Guides and mentors

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Mentors are in a sense, also tools for proliferating lifelong learning into the community. In another sense the possibility that volunteers, friends, family and members of the community can all be mentors makes us all into potential teachers now, especially at the community level, and this poses interesting questions about how the talents, knowledge, experiences, skills and empathy inherent in any community can be mobilised for the good of all. In a paper published again by Longworth in the JOLLI magazine.(52) *'The key to implementing successful ideas, strategies, programmes and dreams in a learning community lies with people, and in particular those people with the insight and the energy to take the leadership role. The whole concept of leadership is of major importance in the effectiveness of learning*.' The European Round Table of Industrialists (17) suggests that *'Everybody can help to facilitate and encourage and so make it happen. Spontaneity, innovation, experiment, diversity and decentralisation are the key words'*. The European Commission's memorandum on Lifelong Learning supports modern Learning Organisation concepts of decision-making at the most appropriate point close to the job to be done.(19) *'Civil society organisations and associations have their strongest roots at local level, and typically possess vast reservoirs of knowledge and experience about the communities of which they are part. In this context, a new approach is needed which envisages* ***guidance as a continuously accessible service for all,*** *and which overcomes the distinction between educational, vocational and personal guidance, and which reaches out to new publics. Living and working in the knowledge society calls for active citizens who are self-motivated to pursue their own personal and professional development.*

The general principles of active citizenship and volunteering as tools for motivating people and regenerating creative formal and informal learning are reasonably well known. Here we concentrate on the particular issues concerning the deployment of guides and mentors. Many schemes for using and training guides and mentors in the community now exist as result of the recent emphasis on lifelong learning. In several senses their use has become an additional tool for promoting self-awareness and empowering people.

As 'Lifelong Learning in Action' reports, 'In the UK, the strategy of the city of Southampton's learning outreach project is to develop and train a team of community mentors who will support the learning needs of all people in a neighbourhood. The aim is to raise levels of self-esteem and motivation amongst harder to reach learners in the city in order to both encourage them to return to learning and to provide on-going mentoring support to help them fulfil their potential. Outreach workers come from learning institutions, from other agencies in the city which have day to day contact with local people and from volunteers who are keen to encourage and support people in their local community to return to learning.

They are trained and accredited to work at basic, intermediate or advanced level, and work through housing associations, further education colleges, community schools, careers services, the Workers educational service, parents associations, employment offices – any organization which can help them to make contact with people and spread the message of learning. They act as a support mechanism, assessing learning needs and opportunities and, most importantly, as mentors to those who most need encouragement to continue in learning. Other neighbourhood support facilities in Southampton are provided from the community centres, which run, for example, programmes for new mothers (the first babies group), parents of young schoolchildren (parents as teachers) and voices (a project to give disadvantaged people the confidence to negotiate with city offices).

Mentoring, or its alliterative transatlantic equivalent 'study-buddy', is a growing aspect of a lifelong learning society, fed by the massive increase in volunteering and the enlarged participation of non-traditional learners in educational activity. As we saw in the Learning Audit above, mentoring can take many forms. As a shoulder to lean on in case of difficulty, as a guide through the minefield of educational provision, as a coach in particular subjects, as a counsellor expanding the horizons of what is possible. It doesn't need to be related to educational study. 'Making Lifelong Learning Work', (xx) reports on a scheme in Brixton to provide responsible and respected adult mentors for children with behavioural or learning difficulties, and

the USA adopt-a-school programme (xx) contains many examples of managers and workers mentoring young people in schools in many different ways.

Indeed North America is the spiritual home of mentoring, and especially telementoring, in universities, research establishments, companies, churches, colleges and schools. Even film and sports stars get themselves involved in supporting single parent families. The Scotsman newspaper reports that the 'big brother and sister' scheme, in which respected mentors spend two to four hours with children at risk, found that children with a mentor were 46% less likely to abuse drugs, 57% less likely to truant and 32% less likely to be violent. (xx

Mentoring is not an easy task nor is it one to be taken lightly. Each organization or community adopts its own rules and regulations, publishes guidelines and runs courses for potential mentors. And of course there must, unfortunately in today's world, always be safeguards against those who would abuse both the system and the person. But a properly run mentorship programme can mean the difference between success and failure for some thousands of at risk children in large urban depressed areas.

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Mentoring programmes should take into account the needs and goals of the mentees, students who will be mentored and their families, the mentors themselves, the schools, and the community in general. The following are some of the questions that should be asked in a school-based mentoring program, but many are more generally applicable. For example:

ü Why do you need the mentors? What issues will they address? Is this a good solution for these issues?

ü How can mentors best be used? Will they be acceptable to teachers, parents, and members of the community? Which age groups might benefit most from having an adult mentor? How will assures the safety of the students?

ü Who can serve as mentors? What special knowledge and skills should they have? Would they be appropriate for the children who will be in the program?

ü How many mentors are needed? What kind of time commitment can they make each week? Is there a need for a long-term commitment

ü What is the involvement and responsibility of the teachers and the school?

ü What training will the mentors require? Who can provide this training? How much will this and the mentoring cost?

ü When can mentoring take place? How often, and for how long, will mentors and students meet?

ü How will the mentoring take place? Can it be telementoring, face to face or a combination of the two.?

ü What, if any, support or other materials will the mentors or students need? Will mentors or students need transport?

According to USA guidelines there are several models. For example there is

- *natural mentoring*, when a sustained relationship develops naturally between a coach, teacher, neighbour, or other adult and a student,

- *planned mentoring*, when a relationship is purposefully created to help a student who may need the wisdom and support of a caring adult
- *team mentoring*, whereby students can be exposed to several mentors on a regular basis.
- *Tripartite mentoring* in which, in addition to the usual adult-student relationship, the mentored student also serves as a mentor to a younger child.

Mentoring can be initiated by a school, a university, a community, a company, a voluntary organization or an adult education college. The Hewlett-Packard company's e-mail mentoring program (xx) is one example of the innovative ways in which new technology can be employed to provide help to needy students. Its aims are to improve mathematics and science achievement in secondary level education, to increase particularly the number of women and minorities in mathematics and science, and to help motivation in children at school. The project creates a 'telementoring relationship' by e-mail. Students and Hewlett-Packard employee mentors collaborate on classroom activities such as science projects and mathematics lessons, under the direction of a supervising classroom teacher. Teachers are an integral part of the project. They submit a lesson plan for the student and mentor to work on together (and on which the student will receive a grade), and supervise the mentor-student interaction.

Mentors communicate with the student at least 2-3 times per week and agree to be a positive role model, using effective communication skills to encourage their students to excel in maths and science. 2,900 mentors from 14 countries have helped operate the programme in the United States, Canada, Australia, and France program. Teachers have noted increases in student attendance, better use of technology, more motivation at school, and greater self-confidence..

There are hundreds of possibilities and opportunities for good mentoring programmes in the development of a learning city and region. They have a proven track record and the coming years will see a large increase in their number as the lifelong learning philosophy becomes more accepted.

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