

## Part 1

# 1 Contexts: when and why advisors advise

This book argues that the feedback discussion is the critical part of the process of providing advice and support to teachers. This discussion is undertaken by individuals, and the roles and positions they create in this feedback session will be of crucial importance to the success of the advisory process. In later chapters we shall explore the psychodynamic processes which take place in these sessions, but any relationship which is built during the session will be affected by the institutional and formal contexts within which the advisor is working. It is the aim of this chapter, therefore, to explore first the implications of these contexts for the advisor.

## 1.1 Pre-service and in-service contexts

There are many contexts in which feedback is given to teachers covering both pre-service and in-service teaching. Much pre-service advising operates within the context of teaching practice supervision. With in-service teachers, contexts range from the informal discussions which might occur between colleagues (often called ‘critical friends’), through to the more formal visits of a head of department in a school or an area advisor, and to the official annual inspection of lessons by ministry officials. The observation of lessons on pre-service and in-service TEFL courses such as the Cambridge RSA or Trinity Certificate and Diploma programmes provides another context in which advisors work. Each of these contexts will have an effect on the conduct of the feedback session, inasmuch as each situation will provide its own set of participant preconceptions of the purpose of the session. This will define the roles of the advisor and the advisee within the session. The contexts which we shall examine are:

Pre-service	Teaching practice supervision Mentoring ‘Private sector’ TEFL certification
In-service	‘Private sector’ TEFL Diplomas Internal appraisal (Head of Department, Headteacher) Inspection Colleague to colleague (‘Critical Friends’)

The pre-service/in-service dimension will have an important influence on the areas that advisors will discuss with teachers, on the content and focus of the

teacher learning process and on the degree of experience which the teacher brings to the discussion. These issues will be discussed in Chapter 2 (see particularly the discussion of teacher life cycles), but in this chapter we wish to concentrate on the wider social and institutional contexts within which advisors work.

## 1.2 The issues

There are three interrelated ‘dimensions’ which are common to all situations and which are likely to have a powerful effect on the feedback discussion. These we will characterise as the Interpersonal Climate, the Institutional Role, and the Purpose:

INTERPERSONAL CLIMATE	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>
INSTITUTIONAL ROLE	<i>Technical</i>	<i>Professional/Personal</i>
PURPOSE	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Developmental</i>

Figure 2 Three dimensions which affect feedback discussion

Before examining the different contexts in which advice is given, we shall briefly look at each of these dimensions.

### 1.2.1 Interpersonal climate: formal vs informal

The provision of effective advice depends to a large degree on the perceived status of the advisor by the advisee and the consequent interpersonal ‘distance’ between them. We shall argue that situations in which the advisor and the advisee trust each other and feel relaxed are more effective for giving advice. Although there are cultural differences which must be taken into account (in some cultures, extreme informality in a feedback situation may be inappropriate), the less formality that there is in the situation the more likely there is to be a degree of perceived ‘equality’ between the advisor and the advisee. In this situation, it will be easier for the advisor to provide supportive and non-threatening advice than in a more formal setting.

The above contexts in which advice is given obviously differ greatly in the degree of informality involved (the critical friend being potentially highly informal and inspection being potentially highly formal). This arises from the external social/work relationships between the participants. Although these factors will be difficult to change, an advisor who is aware of the potential constraints of the external circumstances can aim to counteract them by altering other, more immediate, factors such as the place of the feedback or the seating arrangement (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of the role that body language can play in providing advice).

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### *1.2.2 Institutional role: technical vs personal*

Later in this chapter we shall discuss the connotations associated with terms used to describe the advisor's role (e.g. inspector vs advisor, supervisor vs mentor). Here we merely point out that the very terms used to describe the role are descriptors of the function that advisors play within institutional frameworks. The teaching practice supervisor's role will usually be defined in documents produced by the college or university running the Teaching Practice. An advisor visiting a newly qualified teacher will have a specific role to play within the qualifications framework for that country. Both may have schedules of competencies based on standards (see Chapter 2) which will need to be completed as part of the visit. All of these documents provide a background to the feedback discussion and accumulate to form an institutional 'discourse' (Fairclough 1992) of inspection/advice. This discourse may have a technical agenda which is at variance with the professional/personal agenda which the advisor wishes to emphasise. The presence of such discourses cannot be ignored and, again, the advisor will need to be aware of this framework and, if necessary, take action to counteract their effects on the relationship in the feedback discussion.

### *1.2.3 Purpose: assessment vs development*

If any one of our dimensions epitomises the dilemma faced by teachers and advisors, it is the tension between assessment and development. For teachers and for trainees, the issue of assessment is probably the most problematic in any feedback process. In any advisory encounter, even in the relatively non-threatening situation of advice being given by a colleague, there lurks the fear of being assessed and thus criticised. This is a central issue which must be confronted by anyone involved in providing advice (for an exploration of this issue, see Task 1.1). The emergence of the non-judgmental, humanistic counselling tradition in the West (see Chapters 4–6) is a response to just this issue and will provide one of the constant themes to which we shall return throughout the book.

However, if we look at the advisory contexts which we have outlined above, they nearly all involve assessment. No matter how supportive the teaching practice supervisor may be or how much the inspector sees their role as one of developing the in-service teacher, this intention may be completely misread by the trainee/teacher if the institutional outcome is to provide a report on the trainee/teacher for the purpose of certification or employment. Thus, the advisor will need to be keenly sensitive to this issue. They will need to be completely honest with the advisee about these two conflicting roles and, where possible, will need to separate them.

## 1.3 Pre-service contexts

### 1.3.1 Teaching practice supervision

This is perhaps the most common situation in which advice is given to pre-service trainees. Most initial teacher preparation throughout the world is carried out in post-school tertiary institutions, either teacher training colleges or universities.

#### Theory vs practice

In many contexts, it is colleges of education who train primary level teachers, while the training of secondary teachers is often exclusively the province of the universities, who may not appreciate the value of practical teaching at all. In some countries, the preparation of secondary teachers may contain no practical element. In these cases, future English teachers follow a general degree course which usually has a ‘methodology’ component but no teaching practice element. Good examples of this system can be seen in Poland, Russia and Tunisia. In Poland student teachers follow a five-year academic *Magister* programme and in Tunisia a four-year degree in Arts and Civilisation. In this type of situation, academics deliver plenary lectures on educational psychology, philosophy and sociology while ‘real’ teaching is left until later. This produces an ‘educational intelligentsia’ comprising those who teach methodology in university departments (the ‘methodisti’ of the Pedagogic Institutes in Russia are a good example) and who place a great deal of importance on theoretical knowledge but have little or no practical experience of teaching.

This situation is now changing. In many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the language teacher training departments were established to train teachers of Russian. With the increased demand for English in schools following the political and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the need to train English language teachers has necessitated the establishment of new programmes to train teachers. For example, in Poland and the Czech Republic, there have been a number of colleges established offering 3-year Licentiate degrees which train language teachers for the middle schools. These colleges were founded and are supported in their efforts by the British Government through the PACE/PRINCE/FASTTRACK projects and have built in to their programmes the idea of teaching practice as a central part of the degree programme. However, these colleges are not totally independent as they are validated by established universities. This involvement of the university sector in colleges of higher education means that the ethos of the ‘methodisti’ or curriculum expert can continue to have an effect on the way that supervision is carried out. It can affect the view that supervisors have of their role and the view the trainee teachers have of the visiting supervisors. Although there have been moves in this region to move to a mentor-based supervision system – in some areas all supervision is carried out by the school-based mentor – under the traditional system, the supervisor is expected to provide answers to the

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trainee's problems based on knowledge gained from theoretical models based on 'scientific' research; yet it may be practical insights which the trainee most needs. In addition, supervisors working within this institutional culture often have little practical classroom experience and so may use theoretical explanations of teaching as a defence against this lack of experience. Thus, the situation is exacerbated by the theory/practice divide and the 'distance' between the advisor and the advisee is emphasised and amplified by the imbalance of theoretical knowledge possessed by the two.

#### Technical vs personal roles: assessment vs development

The potential conflict between the technical and professional/personal roles of the supervisor and between assessment and development is perhaps the clearest within the pre-service context. Teaching practice, although having a central pedagogic role in developing the novice teacher's teaching skills, also has an important gateway function for the profession. The time spent in the classroom not only plays an important part in the development of the teacher's basic teaching skills, but is also a time for the novice to demonstrate their level of competence in such skills. As such, this dual role poses a real dilemma for the supervisor. Is the role primarily one of attempting to develop the teacher's skills and understanding of teaching, or is it one of assessing their performance? The former role might well lead the supervisor into a more supportive and less authoritarian role whereas the role implied by the latter is more authoritarian, prescriptive and judgmental.

One solution to this dilemma is suggested by Stones (1984). He argues strongly that as few undergraduates are ever failed on teaching practice the teaching profession should essentially ignore the judgmental aspect and concentrate instead on the developmental side. Trainees, he argues, should be judged on *ipsative scales* (scales relating to their personal development) rather than on absolute measures of competence. Whilst this does offer an attractive solution to the dilemma posed by the dual roles, in political terms such a position is untenable. Quite reasonably, society will continue to demand that certification courses act as gateways to the profession and that the certification which they offer should indicate that teachers have the necessary skills and competencies to fulfil their roles. If practical teaching is to play a part in this certification process, then advisors acting as teaching practice supervisors will continue to be asked to provide judgments on suitability.

This tension is recognised in a number of curriculum models used at the pre-service level. The fact that on most undergraduate degree programmes in the UK teaching practice does not aggregate to the overall degree classification is an indicator of the difficulty of assessing teaching practice in the same way as other subjects. For further discussion of curriculum models and assessment/development, see Task 1.2.

### 1.3.2 Mentorship

An increasingly popular method of providing feedback on teaching at the pre-service level is that of mentorship. Starting in the British education system in 1992, it has spread widely and is increasingly being used in ELT contexts overseas, particularly in Eastern Europe (see Malderez & Bodóczy 1999, p. 3).

The mentor on pre-service teacher education programmes is a classroom teacher who accepts a novice into their classroom for a period of teaching practice. On the superficial organisational level, this person appears very similar to the teacher who, under the old system of teacher education, accepted a student from a teacher training college on a block teaching practice period, the 'co-operating teacher' as they are often called in overseas contexts. Many of these teachers did, in fact, provide extremely helpful advice and guidance to young trainees and performed many of the functions that are provided by the present mentors. However, previously this help and guidance was provided on an *ad-hoc* basis; those who received it profited, those who did not lost out. Ultimately, although the classroom teachers and the schools provided reports on the student teacher's period in the school, the responsibility of providing both developmental advice and assessment lay with the training institution. In the present system, mentors have a specific and defined responsibility for training and, ultimately, for assessment. Thus, the mentors not only have a professional/developmental role (as did co-operating teachers), but also an institutional role and an assessment function.

#### The roles of the mentor

In addition to having an institutional role in assessment, the mentor, in accepting a student for a long period, can also be asked to perform a wide range of roles. These include:

- **Technical/assessment roles**
  - Coaching the teacher in classroom-based skills
  - Informing the teacher of wider curriculum issues
  - Helping in goal formation and clarification
  - Evaluating classroom performance
- **Personal/developmental roles**
  - Motivating the teacher
  - Confidence boosting
  - Counselling – listening to problems; helping to reduce feelings of anxiety
  - Helping the teacher settle into the school
  - Problem-solving

Many writers place a great deal of emphasis on these developmental and personal/professional roles and it is these functions which are perhaps seen as the most important by many mentors and trainees (Fish 1995, Smith and West-Burnham 1993).

However, as mentioned above, the mentor does play a technical institutional

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role in the gateway process by providing input to the assessment of the trainee's teaching practice performance. The difference is that, unlike the traditional supervisor, the mentor does not work alone. On British mentor programmes (probably the most developed models of mentoring) the overall grade of the trainee is decided in a three-way conference between the mentor, the trainee and the college tutor. Thus, the inherent tension between development and assessment is structurally removed to the teaching practice conference where the trainee, the mentor and an outside 'moderator' jointly negotiate the overall assessment profile for the trainee. This system has a number of attractions: In removing the burden of overall assessment from the mentor to the conference, it frees the mentor to be supportive and developmental in the day-to-day process of giving advice to the trainee; by involving the trainee in the decisions about their strengths and weaknesses, it allows for effective 'ownership' of any future action plan by the trainee; by involving a college supervisor in the final decision about the trainee it provides a check that standards are maintained between different teaching situations. This, then, is a structural approach to a resolution of the essential tension between assessment and development. The conflict is resolved through a combination of personnel (the involvement of the college supervisor) and process (the negotiation).

#### Formal vs informal: the mentor as guide

From an examination of the institutional roles and purpose of the mentor, we now turn to the interpersonal implications of the role. The term 'mentor', in itself, is a highly attractive one for native English speaker teacher educators. Although few would recognise its precise etymology, the connotations within the language are those of a warmth, experience and sympathetic guidance, and these connotations probably account for its success as a term.

Within the literature on mentorship, the following definitions have been offered:

- 'Mentoring is a process by which an older and more experienced person takes a younger person under his/her wing freely offering advice and encouragement.' (Jeffrey and Ferguson 1992)
- 'The role of the mentor is to act as "wise counsellor", guide, adviser to younger or newer colleagues.' (Smith and West-Burnham 1993)
- 'The mentor will be a senior colleague whose role is to support, facilitate and coach the new teachers.' (Earley and Kinder 1994)

The above discourse is one of warmth and 'natural' teaching and learning. It clearly involves an asymmetrical knowledge relationship between the mentor and the mentee, but the relationship portrayed is largely informal, a relationship which is reinforced by the long timescale involved in such partnerships. The formality which can characterise the relationship between the formal teaching practice supervisor and the trainee is largely absent in the mentor/mentee situation. In addition, as discussed above, the tensions between development and assessment are to a degree ameliorated by the system of mentorship, allowing the mentor to concentrate more on the former. These are

probably two powerful reasons why mentorship has become such a popular model for pre-service training both in Britain and, increasingly, in overseas contexts.

### 1.3.3 Private sector TEFL certification

This may seem to be an odd classification of training/advising situations. However, deriving from the lack of any government-recognised qualification for teaching EFL in Britain, entry to the profession for British teachers is largely in the hands of private examination bodies such as the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) and Trinity College. Unlike overseas teachers who generally pass through a tertiary level training programme at college or university, British teachers entering the profession do so through intensive post-graduate training programmes run largely by private institutions and validated by one or other of the examining bodies. This training situation provides a rather unique set of circumstances. At the Certificate (pre-service) level many courses are delivered as short, intensive programmes lasting less than 6 weeks. These types of courses are not only restricted to the UK. The intensive certificate programme is a very common method of inducting new teachers and has attracted some research interest (e.g. Richards, Ho and Giblin 1996). It is for these reasons that we feel justified in including it as one of the contexts within which advisors work. Specifically, we shall examine the implications of the intensive training programme.

#### The relationship between trainer and trainee

Given the intensive nature of these programmes, trainees and trainers often form extremely close ties. The relationship is usually highly informal, both in the methods of teaching (workshop style input sessions held in plenary) and in the manner of providing feedback to the trainees. The atmosphere is usually close to that found in private language schools – not surprisingly, since this is the location of many courses. In addition to the obvious influence that the location has on the social practices, there is also a tradition of ‘teaching by example’ on pre-service programmes, and thus the informal learning approaches of the training programmes mirror the pedagogy espoused for adult language teaching. The trainees will often be newly graduated students and in many circumstances the trainers and the trainees may not differ greatly in terms of age. All of these factors combine to produce a very different atmosphere from that found in other classroom supervision situations, such as in state schools.

Whilst this apparently ‘democratic’ and informal relationship may well form a facilitative backdrop for the acting out of more humanist approaches to counselling and learning, it is important to appreciate the peculiarities and uniqueness of the social setting. The learner/trainee may well not be familiar with such an egalitarian approach. Their experience of previous learning may well lead them to the belief that a greater social ‘distance’ and more formal



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system of feedback is more appropriate for learning. Thus, the advisor will need to convince the learner that this approach is, in fact, productive. As a corollary to this, the advisor who may have learnt feedback skills on such intensive programmes yet who is working in a state-school environment will need to be aware of the large differences that exist between the two contexts.

#### Technical vs personal roles: assessment vs development

The intensive nature of these programmes and the stress that they place upon trainees means that tutors are often involved in wider issues than the purely pedagogic. Even within the professional domain, the tension between supportive development and critical assessment is highlighted and intensified by the nature of the courses. This is particularly true of the weaker trainees whose confidence is low and who need to be supported carefully to develop as teachers. Such trainees can take up large amounts of tutor time and attention so that trainers working on such programmes often complain of the exceptional stresses imposed by the necessity to undertake a wide variety of personal and technical roles. Earlier courses of this type used external examiners to provide the final assessment of the teacher. Increasingly, the regulatory examination bodies are using external moderation of the *course*, rather than the teachers, as their means of guaranteeing standards and quality. These wider curriculum changes, in which the external assessment of the candidates has been replaced by external assessment of the providers, only add to the difficulties of acting as both a guide to professional growth and an assessor of sufficient competence for certification as a teacher.

Although these tensions are not unique to this situation (see the description of the mentor roles above), in the intensive training context, there is not the time offered by the mentor context for many of the problems to be resolved. In providing feedback, the advisor in this situation will need to be aware of which 'agenda' is being addressed; is it social, personal, technical? Is the advice provided for professional development, or is it to indicate a level of assessment? (for further discussion of agendas as viewed by Heron, see Chapter 5).

## 1.4 In-service contexts

### 1.4.1 Private sector TEFL Diploma courses

There are many similarities between these courses and the pre-service certificate courses discussed above. This is particularly true in terms of the micro organisation culture within which they both work. Most are located within schools and colleges which deliver mainly language classes, and are associated with a 'hands-on', highly practical approach to learning about teaching, in stark contrast to the often heavily theoretical approaches of the traditional tertiary sector previously described. Associated with this philosophy, there is often a highly informal interpersonal climate, in the same way as we noted with pre-service certification courses. Many of the courses at this level are delivered

on a part-time basis, although not exclusively so, and this allows for a more relaxed and less frenetic relationship to develop between the advisor and the teacher/trainee.

However, there is a major difference between the two types of course; the level of experience brought to the feedback session by the teacher/trainee. On pre-service courses there is a highly asymmetrical relationship between the tutor and the trainee; the trainee is by definition a novice, and the tutor is to a large extent the 'expert'. This relationship will be recognised, at least tacitly, by both parties; although the tutor may well take a more 'reflective approach' to the teaching (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the reflective practitioner), both parties will acknowledge the greater experience of the tutor. With Diploma courses, the differential between the advisor and the teacher will be considerably reduced. Given the fact that the age gap may also be reduced (a factor involved in many in-service situations), advisors will need to appeal to other bases than established, traditional social status values (e.g. age, experience, tutorial position) on which to 'validate' their claims to be able to offer advice (for a further discussion of validity claims, especially in cross-cultural contexts, see Chapter 10).

In this situation the tutors on such courses tend to ascribe to a reflective approach to learning about teaching. They place a lot of importance on teacher self-reflection and self-evaluation, and feedback sessions are often highly trainee-centred using a 'democratic' form of counselling (see Chapter 4 for a discussion). However, as with the changes mentioned above in the pre-service context, curriculum changes have shifted the burden of assessment from an external examiner to the tutorial team. The implications of these changes are that there is apparently a mismatch between the espoused philosophies of self-evaluation and 'democratic' counselling, reinforced by the highly informal atmosphere in which it all takes place, and the institutional function of assessment. Unless this is understood by the trainer/advisor and dealt with honestly, the 'messages' sent by the advisor may well be interpreted in quite a different manner by the teacher receiving them. Thus, advisors need to be aware of these factors when providing feedback on such courses.

### ***1.4.2 Internal appraisal and staff development***

In addition to the use of advice in teacher training, managers will also be involved in providing advice to teachers for the purposes of staff development or appraisal. Thus, Heads of Departments, headteachers and Directors of Studies will be asked to watch teachers and to provide feedback on the way that lessons are conducted. This can happen for a number of reasons:

- to provide support for a newly qualified teacher (NQT)
- to monitor the way that teachers are performing as part of routine staff appraisal
- to help a teacher who is perceived to be having problems
- to assess staff development needs of such a teacher