Learning Development: the Four Roles: An Integrative Model

THE MENTOR

Drawing on your experience as a senior member of the academic community (as learning developer, former student, or other professional roles in HE) to help contextualise a student’s experience and inform their thinking.

- **Useful when:** the student needs to draw on experienced outside perspectives to make sense of their learning context and the implications of their decisions
- **Skills needed:** interpreting academic culture and convention, modelling study approaches or reader responses, sharing experience to normalise and reassure, provide additional information about a context to aid decision making, reflective detachment
- **Example situations:**
  - Negotiating and developing their authorial voice and style
  - Decision-making and understanding the implications
  - Understanding how a reader responds to a text
- **Pitfalls:** student may perceive your input as too directive or authoritative

THE LISTENER

Active listening with minimal input, to help students articulate, clarify, value and come to terms with what they are thinking or feeling.

- **Useful when:** the student implicitly knows what they’re trying to achieve, and has everything they need to achieve it, but needs a sounding board to help them feel valued, clarify their own thinking and accept it.
- **Skills needed:** active listening to what they say and what they don’t say (incl body language), minimal verbal and non-verbal encouragement, reflecting back and mirroring
- **Example situations:**
  - Untangling and refining their argument in an assignment
  - Dealing with challenging new ideas or feelings about study, e.g. threshold concepts
- **Pitfalls:** may become directionless

THE TEACHER

Determining what the student needs to know, imparting that knowledge through explanation and setting rehearsal tasks, and assessing whether it has been learned.

- **Useful when:** the student is not in a position to figure out the knowledge they need or to know if they have got it right
- **Skills needed:** explanation, use of questions to scaffold and assess, constructing tasks to aid understanding
- **Example situations:**
  - How to reference
  - Grammar
- **Pitfalls:** you may overuse this mode, underestimating what the student can bring

THE COACH

A goal-focussed approach to helping students identify, refine and address their own aims, drawing on their own knowledge and resources.

- **Useful when:** the student has the necessarily knowledge, explicitly or implicitly, of themselves and their subject, but isn’t sure how to move forward
- **Skills needed:** open questioning to help clarify, explore, challenge, focus, decide and plan
- **Example situations:**
  - Narrowing down a dissertation topic, cutting out sections
  - Managing revision
- **Pitfalls:** student may assume you have, or are looking for, specific answers