Africa Education Review

ISSN: 1814-6627 (Print) 1753-5921 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/raer20

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To cite this article: Karen dos Reis & Martin Braund (2019) Are School-Based Mentors Adequately Equipped to Fulfil Their Roles? A Case Study in Learning to Teach Accounting, Africa Education Review, 16:4, 17-36, DOI: 10.1080/18146627.2018.1460210

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1460210

Published online: 21 Mar 2019.

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ARTICLE

Are School-Based Mentors Adequately Equipped to Fulfil Their Roles? A Case Study in Learning to Teach Accountancy

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Abstract

This article reports on a study that explored how school-based teachers fulfilled their roles as mentors in response to challenges faced by pre-service teachers while learning to teach accounting. Pre-service teachers in their final year at a University of Technology in South Africa and practising teachers from six high schools participated in the study. Pre-service teachers e-mailed reflection journals on a weekly basis over a period of four months to the first author who is a teacher educator. Unstructured interviews were carried out with each pre-service teacher and their respective mentors. The results indicated that not all mentors assisted the pre-service teachers according to the expectations of their roles. Despite mentoring having the potential to enhance the preparation of pre-service teachers, in the cases studied it did not always yield positive results. It became clear that the cumulative nature of the accounting discipline requires a different type of mentoring from other disciplines. In fact, numerous factors revealed in the study influenced the failure and success of mentoring pre-service teachers. Many of these factors are ones over which the university has no control.

Keywords: mentors; pre-service teachers; accounting; learning; teaching

Introduction

Although mentoring is widely advocated to enhance teacher preparation it comes with its strengths and challenges. Historically, mentoring was considered by humans as a way in which an older (wiser) generation assists a younger (less wise) one to achieve their goals (Rapuleng 2002, 57). In higher education settings mentoring is a method to assist students to understand and learn comprehensively from their daily experience (Hamilton

UNISA university of south africa PRESS
Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Africa Education Review
http://www.tandfonline.com/raer20
Volume 16 | Number 4 | 2019 | pp. 17–36

https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1460210
ISSN 1753-5921 (Online), ISSN 1814-6627 (Print)
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2003, 21). According to Kardos and Johnson (2008, 5), mentors assist beginner teachers with macro and micro lesson planning and with utilising appropriate resources to present successful lessons. Part of the bedrock for developing the role of mentors in teacher education has been the notion of "reflection" through which experienced professionals (teachers) draw on a, "repertoire of examples, understanding and actions to interpret situations in an immediate and interactive way" (Schon 1987, 138). While the notion of a mentor as a 'reflective practitioner' may have some credence in the educational systems of developed countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) and Australia, progress in African countries has been hindered by a lack of value placed on reflection and a tendency for student teachers to blame systemic dysfunctionality rather than being willing to recognise and analyse their own contributions (Pryor and Stuart 1997). Additionally it has been found that reflection and innovation are inhibited in teacher education where examination-oriented systems dominate (Stuart and Kunje 1998; Stuart, Morojele and Lefoka 1997). In the South African context, there are imperatives to improve reflective components of teacher education (DoE 1998). While competences for teachers in government policy documents are built around a rhetoric of reflective practice, there are needs for courses in higher education to more fully integrate and apply practice and theory rooted in real contexts for teaching that recognise the complex art of being able to teach (Robinson 2003, 21).

A pilot study conducted prior to the one reported on here revealed discrepancies between the role expectations of the school-based mentor and the pre-service teacher (Dos Reis 2012, 16). The pre-service teachers expected their mentors to provide mentoring assistance through ongoing observation of lessons, constructive feedback on becoming a competent accounting teacher and to write a weekly report on their progress and submit this to the university lecturer responsible for training. In contrast, the school-based mentors appeared to be confused regarding their role expectations. They indicated that they had not been requested in advance to mentor the pre-service teachers and were often compelled by the school principal to mentor pre-service teachers as opposed to doing this voluntarily. Added to this, the mentors stated they were unaware of pre-service teachers' skills and knowledge acquired at university and were therefore unable to provide appropriately targeted mentoring support. Hence the study arose from needs expressed by pre-service teachers for their university to play a greater role in training school-based mentors on their role expectations. Against the backdrop of research discussed in the following sections, the current study explored the extent school-based mentors fulfilled expected roles, in addressing the challenges of learning to teach accounting.

Roles of Mentors

The literature on mentoring indicates a number of roles of the mentor to facilitate the professional development of a mentee (Rheineck and Roland 2008). According to

Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba (2007, 297), a mentor's role is multifaceted and fulfilling a mentor's role should not be taken lightly. Mentors are referred to as counsellors, role models and advisers who share their experience with inexperienced individuals and provide the mentee with information on the logistics of how the place of work functions (Mohono-Mahlatsi and Van Tonder 2006, 384).

The literature review in the context of mentoring in teacher education leads us to an understanding that the mentor in teacher education should act as coach, expert, guide and, crucially, as reflective practitioner. For the purposes of the study, the aforementioned roles will each be briefly discussed.

Coach

Coaching is described as a technique to improve the performance of a mentee by identifying and addressing the skills they lack (Hamilton 2003, 62). The role of a mentor as coach is to assist the mentee to locate resources, to improve their understanding of subject knowledge and to expand their skills of teaching (Portner 2003, 8). According to Hamilton (2003, 65), coaches need to be knowledgeable regarding skills involving recognising what the mentee is doing wrong and in providing detailed steps for mentees to improve their performance. To enable this, mentors should be able to provide feedback that the mentee can understand, practise and be motivated to act on.

Expert

Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba (2007, 300) believe that expertise in a specific subject can only be gained through experience; hence, mentors who are experienced are able to provide greater assistance than those who are less experienced. Botha and Reddy (2011, 259) strongly believe that learning to teach is effective only if the school-based mentor is an experienced teacher. Moberg (2008, 835) refers to a mentor as an experienced individual who takes over the responsibility of mentoring an inexperienced individual. In contrast, Hamel and Jaasko-Fischer (2010, 441) provide evidence in their study that, regardless of the mentors' years of experience in teaching, all mentors find it challenging to provide adequate time to assist pre-service teachers with lesson planning and to provide sufficient feedback on their lessons. Even in highly developed teacher education systems, like Australia, experienced mentors find it hard to unpack professional practices, tending instead to communicate more pragmatic and technical features of teaching (Murray, Nuttall and Mitchell 2008, 234).

Guide

The most difficult role of a mentor is to guide the pre-service teacher as opposed to dictating how to teach (Oetjen and Oetjen 2009, 101). It is essential that mentees are

challenged, assisted, and given guidance along a journey that they are not familiar with as this will help define their professionalism (Rheineck and Roland 2008, 91). Mentors need to develop an understanding of how pre-service teachers learn to teach specific subject content and generate skills to aid them effectively.

Dewey (1938, 26) contends that all humans have desires as far as professionality goes. However, the strength of the desire will influence the effort required to achieve it. School-based mentor teachers' desire to support pre-service teachers learning to teach influences the degree of effort they put into enhancing the professional development of the pre-service teachers. Consequently, teachers who are willing and committed to their roles as mentors can empower pre-service teachers to act and think as learners by utilising investigative techniques that help them discover their strengths and weaknesses (Campbell and Brummet 2007, 50). For example, instead of rectifying the mistakes that occur during the mentee's lesson presentation, the mentor might instead pose questions to the mentee to help them analyse and explain their own actions.

Reflective Practitioner

Schön's (1987) notion of "reflection" is pre-dated to some extent by Dewey (1938, 25), who, for example, saw the problems of teaching being regarded as a set of rigid handed down procedures and argued that teachers need to develop particular skills, such as observation and reasoning, in order to reflect effectively, and should have qualities, such as open-mindedness, wholeheartedness and responsibility. The term "reflective practice" has been claimed by teacher education courses in Europe and the US but interpretations are often loose and varied. Actually, Schön (1987, 135) recognises two types, namely: "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" or "after action". It should be noted that the time frames and characteristics of teaching mean that reflection after action is more likely than the sorts of on-task reflection-in-action in the artisan and engineering workshop situations described in much of Schön's early work. John (2000, 14) suggests that a reflective teacher needs, "highly tuned and highly differentiated intuition for understanding and interpreting classroom life and a wide repertoire of appropriate models for reacting to specific situations". He argues that increased emphasis in teacher education on analysing key moments, and identifying and encouraging the use of intuitive processes can assist student teachers in developing these skills.

When an outcome of a particular task is not achieved, reflection can be utilised to assess the task and plan future action (Schön 1987, 26). When teachers make a conscious effort to write down the strengths and challenges of their lessons and how they can make changes in their practice to make lessons more effective, their reflections are being utilised to enhance their professional development and develop their "meta-cognitive skills" (Kriek and Grayson 2009, 192). Despite self-reflection being a useful tool for professional development, mentoring provides a better understanding of the practice of

teaching and ongoing learning for a pre-service teacher than self-reflection alone (Baker and McNicoll 2006, 28).

For mentors to develop reflective skills they must engage in reflection themselves, and this could be facilitated in a "collaborative and supportive framework" (Frost 1993, 142). Professionals who collaborate in forums to enhance professional development are able to transfer tacit knowledge, which is in the "heads of individuals" and not written explicitly in books (Sanchez 2004, 2).

Mentoring in the South African Context

South Africa is considered to be a developing country where there is great disparity between the socio-economic status of citizens (Dass-Brailsford 2005, 580). The National Education Policy Act: Norms and Standards for Educators (Notice 82 of 2000) states six roles for teachers, namely: specialists in a phase or discipline; learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner and a community, citizenship and pastoral role. Morrow (2007, 99) argues strongly that these roles pay no attention to the realities most South African teachers face while working in schools that were racially disadvantaged as a result of the apartheid system, as there is a major difference between those teachers who work in schools which function efficiently and those that do not. In South Africa previously disadvantaged schools experience overcrowded classes and inadequate resources (Morrow 2007, 32). Previously disadvantaged schools or poverty-stricken schools experience difficulty attracting and retaining good teachers (Kardos and Johnson 2008, 2). Most previously disadvantaged schools experience chronic teacher absenteeism; timetables that are run inefficiently; and teacher-centred learning (Morrow 2007, 56). The development of mentoring in teacher education in South Africa must be seen against this systemic, social and educational backdrop.

It should be noted that not all previously disadvantaged schools are considered to be dysfunctional. However, there are strong arguments in the literature that dysfunctional schools should be avoided as sites for mentoring pre-service teachers (Mawoyo and Robinson 2005; Morrow 2007). Placing pre-service teachers at dysfunctional schools can have numerous implications for how they learn to teach in the context of mentoring.

Dysfunctional Schools

A concern raised by Fricke, Horak, Meyer and Van Lingen (2008, 72) is that some teachers at dysfunctional schools, who participated as mentors, were sometimes unsure what their duties as mentors entailed. They state that these teachers did their schooling at dysfunctional schools and were often not exposed to good role models of teaching. The danger here is that these teachers are often incapable of assisting mentees as they

themselves have not gained experience in schools which had good practice. Pryor and Stuart (1997) report a similar lack of agency in a comparative study of teacher education practices in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa where prevalence of transmission learning means that student teachers are often taught merely to replicate such practices without reflection on the efficacies of methods.

The danger of dysfunctionality with respect to teaching and learning is that pre-service teachers become demoralised and reconsider their career choice. However, Mawoyo and Robinson (2005, 113) warn that while it may be good for pre-service teachers to be exposed to a school that functions well, that this could paint a picture of "unrealistic expectation of the profession". It would therefore be ideal for pre-service teachers to do their teaching practice at schools that are not necessarily well-resourced, but have good teachers.

Language Barriers

South Africa has 11 national languages, but the languages of instruction at schools and universities are exclusively Afrikaans and English (Joubert 2010, 39). The Language in Education Policy (DoE 1997) strongly advocates for learners to learn in their mother tongue. Despite the aforementioned policy, the DoE encourages teaching in English, a language that is often not the home language of most learners (Adams and Sewry 2010, 1).

Teachers lack training to deal with learners who are second language English speakers and often these teachers have limited English proficiency to teach learners (Adams and Sewry 2010, 2). Teachers have often expressed a need for formal training to teach learners who are second language English speakers as learning through their own attempts have proved to be unsuccessful (O'Connor and Geiger 2009, 264). Hence, there have been recommendations that both in-service and pre-service teachers in South Africa be provided with training in second language acquisition and bilingualism (O'Connor and Geiger 2009, 265).

Pre-Service Teachers Choose Own Placement

Pre-service teachers tend to focus more on the logistical aspects of teaching practice than the quality of mentoring. For example, in a study conducted by Mawoyo and Robinson (2005, 113), pre-service teachers chose schools that were close to where they lived as opposed to schools that might provide them with a good teaching practice experience with the chances of supportive mentoring. It was evident in Mawoyo and Robinson's study that pre-service teachers were not concerned about the quality of the school and the type of mentor assistance that might be provided. This concern that pre-service teachers are allowed to choose their own placements without the guidance of

the university was raised in the report of the Council on Higher Education (CHE 2010, 94). Karel and Stead (2011, 406) on the other hand are in favour of pre-service teachers taking responsibility for finding a mentor who can act as a professional role model and who shares similar interests as, "personal chemistry is important for a good mentoring relationship". In the South African context, it remains evident that the most important focus for many pre-service teachers in choosing a practice school is the location rather than the quality of mentoring that might be available.

Methodology

Participants

The research sites included six schools located in the Cape Metropole, Western Cape, South Africa. We used purposive sampling and focused on accounting as a "vehicle" to guide our choice of sampling to explore how pre-service teachers learn while teaching accounting. The sample of the study consisted of six pre-service teachers learning to teach accounting in the fourth year BEd: FET programme and their respective school-based accounting mentors. The main reason for using the fourth year pre-service teachers was that in their final year of study, they spend six months at a school to work alongside a school-based mentor. This time period gave the researchers sufficient time to explore challenges and how school-based mentors responded to them. Participation in the study was voluntary for the accounting school-based mentors, but it was mandatory for the pre-service teachers as teaching practice forms part of the BEd: FET curriculum.

According to the teaching practice policy of the university where the study took place, pre-service teachers must be assigned a school-based mentor for each of their subject majors. As is the norm in South Africa and as discussed in the literature review, pre-service teachers were allowed to choose the schools where they wanted to do their teaching practice internship. Following these choices, a letter was provided to inform the accounting school-based mentors of the purposes of the study and to solicit their participation. A summary of the participating pre-service teachers, their mentors and the schools in which they were placed is shown as Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of study participants and placement schools

Participant		**School**
Mentee	**Mentor**	
Ally First language: Afrikaans	Mrs Ashton First language: English 20 years' experience	Township (Previously disadvantaged school – Focus school)
Lara First language: Afrikaans	Mr Lucas First language: English 14 years' experience	Urban (Ex-Model C)
Neo First language: Isi-Xhosa	Mr Niemandt First language: English 13 years' experience	Township (Previously disadvantaged school)
Siya First language: Isi-Xhosa	Mr Sauls First language: Isi-Xhosa 11 years' experience Mrs Adams First language: Isi-Xhosa	Township (Previously disadvantaged school)
Tanya First language: Isi-Xhosa	Mrs Teale First language: Isi-Xhosa 6 years' experience	Township (Previously disadvantaged school)
Zara First language: Isi-Xhosa	Mrs Zack First language: Isi-Xhosa Mrs Barnes First language: Isi-Xhosa 4 years' experience	Township (Previously disadvantaged school)

Permission was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department to gain access to the schools and ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Review Board to conduct research with their pre-service teachers. Written consent was obtained from all the participants before any data was collected and confidentiality was guaranteed. For this reason the pseudonyms shown in columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 are used in the article.

To meet the criterion for validity firstly, reflection journals were collected and unstructured interviews and focus group interviews were conducted. Secondly, a "chain of evidence" was established. The use of several research methods enabled the researchers to corroborate the information given by the participants. The researchers verified and concluded the data through a process of checking the validity of statements made by the participants through follow-up interviews and by proving noticeable trends and explanations (Simons 2009, 120).

Data Analysis

The data in the study was collected from reflection journals, unstructured interviews, focus group interviews and fieldnotes. Reflective journals can provide the teacher educator with a valuable tool showing how pre-service teachers perceive and experience teaching practice while learning to teach (Mills 2007, 69). The pre-service teachers were requested to complete entries in their reflection journals on a weekly basis; to write on their experiences while learning to teach accounting; and to describe the nature of their school-based mentors' support.

The purpose of the unstructured interviews with the pre-service teachers was to gain a better understanding of their challenges while learning to teach accounting and their interaction with their mentors, if the information in their reflection journals were unclear. Unstructured interviews were conducted with the accounting school-based mentors to ascertain the pre-service teachers' performance while learning to teach accounting, and to gain perspective of the accounting mentors' role as mentor. A total of 96 reflection journal entries were collected from the pre-service teachers; 18 unstructured interviews were conducted with the pre-service teachers; and 12 unstructured interviews were conducted with the school-based mentors.

Verbatim transcriptions of the journals and unstructured interviews were completed according to thematic analysis (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit 2005, 104). The transcripts were read in order to get a global impression of the content and open coding was used to analyse the data. When meaning was attached to a sentence or phrase, it was coded under the relevant theme. The software package, Atlas.ti, was used as a tool to code, retrieve and build theory by connecting codes to develop categories (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit 2005, 133).

Analysis of the data within the context of the pre-service teachers' and school-based mentors' experiences was initiated to look for major themes situated in the data in order to develop explanations so that "theories, reasons and causes of social behaviour can be established" (Hitchcock and Hughes 1994, 43). The reflection journals, field-notes and unstructured interviews were analysed according to reductive analysis.

Since the Pre-service teachers who participated in the study were second language English speakers, some of the transcripts had grammatical errors and disconnections within sentences, associated with their spoken use of English. The researcher only made grammatical corrections where the meaning was not adversely affected. Verbatim quotations from the data are used to support the findings.

Study Findings

The findings on how school-based mentors responded to the challenges pre-service teachers faced while learning to teach accounting in terms of the four mentoring roles

identified and discussed in the literature review are presented. The data revealed that mentor assistance was provided mainly with lesson preparation and feedback after lesson observations. Other types of mentor support that were less prominent but that emerged as themes worthy of some mention were co-teaching and demonstration lessons. The role of mentors as experienced/expert teachers is combined with that of reflective practitioner to explain the nature of feedback given to pre-service teachers, mainly after they had taught.

Mentors as Coaches

The coaching role of mentors in the study emerged as one providing basic practicalities mainly in planning lessons. In certain cases coaching was minimal and ephemeral, while in other cases it was more ongoing. It was evident from the data that Ally, Lara and Neo had their mentors' continuous support regarding lesson preparation, while similar support was not offered to Siya, Zara and Tanya. Ally, for example, had an agreement with Mrs Ashton to discuss all her lessons before she taught them and said,

> All my work and activities that I have prepared for them [learners] I first show it to her [Mrs Ashton].

Like Ally, Lara's mentor, Mr Lucas, also provided ongoing assistance. The importance of Mr Lucas's assistance became evident when Lara encountered an error in the prescribed textbook used for the Grade 11 accounting class. In her reflection journal she wrote,

> My mentor is guiding me very well on how to teach manufacturing. He helped me work out my lesson plans for next week. It is a continuing process, work in progress.

In the case of Siya, both his mentors seldom assisted him with any detailed lesson preparation preferring instead to offer only tasks or examination related activities. Siya's mentor provided him with a textbook and sometimes would see him briefly to give him question papers to revise with the learners. Siya commented,

> Sometimes he just tells me that I must repeat the question paper and do it as an exercise.

Mentors as Guides

Learning to teach through observing the accounting mentor teaching can be instrumental in guiding development of pre-service teachers' teaching skills. The study revealed two such cases, namely, for Neo and Lara.

At the initial stages of his internship, Neo observed his mentor on a regular basis. Neo found his mentor's teaching methods to be similar to his own preferred teaching style, crediting him for being an experienced teacher. At his interview he stated that,

> I observed my mentor most of the time. I learned his style of doing things even though I found that it is not much different from the one I use … he knows the learners better than me.

When Lara observed her mentor, she indicated in her reflection journal that she found the learners grasped his method of teaching and wrote,

> I learned from him how to explain the difference between the receipts and income, payments and expenditure ... he made it so simple ... I could see that the learners understood it instantly.

Mentors as Experts and Reflective Practitioners

After observing lessons taught by pre-service teachers, school-based mentors provided feedback and advice on how to improve their teaching. Sub-themes of the feedback that emerged in analysis of the data related to the three domains identified by Shulman (1986, 8–9), namely: pedagogical content knowledge (PCK); pedagogical knowledge (PK); and content knowledge (CK). PK of teaching refers to "generic principles of classroom organisation and management"; CK, on the other hand, refers to the formal knowledge teachers acquired in a particular field, in this case, accounting. PCK comprises an understanding of the content and complexity of a specific subject and the teaching strategies and processes likely to bring about effective learning of that content.

In the case of Ally, Lara and Neo, most of the feedback related to PCK, while Zara and Siya received minimal feedback on PCK. Tanya's mentor's feedback related predominantly to PK, while, feedback related to CK was evident only in Ally, Neo and Lara's cases. Feedback on PCK sometimes consisted of warning pre-service teachers not to provide too much information for learners in a particular lesson period. This seemed to be in response to pulling back on pre-service teachers achieving specific lesson objectives using didactic transmission modes of teaching. For example, Ally related that her mentor wanted her to refrain from providing all the answers on the chalkboard for the learners. Instead, her mentor expected Ally to challenge the learners and allow them to work independently. Ally stated that,

> Mrs Ashton said I must give the learners a chance to do the work on their own ... they [learners] are taking advantage that I always do the answers of the activities on the board.

Lara's mentor wanted her to adjust her teaching according to the pace of the learners. He advised Lara to teach small chunks of information in a particular period to ensure that she facilitated learners' understanding of accounting. He explained in the interview that,

> Sometimes she has done too much in one period ... you know the learners are very slow ... she must try to do short pieces at a time.

There was limited evidence in the study of much post-lesson mentoring support for Tanya. Only in one particular instance did Tanya write in her reflection journal that her mentor gave her advice on how to teach. It appeared that Tanya misunderstood this advice because she planned to challenge the learners by giving them an activity to complete before she provided them with an example of a new topic. She stated in the interview that,

> Mrs X (My mentor) told me not to explain everything to the learners ... let them try and to do the exercise on their own ... next week I will give activities before doing the example.

When the first unstructured interview was conducted with Zara's mentor after approximately two weeks of teaching, Mrs Zack hesitantly remarked that Zara's interaction with the learners was minimal and claimed that,

> Maybe she should try and engage the class ... there were only a few learners answering her questions … I think the lesson was fine ... she's trying at least.

Two pre-service teachers reported that they experienced difficulty with PK, in particular how their school-based mentors responded to the challenges of classroom and time management.

Tanya revealed that her mentor observed that some of the learners were too rowdy while Tanya presented her lesson and at interview mentioned that,

> When Mrs Teale came to observe me ... she told me the only thing that I need to improve on is how to manage a noisy class ... I must show the learners that I'm the one who is in charge.

Lara repeatedly expressed concern in her reflection journal regarding her inability to deal with the learners' unruly behaviour in the classroom, and their lack of co-operation, which prompted her to request her mentor's intervention. She asserted,

> This is a very hyperactive group ... my mentor spoke to the class and told them that they are only disadvantaging themselves if they don't work with me. He also gave me some tips on how to handle the class.

PK related to behaviour also stimulated an example of co-teaching. Lara struggled to facilitate the learners' understanding and was unable to manage their unruly behaviour in the classroom. She felt compelled to discuss the problem with her mentor and expressed in the interview,

> I really needed a solution for the problem so me and Mr L talked about it.

Lara and her mentor decided together that co-teaching might be a way to tackle Lara's problems. Despite the advantages, Lara related that she also found co-teaching challenging. When it was her opportunity to teach the learners, she omitted to establish whether they understood what had been previously taught by her mentor. She explained in her reflection journal that,

> I realised that they [learners] didn't understand the work he [my mentor] explained to them 100% ... now I have to redo everything with them this coming week.

In the cases of Ally and Neo, the study findings showed clear evidence of the mentors assisting the pre-service teachers with accountancy content knowledge. There was no such evidence in the cases of Lara, Zara, Siya and Tanya. Neo explained to the learners the entries in the general journal but forgot to insert the debtors and creditors columns, which is important to apply the double entry system. He also neglected to provide narrations of each transaction to give a brief explanation why the transaction had occurred. His mentor observed that Neo omitted vital information in his lesson and warned him not to assume that the learners would understand his explanations. Neo remarked that,

> I learned that I must always work perfectly ... do the things as it is supposed to be.

Discussion

The study findings revealed there was some evidence that mentors assisted pre-service teachers according to expectations of the four main roles discussed in the literature review on school-based mentoring. However, there seemed to be a number of instances where the mentors' actions in these roles did not fulfil enough expectations to help the pre-service teachers develop sufficiently in a way that might enable them to learn enough to enter a teaching career with confidence.

Mentors as Coaches

Coaching has been described as a technique to improve mentees' performance by identifying and addressing the skills they lack (Hamilton 2003, 62). Several mentors in the study illustrated this as a coach in the mentoring relationship. According to Hamilton (2003, 65), coaches need to be knowledgeable regarding skills of recognising what mentees are doing wrong and providing detailed steps to improve their performance. An illustration of this was with Neo's mentor who helped him to modify his lesson plan before presenting his lesson. Ally's mentor wanted to share her expertise to assist Ally to teach learners accounting more efficiently. She was able to rationalise why Ally had to follow a certain procedure for teaching a topic and explained why she should

challenge the learners. Co-teaching has become a mainstay of the coaching role in teacher education (Graziano and Navarrete 2012, 109). Badiali and Titus (2010, 76–78) describe examples of co-teaching that had positive outcomes for learners as well as for teacher educators, mentors and pre-service teachers. In the study co-teaching was not a common mentoring tool. However, the usefulness of this tool was evident in one case that we noted as co-teaching enabled Lara to overcome challenges she experienced and motivated her to teach accounting after her initial feelings of frustration and despair. The advantage of co-teaching in this case was that Lara could experience a fuller teaching cycle as proposed by Tomlinson (1995, 52) contributing a valuable learning experience for the pre-service teacher (Frick, Arend and Beets 2010, 425).

Mentors as Experts

Maphosa, Shumba and Shumba (2007, 300) advocate the use of experienced teachers who are knowledgeable and skilled in a specific subject area for mentoring pre-service teachers, while Hamilton (2003, 34) and Allan (2007, 19) caution that this should not be the only criterion for selecting suitable mentors for pre-service teachers. These authors argue that the choice of mentor teachers should be based on their professional status and personal qualities for the purpose of mentoring.

The study findings revealed that experience in teaching was insufficient on its own to fulfil the expectations of this mentor role. For example, Siya's mentor had more than a decade of experience in the teaching of accounting, but could not fulfil his duties as a mentor due to chronic absenteeism and even when he was at school, he was unable (or unwilling) to provide feedback on Siya's teaching. In the cases of Ally, Neo and Lara, however, their mentor teachers' experiences in teaching accounting were to these pre-service teachers' advantage.

Mentors as Guides

The level of commitment displayed by the mentors to guide the pre-service teachers in the study varied in each case. It was evident that Ally's mentor's continuous presence in her classes was an illustration of her commitment to Ally's quest to become a qualified accounting teacher and also to ensure that her learners were being taught adequately. According to Campbell and Brummet (2007, 50), teachers who are willing and committed to their role as mentors empower pre-service teachers to act and think as learners, utilising numerous investigative techniques to discover their strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, as was the case for Siya's mentor mentioned previously, a lack of commitment to mentoring in African teacher education seems all too common. For example, Mukeredzi and Mandrona (2013, 142) found a lack of effective guidance for mentors leaving them without clear views of what is expected. Positive actions by

mentors tended to be outweighed by the negative impacts of teaching in schools where the learning environments tended to be dysfunctional (Mukeredzi and Mandrona 2013, 149). Maphosa, Shumba, and Shumba (2007, 306) reported similar observations where mentors displayed unprofessional conduct, such as: leaving their classes unattended; reporting late for duty or not reporting at all; not observing students or modelling lessons for them; and sending pupils on personal errands during learning time.

Although Lara's and Neo's mentors did not display similar levels of commitment to Ally's mentor, some ongoing guidance was evident. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002, 3) claim that learning can be enhanced through diligent work and continuous effort linked with support from the mentor. Ally, Neo and Lara's mentors observed their lessons and offered advice specifically linked to learning how to teach accounting (PCK), rather than just advice of a general pedagogical nature (PK). The study findings contrast with those of studies by Frost (1993, 132), who expressed the view that mentors are often reluctant to observe pre-service teachers' lessons preferring instead to offer only general assistance with lesson preparation, and those of Boz and Boz (2006, 353), who showed that observation by mentors, where it takes place, is often based only on one-off events.

Mentors as Reflective Practitioners

The reflective practitioner model advocated by Maynard and Furlong (1995, 20), which refers to the mentoring relationship, was evident to some extent in the cases of Ally, Neo and Lara. These mentors collaborated with the pre-service teachers to address their concerns with learning how to teach accounting and devised appropriate strategies to help them improve. For example, the mentors were able to address Ally's and Neo's concerns over their PCK and Lara's particular anxiety about her classroom management skills.

Zara, Tanya and Siya were able to carry out self-reflection but unable to identify and act further on challenges that these reflections raised due to the lack of mentoring support. We concur with the view of Matoti, Junqueira and Odora (2011, 1142) that sometimes pre-service teachers are unable to reflect on their own experience to develop and understand new experiences but the evidence from the current study indicated that, regardless of pre-service teachers' reflection on their practice, not all of them were able to identify challenges in teaching on their own and hence their mentor's assistance was required. While there was evidence of some degree of support for CK (for Ally and Neo) and for general PK (for Lara and in a more limited example for Tanya), the mentors seemed unable to provide in-depth feedback on specific PCK that went beyond rather perfunctory aspects of planning lessons or including too much content.

Conclusion

The study set out to explore whether school-based mentors are adequately equipped to fulfil their roles. The findings showed that while there was some evidence that key expectations were sometimes met, often the support and depth of reflection were far too ephemeral and episodic or, in the worst cases, non-existent. Pre-service teachers whose mentors displayed commitment to their role as mentor teachers boosted their confidence in teaching accounting as time progressed (Portner 2003, 75). For example, co-teaching enabled Lara to overcome the challenges she experienced and this motivated her teaching of accounting. Mohono-Mahlatsi and Van Tonder (2006, 384) state that mentoring, when done effectively, provides confidence to the mentee and reduces professional isolation. The opposite was found in the case of Siya, Tanya and Zara, whose teaching practice internship was negatively influenced by lack of mentor support.

It is important for mentors to assist pre-service teachers with unravelling the planning and preparation of lessons; guiding them on what to observe; showing and encouraging monitoring of learners' progress; and reflecting on their practice so as to familiarise themselves with the complete teaching cycle (Tomlinson 1995, 48). To accomplish this will require a profile of each pre-service teacher's teaching competency to be established in order to ascertain the degree of mentoring support required during teaching practice. This could be done by using a progression map across all years of the degree so that progress on key teaching skills and actions could be monitored, graded, tracked and reported to all the stakeholders involved in teacher education. A method that could assist in the development of mentoring and the extent of reflective practice might be to use video recording technology (e.g. on smart phones) to capture key moments of lessons providing opportunities for pre-service teachers and mentors to view recordings together so that joint reflection on productive methods to move teaching forward can occur (see, e.g., Schepens, Aelterman, and Van Keer 2007).

The study was inevitably limited to just a few cases in a few schools and by the availability of data from mentors. More extensive research particularly highlighting mentors' and school administrators' perspectives on the mentoring process is required especially in South African/African contexts. Whatever methods are used to improve mentoring there needs to be a national effort to improve the situation for many of pre-service teachers so that the efforts they have made in their years of training at university are not dissipated or downgraded by what they experience in practice schools. Mentor training at the present time is far too light touch and sporadic, what is needed is clarity on mentor roles, investment in mentor training and a system of support that provides time for mentors in schools to learn and practice roles effectively.

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