

Student teachers' perceptions of mentoring as an influencer of their professional teacher identity development

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Jessica completed her BEd Cum Laude in 2009, after which she started teaching. Inspired by the positive influence of the mentor lecturer who was assigned to her during her work-integrated learning period while still an undergraduate student, mentorship became a topic of particular interest to her, and was the focus of her Master's Degree. She later worked as a lecturer at the University of Pretoria, mentoring students of her own.

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of the mentor lecturer in the development of the Professional Teacher Identity (PTI) of 838 fourth-year pre-service teachers while doing Work Integrated Learning at a South African University. The students reflected in group workshops on the role of the mentoring they received in their PTI development. In this qualitative, descriptive case study, a document analysis was conducted on transcriptions of the posters that the groups created. The results showed that the mentor lecturers ranked sixth out of nine as influencers of the students' PTI development. The students felt misunderstood and unsupported. There are three possible interpretations of this finding: the role of the mentor lecturer is an unnecessary and unwanted feature of the teacher training programme, the mentor lecturer is not meeting the needs of the student, or the millennial generation into which this sample fits is not open to critical self-reflection and critique.

Key words: Professional Teacher Identity; Work Integrated Learning; Mentor lecturers

Context

The Bachelor's degree in Education (BEd) programme in South Africa offers an academic and theoretical base for pre-service teachers which, at the university where this research was conducted, entails three years of didactical and pedagogical instruction. In the students' fourth year, they are required to complete six months of work integrated learning (WIL) where they teach in a classroom instead of presenting micro lessons on campus. They receive visits and personal mentoring from a mentor lecturer from the university, and they are guided on a daily basis by the mentor teacher to whom they are assigned at the school. The WIL experience gives students the opportunity to experience the classroom from a teacher's perspective under the supervision and mentorship of experienced teachers and lecturers. However, as Kamarudin et al (2021) point out, it is difficult to evaluate the WIL programme, and many teacher training institutions base such an evaluation on the perceptions of the mentors and mentees.

While the WIL portion of the programme is very practical, the BEd programme in general is very theoretical, which means that there is often a large gap between the two. To address this gap, the Fourth Year Initiative for Research in Education (FIRE) Project was introduced in the Faculty of Education at a large university in South Africa. It was designed to help students apply practice to theory and vice versa, so that students could determine how their experiences related to what they were taught. The students were required to reflect in groups on their experiences during the WIL period and collaboratively derive meaning from the experience.

The project was a key element in the consolidation of pre-service teachers' education, especially with its role in professional identity cognition. The FIRE Project encouraged the students to be reflective practitioners in a collaboratively dynamic way: each group member had a different teaching experience and different ontology, so responses could not be scripted beforehand as they responded to the input of their peers. Peerness, as described by Kroll (2016), refers to a sameness in some way, a similar situation in which the peers find themselves, or "equals in at least one particular element" (Skaniakos et al, 2-14, p. 76). The students shared their WIL experiences, with a particular focus on how the mentoring they received from the mentor lecturer as well as the mentor teacher influenced the development of their professional identities as teachers.

The problem that was considered is the possible discrepancy, in terms of professional teacher identity (PTI) influencers, between the experience of the student at school and the theory that was learnt at university: which voice was the loudest in their minds – the school or the university? This thought is the basis of what Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1983) refer to as the "two worlds' pitfall" (p. 10). The question that arises concerns students' perception of the influence of the mentor lecturer. If the influence of the mentor lecturer is weak or absent, the student may not be able to facilitate the merging of the academic world with the world of work within their practice, resulting in a perpetuation of the school classroom that they experienced as learners. This also means that the advancement in theory that is part of the academic world may never reach the classrooms of these student teachers when they become practising teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of mentor lecturers on pre-service teachers' PTI. The role of the mentor lecturer in WIL is to assess, guide and, if needs be, correct, or even protect the student (Izadinia, 2015). This relationship has the potential to be pivotal in the formation of a pre-service teacher's identity. Specifically, this study strove to answer two questions:

1. How do the pre-service teachers perceive the influence of the mentor lecturer on their identity as Carer, Subject Expert and Teaching and Learning Expert? This question was

posed in terms of the three-factor PTI framework suggested by Beijaard, Verloop and Vermunt (2000), and was also used as the conceptual framework of the FIRE project.

2. How do the pre-service teachers perceive the lecturer as a mentor? Hudson's five-factor model of mentoring for effective teaching (Hudson, 2004) was used as the lens through which data in response to this question were analysed.

Literature Review

In this abridged review of the relevant literature, the four concepts that are foundational to this article are discussed. These are: WIL, the nature of PTI, the factors that influence PTI, and the role of the mentor lecturer.

Work Integrated Learning

Smit and du Toit (2021) describe the WIL pre-service training phase as *fundamental* in preparation for the classroom. During WIL, the student teacher is an apprentice who is there to interact with experienced teachers and mentors in their journey towards professional growth. The WIL provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between the world of the university and the world of the school (Kadir & Aziz, 2021). Moving into the school for the period of the WIL means that students participate in a Community of Practice (CoP) in which learning can take place. Wenger (1998) speaks of the development of “an identity of participation.” (p. 214) in this case, PTI. In fact, Muyengwa and Jita (2021) link WIL directly to the enhancement of professional identity development.

The nature of PTI

PTI is not a simplistic concept. Kress (2011) confirms this: “Teacher identity is not simply who teachers think they are” (p.8). PTI has been variously described as changeable, unstable, difficult to define, and highly influenceable by external factors (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006). The term ‘elusive’ is used by Olsen (2008) in this context. Grootenboer, Smith and Lowrie’s (2006) describe PTI as “self-in-practice” (p. 614). This term implies that the nature of an individual’s PTI is optimally revealed when that individual is in the classroom. In their fourth year, the students are in the classroom for the first time as practising teachers, so PTI is simultaneously being tested and established. Mansfield, Beltman and Price (2014) relate PTI to teacher retention, as well as to the resilience and effectiveness of those in the profession. In fact, PTI can be related to the teacher’s ability to cope with what Zhumash et al. (2021) describe as “the complex and increasing demands of today's education reforms” (p. 263).

The influencing factors of PTI

Although there is a plethora of theories about how teachers learn and develop (Rutten, 2021), there is general agreement that PTI is influenced by both personal and contextual elements which act on each other over the duration of a teacher’s life (Beltman et al., 2015; Makovec, 2018; McChesney & Aldridge, 2021). Nash (2021) speaks of the benefits of “integrated partnerships” (p. 62). Teaching, according to Olsen (2008, p. 5), “is not merely a cognitive or technical procedure but a complex, personal, social, often elusive, set of embedded processes and practices that concern the whole person.” The “whole person” in the case of a pre-service teacher is also part of another complex environment – the university. Schepens, Aelterman and Vlerick (2009) describe teacher education programmes as “ineffective [because they] provide the knowledge through various, often fragmented courses, while the schools provide the setting where student teachers are expected to apply those theories. Student teachers are required to integrate it all by themselves” (p. 4). Such integration would include “all dimensions of human functioning specifically related to a person’s emergent conceptions

of their personal and professional selves” (Palmer et al., 2015, p. 412). It is these personal and professional aspects which come together in the development of PTI. Walkington (2005) also emphasises the link between the university and the school, indicating that identity is shaped by both. This implies that investigating pre-service teachers’ PTI must involve both worlds, looking particularly at the role of the mentor lecturer, who bridges the gap between the two.

The role of the mentor lecturer

Bwiruka, Maani, and Ssetumba (2021) argue that mentoring involves shared goals, opportunities, motivation and rewards, in effect, the process involves “the mentor, the mentee, and the relationship” (Ani, Iketaku & Uzosike, 2021, p. 27). According to Hong (2010), the role of the mentor has evolved from a strong hegemonic role to that of someone who comes alongside the student and provides informed feedback as counsellor, equal partner and critical friend.

Mentoring is teaching in its most intense form and could be defined as teaching a classroom of one with the hope of transferring much knowledge in a short amount of time. Debriefing and reflection are fundamental to this process (Spratt, 2019; Sutherland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010; Zegwaard & Rowe, 2019). McCullough and Pelcher (2021) found that one-on-one conversations contributed to the quality of content delivery. Such mentoring involves the mentor’s socialisation of the student so that the mentee can equal and exceed their mentor in passion, technique and skill in the classroom, in effect, what Nikoçeviq-Kurti and Saqipi (2022) refer to as mastery experiences. The mentor lecturer takes on the role of a mediator and an interpreter of how real-world experiences relate to the theory learnt, specifically in order to ensure that the tenets of best practice are passed on to the next generation (Babarinde et al., 2022, p. 2236). In fact, Jafar et al. (2021) define mentoring in terms of the *quality* of the guidance that is provided.

Failures in mentoring, according to Kamarudin et al (2021), are the result of what they describe as artificial experiences. These include “lack of trust, bad intent from the side of the mentee, dysfunctional behaviour of the mentor due to lack of training, or their inability to adapt to the changing needs of their mentee” (p. 56). It is particularly the latter which was found to be relevant to this study, given the access to the student teachers’ perceptions of mentoring as provided by the FIRE project. Parker et al. (2022) refers to “strong relational ties” (p. 525) that improve the outcomes of mentoring, which in this case include the development of the student teacher’s PTI.

Approach and Method

Methodology

This was a single, descriptive case study so chosen because this would allow a “comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms” (Roberts et al., 2019, p.4), describing what Creswell (2007) speaks of as multiple realities, in working with individuals who have their own perceptions of their world and the events in it. These multiple realities nevertheless constitute a single unit, bounded by space and time (the entire Fourth year BEd population in a single year), as described by Gagnon (2010). Yin (2009) points out that a case study is a suitable research method when the research question is how or why – in this particular study, the questions fall into the “why” category. Yin (2009) also speaks of data needing to converge in a triangular fashion, which implies the use of two or more sets of data, or, for example, using qualitative and quantitative methods (Heale & Forbes, 2013). Methodological triangulation is used in this study.

Multiple quotes are used to capture the perspectives of the participants, as advocated by Creswell (2007). To support this qualitative approach, the numbers generated by the ranking were analysed statistically. While this was a quantitative exercise, the use of statistics did

notFinal test on Monday 5make this a mixed methods study (Maxwell, 2010). Statistical analysis does however contribute to the “internal generalizability” (Maxwell, 2010, p. 478) of the conclusions by determining that the findings have a symbiotic relationship with the environment/situation in which they are found, and also helps to “identify patterns that are not apparent simply from the unquantitized qualitative data” (p. 479). The ranking of mentor lecturer influence by the students lent itself to a quantitative analysis – patterns emerged from the statistical analysis which provided insight into the data from a different point of view.

The sample group consisted of the entire fourth-year BEd population, all 838 of whom were involved in the FIRE project. The sample consisted of males and females and was linguistically and racially diverse. The group comprised students from the sciences and arts and was representative of all four phases: Foundation Phase: pre-school to Grade 3, Intermediate Phase: Grades 4–6, Senior Phase: Grades 7–9, and Further Education and Training (FET): Grades 10–12. The students were asked to sign letters of confidentiality in which they granted permission for the data to be used for research purposes. Ethical clearance for the FIRE Project was obtained from the Ethics Committee at the university’s Faculty of Education. All of the participants always remained anonymous and none of the names of the schools at which the students conducted their WIL were revealed.

The students came together in workshops twice during the WIL period, which consisted of two school terms. They worked in groups of between six and ten (93 groups). They were asked to list in descending order from the most to the least important, the aspects that they thought contributed to the teacher identity as a professional. They were also expected to quantify who the bigger role players were in the formation of their identity and their becoming an effective teacher; this ranking was indicated by cutting coloured cardboard sheets into different sizes. The more important the role player, the bigger the cardboard with that heading and description. These diverse cardboards were then glued onto an A1 (594x841mm or 4 of the usual A4 paper) sheet of paper to make a poster.

The students then qualified what the contributions of these role players were by describing narratively why and how those role players affected them. Mind maps work well when collaborative thinking is required “because it develops synergistic interactions and abundant knowledge” (Leeds et al., 2019, p. 8). In this case, the students used a mind map format to visually represent their group’s thinking on their collective experiences. Their perceptions, reflections and comments were then collated and transcribed, resulting in hundreds of pages of transcribed data.



Figure 1

Mind Maps with Ranked Coloured Cardboard Sheets

The data were subsequently organised into themes, while bearing in mind the characteristics of self-reflexivity, context, and thick description (Tracy, 2019). The amount of qualitative data that was collected made it essential to use an organising programme in the analysis, in this case, Atlas.ti 8. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26.

Findings

When analysing the data collected from such a large sample (n=838), the findings are not predictable because of the diversity and complexity of individual perceptions, and the fact that two students could have experienced the same mentor lecturer differently. The participants not only described the influencers that changed their PTI landscapes, but also ranked these influencers in terms of the magnitude of that influence.

Quantitative analysis

The data were collected from 93 groups who were asked to rate the impact of influencing factors on the development of their PTI. Ten role players were identified. These role players became the codes used in the data analysis, as in the table below.

Table 1

Identity Formation Role Players and Associated Codes

Role Player	Code Name
The teacher under whose guidance the student worked during the WIL period)	Mentor Teacher
The university lecturer to whom the student was assigned during the WIL period	Mentor Lecturer
Lecturers who presented courses to the students during their academic training	Undergraduate Lecturers
Teachers who taught the students as school children	School teachers
The students themselves i.e. their own aspirations	Self
Religious convictions	Faith
Media	Media
Enjoyment of a particular subject	Subject Interest
Funding that was available for the student to be able to study Education	Loan Availability
People not associated directly with the students' academic training, thus family members and/or friends and/or the learners who were taught by the students during the WIL period.	Family, friends and children

Only one group included the category *Subject Interest* in their ranking. Therefore, this category had no statistical value in this analysis and, as a result, was excluded. No group ranked all of the original ten categories; the most categories that were ranked by any group were seven. Thus, the data are categorical, ranging from one to seven across the categories mentioned above.

It was not possible to compare the responses as they appeared in the raw data because, for example, ranking second out of a possible five is not equivalent to ranking second out of a possible nine. Therefore the data needed to be scaled. This means that all of the responses were placed on the same scale, allowing the importance of each categorical response to be evaluated

Table 2

Normalised Scores

Statistics

	Mentor lecturer	School teacher	Family, friends, children	Faith	Mentor teacher	Undergrad lecturers	Self	Media	Loan
N Valid	85	62	87	22	76	63	28	20	3
Missing	8	31	6	71	17	30	65	73	90
Mean	,4635	,7312	,2356	,6364	,5684	,6413	,6012	,4500	,4444
Median	,4000	,8333	0,0000	,6667	,6000	,8000	,6667	,4000	,6667
Std. Deviation	,25674	,24021	,29124	,25006	,29221	,25185	,29165	,28928	,38490
Range	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	,67
Minimum	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Maximum	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	,67
Rank	6	1	9	3	5	2	4	7	8

and the various importance levels of the categories to be compared and ranked, thus comparing apples with apples, in a manner of speaking.

The normalised average scores for each element were calculated using the mean (average) scores, and the mean scores were then ranked. As can be seen in Table 2 (as presented in SPSS), the scores were ranked in order of importance - the higher the score, the more important the specific element in the opinion of the respondents. Thus, the mean scores indicated the overall ranked importance of the categories.

Based on the scores, it can be seen that the category of School Teachers was ranked the most important influencer, in first position, followed by Undergraduate Lecturers and Faith in this sample. The Media, Loan Availability and Family, Friends and Children categories were ranked the least important influencers. Interestingly, the Mentor Teacher and Mentor Lecturer categories lay in the bottom half of the rankings, ranked fifth and sixth, respectively.

The fact that the mentor teachers and the mentor lecturers ranked significantly low (fifth and sixth out of nine) is indicative of the small impact of these two influencers on the PTI of the respondents in this study. Clearly, the mentor lecturers were not perceived as significant role players in the development of PTI in this sample.

The first possible implication of this finding is that, according to the thinking of some students, lecturers are best kept in the lecture hall because they do not bridge the theory-practice gap and therefore the role of mentor lecturer is not useful. A second implication could be that the mentor lecturer is needed and would be valued, but the lecturer is out of touch with the classroom and cannot give relevant and much needed advice. So, either the function of mentor lecturing is redundant, or the mentor lecturer is valuable but not adequately informed about the modern classroom and the problems that teachers face on an everyday basis. For example, cyber bullying is a new problem. A mentor lecturer who has not taught in a classroom where social media and technology were factors may not know how to practically advise a pre-service teacher who is faced with problems in this regard. Donnison (2007) speaks of *being digital* and states that institutions need to adjust their practices to suit the characteristics of the Net Generation, who are notoriously easily bored (Ferrer et al., 2020) and who require instant gratification because they have grown up online (Sas, 2019; Watkins, 2017; Wolor et al. 2021).

A third possible implication of the quantitative findings is that this sample is typical of the millennial generation, as described by authors such as Bergman, Ferrington, Davenport, and Bergman (2011), deBard (2004) and Ferrer et al. (2020): young people, born between the early 1980's and the early 200's (Larioque, 2019), who believe that they are unique and special and entitled to be treated as such, dependent on regular and consistent affirmation and protection from difficulties. This generation is "the most talked about and largest generational cohort in history" (Alugar, 2021, p. 119) who are set to constitute 75% of the workforce by 2025 (Alugar, 2021). Millennials have distinct characteristics (Kim & Yang, 2020; Wolor et al., 2021); Ferrer et al. (2020) describe the millennials as "entitled, outwardly spoiled, politically densed, and lazy" (p. 10). Whitney et al. (2021) agree, but also mention positive characteristics, including being ambitious, confident, and optimistic. Wolor et al. (2021) point out that millennial employees easily seek new jobs "if they feel uncomfortable and their needs are not met (p. 105). In the words of Wolor et al. (2021), "They want to be promoted immediately and like compensation rewards." (p. 107) Gardner (2016) highlighted a thread that has become common in the literature: "this generation is quintessentially different from the generations preceding them" (p. 7), and needs understanding and support. It may be that this sample had a disproportionate need for approbation and affirmation; Twenge (2009) speaks of "Generation Me" (p. 398).

Koeller (2012) describes this generation as lacking the ability to reflect and not comfortable with autonomy and self-direction (Hays & Reinders, 2018). According to Watkins (2017), the lack of capacity for critical reflection is a "noted weakness" (p. 23) of this

generation. Koeller (2012) further explains that this generation has either grown up or at the very least grown used to various forms of media, without necessarily being reflective about what they are exposed to through these platforms. Hays and Reinders (2018) coined the term *critical learnership*, which they define as follows: “Critical Learnership involves shared and continuous critique and challenge of existing ways of thinking, doing, and being, while building autonomy and self-direction” (p. 1). Possibly, this generation lacks the ability to discern and apply such a hidden curriculum.

Qualitative analysis

Using an inductive thematic approach (Fraser, 2018), the data was analysed with codes related specifically to the conceptual framework: descriptors for the coding were generated by adapting Beijaard et al.’s (2000) three-factor model to investigate the PTI aspect of the data, and Hudson’s (2004) five-factor model to investigate the mentoring aspect. In total, 188 quotations were allocated to those codes.

Coding

Five codes each from Beijaard et al.’s (2000) and Hudson’s (2004) models are discussed here. The students drew repeated and specific attention to the mentor’s role as Carer. Thus Carer was split into three codes, each distinctly describing the different aspects of this construct. The table below presents the codes that were generated.

Table 3

Codes Generated adapting Beijaard et al.’s (2000) and Hudson’s (2004) models

Beijaard et al (2000)	Hudson (2004)
Lecturer as Carer	Feedback with Clear Expectations
Lecturer as Inadequate Carer	Negative Feedback
Lecturer as Carer influencing PTI	System Requirements
Subject Expertise	Negative Perceptions of System Requirements
Teaching and Learning Expertise	Pedagogy: Teaching Guidelines

Findings from the Qualitative Data

While not all the codes and their allocations can be discussed in this article, the findings from the qualitative data show that in this sample, the need for affirmation was very high. The groups who had a mentor lecturer that they perceived as caring and nurturing, stated that this aspect was what they appreciated the most in their mentor lecturer interaction. The second most frequently allocated code referred to the students’ discussion of inadequate care, that is, when their affective needs were *not* met by the mentor lecturer. None of the other factors regarding the roles and characteristics of the mentor lecturers carried as much weight.

The mentor lecturer’s perceived influence on PTI

Some of the students felt very strongly about the mentor lecturer’s influence on their PTI, but very few groups referred directly to this influence. The students whose PTI *was* profoundly influenced by their mentor lecturer were emphatic and very positive about this influence - but this was the experience of the minority. The mentoring that was not lauded was either insignificant and lacklustre or annoying. None of the students were so severely

negatively influenced that they wanted to leave the programme. In fact, no one specifically mentioned a negative effect of the lecturer on their PTI. Thus, the mentor lecturer influence was either positive or negligible. Some examples of the coding and responses are presented for further clarification of the students' perceptions regarding their mentor lecturers.

Lecturer as Carer. Here the mentor lecturer displayed empathic personal attributes. This code was allocated the most frequently to comments by 39 of the 93 groups. Below are some of the comments:

“Some [mentors] were very approachable, helpful and genuinely caring (even to the point of going to the funeral of a student who passed away).”

“The lecturer that is really good would literally accommodate you in any way she is humanly capable. Punctual. Reliable.”

“She encouraged us to be calm and that everything will be okay.”

“Applaud[ed] my best teaching strategies. He/she treated me with respect.”

“Motivate[d] me constantly to do better and improve my lessons. Encourage me with positive comments. Acknowledge and praise me when I'm doing well in certain parts of the lesson.”

“My mentor is very accommodating. She always makes me feel free. Her comments were fair. My mentor checks up on me on a weekly basis to see if I am still coping and to ask any questions.”

“They [the mentor lecturers] gave us academic knowledge, but the personal growth and emotional support that we received helped us to form our identity.”

Some groups indicated that their mentor lecturers taught them how to become reflective practitioners. They recognised this impartation of skills as a contributor to the quality of their classroom practice. Some lecturers also taught the students to be independent and to think and be “inspired to stand up for ourselves” (Group 41).

Lecturer as Inadequate Carer. The second most frequently allocated code was Lecturer as Inadequate Carer, with 28 quotations. These negative sentiments were expressed in more detail than the positive ones generally were. Below are some of the comments.

“They do not always understand that this is still a challenge for us. Big problem for us was that we had not yet been out on teaching practice – we had no idea how to handle the physical atmosphere and management in the classroom.”

“She has not really been involved with this process. We don't really spend time with them, it isn't consistent support.”

“They should understand that we have different personalities. Listen and consider our suggestions as student teachers. Listen and pay attention to our lessons.”

“Some of them are dominant, they don't allow negotiation.”

“Respect our lessons, be in class for the whole period”.

“Make more contact. Be more interested.”

“Some lecturers have never been teachers, so they do not understand the teaching dynamics.

“Some of them are less experienced.”

“Uninvolved: no knowledge of what is going on in schools”

“They don't support us; they don't care. They forget that we are still learning”

“[They] don't give us solutions to common problems faced by teacher in a South African school. Too focused on theory.”

The need for affirmation and support is communicated clearly in these quotes. According to Amaliaa (2020), affirmation is a process which turns what is perceived as negative into something that becomes motivational. A student's success can be linked to their perception of how a teacher, or in this case a lecturer, feels about them (Beckford, 2020).

Subject Expertise. The assumption is made that if someone is appointed as a mentor lecturer by a university, such a person is a subject expert. That expertise may lie within a subject per se or in a phase, such as the Foundation Phase; regardless, the person is deemed to have expertise from which the student can benefit. It is also assumed that the person is not only an expert in their speciality, but knows how to teach it. However, it is their ability to communicate these aspects which these students found commendable or unfavourable. According to Hudson (2004), a good mentor lecturer is someone who has good pedagogical knowledge and is someone from whom students can learn easily, while also knowing their subject. However, such knowledge does not necessarily translate into good mentoring.

This code was not frequently allocated, but the few comments that there were made were very positive. The students felt that the lecturer increased their appreciation and knowledge of the subject. The student groups who did refer to subject knowledge (14 quotes) greatly appreciated this attribute of the mentor lecturer.

Teaching and Learning Expertise. This code was linked closely to Pedagogy: Teaching Guidelines (Hudson), generating 30 quotes in all. The quotes indicated that the students felt that their mentor lecturer contributed to their repertoire of teaching skills. These students also commended their mentor lecturers for helping them to make sense of theory in terms of the reality of the classroom. The students said they found themselves learning new strategies from their mentor lecturers, so that their professional range was being stretched through the influence of the mentor lecturer. One group said the following:

“My mentor lecturer believed in my teaching and she even taught me how to use other methods in my teaching so that I can do more.”

Perceptions of the mentor lecturer’s mentoring

Mentorship, as seen through the lens of Hudson’s (2000) model, allows a researcher to look at the characteristics of mentoring. The findings in this study indicate that some of these characteristics were more important to the students than others.

Feedback with Clear Expectations. Feedback from the lecturer was found to be a crucial element in mentoring, particularly regarding the way in which the mentor communicated specific outcomes to the student. According to Ovando (2005), constructive feedback is what is required for teachers to respond positively and appreciatively to feedback. Without explicit communication, the students felt they could not meet the expectations of their mentor lecturer. The students greatly appreciated instances when the mentor lecturers clearly communicated their expectations in a positive way. Feedback with Clear Expectations was the most frequently referenced code (23 quotations) of those generated from the Hudson model. The students explained that they benefited from their mentor lecturer constructively criticising their lessons, helping them with discipline and learning strategies and that this would be of great benefit to their own PTI, enduring into the future. When the mentor lecturer gave relevant and structured feedback, the students indicated that they were able to learn from the mentor lecturer how to give good feedback themselves. It was part of the implicit curriculum – in receiving good feedback, they learnt how to give good feedback to their learners.

Negative Feedback. This code was allocated four times and in those quotes, the students described feedback that ranged from absent to irrelevant to harsh. The students emphasised their perception that carefully constructed, thought-out feedback not only informed them on how to improve their current teaching strategies, it also improved their own ability to give feedback and this would benefit them in future teaching endeavours.

System Requirements. This code refers to, for example, completing the lesson plan forms and filling in the extra-curricular programme form, i.e. what the university required the students to do in order to fulfil the requirements of the WIL. Some students indicated that they were unsure of how to manage a classroom while simultaneously fulfilling the system requirements of the university. Neither this code nor its shadow code, Negative Perceptions of

System Requirements, were frequently allocated. The implication here is that the students did not connect system requirements to lecturer mentoring, as the university's requirements in this regard were clearly stated in the WIL guidance file, and the school system requirements would probably not have been known to the mentor lecturer.

Conclusions

Mentor Lecturer Influence on PTI

Although the students were asked directly about the influence of the mentor lecturer on their PTI as Carer, Subject Expert and Teaching and Learning Expert, only eight groups specifically discussed the mentor lecturer's role in terms of the development of their PTI, and then mainly in terms of the encouragement they received as emotional support leading to personal growth. None of the participants spoke of the mentor lecturers' influence on their PTI in terms of developing them as Carer, instead they discussed their mentors' role in terms of caring for *them*. This sample did not discuss the influence of the mentor lecturer on *their* PTI as Carer – instead, they discussed the lecturer as Carer. The reason for this may lie in the findings of research by Miller and Mills (2019): “students value approachability and relatability as traits in a caring professor” (p. 78). What seemed to be absent or sparse was what Irby et al. (2017) speak of as the development of trust relationships which provide an environment that promotes growth. This is corroborated by Walters et al. (2020), who linked professional identity development to a meaningful mentor-protégé relationship. Only a minority of the students was cognisant of the influence of the mentor lecturer on their PTI in terms of Subject and Teaching and Learning Expertise.

Perceptions of Mentor Lecturer Mentoring

Judging by the words of Huizing (2012), “Mentoring provides the capacity to learn wisdom and experience from another who has been there and done that” (p. 27), it seems reasonable to assume that mentor lecturer mentoring would provide exactly that, but this study has shown that, at least for this cohort, this was not the case. Lecturer feedback was often not perceived by this cohort as relevant. Colvin and Ashman (2010) point out that everybody involved in the mentoring process has different ideas about the mentor's role and how it should play out. We conclude that discussion of mentorship should involve *menteeship* – what does the mentee need? In fact, in the United States, there is a law known as the Individualized Induction Plan, which provides for tailor-made and intensive support and assistance for each fledgling teacher (Bullough, 2012, p. 59). The mentor lecturer is in a hegemonic position with reference to their mentees and should therefore guard against making assumptions regarding their students' needs without being informed by the reality of their context. Ossenberg et al. (2019) describe feedback as “an interactive, dialogic process between the learner and the learning partner” (p.383). Aderibigbe et al. (2016) emphasise the supportive nature of mentoring, describing it as pivotal in the creation of an enabling environment. Our study found that relevance and support are non-negotiable requirements for mentees to benefit sufficiently from mentorship.

The theory-practice gap

The theory-practice gap is a global phenomenon, keenly felt by the participants in this study. In schools where the students were on WIL, the only person who was qualified to breach that gap, in their opinion, was the mentor lecturer. The students perceived the WIL exercise as one of the teacher education programme's sole opportunities for real individualised, personal education. This, they thought, was where someone who was didactically and pedagogically experienced would have face to face discussions with them about their particular set of needs and areas where they lacked understanding. According to the findings of this study, this

interaction did not uniformly take place. So, sometimes the lecturer missed the mark, and sometimes the students were unreceptive. In any one-to-one interaction, personalities come into play. Sometimes neither party may have been lacking: instead, they may have just been mismatched.

Central conclusions

The mentor lecturer has the potential to greatly influence students' PTI. The findings revealed four possible reasons for which the mentor lecturers were not perceived as being influential in the development of the sampled students' PTI.

Firstly, mentor lectureship may be obsolete and the role redundant. The lecturer may be out of touch with the context of the modern classroom and so does not understand the students' needs. Jarvis (2006) explains that the classroom itself has changed:

The traditional image of the teacher is someone who tells students what to learn and encourages them to learn and rehearse what they have been taught. It has been they who have mediated knowledge to children and adult learners alike. Teachers were 'the fount of all wisdom', but now that has all changed. (p. 13)

Lecturers may not practise that change. Hativa (2000) speaks of lecturers who deliver their inputs in an uninterrupted way, where students are not active participants. In fact, Barzun (1944) describes lecturing as follows:

Lecturing comes so natural to mankind that it is hard to stop it by edict. It simply turns into bootleg form. Many teachers think that because they sit around a table with only a dozen students they are running a discussion group, but they are lecturing just the same if the stream of discourse flows only in one direction. (p. 37)

Secondly, the mentor lecturer may not have enough time to dedicate to students. Several groups commented on lecturers not having time to answer their questions, or leaving their class before the lesson was done.

Thirdly, the students being millennials, as discussed earlier, may have been resistant to correction and not open to critical reflection. They may also have needed more support, approbation and affirmation than the mentor lecturers were aware of.

Fourthly, the mentor-mentee interaction is a one-on-one interaction in which neither party may be at fault, but they may be mismatched, so much so that no learning takes place. Hudson and Hudson (2010) found that this problem was so prevalent that it was suggested that mentors and site coordinators meet before the mentoring process begins in order to avoid personality and needs clashes.

This study strove to answer two questions: how do pre-service teachers perceive the influence of the mentor lecturer on their PTI? This cohort generally perceived their influence as insignificant. The second question was, how do pre-service teachers perceive the lecturer as mentor? They found the mentoring to be inadequate because they needed more care, attention, and affirmation.

Recommendations

A finding of this study is that the students were perhaps not as reflective as the mentor lecturer might have thought, much as was documented by Insuasty and Castillo (2010). What Seng (2004, p. 9) suggested is as relevant now as it ever was:

[T]he evidence of low reflectivity among student teachers suggests the need for program designers to consider further changes in terms of pre-practicum preparation and supervision strategies that may promote reflectivity among student teachers. Efforts should be made to ensure the link between mentoring practices and reflectivity.

One of the old precepts of teaching says the following: do while the student watches, do with the student, watch the student do. This relates specifically to the modelling of which Hudson (2000) speaks. At university, students are taught *about* teaching, but teaching is not

necessarily modelled to the students, as the qualitative analysis in this study indicated. The teaching model of university lecturing very often cannot be applied to classroom teaching because lecturing, while being educational, is not necessarily demonstrative of good teaching practice. This is because lecturing is often teacher-centred, while the classroom should ideally be learner-centred (Barzun, 1944; Roettger et al., 2007, Bremner et al., 2022). At university, the lecturer-student ratio often does not easily allow for student/learner-centred teaching. So, the theory-practice gap is seldom narrowed. There is thus a need for a revisitation of teaching strategies in higher education (Roettger et al., 2007).

Another problem lies with mentor lecturers who have not been in the classroom themselves, or were last in a classroom long ago: the nature of the classroom has changed. While lecturers cannot be put in a classroom to refresh their knowledge of the context, it would be useful to create outreach programmes in which the mentor lecturers spend time with the phase in which they specialise. This would not only be of benefit to learners, but would also keep the lecturer's hand in, as it were.

What is expected of the mentor lecturer needs to be very clearly stated within the guidelines given to the mentor lecturers. Guidelines that refer to system requirements, like filling in forms, assessment deadlines and lesson schedules, do not guide the mentor lecturer toward meeting the need of the mentee. The affective and logistical support that the mentee needs is left to the intuition of the mentor lecturer and seems to be neither standardised nor regulated. Needs in this regard were very clearly identified in the qualitative analysis of this study's data. Virtič et al. (2021) found it essential that the "personal attributes of a mentor" (p. 15) are channelled to support the students in order for the students to have a positive mentee experience. It seems necessary that mentor lecturers pay more attention to the nurturing aspect during the WIL – this is what these students appreciated or felt the lack of the most. It may be that the suggestion of Szymkowiak et al. (2021) should be seriously considered in tertiary training: "Motivation is optimized when students are exposed to a large number of motivating experiences and variables on a regular basis, that is, ideally, students should have many sources of motivation in their learning experience from each class" (p. 1).

The final question to be answered in such a study as this is about who could benefit from its findings and conclusions. The student teachers would benefit if mentor lecturers took on board the students' need for affective care. Such care would not only increase the influence of the mentor lecturer on the development of the student's PTI but would also demonstrate to the students the value of caring mentorship in their own practice.

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