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## AN ALTERNATIVE TEACHING PRACTICE PROGRAMME FOR ACADEMIC STUDENTS AT BELVEDERE TECHNICAL TEACHERS' COLLEGE

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### **1.0 Introduction**

The aim of this paper is two fold. Firstly, it intends to review the current teaching practice programme for academic students at the Belvedere Technical Teachers' College. Secondly, the paper intends to suggest an alternative programme for the students. The need for this paper has been prompted by the need to improve the quality of teacher training in general and of teaching practice for academic students in particular.

### **2.0 Background to the problem**

Belvedere Teachers' College trains secondary teachers for Academic, Technical/Vocational(Tech/Voc) and Agricultural subjects. The academic subjects offered are: Science, Mathematics, English, Physical Education, Geography and Development Studies. Science and Mathematics are considered as major subjects and the rest are taken as minor subjects. The difference between a major and a minor subject is that minor subjects are studied in pairs, for example, a subject like English is offered in combination with Physical Education, Business Studies and Development Studies. Major subjects on the other hand, are not combined with any other subject.

The college also trains teachers for Agriculture and Technical and Vocational (Tech/Voc) subjects. This group of students are qualified Agriculture Extension Workers and qualified technical/vocational graduates who join the college for the Diploma in Education course. The duration of this course is four terms one term of which is spent on teaching practice.

### **The Teacher Training Component**

The teacher training course has three main components, namely, subject content knowledge, pedagogic knowledge which exposes students to various issues concerned with how to teach, and teaching practice which gives students the opportunity to practice how to teach. The Tech/Voc groups take three years acquiring subject content and technical skills knowledge. In addition to this, they also go out on industrial attachment for eight months during this period. At the end of the three years the students are awarded a National Certificate for the technical subject in which they will have trained. With this qualification they have an option to either join the industrial sector as skilled workers or train as secondary school teachers. Since the inception of this programme the majority of students have opted for the teacher training course.

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### **Post Agriculture Diploma in Education (PADE)**

The college also trains teachers for Agriculture. This group of students are qualified Agriculture Extension Workers who join the college for the Diploma in Education course. They also take four terms to complete the course with one of the terms used specifically for teaching practice.

### **Diploma in Education : Academic Subjects**

The teacher training programme for the academic group on the other hand is slightly different. These students are exposed to subject and pedagogic content knowledge in the first year of their training. They are out on teaching practice for the whole of their second year. They then rejoin college in the third year for more content knowledge and final examinations after which they are also awarded the Diploma in Education.

The reason why these students are on teaching practice for one whole year emanates from a policy introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture during the 1980's. This period was a period where there was a dramatic increase in the number of secondary schools countrywide. As can be appreciated, increasing the number of schools takes a shorter time than training teachers. As a result it was difficult to supply all the schools with qualified teachers and most of the schools were employing unqualified teachers. In order to address this anomaly the Ministry of Education and Culture sought the assistance of student teachers who were supposedly substitutes for unqualified teachers. Whereas student teachers had been going on teaching practice for one term, they were now going out for one year. This would not only solve the issue of supplying schools with better teachers but it would also satisfy the teaching practice component of the teacher training course. In addition to carrying out this national service, the students were also remunerated for their services as they were literally carrying out the duties of qualified teachers. Thus, students moved from the state of being a student to a position of responsibility as some of them found themselves heading departments and representing the schools at various teaching professionals' fora. The deployment of student teachers to schools was therefore determined by the staffing situation in the schools and not by the needs of the students in terms of the assistance they would receive from the schools.

In the 1990's the staffing situation in the schools has improved and when students go out on teaching practice they are no longer treated as qualified teachers. They are expected to work under a qualified teacher and their teaching load has been reduced. The remuneration package, however, has not been withdrawn although the duration of teaching practice is still one year.

In view of these developments, Belvedere Teachers' College has introduced a teaching practice policy which takes into consideration the fact that teaching practice should be considered as a form of apprenticeship where students work with a qualified teacher who will act as a mentor. Student teachers are expected to teach

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a maximum of 18 periods per week. The college deploys students to schools which are easily accessible from college. The regions utilised for this purpose are Mashonaland, East, West, Central and Harare.

### **Teaching Practice Supervision**

The supervision of students on teaching practice has not undergone any major changes. Supervision has always been carried out by college lecturers, school heads and/or heads of departments. All students are required to have a minimum number of grades in order to pass or fail teaching practice. The number of grades is determined by the duration of the teaching practice period. The Tech/Voc students and PADE who are out for one term are required to have a minimum of two grades whilst the Academic students should have at least three grades.

### **Observations**

The teaching practice office has observed a few problems arising from the current teaching practice patterns in general and particularly the teaching practice pattern for academic students. The problems arise mainly in the areas of the attachment policy, deployment, supervision of students by college and school personnel and the duration of the teaching practice period.

### **Attachment**

When the college adopted the principle that teaching practice should be a form of apprenticeship where students are attached to departments within schools, the main focus of this policy was on reducing the number of periods which students could teach and to have student teachers treated as learners and not as qualified teachers. The policy states that the students are expected to teach a maximum of 18 periods per week. It has been observed from timetables submitted by students that some students are allocated as little as 8, 10 and 12 periods per week whilst others are allocated 18, 20 and 24 periods. This is an issue which has also been observed with respect to the Tech/Voc and PADE students.

Such differences in teaching periods could mean that the college needs to review its expectations of the attachment system. It is likely that not all students are benefiting from the attachment system given the varying conditions under which they work.

### **Deployment**

The deployment of students for teaching practice seems to be determined by the accessibility of the school from college. Secondly, it is also determined by whether or not the schools require the services of student teachers. The college needs to seriously consider forming partnerships with secondary schools which can be utilised for various exercises related to training teachers such as micro-teaching, team teaching, research exercises, observation of lessons, school organisation and

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administration, to name just a few. Such schools would also need to avail themselves for use by the college at agreed times. The college needs to decide on the criteria for selecting such schools and to staff develop school personnel on their role as partners in initial teacher training.

### **Supervision of students**

The supervision of students has been carried out mainly by college lecturers. Several problems have been observed from this. Firstly, the supervision of academic students has not been thorough due to shortage of manpower. There are ninety lecturers who are expected to teach seven hundred and sixty students on campus as well supervise students on teaching practice. Approximately 230 academic students, 55-60 PADE and 215 Tech/Voc students are out on teaching practice in any one year albeit at different times.

Secondly, the college usually has one reliable vehicle which ferries lecturers to various schools for teaching practice supervision. The distance between these schools is such that it is uneconomic to visit only one school at a time. By visiting several schools in one day lecturers are forced to make rushed supervision which does not benefit the students.

Thirdly, students are not visited as often as they should by college lecturers due to other commitments at college.

Given the facts highlighted above, if schools are to be fully involved in the training of teachers, then the supervision of students could be made the responsibility of both the schools and college. This would not only ensure that students are constantly supervised, it would also make students work harder and enjoy teaching practice. Thus, the issue of manpower and frequency of supervision will be addressed. Secondly, there is need for the college to consider the need to adopt the idea of identifying mentors in schools who will assist, guide, monitor and tutor student teachers during the times that they visit schools. They will also work closely with various departments in the college. The college also needs to consider the criteria for selecting mentors. They also need staff development in their role as mentors.

Whilst the college is considering the issue of involving schools in this exercise it may need to also consider some form of incentive for those schools which will be taking on the extra duty. The incentive could be for the school as an institution, to the individual departments assisting students or to the mentors as individuals. This is a practice already in use in UK. The source of revenue for this exercise however is not the issue of this paper.

### **Performance of students**

Over the years the teaching practice office has also noticed a pattern in the performance of the students during teaching practice. The Tech/Voc and PADE groups tend to score higher marks than the academic students. Lecturers also

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indicate in their assessment reports that the PADE and Tech/Voc groups have a more mature approach to their work and that they have a more positive attitude to teaching than the academic students. Comments in assessment reports for academic students, on the other hand, indicate that most of the students have not fully mastered the subject content and this affects their planning and delivery of lessons. The performance of some of the students tends to deteriorate towards the end of the year. Reports from some of the schools also identify similar weaknesses in academic students. We cannot rule out the fact that the duration of the teaching practice period may be a major contributing factor to this problem.

If we consider the issue of immaturity of academic students we can observe that the PADE and Tech/Voc students spend three years acquiring subject knowledge and skills and they also go on attachment during the same period. The academic students, on the other hand, are in college for only one year before they are released for teaching practice. Perhaps these students would benefit more from the course if their teaching practice period was slotted much later than the second year to give them time to mature and to acquire more subject content and pedagogic knowledge. Acquiring sufficient subject content knowledge gives students confidence to teach effectively and to develop positive attitudes towards their subjects and the profession.

The effect of the duration of the teaching practice period for academic students has been fully addressed within the factors that have been highlighted so far. It has been indicated that it could affect students' attitude to teaching, their performance on teaching practice, the quality of assistance from school and from college lecturers, to name just a few. The need to reduce the duration of the teaching practice period for this group cannot be over emphasised. It also indicates the need to introduce a variety of activities which students could engage in apart from learning how to teach. The teaching practice period need not be composed of just going out to teach as is the current emphasis.

Students could be introduced to simple research exercises which enable them to discover on their own what teaching is all about. Students could also be given time to observe different learning situations by spending time in nursery, primary and secondary schools. They need to be aware of the different types of schools in the country. They need to be aware of management styles in schools and in classrooms. This will give direction to the attachment system where students are attached to schools to observe various activities and the college curriculum moves from teaching practice to school experience which encompasses more activities. Students may be required to spend specified number of contact hours on various activities identified by the college. All these activities will be carried out in combination with subject content and pedagogic knowledge. This implies that the school experience will be broken down into segments for various activities and a term for teaching practice.

### 3.0 Options for a new programme



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We will now consider how the suggestions discussed so far could be fitted into new a teaching practice programme. It should be noted that the suggestions are for academic students only, but they may also be applied to other subjects as the need arises. The focus of the suggestions is on improving the quality of training of academic teachers by initially reducing their period of teaching practice and giving them more time for subject content and pedagogic content knowledge, school experience and teaching practice. It is hoped that by taking this measure the issues of attachment, deployment, supervision, behaviour of students and their performance during teaching practice will also be implicitly addressed.

Note that all the groups at college are included so that logistics issues are also considered in conjunction with the various options.

### KEY

AC : academic group.  
 ATT: attachment.  
 TEC : Tech/Voc group  
 TP : teaching practice  
 IN : students on campus

### POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE

#### OPTION A: TP OVER ANY ONE TERM IN THE SECOND YEAR

##### OPTION A1:

GROUP TERM 1 TERM 2 TERM 3

1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN		
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	<b>TP</b>	IN		IN	
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC	IN		IN		IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN	IN		<b>ATT</b>
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC		<b>ATT</b>		IN	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN		<b>TP</b>	IN	
PADE		IN	<b>TP</b>		IN

##### OPTION A2:

GROUP TERM 1 TERM 2 TERM 3

1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN		
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN		<b>TP</b>		IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC	IN		IN		IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN		IN	<b>ATT</b>

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3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC		<b>ATT</b>		IN		IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN		<b>TP</b>		IN	
PADE		IN		<b>TP</b>		IN

**OPTION A3:**

<b>GROUP</b>		<b>TERM 1</b>		<b>TERM 2</b>		<b>TERM 3</b>
1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN		IN	IN		
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN		IN		<b>TP</b>	
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		IN		IN		IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN	
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN		IN		<b>ATT</b>
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC			<b>ATT</b>		IN	
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN			<b>TP</b>		IN
PADE		IN			<b>TP</b>	

**OPTION B: TP OVER ANY TWO TERMS IN SECOND YEAR****OPTION B1:**

<b>GROUP</b>	<b>TERM 1</b>	<b>TERM 2</b>	<b>TERM 3</b>
1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	<b>TP</b>		<b>TP</b>
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		IN	IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN	IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC		<b>ATT</b>	
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN		<b>TP</b>
PADE		IN	

**OPTION B2:**

<b>GROUP</b>		<b>TERM 1</b>		<b>TERM 2</b>		<b>TERM 3</b>
1 <sup>ST</sup> AC		IN	IN	IN		
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN		<b>TP</b>		<b>TP</b>	
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		IN		IN		IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN	
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN		IN		<b>ATT</b>
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC			<b>ATT</b>		IN	
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN			<b>TP</b>		IN
PADE		IN			<b>TP</b>	

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**OPTION C: TP OVER TWO TERMS IN SECOND AND THIRD YEAR****OPTION C1:**

GROUP TERM 1 TERM 2 TERM 3

1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	TP	IN	TP
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		TP	IN

1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN	IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC		ATT	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN		TP

PADE		IN	TP
			IN

**OPTION D: TP OVER ANY TWO TERMS IN THIRD YEAR****OPTION D1:**

GROUP TERM 1 TERM 2 TERM 3

1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC	TP	IN	IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN	IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC		ATT	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN		TP
PADE		IN	TP
			IN

**OPTION D2:**

GROUP TERM 1 TERM 2 TERM 3

1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC	TP	TP	IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN	IN	IN
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN	IN
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC		ATT	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN		TP
PADE		IN	TP
			IN

**OPTION E: TP OVER ANY ONE TERM IN THIRD YEAR****OPTION E1**

GROUP TERM 1 TERM 2 TERM 3

1 <sup>ST</sup> AC		IN	IN
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2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN		IN		IN	
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		IN		TP		TP
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN	
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN		IN		ATT
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC			ATT		IN	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN			TP		IN
PADE		IN		TP		IN

**OPTION E2:**

GROUP	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3			
1 <sup>ST</sup> AC		IN	IN		IN	
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN		IN		IN	
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		IN		TP		IN
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN	
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN		IN		ATT
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC			ATT		IN	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN			TP		IN
PADE		IN		TP		IN

**OPTION E3:**

GROUP	TERM 1	TERM 2	TERM 3			
1 <sup>ST</sup> AC	IN	IN	IN			
2 <sup>ND</sup> AC	IN		IN		IN	
3 <sup>RD</sup> AC		IN		IN		TP
1 <sup>ST</sup> TEC	IN		IN		IN	
2 <sup>ND</sup> TEC		IN		IN		ATT
3 <sup>RD</sup> TEC			ATT		IN	IN
4 <sup>TH</sup> TEC	IN			TP		IN
PADE		IN		TP		IN

**4.0 ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

In considering the possible teaching practice option for the Academic group, we need to bear in mind the following:

- That if the teaching practice period is reduced from one year it is likely to affect the accommodation facilities at the college.
- That the Academic students require time to mature and to master adequately the basic teaching skills prior to the teaching practice exercise.

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- That students still need time to work on their Curriculum Depth Studies and any other research based projects.
- That the school experience need not focus on teaching practice only. Students need to be exposed to other activities related to teaching such as simple research activities, attending school meetings in order to appreciate management issues in schools .

### The 'A' Options

This group of options is suggesting that teaching practice for the academic group be slotted into any of the terms in the second year.

Option 'A'1 does not give students time to mature, acquire sufficient pedagogic and subject content knowledge. Option 'A'2, on the other hand, is falling within a term where the PADE and Voc/tech students will also be on teaching practice. This is likely to overcrowd schools and most importantly it will make supervision of students a very difficult task for both college and school personnel. Option 'A'3 falls in the term for public examination. Students may not fully benefit from the school experience since teachers will be preoccupied with the end-of-year examinations. The supervision of the students by college lecturers will be disrupted as some timetables are not adhered to owing to the examinations.

### The 'B' Options

This fails to address the issue of giving students time to mature. It also implies that students are out on teaching practice during the already busy second and third terms. It however gives students time for examinations and project work but fails to provide adequate time for the build up towards the block teaching practice.. It does not affect accommodation issues.

### The 'C' Options

The college will need to review its accommodation requirements in order to accommodate the students in the first and second terms. The third term could be utilised for school observations and research. It should also be noted that the students may need to spend time on campus whilst they are on school observations because they will need to discuss their work with subject lecturers and to consult with lecturers in the Professional Studies section. If the teaching practice period is slotted into the first term of year three, students would benefit as schools will not be busy. Supervision of students could be adequately accomplished within the first term.

### The 'D' Options

Option 'D' 1 could be suitable if it did not have students on teaching practice in the second term. The college will have to review the accommodation facilities in the second term to ensure that other students are not affected. The accommodation

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factor may not be a problem if the number of third year students could be replaced by the same number of Academic students. The enrolment figures will have to be tailored to suit this situation.

Option 'D' 2 has the problem of having teaching practice in the busy terms as already discussed.

### The 'E' Options

The 'E' options certainly address the issue of giving students time to mature, but the teaching practice slots are in the busy terms. Whilst 'E: 2 gives ample time for examinations in the third term 'E' 3 on the other hand implies that all exams and course work be completed before teaching practice.

### Conclusion

From the above analysis it appears that Option C1 would be the most suitable as it allows students more time in college prior to teaching practice. It also allows students time to engage in a variety of activities other than teaching which if included in the teacher training programme would certainly improve the quality of Academic students and consequently the quality of their teaching during teaching practice.

Whilst changing the teaching practice pattern for this group of students may not be the panacea for all ills associated with teacher education it is, however, the beginning of a series of changes necessary in improving its quality.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Belvedere Technical Teachers' Training College needs to change the current teaching practice programme for Academic students. This paper suggests that the college adopts Option 'C'1 which gives students adequate time to mature, acquire sufficient subject content knowledge and pedagogic skills which are necessary in making them effective and confident teachers.
2. The College needs to establish partnership with selected schools. Once these are identified the task of initial teacher training will be a joint effort between the college and the schools. Schools will be made aware of their role in teacher education through staff development workshops with the college.
3. The college and schools will identify suitable personnel within the schools who will need to be made aware of their role in assisting students. This can only be established when the college has defined its objectives for sending students out on school experience and teaching practice.
4. Mentors will need to be made aware of their role in assisting students. This can only be established when the college has defined its objectives for sending students out on school experience and teaching practice.

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5. The college may need to seriously consider reducing its enrolment for academic subjects as this new teaching programme is more effective with fewer students.

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