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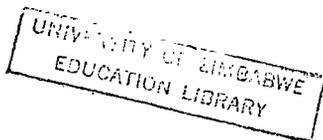
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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFICACY OF THE TRIPARTITE STUDENT TEACHER MENTORING SCHEME IN ZIMBABWE'S MASVINGO REGION

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Abstract

The study analyzed the efficacy of the tripartite relationship between the mentor, the lecturer and the student teacher in teacher education when the students are on teaching practice with a view of examining its impact on the student teacher in Masvingo Region. Key areas covered by the research questions were: college input into teaching practice, the role of the lecturer and the mentor, and future of the attachment programme in Zimbabwe. The study employed the descriptive survey method and the research instruments used were the questionnaire and the interview. A study sample of 80 mentors, 32 lecturers and 65 student teachers was selected. The findings revealed that the key players of the programme held different conceptions of the teaching practice, held different interpretations of college guidelines as well as different conceptions of their roles which adversely affect the efficiency of the tripartite relationship. Recommendations made included the need for a democratic and professional relationship among the three members of tripartite relationship and that more dialogue between the lecturers and the mentors in particular is needed so that their roles are complementary.

Background

In Zimbabwe, the mentoring scheme of teaching practice in colleges of teacher education came into being in January 1995 replacing the one whereby student teachers were deployed into a school to assume the full responsibility of the classroom, thus operating as full-time teachers. Under the Mentoring Scheme (MS) the student teacher is attached to a full time experienced teacher. The move was made in the belief that student teachers benefit from the expertise of the experienced teachers to whom they are attached (Siyakwazi 1996). The three colleges under study are all involved in the pre-servicing of primary school teachers. A preliminary study of the colleges revealed that none of the stake holders, (mentors and lecturers) had received any formal training in mentoring.

It was in the realization of the fact that mentors had no slightest initiation in the MS that the colleges prepared guidelines that spelt out college expectation of the school on the student. Besides these guidelines there was no other opportunity to sensitise the mentor on what is expected of him/her. The study examined the efficiency of the tripartite relationship of the Mentoring Scheme in preparing teachers as perceived by the key parties in the relationship. Significant policy implications of the findings are highlighted and insights into how the Mentorship Scheme can be improved are also made.

Conceptual Framework

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a situation whereby a regular certified professional staff member of a school is assigned a student teacher for grooming and professional development. Bearing in mind that these students may not have pre-training teaching experience, it is this staff member, the mentor, who plants and nurtures the student's professional attitudes and teaching competence.

The college does the deployment of the student to the school, but the choice of the mentor lies with the school head that has a clear view of her/his mentor's qualities and other existing responsibilities and how these will allow her/his the potential to perform the additional role of mentoring. According to the University of Sussex Primary Handbook (1995-1996) the mentor should meet certain criteria and should be chosen upon those criteria. Key among the requirements are that she/he should be qualified and experienced, has a strong knowledge of the curriculum, has a proven record of classroom competence and has the ability and will to work with someone, (Burden 1990). The (MS) was made in the belief that it would improve teacher preparation. It was thus a move in search of effectiveness and excellence of the Teaching Practice (TP) system, (Siyakwazi 1996). The MS requires the integrated effort of the mentor, the student and the lecturer, who it is believed will bring a unique capability to the whole enterprise.

Expected duties of the mentor

Furlong and Maynard (1995) find the mentor's roles moving in phases. During the first phase of TP, the mentor is a model showing the student the right way of approaching professional issues. During phase 2, she/he is a coach who observes

and provides feedback to the student whom she/he observes teaching. During phase 3, the mentor is a critical friend who now encourages the student to reflect on own practice. It is now not learning about teaching but teaching itself. The final phase sees the mentor as a co-enquirer. These stages are sequential as they feed one into the other. Ideally, according to these authors, colleges should provide mentors with documentary guidelines showing these phases. A preliminary study of the college guidelines of the three colleges under study showed that none included or alluded to these developmental phases.

Practicums of initial teacher preparation

Three major models or practicums of initial teacher preparation have been advanced and each of these reflects different ideas about the source of teaching expertise, and the ultimate role of the mentor, (Zeichner 1996). These are: the **apprenticeship model**, the **applied-science model** and the **inquiry-oriented model**. Under the apprenticeship model the source of teaching expertise is thought to be the mentor who needs to only show the novice how to do what she/he is able to do well. The mentor's role is to break-down teacher preparation into atomized, discrete and trainable skills which the student should emulate, (Zeichner 1996). This model encourages imitation rather than understanding.

The applied-science model emphasises on the student applying knowledge and theories from college. The student is expected to develop the ability to act in ways consistent with ideology of academic courses. The model views students as "receptacles of prepackaged knowledge" Freeman (1994).

The inquiry-oriented model views teaching as a form of action research and the teachers as reflective practitioners. This macro approach to teacher preparation sees the student as a researcher, problem poser and problem solver who is able to interpret complex unpredictable situations, make decisions and act upon them, (Ndawi 2004).

These three conceptual approaches formed the framework on which this study was conducted. The study aimed at finding out to which of these three the MS was closely aligned.

Purpose of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Assess the efficacy of the tripartite student teacher mentoring scheme in Masvingo region
2. Highlight some policy and planning implications.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey since the main thrust was on describing and analyzing the relationships of mentors, students and lecturers.

The study was conducted in 2000 with students who were on TP in 2000 and those that had just completed their TP in 1999, their mentors and the lecturers who visited them on TP. From this population of 960 2nd year students of 2000, 1008 3rd years of 2000, 138 lecturers and 950 mentors a sample of 187 people was chosen. The college was the unit for sampling. The students were systematically randomly sampled (to ensure equitable representation from each college) and also stratifiedly sampled to cater for different year groups. The mentors were randomly selected according to setting of school and also according to parent college of student attached to mentor. The study sample had 65 students, 80 mentors and 32 lecturers. From this sample, a sub sample of 11 mentors, 12 students and 6 lecturers was randomly selected for interviewing purpose.

Interviews and questionnaires were the instrument used to solicit information. Interviews were face-to-face, unstructured but focused, and questionnaires were close and open-ended. The 2 instruments elicited the same information.

Findings

Information was analyzed thematically as follows:

- Lecturer and Mentor conception of TP
- Preparation of a student for TP

- Preparation of a mentor for TP
- Lecturer and mentor's role on TP
- Future of MS

Conception of TP

The absolute majority of the lecturers (99%) viewed TP as a time when the student goes beyond the practice of the learnt college theory to a point where one constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs own practice. The mentors on the other hand viewed TP as a time when the student emulates his/her mentors' skills. To the mentors (93%), TP is merely the mechanics of skills imparting. Thus the key members of the tripartite alliance held different views of TP. The lecturer's views fitted the inquiry-oriented model where the student is an action researcher, the classroom a laboratory in setting and the mentor a direction pointer, guide, supporter and co-enquirer. The mentors' views suited the apprenticeship model, where the mentor is the source of teaching expertise and the student a copycat who would eventually become like the mentor. 92% of the mentors viewed students as passive recipients of their mentor's knowledge rather than sources of knowledge themselves. Little wonder why 92% of mentors did not look forward to learning from the student and 90% of the students found their mentors restrictive and prescriptive. This variation in conceptions of the MS by these 2 key players was likely to affect the efficiency of the program in meeting its goals.

A possible explanation for this is that the education process in Zimbabwe is in the main largely based on the much criticized 'banking concept' (Freire 1970) where students are taken as 'empty vessels' to be filled. Since educational practices are informed by specific orientations, mentors find themselves (Babikwa 2004) reproducing the training process that created them. Viewing themselves (i.e. mentors) as sole possessors of knowledge has key implications of perpetuating a false confidence among themselves that prevents them to learn from students while undermining the student's creativity and innovativeness as well as the students' inner motivation to work on their own. The current practice (i.e. largely apprenticeship model) defeats the excellence goal of the MS. The essence of TP is not to turn students into copycats and present the mentor as a

definite exemplar. Who said the mentor's expertise are "exhaustively excellent and sufficient" for preparing students for situations different from those in the mentor's classroom, (Zeichner 1996). The 'excellence' talked about is the production of a self referential teacher in terms of what works in a particular situation and production of a cadre who is able to draw on line decisions to solve problems that are unique to a particular situation (Richards 1996). College TP policy should focus on exposition of mentors to some valuable critical orientation so that their mindset is shaped towards emancipatory education that promotes student freedom and rational autonomy. This is not a new finding Zeichner (1996) also observed that mentors tend to direct student activities rather than enable students to work in a self directed way.

College preparation of a student for TP

The following table gives a summary of students' views of their preparation for TP by the college.

Table 1 – College preparation of a student for TP.

The college prepared you adequately for TP in this area:	Extent of Agreement			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Scheming and planning	44(67,7%)	17(26,1%)	2(3,1%)	2(3,1%)
Classroom Management Strategies	2(3,1%)	15(38,5%)	6(9,2%)	32(49,2%)
Class Control techniques	8(12,3%)	2(3,1%)	26(40%)	29(44,6%)
Use of learning aids	51(78,5%)	13(20%)	1(1,5%)	0
Teaching strategies	4(6,2%)	19(29,2%)	42(64,6%)	0
Behaviour expected of a teacher	38(58,2%)	24(36,9%)	3(4,6%)	0

[n=65]

The results show that students felt adequately prepared for TP in areas of scheming, planning; preparation of teaching aids and their use. Students found the preparation not very adequate on class control, classroom management

strategies and teaching strategies. A possible explanation for this is that, given the ever changing, complex and unpredictable nature of the classroom, college preparation for these aspects can never be adequate (Feimen-Nemser 1992).

Responses from mentors were compatible with what the students said. 97% of the mentors found students adequate in areas of planning and scheming and use of aids and lacking skills in class control skills and teaching strategies. This could mean that there is need for the colleges and mentors to shift their focus and emphasis in teacher preparation from skills oriented training to reflective practice. Planning, scheming and use of aids are mechanical skills where students are taught to do things in a particular way but skills of class control and teaching strategies can not be prescribed.

Mentor preparation for TP

97.5% of the mentors concurred that the only timely preparation for TP that the mentors received from colleges were the posted written guidelines that spelt out the college expectations from the school on the student. All lecturers agreed totally that the only timely mentor preparation for TP were these guidelines.

However, the majority of lecturers (97%) said the mentors did not quite understand these guidelines and hence implemented them partially. Reasons cited by lecturers were: simple ignorance (95%), and mere mischief (9%). All the mentors on the other hand said they understood the guidelines, found them easy to implement, useful and compatible with what they expected the student to do. A possible origin of this finding could lie in difference in interpretations arising from no discussion(s) to enhance convergence of interpretation and implementation.

Using college developed and packaged written guidelines as the only form of mentor initiation and conscientisation about the programme had the following weaknesses: top-down information dissemination, which could be easily resisted by the mentors, lack of fostering a collegial relationship between lecturers and mentors on issues that could enhance the efficiency of the program. This autocratic approach does not nurture a participatory spirit and is inconsistent with the theoretical objectives of the MS. Colleges should have TP policies that spell out communication structures between colleges and school. This communication should be closely monitored, adjusted where necessary, and formatively evaluated for effectiveness.

Professional relationship patterns between mentors and lecturers

Lecturers (98%) had the view that mutually agreed positions through dialoguing should prevail in molding students into competent classroom practitioners. They found their role on TP complementing the mentor's. All lecturers cited their role on TP as that of supervision and assessment. Mentors (86%) on the other hand did not find their role complementing that of the lecturer and found the relationship, if at all there, not positive. 98.5% of the mentors found the lecturer's role on TP as that of assessment. Doses of supervision were too few to talk about. Chikunda (2000) also observed that lecturers emphasize their assessment role disregarding their tutoring role. College TP policy should emphasize on the dual role of lecturers on TP and design TP instruments that accommodate both aspects. 85% of the mentors lamented the idea of colleges disregarding school based marks as contributory to the student's final grade on TP. (Bondolfi Teachers College was particularly named). 81% of the mentors found the lecturers visits quite lightning and too brief for any meaningful lesson observation. 69% of the mentors reported about lecturers who did not even talk to the mentor. One of the interviewees said "I am yet to come across a lecturer who knows that a mentor exists – not in the 5 years I have been a mentor". If this is the scenario, where is the partnership to talk about? Then these 2 key players should both go through a process of deconstruction and reconstruction of their mindsets. Lecturers need to deconstruct their mindsets as 'gurus' and reconstruct themselves, as co-educators with mentors and the mentors need to be empowered to be true equals with lecturers as regards supervision and assessment of students on TP.

The students found the lecturer's role as mainly assessment (98%) and supervision (63%). 68% of the students reported about lecturers giving a mark before post lesson discussion. 98% of the students found their mentors prescriptive and wanting only their views to prevail. Students thus were dissatisfied with both the lecturers and the mentors and found both failing to give them room to defend their practice. MS is found on the principle that knowledge is constructed through the interaction of the mentor, the lecturer and the student. There is a mismatch between philosophy of the MS and the happenings on the ground. There is need to staff develop the lecturers too on the MS. When this scheme was introduced lecturers were not initiated on its essence. College TP policy should emphasize on the dialogical interaction between lecturer-mentor, lecturer-student and mentor-student.

Future of MS

The student, mentor and lecturer wanted the system to continue but with improvements. 98% of the students wanted the mentors sensitized on their role by the Ministry or the college so that TP would be beneficial for all students. Students also wanted their mentors' marks considered on their final assessment, as part of college policy, a thing which colleges are now practising. 98% of the mentors wanted some in-service so that they could keep head and shoulders above the students. Very few (17%) indicated that they also learn from students. All lecturers felt that the system should continue but be enhanced through training of mentors (84%), and through employment of a definite criteria for mentor selection (75%). 68% of the lecturers wanted mentors marks considered for final grades of students on TP.

Way Forward

Some analysis of the implications of the findings discussed above is necessary especially now considering that the attachment system is gaining strength. As highlighted in the findings, lecturers and mentors held different conceptions of college guidelines, held different conceptions of TP and also different conceptions of their roles. The main recommendation is that there is need for a greater cooperation between the school and college so that these differences in conceptions are ironed out.

In view of the major findings, this study is for the adoption of the inquiry-oriented model of initial teacher preparation. The study finds the model offering an excellent alternative conceptualization that appropriately recognizes the thoughtful professional aspects of the students on TP. The findings reveal that students are largely portrayed as technicians. The inquiry-oriented model produces autonomous students who are liberated from the unwarranted control of both the lecturers' and the mentors' beliefs. This model, as Richards (1996) says, makes the classroom a laboratory in setting where the student generates and tests own hypotheses and uses the knowledge so acquired as basis for further development. Lecturers and mentors should undergo staff development in the MS under the inquiry-oriented model so that they facilitate the development of students who continuously make a systematic enquiry into the dimensions of own teaching and not to equip students with narrow recipes that are tailored for predicted situations.

The lecturers and mentors need to co-plan that which affects student's classroom practice. If guidelines are to be made then they are only to serve as a print form of what would have been agreed upon.

The student also needs to be heard by both the mentor and the lecturer. College TP policy needs to emphasize on democratic post lesson discussions before awarding of mark. From time to time the school and college should meet to evaluate their efforts and cooperation in the MS. Where gaps are identified strategies for narrowing or even closing them should be put in place. This way the efficacy of the tripartite relationship of mentor, lecturer and student can be enhanced.

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