Mentoring: Reflections of Student Teachers in One South African University

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ABSTRACT This paper captures the voices of mentees on their experiences of mentoring during teaching practice. The study adopted an interpretivist paradigm. A case study design was used. Data was gathered from 18 purposively selected student teachers that had been on their final teaching practice stint. Data was collected through analyses of the student teachers' reflective journals and their responses to interviews. The paper established that some student teachers enjoyed cordial relationships with their mentors who provided them support and guidance in areas such as planning and setting of tests. However, some were left to their whims without the desired support from the mentors. The paper recommends that mentors and mentees be tutored on their roles in the mentoring relationships. The institutional heads should be oriented on models of assisting mentors and mentees. Collaboration between the university and the Department of Basic Education should be forged to assist mentors and mentees.

INTRODUCTION

Effective mentoring is pivotal in the development of student teachers (du Plessis 2013). In agreement, Hudson (2009: 64) posits, "Mentoring has been viewed as a valuable construct in fostering pre-service teachers' personal and professional development." It is important to acknowledge that the term "mentor" is borrowed from the male guide, *Mentor*, in Greek mythology, and this historical context has informed traditional manifestations of mentoring. The mentor was seen in the context of a protector of the protégé as was evidenced in Greek mythology where the goddess Pallas Athene would transform into a Mentor to protect, guide and help Ulysses' or Odysseus' young and unskilled son Telemachus (Fischer and van Andel 2002; Tillema et al. 2015). Mentoring is where teachers and prospective teachers meet within school settings. The concept of mentoring is discussed below.

Concept of Mentoring

Mentoring is a term generally used to describe a relationship between a less experienced individual, called a mentee or protégé, and a more experienced individual known as a mentor. "Traditionally, mentoring is viewed as a dyadic, face-to-face, long-term relationship between a supervisory adult and a novice student that fosters the mentee's professional, academic, or personal development" (Donaldson et al. 2000 in Packard 2011). Additionally, Wronka (2012: 629) contends that mentoring is an "intense interpersonal exchange between a senior experienced colleague (mentor) and less experienced junior colleague (protégé or mentee) wherein the mentor provides support, direction and feedback regarding career plans and development." Gehrke in Wronka (2012: 630) refers to mentoring as "a complex, interactive process occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise, which incorporate interpersonal or psychosocial development, career or educational development and socializing function of relationship." Finally, Hawkey in Leshem (2012: 413) avers that mentoring is "idiosyncratic in the sense that mentors and student teachers bring into the mentoring process a diversity of beliefs and concerns that lead to complex interactions and complicated dynamics." The definitions above point to one persistent notion that a reciprocal relationship exists between a mentor and mentee and it is laden with members' baggage from their pasts.

Rationale for Mentoring

As alluded above, mentoring is of value to the development of a student teacher. It can en-

hance the mentees' self-esteem, boost their morale and can gradually speed up their transition into their new role as teachers (Hamilton 2003: 27). Mentoring also provides career development, advances mentees' personal growth and professional development. However, benefits are not only one-way, they are reciprocal as the mentor is also embroiled in the learning process. Mentoring has futuristic goals that aim at sharpening skills for trainee teachers with a focus on improving their career and professional engagements. Student teachers amass knowledge and skills they will employ in their future roles as teachers and mentors.

Models of Mentoring

Hudson's five-factor model of mentoring includes personal attributes, system requirements, pedagogical knowledge, modeling and feedback (Hudson 2010; Hudson et al. 2008). A mentor's personal attributes involve being supportive to the student teacher, listening to the mentee, helping instill confidence, reflective practice and positive attitudes. System requirements refer to the mentor's ability to articulate aims, policies and curricula required by an education system. An effective mentor also would articulate issues surrounding teaching and learning to student teachers such as planning, timetabling, teaching strategies, content knowledge, classroom management, questioning skills and assessment (Hudson 2010). The mentor needs to model desirable teaching traits, teacher-learner relationship, suitable classroom language and proper classroom management. Lastly, mentors provide advice and feedback to mentees on lesson plans, teaching and learning environment as well as their evaluations.

Literature further identifies three mentoring models, namely, the apprenticeship model, competency model and reflective model (Maynard and Furlong in Fischer and van Andel 2002), whereas in the apprenticeship model the student teacher observes the mentor and learns, in the competency model, the mentor gives the mentee feedback about performance and progress. In the reflective model, the mentor assists the student teacher to become a reflective practitioner.

Role of Mentor

A mentor has varied and sometimes conflicting roles in the mentoring process. According to Packard (2011), mentoring roles are classified into two, that is, psychosocial and career-related. Psychosocial roles refer to the mentor as a counselor or friend whereas career-related mentoring subscribes to mentor as coach or sponsor. Role modeling can be classified as the third class of mentor roles as mentors are role models for student teachers. Mentors can differ with mentees in the field of specialization, gender and other variables but some students opt for mentors who match their own demographic variables. For school experience or teaching practice, the main convergence between mentor and mentee is teaching as the area of specialization. Mentors are qualified teachers and mentees aspire to be teachers. Mentors offer pedagogical advice and guidance for developing the mentee's practices and support learning of learners in planning, timetabling, teaching strategies, problem solving, content knowledge, class control, delivering of instruction and discipline (Packard 2011).

In tandem with the above, Fischer and van Andel (2002) contend that the role of the mentor includes teachers as learners, guide and leader, good friend, listener, someone enabling somebody in classroom management, organizer of experience for the trainee, counselor, coach, supporter, supervisor, taker and giver of feedback, problem-solver and networker. However, the mentor's role is fluid and sometimes posing conflict and may change depending on the meaning attached to it. For example, if the roles affect the mentor's career, a mentor may opt to change it. For instance, roles may cause conflict when the mentors are supposed to guide the mentees while on the other hand, they have to assess them and award marks that determine the success or failure of the mentee (supporting and judging) (Leshem 2012). Juggling between the conflicting roles puts pressure on both, the mentor and mentee, as the element of trust between them becomes delicate and fragile and can be easily destroyed.

Colleges and universities are supposed to ensure that mentors are clear about their roles in mentoring student teachers (Maphalala 2013). However, studies have shown that mentors are often not sure about their roles (Maphalala 2013). For instance, a study at UNISA on school-based mentoring revealed that thirty-seven percent of mentors had received training on mentoring against sixty-three percent who had not, despite

the fact that UNISA conducts a series of workshops to skill mentors every year. In agreement, mentoring is taken as a way to professionally develop teachers (Hudson 2009). In a study by Hudson, mentors recommended that professional development for effective mentoring should be included in the programs to enhance their skills.

Role of Mentee

The mentee's main role in the mentoring process is to learn the ropes of the trade. In the process, the student teacher has to maintain the role of managing, whereby the mentee lets the mentor know his/her needs. This strengthens the mentor and mentee's mutual trust. Kinuthia (n.d.) states that the role of the mentee in the mentor-mentee relationship is to communicate with the mentor, have a willingness to learn, take feedback positively and seek assistance. Ambrosetti and Dekkers (2010) also cite the following mentee roles as being crucial in mentoring, that is, performing tasks as required, collaborating with mentor in developing skills, learning from mentor the skills and knowledge of the trade, observing the mentor in action, teaching lessons, and evaluating and reflecting on the job. However, the role of the mentee is complex as it changes with the situation. For example, at one instant, the mentee is performing teaching and at the same time has to be evaluating and reflecting on the work. Alexander et al. (2014) state that student teachers should constantly reflect on their practice, especially after lesson delivery.

Important to note is that the student teacher is in a dyadic relationship with the mentor. If one considers mentoring as a dyadic relationship, what space does the supervisor occupy in the puzzle? Should one probably consider terming it a triadic relationship? Perhaps, there is a salient third force that is always present, the institution where the mentee is affiliated. However, for this paper the researchers shall only consider mentor and mentee.

Mentor-Mentee Relationship

The mentor-mentee relationship can be a one-on-one relationship or a network of multiple mentors (Packard 2011). The mentoring relationship can be "formal, informal, long-term or short-term, convened electronically or face-to-face" (Packard 2011: 1), "confidential, inspiring and trusting relationship" (Fischer and van Andel 2002), and with "mutual trust and belief" (Koki 1997). Mentoring is a "developmentally oriented interpersonal relationship that is typically between a more experienced individual and a less experienced individual" (Wronka 2012: 630). Thus, the mentor-mentee relationship is a developmental process, which passes through a series of stages that determine the conditions and the outcomes of the mentoring process. For instance, by working together, the mentor and mentee overcome certain hurdles cooperatively and in this process acquire some useful knowledge and skills for future use. The mentee's growth gives the mentor and mentee satisfaction, as they both invest time, effort and know-how in preparation for the mentee's productivity or future achievement (Fischer and van Andel 2002). What has been given is the ideal situation. However, conflict may occur between mentor and mentee when expectations of one (mentor) are not fulfilled by the other (mentee) and vice versa. The study ensuing from the current literature needs to establish the relationships between the mentors in this context.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions for the paper:
1. How did mentees experience mentoring?
2. What was the relationship between the mentee and mentor?
3. How can the mentoring experience be improved?

METHODOLOGY

The paper adopted a qualitative approach in order to capture the perceptions of the mentee respondents (Qualitative Research Consultants Association 2015). A multiple case study or collective case design was used. Case studies are researches that are used to investigate phenomena within their life context with the aim of generating a deep or in-depth understanding of the particular phenomena (Crowe et al. 2011). Yin (2009) posits that a multiple case study focuses on more than one entity or event that forms a case that aims to capture the complexity of the object of study. In the current paper, the ment-

ees were the multiple bounded cases in the larger case of school experience. Data was gathered from 18 purposively selected university student teachers that were on their final teaching practice stint. Purposive sampling was used to select the information-laden sites. This is in line with Teddlie and Yu's (2007: 77) assertion that purposive sampling is "selecting units based on specific purposes". In this case, the mentees were selected as they bore the information on their experiences and perceptions of mentoring. Data was collected through analyses of the student teachers' reflective journals and their responses to interviews. Reflective journals were used, as mentees write journals on a daily basis to evaluate their practice. The multiple data sources used provided the study with credibility. Issues of data credibility in case studies are shrouded with subjectivity, as the researcher is part of the data creation process. However, the researcher should strive to let the case speak for itself (Stake 2005). Hence, the use of verbatim accounts in data presentation and analysis. Data was analyzed and case themes (Creswell 2013) marked the sub-headings of the report. Ethical considerations were adhered to as respondents were granted to withdraw any time they deemed it necessary. Clearance was sought from the university and the department concerned.

RESULTS

Mentor-Mentee Relationship

The paper revealed that some student teachers enjoyed a cordial relationship with their mentors as evidenced by the respondents' sentiments below:

ST5: *My mentor was a good person who taught me many things about teaching. She also showed me some teaching strategies I was not familiar with. She also encouraged me when she praised me when I presented my lesson perfectly and that made me more confident.*

ST8: *The relationship I had with her was very good. We would sometimes plan the lesson together. She was always willing to help when I needed help with anything related to the subject and the class.*

ST9: *We had a good and motivational relationship. My mentor was very supportive, we had a mutual respect and we understood each other.*

ST3: *I had a good relationship with my mentor.*
According to the respondents, their relationships with the mentors were amiable. Key in the relationships was the mentors' willingness to assist the teacher trainee with the ropes of the trade. The collaboration that went on cemented the relationship. However, ST14 seemed to have a different experience as outlines below.

ST14: *Not a good relationship... The one for grade 10 just gave me every material and stayed in another staffroom and I stayed in another. She just said I must do or prepare a test after finishing.*

According to ST14's response, the mentor had no time to mentor the mentee. The mentor left the student to fumble and find his/her own feet. There was no room for contact as the mentor sat in another room and just expected to get the learner's test results after the mentee was done with whatever she was doing with the class.

What They Liked About the Mentor

Mentees were asked about what they liked about the mentor. The responses were varied. ST10 and ST8 liked their mentors' diligence. ST10 also added another dimension that the mentor's diligence presented a platform for productive teaching and learning. The responses below bear testimony to this:

ST10: *He put a lot of effort concerning his duty. He is very serious about his work.*

ST8: *She was always...dedicated to her work... She was also passionate about her work, which made teaching and learning easy for both learners and teachers. She always encouraged learners to be committed to their work.*

ST11 intoned that the mentor was always willing to assist and ready to teach the mentee "new things" and was free to seek assistance from the mentee as reflected by the words: "*I liked that he was helpful, and always willing to teach me new things.*" Whenever he needed help, he was always free to ask. This could have given a boost to the student teacher's self-esteem knowing that his/her contribution was valued by a qualified practitioner.

ST3 added by giving areas in which the mentor assisted. These are shown in the following captions.

ST3: *Very professional and straight to the point. Always assigning tasks and helping me*

do my own work, including setting providing guidelines on lessons taught, marking scripts and providing mentorship on administration and class activities.

ST13 also liked the way the mentor handled the class and including humor in his teaching methods as intoned in the statement below.

ST13: *I liked how he handled and manages his class. There is room and time for play and time to be serious. I think having a sense of humor also goes a long way to assist learners.*

As evidenced from responses above, mentees had many reasons they liked about their mentors and may emulate in future practice as teachers, ranging from teacher diligence, deportment, teaching methods and assistance rendered to mentees.

Areas Mentee Needed More Help from Mentor

Mentees also reproved the way mentors left them to bear the brunt of class control. The respondents had this to say:

ST3: *The mentor was rather leaving everything on hold as sometimes when I was looking for guidance she will postpone and never get back to me. Hence, I needed more cooperation.*

ST13: *I think with regards to discipline, my mentor could have helped me more, remember the pupils are close to her and are used to a certain leadership style, shifting the authority to someone else is a rather big transition for them.*

ST6: *I think he should have helped me more with disciplining students.*

ST14: *... How to teach using different strategies, how to handle learners who do not submit their work, and how to do some administrative work.*

According to the above sentiments, mentees left mentors to delve into the unknown without guidance and sometimes had to contend with empty promises. Furthermore, they craved for help with methods of disciplining learners and other teaching methods that were denied. Hence, they needed the support of mentors to avert mentee stress. Adequacy of support from school, mentor and university is discussed next.

Adequacy of Support from Mentor

Students received mentor support differently. For instance, ST14 stated, "*... Mentor did not give that much support...*" This could imply that the mentee's expectations were not met. In contrast, other students' responses were on the other end of the continuum. They intoned as below.

ST13: *My mentor took the extra load and provided me with constructive feedback all the time.*

ST8: *My mentor was very supportive. She provided me with necessary teaching materials such as textbooks and teachers' guide.*

According to ST13 and ST8, their mentors went out of the normal call of duty to assist the mentee. This could be the ideal situation mentoring calls for.

Suggestions for Improvement on Mentoring

Some respondents proffered the following suggestions for improvement:

ST11: *School mentors and method lecturers should have time with student teachers, maybe every week of the school experience to reflect on their weaknesses and challenges they encounter. The faculty (school) should be more organized and communicate things on time and professionally.*

ST5: *The period of school practice is short for us to say we have gained experience. So I think it should be extended to be 5 or 6 months. We need more time with learners and mentors.*

The responses in this section reflect the mentees' dire need for more contact time with mentors. ST5 stated that more time of up to six months in schools, was needed for school practice so that mentees learn more and get experienced in the art of teaching.

DISCUSSION

Findings of the paper reflected that some mentees had a cordial relationship with their mentors during teaching practice. The mentors, according to these mentees, were willing to render assistance to mentees. This assertion is corroborated by Mudzielwa and Maphosa (2014) who contend that generally, mentors are helpful to student teachers in areas such as record making and keeping as well as classroom management. Mentees also brought out that some mentors exuded diligence and dedication to duty as virtues they could emulate. In agreement, Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009), in their study on

teaching practice found that mentors were supportive and willing to assist mentees by giving them valuable advice. However, some mentors left student teachers or mentees to find their own way in a maze of the multiplicity of the teachers' roles. Students who experienced this felt alone without guidance. They yearned for contact with mentors so that they could be assisted. Maphosa et al. (2007: 300) buttressed this and suggested that mentees should be given ample time to observe mentors teaching and evaluate the lessons together with their mentors so that they can emulate their hosts. The researchers contend that mentors should not be passive but should groom the mentees in the art of teaching and self-evaluation.

Mentors who sought assistance from mentees made them feel appreciated and valued. It was a morale booster and helped enhance the mentees' self-esteem. Self-esteem yields positive results. As Collins (2003: 8) states, students should be given "a hand" to boost their self-esteem. The hand has five fingers representing acknowledgement, recognition, application, matching and achievement. These five elements are needed if mentoring is to be beneficial. Mentees' contribution and presence should be acknowledged. For self-esteem to be cultivated and nurtured, the mentor should assist the mentee to recognize potentialities, apply what has been learnt, model and realize positive rewards. The Mentor Partnership of Southern Pennsylvania (2006) also posits that young people need mentors who value them and create opportunities for them to enhance their self-esteem. Thus, mentees should be made to feel a sense of belonging, competent and worthy.

Mentees admired teachers for blending teaching methods with a dab of humor, as it helped learners learn through play. According to Deiter (2000), humor enhances learning as long as it does not bear derogatory overtones. It brings fun and enjoyment to the learning process as long as the jest is not overdone. This teaching learning tool can thus be emulated by mentees to both the learner and the teacher's benefit. In mentoring mentees observe and decide on what to model from mentors so as to improve their practice.

Mentees also suggested ways of improving mentoring during teaching practice. They needed more cooperation from mentors who denied them assistance and either postponed or never gave feedback at all. Therefore, Maphosa et al. (2007) suggested that mentors should not take student teachers as relief teachers who come in to take off responsibility from their shoulders but as apprentices to be inducted into the teaching profession in line with the Hudson's (2010) five-factor model explained above. In fact, the apprenticeship, competency and reflective models (Maynard et al. 2002), together with Hudson's (2010) five-factor model can be combined to present a staff development model that can assist the mentee to be a good teacher. As individuals, each might have inherent weaknesses that can be addressed by use of the other.

Mentees castigated that some mentors did not assist with disciplining students. They recommended that since mentors were known by learners, they were supposed to help mentees to discipline them. Although some trainees had support from mentors, others felt they needed more assistance from mentors on teaching strategies and administrative work. This is in line with Hudson's (2010) recommendation that mentees require assistance from mentors in areas such as planning, timetabling, teaching strategies, content knowledge, classroom management, questioning skills and assessment. Disciplining of students is part of classroom management requiring skill development.

Another suggestion proffered by mentees was that the duration of teaching practice should be lengthened to five-six months, as the current stint of eight weeks was short. Mentees complained that the time allocated for teaching practice did not give mentees enough time to practice and gain experience. In the same vein, Hansford et al. (2004) contend that lack of time is one of the weaknesses of mentoring.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that mentoring is a relationship that calls for cooperation and is a two-way communication to cultivate trust between mentee and mentor. For teachers, these two have to strive to work together for the benefit of the learner under their care and at their mercy. Questions that need to be asked are: How prepared are mentors to take up their role in mentoring? How prepared are the student teachers for their encounters with their mentors? How are mentors selected in their schools? These questions will be answered in an ensuing study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that mentoring is a reciprocal activity involving the mentor and mentee. Hence, the paper should not be limited to mentees only but include mentors too. It can also be further recommended that the university personnel in charge of teaching practice be included in the study so as to obtain a rounded perspective of what transpires during school experience.

Mentees seemed to yearn for more guidance and extended contact time with mentors for them to gain more from teaching practice. The paper thus recommends that there should be a revisit of the time allocated for this school experience to allow the mentees ample time to observe mentors teaching and to also have more time to take the reins and experience the teaching process.

The paper further recommends that the university and the schools work collaboratively to equip both the mentor and mentee with proper guidance on how the mentoring exercise should be handled. The mentees in the paper seemed to have expectations that were not fulfilled by their mentors. Collaboration between the university and Department of Basic Education should be forged to assist mentors and mentees in their relationship for the benefit of the learners.

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