PLANNING AND PREPARATION IN TEACHER TRAINING – VIEWS OF TEACHER TRAINEES

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Abstract:
This study analyses the perceptions of teacher trainees in relation to the assistance they receive from their mentors regarding planning and preparation of lessons during teaching practice. A questionnaire survey was conducted among one hundred and twenty (120) teacher trainees by using the five point Likert scale in which the respondents were asked to evaluate statements on planning and preparation by giving it a quantitative value; in this case the level of agreement or disagreement was the dimension used. The study provides sufficient evidence that University of Botswana teacher trainees are fairly assisted in the planning and preparation of lessons when on teaching practice. This guidance from mentor teachers is adequate evidence that the teacher trainees can work independently in an environment where they are not constantly supervised. While teacher trainees are adequately guided on several dimensions of teaching, data collected and analysed in this study also indicates that there is little communication regarding information on the goals or aims of teaching as a planning activity. At the end, it is evident that planning and preparation, as important ingredients in teacher preparation, can form part of the mentoring programme. Teacher-trainees can internalise these qualities in order to become better teachers upon completion of their teacher training.

Keywords: teacher trainees, preparation, planning, mentors, teaching practice

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1. Introduction

A high quality induction and mentoring programme is essential in order to produce seasoned teachers. Prospective teachers need to understand the culture and ethos of their school, their professional obligations, and be supported in order to develop their teaching practice and integrate it into their school's professional learning communities. Assisting prospective teachers as they are introduced to the trade helps build teaching excellence and improve student outcomes, teacher wellbeing, as well as resilience and retention in the teaching profession (Shrawder & Warner (2006). The aim of an effective mentoring programme is to build the capacity of mentors to support prospective teachers through on-going professional learning embedded in day-to-day practice. The essence of mentoring is anchored on the shared purposes and mutual goals of the mentor and the teacher trainee. This exercise aims at building the capacity and self-efficacy of the prospective teachers which is intended to have a positive impact on improving student learning outcomes.

Planning and preparation are important ingredients in teacher preparation and mentoring programme. These are the two skills that teacher-trainees have to internalise in order to become better teachers upon completion of their teacher training. Mentoring is an essential part of the teaching profession and it has to be effective (Baartmann (2016) in the development of a rounded prospective teacher. The successful mentor and teacher-trainee relationship has to be collaborative and mutual since both parties have a responsibility to explore, define and resolve mentoring issues. By mentor, we refer to an experienced teacher who is an expert in a particular area and one who takes on the additional role of supporting and developing colleagues who may be teacher-trainees or new teachers joining the profession (Wright, 2012). On the whole, teachers drive the quality of the education service, and the mentor is at the heart of this process. Wright (2012) makes the observation that mentors are central in the training of quality teachers as well as in the education enterprise as a whole since they “have a relationship with the mentee, which no one else can equal and their influence is the major determiner of the success, nature and quality of the new teacher” (p.2). While there may be different ways of looking at the role of the teacher trainee during internship, Wright (2012) highlights that teacher trainees go to tertiary institutions to gain experiences while on site in order to become future fully-fledged teachers. Furthermore, a mentor can be an important factor in the quality of a teacher trainee’s professional life who is being introduced to teaching for the first time both in their social and academic professional development.
2. Problem

The authors have observed that oftentimes some teacher trainees experienced challenges during their teaching practice or practicum despite being taken through preparatory period prior to the practicum and being attached to mentors at the cooperating schools. Since highly prepared and effective mentors are a prerequisite for providing a successful and useful support to teacher trainees during their teaching practice (Bird 2012) mentors, need to possess several mentoring qualities including pedagogical knowledge, modelling, and feedback for them to effectively do their job. Within the Botswana context, there is need to find out if mentors possess and exhibit these qualities. Some mentors may not have adequate skills to assist teacher-trainees or they may have some other challenges that hinder them to properly guide the protégés in terms of how they could better prepare and plan for their lessons (Bird, 2012). Several issues usually arise about whether the student-teachers are adequately assisted and guided in relation to preparation and planning of lessons since teaching is a complex, demanding and context specific exercise (Ingersoll, 2012; Cooper, 2013). This guidance entails providing assistance in relation to basic aspects of teaching such as aims and goals of teaching a particular topic, suggesting new viewpoints and how individual teacher trainees could improve on their teaching.

3. Key research questions

1. How do mentor teachers assist teacher-trainees in both the preparation and planning for their lessons?
2. What are the challenges that teacher trainees encounter in preparing and planning for their lessons?
3. How can teacher-trainees be better trained in order to better plan and prepare for their lessons?

4. Methodology

The study was conducted in Botswana among Business Education teacher trainees from the University of Botswana who usually have two teaching practice sessions in their second and third year of training for seven weeks in each session. The teacher trainees are usually posted to both public and private primary and secondary schools. The majority of the student-teachers are absorbed by the public secondary schools while a smaller number are posted to primary and private secondary schools. In this study, the
teacher trainees’ views about how they are assisted by the mentors in relation to preparation and planning were investigated. A quantitative methodology was adopted and questionnaires were administered to one hundred and twenty (120) respondents. A five point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was used and when reporting the data it was compressed into Agree, Uncertain and Disagree as a way of making data easy to comprehend. The respondents comprised a group of teacher trainees in the Business Education programme who were in their final year in a three-year programme at a public university in Botswana and all responded and returned the questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted with students who were doing Business Education but were of a lower academic level.

5. Presentation of results and discussion

5.1 Guidance on lesson preparation and planning
The primary role of the mentor is to support the teacher trainees as they assess their own teaching and student learning. The mentor assumes various roles among which are to help teacher trainees collect their own data and information as they prepare and plan for lessons, as well as promote opportunities for reflection (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2001). Preparation involves accessing the resources and how to secure them in order to deliver an effective lesson. In addition, one has to have a “back up plan” in case something goes wrong in relation to a prepared lesson. Preparation also involves the teaching space and how it is set up. The results show that the majority of student teachers were guided by their school-based-mentors on how to prepare for their lessons since 69.1% (Figure 1) indicated agreement and this shows a good rapport in the dyad.
While there may be several dimensions to mentoring in relation to instruction, there are two aspects that stand out namely, preparation and planning. Similarly, just like in preparation, when planning one has to think of the content to be taught within a given time. Various techniques and stages of delivering the lesson for it to be meaningful play an important part in the planning stage. Planning therefore entails methods, techniques, content, assessment, skills and objectives, and time. It is a major component of classroom management practices including teacher trainee relationships (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2011) which need to be internalised. When planning, teachers are compelled to make adaptations in the lesson plans in order to accommodate the instructional needs of individual learners hence bringing on board all learners in order to promote learning. As they prepare and plan, teacher trainees need to have quality time with their mentors (Ingersoll, 2012; Sempowicz & Hudson, 2011) as they go through what is to be taught, and if interaction takes place, they could be instilled with confidence. As indicated above, there has to be pre-lesson, post lesson reviews and feedback that can further guide in relation to preparing and planning for future lessons. A class will naturally comprise learners with varied intellectual abilities and behaviours that one has to consider when planning as well as the tasks if any for this group. In preparation and planning the teacher trainees will integrate what they know with the new experience in the field. As part of planning, teacher trainees, observe mentor teachers and possibly those teaching the same grade. In addition, and as part of planning and preparation, the teacher trainee has to be prepared for lessons and should remain up to date on various dimensions of teaching. In relation to planning of lessons, 63.7% (Table 1) of the teacher trainees indicated that they were adequately guided by their mentors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>74.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Support in terms of guidance through advice, makes preparation and planning necessary while still maintaining consistent communication between the two parties. Rhodes and DuBois (2006) observe that the “formation of a close relationship is conditioned by several factors, including the background characteristics of the mentor, the effectiveness of the mentor in addressing the developmental needs of the child, the consistency and duration of the tie, and the broader programme and community context in which the relationship unfolds” (p. 625).
Since it is a two-way process, the mentor, too develops a learning relationship with the teacher trainee in terms of personal qualities and inter-personal skills. The personal attributes that teacher trainees would have observed from the mentors are likely to influence the latter’s ability to reflect critically on their own practices (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012). In addition, mentors need to question their assumptions with regard to teaching and learning, and in this way, they would be able to develop new perspectives, and gain new knowledge and insight about themselves and their profession as they engage in the mentoring process by constantly interacting with the teacher trainees. Similarly, teacher trainees are likely to model their behaviours in relation to those of their mentors.

As they plan, teacher trainees are assisted to make their own choices while the mentor suggests possible options. For example, in their study Sempowicz and Hudson (2012) observed that planning and preparation by the teacher trainees were a result of what they were constantly observing what the mentors did through mainly modelling certain specific processes. The lesson plans and how the mentor presented them would be important processes for the teacher trainees as they observed the mentors. Teacher trainees would naturally model on the mentor as how to engage in some activities and this included evaluation and feedback which is an integral part of preparation and planning. For example, regular feedback received from teacher trainees assists the mentors to sharpen their classroom teaching skills (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012). In addition, both the mentor and the teacher trainee can engage in pre-lesson and post lesson review as a way of better preparation that would consequently lead to an effective delivery of instruction. For instance, the discussion of lessons can be done prior to being observed, during teaching or after the exercise.

In their study Sempowicz and Hudson (2012) found out that it was evident that advanced planning and discussion of teaching techniques prior to teaching as part of planning were vital because it increases teacher trainees’ confidence and ability to successfully deliver instruction. As part of the process of preparation and planning, mentors do listen to the mentees as well as pay attention to their language and circumstances in order to understand how they might best provide appropriate support (Sempowicz & Hudson, 2012). The aim of mentoring is to promote the teacher trainee’s development and ability to internalise key core competencies in a specific area. The mentors assist teacher trainees achieve their goals and develop as persons in their area of specialisation. In the process of mentoring, the mentor determines the goals that he or she aims to achieve and build capacity in helping develop the protégé (Center for Health Leadership & Practice, 2003).
5.2 Information about school policies, timetable and schedule

In this study, 70.9 %, (Figure 2) which is a large number of mentors, assisted teacher trainees either with timetabling or scheduling of lessons and other activities related to classroom instruction while 58% of mentors discussed school policies with prospective teachers.

![Figure 2](image)

Prospective teachers need to be made comfortable regarding how the school they are practising in is run. For example, two important pillars of the school namely the vision and mission need to be clearly communicated to teacher trainees so that they relate to them as well as internalise them. This is to assist teacher trainees see their relevance as well as being viewed as members of the institution. In addition, teacher trainees need to understand how the school functions in relation to the timetable and other school scheduled activities.

During this process which entails some guidance on the part of the mentor who shares their knowledge, skills and experiences, the protégé is assisted to have a better understanding of the career that they are preparing for. During this interaction which is viewed as putting trust on the dyad, the mentor provides guidance, support and encouragement (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006) to the teacher trainee in relation to the latter’s instructional preparation and eventually the delivery of instruction, leading to learners’ “positive development outcomes” (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006, p. 6). In this way, the teacher trainees will be in a position to appreciate and understand what they are teaching and the learners that are being taught (Samkange, 2015).
5.3 Mentors discussing with teacher trainees the aims (goals) of teaching

Aims or goals are related to a teacher’s philosophy and related to this, Wong (2004) makes the observation that “any efforts that are made must improve student achievement. Improving student achievement boils down to the teacher. What the teacher knows and can do in the classroom is the most important factor resulting in student achievement” (p. 41).

Table 2: Did the mentor discuss the aims of my teaching?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Cumulative Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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When comparing with other dimensions, the aims and goals of preparing and planning for teaching score low, for example, 49.1% of the teacher trainees discussed lesson aims or goals with mentors while 27.3% and 23.6% never discussed any and were not sure respectively (Table 2). It is clear that 50.9% is a significant number for those who were not assisted in discussing the aims of teaching and those who were not sure if they were rendered some help. It is less than half of the teacher trainees who indicated that some discussion took place about aims of a lesson before the teacher trainees could go into the classes. This is a very important aspect of classroom instruction which should stand out as having been attended to by the mentors.

Close to 71% of the teacher trainees indicated that their mentors were articulate about what teacher trainees needed to do in their teaching, which is a clear sign that they had an idea as to what they were doing as they guided the student teachers in lesson preparation. Cooper (2013), observes that planning involves articulating various instructional activities such as “providing explanations, giving feedback, observing student performance and so forth” (p. 44) and what a teacher does “is quite complex, and this complexity necessitates some special skills, knowledge, dispositions and performances that are important in planning and instruction” (p. 51).

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) reviewed several empirical studies that were carried out over a period of about thirty years and observed that teachers who were mentored to had better prepared lessons than those who were not exposed to it. They further made the observation that, “For student achievement, almost all of the studies showed that students of beginning teachers who participated in some kind of induction had higher scores, or gains, on academic achievement tests” (Ingersoll & Strong 2011, p. 201). In New Zealand the mentoring system for teacher trainees and new teachers forms part of the education
system where “rather than just providing ‘advice’ and emotional support, the mentor teachers co-construct professional learning, where often the learning is reciprocal” (New Zealand Government, 2015, p. 4).

Rakicioglu-Soylemez and Eroz-Tuga (2014) observe that mentoring “requires special attention to create a systematic effect on the learning of teaching so that practice teaching becomes an effective professional learning experience for prospective teachers” (p. 147).

Mentoring is context-specific and mentors are involved in assisting teacher trainees to prepare and plan as well as to assist them with all other aspects of teaching (Hudson, 2013; Hudson, 2004; Rakicioglu-Soylemez & Eroz-Tuga, 2014; Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2001).

5.4 Providing new viewpoints or perspectives on teaching.

As earlier indicated, teaching is complex, demanding, varied and context specific (Ingersoll, 2012; Cooper, 2013; Okwuedei, 2010). There is a lot that teacher trainees expect from their mentors. Since teaching is complex there is need for mentors, to assist the teacher trainees to survive while striving to achieve “the ultimate goal of improving student growth and learning” (Ingersoll, 2012, p.1). Student teachers just like new teachers in the field face numerous challenges of transition into teaching hence the need for guidance and induction support as they learn the art of teaching and enhance their efficacy as facilitators of student learning. As mentors assist teacher trainees in preparation and planning of lessons they will naturally be guided and influenced by “personal perspectives, values, and assumptions that underlie mentors’ teaching and mentoring.” (Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2001, p. 58), and this might affect and influence teacher trainees’ own classroom practice. This is an aspect that underscores the importance of how different teachers approach teaching as a practice.

Reflection is another important dimension since it can assist to improve instruction and help a teacher trainee build understanding of content and pedagogy, change the way they teach, consistently set goals for improvement in their instruction since they will be engaged in continuous discovery of their practice (LINCS, 2015). A similar observation is made by Prabha and Kumar (2011) in their study of prospective science teachers on the importance of reflection in teaching where student-teachers can use their experiences and knowledge in lesson planning and preparation as well as in instruction. In that way, reflection can empower prospective teachers since they will be able to adopt a multidimensional approach in the teaching and learning process and this will naturally provide them with adequate room to be flexible since they will be able to take into consideration the diverse learning needs of the learners (Prabha &
Kumar, 2011)). This flexibility and reflection can only materialise if education on the whole is not confined and restricted to the boundaries of the classroom.

Teachers plan and implement daily classroom routines and patterns of interaction and prospective teachers are expected to plan their lessons appropriately since good planning allows teachers to focus and be flexible in their instruction (Greenberg, Putman & Walsh, 2014; Ali, Khalid, Naqvi & Aamir, 2006; Bird, 2012). In addition, teachers are viewed and expected to create effective educational environments whereby students, content, techniques and strategies coalesce. Shrawder and Warner (2006) say that

“A good lesson plan helps you carry out the all-important task of setting goals and describing how you will reach them. A lesson plan is the road map or framework used to plan and conduct every class from first meeting to final exam. In addition, lesson plans ensure you have created a logical, systematic learning process essential to making sure your students achieve the most learning in the least time” (p. 3).

Cooper (2013) notes that “experts recognise a new situation as being similar to a type of situation they have faced before and quickly call on a repertoire of routines that they have used in the past. Novices face a new situation without much prior experience to draw on” (p.68). 60% (Figure 3) of the teacher trainees were given new perspectives or viewpoints about teaching a lesson or a series of lessons by their mentors.

Sempowicz and Hudson (2012) found out that during the mentoring process, the mentor would like to question their own assumptions with regard to teaching and
learning, and in this way, they would be able to develop new perspectives, and gain new knowledge and insight about themselves and their profession as they engage in the mentoring process by constantly interacting with the teacher trainees.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The study provides sufficient evidence that during teaching practice, teacher trainees at the University of Botswana are fairly assisted especially in the area of planning and preparation, which is the focus of this paper. This means that the guidance from mentor teachers is capable of equipping the teacher trainees to work independently in an environment where they are not constantly supervised. Even though teacher trainees’ responses are positive in most questions, suggesting that mentoring in the area of planning and preparation is ably done during the practicum, the fewer negative responses of those who disagreed and those who were uncertain cannot be ignored altogether. This is because such responses probably signifies that there are still some challenges that teacher trainees encounter in teaching practice in general, and in preparing and planning for lessons in particular. Therefore, there is need for further inquiry into the issue at hand where most players who are normally involved in the teaching practice will be consulted, and possibly empower or equip further the mentors in order to improve on the efficiency of mentorship in general. While the views of teacher trainees are clearly articulated in this study, there is little evidence provided about mentors except what is gathered from the views of the teacher trainees. In that way, there is need for studies that solicit the views of mentor teachers with respect to teacher trainees. In addition, there is need for more qualitative studies in this area since most studies including this one are quantitative (see for example, studies by; Ali, Khalid, Naqvi & Aamir, 2006; Glazerman, et al, 2008; Zanting, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2001; and Waterman and He, 2011). Qualitative studies are likely to take into consideration the expressed opinions of those who were neutral and those who were not sure, because personal accounts of lived experiences are not clearly articulated in quantitative studies. Furthermore, social desirability bias is likely to be minimised through probes and follow-up questions.

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