Retention or Therapy? The Role of Personal Tutoring in a Further Education College.

Submitted by Alvinia Menary, to the University of Exeter
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Signature…………………………………………
Abstract.

This thesis focuses on personal tutoring and pastoral support and guidance in a Further Education College. In this study, I explore the relational dynamics and social construction of the role of the personal tutor and reveal alternative discourses concerned with the emergence of the ‘therapeutic’ in the sector. Within the current audit culture of Further Education, new pedagogies of practice are emerging in response to Government policy, regulation and control and I illuminate their impact upon the sector, noting the sites of conflicts for personal tutors engaged in the labour process as they mediate the ‘emotional learning agenda’.

The research includes interview data from twenty personal tutors and nine senior managers (senior tutors), and also includes data from two focus groups. The twenty personal tutors are representative of a breadth of courses across the institution from Foundation Degree to Special Needs, teaching a range of subjects from Marine Science to Performing Arts. The focus groups represent new full-time and part-time trainees to the profession attending the Initial Teacher Training Course. The data was collected over two years from 2006, in a Further Education College in the South West of England called ‘Pendene’. Policy documents including Ofsted reports were also incorporated into the study as secondary data sources.

In this research, I reveal that personal tutors at Pendene College were investing time and energy in the emotional lives of their students, in response to policy and practices related to retention and achievement which challenges the arguments from Ecclestone (2004), Furedi (2003) and Ecclestone and Hayes (2009) concerned with the expansion of therapy culture in Further Education. This significantly suggests a paradigmatic shift in the culture of pastoral care within the post-compulsory sector, one driven by the economics of retention. However, not all students were engaged in pastoral support and guidance and this study reveals a group labelled the ‘untutored’ who emerge as separate from those ‘needy’ students whom personal tutors support. Personal tutors were also ‘actors’ taking on different roles and analysing this process illuminated their propensity for engagement in emotional labour and labour processes within the hegemonic culture of Further Education.
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# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1. Personal tutoring in Further Education</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Personal background and interest</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Models of personal tutoring</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. The research question</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Overview of the thesis</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2. The national and local context of personal tutoring</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Introduction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Government directives informing personal tutoring</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Globalisation and the commodification of emotions</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Local policy and practice</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. Conclusion</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 3. Literature Review</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Introduction</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Emotional labour</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Issues of Practice</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Chapter 1. Personal tutoring in Further Education**

1.1. Introduction

1.1.2. The meaning of personal tutoring

1.2. Personal background and interest

1.3. Models of personal tutoring

1.4. The research question

1.5. Overview of the thesis

**Chapter 2. The national and local context of personal tutoring**

2.1. Introduction

2.1.1. External policy developments and how they shape the FE sector

2.1.2. National policy determining professional identity

2.2. Government directives informing personal tutoring

2.2.1. The Nationals Skills Agenda.

2.2.2. Funding changes in FE

2.2.3. Financial support for FE students: The Educational Maintenance Allowance

2.2.4. The Healthy College initiative and retention of students

2.2.5. The national inspectorate context: Ofsted

2.2.6. Policy and practice informing the tutor as performer

2.3. Globalisation and the commodification of emotions

2.3.1. The development of the national emotional learning agenda

2.3.2. National policies contextualising student needs

2.3.3. Neediness as a key discourse in FE

2.4. Local policy and practice.

2.4.1. Monitoring EMA

2.4.2. Implementing ECM directives

2.4.3. Conflicting identity –being a personal tutor

2.5. Conclusion

**Chapter 3. Literature Review**

3.1. Introduction

3.1.1. A review of trends in researching FE

3.1.2. The therapeutic turn

3.1.3. Well being

3.1.4. The politics of emotion

3.2. Emotional labour

3.2.1. The management of emotions in the workplace

3.3 Issues of Practice.

3.3.1. Professional identity

3.3.2. Surveillance for judgment

3.3.3. Client centred issues
Chapter 4. Methodology and Methods

4.1. Introduction

4.2. Epistemological approach
   4.2.1. The metaphor of performance
   4.2.2. The green room; the staffroom

4.3. My adaption: the research approach
   4.3.1. Sample
   4.3.2. Sampling
   4.3.3. Descriptions of sample participants
   4.3.4. Trainee teachers as participants
   4.3.5. A focus on the tutors
   4.3.6. Telling the research story
   4.3.7. Research questions

4.4. Methods
   4.4.1. Recording the interviews
   4.4.2. Research diary and notes.
   4.4.3. The interview schedule
   4.4.4. Including a quality question and dimension to the interviews
   4.4.5. Interviewing skills
   4.4.6. Group Interviews (Focus)
   4.4.7. Telling the stories and confronting the problems of legitimation, authorship and ‘truthfulness’
   4.4.8. Ethical issues: the application of consent
   4.4.9. Focus group challenges

4.5. My role as an insider researcher
   4.5.1. Coping with the power relationships for the interviewer and the interviewee
   4.5.2. Protection for the researcher
   4.5.3. The development of themes in the data analysis

4.6. Data analysis
   4.6.1. Interpretation
   4.6.2. Validity and reliability
   4.6.3. Applying validity and reliability in this research

4.7. Evaluation of research methods

4.8. Conclusion

Chapter 5 Personal tutors perceptions of their role

5.1. Introduction
   5.1.1. Providing therapeutic support in personal tutorials
   5.1.2. Supporting students in the dual sector
5.1.3. The personal tutors' ability to detach according to gender and subject
5.1.4. Personal tutors' perceptions of the impact of well-being on tutorial practice.
5.1.5. Personal tutors' concerns about supporting students with additional needs.
5.1.6. Tutorial practice and the emotional well-being of vulnerable students
5.2. Personal tutors' perceptions of students who are coping – the untutored.
5.3. Personal tutors who emphasise emotional well-being in their role
   5.3.1. Engaging with emotional labour and coping with students' demands
   5.3.2. The issue of retention for the personal tutor and 'keeping all sixteen on the course'.
5.4. Conclusion

Chapter 6. Training personal tutors in Pendene College
6.1. Introduction
   6.1.1. Training the personal tutor at national and local level
   6.1.2. Therapy culture and Rogerian principles
   6.1.3. The personality characteristics of performance detailed by Ofsted
6.2. The provision of formal training at the institutional level
   6.2.1. The personal tutors' response to formal training
   6.2.2. Social processes shaping practice in Pendene College
   6.2.3. Senior tutors’ response to informal processes of training
   6.2.4. Mentoring and support for personal tutors
   6.2.5. Learning the role of being a personal tutor
   6.2.6. Responding to national directives and conforming to tutorial practice
6.3. An empathetic approach shaping informal processes
   6.3.1. Therapeutic language use by personal tutors
   6.3.2. Addressing the social and emotional needs in tutorials
   6.3.3. Separating the academic from the emotional needs
   6.3.4. The institutional construction of tutorial practice
6.4. The importance of retention and the subject tutors' role
   6.4.1. Subject coaching and the role of the subject tutor in retention
   6.4.2. The role of the subject learning coaches in Pendene College
6.5. The therapeutic relationship and developing the skills of the therapist
6.6. Conclusion

Chapter 7. Contested practices in personal tutoring
7.1. Introduction
   7.1.1. Addressing the research questions
7.1.2. Empathetic personal tutoring
7.1.3. Personal tutors’ perceptions of tutorial practice
7.1.4. Personal tutors’ development of a counselling role
7.2. Practice indications of retaining students
7.3. The research contribution to the field of pastoral guidance and support
  7.3.1. Placing this study within the broader perspective
7.4. Evaluation of research methods.
  7.4.1. Strengths and limitations of the research
  7.4.2. A personal reflection on the research journey
  7.4.3. Implications for further research

List of Tables
Table 1. Study participants
Table 2. The ethic of care in education – a new logo for Ofsted
Table 3. Measures of performativity of a personal tutor /tutor at Pendene College
Table 4. Performativity and the social construction of teaching
Table 5. Criteria for selecting participants using positive sampling
Table 6. Personal tutors subject and department
Table 7. Interview Schedule list of question for the senior tutors
Table 8. Characteristics of ‘performance’ for the tutor related to personality traits using the Grade 1 Ofsted criteria
Table 9. Number of tutors who use terms of therapy

Appendices
Appendix 1 - Participants Leaflet
Appendix 2 - Table 10. Typology of questions uses the categories of practice, skills and policy
Appendix 3 - Table 11. Interview Schedule
Appendix 4 - Table 12. Focus group – real time
Appendix 5 - Table 13: Focus group schedule
Appendix 6 - Ethics Form

References