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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mentoring in the field of teacher education

Indrani Kalita

Assistant Professor, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University

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Corresponding Author*Indrani,kalita****Abstract**

Teacher education is the process of providing teachers and potential teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to teach effectively in a classroom environment. Most teacher education starts with initial training such as degree program at a college or university, though other paths are available for a candidate to begin teacher education.

The term “mentor” stems from Greek mythology in which Odysseus entrusted the care and education of his child to a friend named mentor while the father was away of his adventures and travels. Mentoring has come to be used for a variety of relationships. Some of its synonyms include role model, coach, guide, sponsor, friend and adviser.

Good quality mentoring in schools makes an important contribution to developing the professional skills of new teachers and ensuring the best quality learning experiences for pupils. This paper is an attempt to reflect an innovative concept of mentoring in the field of teacher education in India.

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INTRODUCTION

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, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000). 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.

Mentors and supervisors assist student teachers in developing effective classroom management and teaching techniques. The relationship that forms between mentors/supervisors and student teachers is professional, friendly, open and cooperative. It helps us to ensure that the future of the education system is strong and promising.

Mentoring is a professional activity, a trusted relationship, a meaningful commitment. The origins of mentoring can be traced back to ancient Greece as a technique to impart to young men important social, spiritual, and personal values. Mentoring as we know it today is loosely modeled on the historical craftsman/apprentice relationship, where young people learned a trade by shadowing the master artisan. In the mid-70s, corporate America redefined mentoring as a career development strategy. The concept of mentoring faculty and administrators is relatively new to higher education and rare in information technology circles, where staff professional development often takes the form of technical manuals and certifications. It is precisely this type of support organization, however, that needs a strong foundation of mentoring to build and retain a healthy workforce that can react quickly to change and can develop, adapt, and regenerate itself over time.

Mentoring relationships range from loosely defined, informal collegial associations in which a mentee learns by observation and example to structured, formal agreements between expert and novice co-mentors where each develops professionally through the two-way transfer of experience and perspective. Whether the relationship is deemed formal or informal, the goal of mentoring is to provide career advice as well as both professional and personal enrichment. We define a mentoring relationship as helping and supporting people to manage their own learning in order to maximize their professional potential, develop their skills, improve their performance, and become the person they want to be.

MENTORING IN THE FIELD OF TEACHER EDUCATION

At all stages of teacher education, mentoring is an acknowledged part of learning and developing new skills. In initial teacher education (ITE), student teachers learn from experienced class teachers in primary and secondary schools. In the induction scheme, newly qualified teachers learn professional skills and strategies from experienced colleagues. Mentoring is also an appropriate way for experienced teachers and managers to acquire management and leadership skills that can then lead to posts with wider responsibilities.

Mentoring appears to have the essential attributes of: a process; a supportive relationship; a helping process; a teaching-learning process; a reflective process; a career development process; a formalized process; and a role constructed by and for a mentor. The contingent attributes of the mentoring phenomenon appear as: coaching, sponsoring, role-modeling, assessing and an informal process. If developing learning organizations in a learning society is a desirable social goal, mentoring can perform an important function in helping people develop their highest potential. If everyone is capable of being a teacher (mentor) and a learner (mentee) individuals should strive to develop their capacity to learn from and support the learning of others.

A mentor is a highly educated and experienced teacher who's personal and professional qualities enable him/her as much as possible to facilitate the smoothest and least painful transition of a teacher training institution graduate into an able professional teacher. The mentor participates in a graduate's social roles transition, i.e. from a role of a student/teacher trainee into a social role of a professional teacher. Owing to the specific place of mentor among teaching staff, in comparison with other teachers' and colleagues roles, he/she has to fulfill a number of more demanding and responsible tasks. In our opinion there are at least two major aspects of mentor's tasks we have to take into account. These can be specified as follows:

A/ Professional aspects,

B/ Psycho-social aspects.

Each of them can be divided into the following subgroups:

A/ Professional aspects of mentor's roles comprise:

1. Educational development

a) Development of novice's teaching skills

(E.g. lesson planning, teaching performance, (self-) evaluation, use of educational technology and teaching aids, etc.)

b) Novice's cognitive development

c) Novice's socio-emotional development (e.g. ability to create a co-operative and creative classroom climate, teacher – student interaction, teacher – teacher interaction, teacher –personnel interaction, etc.)

2. Development of novice's skills in keeping administrative documents

(E.g. record keeping, class register, students' profiles, implementation of official documents of the Ministry of Education, etc.)

3. Life-long professional development

a) Novice's contacts with professional institutions (e.g. regional/district methodological centres, pedagogical psychological advisory centers', pedagogical – psychological advisory centres for children with special needs, etc.)

b) Skills formation in looking for latest news and development published in various professional materials and sources either in novice's teaching subject(s) or education in general.

c) Novice's participation in courses, seminars, meetings, conferences.

B/ Psycho-social aspects of mentor's tasks include:

1. Introduction of a novice:

a) Into the teaching staff

b) To personnel and giving information about the Trade Union of Teachers and the Parental Board

c) Into the school environment, getting him/her familiar with the physical conditions of the school equipment and facilities

2. Transfer of professional ethics of teachers into novice's practice
3. Demands on mentor's personal traits and abilities (in general, specific ethic traits, internalization with the mentor's role and enthusiasm for it)

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MENTORING:

- Beginning educators need and deserve ongoing professional development opportunities.
- Mentoring is the central feature of any successful beginning educator induction programme.
- Without mentoring, new staff will focus on survival. With mentoring, new staff can focus on professional development and serving students.
- Mentors and protégés both gain from the experience.
- Mentor programmes built on a knowledge base of best practices have the greatest potential for success.
- If a district has expectations for a mentoring program, a formal programme with in-depth mentor preparation and support must be in place.
- Mentoring partnerships can vary widely, from one-on-one mentor, protégé partnerships, and the teams of mentors working with single or multiple protégés.

(From Oregon State Mentoring Programme 2004: www.ode.state.or.us)

TYPES OF MENTORS:

Different mentoring relationships generate a whole host of mentor types and styles.

- **The wise leader** is someone who through executive title, seniority, or status within the organization has reached the pinnacle of his or her career and is worthy of and willing to impart knowledge and wisdom to others in the organization. Often natural leaders, these politically astute individuals exude a certain air of confidence and innately understand and have thrived within the organization's culture and practices. While most of their mentoring relationships are formally arranged, wise leaders have been known to take on protégés in informal apprenticeships.
- **The life coach** is a professional mentor, often in the organization's human resources division or an outside consultant. Staff looking to change jobs or careers often hires life coaches outside the work environment to evaluate their performance, prepare for new career opportunities, or simply set and achieve personal goals. These relationships tend to be short term with a targeted and prioritized set of objectives. While life coaching usually happens in a face-to-face environment, more and more life coaches are offering their services virtually—over the telephone or the Internet.
- **The teacher** could be an educator, working with current or past students to build their professional talents and skills, or someone who assumes the "honorary" role of teacher—promoting learning and growth by imparting knowledge, debating ideas, or recommending resources. A teaching relationship might be officially sanctioned, such as enrolling for independent study, or as informal as dropping by during office hours for a chat.
- **Peer mentors** participate in informal relationships in which colleagues or friends pair up to help each other grow within an organization. They might team up to gain professional development experience, share networking contacts, or simply support each other's career path choices.
- **The confidante** is not so much a mentor as someone to use as a touchstone or sounding board. It is helpful in both healthy and dysfunctional work environments to have a confidante with whom to bat ideas around, air frustrations, request reality checks, and seek advice.
- **The self-help mentor** takes the form of books, manuals, articles, checklists, software, Web sites, and so forth that provide proven formulas or step-by-step advice on how to grow professionally. While not a substitute for the real thing, some of these popular resources are useful in helping an employee map a career path and/or lay a foundation for future mentoring relationships.
- **The inner mentor** is the internal voice that calls upon intuition to glean and mold life experiences into a personalized leadership philosophy. This nontraditional self-mentoring approach takes into account past experiences, current competencies, and future potential. The first step is to conduct a life experience inventory, identifying experiences that might hold leadership potential. It is the deconstruction—the

picking apart—of these experiences to reveal underlying values and beliefs that will translate into a customized set of leadership principles. The process of mentoring yourself is difficult—it takes concentration, self-reflection, and the ability to trust your own instincts.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MENTORING:

- **Strive for mutual benefits.** The relationship should be defined from the beginning as mutually beneficial. Each participant has committed to the relationship by choice. Each should openly share his or her goals for the relationship and work collaboratively to help achieve them.
- **Agree on confidentiality.** Maintaining an environment of confidentiality is a critical component in building trust between the participants. Without a mutually understood ability to speak freely as the situation warrants, the relationship is unlikely to reach its full potential.
- **Commit to honesty.** The participants should be willing to candidly share what they expect to gain from the relationship and their vision for getting there. They should be prepared to offer frank feedback as appropriate, even if the feedback is critical.
- **Listen and learn.** Mutual benefit and honesty can only be achieved when both members feel their viewpoints are heard and respected. Mentors, especially, need to remember that the relationship is not primarily about them. Co-mentors should not be intimidated or made to feel their views are not valued.
- **Build a working partnership.** Consider structuring a working partnership that includes project consultation or active collaborations rooted in the common ground of shared professional goals. These collaborations can lead to discoveries about each participant's preferred working style, daily obligations, and professional aspirations.
- **Lead by example.** Actions create the most lasting impression.
- **Be flexible.** It might help for a mentoring relationship to have defined goals, but the process may be as important—or more so—than the goals.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF MENTORS IN TEACHER EDUCATION

Some may think that teachers are the only ones who would benefit from peer mentoring and coaching programs in education. However, educators who are coaching these new teachers can learn a lot as well. As a mentor teacher, one can gain valuable experience.

However, we cannot just expect to teach a new thing teacher knows just reading a long list of points to remember. There are ways to develop and use effective practices for these new teachers as a mentor teacher useful. As older teachers begin to retire, it is important that teachers are taught the latest and mentor well because it will be an important part of the education system. These new teachers who are going to go into all the daunting responsibility of the class need a support system that allows them to move from theory to practice. Being a mentor teacher is an important role, because mentoring new teachers can help them to improve and strengthen their skills and practices, and then keep them in the profession.

Teaching can be demanding and complicated. It is important for a mentor teacher know that they can also learn a lot from mentoring. For example, teachers, veterans must stay current with new teaching methods, the energies in the classroom, and experience periodic professional renewal, in order to avoid burnout. It is useful to remember that all teachers are students for life and work in collaboration with colleagues enhances classroom practices, improve student learning and builds school communities. Therefore be involved with peer mentoring and coaching not only improves health, but helps students learn better as well.

There are some things which we can do to become an effective teacher mentor.

- Everything depends on the methods used and on whether or not to identify and analyze the needs of the mentee in the mentoring relationship. After identifying the needs, the mentor should review and research and outline an effective plan to meet their mandates of state for a mentoring program effectively. One of the first things a mentor can do is to help make the mentee understand the school environment and culture.

- The next step for a mentor teacher would be to help improve the skills necessary for successful classroom teaching. Many new teachers may need assistance with expertise in the management class with the new guidelines to follow. Another problem that a novice teacher may need advice on is the problem of balancing work and personal life. These are all important questions to get a hold of a new teacher when he or she is about to enter the classroom.
- It is also useful to use real-life situations, in order to give a new teacher ways to deal with the problem, because they are required to meet the same. Keep the lines of communication open, even after the relationship is formally over, and be willing to listen, learn and practice new techniques.

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO MENTOR A NEW TEACHER:

- Observe the new teacher's lessons. After observing a few lessons, the mentor should begin a weekly schedule for providing feedback whereby mentors share his/her observations, positive notes and areas she/he thinks should be improved. Mentors should take note of what worked particularly well and which areas need improvement without criticizing or judging the teachers. Mentors should be available to help new teachers on a frequent and regular basis.
- It is important for mentors to encourage teachers to stop and think after giving a lesson whether it was a good one or not, and why. This is not in order to indulge in self-congratulation or regrets, but in order to have a basis for their own learning from done to improve it.
- Following the session, mentors should encourage the new teacher to brainstorm a list of concerns that might be difficult or challenging. By going over them together, the mentor can encourage the new teacher to explore answers to these questions. Encourage new teachers to explore using a dialogue journal where the mentor gives feedback based on his/her reflections. Teacher mentors can also give a checklist (similar to the list below) to serve as a guide for building his/her own self-awareness.
- Modeling is an important part of teacher mentorship. Give the new teacher a week to implement the goals with regard to lesson planning and classroom management. As part of the process of learning effective instruction, mentors model different strategies of effective instruction and activities that engage students right away. Mentors should also take the opportunity to prepare some activities or an entire lesson together. They can also work together on planning the rules and procedures of a classroom management plan and discuss effective tactics for how to engage students more effectively. As part of the modeling process, new teachers should be invited to observe lessons by other seasoned teachers. The focus is not to emulate but to observe quietly as part of the learning process.
- Before new teachers decide to give up after their first year of teaching, mentors should encourage them to teach a second year. There are just so many new and unique experiences that happen in a new teacher's first year. Now that the mentor knows the teacher's capabilities, it is time to come up with a long term plan that will help new teachers develop other strategies for effective instruction. Mentors should help new teachers come up with plan additional ways of mentorship that still continue to support areas of lesson planning and classroom management so that new teachers can eventually find his/her own style of teaching that is comfortable.

CONCLUSION:

There are different limitations of our present teacher education programs for which the need of mentoring in the field of teacher education has been felt. The limitations are as such:

- Based on theory i.e., maximum emphasis is being laid on theoretical and conceptual input
- No concrete model in transactional strategies with regard to meet the need of the individuals.
- Lack of approach and learning materials.
- Lack of involvement of teacher in policy decision.
- Lack of technical resource support for professional development of teachers.

To remove such difficulties innovative method like mentoring can be applied to provide a holistic which can acknowledge the multiple dimensions of the human personality-physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual-thus moving towards the perennial dream of an integrated individual living on a harmonious planet. Within the global learning conditions, teacher education also aimed at helping developing lifelong learning. Hence we can conclude that teacher educator's understanding of the systematic features of the quality movement is essential, particularly if we are to lead efforts to enhance teacher educators today is to mend the existing system with vision to help teacher education grow as a profession and produce quality teachers for schools.

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