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Enhancing the quality of pre-service teachers learning through the conceptualizing of mentoring strategies during the practicum

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Abstract

Professional experience has been described as a cornerstone of teacher preparation that has a "profound impact on student teachers" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Shulman, 2002, p. 409). There is a wide variation of teacher education programs across the world however, in most countries teacher preparation programs consists of initial university-based course work followed by school-based student teaching practice. Clearly, this program structure has implications for the role of professional experience in creating genuine opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop teaching practice and knowledge about the profession. During the professional experience, mentoring pre-service teachers has been considered critical in ensuring a quality learning (Hascher , Cocard, & Moser, 2004). A number of researchers(Hascher , et al., 2004; Maynard, 2000; Putnam & Borko, 2000) believe that the quality of pre-service teachers learning largely depends on how effective mentors are in creating a positive learning environment. This establishes the need for greater clarity around effective mentoring strategies and a clearer understanding of how best to mentor pre-service teachers. This study contributes to addressing this gap by developing a model of mentoring strategies based on Kram's (1983) mentoring theory, through interviews and focus group discussions. The data was used to develop a tool to guide mentoring. This paper analyses this tool based on Kram's (1983) mentoring theory and makes a contribution to enhancing the quality of mentoring.

Keywords

quality, pre, service, teachers, learning, conceptualizing, mentoring, enhancing, strategies, practicum, during

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Contribution

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Introduction:

Professional experience has been described as a cornerstone of teacher preparation that has a "profound impact on student teachers" (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Shulman, 2002, p. 409). There is a wide variation of teacher education programs across the world however, in most countries teacher preparation programs consists of initial university-based course work followed by school-based student teaching practice. Clearly, this program structure has implications for the role of professional experience in creating genuine opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop teaching practice and knowledge about the profession.

During the professional experience, mentoring pre-service teachers has been considered critical in ensuring a quality learning (Hascher , Cocard, & Moser, 2004). A number of researchers(Hascher , et al., 2004; Maynard, 2000; Putnam & Borko, 2000) believe that the quality of pre-service teachers learning largely depends on how effective mentors are in creating a positive learning environment. This establishes the need for greater clarity around effective mentoring strategies and a clearer understanding of how best to mentor pre-service teachers. This study contributes to addressing this gap by developing a model of mentoring strategies based on Kram's (1983)mentoring theory, through interviews and focus group

discussions. The data was used to develop a tool to guide mentoring. This paper analyses this tool based on Kram's (1983) mentoring theory and makes a contribution to enhancing the quality of mentoring.

Research Question: *What are the successive phrases of mentoring relationship between the supervising teachers and pre-service teachers during the practicum?*

Theoretical Approach

Kram's(1983) open systems perspective on mentoring provides the general theoretical framework for the research. Kram's (1983) research created a four phase conceptual model through which mentoring relationships progress. These are (1) initiation (2) cultivation (3) separation and; (4) redefinition (p.614). Movement from one phase to the next is marked by Turning Points "characterised by particular effective experiences, developmental functions, and interaction patterns " (p.621). According to her theory of mentoring, mentors provide career related functions and psychosocial functions, with the greater the number of functions provided, the more beneficial the relationship will be

(Kram, 1985).

The framework is applicable to mentoring in teacher education offering two primary dimensions: job and career benefits and psychological benefits within the relationship.

Significance:

In the light of Kram's (1983) mentoring theory, the current study makes a contribution to identify with the model by highlighting four phrases and specific mentoring strategies needed to maximum the potential of quality mentoring during the practicum. It offers a foundation for guiding the mentoring practice at different stages in the process. The study has implications for providing mentor teacher with a clearer vision of how to select, prepare, and support teachers with a particular awareness of psychosocial mentoring strategies (personal feedback and friendship) with the need for context specific mentoring.

Method

Research methodology

A case study research design approach was used to identify the mentoring phases and mentoring strategies in collaboration with the university and practicum schools. Participants included, pre-service teachers, school mentors and University liaison officers. The researcher intended to explore contemporary issue of mentoring, within a real life setting. Data was collected during two practicum blocks in a Masters of Teaching cohort.

Methods of data collection
Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with pre-service teachers, mentor teachers, and University liaison officers. The interviews investigated a range of differing views and experiences on mentoring during the practicum. Building on the interview findings a mentoring workshop with research participants was conducted, with a focus on shared mentoring practices. The participants were grouped and asked to discuss and fill in information answering specific questions for each practicum.
This discussion helped in distinguishing the different stages in each of the two practicum supervision guides (mentoring tool). The participants came up with the different phases of support, expectations for the pre-service teachers in each stage, support help and suggestions for feedback and assessment.

Data analysis
The interview transcripts were used to conducted a thematic analysis using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The data was analysised in terms of two success measures: (1) The pre-service teacher mentoring needs e.g. relationship, communication, emotional support, welcome, guidance, feedback, reflection (2) Mentoring practices e.g. orientation, mentoring form, roles, expectations, feedback, assessment. The themes were summarized and supported with illustrative quotes. Initial findings from the interviews were shared with participants at the workshop. The data from the interviews and the workshop were combined to develop the mentoring guide.

The Mentoring Guide
The Mentoring Guide draws on analysis of survey, interview and workshop data to describe supported pre-service teacher development during the course of four and six week professional experiences. Pre-service teachers' development is expressed as expected capabilities in learning-to-teach outlined in four stages in each of the two placements. These

expectations were linked to key teaching processes referenced to the professional teaching standards, and accompanied by a range of supportive mentoring/feedback strategies. The guide is a systematic description of the staged and scaffolded professional progress with a focus on performance mastery, consolidating and extension of pedagogic practice.

Expected Outcomes

Stages of Mentoring

Stage 1: Getting orientated
Most of the participants suggested that this stage was from 1-3 days of their practicum, with extension for more complex schools/ diverse or disadvantaged student populations. The 'turning point' at this phase is characterised by their first independent teaching episode.

Stage 2: Assuming the Role
During this phrase, the pre-service teacher is supported in their teaching delivery. They take on the role of teacher, experimenting with teaching ideas that are guided by the mentor. Development of trust in the relationship ensures emotional support and professional confirmation. The negotiated handover of teaching characterize the turning point in this phase.
Stage 3: Performing the Role
This phase is where the pre-service teacher builds confidence with their practice and understandings of the role of a teacher. Feedback becomes important, targeting specific personal weaknesses, strengths and ideas on how to improve. The turning point is the affirming of the pre-service teachers strengths and acceptance as a colleague.
Stage 4: Mastering the Role
This phase involves the pre-service teacher taking on greater teaching responsibility. The mentor encourages experimentation and risk taking. The building of confidence, self-efficacy occurs at this time, marked by critical reflection. The turning point is recognition of professional status and development of teacher identity.

Functions

Career strategizing was not consistently viewed as a strategy, with less prominence on psychological functions. The more intimate areas of emotional support relied upon established trust, developing along the different stages. It included; building trust, rapport, sharing reflections and supportive conversations.
There was recognition of the need for psychological support to build confidence. The psychological function friendship was not viewed as essential and missing as a function. Personal feedback in some stages was absent. Development occurred across the stages starting with expectations to personal progress, trust and communication.

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