Mentoring and Prospects for Teacher Development - a South African Perspective

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Abstract

School-based mentoring has developed in response to a number of factors pertaining to the pre-service education of student teachers and the in-service professional development of experienced teachers. Traditionally teacher education has consisted of university-based theory with school-based practice, based on an understanding of professional learning as 'theory into practice'. One of the problems with this model is that theory may come to seem too remote from practice, and that practice appears untheorised by remaining implicit and unproblematised.

The one-year teachers' diploma course offered by the Rhodes University Education Department incorporates a ten-week teaching practice slot. This protracted period has been useful in allowing frequent and consistent contact between university tutors and student teachers, and between mentor teachers and student teachers. Where the system has not been strong is in enabling meaningful collaboration among all three parties.

A pilot school-based mentoring programme was thus implemented in 1999, involving English First and Second Language student teachers, the two university tutors and seven mentor teachers. Ongoing evaluative research revealed that the programme was welcomed by all, and that the student teachers in particular gained much in the way of learning to be critically reflexive in a non-threatening environment. However, the research also uncovered areas that need to be developed. Student teachers, for example, need guidance in terms of learning how to talk about teaching; mentor teachers need to develop the confidence and expertise required to open up their practice in a critically constructive context.

On the strength of the programme's success, the Education Department has extended school-based mentoring to all HDE students, and is exploring ways of setting up courses through which other educators (such as EDOs) may receive training in pre- and in-service teacher mentoring.

Theoretical background

School-based mentoring has developed in response to a number of factors pertaining to the pre-service education of student teachers and the in-service professional development of experienced teachers.

Traditionally teacher education has consisted of university-based theory with school-based practice, based on an understanding of professional learning as 'theory into practice'. Underpinning this view is an assumption of the superiority of theoretical knowledge over practice, and a view of practice as always in deficit in relation to a theoretical ideal. Consequently, there has been little real negotiation of a common understanding of teaching practice between theoreticians and practitioners, with little recognition of practical knowledge by theoreticians and a scepticism of theory by practitioners.

In addition, classroom teaching is a complex and demanding activity for which student teachers need strong support and a protected, structured environment as they start teaching in order to be able to try out new ideas and test their hypotheses. Thus, in many cases, when the school culture does not support the student teachers' new ideas, they become acculturated to the school's dominant culture (McIntyre and Hagger, 1996:30); or, as a coping strategy, they retreat to their 'latent culture' i.e. the way they themselves were taught (Calderhead, 1984:110-111). Consequently, student teachers have found the interface between theory and practice problematic.

Schön (1983) challenged the notion of professional knowledge as a stored set of propositional theories applied in practice, and instead suggested that professional knowledge is constructed of a reflectively processed and increasingly refined repertoire of cases, used as references to frame new situations and problems. Increasingly, it is

recognised that experienced teachers have a rich repertoire of this contextualised, practical professional knowledge, which complements the theoretical knowledge of the university subject tutor. Student teachers need access to both kinds of knowledge (McIntyre and Hagger, 1993; Furlong and Maynard, 1995; Cooper and McIntyre, 1996) and the opportunity to use both to interrogate the other, and so develop a dialectic between theory and practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986:34).

However, this practical professional knowledge, which makes the practice of experienced teachers look fluent and effortless, is often so embedded and implicit that teachers find it difficult to articulate it to student teachers. Schön (1983) suggested that it can be made explicit through reflection on practice. This Vygotskian model of reflection on practice emphasises the role of 'other in learning and dialogue as a means of enabling a learner to enter and participate in the discourses of established practice' (Edwards and Brunton, 1993). Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that reflection on practice is a crucial element in the professional development of teachers (Calderhead and Gates, 1993), not only to make explicit what they do, but also to ask questions of their practice, and to modify it accordingly.

The introduction of school-based mentoring attempts to address these issues. It provides for complementary roles between university-based method lecturers and school-based experienced teachers acting as mentors. In jointly planning and supporting the school-based learning of student teachers during their practical teaching experience, lecturers and mentor teachers develop a shared understanding of the teaching practice experience. The practical craft knowledge of mentor teachers and the need to make this accessible to student teachers is recognised; and through the closer collaboration of theorists and practitioners, there is the opportunity for a much closer integration of theory and practice (Hagger, Burn and McIntyre, 1993).

In the process of mentoring, mentors involve student teachers in their lesson planning; they are observed by the student teachers and model good practice; and they reflect on their practice with the student teacher, making explicit their professional craft

knowledge. Mentors involve student teachers in collaborative teaching, gradually introducing them to the complexities of classroom teaching until they are ready to take over teaching a class on their own. Mentors observe student teachers teaching and reflect with them on their teaching experience, helping them to integrate that learning into further planning, so as to develop a reflexive cycle of planning, teaching, observation, reflection and further planning. Mentors and student teachers meet regularly with university-based method lecturers to reflect on, monitor and plan student teachers' learning experience. In these ways, the learning of the student teacher is 'scaffolded' by the school-based mentor, with the university based subject tutor working in close collaboration.

Although the focus in school-based mentoring programmes is on improving the school-based learning of student teachers, an incidental but important effect has been the professional development of the school-based mentors themselves, as a result of opening up their own classrooms and practice for observation and reflection, their close collaboration with university-based subject tutors and their focus on modelling excellent teaching practice (McIntyre and Hagger, 1992). This opens the possibility of whole school involvement and broadening the base of professional development within the school.

Pilot mentoring project
Context
In the university Education Department, student teachers do a one-year post-graduate professional qualification during which they spend 21 weeks in the department, attending lectures, seminars and preparing for the ten weeks of teaching practice in schools.

The teaching practice model that developed in this department over the past years has proved to be largely successful and effective. The success of the programme rested on two premises:
First, that the subject method lecturers from the department stayed in touch with their student teachers, visited their classrooms regularly (at least three times), giving

meaningful feedback, and finally, assessed the students' overall performance as "pass", "fail" or "distinction".

Second, that the host school played its part, that is in appointing suitable supervising teachers who also observed the students' teaching, discussed their teaching with them, and helped to compile the schools' overall assessment of the student teachers.

However, the shortcoming of this approach was the lack of collaboration between the department and the host schools. University method tutors as a rule did not make it part of their role to liaise with supervising teachers. As a result, the student teachers' development was not viewed as a collaborative effort, involving supervising teachers, university subject tutors and the student teachers themselves. This lack of professional collaboration at times led to the school and the university developing widely contrasting opinions of students' capabilities; or to students themselves developing widely divergent views of what the two supervising bodies expected. This situation reflects the problems inherent in the traditional approach to teacher education, where the theory based input of the university and the more practical contribution of the school have been uneasy bedfellows. Student teachers have thus not had the opportunity to develop the dialectic between theory and practice referred to earlier (Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 34). Although the notion of reflection on practice is central to the student teachers' university based course work, and student teachers were expected to reflect critically on their practical teaching experiences, no explicit support structures existed which might enable student teachers to develop critical reflectiveness during their ten week teaching practice. Clearly both the schools and the university had roles to play, and needed to find a way of merging the contribution of both these parties, as well as the students, into a single, coherent effort that would be in the best interests of the students' development as teachers.

School-based mentoring seemed to offer the prospect of both pre-service and in-service teacher development since it provides for

- shared responsibility and complementary roles (the practical contextualised knowledge of the school-based mentors and the broader, decontextualised perspective of the university-based method lecturers);

- a strongly supported and a structured practical experience for student teachers;

- opportunities for student teachers to access the 'professional craft knowledge' of experienced teachers (McIntyre and Hagger, 1993; Furlong and Maynard, 1995; Cooper and McIntyre, 1996) through structured reflection on their mentor teachers' practice;

- the mentor teachers' own professional development, as a result of opening up their classrooms and practice for observation and shared reflection with student teachers, their focus on modelling excellent teaching practice, and their close collaboration with university-based method tutors (McIntyre and Hagger, 1992, Calderhead and Gates, 1993);

It was against this background that we proposed this pilot study of a school-based mentoring programme for the student teachers doing the English first language and second language courses.

Aims

The aims of the research project were:

- to develop with mentor teachers a school-based mentoring programme appropriate to the local context

- to describe the experiences of the student teachers, the school-based subject mentors and the university-based method tutors

- to assess whether such a programme is sustainable and appropriate for the HDE programme as a whole

We felt it was important to work with teachers as equal partners, as we recognised that the particular contextual knowledge of teachers was crucial in developing a realistic model for the pilot project. We hoped that they might develop a sense of ownership, rather than have us produce a preconceived model for them to implement. In addition,

many of them already had experience in supervising student teachers and we did not want to undermine or disparage their previous contribution.

The relationship of the university education department with the schools and supervising teachers is a sensitive one: facilities for teaching practice are dependent on the goodwill and co-operation of the schools and the teachers concerned, as there is no obligation on the part of schools to participate, and there is no financial compensation for the school as a whole or for the individual teachers.

Research question

The research question we developed, to guide the project was:

- In what ways and to what extent, is school-based mentoring an appropriate, sustainable model for the practical teaching experience of student teachers on the HDE programme at Rhodes University?

The process

1. We approached English teachers in schools to sell the idea of school-based mentoring and of their participating in the pilot programme and research.
2. Preparatory workshops were held with prospective mentor teachers to clarify the concept of school-based mentoring, to develop a common understanding of the respective roles of subject mentors, method tutors and student teachers, and to introduce mentoring skills.
3. During teaching practice, we liaised closely with mentor teachers, through regular visits: three visits for each student teacher, for joint observation and feedback, and informal visits, for administrative purposes and to maintain contact with mentor teachers.
4. Formal interviews were held with student teachers and subject mentors at each school at the end of teaching practice. In most cases we reviewed the mentoring process in terms of the model we had proposed in our initial discussions: what had worked well, what hadn't and what could be improved.

5. The main issues arising from the interviews were collated and distributed to the mentor teachers and this formed the basis for a focus group discussion of the subject tutors and all the mentor teachers to review the programme and make recommendations for the future.

Twelve English teachers from five different schools were approached to become mentor teachers. They welcomed the prospect of closer collaboration with the university education department and agreed to participate in a workshop to develop a common understanding of the respective roles of mentors, method tutors and student teachers in the pilot mentoring programme. The teachers felt that

- more contact and continuity between student teachers and mentors would be beneficial, with an earlier introduction to the practical aspects of teaching and possible benefits in terms of integrating theory and practice at an earlier stage in the year;
- there would be benefits in terms of building a closer working relationship between student teacher and mentor;
- collaborative assessment would give a fuller, more coherent picture of the student teachers' development; and would provide the opportunity to pick up and deal with potential problems early on in TP;
- they welcomed having expectations regarding their role clearly structured and defined at the outset;
- one teacher expressed an interest in knowing more about the theoretical part of the HDE course so that he could bring that into discussions with the student teacher.

During the workshop discussions, some mentors felt that the proposed model of an initial period of observation, followed by some collaborative teaching, and only then solo teaching, should depend on individual student teachers: they felt that some might be impatient to start teaching immediately. In fact several mentors felt that 'throwing them in at the deep end' was a better learning experience. This seemed to point to a perception among mentors that there was not a lot that student teachers could learn from observing their practice.

A handbook for mentor teachers was drawn up, drawing on material from the Oxford School Mentoring Handbook (Hagger, Burn and McIntyre, 1993) and adapting it according to the mentor teachers' input.

Findings

Perceptions of university method tutors

It would be fair to say that the project involved everyone in more work; there is no way of avoiding this. Nevertheless, the experience was, we think, beneficial for all concerned. For us, as university tutors, the following benefits are worth noting:

- Increased emphasis on liaison between ourselves and mentor teachers. Our expectation were that mentors would attend 'crit' lessons with us, and that every visit would include a three-cornered meeting (tutor, student, mentor) where the particular lessons as well as general progress and problems were discussed.
- Increased quality contact between ourselves and our student teachers. The feedback sessions were considerably enriched by the input of mentors, resulting in a more professional level of contact between ourselves and our students.
- Greater awareness of the schools' English Departments' internal workings and modus operandi. At times we felt we had become 'members' of English Departments at schools, as we were drawn into discussions of planning, observing, feedback and so on.
- There was a real sense of partnership in some cases: we, as tutors, and the mentors were collaborating professionally to improve the school-based experience for student teachers.

Perceptions of mentors and student teachers

Successes

The feedback in general was very positive, particularly about the perceived improved communication between the university tutors and mentor teachers. Some mentor teachers felt that any problems could be resolved easily and quickly and that communication had been more frequent and relaxed. It was felt that university tutors had got a better sense of the student teachers' progress with more regular and evenly spaced visits. One of the mentors noted that the process was different for different students, as they had different needs and starting points.

The most enthusiastic response to the mentoring process was in regard to the shared observation and debriefing of student teachers. Most mentor teachers felt that this was very worthwhile and helpful for the student teachers, and an improvement on the previous practice. Mentor teachers saw this as 'the most helpful part of the process,' that bringing three people together with different perspectives of the educational process was a 'positive source of ideas to improve the lesson' … 'a far more satisfying situation' as mentor teacher and university tutor might be looking for different things and these would emerge in the discussions. It was felt that this was more balanced and fairer as the mentor teacher would have particular situated knowledge about the classes and what was or was not appropriate teaching practice.

Planning seemed to have been relatively unproblematic; student teachers had been allocated teaching that fitted into the overall plan of the department. It appeared that most of the planning had been at the macro level; students commented that they had a very clear idea when they started out what they were expected to do, which they found helpful and reassuring. Some mentor teachers had helped and supervised student teachers quite closely with their day to day planning, while others had allowed students the latitude 'do their own thing'.

One mentor teacher liked working very closely with the student teacher in this regard as she felt it helped her keep a handle on what was going on in her classes and she could easily pick up where the student left off; the student also felt that this relationship had worked very well for her as it gave her a very structured, safe framework. Another student in the same school had worked more independently and had thrived on the challenge – which serves to emphasise the point that different students have different needs.

However, there was some lack of clarity as to how much consultation of mentors there should be by student teachers on actual lesson planning. Consultation seemed to occur only on broader macro levels, mostly to ensure that student teachers were following the year or term plan already existing at the school. One mentor felt that expectations were not clear; when he asked to see a student teacher's lesson plan he felt as if he 'was policing'; another said 'it felt demeaning' to ask for a lesson plan, this in spite of the fact that university tutors routinely expect lesson plans when they conduct classroom observation.

Observation of student teachers by mentor teachers seemed to go well. In some cases students felt that they would have liked their mentor teachers to sit in more often and give them more feedback; when they were asked to, mentor teachers seemed surprised and almost flattered. Again, perhaps this points to an inherent tension between allowing the student teacher autonomy and closer supervision; perhaps also to mentor teachers underestimating just how much they have to offer student teachers, in terms of practical knowledge. Feedback seemed mostly to be fairly informal. In some cases, mentor teachers and student teachers had more formalised meetings on a regular basis, around planning as well as reviewing the student teachers' progress. The student teachers who experienced this level of support found it helpful to have time set aside for discussing their progress. The fact that it happened in a few cases only again points to varying individual relationships and styles.

Linked to this is the question of developing a 'critically constructive' relationship. Most mentor teachers did not seem to feel any tension here between being supportive and critical. They felt free to be frank and students were open to their suggestions. Student teachers felt that they appreciated the helpful and frank advice they had received from their mentor teachers. In some cases there was a more open ongoing discussion; mentors were willing to help with anything but in some cases felt that the initiative should come from the student teachers. A student observed that if there was no problem, there was nothing to talk about.

The mentors agreed that the process of mentoring a student teacher had made them think about their own practice – through observing the student teacher and being observed themselves, and through the student teachers' questions and problems. It had made them more conscious of the way they taught. Observing student teachers' lessons in their own classrooms made mentors aware of factors in classroom interaction they had not previously noticed, and it made them think of different ways of managing classes and presenting lessons.

Mentors responded favourably to the idea of recognition and accreditation for the role they played but were dubious about committing themselves to more time for further training.

Challenges

Observation of mentor teachers by student teachers and opening up of mentors' practice seemed to happen to varying degrees. Students said they found the observation helpful in terms of getting to know students' names and getting a sense of the class dynamics and what was or wasn't appropriate class behaviour in terms of discipline. Most of the learning by students from this experience seemed to be about the specific characteristics of particular classes and how to manage them, rather than what was intended (the learning of craft knowledge).

The timing of this observation was an issue. Some mentor teachers felt quite strongly that it was better for student teachers to get right in and start building a relationship **as a teacher**, with their particular classes, rather than to spend time observing them teaching as they felt the classes would continue to see them as students and would not take them seriously.

Arising from this apparent tension - the need for student teachers to get to know their classes and be accepted as their 'teacher', and the need to observe mentor teacher practice – the suggestion arose that student teachers should be placed with their mentor teachers earlier in the year, so as to have some opportunity earlier on to do the 'getting to know the class' kind of observation.

Most of the observation by student teachers seemed to happen at the beginning of their teaching practice. The 'model' suggests that it is useful for student teachers to continue with observation throughout their teaching practice, as they are likely to be able to learn different things from their observation as their own teaching practice develops and they have more of a sense of what they would like to focus.

It seemed that the ideal of 'opening up of practice' was not really achieved. In some cases mentor teachers felt that students observed their teaching but then didn't seem to know how to ask questions, or felt inhibited about asking questions. On the other hand, some mentor teachers felt that they didn't really know what to talk to the students about after the lesson: 'Because it's implicit, it's quite difficult. Half the time I'm not sure what comprises teaching practice'; or they felt they didn't want to 'impose their point of view.' So sometimes it seemed a case of 'who makes the first move?' And yet in the cases where student teachers were able to talk to mentor teachers about their (the mentor teachers') practice, they felt they learnt a lot.

That seemed to be a fruitful area for further discussion as the notion of mentoring is premised on the view that experienced teachers have a great deal of practical professional craft knowledge that is essentially different from the kind of theoretical knowledge that

universities are able to offer, and that this is extremely valuable to student teachers. But it is recognised that this practical knowledge is very often implicit and hard for experienced teachers to make explicit: the problem seems to lie with 'making the familiar strange.' Student teachers, on the other hand, lack the experience to really 'see' what is happening in the classroom.

There did not seem to have been much planned, structured collaborative teaching. In some case there was some informal joint teaching, or sharing of lessons e.g. the mentor teacher starting the lesson and then handing over to the student teacher, or with the mentor teacher joining in informally.

In the focus group discussion, where the student teachers were not present, mentors' feelings of insecurity about opening up their practice surfaced: 'Most teachers are reticent about saying "these are my strengths". And 'sometimes it's difficult to be honest about oneself, to say these are my shortcomings … it could be quite painful'; 'what does the student think, what does the university think, when they hear this and this about my teaching'; 'I would find it quite difficult if a student teacher told me they didn't like something I did; I would find it quite difficult for the rest of TP to tell them what to do.' Mentors responded fairly negatively to the idea of opening up their practice to a bigger group of students and a tutor, as a way of modelling the process. This lack of confidence on the part of good, experienced teachers surprised us.

Observations and recommendations

We found that mentor teachers were all overwhelmingly enthusiastic, supportive and appreciative of the closer working relationship with the Rhodes University Education Department. Mentor teachers also expressed appreciation at having a clearly structured role in relation to the student teachers' school-based experience

Mentor teachers adopted the model and guidelines for school-based mentoring to varying degrees. They tended to utilise some aspects and discard others, adapting them to their existing practices and values, drawing on their previous experiences as supervising

teachers and their own experiences as student teachers. This points to Schön's (1983) constructivist view of the nature of professional knowledge and the relationship of theory and practice: that professionals (not just teachers) develop a body of practical knowledge which is built up through practical experiences; and these experiences are used as references with which to 'frame' new situations or problems. He suggests that in the course of practising, professionals' decision making and actions are based on an accumulated and increasingly refined series of framing experiences rather than by direct reference to a body of learnt theory.

There appeared to have been some confusion at times regarding the extent of the mentor teacher's supervision and intervention, for example with regard to student teachers' lesson plans. In some cases student teachers did not offer their lesson plans for comment or assistance from their mentor teachers and mentor teachers felt that to ask to see them amounted to 'policing.' In fact they commented that they did not think that student teachers actually prepared proper lesson plans unless they were expecting a visit from their method tutor. We realised that the student teachers had not been fully prepared for their roles as mentees: they needed to be shown the value of discussing their lesson plans with their mentor teachers, and also to recognise the importance of the practical knowledge that the mentor teachers are able to offer.

What mentor teachers appeared to find most difficult was being observed by student teachers and 'opening up their practice' to their mentees. What comes through in our research is that **at an intellectual level**, mentor teachers' perceptions of their professional craft knowledge are that they underestimate it or do not recognise it. Because their classroom practice is fluent and routinised they appear not to know what features of their practice should be highlighted and discussed. Prabhu (1992) claimed that teaching as social practice was essentially uncertain and that uncertainty was uncomfortable and stressful for teachers who - probably partly unconsciously - routinise aspects of their practice in order to reduce uncertainty and stress. Thus routines should be viewed as a positive way of dealing with uncertainty, for both teachers and students (Prabhu, 1992; Wong-Fillmore, 1985). However, this routinisation and fluency make it

hard for mentor teachers to make the familiar strange, to make their professional craft knowledge explicit for student teachers. Student teachers, on the other hand, find it difficult to 'see' and make sense of what is happening in the classroom, partly because they do not have the practical classroom teaching experience and partly because what they do see seems so fluent and effortless.

But also **at an affective level** teachers find it uncomfortable to be observed by students or university method tutors; teachers seem to feel that being observed and then talking about their lesson afterwards is exposing their practice to judgement and criticism, that they would be evaluated against some ideal prototype. A teacher noted that he felt diffident about pointing out his strengths to student teachers and also might find it painful to acknowledge his weaknesses; he felt this signified a lack of confidence in his teaching practice. He also wondered what the student teacher would think of his practice (as measured against some ideal theoretical model) and what the university tutors would think about what he did. Perhaps this points to the isolation of the average teacher, with little time or opportunity for reflection and sharing and affirmation of their practice. This also indicated a perception that the theoretical knowledge of the university is more important than the practical craft knowledge of the mentor teacher and an imbalance in respective power relations.

Teaching practice is also highly personalised (Furlong and Maynard, 1995: 83) and 'teaching is an occupation that is *felt* as much as experienced' (Nias, 1989 in Furlong and Maynard, 1995: 84); an art as much as a craft (Eisner, 1991). Teachers may therefore feel particularly vulnerable to student critique, since it is not merely their 'doing' that is on display, but also their 'being'.

This points to the need to clarify with mentor teachers what we mean by 'professional craft knowledge'; and to separate the notion of reflection on practice in order to make explicit that 'professional craft knowledge,' from the idea of a judgmental 'critting' of lessons (i.e. address the intellectual and affective issues). At the same time one would hope that mentors, in the process of reflecting on their practice, would become confident

enough to say 'This might have worked better if I had done that', suggesting a shift in focus from detecting the negative to making explicit the skills while maintaining a critically reflective stance. It is important to note here that the essence of facilitating reflection on practice is that of Carl Rogers' 'unconditional positive regard' (Brown and McIntyre, 1993) as a means to reducing defensiveness and building confidence on the part of the mentor or student teacher.

What do we learn from this experience?
The pilot mentoring programme has been perceived to be largely successful in improving the school-based experience and learning of student teachers. We recommended that this be extended to the whole HDE class in 2000.

We need to properly prepare student teachers for their role as mentees. One of our mentors felt that student teachers had little to say, and hardly ever asked questions Clearly student teachers need to be gradually exposed to the 'craft' of 'reading' a teaching performance, and learning how to ask questions about what they see. In response to this perceived need, the Educational Studies course presented to training teachers has developed one of its components along the lines of micro-teaching. Each student has had the opportunity of teaching a short lesson which was filmed and played back to the student and a group of peers for critical discussion, roughly along the lines of the "Teacher Process Recall" video programme released by the Education Development Service of the University of Northrumbia (1994). It will be interesting to see whether this module will have any effect on the student teachers' ability to 'find the language' to talk about their and others' teaching.

Considerable interpersonal skill is needed to make this happen, and this too will need attention. Observation tasks for student teachers that are negotiated with their mentors beforehand might help to structure this process. It would be helpful to bring student teachers back to the Education Department at some point during their teaching practice experience to reflect together on the outcomes of these tasks.

We need to offer mentor teachers training, particularly in reflecting on and opening up their practice to student teachers, to help them 'make the familiar strange' and make explicit their implicit professional craft knowledge.

We also need to help teachers to move away from a deficit view of teachers' practice and the notion of observation and reflection as an essentially critical and judgemental process, to one that focuses on what teachers know and do well and helping them to make that explicit while maintaining a critically constructive perspective. We recognise that this is likely to be a difficult process for teachers but one that is likely to lead to considerable professional growth: 'Reflection has come to be widely recognised as a crucial element in the professional development of teachers…' (Calderhead and Gates, 1993:1)

What's in it for mentor teachers?

At present, not much that is readily quantifiable. Acting as a mentor requires more of teachers in terms of time, responsibility, commitment and emotional energy. Mentors receive little by way of compensation beyond some relief from teaching (once mentees become more independent) and an acknowledgement by the university of the important role they play in mentoring and assessing the student teachers' professional learning and development. There is the prospect of their own professional growth and development, but as this can be an uncomfortable process it is not one that teachers might readily embrace.

We therefore propose to develop a certified course in mentoring skills to offer to mentor teachers that would include their practical school-based experience as part requirement. This could be developed as both a stand-alone module or fit as part of a BEd Hon or Masters programme. We have had preliminary discussions with members of the Rhodes Education Department and agreed in principle to pursue the setting up of such a course jointly between the Rhodes Education Department and the ISEA.

The broader picture

While the idea of school-based mentoring, as a means for both pre-service and in-service teacher development is a relatively new concept in South Africa, it is significant that mentoring is listed in the Norms and Standards for Educators (South Africa 2000). As far as we have been able to ascertain, there have been some initiatives at the University of the Western Cape (Robinson, 1999) and at the University of Port Elizabeth. More recently the concept seems to be gaining ground. The Imbewu (Xhosa for 'seed') Project, an internationally funded project concerned with training teachers for the new curriculum, has recognised the need for school-based teacher development and has included training of mentors for school-base follow up and support.

This concept of mentoring is different in that it involves training education department subject advisors and district officials to act as mentors in schools, to teachers undergoing training; as opposed to teachers in schools acting as mentors to student teachers or newly qualified teachers. The national department of education teacher development directorate have also indicated that they recognise the need for school-based teacher development but do not have the resources at present to train mentors in all schools and so are focussing their efforts at district level.

However, an agreement between the National Education Department and the Education Labour Relations Council has stipulated 80 hours of compulsory INSET for teachers. In addition, the Skills Development Act (1998) has introduced a levy, payable by employers, including government, for employee skills development. We hope that these measures will provide both the incentive and resources for much needed in-service training for teachers, which could well include training in school-based mentoring.

We hope this paper may provide some insight into the possibilities for school-based mentoring and teacher development in our particular South African context of educational transformation.

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