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A Survey of Bindura University of Science Education Student Teachers' Perceptions of the Mentoring Model of Teaching Practice

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Abstract

The study investigated student teachers' perceptions of the mentoring model of teaching practice that they went through with a view to improving future mentoring programmemes for student teachers from this university and similar institutions in the country. It focused on student teachers' perceptions of the guidance that they received in developing professional skills. Forty-four (44) final year Bachelor of Science Education students and 24 mentors provided data for this study. The results were that pre and post lesson conferences with mentors enabled student teachers to develop new insights into their lessons, improved their reflective practices and that some mentors were reluctant to have student teachers sit in lessons that they were teaching. The study concluded that mentoring was an effective way of initiating student teachers into school practice, improving coherence between the university and schools.

Introduction

The study investigated Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE) student teachers' perceptions of a mentoring programmeme that they went through during twelve weeks of full-time teaching practice. The study focused on student teachers' views on professional skills that they developed as a result of mentoring, the influence of mentoring on their reflective practice and their perceptions of the mentoring that occurred. The study was necessary because mentors for student teachers from this university were not trained or given guidelines on how to perform their duties. In the absence of training or guidelines, mentors were to figure out for themselves how to guide student teachers, resulting in the guidance given varying from one mentor to the other. When such a situation arises it is prudent to look back and assess how the mentoring was conducted so that mistakes in initial programmes are ironed out. Generically, student teachers were given full teaching loads from the onset of teaching practice. They developed teaching skills on their own without day to day guidance from experienced teachers. Research indicates that teacher trainees need to be exposed to practices of experienced teachers so that they are made aware of their craft knowledge. Mentoring is a way of initiating student teachers into teaching in the same way that other professionals like medical doctors or mechanics are inducted in their respective disciplines through internship or apprenticeship. This study uses student teachers' views to establish the nature of mentoring that occurred to them.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What were the student teachers' perceptions of the guidance that they received from mentors?

2. How did student teachers perceive the influence of mentoring on their reflective practice?

3. In the absence of mentor training, how did student teachers perceive the mentoring that occurred?

School Attachment

The trend of teacher training world over is that trainees spend long periods on school attachment. McCulloch (1993), Russel, et al.(1993), Alsop and Benson (1997) and McGoey and Ross (1999) advocate that at least three quarters of student teachers' professional training time be spent in schools. They argued that teaching can only be developed through experience in the classroom and that schools are the only suitable places for the relevant learning of how to teach. Theory alone cannot substitute the experience that is gained from a real classroom situation. Long periods of classroom practice enable student teachers to master a wide range of essential teaching competencies and make them examine and experiment the conceptions of teaching and learning that they bring with them to teacher training programmes (Hewson, et. al. 1999). Success of student teachers' school attachment is measured by how well they are encouraged to teach and the actual teaching that goes on in the classroom (Hayward, 1997). The gap is usually kept at a minimum when student teachers are attached to mentors who guide their classroom practices.

Models of Teaching Practice.

Hayward (1997:16-20) identified four models of teaching practice used by the Oxford interns. These were the apprenticeship, theory into practice, reflective-practice and the practical theorising models. In the apprenticeship model, student teachers imitate the classroom practices of their mentors. Mentors coach student teachers to acquire teaching competencies and skills which enable them to develop into effective teachers (Berliner, 1996). Student teachers need some educational theories to guide their imitations of experienced teachers. The theory into practice model requires that student teachers have practice guided by theory so that they may reflect well on their practices. The reflective practice model compels student teachers to justify the rationale for applying certain educational theories in the classroom. In this model, teaching is perceived in terms of teachers' thinking and their use of reflectivity to guide their practice (Hextal, et. al; 1991). For one to make meaningful reflection one needs a rich teaching background on which to base reflection. This invokes the practical theorizing model that asserts that student teachers come to training institutions with their perceptions and beliefs about teaching and learning (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1999). These perceptions and beliefs are to be tested in the real classroom situation to see their effectiveness before they are accepted as theory that guides their practice.

The Model used by BUSE

The model used by BUSE students on school attachment was an eclectic one, which utilized the positive aspects of the four models discussed above. Student

teachers practise teaching under mentors who assist them to learn the skills and artistry of teaching. This enables student teachers to share the expertise and craft knowledge of their mentors through imitative interactions. Brown and McIntyre (1988:7) perceived craft knowledge as "that part of their knowledge which teachers acquire primarily through practical experience in the classroom, which is for the most part not articulated in words." It is primarily the acquisition of craft knowledge that the apprenticeship model was adopted. The model was not used alone because it puts too much autonomy in experienced teachers without input from the university to assess how well student teachers were applying teaching and learning theories. The combined theory into practice and apprenticeship models enables student teachers to have their practice guided by educational theories. This makes mentors to guide student teachers using their teaching experiences and in ways that are consistent with classroom practices recommended by research to be effective.

The theory into practice model ignore the specific concerns of mentors and dwells on the primacy of the theoretical knowledge student teachers bring to the attachment school (Hayward, 1997). On the other hand the apprenticeship model cannot inform the unreflective student teachers on what to do when they decide to deviate from the practices of their mentors. The two models are used jointly with the reflective practice model. The reflective practice model perceives teaching as depending on teachers' actions and what influences those actions. The use of the reflective practice model enables student teachers to justify the grounds on which they base their practices but do not develop in them the skills and habits required in the theorizing necessary to analyze teaching. One can be a reflective practitioner without necessarily becoming an effective teacher. It is out of this realisation that the reflective practice model is

blended with the practical theorizing model. The practical theorizing model is used because student teachers do not come to the university blank of ideas on teaching and learning. It is therefore, naive to dwell on the ideal practices suggested by research and ignore their perceptions and epistemological beliefs. The practical theorizing model enables student teachers to theorize about their perceptions of teaching and learning and encourage them to put their beliefs into practice in the classroom. This model makes student teachers accept theories as valid knowledge after testing their success and applicability in the classroom. Mentors discuss with student teachers appropriate ways of applying their theories and make suggestions of improvement in the context of the attachment school. The use of the merits of the four models enable student teachers to be exposed to a variety of classroom practices. The apprenticeship model is adopted for imparting craft knowledge to student teachers. The theory into practice model for enabling student teachers to put into practice the numerous theories that are learnt on campus. The reflective practice model for enabling student teachers to have a critical analysis of their practices and the use of the practical theorizing model is to ensure that student teachers test the effectiveness of their perceptions and beliefs about teaching before accepting them as valid knowledge that guides their practices.

Population

The population of this study was 56 students doing Bachelor of Science Education (BSc. Ed) in final year and their mentors. BSc. Ed students at BUSE do a concurrent degree in two science subjects and Education. When students are deployed to schools Heads appoint teachers to act as mentors. The criteria

used by Heads to appoint mentors are not made explicit to the university. The survey shows that 21% of the mentors held CE/Dip.Ed; 54,5% held BSc. degrees without a teaching qualification; 21% held B.Ed; 8% held Grad.CE and 4% held Licentiate in Education. At times several student teachers in one school were attached to Senior Teachers or Heads of Departments resulting in the number of mentors being lower than that of student teachers on school attachment. For this study 50% of the respondents were Heads of Departments, 21% were Senior Teachers, 4% were Deputy Heads and 25% were teachers without administrative responsibilities (Appendix I).

Instruments

The major goal of the study was to describe student teachers' perceptions of the mentoring programme that they went through. For this to be possible interviews and questionnaires were conducted on student teachers and their mentors. Collecting data from student teachers alone was likely to overshadow intangible features inherent in the two groups. With data from the two groups it was possible to triangulate the existence of certain traits and subsequently compare and contrast accounts from one group with those of another in order to produce a full and balanced report. The twenty-one closed questions set aimed at obtaining as representative a range of responses as possible from the universe of competencies expected of newly qualified teachers. Competencies expected of newly qualified teachers were extracted from (1992) and Cohen, et al; (1996). The rationale for adapting these competencies was to see whether or not student teachers developed them while under training. Questions were set under

scheming, lesson planning, lesson delivery, and assessment. In addition to closed-ended questions, interview schedules and open-ended questions were constructed to get information on the influence of mentoring on student teachers' reflective practice and their views of the mentoring that occurred. After setting the questionnaires, lecturers in the Pedagogics Unit of the university were consulted for their opinions about how well the items reflected the competencies identified. The Kuder-Richardson formula gives an internal reliability of the student teachers' questionnaire items of 0.93 and that of mentors 0.84. This means that 93% and 84% of the variance in given responses by student teachers and mentors respectively are true score variances.

Procedure

The questionnaires for student teachers were administered in a lecture at the beginning of the semester after school attachment. Students were not told prior to the lecture that they would be asked to fill the questionnaires. Forty-four (44) students present filled the questionnaires and those absent were excluded from the study. The assessment critiques generated by the researcher, other university supervisors and the external assessor formed sources of data for this

study. The geographical location of the schools in the survey could not allow the researcher to personally administer the questionnaires to the mentors. Postal questionnaires were considered on the merit that mentors could fill them at their convenient time and post them back. Anonymity of the respondents was believed to increase the frankness of responses. Forty questionnaires were mailed to mentors through Heads of schools and about 43% were returned by the time data was to be analyzed. After such a low turn out seven schools from each of the seven provinces where student teachers had been deployed were visited. Mentors at schools visited were interviewed to probe their responses and those who had not mailed back the questionnaires were asked to fill them. In all 60% of the mentors completed questionnaires that provided data for this study.

Results

Research Question 1. Student teachers' perceptions of assistance received from mentors

Table 1
Student teachers' and mentors' perceived assistance

Category	Students' Responses (n =44)				Mentors' Responses (n =24)			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
A Scheming	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Choice of topic for mentors	30	68	10	23	16	67	0	0
Collaborative scheming	30	68	10	23	19	79	3	13
Logical order of covering topics	33	75	10	23	20	83	3	13
Framing scheme aims	15	34	28	64	18	75	6	25
Correct use of scheme format	26	59	18	41	21	88	3	12
Evaluation of schemes	21	48	23	52	18	75	6	25
Average responses		59		38		78		15

B Lesson Planning								
Choice of lesson topic	12	27	32	73	14	58	10	42
Framing lesson objectives	10	23	34	77	12	50	12	50
Depth of lesson content	17	39	24	55	21	88	2	8
Setting differentiated work	17	39	25	57	11	46	11	46
Choice of media	22	50	21	48	14	58	8	33
Average responses		36		62		60		36
C Lesson Delivery								
Introducing a lesson	27	61	17	39	19	79	3	13
Organising pupils' activities	24	55	18	41	20	83	2	8
Classroom management	24	55	20	45	19	79	5	21
Effective questioning	21	48	23	52	18	75	4	17
Probing pupils' responses	26	59	18	41	16	67	6	25
Average responses		56		44		77		17
D Assessment								
Marking pupils written work	22	50	22	50	19	79	2	8
Appropriateness of written work	24	55	20	45	21	88	1	4
Follow up on corrections	20	45	20	45	19	79	2	8
Regular checks on pupils' mark profiles	24	55	19	43	18	75	3	13
Regular checks of TP files	13	30	29	66	13	54	8	33
Average responses		47		50		75		13

rx=0.93 r= 0.56 ry=0.84

Note: r is Pearson's correlation coefficient, rx and ry are the internal reliability coeficients of the students' and mentors' questionnaires found by using Kuder-Richardson's formula.

The correlation coefficient of 0.56 suggests that the relationship between student teachers' responses and those of the mentors were not strong. This means that student teachers' responses on a particular item may not be used to

predict that of mentors. On individual items the percentage of student teachers' responses acknowledging receipt of assistance was generally lower than that of mentors. The contrasting perception of assistance received and given between student teachers and their mentors could have arisen from the differences in philosophy and perspectives on teaching of the two groups. Due to this disparity data analysis centre mainly on the responses of student teachers because this was the goal of the study.

Perceptions of the Assistance Received in Scheming

Student teachers were asked to use the university scheme format but were also allowed to use formats existing at their attachment schools, if the school authorities insisted. However, all of them were allowed to use the university format. This made their scheming uniform. From Table I it can be seen that 68% of the student teachers acknowledged receiving assistance in choosing a topic for scheming, 68% on collaborative scheming, 75% were assisted to arrange topics for scheming in a logical order and 59% were helped to use the scheme format correctly.

Perceptions on Help Received in Lesson Planning

Student teachers were expected to make a detailed lesson plan for every lesson that they taught. The major purpose of the detailed lesson plan was to assist student teachers to prepare for their lessons in advance so that they could deliver them well. Table I shows that 32% of the student teachers said that they received assistance in framing lesson objectives, 39% in choosing the depth of

content to be covered in a lesson, 39% in setting differentiated work and 50% in choosing media.

Perceptions on Help Received in Lesson Delivery

Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the student teachers acknowledged that they were helped to select and sequence the content of a lesson, 55% on organizing class discussions, 48% on speaking in the classroom and 61% on using the chalkboard. 61% of the student teachers acknowledged receiving assistance in introducing a lesson, 55% in organizing pupils' activities, 55% in classroom management and 59% in probing pupils' responses (Table I).

Perceptions on Help Received in Assessing Pupils' Work

Fifty percent (50%) of the student teachers said that they were helped by mentors to evaluate pupils' written work, 55% were helped to set challenging exercises, 45% to set remedial work and make follow-ups on pupils' corrections, 55% on maintaining a profile of pupils' progress and 30% on regular checking of their teaching practice files (Table I). Reports of the external assessor and university tutors indicated that some student teachers rarely kept their teaching practice files up to date.

Research Question 2: Student teachers' perceptions of the influence of mentoring on their reflective practice.

Sixty-eight (68%) percent of the student teachers attached to qualified teachers said that "they held pre and post lesson conferences" with their mentors. In pre

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nferences" with their mentors. In pre

lesson conferences student teachers said that they discussed lesson objectives, media to be used in the lesson, teaching methods to be used and possible classroom management techniques. After delivering the lesson in which the mentor was sitting in, post lesson conferences were organized in which student teachers were asked to reflect on the actions and decisions made in the lesson. The student teachers asserted that these conferences enabled them to make "systematic investigations of the grounds that influenced their actions in planning the lesson and executing it"

Research Question 3: Student teachers' perceptions of the mentoring that occurred in the absence of mentor training

Interviews with Heads/Deputy Heads, mentors and student teachers were carried out to determine the mentoring that occurred. These interviews revealed that 43% of the mentors were hesitant to give student teachers as much guidance as they were capable of giving because they feared to "contradict with student teachers' theoretical knowledge of how they were taught to teach". Some student teachers said that the mentors who anticipated this situation ended to comment on their classroom performance without pursuing the hinking that prompted their actions and performance. For instance, these nentors could suggest that student teachers "organize group work, let pupils work out problems on their own, improve questioning techniques etc" without aborating why these were necessary things to do. Some student teachers 1%) said that they were given "a fixed teaching load at the beginning of the achment period". They were expected to learn about "teaching while

teaching" by being left alone to "swim or sink" in the classroom without intervention from the mentors unless they approached them for help. They said that their mentors believed that "good teaching depended on one's personality, beliefs and perceptions of how pupils learn and that student teachers were expected to figure out their own ways of teaching". This view reinforced the idiosyncratic orientation that endorses personal preference and experience as the basis of shaping one's classroom practices. Student teachers under Heads of Departments and Senior Teachers said that they were "supervised rather than mentored because the mentors were always busy and appeared when they wanted to make assessment reports". Heads/Deputy Heads alluded that Heads of Departments and Senior Teachers were chosen as mentors in order "to reduce their teaching loads so that they could carry out their administrative duties without disadvantaging their classes". In some cases student teachers were approached to replace absent teachers because they had low teaching loads resulting in some of them complaining that they were sometimes turned into "relief teachers". 32% of the student teachers said that they were not allowed to enter mentors' classrooms and those of other teachers in the department in order to observe how they conducted their lessons. This resulted in the affected student teachers failing to fill in classroom observation schedules that were to be filed fortnightly.

Discussion

Mentoring recognizes that successful classroom practice by student teachers is an art that requires insight, knowledge and assistance from experienced teachers. Student teachers on school attachment need mentors to give them feedback on how well they were coping with their classroom practice and help

in cases where they face professional problems. Mentoring improves student teachers' classroom practices and their commitment to duty (Portner, 1998; Duke, 1990). Without assistance from mentors Portner (1998: 4) purported that the student teachers "merely cope with the day to day classroom practices without teaching well".

Student Teachers' Perceptions on Professional Guidance given by Mentors

Student teachers' perceptions of assistance given in framing scheme aims and lesson plan objectives were generally low (34% and 23% respectively). There are two major factors that contribute to this scenario, namely, mentors' qualifications and teaching experience. In order to ensure useful mentoring programmes, experienced qualified and successful teachers should be chosen to be mentors. Teachers with first degrees only did not command much respect from student teachers because student teachers felt that they "were more knowledgeable on professional skills." Chen (1993); (1998) and Duke (1990) believed that when student teachers are attached to under qualified teachers they resent their assistance on the grounds that such teachers may not posses sufficient ground to guide them. Qualified teachers shared their experience with student teachers by bringing to the fore realities, practicalities and constraints of classroom practice that were guided by educational theories. Through years of experience, they accumulated tried and tested strategies for handling different situations in the classroom, know how to break down syllabus content into teachable units and can match concepts with pupils' cognitive levels (Stephens, 1984; Portner 1998; Fish 1995). Experienced teachers also imparted their craft knowledge to student teachers and provided suggestions that worked in the classroom which student teachers emulated.

Mentors' guidance enabled student teachers to evaluate pupils' performance consistently. Assessment of pupils' performance is a subtle exercise because it requires student teachers to combine "humanitarian concerns with genuine objectivity so that the truth about pupils' performance is told without breaking their spirit" (Stephens, 1984:79). Through mentors' guidance student teachers combined assessment with empathy and gave constructive and supportive comments on pupils' performance. By making comments that encouraged pupils to work hard student teachers assessed pupils' progress on the basis of a comparison of their current performance with previous ones rather than comparing a pupil with the rest of the class. This kind of assessment enabled the student teachers to identify content pupils had mastered and where they were having problems so that relevant remedial work was set on the needs of the pupils.

Perceptions on Student Teachers' Reflective Practice

It was necessary that student teachers were attached to mentors so that they could be assisted to deliver their lessons well by developing skills of reflection on their practice. Teaching provided student teachers with new experiences every time that they walked into the classroom and demanded that successful and experienced teachers were available to assist them to reflect on strategies and assessment techniques that they employed at every stage of the lesson (Portner. 1998). The pre- and post lesson discussions held with mentors enabled student teachers to develop the skills of reflection and made informed decisions on how to teach, decide on when to teach whole classes, groups or individuals, motivate pupils to learn, review teaching sessions and improve future lessons.

The skills of reflection that student teachers developed as result of mentoring enabled them to continually improve their practice.

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the student teachers who were attached to qualified teachers said that mentoring influenced their reflective practice. They purported that the pre-lesson and post- lesson conferences that they held with mentors helped them to make "systematic investigations on the grounds for professional action." Pre-lesson discussions where student teachers and mentors discussed lesson objectives, teaching strategies, media and ways of monitoring pupils' learning were organized before lessons in which student teachers were to teach with the mentors sitting in. In the pre-visit discussions mentors asked probing questions in ways that encouraged student teachers to have fresh visions of teaching the lessons. Mentors made suggestions that enriched lesson delivery, set targets of professional practice to be focused on, and instilled confidence in the student teachers to reflect on how they could handle their lessons. Reflection in this sense was thinking through consequences of the student teacher's plans, actions and modifications based on thoughtful considerations of the discussions (McCulloch, 1993; Hayward, 1997; Portner, 1998). After the lesson delivery student teachers said that post-lesson discussions were organized in which mentors continued to coach them on how some aspects of the teaching/learning process could be improved. In the post lesson discussions the student teachers were encouraged to reflect on the theories, beliefs or views on good practice that influenced the planning and teaching of the lesson. During these discussions mentors encouraged the student teachers to assess the effectiveness of the lesson, identify factors that contributed or interfered with pupil learning and to consider possible waysin

which they could have used alternative instructional strategies to improve the lesson (Porter, 1998).

Pre and post lesson discussions enabled student teachers to "develop insights that improved their practices in later lessons". The mentors who organized debriefing sessions said that student teachers were "receptive to advice they gave and implemented suggestions made". As a result of student teachers' willingness to take advice given, the mentors purported that "their lessons tended to improve with time". The student teachers that occasionally held pre and post lesson conferences acknowledged that mentoring influenced their reflective practice, understanding of pupils' needs and improved their decision making in the classroom. This was consistent with findings from Chen (1993:46) which concluded that discussions between mentors and student teachers improve the latter group's reflective thinking and influenced their "cognition, pupils' requirements and teaching actions".

Student Teachers' Perceptions of the Mentoring that took place in Schools

It was a fallacy that the university expected mentors to carry out their duties without induction because it is not always the case that by virtue of years of successful classroom practice teachers automatically become good mentors (Stephens, 1984). Successful mentoring is based on a thorough knowledge of what mentors are expected to do with student teachers. With a clear vision of their duties, mentors understand that the success of mentoring depend on the relationship that develop between them and the student teachers. Mutual trust between the two parties allows mentors to develop a genuine understanding of student teachers' actions and needs, and in turn, student teachers come to accept

the advice given by mentors. Mutual trust also enables mentors to carry out their "relating" and "coaching" roles well (Portner, 1998; Stephens, 1984). In coaching roles mentors "fine tune" student teachers' professional skills and enable them to expand their teaching modalities by observing the mentors and colleagues in their department teaching. Student teachers said that most mentors in the study were "reluctant to let them sit in lessons they were teaching". This may indicate that mentors were not aware of their coaching and guiding roles in which they were to impart their craft knowledge by allowing student teachers to observe and imitate their practices. Being observed is sometimes an uncomfortable experience even if the purpose of the observation has been specified and agreed upon as essentially a learning experience rather than an assessment one (Fish, 1995). Mentors committed to improve student teachers' practices should be free to allow them to sit in their lessons and discuss with them the way they conduct their lessons and the reasons behind their decisions and actions. Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) maintained that mentoring should challenge the traditional isolation among teachers and improve teaching by fostering norms of collaboration and shared inquiry that creates opportunities for teachers in one department to visit each others' classrooms. The inter class visits benefit both the student teachers and teachers in the department because both parties continue to improve their practice through discussions, experimentation, reflection and collaboration

This study revealed that some mentors were hesitant to give student teachers as much guidance as they were capable of giving because "they feared to contradict with their theoretical knowledge". This happened because there was no coherence between the university and attachment schools. In ideal situations mentors and university tutors have equal contributions to the knowledge

student teachers need to apply on school experience so that neither group gives student teachers conflicting advice. Tutors and mentors have useful knowledge that could be valuable to improve student teachers' classroom practice. Mentors possess unique practical knowledge on the feasible situations that work in their schools and tutors have generalized research embedded knowledge on how ideal teaching/learning should be organized. Integration of expertise from mentors and tutors require collaborative planning, implementation and evaluation of student teachers' school programmes (Corney, 1993). Without collaboration between the university and schools, school attachment programmes may be made on "'unrealistic assumption that a straightforward continuity of perspectives between schools and the university were possible and desirable" (Hayward, 1997:18).

Some student teachers (43%) purported that their mentors were caught in the dilemma of "fearing to contradict with student teachers and being ignorant of what to do with them because the university had not given mentors a blue print on what to do". These mentors left student teachers to "swim or sink" in the classroom by letting them teach full loads from the onset of school attachment without their guidance while others supervised them in ways they were guided when they were student teachers themselves. Leaving student teachers alone in the classroom was a model of school attachment in the eighties when the focus of training was on quantity rather than quality (Bourdillon, 1983). The belief then was that teaching skills developed with constant practice in the classroom and that student teachers were to ease the shortage of personnel in schools. With emerging research indicating that teaching was more than just achieving curriculum objectives but a complex profession that reflects on what guide teachers' decisions and actions in the classroom, the focus of school attachment

changed (Hextall, 1991; McCulloch, 1993; Chen, 1993 and Hayward, 1997). Student teachers start teaching from their own ideas and preconceptions that may need some modifications in order that practical realities of schools and pupils are met. This view prompted that student teachers be attached to mentors who guide them on classroom practice and gradually be given autonomy in the classroom rather than get a fixed load at the beginning of the attachment period. Corney (1993) suggested that successful school attachment require student teachers to get guidance from mentors at the beginning of the attachment period then depending on their learning and confidence be progressively given greater responsibility while continuing to work under mentors, contrary to the "swim or sink" notion. The "swim or sink" notion emphasized personal orientation which promoted student teachers' own learning and development and not "a coherent perspective on teaching, learning and learning to reflect on their practice" (Feiman-Nemser 1990:1).

Conclusion

The emphasis of teacher training programmes world over is that student teachers on teaching practice be attached to mentors. Mentoring anticipates that clear guidance from mentors enable student teachers to develop three qualities of teaching, 'interactive teaching, general professional qualities and educational thinking' Corney (1993:725). In interactive teaching student teachers achieve appropriate levels of pupils' interaction that enable them to understand the content under review. General professional qualities refer to

collaboration with colleagues in the school and treating all pupils fairly despite their multicultural backgrounds. Qualities of educational thinking refer to student teachers' ability to reflect on professional decisions and actions and accommodating pupils' individual differences during lesson planning, selecting examples and handling class discussions. Reflective practice enables student teachers to continually improve their practices through a re-examination of what they do in their lessons followed by an analytical thinking of the decisions and actions taken and making suggestions for improving future lessons. Mentors are engaged as school based teacher educators to enable student teachers to develop the skills of reflection (Duke, 1990; Chen, 1993; Feiman-Nemser and Parker, 1993 and Alsop and Benson, 1997). This study showed that mentors provided student teachers with assistance in securing professional skills and all the things they lacked because they had not taught before and the new things they needed to know in order to teach their lessons well. The quality of mentoring depended on mentors' qualifications and positions they held in the schools. Whilst teachers with first degrees without teaching qualifications helped student teachers to acquire some professional skills, the assistance they gave was not taken in the same spirit by student teachers because they felt that they were not competent enough to lead them on professional matters. To make student teachers respect mentors' assistance, successful qualified teachers in the school should be appointed mentors. On the other hand Heads of Departments and Senior teachers did not provide satisfactory mentoring as they had a tendency to let student teachers practice teaching alone. Successful mentoring depended on coherence between the university and schools in order to enable mentors to carry out their duties without coming into conflict with tutors and student teachers' theoretical knowledge. Coherence also enabled mutual trust to develop between mentors

and student teachers. Mutual trust was important in mentoring because it created environments that allowed either side to develop a genuine understanding of each other's needs and allowed the two parties to share their experiences and reflections honestly. This enabled student teachers, mentors and teachers in the department to sit in each other's lessons, thus breaking the isolation among teachers to remain in their classrooms alone. Interclass visits are healthy because they allow teachers in one department to discuss and reflect on their practices.

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APPENDIX 1

Demographic Data

MALES	72%
FEMALES	28%
AGE: Below 25	0%
26 to 30	36%
31 to 35	40%
36 to 40	12,5%
41 to 45	5,75%
46 to 50	0%
Above 51	5,75%

Qualifications

CE/DIP.ED	21%
BSC.only	54,5%
B.ED.	21%
Licentiate in Education	3,5%

Qualified Experience

0 to 5 years	20%
6 to 10 years	50%
11 to 15 years	20%
Above 15 years	10%

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