

Review

Teacher preparation in the Arab World: Effective mentoring – A missing link

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Abstract

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Teacher preparation in the Arab World is mostly done by colleges of Education at Arab Universities. Regardless of the quality of teacher preparation programs offered, one major hindrance to graduating effective teachers is the poor quality of the Internship (practicum) component of the programs. Internship is usually mentored by traditional school teachers who lack the proper training as professional mentors. This paper proposes a diploma in Mentor Training that may guarantee a successful internship experience for better and more effective new teacher induction.

Keywords: Cooperating teachers, internship, mentoring, practicum, student-teacher, teacher preparation, teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

Definition of Terms

Mentoring

It is a formal coaching relationship in which experienced teachers (mentors) share their knowledge and experience with novice teachers or teachers-to-be (mentees or protégés) to promote their personal and professional growth (Wong 2004). The word 'formal' in the definition highlights the idea that a successful mentoring program should pair mentors and mentees in an official and appropriate manner. Furthermore, it distinguishes mentoring from an informal 'buddy system' whereby a beginning teacher may get some initial help from well-meaning colleagues who reach out on their own (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Mentoring for beginner teachers is a common practice in various universities and colleges all over the world. In our part of the world, teacher coaching and/or mentoring have also been practiced in schools as an ice-breaking induction procedure to help newly appointed teachers adapt to the school teaching environment. In many situations in several Arab countries, school principals

tend to assign some experienced teachers to work as mentors of the new teachers for a short period of time. Such mentors usually offer teacher guidance in the form of modeling or class observation and feedback discussions. The fact of the matter is that most of those so-called mentors may lack the proper qualification of a professional mentor and as such may negatively affect the new teacher's attitude and or image of the teaching profession. This can happen and actually does happen, because such mentors were not trained to be mentors. The only qualification they might have had is long teaching experience regardless of how much added value exists as a result of this long teaching experience. In worse cases, moreover, the mentor is chosen to be a mentor for a new-comer simply because there is no other choice: the mentor is the only school teacher sharing the same specialty area of the new-comer.

In responding to such a drastic situation, teacher preparation colleges or institutions have adopted a longer and more-intensive internship component within their teacher preparation programs. This solution, it is thought, will give the student-teacher a good hands-on experience under some sort of supervision from the college professor

or college supervisor. However, the role of the supervisor is actually restricted to five or six visits to the school where the student-teacher is doing the internship during the whole program. Henceforth, the real training the student-teacher has is what can be learned from the school mentor. Again, the school mentor may not be the best model either for the lack of mentoring skills or the long teaching experience based on traditional teaching practices or both.

This paper argues that mentoring needs to be done at the hands of a professional mentor. A professional mentor is an experienced teacher who has received proper training in mentoring appropriate and in-sync with the current teaching and pedagogy approaches that student-teachers learn at their colleges. Such a professional mentor is in fact still a missing link in almost all Arab countries teacher preparation programs. This paper suggests an intensive Mentoring University Diploma Program to guarantee the proper preparation of Mentors who can provide professional support for student-teachers during their practicum. The components and qualities of this Mentoring Diploma Proposal shall be the focus of this article.

Politicians, business people, actors, physicians, lawyers and sports figures all have used coaches to improve their practice. More and more, schools are developing high quality coaching programs as they also realize that coaches help people and organizations improve. Richard Elmore states, "To make deep changes in teachers' instructional practice and content knowledge, educators need both opportunities for continuous learning focused on improving student learning and overall school success rather than individual success, grounded in the realities of practice and located within the school as close to the classroom as possible; collaboration with peers about problems of practice; regular feedback about their practice; and opportunities to examine their beliefs related to teaching and learning" (Elmore, 2002).

Mentoring is one of the major aspects of teacher education programs which often comes as a collaborative effort between university supervisors, teacher educators, school administrators, supervising teachers, and pre service teachers (He, 2010; Schwille, 2008) to prepare better teachers for the increasingly challenging classroom environment. Studies demonstrate that mentors need to be more informed about the needs of the beginning and novice teachers they mentor (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka, 2009).

Teaching is a complex work that cannot be fully learned in the short period of pre service teacher education (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Ganser, 2002; Gold, 1999). Like other professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and architects, teachers continue to learn on the job, especially in the crucial early years. In the teaching profession, this structured support is usually provided in the form of mentoring from veteran teachers. In the last

20 years, mentoring programs for teachers have become the dominant form of teacher induction (Strong, 2009); in fact, the terms induction and mentoring are often used interchangeably. Both empirical research and anecdotal evidence indicate that beginning teachers who receive some type of induction and mentoring generally have higher levels of job satisfaction, commitment, and retention within the profession (Cohen and Fuller, 2006; Fuller, 2003; Kapadia et al., 2007) as well as larger student achievement gains (Fletcher and Strong, 2009; Fletcher et al., 2008; Rockoff, 2008).

Significance of the Study

It is important to develop deeper understandings about how cooperating teachers perceive their important role as mentors to student interns and to explore the factors deemed necessary for effective mentoring to occur.

While much of the research on mentoring focuses on the beginning teacher, little research gives voice to the mentor teacher; yet there is growing research demonstrating that the mentor-protégé relationship enhances the growth and professional development of the mentor or more experienced teacher (Hastings, 2004; Howey, 1988; Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka, 2009; Tauer, 1998). Additional research has focused on the process of mentoring relative to the mentor and mentee (Achinstein and Villar, 2002, as cited in Iancu-Haddad and Oplatka, 2009).

This study is in line with research that gives attention to mentor teachers and their importance to the success of any teacher preparation program, especially in Arab Countries where there seems to be a huge gap between the sort of education student-teachers gain during their preparation programs and the actual practice of teaching in schools where most teachers are still using old-fashioned teaching approaches and techniques. Therefore, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of how the modeling of a mentor teacher provides a link for the novice teachers or student interns and how to develop the factors deemed necessary for effective mentoring to occur. According to He (2010), the mentee or pre service teacher needs significant guidance in both pedagogical and content knowledge throughout the mentoring process. In fact, He says that the mentoring experience is one of the primary factors that determine the success of the first-year or beginning teacher's experience (p.272, 273).

Research investigating strategies for promoting effective mentoring relationships may facilitate positive internship experiences for cooperating teachers, student interns, and university supervisors. For example, research by Roehrig et al. (2007) demonstrates the importance of appropriate mentor modeling (e.g., effective instructional strategies for the mentee to observe), as well as the need for a clear and open line of

communication throughout the mentoring experience between the mentor and mentee.

The development and implementation of formal mentoring programs and mentoring models in the context of teacher preparation programs can better prepare the prospective teacher for success during the challenging beginning years of teaching (He, 2010). It is critical that mentors get the experience and support they need to be effective mentors for beginning teachers. Organized, formal mentoring programs can provide both structure and rationale for the need for effective mentors for beginning or novice teachers. Research demonstrates that mentors who are considered "effective" tend to have more experience as mentors than those who are not (Roehrig et al., 2007). Some studies also show that quality mentors need to have both expertise and competence (Evertson and Smithey, 2000; Stallion and Zimpher, 1991; Wang and Odell, 2002) in the realm of mentoring if they are to help their beginning teachers be more effective. Mentors who have had adequate preparation, research shows, are better able to assist their mentees with classroom management, problem solving, and lesson planning expertise (Evertson and Smithey, 2000). It is within this realm of research importance that the current proposed Mentoring Diploma program is suggested.

Hypothesis and Research Questions

It is hypothesized that many teachers in the Arab world lack the sufficient training and education to serve as professional mentors, therefore student-teachers doing their internship or pre-service training are usually trained at the hands of cooperative teachers who may not share the same teaching philosophy or preparation held by student-teachers. Such a situation, it is found, creates a state of confusion for student-teachers: they either are obliged to put aside what they have learned at the teacher preparation program in order to please the cooperative teacher (the mentor) so that they get the mentor's appraisal and positive report or they find themselves struggling into a very inconvenient relationship with the mentors for the whole pre-service (internship) experience which most of the time ends up leaving its negative effects on the student-teachers' general attitude towards the teaching career. Henceforth, the researcher believes that there is a need for an intensive diploma program to prepare mentors who enjoy a high degree of professionalism and can guarantee a successful internship experience for future teachers. This assertion will be further consolidated by answering the following questions:

- What is the actual need for mentoring in Arab world?
- What are the characteristics and qualities of a good mentor?

- What are the anticipated benefits of the suggested Mentoring- program?

Review of the Related Literature

In "Induction and mentoring of novice teachers: a scheme for the United Arab Emirates", Ibrahim, (2012) discusses the need of beginning teacher to be supported. He states that as there is a growing interest in teacher mentoring and in providing support from the experienced teachers to work with beginning teachers, many justifications for providing such support are put forward in the literature. The first rationale is based on a 'deficit assumption'. According to this view, beginning teachers face difficulties for a variety of reasons (p.235). First, teacher education programs, with their theoretical focus, fail to train them for the day-to-day duties of teaching (Feiman-Nemser 1983; Olson and Osborne 1991). During the short period of student teaching, they are offered mere glimpses of real teaching and are shielded from the complexity of school culture (Lawson 1983). Second, beginning teachers often have unrealistic beliefs about the difficulty of teaching and their ability to manage classrooms and students' behavior (Feiman-Nemser 1983; Hebert and Worthy 2001). Third, in many instances, the school community fails to provide adequate support for beginning teachers. These teachers are often expected to assume the same responsibilities as veterans, given difficult workloads, and left to teach primarily on their own through trial and error (Darling-Hammond 1997; Hebert and Worthy 2001; Huling-Austin 1988; Martinez 2004).

Consequently, most beginning teachers experience a reality shock as they come to realize they are ill-prepared to meet the challenges they face when they first teach in their own classrooms (Berry 2004; Hebert and Worthy 2001). Many of them leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (Huling-Austin 1990; Ingersoll and Smith 2003) and those who stay have two jobs to do: to teach, and to learn how to teach (Feiman-Nemser 2001; Wildman et al. 1989).

The Nature of the Internship

The internship or field experience is considered one of the most significant milestones of the teacher preparation program (Brimfield and Leonard, 1983). Russell M.L and Russell J.A (2011) emphasize that careful consideration must be taken when assigning student interns to mentors or cooperating teachers to ensure that the field experience is productive for all involved (p.16).

The researcher, furthermore, believes that in addition to what Russell says the main expectation from internship is to observe and gauge how much of the education theory, pedagogy and subject area knowledge learnt at the college is being incorporated in the field experience. Therefore, we need to rely on the school mentor for this

guidance and evaluation. It is evident in many cases, the mentor himself/herself is either professionally untrained or lacks the sufficient knowledge to train their mentees; a fact that proves the dire need professionally trained mentors.

Benefits of good mentoring

Research reveals many areas of potential benefits of induction and mentoring programs.

Ingersoll and Kralik (2004), in a review of 10 induction studies, found that mentoring programs have a positive impact on teachers and their retention. The absence of support during the first years of teaching, on the other hand, has been identified as a primary reason for teacher attrition. For example, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) found that teachers who had no formal induction are twice as likely to leave within the first three years of teaching. In addition, Villar (2004) found that teachers participating in induction programs develop teaching skills and capacities more rapidly, thus minimizing the time they take to perform at the same level as experienced teachers. Furthermore, Whisnant, Elliott, and Pynchon (2005) found that mentoring and induction programs increase teacher satisfaction, reduce their isolation, and enhance their professional growth (see also Ingersoll and Smith 2004; Moir and Gless 2001).

While beginning teachers benefit greatly from mentoring programs, mentoring enhances the personal and professional identities of mentors as well (Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent 2004); it helps them develop their skills of observation and communication, gives them time to develop new insights into their own teaching style, and furthers their professional development (White and Mason 2003). Moreover, mentors learn from their protégés, build new relationships, and renew their commitment to teaching (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000).

How to make mentoring more effective?

The mere presence of a mentor is not enough. A mentor needs to be extremely effective and this necessitates three features: good level of professional training as a mentor, a good knowledge of content area, and lesser work-load at schools to have more time with the mentees.

These three elements interact with the specific background, strengths, and needs that the new teacher brings to the classroom, as well as the school context in which he or she is teaching.

Many mentors are chosen initially because they are good teachers. Being a good teacher of students, however, does not automatically mean that one will be a successful mentor of adults (Feiman-

Nemser, 2001). To be effective, mentors require training and ongoing support to develop specific skills in assisting new teachers—for example, developing working relationships with adults, determining the strengths and needs of a new teacher, helping teachers set meaningful goals, and providing constructive feedback on instruction. Research indicates that when new teachers are paired with highly trained mentors, the pace of new teacher learning increases (Moir et al., 2009).

The kind of support mentors provide generally falls into two categories: emotional or psychological support and support that focuses on instruction (Gold, 1999). Most mentoring seems to focus on providing emotional support, helping teachers navigate the challenges of the first year. Such emotional support is valued by beginning teachers and may help reduce teacher attrition. However, to improve their pedagogical knowledge and skill, new teachers also need support focused on the core of education—teaching and learning of content. In fact, a number of studies (for example, Wechsler et al., 2010) have found that mentoring focused on instruction is related to positive outcomes for teachers. This focus means that, ideally, new teachers should be matched with trained mentors who are knowledgeable about their subject matter (Rockoff, 2008). Although non matched mentors can provide emotional support and coaching on classroom management, it's hard for someone who have never taught history to guide a new teacher in using primary source documents or for an English teacher to help a novice science teacher learn to address common student misconceptions around photosynthesis. In a study conducted of a mentoring program in New York City, teachers rated mentors as more helpful when they were matched on either grade level or subject area, particularly at the secondary level (Grossman et al., 2012).

Time also matters. Having more time with a mentor increases the novice's satisfaction with mentoring (Grossman et al., in press; Rockoff, 2008); and having a mentor for at least two years may also increase the effectiveness of mentoring (Glazerman et al., 2010; Moir et al., 2009). Yet, research suggests that many teachers don't get as much time with a mentor as their induction program mandates or as the new teacher desires (Wechsler et al., 2010).

Qualities of a Good Mentor

There are basic though essential qualities of the good mentor. Rowley (1999) emphasizes the qualities of a good mentor as to be committed to the role of mentoring, be accepting of the beginning teacher, be skilled, be effective in different interpersonal contexts, be a model of continuous learner and communicates hope and

optimism (p. 20-22).

The question is how can a mentor gain all these qualities? Rogers (1958) pointed out that empathy means accepting another person without making judgments. The good mentor teacher recognizes the power of accepting the beginning teacher as a developing person and professional. The works of Rogers (1958) and Combs et al. (1971), for example, can raise levels of consciousness about this important attribute. Equally important in the training protocol is helping prospective mentors understand the problems and concerns of beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984; Fuller and Bown, 1975) as well as stage and age theories of adult development (Loevinger, 1976; Sprinthall and Theis-Sprinthall, 1980).

The Supervisory Beliefs Inventory (Glickman, 1985) offers an excellent vehicle for introducing mentors to the challenges of interpersonal communication. In similar fashion, The Leadership Adaptability and Style Inventory (Hersey and Blanchard, 1974) can provoke mentors to reflect on the appropriateness of their mentoring behavior given the maturity and commitment of their mentees.

In "Mentors: They Simply Believe," Lasley (1996) argues that the crucial characteristic of mentors is the ability to communicate their belief that a person is capable of transcending present challenges and of accomplishing great things in the future.

Furthermore, Rowley (1999) consolidates that a training program that engages prospective mentors in reflecting on the qualities of effective helpers will be an excellent place to begin, that equips mentors with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions prerequisite to effective coaching and that engage mentors in completing and reflecting on self-inventories that provide insight into their leadership or supervisory styles will be particularly helpful (p.20-22).

The Statuesque in the Arab World

Colleges of Education at many Arab Universities are the sole teacher-preparation faculties. They usually offer several Teacher Education programs in the graduate and the undergraduate levels that require field work or internship. There is a great concern by specialists that student-teachers are usually trained at the hands of incompetent cooperative teachers (mentors) at schools who either lack the professional trainers to lead mentoring responsibilities and/or lack the proper teaching skills which reflect the most up-to-date trends in the profession. Consequently, the internship experience is seen unfruitful or counterproductive (the researcher's first hand recollections from working in the colleges of Education in Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar).

The current situation in Arab countries schools makes mentoring student-teachers a real problem in preparing future teachers. In most cases, student-teachers are

educated at the hands of excellent academicians while progressing on their university years only to find themselves face to face with school mentors who are who practice teaching in a very traditional ways. The researcher's notes from various school supervision visits in Jordan, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar show a set of common problems arising from the above stated conflict.

First: it has been noticed that many student-teachers face some sort of alienation by school teachers in the beginning of their internship period. This reflects an unannounced feeling by school teachers (mentors) that the student-teachers are those university kids who come to the internship with new ideas and new approaches which don't work in the work place. Many a time, in a supervision visit, the researcher is asked by school teachers: what do you teach those kids at the university? In reality, school teachers fear change and find their security in things they know better. Teachers-to-be, however, come to the internship practice with innovative approaches and new challenging teaching ideas taken from the most recent books or research findings. This conflict creates estrangement.

Second: the lack of training in mentoring techniques and strategies makes school teachers, even those who might have been recognized by their schools as excellent teachers, practice mentoring with arrogance or humiliation. Student teachers have expressed in several occasions many incidents of such a practice. Many are looked down at as the new know-nothing kids; others are seen as good obedient students who should watch, listen and do exactly what the mentors show them or demonstrate for them in the actual classroom. Still, some are roughly interrupted by the mentors while delivering a class session in inappropriate styles (the researcher unpublished notes of internship practices in Arab schools).

Third: several times, and in an attempt to gain high mentors' recognition and grades for the internship practice, student teachers tend to adopt a let's-be-friends strategies with the school mentors. It is usually noticed that student teachers, in order to keep a peaceful relationship with their mentors, tend to unlearn whatever they have learned at the college of education and, at the same time, practice teaching according to the same style used by the mentor. Many spot-check visits to student teachers doing their internship have revealed shocking observations of wrong practices. Post conferences with the student teachers have shown, in almost all such instances, that they are doing so to please the school mentors.

Finally, the lack of unexperienced mentors in schools and the fact that many of these mentors are selected as mentors by school administration on the mere fact that they are the only ones available or the ones who have good rapport with the administration and who shall enjoy a reduced teaching load as well as some financial rewards for mentoring, all makes the mentoring practice

in the Arab world doomed to failure.

CONCLUSION

The researcher believes that Arab colleges of Education need to develop special Mentor training Programs in order to create generations of professional mentors capable of leading a successful mentoring roles for student teachers during the internship practice. Such Mentor Training Programs are expected to include three major components: Psychology of Mentoring, Best teaching Practices, and Mentoring as a profession. The first component shall teach the mentors-to-be the nature of the relationship between the mentor and the mentee with all its subtle delicacies and complications. Such an education is thought important to reduce the tension that usually accompanies and marks the relationship between mentors and mentees in current practices.

The second component is equally important to the first; mentors-to-be should be selected according to their adaptability and flexibility to change. Without updated knowledge in the most current teaching practices, mentors will shrink to what they know and what they do henceforth they will always be adamant to change and will reject student teachers' innovative and creative teaching ideas. Many mentors have been in the teaching profession for so long that they fear any change and they resist any sort of innovation. Such people may do more harm than help to student teachers during the internship practice.

Finally, the third component helps mentors-to-be gain a better self- image as professionals. The Mentor Training Program may end up with a Mentoring License. Such a certificate shall have a positive impact on the mentor and her/his portfolio. When mentors become professional, the researcher believes, they will be more motivated for success and development in their schools. When mentors do their mentoring tasks as professionals, their sense of achievement becomes more important compared to doing their work just for the sake of some extra money.

It is expected, if such Mentor Training Programs are implemented, to have important implications for many stakeholders including colleges of Education, schools, and the Community at large. By training experienced teachers as mentors through a specially designed program, a new perspective can be given to the field of teaching and learning. The following are the anticipated benefits of this program.

- Mentors and mentees will become more familiar with their teaching responsibilities and of their responsibilities to the teaching profession.
- Mentors will realize the value of mentoring and its advantages for successful internship and future teaching success.
- Mentors will become fully aware of their competencies and abilities as professional trainers.
- Mentors will have an increased interest in life-long learning to stay a la mode in the teaching realm.
- Mentors may also become aware of leadership talents they had not previously been required to use. Their abilities to communicate well, chair committees, lead study teams and carry out research may give them more self-confidence and create some future prospects for further education plans.
- Mentors may be revitalized, and their careers rejuvenated. The Mentor Training Program may empower them and make them realize the importance of guiding and helping new inexperienced teachers.
- Student-teachers will have, as a consequence, more dependable guidance and a better internship experience.
- Colleges of Education will have more confidence that their student-teachers are in safe hands while doing their practicum.
- Cooperating schools will have the advantage of having a special environment which will create a very cooperative and collaborative flora for their teachers and colleagues and at the same time will rank these schools as landmarks for community service through their cooperation with colleges of education and the general community.

Furthermore, professors at colleges of Education in Arab Countries will be at peace that their student-teachers, after years of teacher-preparation and instruction in the best teaching methods and practice are not forced to unlearn everything during a semester of practicum at the hands of unprofessional, traditional mentors.

In brief, the mentor Training Program can prove to be a truly exciting venture for mentors and mentees in Arab countries. It should be designed to ensure in-depth staff training and improved instructional techniques for our students. In addition, the mentors will be able to concentrate on their individual projects, which may help us advance our teaching development. It is believed that teachers who believe in themselves and their abilities to teach also believe in their students' abilities to learn, such experiences have a significant effect on teacher expectations. Bandura (1986, 1997) believes that four avenues contribute to self-efficacy: mastery experiences, psychological and emotional states, vicarious experiences, and social persuasions. First, successful performance as a mentor creates a mastery experience; while working with new educators, excellent teachers can offer expertise and support that contributes to the learning of both teachers and students. Second, the physiological and emotional cues one receives when sharing and validating one's practice add to perceptions of competence and importance. Certainly observing as novice teachers follow the model provided by their mentors affords a rich vicarious experience. And finally,

the honor of being selected to serve as a mentor and being recognized as a model teacher fulfills the need for acknowledgment. The development of an educator's sense of teaching efficacy pays huge dividends for schools and both novice and veteran teachers. Such reciprocal learning opportunities move schools forward in their efforts to assign an excellent teacher in every classroom.

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