

Mentoring Beginning Teachers: Bridging the Gap between Pre-service Training and In-practice Realities

Wasonga, C. O, Wanzare, Z. O and Dawo, J. I
Maseno University

Research on quality and relevance of pre-service teacher training programmes has found out that their products are ill-prepared for service delivery in schools. This is because there seems to be a disconnect between the college curriculum and the job in-practice. Given the critical nature of teacher input in the teaching-learning chain of curriculum implementation, many authorities have recommended that teacher preparation for primary, secondary, and tertiary education be restructured to address the anomalies to suit the dynamic educational environment. Available literature indicates that inadequacy in teacher training programmes is not unique to any particular state, county, or region. Several scholars, task-forces, and commissions of inquiry have suggested viable approaches for improved teacher training quality but there has been minimal progress. It is therefore necessary to come up with in-service options that would bridge the gap in question. One such in-built mechanism is mentoring that would take place either formally or informally in schools. Both the mentor and the protégé gain hence, wholesomely, improved service delivery to pupils for quality education.

Key Words: Mentoring, beginning teachers, pre-service training, in-practice realities

Pre-service training programmes that prepare prospective teachers have considerable variation from one institution to another, and country to another. The overall aim is for the graduating teachers to handle learners with diverse characteristics towards social, economic, academic and emotional growth and well-being. Goodlad (1990) noted several common components which include; subject matter preparation, a series of foundation courses such as philosophy of education, and a sequence of experiences. These however, involved a disjointed collection of courses, and field experiences. A 1996 report by the National Commission on Teaching and American Future identified several challenges to

quality teacher education. They included: inadequate time allocated to train a teacher jeopardizing learning the subject matter and the nature of learners learning; fragmented and disconnected courses which are difficult to bind into coherent whole; poor role modeling by uninspired and unexciting course trainers who rely on lecturing and recitation; little depth in subject matter offered in a superficial curriculum; theoretical courses that seem irrelevant to actual teaching; and method courses that are not oriented towards practice.

A study carried out in Kisumu East District in Kenya on induction needs of beginning teachers noted that among the inadequacies experienced by teachers in the

new job were orientation, mentoring, seminars and workshops (Saoke, 2010). This influenced their perception of the new job, negatively to a large extent, against the background a disconnect between pre-service training and in-practice realities. The findings were in harmony with Goodlad (1990) who carried out a 5 year study on teacher education institutions and concluded that “teacher education train is not on the tracks. Further, the engine is neither coupled to the cars, nor the cars to one another... The directors do not seem to know where it should go, nor where it is going...” He called for more coherent programmes with a focus on preparing teachers to meet challenges in actual practice in a dynamic teaching environment. This demand that changes be made in the conduct and content of teacher training practice.

Quality teacher training should be evaluated based on Stufflebeam’s Context-Input-Process-Product (CIPP) model (Worthen & Sanders, 1987) or else the intention of teacher training, the training procedures and content may not be in pursuit of the expected results. Stufflebeam’s theory (1973) puts emphasis on methods and approaches that are in use that should be evaluated to determine whether they enable achievements of objectives. Context evaluation provides the rationale for justifying the training programme as an intervention to some unmet needs in the society; In-put evaluation identifies the potential of a programme strategy to provide a logical response to a specified society need; Process evaluation helps to provide feedback on whether programme implementation is oriented towards the achievement of the set objectives or it needs revision or re-orientation; and Product evaluation involves comparison between the probable result and the initial objectives. The aim is to take note of the discrepancies and address them for

improved quality products immediately. However this may take quite long yet every passing moment, the beginning teachers are subjecting learners in their charge to less than quality learning hours that eventually translate into undesirable end-course consequences. Kenya suggested this (Republic of Kenya, 2005) but half a decade later, little effort has been made to enforce restructuring of teacher training. There is urgent need for educationists to come up with practical alternative make-up for the shortfall.

Several studies decry the relevance of teacher training, and several proposals have been put forth to address the pre-service deficit by way of in- service courses. Most of this professional development experiences for teachers fail to make an impact because one-short-workshop is inefficient as topics are selected by different people other than the ones receiving it and follow- up support is rare (Fullan, 2003), besides assuming that all schools have the same in-practice realities. It is because of such inadequacies that it is important to pursue mentoring as an in-house in-service staff development process that is minimally expensive in personnel and time and relevant for the leaner teacher in a specific educational institution.

CONCEPTIONS OF BEGINNING TEACHER COMPETENCE

Beginning teachers have a wealth of experience from pre-training, in-training and post-training engagements that may influence their teaching. Reynolds (1992); Danielson (1999); and Darling-Hammond, Wise & Klein (1999) who listed the following:

- some understanding about pedagogy appropriate for the content they are expected

to teach which they acquired during their pre-service education;

- knowledge of the subject matter they are expected to teach;
- knowledge of strategies, techniques, and tools for creating and sustaining a learning community, and the skills and abilities to employ these strategies;
- the disposition to find out about their students and school, and the ethnographical skills to do so;
- the disposition to reflect on their own actions and students' responses in order to improve their teaching and strategies and tools for doing so; and
- knowledge about learners and learning, human growth and development, motivation and behaviour, learning theory, learning differences, and cognitive psychology.

Available literature suggests that the teaching fraternity may be expecting far beyond the ability of the novice teachers. This makes them to suffer lack of professional support and isolation leading to a lonely stroll into teaching. Danielson (1999) described this entry as a 'swim or sink in the deep-end of the pool' situation. Wanzare (2007) cited several authors who noted that beginning teachers respond to resulting frustration in ways some of which negate the course of teaching. These include:

- adopting teaching styles which they had formerly disapproved of, leaving them guilty and more frustrated (Ballantyne, et al.1995);
- developing negative, emotional, physical, attitudinal, and behavioural problems, such as I-don't-care attitudes and laziness (Wilson and Cameron, 1994; Dussault et al, 1997; Schmidt and Knowles, 1994);

- quitting the teaching profession, leading to loss of potentially-good teachers (Fieman-Nemser, et al, 1999, citing Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gordon and Maxley, 2000; Huling-Austin, 1989, citing Sclechty and Vance, 1983);
- Developing survival mentality, a set of restricted teaching methods, and a resistance to curricular and instructional change that may last through-out their teaching careers , and which in the long run may prevent instruction from occurring(Huling-Austin, 1986; 1989; Romatowski et al, 1989);
- diminishing commitment to continued teaching (Ryan, 1992);
- developing feelings of disappointment, disillusion, and failure-failing their students, school administrators, colleague teachers, students' parents, and often most painful, themselves (Ryan, 1992; Zepeda and Ponticell, 1996); and
- developing feelings of being overwhelmed and uncertain (Feiman-Nemser et al, 1999).

THE IMPORTANCE OF MENTORSHIP TO PRACTICING TEACHERS

The term 'mentoring' was derived from a tale about Mentor , the friend of Ulysses who was entrusted with the care of Ulysses' son before he embarked on epic voyages. Mentor took all-round care of the son developing him morally, spiritually, emotionally and mentally into a responsible individual. Mentoring is the process of facilitating the development of a fellow who is relatively new by another who is comparably more knowledgeable and experienced through mutual trust and sharing. The concept of mentoring in educational setting has rapidly increased in use as a vehicle to reforming teaching and teacher education since 1980s(Little &

Nelson, 1990) with the hope that experienced teachers would not only model but also help novices learn new pedagogies besides socializing professionally.

According to Kram(1983) mentoring has two broad functions:

i. Career functions, which are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance career development which may or may not be limited to sponsorship, coaching, exposure, visibility, protection, challenging, work and assignments.

ii. Psychological functions, which are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhanced a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and effectiveness in the managerial role of an individual employee. They may include aspects of acceptance and confirmation, counseling, role modeling, friendship, special attribute and complementarity.

Tyson and York (2006) asserted that a mentor is someone usually a work colleague at the same or higher level than the individual, for whom he or she is responsible, to whom he or she is responsible, to whom the individual can go to and discuss work related issues. There is a sense in which the mentoring relationship is similar to that of master-pupil relationship. An individual may be proactive and hence seek mentors from whom he can learn many different issues deliberately or he may go the formal way whereby mentors are assigned to new staff as they are recruited by the organization. It is important to note that a chosen mentor may appear imposed while a freely-chosen mentor may not be forthcoming as not everyone is proactive enough to pick the mentor for himself.

Mentoring relationship is more often oriented towards an exchange of wisdom, support, learning or guidance for purposes

of career growth though sometimes it is used to achieve strategic organizational goals. It is part of talent management activities which organizations engage in to identify, develop, engage, retain and deploy the most talented individuals (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). It is a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, serves as a role model, and befriends a less skilled or experienced person for purposes of promoting the latter's professional and personal development. According to Franke and Dahlgren (1996) it is a professional practice that is emerging as a way for experienced teachers and supervising teachers to offer assistance to new teachers in areas such as syllabus, moral guidance, co-curriculum activities, discipline management of pupils, information on school neighborhood, schools policies, professional ethics, examination techniques, student counseling, and the list is endless. There is need for academic and professional growth for the teachers. Many teachers wish to continue beyond pre-service level training to life-long-learning.

Continuing in-service learning is indispensable if quality is to be expected out of the schooling cycle (Ondieki, 1990). He explained that visionary teacher management systems need to seek ways to bridge the gap in teacher training for one major reason; there is regression- a condition in life that leads to a drop in the level of enthusiasm for one's work. It is decay or deterioration of the level of service given by the teacher. This regression can be manifested in little or no preparation of lessons, little or no planning of lessons, marking student's books in a superficial manner, increased absence from the classroom, forgetting some of the teaching subject content, forgetting how to do certain procedures, and becoming reliant upon few teaching methods regardless of how

inappropriate they may be. On the same note, Nyaoga (2003) revealed that as teacher-experience approached the sixteen-year mark, they suffer efficiency freeze, so neither find preparing lessons and notes vital nor fear the consequences of the feedback. This brings to question, the ceiling of the definition of a 'beginning teacher' who needs mentoring. Is it a newly appointed class teacher, head teacher, head of department, deputy head teacher, games teacher, subject teacher, or a recent entrant into the teaching profession? Does it refer to a teacher on transfer from another station? This implies that staff development programmes such as mentoring should target novices while working with expert practitioners as veterans renew themselves (Wanzare & Da Costa, 2000).

SELECTION AND PLACEMENT OF TEACHER MENTORS

There are no hard-line rules as to who should be a mentor and how the mentoring should be carried out given that to a large extent, its effectiveness relies on voluntary protégé-mentor involvement and commitment. According to Freedman (1993), the most frequently mentioned characteristic of effective mentors is a willingness to nurture another person. Therefore, individuals recruited as mentors should be people-oriented, open-minded, flexible, empathetic, and collaborative.

A valid mentor should be one within proximity of the protégé. Teachers within the same staff are the immediate environment from which mentors can be identified Gehrke (1998) noted that several studies have suggested that a successful mentor-protégé relationship requires 'desire by both parties'. In addition to personal and professional traits, there are other pertinent ways of establishing appropriate matches. These include a gender match; a common

ethnic, racial, cultural, or class background; similarity of work assignments; and others (Freedman, 1993).

School authority may purport to understand the backgrounds of prospective mentors and beginning teachers and therefore match management styles and social interactions. There may also be room for spontaneous matching through natural attraction into mentor-protégé relationship. The ultimate goal as indicated by several studies is to progress a teacher from being a novice, advanced beginning teacher, competent teacher, proficient teacher, and expert. Mentors should therefore be teachers who are able to groom protégés through these stages loaded with the baggage of uncertainty, inexperience, personal issues, and professional expectations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER MENTOR

Functional mentorship varies depending on the needs of the protégé based on their pre-service training and other pre-teaching experiences of which a mentor must facilitate to harmonize with the organizational vision. In all circumstances, the mentor should appear as a professional helper, neither a supervisor nor an evaluator. Gay (1995) describes mentoring as complex, challenging and demanding. He explains that to be effective, the mentor must be able to demonstrate a range of cognitive coaching competencies, such as posing carefully constructed questions to stimulate reflection, paraphrasing, probing, using wait-time, and collecting and using data to improve teaching and learning.

In a synthesis of literature by Dawo (2011), these include the following:

- Knowledgeable of the beginning teachers' needs; (Kajs, Alainz, William,

Maier, Brott & Gomez, 2011, Wang et al, 2008, Wanzare, 2007).

- Good interpersonal skills (Simatwa, 2010)
- Willing to protect the protégé from major mistakes by limiting their exposure to responsibility (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007, Kajs et al, 2011)
- Having internalized knowledge of the organizational vision (King, 2000)
- Role model in word and deed (Simatwa, 2010, De Paul, 2000)
- Interested in the development of other staff for the benefit of the organizational whole (Wanzare, 2007, Wang et al, 2008)
- Patient enough to continue with or repeat processes where necessary, till the protégé is eventually able to walk alone (Indoshi, 2003)
- Respectful of the protégés potential resourcefulness during induction process (Kajs, et al 2011, Carroll & Gillen, 2001)
- Objectively evaluates others and gives feedback (King, 2000, De Paul, 2000)
- Willing to be evaluated by others for feedback mechanism (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007)
- Experienced and mature in thought and behaviour (King, 2000, Carroll & Gillen, 2001).

ANDRAGOGICAL MENTORING APPROACH FOR COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Earlier learning experiences might have been far from effective or comfortable, so that many adults have developed poor learning habits or become apprehensive about further learning (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). Traditional pedagogical approach to adult learning rarely contain within them a vision of challenges which face teachers, schools and students in their

unique educational setting that is both dynamic, diversified and varied (Fullan, 2003). They thrive on domineering lecturing monologues. This is in contrast with andragogical instructional techniques which involve; joint planning, self-diagnosis, formulation of learning objectives, collaborative teaching-learning process, dialogue, and protégé' teacher involvement in evaluation of success at given intervals (Tyson & York, 2006).

The teacher protégé is not 'tabularasa' and the mentor ought to appreciate and exploit this opportunity. In fact, mentoring, just like coaching is a collaborative process (Gay, 1995). Adult learners have a deep and powerful drive to be self-directing, to be in charge of their developmental destinies, and to take control of their learning processes. Adults have accumulated a substantial reservoir of quality experiences. These not only represent a rich resource for the protégé to build upon and relate new material to, but also can be shared with colleagues, the mentor inclusive. It is therefore important for the mentor and protégé to establish a meaningful relationship that would mediate valuable experiential exchange.

Adults recognize their own need to learn as a function of their developmental stage in life and the pressures they feel such as those to avoid technological obsolescence and so adults learn what they feel they need. Adults want to learn things that will be applicable to work-environment-related challenges that they experience or expect to encounter in the near future. Adults are life centered as they want to know how what they are learning today fit in their long-term career objectives (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). The mentor teacher should understand that their learner is largely intrinsically motivated by the dominant unsatisfied needs in their lives such as self-esteem achievement, competence, self-confidence and self-actualization. A lot of research is being

undertaken to understand in more depth how teacher learning may be connected with pupil learning, teachers' work is being solely and increasingly defined as a comparative "value added" by teachers on pupil achievement (Tatto, 2007).

BENEFITS OF MENTORING TO THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM TO A TEACHER PROTÉGÉ

Results of a study conducted by Orpen (1997) indicated that the better the relationship between the mentors and mentees in the mentoring program, the more mentees were motivated to work hard and felt committed to the organization. The mentees who had close working relationship with their mentors were more motivated and committed than those who were physically distant from their mentors. The experience was even more meaningful if mentors liked and respected them, and enjoyed their interactions. The study also found out that when protégés performed poorly or were unmotivated, it was frequently due to situational factors beyond the control of either party. This included breakdown in machinery, non-co-operation from colleagues, out-dated equipment, inappropriate organizational structure and inadequate training.

Mentoring facilitates the learning-to-learn of employee, contributes to the process of meaning-making in the organization and hence its environment, while meeting the developmental needs of employees (Beardwell & Claydon, 2007). The protégé experiences career development and psychological satisfaction as they are challenged to better understand their jobs and the organization. Mentoring allows the protégé to discuss confusing, perplexing or ambiguous situations, and their innermost feelings and emotions, with somebody they can trust and respect. According to Daloz

(1986), they gain from accumulated wisdom and experience from somebody who is knowledgeable and "street-wise" in the ways of the organization, especially its political workings. For older head teachers looking for new challenges and simulation in their managerial role, mentoring represents an ideal development opportunity. It gives them an opportunity to achieve satisfaction and personal reward by showing in the growth and maturity of another individual.

TO A MENTOR TEACHER

A study by Hawk (1986) involving 178 mentor teachers revealed that more than two-thirds responded "definitely" to the statement that participation in mentoring programs "provided positive professional growth for me". It forced them to focus on and improve their own classroom teaching skills; made them aware of the need for educators to communicate with each other; and helped them better understand the principal and central office supervisors role. This implied that mentoring had residual effects on both the mentor and mentee. As they mentor the quality of their teaching improves as they apply cognitive coaching skills with protégés such as listening, asking inquisitive questions, providing non-judgmental feedback, and by reassessing their classroom management (Clinard & Ariav, 1998).

Through mentoring, mentors are forced to reflect about their own beliefs about teaching, students, learning, and teaching as a career because just as teachers learn more about their subjects by teaching, so does mentoring deepen teaching sensitivity and skill (Tomlinson, 1995). This creates a sense of professional renewal. Mentors have a chance to contribute to the teaching profession by helping less experienced colleagues. This enhances their self-esteem

as they also broaden their circle of interpersonal relations with adults as opposed to pupils and students only.

Mentors gain recognition for their knowledge and expertise and are likely to be identified for positions of responsibility. Freiberg (1996) found that at the end of their tenure as mentors, 100% of them were offered unsolicited positions as a result of their experience in the mentoring program. The positions offered provided opportunities to build on what they had learnt as mentors or combined elements of mentoring and teaching. Mentors can be inspired to research on teacher training, teacher mentoring in an attempt to bridge the gap between college pre-service training, in-service training and practice realities. It can inspire them to want to pursue further education or participate in research at university level.

TO SCHOOL

A school benefits both directly and indirectly from mentoring processes. Enthusiastic welcome and orientation, and mentoring of beginning teachers initiate them into productive participation into institutionalized education. School benefits through reduced attrition by way of application for transfers and resignation which often result in staff shortage, unpredictability and instability. Consistent supervision by a mentor identifies problems which may affect instructional process both in the near and distant future to the disadvantage of learners. Good mentoring inculcates professionalism in a beginning teacher who in future would help mentor novices. Mentoring therefore is an avenue for the creation of a reservoir of high quality teachers hence guarantee of quality education.

CHALLENGES FACING TEACHER MENTORING

- Every case of mentoring is a precedent of its own! This is because each new teacher is an individual who cannot be equated to any previous one. This may require new realms of understanding and tackling of their pre-service and post-training experience to harmonize with the organizational vision. This means that there can hardly be an experienced mentor. Previous experience may in reality be an undoing for future mentoring.
- Like every other educational process, mentoring should be evaluated to find out whether learning has taken place for the protégé to meaningfully participate in teaching activities in the school. Who should do the evaluation? How should the evaluation be done? In case of protégé failure to adjust appropriately, who takes the blame?
- Failure on the part of the protégé, the mentor or both impacts negatively on the academic life of the student who is not on a learning rehearsal. Who should be held accountable for the loss suffered by students subjected by educational authorities to a half-baked teacher?
- Mentoring is to a large extent a voluntary job for which no training would be adequate. The relationship quality would be affected by extraneous factors such as time constraints, availability of relevant equipment and resources, protégé cooperation and learning, and appreciation of the mentoring role by the rest of the teaching staff. It is therefore not possible for authority to ensure continued mentor goodwill throughout the entire process.
- Personality dynamics in the mentor-protégé relationship may result in conflicts some of which may cripple the course of mentorship. For instance, mentors in trying to fit role expectations with role enactment

may end up hindering their ability to critique beginning teacher practices since they are also victims of certain professional malpractices. Sometimes the mentor may not want to appear to criticize the protégé in excess and hence avoid dealing with conflicting views and practices. This implies that the protégés may be subjected to less than valuable learning experience in the full awareness of the mentor.

CONCLUSION

Mentoring processes whether formal or informal for teachers in schools benefit the education system as a whole. Schools have an assurance of quality teaching for better results through improved job performance by its teaching staff. These programs may encourage protégés to grow quickly into the organizational culture, facilitate career adjustment, and develop administrators such as heads of departments, nurture employees skills that may still be raw among college graduates, and help school managements in training other teachers in a school as a continuing learning environment. Mentors find ways of helping their protégés, share their understanding and work effectively, draw upon their own networks to give experience and support to their protégés, and encourage them to develop networks of their own. They discover that as mentors, they too need mentors.

RESEARCH AGENDA

Mentoring approaches: It is important to find out approaches used by various authorities in mentoring beginning teachers and their effect on teacher performance. Mentor teacher performance: It is necessary to assess job performance of the teacher mentor during mentoring and compare with pre-mentoring and post-mentoring period from the perspective of teaching quality.

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