



The Sage  
Gateshead

# REFLECT

co-mentoring framework



Creative Partnerships

**REFLECT** is a model of cross-sector co-mentoring devised and led by The Sage Gateshead for Creative Partnerships from January 2007 - July 2008.

138 individuals from schools, the wider education sector, creative and cultural organisations and businesses participated in collaborative learning opportunities enabling them to have the time and space to share, to reflect and to have focused creative conversations.

In its pilot phase the **REFLECT** programme both contributed to and learned from national policy debates on creativity, education and skills through its National Advisory Group. Regional Advisory Groups also supported with recruiting and matching co-mentors.

[www.reflectco-mentoring.com](http://www.reflectco-mentoring.com)

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# REFLECT co-mentoring - a framework

This Framework is intended to act as a guide for people in cross-sector co-mentoring relationships. It was initially created through an extended conversation between Peter Renshaw<sup>1</sup> and Wendy Smith and has been developed and shaped by those participating in and leading the **REFLECT** programme<sup>2</sup>. This Framework sets out the values and principles which define the **REFLECT** co-mentoring process, the way the programme is structured and the way that co-mentors work together. We have included some quotes about co-mentoring from **REFLECT** co-mentors to animate the connection between the Framework and your practice.

## Definitions

The term 'mentoring' and the ways in which this process of learning is approached depend on the purpose and context in which the mentoring or co-mentoring are placed. In this Framework the following definitions are used, thereby providing a spectrum of related but distinct roles:

### Buddying

Buddying is an informal, friendly 'confessional' process in which experiences and insights are shared. It offers low-level support with little sense of progression and is generally only short-term, assisting a transition to a new job or new role

### Shadowing

A job role can be shadowed by an individual with an interest in learning about the role without necessarily aspiring to do that particular job. The reasons for wishing to gain experience through shadowing and observation need to be clear and understood prior to the activity taking place. Shadowing might take the form of peer-to-peer conversation about a shared observation of practice. This could develop into a continuing professional peer relationship - i.e. peer mentoring.

### Counselling

At the centre of counselling lies a conversation about aspects of personal development that might arise from professional practice.

## Advising

Advising constitutes a conversation about professional issues that arise from practice in a specific context (e.g. career orientation; possible new directions for the future; professional development opportunities; new networks and partnerships; marketing; budgeting).

## Tutoring

Tutoring is an intentional, goal-oriented activity aimed at fostering the understanding and learning of knowledge through the process of questioning, critical dialogue.

## Instructing

Instructing comprises a form of imparting and passing on specialist knowledge and skills with little scope for dialogue – i.e. a mechanistic model of transmitting knowledge.

## Facilitating

Facilitating is a dynamic, non-directive way of generating a conversation aimed at enabling or empowering a person(s) to take responsibility for their own learning and practice.

## Coaching

Coaching is an enabling process aimed at enhancing learning and development with the intention of improving performance in a specific aspect of practice. It has a short-term focus with an emphasis on immediate micro issues. (e.g. How can I improve my performance in this particular area? How can I strengthen my workshop practice? What are the most appropriate ways of making my team work together more effectively?)

## Mentoring

Mentoring is a more developmental process, including elements of coaching, facilitating and counselling, aimed at sharing knowledge and encouraging individual development. It has a longer-term focus designed to foster personal growth and to help an individual place their creative, personal and professional development in a wider cultural, social and educational context (e.g. Why am I doing what I do? How do I perceive my identity? In what ways does this impact on my professional life and work? Where am I going? What determines my long-term goals?).

## What are the characteristics of an effective mentoring relationship?

### Findings from REFLECT co-mentors

- Being non judgemental
- Empathy and understanding
- Feeling valued
- Trust
- Honesty
- Boundaries
- Equality
- No hierarchy
- Shared understanding
- Commitment to each other and the process
- Being open to new ideas
- Space to think differently
- Ensuring there's time to take one's learning away and to reflect
- A shared language, values and beliefs
- Mutual respect
- Generosity
- Risk taking
- Making connections
- Good questioning - being heard and having a voice
- Confidence to claim the right to develop in a lasting way
- Structured beginnings and open endings

# Main elements of a co-mentoring process

## Definition

**REFLECT** co-mentoring offers a dynamic, collaborative learning process for co-mentors in a cross-sector context engaging in an equal exchange of knowledge, skills and experience with the aim of developing and sustaining innovative partnership practice and embedding creative learning in the heart of their organisations. It is a time limited relationship with a clear, agreed focus.

## Quality of the learning environment

- Developing a non-judgemental, non-threatening working relationship based on empathy, trust and mutual respect.
- Establishing a safe, supportive learning environment.
- Creating conditions that encourage openness, honesty, informality and risk-taking.
- Defining boundaries and ground rules before commencing the process, by drawing up a learning agreement.
- Building rapport and a clear understanding of who does what and why.
- Selecting a clearly defined shared focus and shaping the process of learning.


## Shared focuses selected by REFLECT co-mentors

### Creativity

- Nurturing creativity in others
- Developing ourselves as creative learners and leaders
- Ensuring we have a shared language which can adequately describe the impacts and benefits of a creative education
- Exploring the transformational role that creativity can play in all areas of school improvement
- How do we create genuine opportunities for creative learning?

### Specific areas of the curriculum

- Exploring visual thinking
- Using film archives as an educational resource
- Exploring different approaches to creative engagement with science.

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- Exploring the use of music across a whole school with an emphasis on times of reflection
  - Exploring kinaesthetic learning and extended outcomes

### Partnerships and collaborative ways of working

- Analysing our practice in a peer-learning relationship within the context of our current working environment
- Developing partnership working
- Establishing a set of agreed outcomes around learning about each other's roles, sustainable partnerships and working with young people
- Investigating ways in which the creative and media sector can be fully engaged with the development and delivery of Creative and Media Diplomas
- Exploring how community organisations can support the learning of children with special educational needs

### Professional and personal development

- Looking at how we can put our own creative practice back at the heart of what we are doing professionally and the impact it will have on ourselves, our projects and our organisations
- Exploring developments at work and sharing experiences to maximise work outcomes for others while improving personal ways of working and wellbeing
- Dealing with transition in our working lives
- Learning to be reflective about our own practice
- Exploring the question 'why do we do what we do?'

### Organisations and leadership

- Mapping paths for organisational success
- Building confidence in our own creative leadership in our work
- Sharing management and leadership issues, following both of us recently taking on new roles
- Exploring the way we see our team and our team perceives us, and the role that we play as leaders or as members of our team
- Examining how creative artists who find themselves managing arts organisations and projects handle the need for compliance and accountability

## Relationship between the co-mentors

- A one-to-one relationship in which each co-mentor empathises and understands the position of their partner. A co-mentoring relationship has to be approached with understanding and sensitivity.
- A reciprocal relationship in which each co-mentor respects their partner's potential for professional and personal development, and acknowledges their motivation for engaging in critical self-review and further learning rooted in practice-based evidence and experience.
- A confidential relationship based on trust and parity of respect. Details held in confidence cannot be divulged to other individuals or organisations.
- An effective co-mentoring relationship is bound by a learning agreement in which mutual roles, responsibilities and expectations are made explicit.
- Clear boundaries have to be established within personal and professional domains if the relationship is to work effectively (fig 1).
- The co-mentoring relationship should be time-based with a beginning and an end. It should not be ongoing as compared with peer professional relationships or peer mentoring.

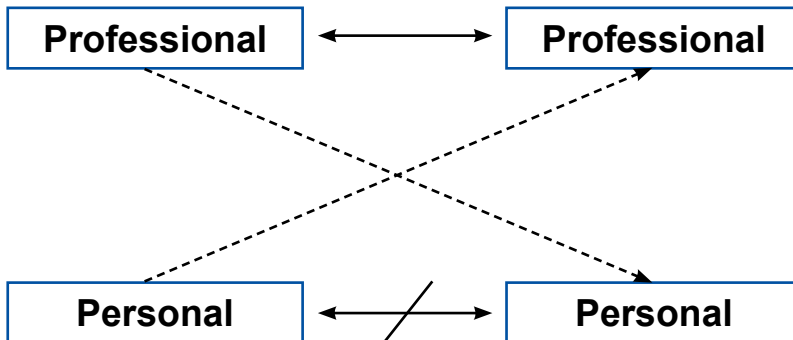


Fig 1



## Reflective practice

Reflective practice or 'reflection-on-action' entails adopting a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of what we do in different contexts. By focusing on the why rather than the how, this process of self-observation and self-review, rooted in evidence and experience drawn from their practice, enables each co-mentor to evaluate their starting point and to redefine their future actions. A reflective conversation helps each person to shift their perspective, change their behaviour and develop a sense of responsibility and authorship of their professional practice in a wide range of social and cultural contexts.

### Facilitating a reflective conversation that focuses on:

- Making connections – asking open questions – active listening – absorbing – rephrasing – reflecting – mirroring back – responding by leading and challenging each co-mentor in a non-directive way.
- Drawing out and enabling each person to step outside and become a detached spectator on their own practice and on their own learning.
- Empowering each person to take responsibility for their own learning and to seek out direct evidence from their practice and experience.
- Encouraging each person to develop listening and analytical skills that help them to build up a strong sense of ownership of their practice in different contexts.
- Deepening each person's awareness and conviction in what they are doing by fostering a greater understanding of context and place.
- Strengthening each person's ability to challenge their preconceived views, to take risks, to make new connections and to shift their perspective.
- Enabling each person to clarify the principles underpinning their work, thereby strengthening a sense of critical engagement based on a continuing review of evidence and experience.

- Empowering each person by asking neutral, open questions that encourage critical self-reflection, curiosity and a sense of enquiry.
- Helping each person to map out a future vision that is sustainable and rooted in practice-based evidence and experience.
- Encouraging each person to adopt a critical perspective about the reasons and consequences of their practice. By focusing on the why rather than the how, this learning process is fundamental to their evaluation of what they do and helps to inform subsequent action.

## Asking questions

### Findings from REFLECT co-mentors

- To hold up a mirror for each other as well as reflect on this experience
- Sufficiently challenging through the depth of your questioning
- Question what you know
- Not having pre-planned questions
- It doesn't take much to take someone on their journey; you just need to develop trust and ask the right questions (open questions and ask 'what else' when the other person has finished speaking)
- What function does creativity play in your life?

## Reflexive practice

Reflexive practice or 'reflection-in-action' focuses on how the quality of each co-mentor's inner listening, attention and awareness can help them to clarify their main purpose and motivation. This inner reflexive conversation, which sometimes cannot easily be put into words, strengthens a person's sense of identity and deepens their self-awareness and understanding of how their personal motivation, values and emotions can affect their professional practice and learning. Being able to connect one's own inner listening to that of others is central to a sensitive mentoring relationship.

### Facilitating a reflexive conversation that focuses on:

- Helping each co-mentor to clarify their motivation and to identify their core purpose.
- Enabling each person to find their own voice and to deepen their understanding of who they are.
- Encouraging each person to explore and verbally articulate the emotional interconnections between their identity, motivation and professional practice.
- Assisting each person to develop an understanding of their relationship with their own creative learning (e.g. What does it mean for you? Why do you do what you do? What do you care about in your creative learning?).
- Helping each person to connect their self-awareness and sense of identity to their outer world – i.e. to the context in which they work and live.
- Encouraging each person to reflect on their own story, their own biography, as a means of clarifying and deepening their understanding of themselves, their history and their personal and professional journey.
- Connecting each person's tacit or implicit understanding with their explicit knowledge of their particular situation.
- Creating the possibility for each person to engage with their emotional intelligence by:
  - becoming emotionally self-aware;
  - developing the ability to manage their emotions and feelings;
  - understanding how to use emotions for the benefit of their self-motivation;
  - recognising and responding to emotions in others through the use of empathy;

- strengthening their interpersonal skills and understanding.


Effective co-mentoring conversations take into account the importance of the dynamic relationship between reflection and reflexivity, between the outer and inner thought processes of each co-mentor. By drawing out the interconnections between each individual's creative, personal and professional development, fundamental questions regarding identity, motivation, meaning and personal creativity become the heart of a continuing reflective and reflexive dialogue.

## Why reflective and reflexive practice?

**REFLECT** demonstrates that where a professional development programme gives people time, space and permission to pause, to reflect, to reconnect and to reappraise, they are likely to see themselves and their professional life in a new perspective. The synergy between the personal and professional in shared reflective enquiry that is rooted in a cross-sector context has resulted in outcomes that have effectively transformed practice. Co-mentors have shifted their ways of seeing, reconnected with their creativity, put their own creative practice back into their work with young people and reengaged with the workplace in a qualitatively different way. Co-mentors developed confidence and trust so that they could share any feeling of vulnerability.

## Findings from REFLECT co-mentors

- Learning more about myself
- Valuing internal dialogue
- Exploring identity – getting down to the crux of who you are
- Sharing your vulnerabilities
- I want to use feelings and emotions.
- I value the space/time and chance to talk deeply
- A chance to think things through instead of doing – doing - doing.
- Reflecting on yourself as a learner
- The programme has already changed my mindset and given me a new perspective – it's placed creativity and learning right at the forefront for me

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- It's good to step back and examine your motivation
  - Gaining confidence in your own understanding and your own opinions
  - Sharing, finding out, learning from others – to be part of a learning process
  - Time to talk about identity and feelings without externally imposed outcomes
  - Time and space for thinking; to challenge and review practice; for reflective practice
  - A way back into artistic practice
  - I have a sharper vision for the future, based on thorough critical review of what has been achieved (or not achieved).
  - Strengthen my ability to challenge my preconceived views

The **REFLECT** programme has had an impact on my personal creative practice by providing an exchange which has focussed on process in an often outcome-centred educational context. Having the 'space' to talk, think, relax and share perspectives with another professional has enriched my thinking, motivation and creative practice (**Creative Practitioner**).

### Characteristics of effective co-mentors

- Being willing to let go of ego, status and authority in order to understand the work of your co-mentor and to adopt a listening, supportive role. Each co-mentor must feel comfortable in this role.
- Using your empathy and interpersonal skills in order to ask appropriate questions regarding the personal development of your co-mentor.
- Having the skills and insight to act as a sounding board for your co-mentor. This is central to any learning or developmental process aimed at enabling a person to clarify their sense of direction, to identify their strengths and realise their potential.

- Aiming to develop a flexible range of language registers in order to frame appropriate questions, respond to different personal narratives and communicate meaningfully, understanding where your co-mentor is coming from.
- Learning to listen actively, including respecting silence, reading body language, focusing on the substance of the conversation and, where necessary, reframing and reinforcing what has been said.
- Developing the ability to be self-reflective and self-aware in order to nurture these qualities in others (e.g., questioning motivation; separating out professional from personal issues).
- Being open and non-judgemental in relation to your co-mentor's individual and professional context.

## What do effective mentors do?


### Findings from REFLECT co-mentors and The Sage Gateshead team

#### Making agreements

- Establish the terms of the dialogue – you don't need to know each other's frames of reference
- Make a commitment to each other and the process – you need to be determined to give it the time and space it deserves
- Boundaries help trust
- Develop trust and account for risk taking – you need to be safe in order to have conversations
- You need to be in a comfortable space because of the personal nature of questions
- Agree a focus at the beginning so you feel good at the end

#### Listening

- Active listening and not interrupting helps your co-mentor reveal their own story
- You can show you're listening through your body language
- Mirroring back what your co-mentor has said
- Reflecting back makes people look at things differently – it helps the co-mentor to come to conclusions themselves

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- Listening to your inner voice
  - Feeling comfortable in silence
  - Really listening for what is not said and not take it all on surface value

### Being empathic

- Making art together - a non verbal exchange can help you get on the inside of each other
- Developing a sensitive awareness of the other person
- Trying to gain an accurate understanding of their world
- Respecting, valuing and accepting their views and opinions without prejudice
- Being 'in the shoes' of the other person

I have given much thought to the way in which we open discussions, not only in this **REFLECT** programme, but also in my daily life as a school leader. I no longer open my meetings with a dictatorial style of information delivery, but instead introduce agenda topics with questions. For instance, instead of telling staff that we needed to raise the standard of children's writing as it was much lower than the standard of reading, I phrased the question "What do we do in the teaching of reading that makes it so successful, and how might we adapt this to the teaching of writing?". The discussion which followed was engaging, informative, enthusiastic and productive. Every participant gave several ideas and we have found ways of incorporating elements of the suggestions into our teaching. My next question will be "What improvements are we able to measure against the strategies we are using?" which will not only give participants a chance to talk about what they do, but also how they know that they are successfully improving standards in children's writing (**Teacher**).

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hmmm

Creative Partnerships  
*exciting minds*



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