

## **Understanding the Role of Mentor Teachers during Teaching Practice Session**

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**ABSTRACT** Mentor teachers have become key players in launching student teachers into the teaching profession. Mentor teachers are recognized for their practical knowledge of the teaching profession, which complements the theoretical knowledge that the student teacher has acquired from the university. This paper therefore investigated how mentor teachers understand and perceive their roles as they prepare University of South Africa (UNISA) student teachers for their teaching careers during teaching practice session in cooperating schools. This study adopted a mixed methods research design because of its ability to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. A total of 46 mentor teachers filled in the questionnaire and 15 of them were also interviewed to gather more qualitative data to enrich the study. Findings reveal that mentor teachers understood their roles to be that of facilitating socialization of student teachers into the teaching profession, by assisting them to gain competence in the various areas of the school functioning, including lesson planning and presentation; classroom management and appropriate use of teaching strategies and resources. The mentor teachers also demonstrated understanding of the concept of 'mentoring', but they needed feedback from UNISA to assure them if student teachers are being assisted according to the institution's expectations. This indicates that UNISA still needs to do more to enhance the roles and responsibilities of mentor teachers in supporting student teachers.