Teacher Mentoring for Effective Teacher Training and Development The Case of a Developing Country, Kenya

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Teacher Mentoring for Effective Teacher Training and Development

The Case of a Developing Country, Kenya

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ABSTRACT: The subject of teacher mentoring has attracted worldwide attention in recent times. This article presents an account of a preservice teacher mentoring project undertaken in Kenya through a partnership of Kenyatta University in Kenya and Syracuse University. The purpose of the study was to understand the effectiveness of the collaborative mentoring model on preservice teacher training. The implementation of the project employed an evaluative survey design evaluating the mentoring process. Findings from the study indicated that collaborative mentoring has the capacity to enhance teacher development at the preservice level. However, there is no policy at the university or the national level to guide the implementation of mentoring in teacher education. The article recommends the establishment of a policy on teacher mentoring in preservice teacher education at the university and national levels. Such a policy could address aspects such as the roles of each participant in the mentoring process.

Teachers are central to national development. They are an important resource in the teaching/learning process, and their training and utilization therefore require critical consideration. The government programs for teacher education aim at providing qualified teachers and are, therefore, central to ensuring the provision of quality education. The objectives of teacher education programs aim at developing communication skills, professional attitudes, and values that equip teachers with the knowledge and ability to identify and develop the educational needs of the child (Republic of Kenya, 2012). The teaching process demands the design and implementation of deliberate plans to achieve intended objectives. To do so, one has to consciously and carefully select appropriate content, resources, and instructional strategies that seek to attain the desired outcomes. Such a task can be daunting especially to novice teachers graduating from colleges and universities and those on training practicum. There is therefore a need to put into place a mechanism for guiding trainees and also inducting novice teachers into the teaching profession. Thus, by definition, such a program would have to be a *mentoring* one in which the novice is assisted to settle into the teaching career with relative ease.

The majority of secondary school teachers are trained at public universities and diploma colleges and are required to specialize in two teaching subjects on graduation. Currently, class sizes in universities are too large for lecturers

to pay special attention to specific methodology, and therefore the quality of the teacher is often compromised. In order to improve the quality of teachers graduating out of our universities, it is imperative that the secondary school teacher training program be restructured to enable trainees to acquire sufficient subject mastery and pedagogy.

Mentoring is the establishment of a personal relationship for the purpose of professional instruction and guidance. In education, mentoring programs are implemented for preservice teacher induction and continuing teacher development. Mentoring provides mentors with the opportunity to impart their knowledge and experience and reflect on their own journey.

Statement of the Problem

In Kenya, as in other countries throughout the world, there are regular preservice teacher training programs that comprise theory and practical components. This practice is faithfully implemented continually without due regard to how the graduates leaving universities and other tertiary educational institutions each year transition to begin their professional careers. For a novice secondary school teacher, this transition can be mired in challenges, such as the interpretation of the curriculum, selection and/or design of instructional resources, planning for teaching, appropriate implementation of teaching plans, and evaluation of teaching effectiveness. Such novice teachers need structured guidance to enable them to gain deeper understanding of the functioning of the school and the teaching process. It is our view that preservice teachers receive induction into the profession during their teaching practice (TP), also referred to as *practicum*. Such induction can take the form of teacher mentoring, which is a necessary process for all teachers preparing to enter into the teaching profession to ensure that their practice is firmly anchored in professional ethics and practice. Since there is no officially functional system of inducting preservice teachers in Kenya, there is a need for establishing a firm, official mechanism of anchoring such teachers on a sound functional professional base so as to, in turn, ensure acceptable learner development in the institutions in which these graduating teachers will be posted. This is the basic reason for developing a professional preservice teacher mentoring program for Kenya. Many teacher training institutions in developing countries are beginning to explore other effective ways of teacher professional development. Teacher mentoring programs the world over are increasingly being perceived as an effective form of development for beginning or training teachers. The significance of mentoring for beginning teachers has been gaining wide recognition in developed countries (Pungur, 2007) but is still at a slow, formative stage in developing countries. But as attention continues to be focused on teachers as a key factor in educational reform, and on their need for on-going improvement and support, teacher mentoring becomes a viable option in education policy.

Objectives of the Research Project

This article examines how secondary school preservice teacher training can be enhanced through a structured mentorship program. It attempts to respond to the following questions with regard to the role of veteran teachers in the provision of quality teacher preparation: *What are the different ways in which preservice teachers are inducted into the teaching profession? What role can the practicing teacher play in inducting the new teacher into the profession?* (these questions highlight teachers' expected roles and missions within the education system). *What is the effect of mentoring on student teachers?* By analyzing third- and final-year student teachers' induction into the teaching profession through a mentoring program, we aimed to understand the effect of mentoring on teacher training.

Teacher Mentoring

In education, a mentor is a trained, experienced teacher who guides a teacher on practicum or a novice on professional matters. It is, therefore, important that a mentor be a teacher with experience who has gone through some relevant training. Teacher mentoring can be a valuable process in educational reform for beginning teachers. Besides helping others to develop and improve their personal and professional potential, mentoring is a meaningful and useful leadership skill. This is so because to mentor is "to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be" (Parsloe & Wray, 2000, p. 22).

In addition to managing and motivating people, it is also important in helping young incoming teachers learn, grow, and become more effective in their jobs. Such a responsibility requires proper training to facilitate reasonable and meaningful delivery of the said service. By establishing teacher mentoring programs, preservice teachers could be guided effectively to develop their instructional skills during practicum or TP and novice teachers given a strong start at the beginning of their careers.

Research identifies various mentoring models, and different institutions in different parts of the world have various modes of organizing teaching practicum. These variations have been occasioned by a number of factors, such the economy, research knowledge, or preference (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Twoli, 2011). These factors have been used by different institutions to come up with models of TP. Two progressive models have been used in the preservice TP: (a) the corporate model, which is regarded as the traditional model, and (b) the more improved collaborative model, which uses experienced teachers as mentors (Twoli, 2011).

The Corporate Model

The corporate model can be regarded as the basic, traditional model that has been used in many parts of the world. This model is still persistent in developing countries for various reasons. It is economical in its operation and can be managed and sometimes abused by generalists. This model allows students to apply to schools of their choice and posted as per their requests by a university or college coordinator. Placement of the preservice teachers is controlled by the needs of the schools. They select the teachers with the subjects for which there is a shortage (see Figure 1).

There are times, indeed, when a preservice teacher is placed in a school where there is no other teacher in the subject area, a situation that makes the preservice teacher "the head of the department" since he or she will be the only one in the department. There is almost no interaction between the teachers and the administration. Even where there is a cooperating teacher who is supposed to guide the preservice teacher, experience has shown that in some schools, the cooperating teacher simply takes leave and abandons the practicing teacher to go it alone. How will such a teacher be guided? When it comes to assessment, preservice teachers are assessed directly by lecturers or tutors from a university or college. These assessors arrive and go straight to the classroom to assess the student teacher. From the classroom, they go away hurriedly, giving very little regard to the school environment.

The Collaborative Model

The collaborative model is rooted in the principles of reflective practice where the student teacher is asked to critically examine his or her actions and the context of those actions. In order to reflect on their responsibilities and performance, student teachers are required to keep a professional reflective journal. Issues from the journal are discussed with the mentor teacher and the university supervisor. This model is similar to the inquiry-based model (Nguyen, 2009) typically used in the United States in which the mentoring process is structured with a triad of participants, including the student teacher, the mentor teacher, and the university supervisor (see Figure 2). "The triad

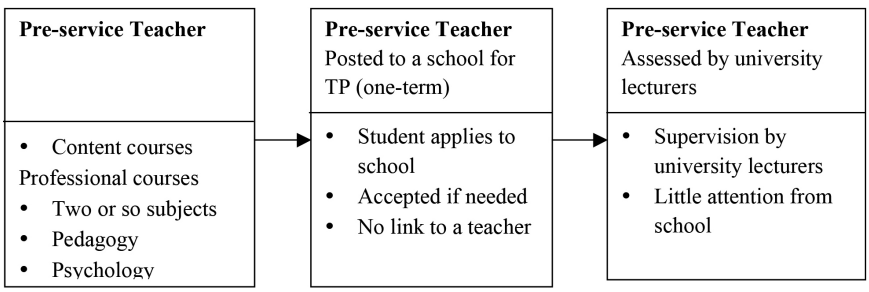

Figure 1. The corporate mentoring model.

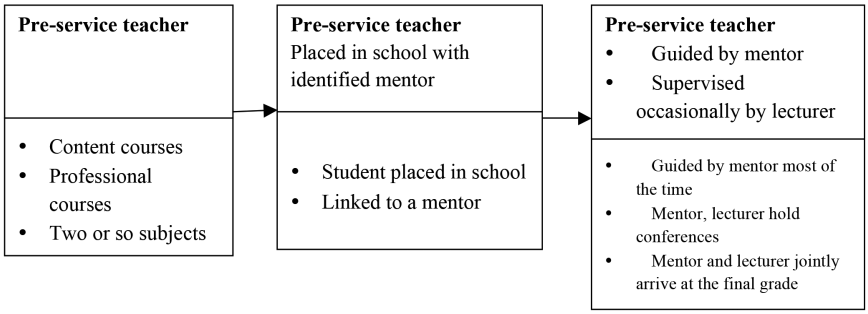

Figure 2. The collaborative professional model.

of cooperating teachers, student teachers, and a college supervisor engages in an on-going and purposeful discourse to explore the teacher–learner (expert–novice) reciprocity, school culture and social relations" (Nguyen, 2009, p. 655). In both the collaborative model and the inquiry-based model, the roles of each member of the triad are carefully outlined.

The central player in this model is the mentor teacher. A mentor teacher would be an experienced teacher in the school who provides frontline advice, support, and feedback to the student teacher. Mentors in general use their experience to assist student teachers in developing classroom management skills, gaining familiarity with methodology, the use of resources, lesson planning, assessment, and reflective practice. It can be summarized that mentors generally provide guidance and model professional behavior through the development of supportive relationships and also play an evaluator role.

The critical stage in this model is the placement time. Prior planning (and even agreement) is needed before the posting stage. The training institution needs to have some standing agreement with the school and, at times, even with the mentors. The training institution will be required to use diplomacy or some policy to work with schools. At times, it may come down to working only with those schools whose policies align with those of the university and have willing experienced teachers to act as mentors.

One assumption that is often made in the mentoring initiative is that all experienced teachers are competent as mentors. This assumption cannot be taken for granted because effective mentors should have certain qualities, as identified by Tilley (2002): "Mentors need to be committed to the educational exercise and to take an interest in the personal and professional development of the mentee. Mentors need to be flexible enough to tolerate and appreciate the uniqueness and individuality of the mentees" (p. 17). For an effective mentoring relationship to develop, it is crucial that the mentor has good interpersonal skills and the ability to listen attentively, deal with differences of opinion in a nonjudgmental manner, ask open-ended questions rather than closed ones, focus on the protégé's agenda, show flexibility and be creative, and use all the above interpersonal skills for the benefit of the practicing teacher.

The cooperating teacher is the one who assigns lessons to the practicing teacher and introduces the practicing teacher to the class and to the school's requirements and regulations. In addition to all these, the cooperating teacher has the role of acting as a link between the practicing teacher and the mentor. This is the person who is knowledgable in the content and hence is suited to guide or assist the new teacher. Where possible, and particularly at the start of the exercise, the cooperating teacher has the option to sit in class to ensure that the teacher is "doing things right." The training institution has representation and a role in this model. There is the university coordinator, who has the main role of placing (posting) preservice teachers or students in suitable schools. This is often a delicate task, as there has to be a mentor–student teacher link. This can be a headache, especially if the population requiring placement is large. The university coordinator has another role of overall administration; he or she has to ensure that the mentor process is working well and that the right university assessors (supervisors) are in the field to observe and provide feedback for the record.

The last person with an important role in the model is the university supervisor (see Figure 3). This should be a person established in teacher development. Such a person will observe the student teacher in class. After observing lessons, he or she would arrange for conferencing with the mentor and the teacher for the purpose of giving advice. Usually, this would end in an evaluation process when the supervisor and mentor jointly come up with an agreed-on grade. In

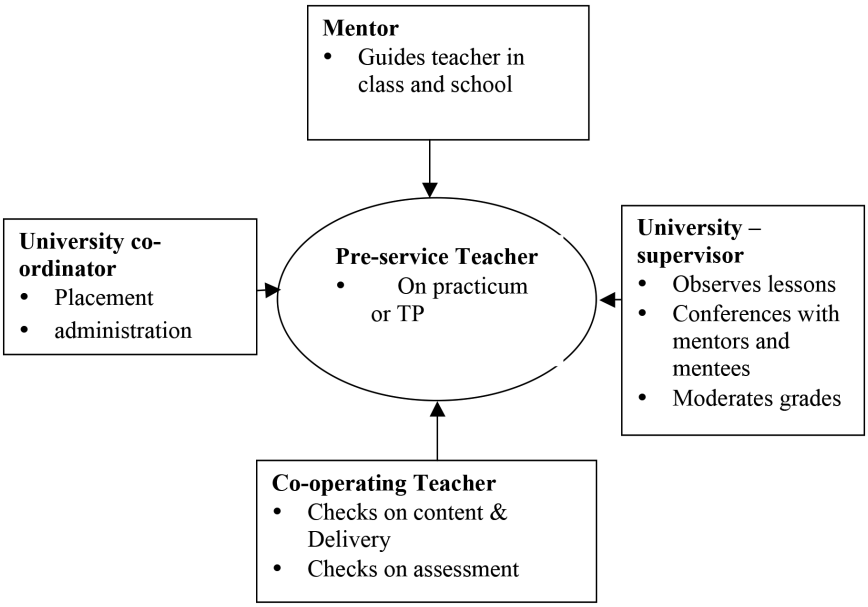

Figure 3. School–university partnership in collaborative model.

most cases, certain characteristics define a strong student–teacher link, and that is why a university supervisor would engage not only in subject-specific support but also content. In sum, the university supervisor's main task is to open up and maintain communication between the parties (Willems, 1986).

Theoretical Framework

Teacher mentoring is grounded in reflection theory. The interaction between the mentor and the protégé is based on activities that are identified in the reflection theory. Dewey (1933) regarded reflection as problem solving or thinking about solving a problem, which involves action chaining. Thus, according to him, reflection is an active, deliberative cognitive process that involves reflective thinking and reflective action. Schön (1983, 1987) presents two forms of reflection: reflection-in-action, which he describes as reflection that happens while action (e.g., teaching) is still occurring, and reflection-on-action, which he describes as reflection that occurs after the event. Clearly, Schön's definition of reflection is intrinsically related to action. According to

Figure 4. The reflection process.

him, through reflection and action, professionals are bound to make rational judgments about how to modify their actions and find new ways of doing them while in action (reflection-in-action) or after the action has occurred (reflection-on-action).

With regard to teacher education, Hall (1985) and Zeichner (2009) claim that emphasizing reflection too soon in their preparation turns novice teachers off and becomes difficult to sustain. The assumption is that neophytes tend to perceive it as a worthless distraction that takes their attention away from mastering the content and teaching skills they are particularly anxious about. However, when reflection is embedded in the mentoring process, such fears are reduced since the mentor is available to offer direction on the challenges posed by the reflection process. The reflection should be an integral component that is incorporated into all the teaching skills and not be seen as a separate entity regardless of the student's level of study, as this would enhance their holistic growth and development. In the context of teacher mentoring, the reflection process occurs in a sequential set of steps (see Figure 4). The process is done collaboratively between the mentor teacher and the mentee.

Methodology

As part of a partnership project between Kenyatta University and Syracuse University, we set out to understand the effectiveness of the collaborative mentoring model on preservice teacher training in a developing country like Kenya. The implementation of the project employed an evaluative survey design involving the training of teacher mentors, the mentoring of selected preservice teachers, and evaluating the mentoring process. The study focused on the following research questions: What are the different ways in which preservice teachers are inducted into the teaching profession? What role can the practicing teacher play in inducting the new teacher into the profession? What is the effect of mentoring on student teachers? By analyzing third- and final-year student teachers' induction into the teaching profession through a mentoring program, we sought to understand the effect of mentoring on teacher training.

We collected data through questionnaires and classroom observations and interviews. The main instruments used were the following:

1. Classroom observation feedback form: This was used mainly by mentor teachers to observe a TP student teaching in class. This was followed by a conference between the student teacher and the mentor teacher.
2. Mentor teacher record form: This required the mentor to give documented and progressive performance on key skills by TP students. The main areas emphasized were planning, class management, instructional skills, integration of resources, evaluation, and, finally, professional growth.
3. Student teacher questionnaire: This was meant for TP students being mentored and also for nonmentored teachers for purposes of comparison.

4. Questionnaire for mentors: This sought to discover their impressions on a number of issues, including workload, school contribution and cooperation, the mentor–teacher relationship, and the challenges and benefits of teacher mentoring.
5. Interview schedule with the school principals. This gauged whether the principals appreciated and supported the program.

Selecting and Training Mentors

The success of the mentoring program depends on a proper selection and training process. According to Gray and Gray (1985), the selection should emphasize experience, commitment, and time to assist preservice or novice teachers. Another characteristic that was emphasized during the selection process for effective mentors was a willingness to nurture another person (Freedman & Jaffe, 1993). This means that the individuals who are recruited as mentors should be people oriented, open minded, flexible, empathetic, and collaborative. One major characteristic that was emphasized in the selection of teachers in this study was "experience" in the field, and a period of 5 years and above was conceived as good enough. Nevertheless, other characteristics, such as commitment, being people oriented, and so on, were considered and used by the school administration in recommending the teachers.

The selection process commenced with the areas or regions. The study had to limit the population to match the resources. With this in mind, two regions, four schools, and 13 teachers were selected for the training (see Table 1). The composition of the teachers was rather skewed with respect to gender. This was partly occasioned by the attempt to match the protégés (TP students) with the mentors. The condition made the gender ratio of male to female four to nine.

The training of mentors was organized and managed by five faculty of the Department of Educational Communication and Technology. They brainstormed first before preparing the notes and the program structure (see Figure 5).

The teachers were invited to the department for a 1-day workshop. The training emphasized the concept of mentoring, relationship skills, effective

Table 1. Distribution of Teacher Mentors in Schools

Regions	*Schools*	*Teachers*
Region A	3	
	1—girls' school	4
	1—boys' school	3
	1—mixed school	3
Region B	1—girls' school	3
Total	4	13

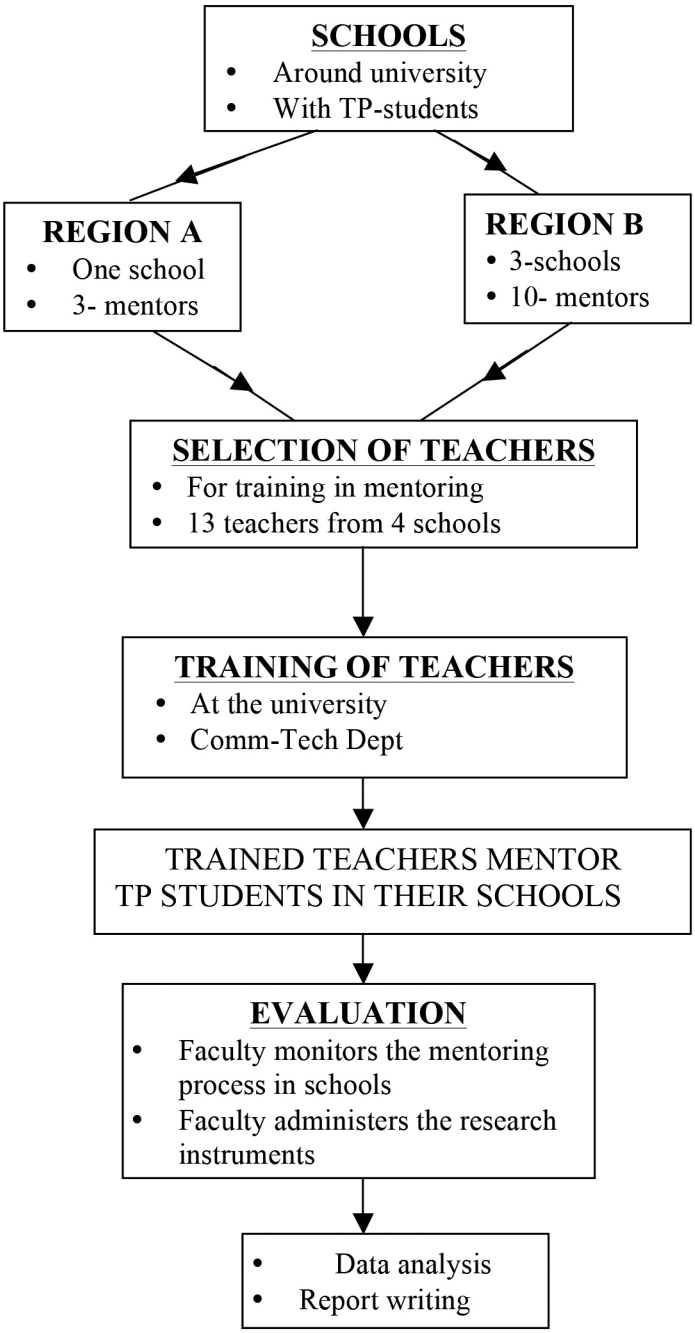

Figure 5. The research stages.

Table 2. Teachers, Gender, and Subject Distribution

Schools		*Teachers*	*Gender*	*Subjects*
A Girls' HS	1	Teacher A	F	English/Literature
	2	Teacher B	F	Home Science
	3	Teacher C	F	Chemistry/Geography
	4	Teacher D	F	History/Christian Religious Education
A Mixed H.S	5	Teacher E	F	Geography/ Christian Religious Education
	6	Teacher F	F	History/ Christian Religious Education
	7	Teacher G	M	Kiswahili/Business Education
A Boys' H.S	8	Teacher H	M	Math/Physics
	9	Teacher I	F	Kiswahili/ Christian Religious Education
	10	Teacher J	F	English/Literature
A Girls' School	11	Teacher K	F	History/ Christian Religious Education
	12	Teacher L	M	Math/Chemistry
	13	Teacher M	M	Kiswahili/History

teaching, models of supervision and coaching, conflict resolution, and lesson evaluation. After the workshop, the mentors implemented the mentorship program in their schools and were monitored and evaluated for one school term, which is usually 12 effective weeks. The main purpose of training teacher mentors was to aid them in having the key knowledge and skills that would be useful in identifying and responding to TP teachers' needs, creating an atmosphere that is collegial in engaging mentors and practicing teachers. Teacher gender, type of school, and subject distribution varied (see Table 2).

Matching Mentors and TP Students

One of the design aspects that needed attention in the teacher mentor program was the mentor–TP student pairing. The main consideration in pairing was the subject combination. Mentors were paired one to one with practicing students who had the same subject combinations. This pairing criterion was preferred mainly because it aided mentors to effectively take charge of both the pedagogical and the content domains in coaching.

Data Analysis

The main focus of the study was on mentors in the four schools. There were 13 mentors who trained, but later one could not practice mentoring because the TP student received a transfer at the last minute. This explains why the data in this report reflect a total of 12 teachers (three males and nine females).

The data analysis emphasized descriptive statistics mainly because of the small size of the information resulting from a small sample. As mentioned earlier, a number of instruments were used to gather the information: the classroom observation feedback form, the mentor teacher record form, the student teacher questionnaire, the questionnaire for mentors, and the interview schedule with the school principals. The data analysis was facilitated using the SPSS software program.

Findings and Discussion

Benefits of the Mentoring Process to Mentees

The main purpose of the mentor programs is to help beginning teachers make a successful transition into teaching by relying on the expertise of the experienced teachers to provide a clinical, real-word training process. The study was interested in identifying the main benefits of mentoring to TP students. A questionnaire and an interview were used to acquire this information. What were the main benefits? The most common benefit that came out strongly was the "immediate and relevant feedback." This was valued greatly by TP students. As one student teacher put it, "It was so settling to have somebody to consult any time in case of a problem. It is not like when you only rely on university supervisors who come after a long time . . . meanwhile you may continue making same mistakes." We see that relevant and immediate feedback is fundamental to the process. It was *relevant* because the mentors were in the same subject area and *immediate* because mentors were available for mentees all the time since they were in the same school. Other benefits reported included the following:

1. The process of teacher mentoring was appreciated by the TP students because it gave them a fast start. They were able to settle much faster regarding writing schemes of work, lesson plans, and general orientation to school rules and places.
2. The help and the fast settlement were like a form of acceptance to the school. Consequently. it helped them build confidence in and motivation for the profession. This is useful to young and beginning teachers, as they are likely to love the profession and stay for a long time. In the long run, the retention rate of teachers can remain high.
3. The protégés were with the mentors for an extended period of time. This gave the practicing teachers ample time to receive elaborate and valid guidance. Examples that were given to reinforce this point related to tasks such as setting and marking continuous assessment tests, developing instructional resources, and participating in co-curricular activities.

Comparing the Performance of Protégés and Nonprotégés

The idea of comparing some aspects of instruction among mentees and nonmentees was of interest to the study. This was done toward the end of the mentoring exercise, which was at the end of the school term. A questionnaire was used for this purpose. It was administered to all the mentees and the same number of nonmentees in the schools within the same environment. A major aspect in the questionnaire sought to know within how many weeks protégés and nonprotégés were able to grasp the structure and interpretation of some instructional instruments or procedures. The results are displayed in Table 3. The distribution shows that the mentees got going early. If we take the case of writing a scheme of work, it is observed that six mentees mastered the structure of writing a scheme of work in 1 week as compared to only four nonmentees. This applies to all other items in the table. This does confirm the general statement that was emphasized by mentees in reference to the major merits of mentoring program that it gives mentees a fast start as highlighted in the benefits of the mentoring process to the mentees in the section above.

The other measure of comparison between mentees and nonmentees was the rate of feedback they gave to their learners. They were asked to indicate "more often" (4), "sometimes" (3), "rarely" (2), or "never" (1). The rates of modes of feedback are reported in Table 4.

Table 3. Time Taken to Grasp the Structure and to Perform Some Tasks

	1 Week		*2 Weeks*		*4 Weeks*	
Task	*M*	*NM*	*M*	*NM*	*M*	*NM*
To write a scheme of work	6	4	6	8	—	1
To write a lesson plan	9	5	3	5	—	3
To deliver content confidently	5	2	5	6	2	5
To respond to questions form learners	8	5	2	6	2	2

Note. M = mentees, NM = nonmentees.

Table 4. Rates on Modes of Feedback

Mode of Feedback	*Mentees*	*Nonmentees*
Questioning	3.88	3.10
Continuous assessment tests	2.40	2.12
Assignments	2.50	1.25
Practical/projects	3.12	2.20

The frequency of mentees is higher than that of nonmentees, which is an indication that mentees sought or used feedback more frequently, and this could be attributed to the mentoring effects.

Benefits of the Mentoring Process to Mentors

Using a questionnaire and an interview, mentors were probed on the benefits of the process. The following main points were given:

1. Mentors were delighted with realizing the satisfaction of developing as a professional. They could observe a TP student go from scratch to become a constructive teacher. They felt that this improvement was a result of their effort and guidance.
2. The other benefit that mentors mentioned was the opportunity to be more reflective. As they advised the beginning teachers, they too had to make sure that they were confident in what they were advising. For example, they had to be sure of the content, lesson planning, and suitable methodologies. This gave the opportunity to mentors to be refreshed on all these areas. This refreshed and professional knowledge and skills would then be incorporated in the mentors' lessons, thus improving their performance and adding to their professional growth.
3. The mentors had the opportunity to interact with the university staff, an opportunity that lays the groundwork for academic and professional consultations. Such an opportunity can be used to consult, for example, on further education and even references for jobs or promotions.

Challenges Faced by Mentors

Nearly all teacher mentors reported a successful session with the TP students. However, they addressed some areas that can be referred to loosely as challenges. One challenge involved planning for instruction. One requirement that every mentor was to fulfill was to guide the mentees on planning. One of the tasks in the planning stage was to ensure that TP students write lesson plans and schemes of work. This proved a challenge for some mentors for two main reasons. First, some mentors have not been in the habit and rhythm of frequent planning and were apparently not sure of the planning process (e.g., writing a lesson plan). They had to refresh themselves on lesson planning, and for some this took a while. Second, while the TP students were familiar with the Kenyatta University format of lesson planning, some mentors had training from other universities that used different formats. This meant learning the Kenyatta University format first before guiding TP students.

The other challenge that mentors faced had to do with the lack of synchronization between the mentor's free time and the TP student's teaching time. It often happened that when the mentor was teaching, the student teacher was also teaching. The overlap of teaching time for both mentor and mentee

denied them adequate classroom interaction (observation), which is a key task in the mentoring process.

The official supervisors of the TP students were university staff, often referred to as clinical supervisors. There were times when conflicts in advice occurred between the mentor and the clinical supervisor, confusing the TP student. While the practicing student teacher might be aware that the mentor is more effective because he or she is in the subject area, the practicing teacher is also well aware that the clinical supervisor awards the final grade. The design of the study did not officially recognize the mentor's grade. The mentors and the mentees were basically at the same level in terms of academic level. This made some mentors feel that they did not have greater authority over the mentees. In response to this situation, some mentors proposed a course form that would elevate mentors to a higher level, preferably a master's course in mentoring and instruction.

Teacher Mentoring and Workload

Mentors were asked to indicate how many TP students they were comfortably able to mentor. This question was put to them after going through the mentoring experience at the end of the school term. The response was almost unanimous, as most of them indicated that they were comfortably able to guide two TP students. They qualified this by emphasizing that this was possible only if TP students were in the same school. A number of mentors had justification for this number of two on the grounds that the mentors were involved in managing their lessons in the two subjects and needed adequate time to guide mentees in such activities as classroom observations and conferencing. The mentors were further asked to indicate how many times they were able to observe mentees teaching in a classroom or a laboratory. The results in Table 5 show a good effort by the mentors. On average, they were able to observe a TP student five times. Through interviews, we were able to see that the variation in observation was due to the teaching load and also to the overlap of the lessons on the school's timetable. The average number of classroom observations by most teacher training institutions is four.

If mentors can manage the indicated observations, then all that the university can do is to simply "fill in" with one or two clinical observations to

Table 5. Number of Classroom Observations by Mentors

No. of Mentors	*Frequencies*	*Totals*	*Mean*
3	4	12	
4	5	20	5.5
3	6	18	
2	8	16	
Total: 12		66	

complete the TP exercise. This, of course, does assume that the mentors still do a good job when it comes to the full-scale mentor program.

Apart from the observation of lessons in classrooms, teacher mentors were required to guide or check on other instruction-related activities. Such activities included the nature and quality of the homework that TP students gave to their learners:

- ➢ Checking on the scheme of work
- ➢ Checking and advising on the lesson plans
- ➢ Observing and advising on classroom management issues
- ➢ Monitoring the evaluation strategies, including the setting for continuous assessment tests
- ➢ Being asked to indicate the frequencies given to these activities

The rate or frequency of attention in one school term was quite reasonable, with an average of 4.4 (see Table 6). Given that one school term has about 10 active weeks, this comes to teacher mentors giving attention at least once every 2 weeks. This is not a bad rate considering that they are busy with other regular school activities.

School Administration Support

School administrators have a crucial role to play if the teacher mentor program is to be successful. This role was greatly realized in the design and progression of this program. It was realized from the beginning that seeking a strong link with the school administration would open the way for other activities planned for the teacher mentoring. It is with this understanding that we made it a priority to contact the school administration to seek for permission to train their teachers and use the school for mentoring our TP students. The request was put personally and in a note to school principals by explaining the nature and the benefits likely to accrue from it. It was with much delight that all school administrators welcomed the idea of launching the program in the schools.

This study received overwhelming support from the administration, especially when it came to providing a conducive environment for their professional growth. The program was announced at the school parade, and

Table 6. Some Tasks Performed by Mentors

Roles Performed	*Frequency*
Checking and advising on homework	4
Advising on syllabus coverage	2
Checking lesson plans	4
Advising on class management	5
Checking evaluation strategies	7
Totals	22 (mean = 4.4)

the teachers involved were introduced. The school as a whole was asked to support the program.

There were a number of issues that the school administration was not immediately ready to facilitate. For example, the school was not ready to reduce the number of lessons for mentor teachers or to rearrange the timetable to suit the program or to participate in supervising the program. Nevertheless, this did not seriously affect the program. The provision of a supportive school climate was supreme. Some school administrators were keen to monitor the program activities and went on to appreciate the benefits. There was this one school where our students were being mentored. There were, however, other TP students from other institutions who were not in the program and therefore were not being mentored. They looked left out and felt that they were missing something important. This observation led to the administration to request that they too should be included in the program. Reports indicate that these TP students from other institutions appreciated the coaching by our mentors.

The Role of the Teacher Mentor in the University Supervision Process

Both the mentors and the mentees reported the need to separate the supervision by mentors and that of the university supervisors. The supervision was done independently, and there was no given time that mentors and university supervisors observed a lesson together. This separation is important considering that the observations serve different purposes. While the mentors focused mainly on teacher development, the university supervisors emphasized the element of assessment. Classroom observation is essential in providing information about a TP student and mentor or clinical supervisor. The mentor can use this information to provide quality advice, while the TP student can use the information to improve the planning and presentation of lessons.

While the mentors focused mainly on teacher development, the university supervisors emphasized the element of assessment. The main goal of mentor supervision should be to bring improvement to teacher performance (Olivia & Pawlas, 1994) rather than to generate a grade for entry in the university transcript. In a way, we therefore expected the moods or behavior of the TP students to be different, to be more relaxed with the mentor than with the university supervisor. The use of clinical supervision techniques can radically change the supervisor–teacher relationship and may result in less stress and anxiety on the part of the TP teacher.

The observation cycle recommended to teacher mentors has three main stages. The phases of clinical supervision used can be represented as shown in Figure 6 following a three-step cycle: (a) a preobservation conference during which the TP student and mentor work out the mode of presentation based on the lesson plan, (b) lesson observation in which the mentor sits in class and

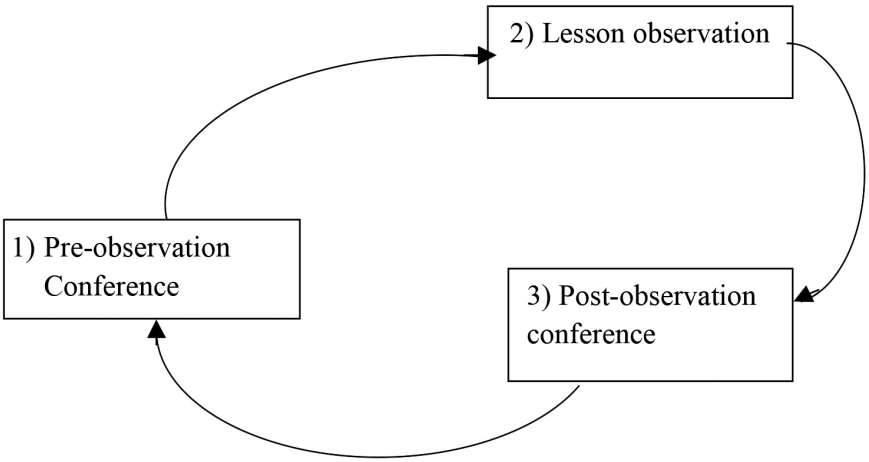

Figure 6. Phases of clinical supervision.

follows the lesson, noting key points for advice and discussion (an observation schedule is used by the mentor to write notes), and (c) a postobservation conference when the mentor gives feedback to the TP student guided by the notes made during lesson observation. Essentially, the feedback focuses on the positive and the weak points and on ideas that were not articulated well in the lesson.

Both the TP students and the mentors had been briefed that the assessment was not for direct grading but can influence the university grade through the skills gained through mentoring experiences. The mentors had free access to the university supervisor's comments and grades. Reflecting on the university supervisor's comments and grades, one mentor had this to say: "The comments are brief and not guiding, especially in content and instruction."

This might be due to the fact that a large number of TP students and many of the university supervisors put out for the job are not in the subject area and at times might not be in the school of education. Such supervisors are limited, though it is acknowledged that some have gained some experience through long service in TP supervision. Another mentor said, "There is limited feedback to TP students. University lecturers are often in a hurry as they race to cover the required number of students observations per day. As a result, they may come in the lesson late or leave early or both." According to her, some may not have the time for postconferencing (discussion after the lesson), which is regarded as a major component of supervision. Yet another mentor commented, "Grading by university supervisors was on the higher side." This again could be due to the concept of "giving the benefit of the doubt." When one is not sure, one compensates for this by offering generous awards to induce the other party to become satisfied and to shut out any critical comments or questions. This seemed to give the mentors the inspiration that they can in fact do a good job compared to some university supervisors.

If we were to go by the mentor impressions, it could be said that most of the mentors had a high degree of belief or confidence and high expectations in their performance. This sort of satisfaction by mentors after the exercise has been associated with the firm training and experiences of mentors (Dilworth & Imig, 1995). This implies that experienced teachers who go through suitable training can quickly but steadily acquire skills in teacher development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report is based on a small-scale research study on a teacher mentor program. It involved only a few teachers in schools that were within easy reach, thus ensuring effective monitoring and evaluation. The main purpose of the program was to determine its effects, especially with respect to mentors helping beginning teachers (TP teachers) to acquire the main skills that can help them enter the profession with a strong base. The results of the program show that there are many gains to be had for both mentor and mentee (TP teachers). Mentors reported increased professional revitalization as a result of their reflections and interactions with mentees. On the other hand, the beginning teachers (TP teachers) reported immediate feedback, motivation, and less isolation and the belief that teaching can be a satisfying profession.

For a successful teacher mentoring program, careful planning and design are important. We found the subject-to-subject design to be ideal. This design allowed a mentor to guide a new teacher (TP teacher) in his or her subject area with the belief that the greatest support to mentees was given in the classroom.

Quality teaching is essential if the mission of education is to be fulfilled. Mentoring can play a critical role in improving the professional knowledge and skills that teachers need to instruct and prepare learners. The outcome of this study encourages us to emphatically recommend that mentoring can be a viable policy option in education for developing countries, especially in Africa. We are aware that teacher mentoring is widely used in developed countries and have noted encouraging gains in teacher development. It is high time that developed countries come up with policies that support teacher mentoring programs. Such programs can be designed to suit particular systems of education and school environments.

Recommendation 1

There is a need to establish an official policy on teacher mentoring in preservice teacher training curricula. Such a policy could address such aspects as outlining the roles of each participant in the mentoring process as well as adequate training of teacher mentors and the role of school administrators. It is also recommended that school administrators have knowledge of any new

programs that concern teachers and instruction in general. Such awareness will put administrators in a position to plan how best to support the program (Janas, 1996). A school administrator's responsibility with respect to a teacher mentoring program includes the following:

- Creation of a supportive school atmosphere.
- Provision of release time: TP students and their mentors can be given enough time and opportunities to work together on a regular, and ongoing basis.
- Development of an instructional design (timetable) that includes a reduced workload.
- Participation in program orientation and school co-curricular activities.
- Supervision and evaluation of the professional performance and relationship developed by mentors and teachers.

School administration should have knowledge of the teacher mentoring program, especially in its formative stage. Both mentors and beginning teachers need the firm support of school administration, from the principal to the head of department. It is with this realization that the research team wrote to principals explaining the program and seeking permission and support.

Mentors in particular needed the support of administrators for successful implementation of this program. As is often said, giving support is a social phenomenon. Teachers are likely to appreciate support, especially if it comes from their superiors. Such support can boost their confidence and self-worth. It is envisaged that the proposed teacher mentoring process can be applicable to many other developing countries.

Recommendation 2

The collaborative mentoring model (Pungur, 2007), which assumes the format outlined in Figure 2, is recommended since it has the capacity to improve teacher development at the preservice level. Findings from the study indicated that collaborative mentoring has the capacity to improve teacher development at the preservice level. TEP

Note

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