cooperative environment, sheds light on what peers can potentially bring to each other when developing their professional practice. Without question, the results of this study provide ample support for the notion that participation in the peer mentoring model used in the current research positively affected the participants' professional practices.

In addition, the current study provides ample evidence that this particular model of formal peer mentoring worked effectively in developing these pre-service EFL teachers' professional practice in the context of Vietnam. The process of learning to teach in Vietnam has been traditionally regarded as a process of transferring knowledge and experience from the experienced teachers (experts) to the novice teachers. This practice reflects the influence of Confucian Heritage Culture, which highly prizes the role of experts in the transmission of knowledge, and emphasises hierarchy rather than equality in relationships (Bond & Hwang, 1986, cited in Sullivan, 2000).

The current study makes a substantial contribution to the field of EFL pre-service teacher education. It not only supports the findings of other studies of teacher education and delineates the benefits of peer-based strategies for developing teacher professional practice, but also details additional areas of professional practice, which are considered important during the practicum for pre-service teachers' learning- to- teach process.

The results of the study can be understood in terms of Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the role of social interaction with capable peers developing core aspects of learning (to teach). Participation in the peer-mentoring model during the practicum enables pre-service EFL teachers to interact with each other positively, in the pro-

cess further developing their professional practice. Vygotsky's theory provides a valid way of understanding pre-service teachers' learning. The study provides further evidence of the fact that learning does not take place in isolation; rather it depends upon interaction. In other words, learning occurs through communication and collaboration with others in social settings. However, the study also highlights the need for well-structured support for interaction among peers. Because peer mentoring is supportive in nature, trainee teachers are not isolated. Rather than being left to struggle with difficulties on their own, peer-mentoring programs provide the trainee teachers with increased support they need to effectively cope with the tasks that they need to be done.

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Chapter 7
Peer Mentoring: A Source of Support for Pre-service EFL Teachers

Abstract This chapter reports on a comprehensive research study whose aims were to investigate how a peer-mentoring model might influence pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions of the amount of support they receive from their peers. The study sheds light on the use of peer mentoring as a model for supporting beginning teachers and its effectiveness in a specific Asian context.

A small part of this book chapter was published in Nguyen, H.T.M (2013). Peer Mentoring: A Way Forward for Supporting Preservice EFL Teachers Psychosocially During the Practicum', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38, (7), 31–44. In this article, I reported both qualitative and quantitative evidence to support the impact of the peer mentoring model on the psychosocial support for pre-service teachers. This book chapter continues to report the comprehensive findings not only on the psychological support but also on career-related support. A part of this chapter was used with the permission of the journal publisher and the editor of Australian Journal of Teacher Education.

7.1 Introduction

Following the previous chapter on the impact of a formal peer mentoring program on pre-service teachers' professional practice, this chapter's focus is upon reporting qualitative findings related to how a peer-mentoring model provides support to pre-service EFL teachers. The study sheds light on the use of peer mentoring as a model for support and its effectiveness in an Asia specific context.

7.2 The Study

This part of the study aims to investigate the views of formally peer- mentored and non-formally peer mentored pre-service EFL teachers regarding the support they receive from their peers during their teaching practicum in a secondary school

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context in Vietnam. This part of the study aims to address the following research question: How do participants in both the formally peer-mentored group and the non-formally peer-mentored group perceive the support they receive from their peer(s) in their school-based practicum?

The peer- mentoring program was implemented as described in Chaps. 6 and 4. At the end of the 6-week practicum, I conducted the focus group interviews using a semi-structured interview format. Although a set of questions was prepared, using a semi-structured approach allowed me to be flexible, that is, to follow each participant's lead (Merriam, 2002). The nature of the semi-structured interviews, which present opportunities to express ideas, is more open than structured interviews or questionnaires (Flick, 2006). Thus, any related issues emerging from the group discussion were considered useful information; and, the participants were considered to be discussants rather than respondents. In sum, utilising the focus group interview method was congruent with the nature of the research question and research purpose. It helped to provide in-depth data to facilitate an understanding of the participants' experiences.

For the purpose of this study, I conducted semi-structured focus group interviews with four to six participants in each group (control and experiment group). Each interview lasted approximately 90 min. Each participant was afforded as much time as possible to air their views on the topic of inquiry: this allowed for further clarification and exploration. The small group size made it possible for all of the participants to be seated close to each other so that they could see and hear each other clearly. As Krueger (1994, p. 17) suggests such small groups "have a distinct advantage in logistics" In addition, these Vietnamese pre-service teacher participants were already familiar with discussion groups of three to six which were commonly used during their undergraduate courses. Therefore, for them, focus group interviews of four to six people created a normal setting for discussion. In order to interview all participants, I conducted six focus group interviews with each experimental and control group.

The transcripts of the 12 focus group interviews were analysed inductively, allowing the themes to emerge from the participants' words rather than beginning with a hypothesis or theory that needed to be substantiated. More specifically, a constant comparative analysis method was used that involved unitising, defining and categorising the data. My aims was to bring all of the information together. The qualitative data were then organized according to group categories (treatment group and control group). One of the named categories for further analysis was, thus, category type. The latent content of the text was determined by a subjective evaluation of the overall content of the interviews (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This process created flexibility: it allowed themes to develop both from the research questions and from the research participants' narratives.

The analytical procedure used in this study for the qualitative data analysis consisted of five concurrent non-linear steps. Figure 7.1 provides a flow chart of this process which combines steps from different models of data analysis (Green et al., 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The two-headed arrow between these steps indicates the non-linear nature of the analysis. The steps were

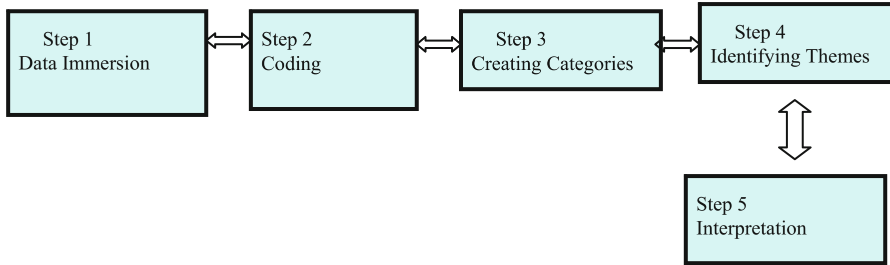

Fig. 7.1 Steps in the qualitative data analysis procedure for this study

repeated at times in an ongoing way as new themes emerged and were identified during the analytic process.

7.3 Findings from the Experimental Group

When identifying their sources of support, the pre-service teachers in the treatment group attributed a great deal of value to their peers. Most of them expressed positive feelings about the peer mentoring they had received, describing it in terms of psychosocial and career-related support. Most of the participants stated that they received both types of support from their peers during their practicum. Ten specifically stated that their peers were the best source of support during their practicum.

7.3.1 Psychosocial Support

Discussion of psychosocial support related to several key areas. Specifically, the participants' comments regarding psychosocial support can be identified by three main sub-themes: first, emotional support; second, sharing; and third, befriending.

7.3.1.1 Emotional Support

Emotional support attracted the most frequently comment in the six interviews: up to 27 individual references in total from all six focus groups. The participants agreed that they received emotional support from their peers during their practicum. Some trainees emphasised the fact that, without their peers, they might not have finished their practicum. The participants in all groups developed their ideas and views in interaction with each other. Each individual collaboratively constructed their

meanings of emotional support in conjunction with those of their peers. The participants continuously provided examples idence of the emotional support they received from their peers. For example, one participant said:

> Most importantly, I always received feedback after the lesson, including my drawbacks and my teaching problems. My peer always said “It’s good, don’t worry.” Thus, I felt supported. We believed that working in pairs like this was very effective. (G04-EP03)

Each individual’s account supported others by emphasising the emotional support provided by their peers. Other participants clarified the occasions when they said that they felt supported when their peers provided constructive and friendly feedback after the lesson. When they all sat at the back observing their lesson, their peers tried to reduce the level of pressure they felt. The emotional support provided came in many forms, an attribute often referred to in different terms, e.g.’ “comforting”, “encouragement”, “caring”, and “being a good listener.”

Some of the pre-service teachers described the emotional support they received in the form of comforting each other. During the discussions in the three focus group interviews, six participants described how supported they felt when their peers comforted them. One said that she felt moved and motivated when she received a comforting message from her peer: “I was devastated after my lesson but, at that time, I received a message from my peer that asked, ‘How are you? Do you feel better?’ I felt like she was my life saver” (G05-EP03). She the only interviewee who reported that her peer helped alleviate her feelings of disappointment: “She is my closest ally during the practicum. Once, I felt bitterly disappointed about my teaching and myself, but she always comforted me by saying: ‘No worries, no problems’. Then I felt better” (G03-EP01). The relating of this experience seemed to be appreciated by other group members as all of them made gestures of support like smiles and relaxed facial expressions.

Some of the participants stated that their peers always reassured them when they had problems and when they were not satisfied with their lessons. One said: “Each time I did not feel happy after my lesson, Trang said ‘No problem’ which made me feel very comfortable” (G01-EP02). Their peers comforting behavior provided the pre-service teachers with more energy and helped them to stay motivated throughout their practicum.

While not always using the term “supportive”, some pre-service teachers described other forms of emotionally supportive behavior offered by their peers, such as providing words of encouragement and demonstrating an eagerness to help. The extract in Textbox 7.1 drawn from four participants comments during a focus group interview, lend supports to this finding. These group members’ interlinked and repeated accounts illustrate a particular form of encouragement collectively perceived by the four pre-service teachers in the treatment group. They indicated that their peers had provided them with a tremendous amount of support and encouragement. Their accounts suggest that they highly valued the role their peers played in helping to vitalize them during their practicum.

Some pre-service teachers in other groups also mentioned their peers’ role in encouraging them. They said that the encouraging feedback they received from

Textbox 7.1
An extract from a group discussion between pre-service teachers about their peer mentors, where each speaker describes his or her experience, building on the experiences described by the previous speaker.

G05—EP03: There is a supporter [my peer mentor] at the back of the class, someone who is my friend. I feel more assured.
G05-02: Sometimes, she [my peer mentor] raised her hand, sending signals of support, and smiled (interrupted by G05-EP04).
G05-EP04: Yes, sometimes, I looked to the back of the room. She gave me a smile. I feel really assured (G05-EP04).
G05-EP05: "[I was left] feeling very assured" (G05-EP05).

peers after each lesson really helped them to stay motivated and to continue their work. Peer responses such as "you are doing a great job", "No problems, the students liked it", "You did a good job", "You taught well", or "Don't be worried, I like your lesson" from their peers seemed to help the pre-service teachers to persevere through the long process of learning how to teach and teaching with little previous teaching experience. Their entry into the profession, was marked by lack of previous teaching experience. Words of praise from their peers inspired them to try harder to teach more effectively. More importantly, according to their responses, their peers' comments help to alleviate their feelings of isolation and incompetence which at times overwhelmed them, especially in the early stages when they said they were nervous and did not know what to expect.

Other participants focused on describing how their peers cared for them. They said they sometimes felt moved and pleased when their peers showed concern for them. One participant recounted the day when she was at home feeling tired. Suddenly she received a message asking "How are you? Do you feel better?". It was from her peer. She said that she felt pleased and happy upon receiving this message. A similar account was given by two other participants, one of whom said, "My peer is a caring person so whatever problems I faced, I talked to her and she encouraged me a lot" (G03-EP01). In another group discussion, some pre-service teachers further elaborated upon how their peers cared for them, when they said,

> I was sick last week. She taught for me for successive three periods. I felt very moved. (G5-EP06)

> That is true. … Last week I was so sick that I was sent to the hospital. Lucky for me, Van taught my class and helped me a lot. (G05-EP05)

Two other participants showed their appreciation by nodding their heads and keeping friendly eye contact. It appeared that some pre-service teachers in the treatment group in particular appreciated the opportunity to work with their peers because they received strong support from them.

Textbox 7.2

G04-EP01: When I got criticism from mentors, I felt like she wanted to find fault with my teaching, instead of helping me make progress. I felt very irritated and, at the time, I wished I could have had some private time with Ly [her peer] to complain about her (G04-EP01).

G06-EP04: She always listens to me, even when I sometimes talked nonsense. Sometimes, I was very angry with my students and I came to talk to her.

Emotional peer support was conveyed by the respect that the peers paid each other as supportive listeners. Five participants in three focus groups emphasized their appreciation of the role that their peers played as listeners. They supported this reaction by claiming they joined with their peers in lamenting specific outcome such as students, mentors, teaching, and workloads. All of the participants who talked about this issue expressed their gratitude of having a peer who was always there for them, to ready share their "ups and downs" and who experienced the same challenges (see Textbox 7.2).

It becomes clear that consistent contact with peers as a result of the formal peer mentoring process allowed the participants to share problems with their peers. Being accessible listeners provided mutual support and encouraged the sharing of problems.

7.3.1.2 Sharing

The participants in the five focus groups were effusive in their remarks regarding the nature of the support in the form of sharing provided by their peers, with up to 27 references made. In most of the groups, group interaction was prominently co-constructed by one participant's account followed by another account of support through sharing. The extract in Textbox 7.3 is an example of the consensus reached among group members that emerged through the discussion of the relevant issues, supporting the credibility of the findings.

Ideas about teaching were constructed through the process of interaction. As the group members shared similar personal characteristics, they seemed to feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences. There was agreement about the importance of sharing in other focus group discussions. Members of three groups claimed that they shared everything with their peers. Other participants revealed that they disclosed details of their love lives, their private lives, their problems, their stresses, and of the happiness that teaching brought them to their peer mentors. Some participants described their relationship as like that between siblings or close friends. They confided in each other and did not hesitate to reveal personal issues to their peers. One participant, who was supported by others in the group, stated: "Me

Textbox 7.3

After the first participant had set the tone by answering the questions from the interviewer, other participants spoke. They began by detailing what they had experienced. Others had to reach back into their past to find incidents that would fit the pattern of discussion that had been established:

G05-EP05: We shared many things—life experience, love, our profession—a lot. In general, we shared everything with each other, like sisters.

G05-EP01: (with emphasis) Yes, a lot.

G05-EP03: (with emphasis): Oh, yes, I shared with my assigned peer the most.

G05-EP: Huong and I were assigned to the same pair. We took the same bus home, so we shared and talked with each other a lot, which lessened our stress. Although we sometimes prepared lessons together (we do not teach the same class), but talking with her on the bus helped me to de-stress.

G05-EP01: At home I have sisters and brothers but they are much older than me so it is not suitable to talk with them, and they don't understand my story. It is the same with other people, kids, parents. Therefore, I don't know who I can talk with. I only talked and shared with my peer because I met her most frequently and worked with her. She and I talked with each other a lot. Moreover, we had many unbearable problems, so we talked and found solutions together. It helped alleviate our difficulties.

G05-EP02 (laughing): I heard about Huong's love life as well. Huong and I always talked about love and exchanged life experiences. I felt I had more information about other fields.

too. Ha and I were matched as peers at university as well, and worked together all the time. We understand each other. Nothing is secret. We talked with each other about everything" (G1-EP04).

Others claimed that they shared personal experiences with their peers more than with others because their peers had experienced similar problems at school. They said that they understood each other; and, more importantly, they had the opportunity to meet and work together regularly. One pre-service teacher stated that the reason why she and her peer always shared things was that they went home on the same bus and the more they shared, the closer they became. Interestingly, these trainee teachers discussed various issues with their assigned peer and shared them with other peers at the school as well. Thus, informal peer relationships had an impact in addition to the overall positive effect of being part of a peer mentoring program group. This is evident in these sample quotes:

> We shared a lot and we felt close. At other schools, they may not know each other. (G6-EP01)

> I see, for example, other schools where student teachers worked independently. They did little practicum practice and did not interact with each other like our group, so it was very

> tedious and wasteful. They came to school and did little, leading to ineffectiveness in their practicum. If I had to choose again, I would do my practicum at this school, where we are busy but can learn more. (G4-EP03)

> Particularly, we have many advantages. We have a lot of friends here with whom we can share ideas. I can talk with my assigned peer, other peers in my group and peers in other groups at my school. (G4-EP04)

In sum, sharing with other pre-service teachers was said to provide pre-service teachers with support, making their school practicum more meaningful and effective.

7.3.1.3 Talking

Talking with peers was frequently mentioned by the pre-service teachers in the interviews with the treatment groups. Twenty mentions in all six groups emphasized that the pre-service teachers talked mostly with their peers during their practicum. For most of them, the opportunities to talk with their peers, especially when they encountered problems, was invaluable. There was strong agreement among all group members regarding the importance of being able to talk. Apart from some pre-service teachers who reported that they were assigned to peers who were in different classes, most of the pre-service teachers stated that the reason for their frequent talks with their peers was because they had been assigned to work together, that they always worked together, and that they shared similar problems. Other outcomes of the assigned peer relationship included feelings of confidence in and closeness to each other, being comfortable talking with each other, having compatible personalities, and being mutually sympathetic. Most of the pre-service teachers remarked that not only did they talk with their assigned peers, but they also talked with many other pre-service teachers in the groups. Some commented that everyone in their group was friendly and easy to talk with.

With the exception of three comments stating that talking with peers helped them reduce their stress and work pressures; most of the pre-service teachers did not directly mention the benefits of their talks with their peers. Yet, their comments on this practice reflected a relaxed and sharing environment where all group members enjoyed talking with one another. As one pre-service teacher commented:

> I liked to go to see Thanh and Loan. We met other friends during the break and we talked with one another. I felt strange if I came to school but did not chat with anyone. All of them are very friendly and open. (G05-EP 01)

Most of the participants found that the friendly and open environment allowed them to talk freely with one another. When asked about what they most often talked about, ten mentions in five different groups revealed that the participants talked about a broad range of subjects, including school, their homes, or their personal lives. However, on reflection, they said they mostly talked about current issues at school such as students, mentors, or teaching. One of the pre-service teachers said that she was surprised to realize that her talks with their peers were very

professional, unlike casual talk with friends. As a result of being assigned to work with each other, opportunities were created for the pre-service teachers to exchange information about professional and personal topics. Their talks suggested that their relationships were not limited to their causal associations alone. They developed into close collegial relationships as they engage in the habit of talking with others about various topics related to their professional concerns.

7.3.1.4 Befriending

Making real friends was another form of support reported by many of the pre-service teachers. In all six group interviews, 19 references were made claiming that peers provided not only friendship, but created a community of trust and friendliness. Participants from all groups seemed to reach a consensus when describing their positive feelings about making a friend as a result of working together in assigned pairs. They emphasized how much they appreciated their relationship. Most of them said they found a friend with whom they felt free to talk openly on a wide range of issues such as love, their private lives, family, and problems. They also arranged to meet after school. Their conversations and get-togethers brought them closer and they said they felt more comfortable with each other. One of them said that before the practicum, she had never talked with her peer (who had been her classmate), but that during the time she was assigned to work with her, she discovered many things about her. It was only them that she realised that she and her peer could become good friends. This response was supported by several other participants who also perceived that they remained friends after the practicum (see Textbox 7.4).

Textbox 7.4

G1-EP05: Huong and I do not study in the same university class but we knew each other before entering the university. However, when we were assigned as a pair for the practicum, we felt happier because we discovered a new person. Naturally, we have a new friend [in each other], not a friend who we knew from a long time ago.

G1-EP04: At the beginning, I didn't know whether this peer mentoring was effective; we just followed what the teachers said. Later, we thought it was really effective. I had a close friend [in my peer], whenever I had any problems, I came to see her.

G2-EP05: We talked more and understood more about each other, and helped each other more.

Similar accounts were repeated in other interviews, affirming the role of peer mentoring in bringing pre-service teachers together and providing opportunities for making friends.

Three of the pre-service teachers who raised this issue indicated that they felt they were lucky to have a friend such as their peer partner. Moreover, two other participants said that they thought that the peer relationship was not limited to the assigned pairs, but extended to the whole group. One participant said:

> I think working in pairs like this brought people together and everyone felt that they had a new friend and became attached to each other. In the beginning, we had to do what the teachers required of us; but, later we gradually developed our working habits and we did not just work in individual pairs. Everyone in the school worked together; the whole group worked together but in individual pairs. (G1-EP05)

From the focus group talks, it became apparent that active peer interactions created a friendly working environment at the practicum school. It was here that most of the pre-service teachers considered each other friends with whom they could share similar problems and in whom they could trust and confide. This type of relationship seemed to have provided them with strong support during their practicum. During this time, they had 6 weeks of interactions with one another; therefore, the degree to which the friendships developed is hardly surprising.

7.3.2 Career-Related Support

Mentions of career-related support occurred in many forms. Comments regarding career-related support fell into three main sub-themes: sharing; providing feedback; and discussion.

7.3.2.1 Sharing

Apart from reporting about psychosocial support, as discussed in the previous sections, participants in the treatment group claimed that they supported each other by sharing information related to their teaching practice during the practicum. Information sharing was one of the most frequent support functions mentioned by members of all six groups. Most of the participants agreed that they and their peers exchanged information regarding many teaching related topics and that this had supported their teaching practice during their practicum.

Participants also mentioned that they had provided support to each other by exchanging teaching materials. Most of the participants (22 mentions) in the six focus groups reported that they found it helpful to exchange teaching material with their peers. Teaching materials are particularly useful for beginning teachers, especially when such materials may not be available commercially. Often they were not provided by the school, and took time to prepare. This view is exemplified by the extract in Textbox 7.5. During the focus group interviews, most of the participants took turns to describe how sharing occurred and how it facilitated their teaching.

Textbox 7.5

G1-EP02: I think it was most beneficial that we could share teaching materials with each other because, sometimes, I did not prepare enough materials for my lesson or I was too tired to do so. I asked Phuc for help".

G1-EX01: I think so. We always shared sample lessons, PowerPoints, games, and interesting activities.

G1-EP03: I asked other peers. They gave me a lot of interesting warm-up activities or teaching activities so that I could apply them in my class.

G1-EP05: [Sharing among peers means] We can have more teaching materials and more helpful information for our lessons.

As a result of meeting and working with each other every day, participants in the treatment group reported that through these "exchanging" activities, that is, sharing teaching ideas and materials, they could do their work better. In this way, they could learn from their peers and improve their teaching through the application of new ideas and materials in their own classes. Apart from supporting each other by sharing teaching materials, six focus group interviews with 22 individual mentions expressed their positive opinions of peer mentoring in terms of helping each other to share the workload. The following were among the representative quotes:

> Van and I shared the teaching workload so we felt less stressed. I taught one lesson, and then Van taught one lesson. We only taught one to two periods per week. I felt relieved. (G1-EP02)

> We marked papers for each other. (G5-EP01)
> We had to design 15 minute tests. We cooperated to do it. (G1-EP01)

Others expressed the value of their peers in sharing responsibility for their school work. During the practicum, student teachers were expected to become involved in many school events such as Women's Day, Youth Union's Foundation Day, and other outdoor activities. A point of emphasis in the participants' comments was the importance of collaborating with their peers in sharing the work of the school. Some claimed that:

> Without the help of my peers, I would not have finished the practicum. (G03-EP01)

> I cannot imagine how I would have overcome all the challenges faced during the practicum without my peers. (G06-EP02)

> My peer and I always worked together to solve our problems. We even stayed up late to prepare for the school camping trip. (G03-EP02)

Eleven individual references focused on the support functions of information sharing. Peers shared information about school, students, mentors, and work pressures. Among these, four focus groups emphasised the role of peers in helping them learn more about their students. For example, they said, "We exchanged information about students, which helped us understand them better and figure out how to deal with them (ha ha)" (G5-EP05); and, "We talked about our students anytime, anywhere" (G4-EP03). Some participants reported that they always shared information

about their mentors. Even though this did not seem to facilitate their teaching practice, one stated "it helped her to understand her mentor and to overcome conflicts with her" (G4-EP04).

In addition, they also supported each other professionally by sharing lesson plans. Some said that they and their peers were willing to provide one another with their own lesson plans for personal references. Participants in four of six focus group interviews (with 11 individual references) discussed the role of sharing lesson plans with their peers. Most participants said that they valued the benefits of sharing lesson plans in terms of saving time, generating more teaching ideas, and improving themselves by recognising their strengths and weaknesses. One participant said:

> We helped each other by sharing our lesson plans; and, we studied each other's ways of organizing an activity. Sometimes, I was stuck. I used her activities (laugh). For example, Thanh and I taught the same skill to different classes. Thus, sometimes, I asked her about some activities in her lesson plan. If I thought it was interesting, I used it for my class. Besides, we used the same teaching materials. We used the same picture in three classes. …. We did not hesitate to ask our peers anything. We were not afraid. If we knew we made mistakes we were happy to correct it. We worked in pairs and then in groups. (G06-EP07)

Finally, some commented on the role of peers in sharing teaching ideas, methods, issues, assessment, knowledge and experiences. Pre-service teachers worked with one another on a daily basis. This, in particular, seemed to give them opportunities to share different aspects of their teaching practice. Their comments on this issue indicated that they valued their peers' impact. By sharing with their peers, one participant commented she "reframed [her] teaching knowledge to match the practical situation at the school site" (G02-EP02). In general, the pre-service teachers highly appreciated opportunities to converse and share their professional concerns and issues with each other at any time. It appears that such sharing through peer interaction somehow facilitated the pre-service teachers' learning-to-teach process. And, it may well have been critical to the success of their practicum experiences.

7.3.2.2 Providing Feedback

Providing feedback is another subtheme which was frequently mentioned by the participants in the treatment group. Covered in this subtheme are the participants' perceptions of peer support in terms of the provision of feedback on their lessons and lesson plans.

Most of the participants in the six focus group interviews said that they valued the supporting role of their peers' feedback on their lesson, with 31 mentions. Different from opinions on mentors' feedback, the participants felt comfortable and excited when sharing experiences related to their peer feedback. Most of them reported that they and their peers provided feedback on each other's lessons. They said that peer feedback enabled them to refine their teaching practices in a reciprocal way. Some of them even said that they felt "empty" when they did not receive peer feedback after each lesson. Giving and receiving peer feedback was reported as

Textbox 7.6

G05-EP02: I liked when my peers gave me feedback on my lessons. When they did not or gave only a few comments, I came to ask them [for feedback].

G01-EP01: I think observation and feedback is the most effective activity because when I taught in class, I did not recognize my faults, but my peers could see them and commented on them for me.

G03-EP02: I got a lot of professional advice from my peers after each lesson and I felt I matured every day.

becoming a habitual and favourite practicum activity (see Textbox 7.6). The interviewees emphasised the value of straightforward and prompt comments from their peers which, they said, assisted their teaching. Four of them cited the value of the observation sheet which was used to guide their feedback and which detailed their peer comments. After each lesson, apart from receiving oral feedback from their peers, they said that written feedback helped them to better understand the comments from their peers.

In addition to their peer support of giving feedback on lessons, a total of 13 mentions alluded to the value of feedback on their lesson plan. Through reading their peer's lesson plans, the participants reported that they could apply what they learned to their own lessons. One participant specifically described how she and her peer were able to learn from each other's lesson plans:

> We discussed our lesson plans a lot. I designed a lesson plan and gave it to Lan. We discussed which tasks should be suitable for the lesson. We always asked each other about our lesson plans before each lesson. We found it very effective. For example, I used some tasks in my class which I thought were not suitable for her class, so we talked and modified the tasks. So they worked for her. This helped both of us have good lessons. (G04-EP03)

Giving and receiving feedback on lesson plans facilitated the pre-service teachers' teaching practice. It appears to have helped them to develop more ideas for teaching, to frame their lessons in a more effective way, and more importantly, to exchange ideas with each other, thereby developing their own teaching repertoire. The extract in Textbox 7.7 from a group interview illustrates the positive effects of the support the trainee teachers received from their peers through lesson plan feedback.

However, three references were made regarding problems with insufficient time to provide feedback on their peers' lesson plans. Comments were made regarding a lack of feedback on each other's lesson plans, and sometimes on situations where peers failed altogether to provide feedback on lesson plans. One of them said:

> In my case, it was different. My peer and I worked in a different class. I taught the morning class and she taught the afternoon class. We did not often meet each other. I emailed her my lesson plans and received limited feedback. (G04-EP02)

Textbox 7.7

G01-EP01: When we designed lesson plans and we faced some difficulties, we called and asked for each other's help. Then we corrected each other's lesson plans.

G01-EP04: Yes, I found it very effective because my peer could see drawbacks in my lesson plans and commented on them.

G01-EP02: We designed our own lesson plans but gave them to each other for feedback. Sometimes, my peer gave very critical comments.

G03-EP03: I have not taught that lesson, but I saw my peer's lesson plan on that lesson. If I saw some holes, or problems, I would comment on them.

Peer relationships were established with others in the group as well. Some of the participants reported that they not only observed and gave feedback to their assigned peers, but did this for other friends in the group as well. They said that they felt comfortable critiquing their peers as a result of the open and friendly working environment their group enjoyed. The evidence suggests that they were creating a learning community in which everyone valued the exchange of ideas and support from their peers. This peer professional support seemed to make these pre-service teachers more comfortable with their professional practice as they completed their practicum. Pre-service teachers highly valued the support they received from their peers through the provision of reciprocal feedback on their lessons and lesson plans. Giving and receiving feedback on professional practice were reported as having helped them to identify their personal strengths alerting then to their weaknesses.

7.3.2.3 Observation

Another set of comments was categorised as relating to peer observation among pre-service teachers. Comments about peer observation were mostly positive. The majority of the pre-service teachers across the six groups seemed to highly value their peer observation practice during their practicum. The comments revealed a general feeling across the six groups that the pre-service teachers not only enjoyed peer observation, but considered it a valuable and helpful activity. Statements such as "I liked to observe my peer's lessons" were among the most common made by the pre-service teachers. Some of them recounted the friendly and relaxed nature of the peer visits. As one said, "I did not fear my peer's visits; our group member attended my lesson every time. … Peer observation was very helpful" (G05-EP04). Other pre-service teachers emphasised (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004) preferences for peer observation by expressing their appreciation for the reciprocal class visits by peers: For example, they said:

> I was not obliged to attend my peer's lesson as much as I did. The mentors did not force me to attend, but I liked it very much. (G03-EP04)

> During this practicum, I could see the benefits of observation, not like in the past, where we observed our peer's microteaching and no one listened. (G04-EP02)

In terms of group interaction, most of the participants seemed to agree with one another in their groups on the role and benefits of peer visits. There was no counter opinion on this issue: most of the participants expressed positive attitudes about mutual peer observations during their practicum.

Comments on this category were also related to the pre-service teachers' agreement to recognise the quality of their peer observation. The statement "peer observation is the most effective peer activity" was a common comment made by most of these pre-service teachers when talking about the quality of peer interaction. Most of them seemed to agree that peer observation was effective in helping them to develop their teaching practice. They cited some reasons why they believed this was to be the case, including mutual learning from peers, drawing links to their own lessons, and for identifying teaching mistakes. They said that peer observation provided them with opportunities to observe and to learn from their peers' mistakes while learning good things from them at the same time. Mutual peer observation was regarded by most of them as a supportive teaching practice. One participant claimed, "I learned from my peer observation more than from that of my school mentor" (G02-EP04). Group participants in all six groups seemed excited when expressing their opinions of peer observation. Not only was consensus reached on this issue, but there were no negative comments made, providing clear evidence of the participants' positive response to this activity.

In further explanations of the effective role of peer observation, seven individual mentions in four focus group interviews showed that the participants said that they recognised the benefits of the observation guidelines. More specifically, they said that the observation sheets for their classroom visits helped them to focus on the main parts of their peers' lessons. Importantly, they emphasized the usefulness of the detailed written comments provided after each lesson. This was evident in a number of responses; for example: "I tried to ask my peers for peer observation sheets after each lessons … as they noted down many comments for me. I could identify my weaknesses and took immediate action to rectify these" (G02-EP02). One participant said that she had developed the habit of writing on peer observation sheets whenever she visited her peer's class. She believed it was "a good professional habit" and "very good and effective" (G04-EP03). Some pre-service teachers noted that it was easier for them to write their comments on the sheet rather than to directly give comments to their peers. They added that peer observation sheets with basic guidelines have contributed to the quality of the pre-service teachers' peer observations in the treatment group.

Further remarks about peer observation a total of eight mentions in three focus groups centered on the need for pre-service teachers to be compulsorily involved in peer observation. Several respondents opined that participants' commitment to peer observation helped them keep on track. This was evident in a number of responses; for example: "If there had been no pressure to observe others and vice versa, we would have not done it" (G06-EP07). One pre-service teacher seemed to place great

value on the compulsory requirement for peer observation at least once a week: "Actually, we were required to have peer observation only once a week, not every time. However, later, we did it voluntarily. Now, it is our habit; we wanted to observe all of our peers' lessons" (G03-EP05). Others responses restated that peer observation was a compulsory requirement and that they had observed almost all of their peers' lessons. It seems that the basic requirement for peer observation laid the foundation for continuous interaction with peer observation activities.

With regards to the frequency of their peer visits, 13 individual mentions across six groups indicated that they frequently observed their assigned peer. Two participants in two different groups said that they rarely visited their assigned peers' classes as they were in different classes; but, they had observed other peers' classes. Apart from one pre-service teacher, who confessed to being sometimes lazy, it was generally agreed that peer observation was the most frequent peer-based activity among pre-service teachers in the treatment group. The majority of participants in all six groups claimed that they frequently observed their assigned peers and other peers in the groups (with eight references in three groups). The statement "I observed my peers often" was the common heard among the pre-service teachers across six groups. Some of them even considered peer observation a pleasure. There was a strong consensus among group members across all six groups regarding this claim. I noted that there members of each group across six groups evincing an air of excitement when talking about this topic, indicating their preference for this activity.

7.3.2.4 Discussion

A total of 30 mentions related to discussion as a supporting strategy emerged from the interviews with the treatment group. There was common agreement among each group about the role of discussion in supporting their professional practice. Most of the pre-service teachers said that they valued the role of discussion among themselves of different aspects of their practicum. They added that these discussions generate ideas for teaching for reducing their stress levels, improved their teaching, helped them to better understand students, and provided them with learning opportunities for self-improvement. One stated that:

> Discussion with my peers helped me to learn more from my peers rather than my mentors. (G02-EP04)

Another said:

> We discussed a lot, even at home. We still chatted, discussing our lessons … I saw it was very effective. (G04-EP03)

Fourteen individual references related to their discussion of lesson plans. As a requirement of the peer mentoring intervention, the pre-service teachers were asked to meet at least once a week to discuss issues related to their practicum. The pre-service teachers claimed that they used this time to discuss their lesson plans. More

specifically, some reported that they discussed how to do warm ups, how to design tasks and homework for each lesson, and how teaching materials and teaching activities should be adapted for different classes. They said this helped them to "prepare the lesson better" (G04-EP04).

Discussion of the work at school was another topic mentioned by the pre-service teachers in the treatment group. A total of ten mentions in four focus group interviews reported this issue. These pre-service teachers claimed that they had spent a lot of time discussing the work at school. As previously mentioned, during their practicum, apart from their teaching practice, the pre-service teachers were required to participate in other class and school activities. This doubtless an extra challenge for them because it required a lot of time and effort. However, the comments on this issue were mostly positive. Some spoke of the friendly and relaxed nature of the discussions with their peers. They said this put them at ease in dealing with much of the work required at school and gave them a feeling of working together and sharing the burden. This become clears in the following quotes:

> We talked and discussed all the work at school together. Sometimes, we had a meeting at a café and talked about the work. We felt really supported and happy because we each had a person who understands and could share the work with us. (G04-EP03)

> We participated in school activities, for example, the English speaking club. At first, no one volunteered to do decorations. Lien and I discussed and assigned the work. When we went camping, we also discussed who rented the camp and discussed how to decorate the camp. I felt less stressed because I had my peers there with me all the time. (G01-EP05)

Their discussions concerning their teaching- related issues during the practicum with a total of nine mentions in three focus groups. It was reported that the pre-service teachers spent time discussing many teaching related issues such as teaching activities, students, motivational strategies, and class management plans. The pre-service teachers; as a group, said that they appreciated their peer relationships as they provided a forum for them to express their ideas and learn from their peers. The following quote suggests the strength of the bond that they developed: "If I had not discussed these issues with my peers, I could not have seen it through. As a result of my peer relations, we felt relaxed and free to discuss many issues including our teaching issues" (G05-EP05). Some spoke of the trust involved and the collaborative nature of the peer discussions on teaching issues. Another student teacher commented, "I felt like I could discuss any teaching issue with my peers, because I feel my peers understand my problems and I was not afraid of disclosing my weaknesses (laugh)" (G05-EP03). Their equal power relationship prompted some participants to claim that they preferred to discuss teaching issues with their peers rather than with their mentors (the latter were their superiors). As one of them suggested, "Sometimes, my school mentor did not want us to apply new teaching methods, but we thought it was motivational for students. We discussed this with each other, then agreed, and tried to use these methods when our school mentor was not present in class" (G04-EP03).

Some pre-service teachers commented on the professional support they received from their peers in the form of problem solving solutions. They said that they had

discussed and then come to an agreement on how to behave with their mentors, and how to manage their classes. One pre-service teacher reported that she had devised motivational strategies for the students based upon discussions with her peer. She said:

> I discussed my current class situation with my peer. My students are very quiet and do not want to speak. We come up with some plans to deal with them. At first, it did not seem ok, but later I was happy to realise that they felt more motivated in class. The tips are simple. I just used some warm-up activities. (G02-EP03)

The discussion of tests was recognised in the final set of comments about discussion with a total of seven mentions in two focus group interviews. These pre-service teachers claimed that they frequently had discussions about tests with their peers. More specifically, they talked about how to design a test and how to mark it. They said they valued the support they received from these discussions because they could share the marking work and improve the test quality. However, this may not have always been the case. One participant commented on the lack of discussion of the tests. Although most pre-service teachers reported being treated professionally, not all of them were assigned to design tests by their mentors. They said that they did not have many opportunities to discuss how to design a test. As one participant commented, "We did not discuss tests because we used ready-designed tests from the mentor. She did not want us to design new tests. Luckily, we did not have to do it, but we could not practice how to do it either" (G02-EP04). The focus group meeting discussions suggested that the pre-service teachers valued the opportunities to consult and discuss with each other.

It may be deduced from the interview data that the pre-service teachers' comments indicated that they placed greater value on both the psychosocial and career-related support they received from their peers. Most of the findings indicate that pre-service teachers felt that opportunities had been created for them to interact with one another, facilitating their support for each other, both professionally and personally. In some cases, the pre-service teachers claimed that they viewed their peers as the most valuable source of support they received during their practicum. In the next section, I continue to report upon how the preservice teachers in the control group perceived the support they gained from their peers during their practicum.

7.4 Control Group Findings

A similar focus group interview was conducted with the non-peer mentored group, my aim being to assess their peer support during their practicum. Although most of the participants relied on the support of their mentors, there were other sets of comments made that reflected the role of the peers as a source of support during the practicum. Two pre-service teachers asserted that their peers were their best source of support. This category of support may be categorised into two areas: psychosocial support and career-related support.

7.4.1 Psychosocial Support

The term "psychosocial support" refers to the types of support that pre-service teachers provided to one another in order to psychologically and socially assist one another to improve their work performance. It took many forms; but, in effect, it could be categorised under four main sub-themes: emotional support; talking; sharing; and, befriending.

7.4.1.1 Emotional Support

There were 11 mentions across all six focus group interviews related to emotional support. Some among the pre-service teachers reported that they received emotional support from their peers. This helped them to "feel better" (G01-Co05), "reduce stress" (G01-Co05), not feel "alone", and "made the practicum go smoothly" (G02-Co01). Those pre-service teachers who commented on this issue said that their peers gave them enough emotional strength to deal with the majority of the problems they encountered during their practicum. As one said: "I got more emotional benefit from interacting with peers. … [W]hen I encountered trouble, for example, I complained. Even though no one could help me out, there was a person [peer] who listened to it. I felt less stressed" (G05-Co05). Another praised her peer's role in supporting her emotionally as follows:

> We often had some pressure, when we talked with our friends, we felt less pressure. In general, I felt supportive in any aspects. I think if there hadn't been friends there for us, we would have found it harder to go through this practicum. My friends made the practicum go smoothly. (G02-Co01)

The form that this emotional support was further detailed in their comments about peers comforting each other. For many of the pre-service teachers, the practicum was a stressful time. It comes as no surprise therefore, that the pre-service teachers valued their peers help to deal with these tensions just by listening to each other' problems and comforting each other. As one pre-service teacher remarked:

> Apart from sharing teaching knowledge, my peer's emotional support was very important. In the beginning weeks, we faced difficulties in teaching; for example, Linh and I did not teach well and our mentors criticized us a lot……. We felt disappointed but we were always there to comfort each other. It, therefore, helped us feel better. (G06-Co04)

The common understanding of what each had to go through seemed to allow these pre-service teachers to empathise strongly with each other: "I had to comfort my friends and said that everyone was the same and not to worry too much. Everyone had problems, the same as each other, not to worry. I think my friends felt better" (G05-Co06).

The pre-service teachers reported a general feeling of being emotionally supported although there were a few comments on this topic (only one or two mentions in each group). This lack of contribution may be explained by the infrequency of peer interaction among pre-service teachers in the control group.

7.4.1.2 Talking

Most of the participants in all six focus groups reported that they spent considerable time talking with their peers during their practicum. A total of 16 individual references were identified. Their participants said that in the main they talked with their peers during the practicum. The one exception, a pre-service teacher said that she talked mostly with her school mentor. This interaction found a consensus among focus group members and across groups. These pre-service teachers, who were quite effusive in their comments, provided many reasons for this, such as being assigned to the same school mentor, the same practicum class, the same university class, sharing the same situation, having a lot of free time during periods, meeting each other frequently, being familiar with each other, feeling it was easy to share with peers, and knowing each other prior to the program. It seems that sharing things in common enabled pre-service teachers to find more time to talk with one another during the practicum. However, most of the pre-service teachers agreed that they just talked with peers with whom they were involved; for example, peers who were assigned to the same mentor or were in the same class. They rarely talked with those outside of their groups.

Although there was a wide range of comments which emphasised talk with their peers during the practicum, few participants commented upon how they were helped by these talks. Only three among them said that talking with their peers helped them realise that everyone experienced the same problems. As one of them said:

> I was not happy with my students' behaviour. They were very stubborn. I could not stand them. I talked with Trang and she also had the same feeling. I felt better as I realised I was not the only one with this problem. (G01-Co05)

Their preference for talking with their peers can be partially explained by the fact that most of them claimed that they always gossiped with their peers (19 mentions in six groups). In other words, they were "off task" when talking with their peers. Four of them even emphasised that they rarely talked about their professional work. They simply chatted with one another to fill in their free time during breaks. So, although interacting, it was not with professional focus. Textbox 7.8 provides a typical extract from a group that illustrates this position. The extract shows no changes in the participants' opinions. They all reported talking with peers. What these group

Textbox 7.8

G01-Co04: We did not always talk with peers. It depends on each situation.

G01-Co06: During the break, we talked about trivial things. I saw that Ha and Trang always gossiped.

Others: (laughing in unison)

G01-Co01: We gossiped about our families, our houses, trivial things.

G01-Co05 (*nodding in agreement*): Me, too.

G01-Co04: Yes, we gossiped about many things such as our classes, our houses, trivial things. We did not talk much about professional things, just trivial things.

to do with professional discussion or with the professional development purposes of the practicum.

7.4.1.3 Sharing

While most of the participants expressed their opinions about talk in the form of gossip, they did not talk much about the nature of the support they received in the form of sharing (only four individual mentions in three groups). This suggests that there was not much group interaction. Two of them claimed that they shared their feelings with their peers after the lessons, although this was an infrequent occurrence. As one of them said,

> Yes, I shared my feelings about the lessons with Trang (my close friend at university), but not every lesson. It is a kind of stress relief for me. I never talked like that with other friends in the groups. We just met and talked about trivial things. (G01-Co05)

Two other pre-service teachers in two different groups commented that they and their friends in the same class sometimes shared their personal problems. One of them commented that she had money problems, and she got support and understanding from her friends in the same class. It was generally found that support in terms of sharing feelings and personal problems was rarely mentioned by participants in the control group. Only a few of the pre-service teachers in the control group placed value on this type of support strategy employed during the practicum.

7.4.1.4 Befriending

Support in terms of befriending by others was mentioned by four individuals in two focus group interviews. These pre-service teachers found that they more friends when interacting with others during the practicum. As one commented, “We gradually considered each other close friends” (G01-Co05). This comment was supported by another pre-service teacher who claimed that “Thao and I were not close to each other before, but after working with the same school mentor, naturally, we felt closer. It is a change. I have a close friend” (G05-Co04). The pre-service teacher in the previous section who said that she did not receive much support from her mentors, said that she relied instead on support of her peers. This helps explain why she developed a common bond with her peer who was assigned to the same school mentor. Another participant said that she and her peers often went out for lunch and coffee together. In general, although these pre-service teachers explicitly valued the friendships they developed with their peers during their practicum, overall, there was not much discussion of this topic by each of the focus groups.

7.4.2 Career-Related Support

Career-related support occurred in many forms. The comments regarding this form of support may be categorized into four main sub-themes: sharing; observation; providing feedback; and, discussion.

7.4.2.1 Sharing

The first sets of remarks directed towards peer support were about sharing different aspects of their profession. This to some extent, enabled them to do their jobs better. Pre-service teachers detailed several profession-related aspects of the practicum which they shared with one another.

A total of 14 individual mentions in six groups commented on their peer support, i.e., the sharing of their workload. During their practicum, pre-service teachers were assigned heavy work. They initially relied upon themselves, but with time they sought peer support as they attempted to meet the requirements both of their mentors and the practicum. They reported feeling that their peers shared much of the practicum work, such as managing the class during outdoor activities, preparing for camping, guiding students to write for the class magazines, preparing musical performances, and organising class and youth union affairs. This typical comment from a pre-service teacher illustrates the perceived magnitude of their workloads:

> I have to do a lot of work during the practicum such as managing the class and participating in all school activities and many other things. Cooperation with my friends helped reduce the workload and made it easier and more effective. (G02-Co03)

Although the role of peers in sharing the workload was recognised by several members in each focus group, there were always a few pre-service teachers in each group (ten individual mentions) who reported that they always did all the work at school themselves. This suggests that their peers' contribution to sharing the workload at best minimal.

In addition to peer support for reducing their workloads during their practicum, a total of 11 individual references in six focus group interviews stressed the role of peers in information sharing was noted. The comments for this category centred on sharing information about mentors, students, student performance, classes, ideas for event organisation, and interesting teaching stories. However, some of them added that the act of sharing these aspects was spontaneous. Once again, there was little evidence of development of this subtheme by all groups. Some showed lack of interest in contributing ideas. Seven pre-service teachers in three focus groups reported that they frequently shared teaching issues with their peers. For example, they said, "We shared with our friends about how we taught in class" (G01-Co03) and "Or student questions arose in class about how I reacted to those questions and solved any teaching related issues" (G03-Co03). Although none of them explicitly mentioned how the sharing of teaching issues could help their teaching practice, there

Textbox 7.9
A pre-service teacher stated as follows:

> I exchanged lesson plans with my friends, but later, I did it by myself. Everyone had to care for themselves. I did it individually and did not exchange them. (G02-Co06)

This was supported by another pre-service teacher,

> Me too. Actually, in about all the classes, lesson plans only happened at the beginning of the practicum; later we always gossiped. (G02-Co05)

And emphasised by another group member:

> "I never exchanged lesson plans because I think…" (G02-Co04)
>
> (Interrupting) "It is individual." (G02-Co03)
>
> "Yes, the individual's responsibility. Therefore, I never exchanged lesson plans with my friends; we just talked about something else." (G02-Co04)

One pre-service teacher in an attempt to clarify the situation said:

> No, we did not exchange the ways to write a lesson plan. … We sometimes talked about it. For example, for me, Ha should do like this or like that in your class. (G02-Co01)

was a general feeling that these respondents unarguably found their peers to be a source of support.

The exchange of teaching materials and lesson plans was mentioned by several pre-service teachers with a total of four mentions in two focus group interviews respectively. Although some of them expressed their support for lesson planning sharing, many (24 individual mention in five groups) observed that this was a rare occurrence and occurred increasingly less over the course of the practicum. A strong degree of consensus was reached in most of the focus group interviews. The extract in Textbox 7.9 from a focus group interview provides an example of how this occurred.

So, clearly there was no change in their views on this issue. They simply told their stories and this activity seemed to be about coming to terms with their experiences. Their comments were consistent with those of the participants in the previous group session, who remarked on the infrequency of discussion and of providing feedback on lesson plans. When this happened it was usually in relation to activities where there were exchanges. For example:

> I rarely share my lesson plans with my friends; but sometimes, my friend and I showed our lesson plans to each other. I thought this or that activity would be quite effective for my class, so I adapted it. Or sometimes I didn't use my activities. (G02-Co04)

Few comments emphasised the sharing of teaching materials (only four mentions in two focus group interviews). However, there was a general feeling that pre-

service teachers in the control group did not interact much in terms of sharing teaching materials. When it happened it was usually due to some specific need. As one of them remarked: "I taught a short lesson while my friend taught a long lesson. She prepared games with a lot of pictures but lacked time. Therefore, she gave it to me. I took them and used the games in my class" (G01-Co03). It is interesting to note that when making comments about sharing, it was extremely rare for pre-service teachers in the control group to mention the sharing of teaching activities. Only reported that she shared her teaching activities with her friends.

7.4.2.2 Observation

Observing peers' lessons was viewed as a source of career-related support that pre-service teachers could offer to others. It was frequently mentioned by the participants in the control group. All groups agreed that they observed their peers' lessons during the practicum, and that this was the most popular activity with their peers. However, their opinions varied, indicating different perspectives of their peer observation experiences.

Peer observation was much valued by most of the participants in the six groups (a total of 16 individual mentions in all six groups). Some even emphasised that peer observation was the most effective activity with their peers during their practicum. Generally speaking, their responses indicated that they valued the role of peer observation in developing their teaching practice. All groups reached the consensus that peer observation was helpful. One of them further suggested that through peer observation, she could see herself in her peer's lessons. Another added, "I can learn from these experiences for myself" (G01-Co02). However, in one group, when one pre-service teacher claimed that he did not want to observe his peers' lessons too often as he thought they would influence his teaching methods, other members who previously subscribed to the value of peer observation changed their views. This is evident in the following extract:

> Honestly, when I observed my friends, if I went to their classes often, I was influenced by the way they taught. (G04-Co01)
>
> Ah, yes. Sometimes I did not want to imitate my friends. I agree with T. (G04-Co02)
>
> Yes, that is true (laughter and agreement from two other pre-service teachers).

Although there seemed a general belief that all groups adopted positive attitudes towards peer observation, negative comments were expressed by the majority of groups on how they perceived the quality of this experience. Ten individual references in four groups explicitly said that their peer observation was not as effective as it should have been. They explained that sometimes they just went to their peers' classes without any purpose. One of them even said that she observed her peer's lesson while sitting next to their mentor. They talked throughout the lesson so she did not pay much attention to what her peer was teaching: nor did she benefit from

the lesson. Another pre-service teacher in the same group added that she also attended her peer's lessons; but, sometimes she did not get anything out of it. Comment by eight individuals in four groups indicated that they did not have any guidelines when they attended their peers' classes. As one of them stated, "I just came to my friend's class and observed. There was no guideline or any requirement to do it" (G01-C02). Although some of them said that their mentors asked them to observe their peers' lessons, there were no further requirements for this activity. And, peer observation seemed largely unstructured. Their interaction tended to be random, based on specific needs. The following typical quotes lend support to this notion:

> My school mentor observed LA's lesson and she said the way LA complimented her students was very motivating. Therefore, I came to her class and learned something from her, thus helping improving my teaching methods in a certain way. (G01-Co03)

> I felt bored with my teaching, so I came to my friends' class in a hope to learn something different. (G03-Co04)

This may provide a link to most of the pre-service teachers' comments in all six groups which indicated that they observed their peers' lessons on a voluntary basis. Even when some pre-service teachers were asked to observe their peers' classes, they sometimes forgot to attend as there was no supervision. With the exception of one pre-service teacher who said she "tended to observe her peers more and more frequently" (G03-Co04), most of the pre-service teachers in all six groups (20 individual mentions) agreed that they participated in peer observation less frequently toward the end of their practicum. Several reasons were offered, including, "We had a greater work load, so we did not have time" (G02-Co03), "We thought it was not necessary" (G03-Co01); and, "Our spirits were low and it was not a (required) professional activity" (G03-Co02). This aligns with their comments on the next support strategy the pre-service teachers used among themselves; that is, providing feedback.

7.4.2.3 Providing Feedback

Comments regarding feedback on lessons and lesson plans were another category of support that emerged from the data. Nine individual mentions in five groups were counted, noting peer support in terms of providing feedback on lessons. There was a general understanding among these participants that during the practicum, they and their peers interacted with one another through giving and receiving feedback, which to some extent allowed them either to "avoid mistakes in teaching" (G03-Co02) or to "improve their teaching practice" (G06-Co03). Some among them added that they observed and provided feedback to their peers in line with their mentors' requirement. Others reported that despite the lack of compulsory requirements for peer observation and feedback, they still attended their peers' lessons because they thought it was necessary and helpful to see other peers teach.

In addition, comments on feedback as a support strategy for pre-service teachers also raised concerns about its quality (a total of ten individual mentions in four groups). Among these, only two persons in one focus group viewed that their peer feedback as more helpful than that of their mentor. They said:

> I think my mentor's feedback was not as good as my peers' because she attended my lessons a lot but after that she was tired and did not pay as much attention to my lesson as the peers who also attended the lesson. My peers gave more detailed feedback. (G04-Co03)

> (Interrupting) Peers gave better feedback because they understood us and we considered each other equals [and were] straightforward.[with our feedback]. (G04-Co04)

However, the rest of the comments related to the quality of peer feedback on lessons indicated that the quality of feedback was limited: "Peer feedback was at a certain level only" (G01-Co04). For example, one of them explained as follows: "We did it without any regulations and obligations. Therefore, giving feedback on peers' lesson was not well-organized and then led to limited quality" (G004-Co01).

Two other pre-service teachers stated that they did not know how to give feedback on their friends' lessons because there were no observation forms or guidelines to follow. They just commented on anything they found significant about their peers' lessons. This, therefore, may have influenced the quality of their feedback to their peers. As one remarked: "I saw my friend's mistakes, but I forgot to note them down. Therefore, after the lesson, I did not comment on her lesson. I wish I had a [feedback] guidance form. It might have been better" (G04-Co05). They suggested that there could have been added valued in having an observation form which would provide focus and allow them to provide more detailed feedback on their peers' lessons.

Beside the quality of feedback, a total of ten individual mentions in four focus group interviews indicated that feedback was infrequent and decreased gradually towards the end of the practicum. The following extract (Textbox 7.10) from a focus group interview showed the intensity of the comments, and the consistent reinforcement of each other's opinions regarding the infrequency of their peer feedback activities.

Textbox 7.10

G05-Co05: My peer also gave feedback on my lesson. [This was] very helpful because when I taught, I could not recognise my mistakes, so my friends commented on it frankly".

Interviewer: How about others?

G05-Co05: Yes, at the beginning of the practicum, it happened. But the later the fewer.

G05-Co05: I agree. It was fewer and fewer.

G05-Co01: Me, too. As others said, the interaction with peers on this was less.

This was consistent with the comments I reproduce later in the chapter which indicate that peer interaction frequency of providing feedback on lessons was considered an uncommon activity among the pre-service teachers.

Although the latter seemed to be more interested in the topic of peer feedback on the lessons themselves, there were only two comments in a group interview related to feedback on lesson plans from peers. One reported, “My friend gave feedback on my lesson plans. For example, if she thought my lesson plan was lengthy, she suggested cutting it” (G04-Co05). Both agreed that this activity was voluntary among them. It seemed that because there were no requirements or procedures for this activity and little interaction with peers in giving and receiving feedback on each other’s lesson plans, the control group pre-service teachers were not interested in this topic. This was demonstrated by the lack of group member interaction and lack of mentions of this topic by the focus group.

7.4.2.4 Discussion

A total of 11 mentions in six groups related to discussion as a supporting strategy emerged from the interviews with the control group. All of these pre-service teachers reported that they had discussions with their peers on a variety of issues. Their interaction helped them to improve different aspects of their teaching practice. Three of them said that they had only a few discussions. As one pre-service teacher said, “Although we did not have many discussions, among those topics we discussed, we could draw on our experience and correct our mistakes and errors. … We could remember it when we taught” (G06-Co03). More specifically, they reported that they and their peers discussed teaching issues, lesson plans, class, and assigned work. As one of the pre-service teachers said, “We sometimes asked each other or had discussions on topics we did not know or were not sure about in the lesson plans” (G02-Co01).

I noted in my interview observation journal that these pre-service teachers showed little interest in talking about this topic as indicated by the low tone of their voices and their uninterested facial expressions. This was consistent with the fact that this position drew little attention from other members in the groups. The remainder of the members in all six focus groups seemed disciplined to contribute much to the development of this position. For each group, only one or two individual mentions were counted regarding the value of peer discussion for different aspects of their teaching during their teaching practice. There was a general feeling that discussion happened only occasionally.

In conclusion, both groups identified similar sources of support during their practicum; however, pre-service teachers in the treatment groups said that they had more support from their peers due to their commitment to the formal peer mentoring intervention than those in the control group. The latter considered their mentors a major source of support during the practicum. This sheds light on the impact of peer mentoring intervention on their perceived peer support. Differences in perceived support from peers led to different degrees of peer impact and to different opinions

about peer interaction between the two groups although they both valued the support they received from their peers. Comments from members of two comparable groups, who experienced two types of peer mentoring during the practicum place emphasis on the importance and value of a well-structured process. It will provide support for those who struggling with the many difficulties inherent in becoming a beginning teacher.

7.5 Discussion

Members of the formally peer-mentored group reported that they were more effective in performing support functions than the latter group. Regarding psychosocial support from peers, four similar themes emerged from the interviews, from both the formally peer mentored group and the non-formally peer mentored group: emotional support; sharing; befriending; and talking. Although both the formally peer mentored group and non-formally peer mentored group acknowledged receiving similar types of psychosocial support from their peers, the nature of their comments differed. The formally peer mentored group reported more support in terms of emotional support, sharing, befriending, and talking than those in the non-formally peer mentored group. These findings seem to corroborate Kram and Isabella's (1985) theory (See Chap. 2) on the existence of psychosocial support functions in the field of pre-service EFL teacher education. The findings reveal that this type of support was received from peers in both groups. In addition, their findings provide further evidence that this type of support was perceived to be at a higher level in the formally peer-mentored group than in the non-formally peer mentored group. In addition, an examination of the interviews extended the types of psychosocial support functions which peers provided for each other.

It can be seen from the data that Kram and Isabella's (1985) framework is comprehensive in identifying the types of psychosocial support. In the article I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, both qualitative and quantitative data were reported to confirm the benefits of this peer mentoring on supporting the preservice teacher psychosocially. I want to highlight an additional element of psychosocial support strategy to this framework; that is talking. It can be argued that this peer mentoring interaction envisaged the opportunities for the preservice teachers to initiate the conversations with their peers. Even they did not identify it as a learning conversation but its benefit was seen to help them to deal with their psychosocial needs and professional needs. In such mutual learning contexts, talks with peers may provide an additional means of psychosocial support. The nature of this talk moved from informal talk to more professional discussions without fear of being judged. This finding aligns with that of Miller (2008) who believed that the potential value of creating a context in which pre-service teachers can learn and support each other while engaged in talk.

Regarding career-related support, the findings from the interview data show that the formally and non-formally peer mentored groups provided career-related support to each other. However, the peers in the former group were perceived to provide each other with more career-related support than those in the latter group.

The study demonstrates that peer mentors, both formally and non-formally assigned, provide career support functions which are almost identical to those reported in Kram and Isabella's (1985) study. Examination of the interview data extended Kram and Isabella's (1985) framework as observation was claimed to be a useful source of career-related support for pre-service teachers. This addition can be explained by the research context and the nature of peer mentoring for pre-service teachers in the current study which focused on pre-service EFL teachers during their teaching practice. Peer observation, either as a requirement or on a voluntary basis, was a popular peer-based activity during the practicum. Participant responses, especially in the formally peer mentored group, indicated that peer observation helped them to improve their teaching practice. The findings of the study align with other research studies in teacher education showing that peer observation can contribute positively to teachers' professional practice (e.g., Anderson, Barksdale, & Hite, 2005; Munson, 1998; Vacilotto & Cummings, 2007). Thus, peer observation should become a career-related category of support for pre-service teachers involved in peer mentoring relationships.

This study supports and extends the arguments of other researchers (Forbes, 2004; Goodnough et al., 2009; Kurtts & Levin, 2000; Le Cornu, 2005; Walsh et al., 2002) by showing that working with peers enables pre-service teachers to provide each other with support personally and professionally. The importance of peer support in professional experiences has been increasingly recognised in the literature. However, in the sphere of teacher training, few formal structures have made use of peers as a valuable source of support (Dinsmore & Wenger, 2006; Laker, Laker, & Lea, 2008; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). The results of this study provide ample qualitative support for the notion that participation in formal peer mentoring has an effect on the participants' perceptions of the support they receive from their peers during their practicum. In other words, it supports the argument that peer mentoring should be a formal support mechanism embedded within the practicum experience in the Asian context.

The nature of the differences in the pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the support they received from peers may well be explained by the nature of their peer relationships. The additional findings from the interview data show that the formally peer mentored pre-service teachers evinced notably more positive attitudes towards their peer relationships and peer interactions than the non-formally peer mentored group. Commitment to the peer mentoring process seemed to have contributed to both the degree and quality of the support they provided to each other, roles which Le Cornu (2005) emphasises when she discussed the need to build commitment to training mentoring attitudes in the participants. In addition, the formal structure of the peer-based relationship based on three previously suggested factors (training, matching, and personal attributes) was perceived to sustain the frequency

of contact among the formally peer mentored pre-service teachers. And, it maximised the effectiveness of the peer-based interactions.

7.6 Conclusion and Implications

The theoretical findings have a number of practical implications for improving the quality of initial pre-service EFL teachers' education preparation by rethinking the use of peer mentoring as a source of learning and support.

The findings suggest the value of implementing a formal peer mentoring model for pre-service EFL teachers in the context of Vietnam where the learning process is based on a process of information transmission from expert to novice. This research contributes to raising an awareness of the feasibility and benefits of the implementation of this peer mentoring model in the TESOL practicum. Teacher educators, policy makers, and teachers in Vietnam generally should consider reframing their practicum to include the use of peer mentoring as a supplementary source of learning and support for pre-service teachers. As the current conditions usually mean that formal support from mentors and university supervisors is limited, peer mentoring would seem to be a way of coping with such limitations. Furthermore, the findings indicate that pre-service EFL teachers in Vietnam are motivated to participate in such a formal peer mentoring model, particularly if it is well- structured and well-planned. These findings contradict the view that pre-service teachers will resist any activity which they suspect will create a greater burden for them during their practicum, and that they would prefer to work in isolation.

Although the study was conducted with a small group of pre-service EFL teachers in the specific context of Vietnam, it has valuable implications for pre-service EFL teachers in other contexts. Indeed, these results suggest that formal peer mentoring should be considered as either an alternative or an addition to traditional practicum strategies, to help pre-service EFL teachers to function effectively in the school environment. Its implementation will improve the quality of the pre-service teachers' teaching experiences. The data also indicate that participants in the study enjoyed their peer mentoring experiences, that it provided support for them during their practicum, and that the formal peer mentoring process had a strong impact on the participants' professional practice. In addition, the formal peer mentoring process was easily implemented. If programs are to provide pre-service teachers with effective support for their first entry to the teaching profession, consideration should be made to integrate a model of formal peer mentoring into the practicum program.

The role of the practicum in pre-service teacher education in general and in EFL teacher education in particular is of significance for the preparation of future teachers. Teacher education programs make concerted efforts to provide meaningful preparation opportunities (Imig & Switzer, 1996). However, it has been argued that pre-service teacher programs need to prepare teachers for a changing world in which working with other colleagues and reflecting on practice are indispensable skills that teachers need to acquire (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). This

approach is based on calls for reform in pre-service teacher education that would provide more opportunities for collaboration (Bullough et al., 2003; Howey & Zimpher, 1999; Knezevic & Scholl, 1996) and reflection on the meaning of practicum experiences (Gimbert, 2001; Keogh, 2005; Le Cornu, 2005; Stillisano, 2004). The results of this study support such calls and suggest the integration of formal peer mentoring program into the practicum. This would provide a method of developing pre-service teachers' collaborative and reflective skills so that they become ingrained, leading to a continuing developmental process for teachers as life-long learners.

The focus of this study is timely and one might suggest critical in the current context of providing quality professional experience in teacher preparation programs, where there are increasing numbers of experienced teachers are exiting the system due to retirement age. Improving the supervisory process – regardless of teaching areas – is important if Vietnam is to produce in order to develop effective and committed future teachers. Thus while we are strongly aware of the importance of good supervision/mentoring to the development of future teachers, the reality of the time and range of knowledge of experienced teachers who take on the role is such that identifying and examining the value of additional approaches is critical. This study, which raises issues of how best to prepare and support pre-service teachers during their practicum, proposes the use of a formal peer mentoring process. In this study, pre-service teachers reported the many advantages arising from their formal peer mentoring experiences. It was shown that, as a result of their peer mentoring experience, they noticed improvement in their professional practice (See Chap. 6) and that they had received more support from their peers.

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Chapter 8
Peer Mentoring with Beginning EFL Teachers

Abstract This chapter reports a case study which explores the experience of groups of Vietnamese EFL teachers toward their participation in a formal peer mentoring model over one semester. Through observations and interviews, this study offers insights into the participants' experiences as well as the application of formal peer mentoring as a model of EFL teacher professional development. This study offers insights into the participants' experiences with this model in Vietnam as well as how this model could be appropriately used as a model of teacher professional development in a particular Asian context.

8.1 Introduction

Language education in the Asian EFL contexts, including Vietnam, over the past decade has been dominated by concerns associated with issues of quality, of teacher education, and of teacher professional development (see Chap. 1). The support provided to English language teachers in general, and beginning English language teachers in particular, is not only critical to the quality of their immediate teaching practice but also to their longlife professional learning. While numerous claims have been made regarding the benefits of participating in mentoring programs for beginning teachers, less attention has been paid to more equal and collegial relationships in mentoring such as peer mentoring. In this chapter, I include a case study which explores the experience of groups of Vietnamese in-service EFL teachers and their participation in a formal peer mentoring model over one semester. This study offers insights into the participants' experiences as well as the application of formal peer mentoring as a model for EFL teacher professional development.

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8.2 Beginning EFL Teachers

The first stage of teaching is well recognised as a critical stage of teacher learning in teachers' careers. Yet, the first entry into the profession can be a daunting experience for beginning teachers who are often defined as teachers with less than 3 years of teaching experience (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Troutman, 2002). Frequently these teachers struggle to survive their early career experiences, with their first-year teaching experiences having a profound effect upon the practices and attitudes they employ throughout the remainder of their careers (Farrell, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Grudnoff, 2011; Loughran, Brown, & Doecke, 2001; Thomas & Richard, 2004; Xu, 2013). Yet, frequently beginning teachers in many countries are left to struggle alone, with little organized help from their institutions or colleagues. Many first year teachers experience feelings of isolation and uncertainty when they first enter the profession. For some, it marks a dramatic transition from pre-service to first year teaching. Thus, it is hardly surprising to find that those first-year teachers who lack the required support, often "lose their enthusiasm, ambition, and idealism and start getting lost in the flurry of a challenging beginning" (Saban, 2002, p. 33).

The beginning stage of teacher professional development has been regarded by some as a period of survival and discovery (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Huberman, 1993; Lee & Feng, 2007; Saban, 2002), it is the time during which beginning teachers first face the challenges posed by their teaching career so that is, an awareness that they will be personally responsible for their professional work. In effect, they are expected to perform like experienced teachers. This phase of learning is very different from their teacher education program experiences (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hartshorn et al., 2010) during which they were supported and did not have to assume ultimate responsibility for their teaching. Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) stress that "critics have long assailed teaching as an occupation that 'cannibalizes its young' and in which the initiation of new teachers is akin to a 'sink-or-swim,' 'trial-by-fire' or 'boot-camp' experience" (p. 2). To overcome this situation, newcomers to the profession may seek help and support from mentor teachers. This suggests that it is essential to provide them with some forms of assistance if they are to be retained within the profession to develop their potential as professionals.

The need for mentoring novice teachers is well-supported by the current literature (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006; Hobson et al., 2009; Lee & Feng, 2007; Nguyen, 2008; Wang, Odell, & Schwille, 2008), the mentoring process provides only one solution to this problem. As Saban (2002) points out, "what she [the novice teacher] needed and valued most was continuous feedback, reassurance, and support regarding her practices in the classroom from a caring colleague with significant teaching expertise" (p. 831).

Mentoring has long been identified as of central importance and practical value to beginning teachers who have a strong need for support from experienced teachers who will guide their practice, provide support, and help them to develop their professional capability (e.g., Arnold, 2006; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami, & Takashima,

2008; Harrison et al., 2006; Hobson et al., 2009). In their extensive review of the literature, Hobson et al. emphasise the practice of mentoring for beginning teachers in different contexts and cite the many that mentoring will afford them. However, not all mentoring processes ensure these rewards. Various scholars highlight the potential limitations of mentoring beginning teachers (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Farrell, 2003; Hobson et al., 2009; Long, 1997; Wang & Odell, 2002). Tomlinson, Hobson, and Malderez (2010), for example, emphasise the following four main failings of mentoring beginning teachers in practice. These include lack of sufficient support; sufficient challenges; opportunities for critical reflection; and, learning and development.

Another problem identified in the literature is the issue of an unequal balance of power in the mentoring relationship between the novice and his/her mentors (Eisen, 2001; Le Cornu, 2005; Maguire, 2001; McGuire & Reger, 2003; Nguyen & Hudson, 2012). The hierarchical structure of mentorship may well diminish the beginning teachers' opportunities to speak openly. It may make them "vulnerable to exploitation", i.e., make it difficult for them to "find their own intellectual niche" (McGuire & Reger, 2003, p. 57). This could be, especially, Confucian Heritage Culture-oriented Vietnam where the status of senior people is unquestionably respected. Within this socio-cultural sphere, teachers are considered experts, who possess unquestionable knowledge and offer students the clear guidance and the best ways to learn. Lee and Feng (2007) and Wang, Strong, and Odell (2004) claim that relationships between mentors and mentees, especially in Asian contexts, rarely becomes intimate. This is because they are enmeshed in an unequal relationship where mentor is an authority figure who comments on lessons, lesson plans, and other activities. In this particular form of teaching environment, hierarchical rules are explicit. They ensure the status of the teachers, in the process of giving rise to a number of issues including overdependence on the role of the mentors, an imbalance of power in the mentorship relationship, and lack of open communication between mentors and mentees. Thus, there is growing support in the literature for a move from a hierarchical mentoring relationship to a more mutual and balanced form such as a peer mentoring model in which there are relatively few significant differences in age, experience, and expertise between the participants in the model. A review of the literature revealed that only a small number of in-depth research studies (e.g., Boreen & Niday, 2000; Forbes, 2004; Meyer, 2002; Staten-Daniels, 2009) have explored the peer-based relationships between first-year teachers. Some that have been focussed on other peers within a professional community have examined the possible support these relationships provide to new teachers. These studies while identifying the benefits of peer-based relationships stress the need for more research in this area.

8.3 Theoretical Background

Peer mentoring is underpinned by the Vygotskian notion of social constructivism and rooted in the reflective practitioner tradition (See Chap. 2).Vygotsky (1981) argued that the majority of learning is not achieved in isolation, but rather through interaction that takes place in communication and collaboration with other people in social settings. According to Vygotskian approach, the construction of meaning occurs first as exchanges between two participants and is then internalized. Vygotskian theory states that in order for learning to become internalized, mediation must occur during the actual problem-solving and joint activity or shared task with others (Vygotsky, 1981).

A sociocultural theory of learning also underpins Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of situated learning, suggesting that all learning should be understood as a process of participation in a community of practice. Learning occurs as the result of interaction among members of a community. The knowledge gained is an immediate outcome of said participation. Thus, teacher learning shifts from individual to participatory focus where knowledge is co-constructed through reflection and interaction. This sociocultural perspective of learning, when applied to participation in the practices of a professional community, has led to the development of useful conceptual tools for understanding teachers' learning (Korthagen, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lerman, 2001). Wenger (1998) delineates three of the defining characteristics of communities of practice as mutual engagement of participants, negotiation of a joint enterprise, and development of a shared repertoire of research for creating meaning. Thus, learning is only meaningful when it occurs in the particular social and cultural contexts within which the knowledge is shared, negotiated, co-constructed, and internalised.

The novice situation, where beginning teachers learn to be personally accountable for their professional work, presents opportunities for situated learning. In such situations, a large proportion of teacher learning occurs within classrooms aided by colleagues. Learning is seen as a process of social participation whereby the process of reflecting, interpreting, and negotiating meaning among all those in the community of participants is critical to knowledge construction (Wenger, 1998). This theory highlights the process in which the teachers move from peripheral to full membership in the practices of the community.

In the light of social cultural theory and its application to teacher learning process, research in this field suggests that the process of learning to teach for beginning teachers needs to provide opportunities for collaboration (Bullough et al., 2003; Knezevic & Scholl, 1996), reflection on the meaning of these experiences (Upitis, 1999), and opportunities to work cooperatively with others (Howey & Zimpher, 1999). Research evidence suggests a wide array of methods, experiences, and strategies to improve the learning-to-teach process of the beginning teachers. Peer mentoring as a form of psychological and career enhancement support for beginning teachers has been increasingly recognized as a helpful strategy as it is theoretically supported by social constructivism and collective reflection (See Chap. 2).

The above strategies provide a theoretical foundation for the study of peer mentoring in teacher education. However, much less is known about peer mentoring EFL beginning teachers in a non-Western context. While there is evidence confirming the benefits experienced by preservice EFL teachers (Chaps. 6 and 7), conditions conducive to such results for beginning teachers have yet to be investigated. A review of the literature revealed very little investigation of the support first-year beginning teachers receive. For these reasons, it is important to investigate the process of peer mentoring for EFL beginning teachers in specific contexts like Vietnam where culturally the knowledge of experts is highly respected.

8.4 The Study

8.4.1 Research Design

This study aims to explore the experiences and outcomes of a peer mentoring program among a small group of beginning teachers in a university in Vietnam. My utilization of a qualitative approach as the basis for this research inquiry has facilitated an in-depth and detailed study of this topic (Patton, 2002). It "can be used to obtain the intricate detail about the phenomena such as feelings, thoughts, processes, and emotions that are difficult to enact or learn from more conventional methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). As Creswell (2003, p. 119) points out, "the focus of qualitative research is on participants' perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives". Therefore, using a qualitative approach provides the researcher with an appropriate tool to understand participants' experiences of a peer mentoring program.

8.4.2 Research Context

My research was conducted in Hanoi, Vietnam, at one of the leading universities training foreign language teachers. Every year, the university recruits a number of beginning EFL teachers, most of whom were outstanding graduates from its EFL pre-service teacher education program. These beginning teachers attend a number of professional development activities in their first year including a mentoring program.

8.4.3 Setting and Implementation of the Peer Mentoring Program

Peer mentoring can be structured in a number of ways. In this chapter, I investigate the experiences of a group of beginning teachers enrolled in a peer mentoring program which was initiated for newly employed beginning EFL teachers at a university in Vietnam. The specific components contributing to formalising the peer mentoring include peer mentor selection, peer mentors' attributes, peer mentor matching, peer mentor training and peer mentor strategies, all of which are described in detail.

Unlike traditional mentoring, where there is a significant gap in rank/status, experience, and expertise between the mentors and mentees, this peer mentoring model employed mentors which 2–3 years teaching experience. These mentors were paired with newly recruited beginning teachers in the Department. Although this model shares similar characteristics with the peer mentoring model for pre-service teachers discussed in Chaps. 7 and 8, it differs in the sense that the mentors have a few more years of teaching experience. In this situation one might expect that beginning teachers would ask their fellow peers for assistance both professionally and personally more often than they would request help from their senior colleagues, whereas the hierarchy which dictates their relationships with their seniors may create a gap in their communication, their fellow peers can serve as "supportive friends, sources of professional knowledge, and sounding-boards for ideas and actions" (Hsu, 2005, p. 315). Wong (2004) argues that effective new teachers are retained when they actively participate in collaborative situations "where all teachers share together, grow together, and learn to respect each other's work" (p. 41). For this model, first year teachers were assigned to second year/third year teachers in a peer mentoring relationship. Although the mentors are in their second or third year of teaching, they are all on a similar level in terms of teaching ability and experience. Often mentors themselves are beginning teachers, for this reason, they can better address novices' problems they have been faced with similar problems themselves. The recruitment of second/third-year beginning teachers as peer mentors for this program aimed at offering a collegial support from a cohort of peers and at avoiding a number of issues related to the lack of power balance in the mentoring relationship between a novice and a senior teacher.

This study, which was carried out over one semester, involved five pairs of mentors-mentees; i.e., five teachers commencing their first year of teaching and another five who had from 2 to 3 years' teaching experience at a university in Hanoi, Vietnam. The departmental manager asked five mentor teachers to engage in an outgoing mentoring relationship with the five newly recruited teachers as part of a peer mentoring program. The latter aimed to professionally assist and support beginning EFL teachers who had recently graduated from a pre-service EFL teacher program and who were newly recruited academics at a foreign language teacher training university in Hanoi. Both mentors and mentees were provided with basic procedures and requirements needed to implement the program. Major activities

centred upon modelling, observation, feedback on lesson plans and lessons, and reflection.

Orientation was conducted for both mentors (second/third year teachers and mentees (first year beginning teachers). All of the participants were provided with peer-mentoring package that included material on mentoring circles and mentoring tasks. However, there was no mentor training program, as the manager who was to have designed it said that they had not prepared it, and they also lacked expertise in mentoring.

The program lasted for one semester during which both peer mentors and mentees agreed to observe each other's lessons and provide feedback. Later, the mentors were asked to provide an evaluation of the mentoring program to their manager. The mentees were required to record their reflections on each lesson, as well as their mentoring experience. These journals served as repositories of self-expression and reflection. According to a number of researchers (e.g., Garmon, 1998; Terrion & Philion, 2008) this component of their training prepares teachers to be reflective practitioners.

8.4.4 Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative approach was adopted to analyze data derived from individual interviews with the five mentees, peer mentoring conversations, reflective journals, lesson plans, and mentoring evaluation reflection forms completed throughout this long mentoring program. Five individual 45-min interviews were conducted after the conclusion of the program, one with each of the mentees. Peer mentors' mentoring conversations, written feedback, classroom observation feedback forms, reflective journal, and mentoring reflective journal reports that were submitted to the peer mentor's manager, were also used as sources of data. After each lesson, peer mentors were required to complete the observation feedback form, and to note down their comments on the first year beginning teachers. In addition, mentoring reflective journal reports were collected every week. In each mentees' reflective journal report entry, first year beginning teachers were asked to report their concerns, and to evaluate the support and professional development they had received from their peer mentors. Beginning teachers' reflective journals were also collected as a source of data.

All of the interviews were audiotaped, then they were transcribed verbatim. I used the interview transcripts as primary data sources, and conducted a thematic analysis using a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The transcriptions were analyzed to identify the main concerns expressed by the mentees vis-a'-vis their professional development and mentoring experiences. The themes were summarized and supported with illustrative quotes. Each of the five interviewees was assigned a specific code. Four broad themes related to the research inquiry were identified from the interviews. Data collected using other instruments (i.e., peer mentoring reflective journal reports, peer mentors' written feedback, classroom

observation forms, mentees' reflections) were associated with each theme that emerged.

8.5 Results and Discussion

The professional development experiences of the mentees as disclosed during the interviews, were summarized, and the four major themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews were identified: engagement between beginning teachers and their mentors; increase in self-reflection; psychological support; and tensions.

8.5.1 Engagement Between Beginning Teachers and Their Peer Mentors

The peer mentoring program required the beginning teachers and their peer mentors to work together, with the peer mentors as colleagues assuming a modelling and mentoring role for the beginning teachers. A number of mentoring activities were reported, and more prominance was given to mutual observation and lesson plan feedback. First, for mutual lesson observation, there were two main kinds of lessons were observed during the peer mentoring program. The first consisted of lessons modelled by mentors. Most of the mentees had a positive feeling about their mentors' lessons and said that they could learn something from their lessons.

Lan: Well, it is good to come to my mentor's lesson. I see how she managed her class.
Trang: I find it very useful. I rarely observe other teachers' classes because I did not have a chance. When I observed Van [her mentor]'s class. I could see some good techniques she used….. I think I could use that technique in my lesson.

However, there were few opportunities for reflection or discussion after the mentors' lessons. They rarely exchanged their views on the lessons. As several of the mentees observed:

Vân: I observed my mentor's lessons but we did not exchange ideas after the lesson. One reason is that everyone is very busy. Another reason is that there was no requirement of exchanging ideas about mentors' lessons in the program. Even if there is, I don't think I can speak frankly about it.
Ngoc: My mentor commented a lot on my lesson, but in her lesson, she did not do that….. Yes, of course, I can not say so to her.

Even in this study, where peer mentors and mentees were close in age and in level of teaching experience, there was some hesitation when it came to exchanging views, because of the perceived risk to their relationship. Lee and Feng's (2007) study of mentoring in an Asian context stressed that mentees were not supposed to question the authority of their mentors, i.e., their seniors. In this study, while the peer mentors were not necessarily seniors, they were still considered more experienced than the mentees. Thus, there was still some resistance or hesitance to

comment negatively on their peer mentors. One possible explanation for this may be found in the Confucian Heritage Culture's (CHC) expectations for communication that urges people's full mastery of their emotions, particularly extreme and/or negative emotions. Usually, in accordance with CHC, students are expected to respect their teachers, not always to question or protest what they say (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Thus, through their observations of peer mentors' lessons, the beginning teachers could learn self-understanding, self-identification and self-reflection. Although this activity provided limited interaction between tpeer mentors and mentees, it still enhanced the learning-to-teach process. According to Lave (1997), there are two main facets to working with junior associates and developing their professional expertise, namely the "way in" and "practice". This mentoring activity is what Lave alludes to as the "way in", a period of observation in which the beginning teachers, as learners or mentee, observe a more senior teachers (in this case, their mentors) and make initial efforts to teach their classes applying and/or modelling the knowledge gained from their observation. Then, they try to refine and perfect the use of this knowledge. This explanation was confirmed by the previous quotes of most of the beginning teachers who claimed that they had used some of the good aspects of their mentors' lessons that they learned by observing the mentors' classes. From a situated learning theory perspective, the engagement of the beginning teachers in a situation which involves an authentic social context (classroom) is crucial to their learning which is framed by the co-construction of knowledge between the learner and the situation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). This finding concurs with other studies (e.g., Hudson, 2004; Lee & Feng, 2007; White, 2006) which report the benefit of observing mentors' lessons in developing mentees' professional practice. As well, they stress the importance of this activity in peer mentoring programs where the mentors and mentees envince little difference in their experience and expertise.

In contrast, there was more interaction between the peer mentors and mentees in lessons where the former and their peers both observed and provided feedback. All of the participants agreed that this activity was helpful for them, even though one had a conflict with her peer mentor. They valued their peer mentors' feedback on their lesson plans, especially their feedback after each lesson. The following comments are indicative of the value of the feedback provided by the mentors.

Van: My mentor, she always commented on my strengths first and my weaknesses later. I felt confortable with this. Most of her comments were appropriate.

Trang: I think I can learn a lot from her comments. She made good suggestions on my lessons. I could avoid them and improve the next lesson.

Ngoc: From her comments, I gained some experience. I had one more chance to confirm the belief that I should have invested more time brainstorming the activities to motivate the passive students.

Lan: I can improve my teaching manner as a result of her comments. Sometimes, I don't know how to control the class. She suggested that I should ask them questions. I think it was a very good suggestion. In the next lesson, I used that technique and my students listened to me.

The feedback session after each lesson provided the beginning teachers with opportunities to listen and discuss their lessons with their mentors and peers. They reported in the interviews as well as in their reflective reports that they could make

the following changes to their teaching related to a number of issues such as classroom management, group organisation, activity allocation, student behaviour management, activity design, teaching philosophy, teaching techniques, and teaching manners. Thus, these feedback sessions created opportunities for professional inquiry and reflection.

Feedback on lesson plans was also a required activity of the peer mentoring program. However, most of the beginning teachers reported that they did not get much feedback from their peer mentors on their lesson plans, partly because the peer mentors were too busy. Nevertheless, two of the mentees reported in their interviews that their peer mentors provided comments on their lesson plans and that they valued those comments. Comments taken from the mentees' reflective journals included the following:

Ngoc: Her comments on my lesson plans were appropriate and built up my confidence in teaching.

Lan: I can learn from their comments and then I made appropriate changes in my lesson. I believe my lesson was better.

Vân: I realise the importance of writing lesson plans and can avoid unexpected situations in the class.

Mai: I can improve my lesson in advance.

Other mentoring activities including information provision and materials exchange were among the activities that the beginning teachers said had a positive impact on their development. Through these activities, the mentors were able to model their practice and this allowed the beginning teachers to access craft knowledge.

These comments articulate a critical aspect of mentoring: using others within the community of practice as resources. As seen from the situated learning perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the evidence suggests that a community of practice emerged among the beginning teachers and their peer mentors in terms of a degree of mutual engagement among the participants. Lesson observation and feedback were viewed by the participants as central mentoring practices. The mentors and beginning teachers interacted with each other through "mutual engagement" activities to reach a negotiated joint enterprise, and the development of a shared repetoire of resources for creating meaning.

8.5.2 Mentoring Programs Increased the Participants' Self-Reflection on Their Teaching Practice

The ability to reflect upon their teaching and the teaching of others is often cited as one of the primary benefits of peer mentoring programs. Peer mentoring programs required novice teachers to observe and to be observed by their peers and peer mentors. Most of my participants said that they valued the role of observation as an impetus for their self-reflection. Some thought of their own lessons when observing their mentors and their peers' lessons:

Trang: I did not recognise that I can manage a class in that way until I observed my mentor's lesson. She can arrange the groups in different ways. It was very motivating. I always think that method of group arrangement would take a lot of time, but in fact, it did not. I started using the same technique in my lesson. It seemed that it went well. I can reflect from her lessons.

Lan: I observed Trang's lesson. She is very cheerful and motivating. I think it is very good for creating a friendly atmosphere in the class. I think my lesson is a little bit boring. I should smile more.

Vân: I got to confirm my learning and teaching principles and also had a chance to look at myself from her comments.

Peer mentor modelling is important as it provides the beginning teachers with common elements for their teaching practice. In addition, the modelling could be considered a forum for reflective practice. All the participants said that their peer mentors had helped them to reflect not only on the successes, but also on the weaknesses of different aspects of their lessons by providing feedback on their lesson plans and lessons. Working with peer mentors and receiving their feedback encouraged the beginning teachers to reflect on their own practice after each lesson. Self-identifying mistakes by observing peers' and peer mentors' lessons improved their work: it helped them to recognise the mistakes and weaknesses in their teaching. In addition, most of the beginning teachers said that they reflected on their weaknesses after receiving their mentors' feedback. This is illustrated in the following quote:

Mai: I used to speak too fast, so the students didn't understand what to do. Also, I tended to move around too much in the class. My mentor observed my lessons, and her comments helped me realize those weaknesses.

The trainee teacher said that with their peer mentors' help, they could reflect on their lessons more accurately because they could not see their personal performance while teaching. The following extracts from the interview data lend support to their observation:

Mai: After each lesson, my mentor gave feedback on what was good and what was not about my lesson. I knew if it was a success or a failure. Sometimes, I cannot notice that. For example, she said I spoke so softly so that the students at the back could not hear my voice clearly. It surprised me as I thought my voice was loud enough.

Trang: All my self-reflection on our lessons was not always accurate if we did not have comments from my mentors. How could we see ourselves when we were teaching in class? My mentor there could help me with that. Most of the things she spotted were those I did not recognise.

Mentees also reflected on a wide range of challenging situations that could occur during the observed lessons and their own lessons. They also considered some coping strategies they could adopt, and behaviour they should avoid. The following extracts from their mentoring reflective journal reports lend support to their claims:

Trang: I Think I should learn from her, the way she carried out the activities. She kept a moderate pace. Also, the nature of her activities was that they were really interesting and motivating. All students seem to enjoyed it

Van: My peer mentor, she speaks too fast. I think some of the students can't get it. I know how hard it is to slow down but I will try to speak slowly and clearly.

In sum, it was generally felt that the peer mentoring process provided a wide variety of procedures following which the beginning teachers could engage in a critical and reflective review of their own practice. These findings demonstrate how colleagues can help beginning teachers increase their self-reflection and their development as teachers. Peer mentoring is rooted in a reflective practitioner tradition which stresses that teachers learn from experie nce through focused reflection on the nature and meaning of their teaching experience (Dewey, 1933; Roberts, 1998; Schon, 1983). And they also learned from the formal knowledge acquired through study with each informing the other (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). In this way, learning to teach becomes more of an exploratory exercise shaped by and through experience rather than through a transmission model. In effect, reflection on practice is part of the process of becoming a teacher. If beginning teachers could learn reflective skills in such as way that they became automatic, they would be able to reify with their own self-development process throughout their lives as teachers (Vo & Nguyen, 2010). The data indicates that beginning teachers effectively contributed not only to developing their relationships with others, but to developing reflective habits which frequently involved the questioning and requestioning of their own practices. From a sociocultural perspective, learning in this case occurs when the beginning teachers create opportunities to examine their own knowledge and experience, for as Buysse et al. (2003, p. 268) observe:

> Reflective practice is predicated on the assumption that knowledge is derived from professionals'own experience and observation as well from formal knowledge gained through theory and research, and that each informs the other.

Through peer mentoring, knowledge and experience was created through communal reflection, and inquiry.

The data shows that the process of self-reflection in preservice teachers occurred naturally as a result of their activity with their peer mentors. However, there is little evidence that the latter were either aware of or able to create conversations which encouraged the beginning teachers to reflect critically. My examination of peer mentoring feedback from post-observation conversations, and classroom observation revealed that most of their mentees comments were directed towards the weak points of the lessons. There was a little opportunity for the beginning teachers to express their comments and negotiate their teaching repertoires with their peer mentors. Most of the post-observation conversations lasted between 10 and 15 min. It seemed that everyone was busy preparing for the next lesson. Comments such as "you should ….", I think it's better if you…", "you don't….." were commonly found in the feedback received. Although most of the beginning teachers valued their mentors' feedback comments in the post-observation conversations and attributed them to changes in their teaching practice. But, the reality was that they were neither encouraged to reflect upon their experiences, nor to explain their practices. Indeed, a number of factors seem to militate against the involvement of the peer mentors in developing critical reflections. First, in some cases, the beginning teachers mentioned that they did not have much time after each lesson because their peer mentors frequently made comments during the break time. Second, as noted in the

study design, the peer mentors were neither equiped with materials nor the training to guide the beginning teachers' professional development through reflection and feedback.

8.5.3 Psychological Support

In addition to their roles as profesional advisors and guides, the peer mentors were expected to provide the beginning teachers with a tremendous amount of psychological support. Teaching in the first year can be a daunting experience for beginning teachers. During the study, they showed their concern over a number of issues such as student behaviors, classroom management, activity organisation, time management, and warm-up activities. This was illustrated by one participant who said:

Vân: I was very stressful when I started teaching as I did not have much experience in teaching at teritiary level and the preservice teacher program did not give me much opportunity to practise teaching in the real life context. Only a 6 week practicum at a secondary school was not enough. I don't know much about students here, the environment, and the staff here even though some of them were my teachers.

Another participant wrote in her reflective report as follows:

Ngoc: I realize that I am so young and inexperienced that I needed to improve myself to keep the job.

The above quotes exemplified the common astonishment expressed by beginning teachers (Farrell, 2004; Street, 2004; Wang & Odell, 2002) who were not only "concerned about creating interesting lessons [but also] concerned about surviving" (Street, p. 13). Thus, having peer mentors who were close both in age and level of experience not only helped them to avoid any feeling of isolation, but provided an additional layer of psychological support. Some interviewees supported this claim:

Mai: Trang, my mentor, is only few year older than me. She shared with me things about her first year of teaching. It was similar to what I feel now. She said to me "don't be worried, you will be fine".

Ngoc: My mentor is very nice. She always commented on good points of my lessons first. I felt that I can do something good in my lessson. I felt more confident and motivated.

Lan: She [her mentor] always conforted me when I came to talk to her about the lessons that I did not feel satisfied with.

Clearly, such words of encouragement were especially meaningful to these beginning teachers. As one of them wrote in their reflective report:

Lan: She showed her supportiveness when I taught. This helped me to feel more confident and I didn't feel like someone was judging and evaluating me.

It becomes clear from the above narratives that the assurance and confirmation offered by the peer mentors helped the first year beginning teachers immeasurably. They valued the opportunity to feel comfortable talking with their peer mentors, and to ask for advice and assistance from them. Their peer mentors in turn were able to

offer empathy and reassurance based on their own experiences of their first year. As one recalled:

> Van: It is a surprise to me that my peer mentor said that she had the same feeling like me and experienced the same difficulties as my self. I feel more confident to know that I am not such a stupid teacher haha,. It is normal to get lost in your lesson.

Providing personal feedback on personal problems or non-teaching related issues was reported as another form of psychological support. This seems to occur naturally during the mentoring process when relationships develop further as a result of trust and respect. Three out of five participants revealed that they disclosed details of their love lives, private lives, problems, stresses, and happiness in life to their mentors. One participant described their relationship as similar to friends. They confided in each other and did not hesitate to reveal personal issues. As one mentee said:

> Lan: Hoa (her mentor) is only few years older than me. During this period of time, I had many sad issues related to my family. I sometimes shared these with her. She was a good listener and always advised me on a number of things. Suprisingly, she shared with me about her family problems as well.

Two other mentees revealed that their peer mentors advised them where to have their hair cut, and where to shop. It seems that the conversations and get-togethers brought them closer: they said that they felt more comfortable with each other. The beginning teachers reported a release of feelings when they shared their personal problems and received feedback from peer mentors who were just a few years older than they were. One of them said that prior to commencing teaching (i.e., when she was a student in the program), she had never talked to her peer mentor; but, after the peer mentoring program, their relationship grew closer. It seems that this type of relationship fosters a sense of community within the cohort, both in informal situations, and in class. Vygotskian scholars (Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999; Lave & Wenger, 1991) suggest that establishing social contexts that support learners is crucial to the acquisition of professional skills.

These findings are consistent with Kram and Isabella's (1985) framework (see Chap. 2) for peer-based relationships. Their study listed most of the aspects of psychological support that they suggested that peers should offer each other. Their finding aligns with other studies (e.g., Boreen & Niday, 2000; Meyer, 2002; Staten-Daniels, 2009) which revealed that when new teachers were asked about their interaction with their fellow colleagues, they said they felt more comfortable talking with their peers because they were able to share similar issues and provide each other with support. In other words, supportive peer based relationships ease the process via which peer mentor/beginning teachers transit into legitimate non-peripheral participation. In my study, by showing support and creating a friendly atmosphere, the peer mentors drew the beginning teachers into the community of practice. This finding is similar to those found in other studies (Hsu, 2005; Nguyen & Luong, 2008) which suggest that as well as helping each other to develop in their profession, the mentees found that their peer mentors, who may be considered as their more capable peers, were a source of personal support in all aspects of their lives.

Lee and Feng (2007) and Wang et al. (2004) who claim that the relationship between mentors and mentees, especially in Asian contexts, rarely becomes

intimate. This may be due to the unequal relationship where mentors have the authority to comment on lessons, lesson plans, and other activities. However, in some cases, the relationships in this study moved from mentorship to friendship, supporting the notion that closeness in age and level of teaching are crucial to developing a collegial and friendly relationship (e.g., Allen & Eby, 2003; Heirdsfield, Walker, & Walsh, 2007; Smith, 2003). These results add to the growing support in the literature for a shift from hierarchical relationships toward a search for more collegiality and mutuality; in other words, it means that mentor assuming the *buddy* role (Harnish & Wild, 1994).

8.5.4 Tensions

While the potential benefits of mentoring for beginning teachers' development were identified, the overall process was not without its challenges. Some beginning teachers' comments revealed not only limited benefit, but tension between the mentors and beginning teachers. These differences arose from the ways that feedback was given post lessons, mentors' personalities, and time limitations. As one beginning teacher said:

Vân: I don't know why my mentor always wanted to comment on the weak points of my lesson. She rarely said a word to encourage me.

Another recounted

Mai: Ithink her feedback was appropriate but not all of the feedback were applicable. Everyone knows what an ideal lesson means, but the fact is that there are a lot of things out of our control. Although I sometimes don't agree with her, I realise that most of what she said was necessary.

Another beginning teacher said:

Trang: I expected her to offer additional advice on the issues rather than finding faults.

Sometimes, the issues went beyond their professional work. As Vân, a beginning teacher revealed:

Vân: She did not seem to like me as she always said that I need to improve this or improve that, but no word of encouragement.

Vân was also the only person in the program who emphatically stated that the feedback from her mentor had little impact on her teaching. This suggested that the developmental paths that beginning teachers take while engaged in their mentoring experiences were uniquely individual. Although the relations may hinder their motivation, the learning process still occurs. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), sometimes engagement involves tension, disagreement and conflict. Through this process, beginning teachers negotiate their own identity to gain full membership of the community. As Vân said:

Vân : I know some of her comments were right. I actually made some changes in my lesson, but I still felt uncomfortable. I may not be her style. I have to accept the fact that not every one liked me.

There was some evidence of lack of opportunity for beginning teachers and peer mentors to collectively reflect on their lessons. As one beginning teacher said:

> Everyone is busy, I felt unprofessional when my mentor always said "it is good, it is ok, you did well". I think she did not take it serious in giving me feedback and we do not have time to sit down and talk about the lesson.

For the above reasons, this beginning teacher found her peer mentor's assistance less than helpful. Her peer mentor was neither sufficiently well-equipped to give proper feedback to her mentee, nor to act as a guide in the beginning teacher's professional development. And, while do beginning teachers only report such situations rarely, their actions gave rise to the questions of training for peer mentors to ensure quality mentoring. And, clearly, there is a need to think carefully about the structure of the peer mentoring program.

8.6 Conclusion

Peer mentoring, a form of professional teaching support, has received widespread attention in the relevant literature; as well as teaching strategy, has been applied worldwide. However, the emergence of peer mentoring as a professional development strategy for beginning EFL teachers has not been given due attention in some EFL Asian contexts, i.e., China, Indonesia and Vietnam for example (Hsu, 2005; Nguyen, 2008). Moreover, there are very few empirical studies that explore the mentoring of EFL in-service programs. This study has shown that beginning EFL teachers' participation in peer mentoring programs, in which both mentors and mentees were of similar age and amount of teaching experience, had a positive impact on their professional development. Most of the participants expressed the opinion that their mentoring experiences were positive. Their process had provided them with opportunities to reflect on their practice, engage with other colleagues, and receive psychological support. This study shows how situated learning where teachers work together to create knowledge from their own experiences in an authentic context, can contribute to the professional development of novice teachers. The characteristics of situated learning are clearly evident in the way in which peer mentors and beginning EFL teachers share inquiry, engage in learning through authentic practice opportunities, increasing a reflection and support provision. The result of this study confirmed the results of other studies which have shown that the peer-based model is able to offer valuable benefits for the beginning teachers' support and professional development opportunities, especially when the peer mentors and the mentee (beginning teachers) are of similar age and teaching experience (Boreen & Niday, 2000; Harnish & Wild, 1994; McCormack & Thomas, 2003; Staten-Daniels, 2009). This model is particularly beneficial for first year teachers because they all have the same level of ability to deal with issues that confront them during their early career socialization.

The outcomes of the research add to the theoretical understanding of peer mentoring as seen through a sociocultural lens and provide practical evidence of the benefit occurring from the application of this contextually innovative strategy for the beginning stages of EFL teachers' professional development. The study has implications for teacher professional development practice. It highlights the need to employ professional support mechanisms for facilitating teacher learning and quality outcomes, especially particular sphere in which it was investigated. Participation in mentoring programs offers promise in light of the benefits often attributed to professional development via a number of mentoring activities. Among these activities, observation and feedback on lessons were reported to have a great impact. However, there also are significant limitations to the role that the peer mentor can effectively pursue. Although a teacher who felt alienated could learn to work with different members in the professional community, such situations give rise to issues of mentor-mentee matching and mentor training (See, e.g., Lacey, 1999). Mentors and mentees were not matched based on their preferences nor were mentors effectively trained to mentor. These conditions may have underpined under clash in their relationships, by extension, undermining the mentoring practice which was supposed to be supportive and friendly. The mentoring literature shows a salient cluster of variables for matching participants in the mentoring process: personality traits, gender, social skills, personal values, work ethic, career goals, experience, and work-related interests. Among these variables, compatibility of personalities seems to be the most critical factor in mentoring relationships. As it has been shown personality clashes and differences resulting from unsuccessful matching lead to an ineffective mentoring program (see Chaps. 4 and 9). Apart from the selection/matching of mentors, one of the most important elements for ensuring the effectiveness of mentoring programs relates to the training or preparation of mentors. As identified in the results section, one beginning teacher found her peer mentor's feedback less professional and less tactful, thus leading to some difficulties in their relationship. This finding stresses the necessity and importance of providing training in peer mentoring skills for teacher mentors, especially on how to give feedback (see Chaps. 4 and 9). Evertson and Smithey (2000) found that

> Protégés of trained mentors showed increased evidence of developing and sustaining more workable classroom routines, managed instruction more smoothly, and gained student cooperation in academic tasks more effectively (p. 301).

As noted in the findings, it was common to find that beginning teachers and their peer mentors lacked both time and opportunities to collaboratively reflect on their teaching practice. This highlights the necessity for institutional commitment. The program should provide peer mentors with additional compensation and/or release time from teaching. The feedback sessions need to be planned and time set aside for the mentoring purpose. Thus, it would be worthwhile to establish a regular time for the peer mentoring meetings, time that can be used for providing feedback on the lessons and other issues. As shown in Chaps. 6 and 7, during the peer mentoring programs for pre-service teachers, the latter were required to set a specific time for the weekly support meetings. This was reported to have enhanced the quality of the

peer mentoring program. It would be even better if the peer mentors received financial support for the time they spent in the peer mentoring program.

This chapter argues for the use of peer mentoring as a formal intervention strategy for EFL teachers' professional practice in contexts where there is a lack of resources for early professional support. The strength of peer mentoring lies in the fact that it uses existing, in-house resources, and the expertise of the faculty members. This chapter has highlighted the benefits and the challenges that exist for others who are considering implementing mentoring programs for beginning EFL teachers.

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Chapter 9
Issues of Implementation of Peer Mentoring for Pre-service/Inservice Teachers

Abstract This chapter discusses the major components in the design for a formal peer mentoring program. In the process, it addresses such topics as training peer mentors, attributes of peer mentors, and mentor-mentee matching. It finally reports the participants' reflections on these issues. The specific aspects that contribute to the effective peer mentoring program include the peer mentors' attributes, peer mentor/mentee matching, and peer mentor training/orientation.

9.1 Peer Mentoring Attributes

Similar to mentoring (see Chap. 4), effective peer mentoring attributes are also important when implementing the formal peer-mentoring program. An understanding of the basic attributes of peer mentoring relationships will help the participants employ it more effectively. Teacher educators in this way can improve the quality of peer mentoring programs.

Peer mentoring may be considered a peer learning partnership. According to Eisen (2001a), "peer learning partnerships are reciprocal helping relationships between individuals of comparable status, who share a common or closely related learning/development objective" (p. 10). This type of learning is particularly advocated for adult learners through both joint reflection and action in the context of real-life practice. Peer learning partnerships stress the two-way learning from partners, joint reflection and peer collaboration. Regarding collaborative partnerships, Saltiel (1998) identifies some key elements, including "shared goal or purpose; trust, respect, loyalty; personality traits and qualities that are complementary; respect for each other; synergy between partners; a valued relationship" (p. 8). Consistent with Saltiel (1998), in a qualitative case study which examined the role of peer learning partnerships in professional development, Eisen (2001b) synthesises some other key qualities of peer learning partners:

> trust (feeling safe), non-evaluative feedback, non-hierarchical status of partners, voluntary participation and partner selection, duration and intensity of partnership, mutuality (common goals, reciprocal learning, and authenticity (openness, honesty). (p.39)

Peer mentoring reflects the perspective of peer learning partnerships in several ways. First, as a peer learning partnership, peer mentoring fosters a power balance

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as well as a bi-directional flow of information between peers, elements which are often absent from traditional mentoring (Holbeche, 1996; Kram, 1985). Peer mentoring engages pre-service teachers in communication and interactions that are not influenced by social distance or the power that exists in mentoring communication. When it develops a non-hierarchical status between peers, this form of mentoring is particularly effective. Any power imbalance can be minimised and/or avoided. Within this relationship, peer mentors are equal partners in terms of power status. Peer mentoring is like a peer partnership: it facilitates reciprocal learning through a nurturing and helping relationship (Glass & Walter, 2000). As well, it shifts the focus to two-way learning as both partners have as much to give as they hope to receive. As Mumford (1993) suggests, peer helping relationships among colleagues are based on the principle of reciprocity.

In addition, the interaction among pre-service teachers in the peer mentoring process becomes more open and authentic because there is more equality in the communication process than in the traditional mentor relationship (Kamhi-Stein, 1999). The central keys to the success of peer-based relationships are respect and trust (Britton & Anderson, 2010; Eisen, 2001a; Penman & White, 2006; Terrion & Leonard, 2007). It is important to recognise the acceptance of each other's expertise and experience, and to emphasise "shared learning, shared caring, reciprocity, and commitment to each other's personal and professional growth" (Glass & Walter, 2000, p. 115), as well as collegial supports (Retallick & Butt, 2004). These findings parallel the insights gained about peer learning partnerships. Trust and respect among peers create a favourable atmosphere in which peers "freely admit their failings to each other and be receptive to suggestions for improvement" (Koballa et al., 1992, p. 42). According to Turk (1999), trust may be considered the "glue of peer relationships" (p. 92). Trust can be seen as the foundation for building and strengthening a caring relationship among teachers (Cookson, 2007; Haan, 2005; Lasater, 1994; Rymer, 2002). Lacking of trust may be seen as the potential cause of the collapse of the peer mentoring process. In a study of paired relationships between pre-service teachers during their teaching practice, Lasater (1994) found that trust and cooperation are crucial factors in facilitating effective teacher professional development through peer feedback. Vacilotto and Cummings's (2007) study of the most effective behaviours of peer relationships confirms most of these characteristics including "peer support, sensitivity, companionship, flexibility, and a sense of humour" (p. 158) (also see McDougall & Beattie, 1997).

In essence, the literature indicates that mentoring or peer mentoring is a caring relationship in which two participants sensitively show their respect, concern, love, empathy and unconditional regard for the needs of others. Similar to mentoring, peer mentoring also needs high levels of trust, support, encouragement, and caring between peers to be effective. In general, peer mentoring employs the tenets of effective peer learning partnerships. This is important for professionals "who are self-directed, aware of their own learning needs and willing to share their expertise in return for support, feedback and resources." (Eisen, 2001a, p. 10).

Personal attributes were another category perceived to play a vital role in facilitating successful peer mentoring relationships. Regarding these issues, before I

Table 9.1 Peer mentors' personal attributes (n = 30)

Peer mentors' personal attribute	%[a]
Friendly	50
Helpful	47
Cooperative	47
Supportive	43
Caring	30
Trustworthy	18
Sympathetic	12
Cheerful/humorous	12
Responsible	9
Good listener	9
Open	9

[a]% = Percentage of pre-service EFL teachers who indicated the attribute

implemented the peer mentoring program for pre-service teachers during the practicum at a university in Vietnam, I asked them about their expectations of their peer mentor attributes. Personal attributes of peer mentors required by these pre-service teachers were versatile and included a peer mentor who could be friendly (50 %), helpful (47 %), cooperative(47 %), supportive (43 %), trustworthy (18 %), and caring (30 %). In addition, there were other attributes that the pre-service teachers required of their peer mentors. At the lower end of the percentages, the participants' responses showed the varied personalities within any cohort. Indeed, 9 % required the peer mentor to be responsible while 12 % wanted a sympathetic peer mentor and 9 % wanted their mentor to be a good listener and open. Apart from the attributes listed in Table 9.1, other attributes required of their peer mentors included being understanding, frank, critical and social.

Among these attributes, friendliness was mentioned most by the pre-service teachers, one of whom said "I think my peer mentor must be friendly; otherwise, how can we work with each other for such a long time. It also makes us feel less stressed as well". Most of these attributes are consistent with what the literature suggests about the peer mentor attributes. The list of expected attributes was introduced in the training sections for the peer mentors.

After the peer mentoring program, I investigated the pre-service teachers' attitudes toward their peer mentoring experience in terms of peer mentor attributes. Three pre-service teachers in two focus group interviews thought that peers working in a pair should have compatible personalities. As one of them remarked, "It is very difficult to work with someone who is contradictory to your main personality type" (G05-EP02). In addition, pre-service teachers identified several beneficial personal attributes which they believed contributed to an effective peer relationship: frankness, accessibility, openness, honesty, helpfulness, and comfortableness. A total of

five mentions in four focus group interviews emphasised the importance of frankness in effective mentoring. Regarding this requirement, one pre-service teacher said:

> My peer rarely criticised me. Therefore, I said to her that I preferred frank and critical comments. I liked her to be frank about my lessons, commenting on as many mistakes as possible so that I could correct them. We worked more and more effectively because we were very frank with each other (G06-EP01).

In addition, one of pre-service teachers suggested that the importance of peer mentoring was "having someone there to help." She further supported this notion by saying, "Our relationship was close and very effective because whenever I needed her, she was there for me" (G01-EP01). Being open with each other was mentioned as an important personal attribute by several pre-service teachers in three focus group interviews. One teacher said: "We needed to be open as friends. Otherwise, it is very difficult to work together. My peer and I are very open. We shared a lot of things and it helped us a lot" (G03-EP01).

Two pre-service teachers' comments indicated their observation that effective peer interaction required a high level of honesty. They valued the companionship of those on whom they could rely. Two pre-service teachers indicated that the success of their peer relationship was attributable to feeling comfortable when talking with their peers. Finally, being helpful to each other was the personal attribute most highly valued by three pre-service teachers who always praised their peers for being very helpful. Interestingly, before the peer mentoring program, frankness, openness, honesty and criticalness were among the least mentioned attributes. However, after the peer mentoring program, most of the pre-service teachers considered these attributes as critical factors in developing their fruitful peer mentoring relationship. Both formal and informal peer mentoring are pressure-free processes and mutually beneficial because both parties can mentor and learn from each other. Neither participant is the other's superior. Peer mentoring requires pre-service teachers to engage in conversations and interactions that are not affected by social distance. Unlike mentorship, where there is an imbalance of power in the relationship between the mentors and the mentees, peer mentoring relationships offer the participants a space for open and frank conversation. Thus, the above characteristics are critical to enhancing the quality of their peer mentoring experiences. As evident in various attributes that pre-service teachers thought should be required, matching pre-service teachers could become an arduous task. As I have suggested in the previous sections, many peer groups grew by adapting to working with each other. Nevertheless, the key attributes indicated in this section could provide an initial checklist for ensuring that pre-service teachers in their roles as mentees and mentors were suitably matched or at least aware of the role that personality plays in professional relationships.

The challenge when engaging in peer mentoring is to understand what components the process includes, and how to operationalise them in a specific context. A critical decision to make at this juncture relates o matching and training, issues I discuss in the next two sections.

9.2 Peer Mentoring Matching

Like mentoring (see Chap. 4), peer mentor matching also has a critical role to play in enhancing the relationship. The issue of similarity is important because as the research indicates the more the participants in the mentoring and peer mentoring processes consider themselves to be similar, the greater the perceived benefits of the mentorship (see Chap. 4). This hypothesis was confirmed by my findings with the implementation of peer mentoring programs for pre-service EFL teachers during their practicum.

A coupe of years ago I implemented a peer mentoring program involving 30 pre-service teachers. In this peer mentoring intervention program, pre-service teacher participants were matched as closely as possible to their preferences, time tabling, age, and similarity. After the intervention, most of the pre-service teachers said that they were happy with their pairing. Among those teachers, 16 of them explicitly stated that they were lucky to have been paired with their peer. Most of them were assigned to the same school mentor in the same class and were compatible in most aspects of life and personality. As one commented, “I am happy with the pairing. I studied with her, and stayed near her place. We went home together and talked about everything. Lucky me, that I can work with someone I know and like” (G01-EP02). Most of the pre-service teachers agreed that pairing played an important role in their peer mentoring process. One of them provided the following reason: “I think working together in pairs would not be effective if both partners were not suitable to each other in terms of commonality, personalities, working styles” (G05-EP01). Although most of the pre-service teachers were assigned to work with their peer in the same class or with the same school mentor, for reasons beyond the control of the program, four pairs had to work with a peer who taught a different class and was with a different mentor. Most of these pre-service teachers said that this was an inconvenience: it disrupted the cooperation with their assigned peer, some among them even said they opted to work with other peers in the group instead of or as well as.

Fifteen individual references were made concerning suggestions for pairing, which confirms the suggestions in the literature. They said that peers should share the same professional teacher, teach the same class or have a similar timetable. Otherwise, they would have fewer opportunities to work with and observe each other. These were among a number of similar comments that supported this position:

> I think we should teach the same class. Because my peer and I were in a different class, it was hard for us to talk to and observe each other (G01-EP03).

> It would have been great if we had taught the same class. She could have done what I wouldn’t have been able to do (G04-EP01).

One student teacher, who voiced the difficulty she experienced working with her peer, suggested that peers should share similar personalities: “We had different personalities, so we found it difficult to work together. We tried for 2 weeks and couldn’t continue any longer” (G06-EP06).

One case concerned two friends, whose responses appear throughout this section. In their situation, it would have been better had they not taught the same class. However, this was a singular response by one of the pairs who seemed ineffective in the peer mentoring process: it was not a popularly expressed sentiment by most of the participants. The process of matching in my program seemed effective, evident in the positive comments on their peer mentors. Once again, it echoes the need for a matching process prior to the mentoring/peer mentoring program.

9.3 Peer Mentoring Training

While informal, non-traditional mentors are not trained—mentoring just occurs naturally—the formal mentoring process requires participants to undergo training before the mentoring program begins. Sharing the same ideas of mentor training/orientation, the three models of mentor training (see Chap. 4) were integrated to provide the participants with a number of training sessions. Therefore, before participating in the research (see Part 2), all the participants were required to attend an orientation and training session to familiarise them with the peer mentoring process. This was to help them to get to know each other and to train them in the necessary mentoring skills. The peer mentoring training consisted of four 60 min sessions.

The peer mentor training model integrated some aspects of the three models of mentor training (see Chap. 4). The training sessions conducted prior to the intervention documented the application of the knowledge transmission model, an approach which can reach a large number of participants in a short period. These sessions aimed to provide the participants with a basic understanding, knowledge, and skills of the peer mentoring process. Mentor training sessions helped participants to both develop and use effective peer mentoring practices. In my role of mentor trainer, I assisted the participants by serving as a central contact person and a sounding board to help them deal with issues and any difficulties that arose during their mentoring work. My aim was to enhance their mentoring techniques. I tracked the participants and documented any problems they faced, and the ways in which they offered support and advice to each other. It was particularly important to address any problems as they arose in order to facilitate the process. I did not directly observe mentoring practice, but relied on the information that the participants provided. In turn, I functioned as a sounding board for the participants as they learned and practiced their roles as peer mentors. The university supervisor and teacher mentors were required to facilitate this peer mentoring process by monitoring the participants' progress as peer mentors and by providing support as well as expertise if and when it was needed. By working side by side with the mentor and university supervisor in these ways, the researcher was able to create practice-centred conversation, which, according to the collaborative inquiry model of mentor preparation, would allow "each party to discover and contribute to the knowledge of teaching and mentoring by reframing problems and probing purposes and meaning" (Wang & Odell, 2002, p. 529).

The peer mentor training session started with an orientation to the peer mentoring intervention. The orientation included an explanation of the program's goals, philosophy, requirements, and expectations. Time was permitted for questions and clarification.

The next four sessions focused on mentoring training. Miller (2002) suggests that there should be a balance between what is desirable and what is realistic in different contexts. The training contents and activities were chosen and adapted from several sources (Miller, 2002; O'Mahony & Matthews, 2005; Trautman, 1999, 2007). I sent the non-attendee participants the training package and contacted them by telephone. The contents and associated activities of each phase are briefly summarised in the following sections.

Session One: Orientation

The purpose of this session is: to welcome participants; to present an overview of the intervention program (needs, reasons, goals, contents, and benefits); to motivate the participants to participate in the peer mentoring intervention; and to inform the group of pairs of participants and to get them to know each other better.

First, I welcomed the participants. The I introduced and provided an overview of the peer mentoring program along with general information about the program. I outlined the reasons, goals, basic peer mentoring activities and especially the benefits of the intervention. Then, I ran four activities (see Nguyen, 2010 for details) suggested by Lacey (1999) that would help the participants to get to know each other better. The ultimate purpose of these activities was to help develop their relationships by eliciting more information about each other.

Session Two: Understanding Peer Mentoring

After giving the participants time to get to know each other, I continued with Session Two, the purpose of which was to help the participants to understand peer mentoring. To this end, I focused on four major topics: a definition of peer mentoring, the benefits of peer mentoring, peer mentoring functions; and key principles of peer mentoring. This was followed by several major peer mentoring activities. I defined peer mentoring by eliciting answers from the participants and explaining the benefits of being a peer mentor. I then described the peer mentoring functions and asked the participants to name some activities one could do by employing said such functions. After explaining the key principle of peer mentoring, I described two requisite peer mentoring activities (peer observation and support meeting) in detail.

Session Three: Peer Observation and Giving Constructive Feedback

The purposes of this session were: to motivate the participants to commit to peer observation and feedback; to help the participants understand the use and benefits of peer observation in the peer mentoring process; to facilitate the participants to give constructive feedback; and to orient the participants about the use of the peer observation sheet for peer observation in the intervention. The sessions then covered the following topics:

How can observation be used in the mentoring process?
What are the benefits of peer observation and feedback?
What observation skills do mentors need?

Observation for, and of the development of others
Steps in peer observation
How to provide their peers with feedback?
How to use the peer observation feedback sheet?

As well as attending my presentation, the participants attended three other activities (see Nguyen, 2010 for details). Activity One, on receiving feedback, which was designed by Lacey (1999), aimed to establish an understanding of how each member of a pair would prefer to give and receive feedback. Activity Two, role playing designed by Malderez and Bodoczky (1999) involved practice of mentoring skills of observation and providing feedback.

Session Four: Mentoring Skills

The purposes of this session were: to raise the participants' awareness of the qualities of an effective mentor; to help the participants understand the core principle of peer mentoring and a peer mentor's attributes; and, to prepare the participants with mentoring skills and consultant skills for the peer mentoring process. This section covered the following topics:

Mentor quality;
Mentoring skills;
Consultant skills;
Do's and don'ts for peer mentors; and
Peer mentors' attributes

Following my presentation of these topics, the participants undertook several activities (see Nguyen, 2010 for details). Activity One (what makes an effective mentor), which was designed by Lacey (1999) aimed to stimulate discussion of the qualities and characteristics of effective mentors. Activities 2 and 3 (see O'Mahony and Matthews (2005)) aimed to equip the participants with basic mentoring skills and strategies crucial to dealing with different situations in the peer mentoring process.

Session 5: Conclusion

The purposes of this session were: to re-emphasise the intervention requirements, the responsibility of each participant and tasks; to motivate the participants to develop their action plan; and, to summarise the content of the training. The section covered the following topics:

Intervention requirements;
Responsibility of each participant;
Required tasks for each participant;
Action plan; and
Closing

I concluded the training workshop by re-emphasising the intervention requirements, the participants' responsibilities, and the tasks required of all participants. Then, I summarised the purposes as well as the major aspects of the workshop. All of the participants were asked to develop their action plan of how they decided to work together (expectations, time and place of weekly support meeting, how to contact

each other, when to contact, and frequency of observation). After each the training session, all of the participants were invited to lunch. This gave them further opportunities to get to know each other prior to the intervention (which is described in detail in Part 2).

The above section highlights the particular details of the training connected to these models and the practical application. Most of the participants valued the critical role of the training in the mentoring program. One formal session was conducted and followed by distributing the mentoring package and reminders. In questions asked regarding the adequacy and clarity of training, participant beliefs about their ability and their partner's ability to peer mentor each other were confirmed during the interviews. When discussing the training session, most of the groups agreed that it was necessary to have the training section. They reported that the workshop was informative and provided a sound basis for their peer mentoring. In effect, they found the training session generally useful, essential, informative, and well-organised. Also, it helped them "to have general directions and know about other people in the whole group" (G04-EP02), "to be committed to the program" (G01-EP02), and "to broaden their knowledge of peer mentoring" (G04-EP05). This was consistent with the workshop observation that the participants seemed committed to the role and were aware that their roles as peer mentors required additional skills and knowledge.

Several participants in the interviews offered suggestions for future programs, explicating how they could be improved. First, they felt the training should be less formal and theoretical, shorter and slower, and focus more on the main peer activities and requirements. They added that they did not feel comfortable, had little to discover for themselves, and could not remember everything. One pre-service teacher frankly commented:

> Although you [the researcher] had prepared everything carefully, the training session was not very effective. It shouldn't be so formal and theoretical. You should have focused more on the main activities peers would have to take part in. Informal training would help us feel more comfortable (G01-EP05).

Some suggested that the trainer should speak less and check the audience's understanding of what to do after the session:

> You spoke too much. The training session was not effective because after the presentation I didn't understand clearly what to do. It would have been better if you had checked our understanding (G02-EP01).

One participant suggested using a questionnaire to check the attendees' knowledge of peer mentoring before the training began. Another, who focused on the logistical side of the session, commented on where it took place, and on the screen used to show the Power Point slides:

> The training session took place in a small room. Although the slides were carefully prepared, the screen was put in a hard-to-see position, leading to noise at the end of the room and a lack of attention from the audience (G04-EP02).

In conclusion, it is apparent that mentor training and orientation are critically important in developing a quality mentoring/peer mentoring program. The mentoring training should be well-organised and clear and simple designed, to encourage the participants to commit to the program. Although most of the participants evinced a positive attitude towards their peer mentoring experience, they still reported some peer mentoring problems.

9.4 Peer Mentoring Problems

Pre-service teachers also reported problems that they experienced during the peer mentoring process. These problems covered the following six issues. Although most of the participants in all six groups said that they did not have any major problems with their peers, some of them reported problems related to specific issues. First, four pre-service teachers mentioned differences in personality with six individual mentions in three focus group interviews. These were all individual references without contribution from other participants suggesting that the others may not have had this experience. The first pair expressed their dislike of each other's personality (as mentioned in the previous section). They did not cooperate with each other because neither seemed to understand the other, thus, they were unable to work well together. Their comments in two different focus group interviews suggested that they disagreed with each other on many issues, including managing student behaviour, feedback, work manners, work attitudes, communicative skills, and teaching methods. Somewhat surprisingly, these two teachers had volunteered to work together, and were assigned the same class with the same school mentor. It seemed that the mismatch in their personalities greatly contributed to their relationship breakdown.

Some other pre-service teachers suggested that discrepancy in personality sometimes led to misunderstandings in their relationships. As one said, "My peer is very reserved. I am open. Sometimes, I think she does not like me, maybe not. Although our relationship has improved, I still find it hard to communicate with her" (G04-EP02). Second, being mentored by a different school mentor and teaching in different classes were reported to be factors leading to difficulties for the peer mentoring process, as time became a factor for peer observation and feedback. One participant remarked: "Bich and I were assigned to work with different mentors and different classes, so it was very hard for us to meet and observe each other. We had to try to meet after school" (G06-EP04). In addition, one pre-service teacher stated that she and her peer did not help each other much in terms of professional practice because of differences in working styles and perspectives. She personally preferred to plan everything before the lesson, whereas her peer did not. Therefore, they had little time to discuss lesson plans in advance. Regarding the differences in perspective, she said: "My peer was not friendly to students like me. I am very friendly and open, so students seemed to like me more than her. She did not like that. She always mocked me and I felt irritated" (G06-EP06).

Another pre-service teacher mentioned that the differences in teaching styles did little to facilitate their learning from each other. She added: "In fact, Trang and I have many differences. For example, she always followed a model in designing a lesson and was not creative. We disagreed with each other and, as a result, we did not share much in terms of teaching activities" (G04-EP02).

In sum, it seems that these problems partly influenced the participants' attitudes towards the peer-mentoring process. Those who encountered problems may have felt that the process was not as effective as it should have been and they associated the breakdown with factors they thought should be important in enhancing the effectiveness of their peer mentoring.

9.5 Conclusion

The study suggests that successful formal peer mentoring, like mentoring, is dependent upon many factors and is the result of a well-planned peer mentoring process. The briefing and training in mentoring skills were indispensable in ensuring the successful implementation of the peer mentoring program. An examination of comments regarding the peer mentoring training strongly suggests that future peer mentoring programs should put more emphasis on the issue of peer matching as most of the problems found in the peer mentoring process stemmed from this issue. As such, careful attention should be given to briefing participants, matching them appropriately (selecting the right partner), providing ongoing support and guidance for the peer mentors, training mentors on how to give constructive feedback, and having them reflect on the major attributes of peer mentoring. While the participants' motivation undoubtedly increased due to their involvement in the study, it may well be suggested that the training should be simplified and adjusted to different contexts.

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Chapter 10
Whether Mentoring in Teacher Education: Final Thoughts

Abstract This chapter summerises the main ideas of this volumne and reemphasizes the main factors in creating a supportive environment for effective implementation of mentoring/peer mentoring models in teacher education and teacher professional development in broader contexts. It concludes by suggestions for future practice of mentoring and peer mentoring in developing teacher's professionalism in responses to the reforms in language education in Asia.

10.1 Introduction

Within the current context of reforms in English language education in Asia, the role of English in Asia in general and in Vietnam in particular is further strengthened by the need for developing the English competence of for its citizens. "One of the simple facts of life in the present time is that the English language skills of a good proportion of its citizenry are seen as vital if a country is to participate actively in the global economy and to have access to the information and knowledge that provide the basis for both social and economic development" (Richards, 2008, p. 158). However, teaching and learning situations in these contexts is not as expected. This stresses the critical demand for enhancing teacher quality and supporting them in their teacher education and development. Language teachers constitute a crucial segment in the implementation of the policy for effecting language learning and language change in the expected direction. Empirically, it is mainly teachers who are often held responsible for student underachievement in English in many Asian polities (Hamid & Baldauf, 2010; Kaplan, Baldauf, & Kamwangamalu, 2011; Nunan, 2003). The issue of teacher quality has had much attention drawn to it throughout the evolution of teaching in many parts of the world. Sharing similar concerns about the quality of English language teachers amid changes by a number of scholars (Adamson, 2005; Burns & Richards, 2009; Kam, 2002; Kam & Wong, 2004; Richards, 2008) in responding to the challenges and demands of English education, I believe that central to improving the quality of English language education in the region is the teachers' professionalism. Among many approaches to develop teachers' professionalism, mentoring is considered as an innovative approach to support this. This volume explores the practical role of different models of

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mentoring to respond to increasing demands of reforms in teacher education and professional development. Although all of the studies were conducted in Vietnam, they can have similar implications to language teacher education and development in general. In this concluding chapter, I summarise what we have proposed about mentoring in teacher education and make suggestions about future practice.

10.2 Models of Mentoring

Mentoring continues to establish its increasing role in teacher education worldwide. Different models of mentoring have been used widely and become increasingly popular over the past few decades. A substantial amount of research studies (e.g., Bryan & Carpenter, 2008; Long et al., 2012; Tomlinson, Hobson, & Malderez, 2010) in teacher education reveals that mentoring relationships have had a number of positive effects on both the mentee and mentors. Although this volume has focused specifically on mentoring for language teachers in a specific context in Asia, it has raised similar issues which are the center for mentoring practice in general. This volume confirms the benefits of different models of mentoring in language teacher education and language teacher professional development as well as identifies problems associated with quality mentoring and peer mentoring. Throughout the volume, the studied models of mentoring foster teachers' collegiality, reflection, and professional practice in a professional community of practice. The core features of mentoring encouraged teachers to frequently discuss issues in teaching and learning, frequently observe and give feedback, collaborate, support, and learn from one another. This type of interaction is central to reducing professional isolation and facilitate teacher learning (Brown, 2001).

At preservice level, mentoring has drawn attention during the practicum. During the past several years, the importance of practicum as a vital element of the preservice teacher education program has been increasingly emphasised. The quality preparation of new teachers entering the current teaching force has been seen by many researchers as the key to educational improvement. A number of initiatives have been implemented to change the practice of the practicum in teacher education programs (Bloomfield, 2009; Le Cornu, 2007; Mule, 2006; Sim, 2010). However, professional experience in initial teacher education continues to be very challenging (Bloomfield, 2010; Le Cornu, 2010; White, Bloomfield, & Le Cornu, 2010). Preservice teachers' learning during the practicum is linked to the extent of opportunities they have to interact with different stakeholders, especially with their peers and their teacher mentors. In the current volume, I argue for newer visions of mentoring for preservice teachers which emphasize mutual support, reflection, collaboration, and collegial dialogue. The group mentoring is one of the recommended models which employ both experienced teachers and beginning teachers in the process of observing and giving feedback. Group mentoring can create a forum for teacher reflections (Chap. 5). Group mentoring in which two to three preservice teachers work with a school mentor could create a forum for critical inquiries and

negotiation. Apart from the group mentoring, this volume advocates the use of a peer mentoring model during the practicum. Peer mentoring in which two preservice teachers take a mentoring role for each other with the support from their mentor has proved to be beneficial to preservice teachers during the practicum. In the context of Vietnam as well as many countries where resources are limited, the use of peers as another source of learning seems to be an innovative approach to improve the quality of teacher learning. It is evident that peer mentoring goes beyond a network friend group. Instead, they can help each other get beyond their own professional or personal level and provide great support for each other. It contrasts the suspicion of peers as a professional source of learning among themselves. The peer mentoring model provides preservice teachers with a much richer experience in terms of what they were able to do and to learn from each other. The formal peer mentoring process could provide pre-service teachers with learning opportunities and change the traditional culture of practicum experience which is overly dependent on the mentoring process. The benefits noted were shown in a number of chapters in this volume. In the research context as well as in many places in the world, the quality of practicum should not solely depend on the quality of mentoring. Offering alternatives to maximise preservice teacher learning through the peer based models during the practicum is an initiative to improve the quality of teacher learning in teacher education programs.

At in-service level, mentoring beginning teachers has been regarded as being of central importance and practical value to beginning teachers who have a strong need for support from experienced teachers. Beginning teachers need support to develop the skills and knowledge to become effective educators. Malderez and Bodoczky (1999) claim that many beginning teachers are not initially equipped with the ability to construct a personal understanding of teaching which is necessary for teacher development. This volume emphasizes the need for a move from the traditional model of an experienced teacher mentoring to a more collaborative teacher mentoring model (peer mentoring). Peer mentoring nurtures the power balance. Grounded in partnership and focused on practice, the peer mentoring models should be dialogical, collaborative, and non-evaluative, thus fostering an equal balance of power between participants. There can be a dark side to peer mentoring and mentoring but I believe that this can be minimised by awareness of potential problems.

10.3 Conditions for Effective Mentoring

The book acknowledges that challenges to mentoring and peer mentoring are inevitable given the everyday reality of teachers' professional lives. Thus it is important to identify the conditions for effective mentoring that teacher educators can and do use to implement the mentoring model effectively. In this volume, I identified several critical issues that teacher educators should take it into consideration when planning and implementing a mentoring/peer mentoring program for language teachers. First, although whether formal or informal- mentoring can make a

contribution to the personal as well as the professional development of the teachers, my studies advocate for the use of formal mentoring as a professional growth strategy for teachers at both pre-service and in-service level. In Asian cultures, especially in Vietnam, where the teaching and learning conditions are limited, formalizing informed mentorship increases teachers' commitment and participation in the mentoring. It is formal mentoring that is established, recognised and managed by the institutions, not the spontaneous mentoring that has been proved in a number of chapters in the book to support different aspects of teachers' professional development. Second, the issue of mentoring preparation/training is critically important in ensuring the quality of mentoring/peer mentoring programs. Without support in mentor training, many mentors remained unclear about their role and their responsibility and do not have skills to help student teachers or to mentor them adequately. There is some evidence in the volume that training mentors matters, because it may influence the process of mentoring. This volume stresses the critically important role of mentor training in enhancing the quality of mentoring. Such mentoring preparation is one of the conditions for increasing mentorship quality. However, within the current situation of language teachers who are burdened with work load, the mentoring preparation should be practical and specific. As an example in Chap. 5, in only two 4-h training workshop with cooperating teachers, the teachers should be informed of mentoring approaches and mentoring skills to develop a better understanding of their mentor roles. Third, mentor selection and pairing with mentees should be taken in consideration. The book argues for the importance of similarity in paring mentor and mentee. Another critically important element to foster effective mentoring is building the collaborative mentoring culture at school where the beginning teachers and experienced teachers work together to co-construct the knowledge rather than transfer knowledge. If the mentoring culture is embedded in the daily practice of the school, teachers at different levels can see the benefits of this practice to foster their long term professional development. It is not the process that the experienced teachers are doing a favor for the beginning teacher. It is rather the mutual learning process to improve their teaching practice. This echoes the need for the school leaders and policy makers to provide support for creating a good learning culture in schools. A change in the existing school culture can contribute greatly to establishing a more efficient mentoring system for both beginning teachers and experienced teachers as proposed in this volume.

10.4 Move Forward

There is a need to be a greater emphasis on teacher development opportunities for in-service teachers to raise their standards and to ensure that they can effectively implement educational reforms in English language education in the era of globalization where the role of English is increasingly critical for the nation development. It can be seen in many countries in Asia that despite the government's efforts to provide professional development courses to in-service teachers, the benefits do not reap as expected. As in the case of Vietnam, the centralization of EFL teacher

professional development is not effective as there is a missing link between the contents of these activities and the teachers' needs in their context. Thus, this volume offers a number of mentoring models which work well in the studied context to address context-specific needs of the teachers and to exploit more efficient human resources. It is apparent that mentoring is an approach to teacher education and teacher professional development for teachers in general and language teachers in particular. Lange (1990) believes that teachers evolve during their professional lives and the teacher education programs aims to promote long-life learning for teachers. Effective teacher learning for teacher professional development is clearly a goal of language teacher mentoring. One clear message that has emerged in this book is that mentoring models have positive effects on language teachers both at pre-service and in-service level.

The findings from research in this volume suggest that educational stakeholders need to think about the role of mentoring/peer mentoring in developing teacher quality for educational reforms. The rapid changes in the global economics have imposed educational reforms in many countries. Many changes have occurred in Asia. This leads to numerous challenges facing teachers including accountability, changing curriculum, and the establishment of professional teaching standards. In order to meet these challenges, teacher learning and development (TLD) can help them to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to adapt to the changes. Among a number of TLD strategies, mentoring has been emerging as an effective strategy to improve the teaching quality as well as the quality of education. The issue of using mentoring in teacher education and professional development is advocated to enhance the teacher quality and their student learning. Teachers at different level of their career can benefit from these mentoring models by participating in a learning community in which all participants are engaged in conversation, reflection, and inquiry about their practice. The formal peer mentoring/mentoring process provides structures to sustain these activities, thereby contributing to teachers' professional development and feelings of support, especially for those in their first years of teaching, which, previously, has been considered as a period of "sink or swim" and "do it yourself" (Britzman, 2003). However, how to use this strategy effectively is a matter of concern. What I want to suggest in designing and delivery of mentoring programs is the key features I have found in my studies for effective mentoring/peer mentoring, including: formalization of mentoring, mentor training, mentor selection and pairing, administrative supports, and mentoring culture.

In conclusion, a number of studies in the volume show that preservice and in-service teachers who are provided with quality mentoring/peer mentoring are likely to experience professional growth. This finding is aligned with most of studies in the literature. The contribution of this volume is that it helps portray the picture of mentoring/peer mentoring in a context of language teachers in Asia. The findings provided by the studies in this book may be used as a catalyst for restructuring the teacher education program and teacher professional development programs to better facilitate pre-service/in-service teachers' professional practice and to provide them with more support through the formal collaborative mentoring process. Thus, this would contribute to improving the quality of education by enhancing the quality of teachers' learning.

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