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Learnership in South African Schools: An Open Distance Learning Approach

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ABSTRACT Learnership programmes (LPs) at schools could address the shortage of teachers experienced in schools today. This research is an attempt to explore the option of training teachers through work-based situated learning. The appropriateness of LPs for both initial training as well as re-directed training, such as in-service training, through an Open Distance Learning Institution, is pointed out in this research. The specific aim of the research under review was to investigate placing student teachers in LPs as a means to empower students towards a career in teaching. Within a qualitative research approach, phenomenology as a qualitative research design was chosen as methodology for this project. Interviews with semi-structured and open-ended questions were used to gather data from the participants. The theoretical framework used in this research is the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger. It is evident from the findings that student teachers experienced their learnership appointments at schools as mostly a very valuable positive learning experience. In many instances, student teachers see the LP as the only way to become a teacher. LPs should therefore be developed as a

supportive endeavour in student teachers' becoming competent qualified teachers. These LPs could be a key influence in the success and/or failure of enticing and keeping student teachers in schools. At the same time it is important to note that mentor teachers could play a role by accepting learnership students fully into their classroom as findings reflect that learnership students mostly benefitted through this school-/work-based learning experience. The recommendations indicate learnerships for student teachers as the way forward in teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

If we are to believe newspapers articles of the last few years our teaching profession is in crisis. Rademeyer (2006b:9) warns students to reconsider becoming teachers as working conditions are precarious. Fourie (2006:1) and Rademeyer (2006a:9) both refer to qualified teachers leaving the teaching profession due to poor salaries as well as stress caused by, for example, too many administrative duties, continuous changes and problems with discipline due to overcrowded classrooms. Ncgukana (2013:4) reports on a case where there were nine teachers available for 800 learners. This lack of qualified teachers could have a ripple effect on the country as the growth potential of the economy and further job creation are ultimately affected. Education is all important, both for teachers and learners, when competing within a global economy. The shortage of well qualified teachers is reaching epidemic proportions.

The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) were established in 1999 to address shortages of expertise in the economy. In 2003 their originally limited lifespan was increased to an indefinite duration despite the fact that the majority were completely inefficient. The SETAs are financed with a levy of 1% on companies' salary accounts (SETA 2014). In 2004 the Minister of Labour announced that SETAs would be reconstructed, but nothing came of this announcement (Le Roux 2006:21).

In the annual report of Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA): Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) (SETA: ETDP 2002:1) its mission is spelled out as being "to promote and facilitate an increase in the skills profile of the sector's workforce to benefit employers and employees in the sector by encouraging a partnership between public and private

organizations to assure the quality of provision of education, training and development”. This mission has however fallen along the wayside as SETA: ETDP has experienced internal organisational problems and could not fulfil this promise. Since 2002 their role in the support of student teachers has decreased yearly and at present hardly features at all. Le Roux (2006:21), a well-known economist, stated that most SETAs turn out to be a waste of time and money as they are not fulfilling their mission.

An open distance learning approach has been followed in this research project because a number of learnership students study by means of open distance learning (ODL). ODL entails offering training and education by ways other than face-to-face instruction. ODL instruction is flexible (Jegede 2009:12–13) and technology is used to teach, while residential universities mostly depend on face-to-face tuition. Lategan (2002:91) explains it by referring to ‘click’ universities and ‘brick’ universities. ODL institutions interact with students by means of purposely designed printed materials, online technology that provides tutorial matter, collaboration and support for learning and teaching, SMS communication for instant feedback, tips or urgent announcements, satellite broadcasts as well as video conferencing (Mabunda 2010:232–234). Other communication tools include personal appointments with lecturers, telephone calls, email, faxes, group discussion classes, workshops, school visits by lecturers (ie to students during their teaching practice sessions at schools), DVDs and discussion forums. Technology contributes to the globalisation of higher education because it makes the transfer of knowledge borderless (Lategan 2002:92).

The main aim of this research was to investigate the experiences of student teachers in LPs as a means of empowering students towards a career in teaching through ODL. To conduct this research the following research question was formulated: How do student teachers experience LPs as a means to empower students towards a career in teaching?

In the next two sections, the theoretical frameworks and relevant literature are explained. The research design and data analysis are discussed, followed by a presentation of findings and conclusions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Work-based learning (WBL) is a style of learning suited to the fast-changing world of today, where student teachers find themselves with a need for academic knowledge and practical experience. Work-based learning can be described as an educational approach that aligns academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of student teachers and workplaces (the schools) (Engel-Hills, Garraway, Jacobs, Volbrecht, and Winberg 2010:2). Furthermore WBL can be used as an umbrella term that includes a variety of LPs eg apprenticeships, internships or learnerships. Learning in a social or work-based milieu is a process whereby student teachers learn about real life in the world around them, without having a rule book. They learn instead by listening, watching, absorbing and actively participating (Creth 1986:5). This learning could be strengthened by training through an ODL institution without removing the student teacher from the work-based situation.

WBL is supported by the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger formulated in 1991. Wenger (2000:225-226) argued that the success of organisations depends on their ability to design themselves as social learning systems, and also to participate in broader learning systems such as an industry. Wenger (2000:229) states that social learning systems consist of three constitutive elements, namely (1) communities of practice, (2) mutual engagement and (3) a shared repertoire of communal resources.

Student teachers as newcomers join a new community of practice, the school as social 'container' of the competences that make up such a system (Wenger 2000:226). First, for these communities of practice to function competently they must have a sense of joint enterprise to understand what their community is about while they hold one another accountable for individual actions (Wenger 2000:229). It will be expected from student teachers to understand the school enterprise well enough to be able to contribute to it. This promotes joint ownership by student teachers and mentors (Murthy 2011:289). Eventually this will support the holistic transformation from using information, to application of wisdom (Murthy 2011:289).

Mutual engagement happens as the student teachers and mentor teachers interact to establish acceptable relationships of mutuality with other staff members as well as norms within which the school functions (Wenger 2000:229). This will establish and encourage communication and teamwork. Through this interaction student teachers will eventually become competently able to engage with other members of the community and be trusted as full-fledged partners in these

interactions. Student teachers will convert knowledge into action through experiential learning and simulated role plays (Murthy 2011: 289).

Communities of practice have already produced a shared repertoire of communal resources (Wenger 2000:229). These resources would include all the learning activities that the school engaged in; for student teachers to be competent they must have access to this repertoire and be able to use it appropriately. These practical learning activities would further be strengthened by the academic work expected of the student teachers by the ODL institutions.

Boundary processes among these communities are important for two reasons: they connect communities and they offer learning opportunities in their own right (Wenger 2000:233). As the reconfiguration of the relationship between competence of the mentors (as representatives of the community) and experiences of the student teachers is an important aspect of learning, a fine balance should be maintained. Expertise from the mentors depends on a *convergence* between experience and competence while innovative learning requires their *divergence*. This implies that the mentors' competence must anchor the process but these competences also need to interact with what the student teachers have to offer eg new innovations in teaching and learning. First, across boundaries, effective actions and use of objects require new levels of coordination (Wenger 2000:234). Second, there is a need for transparency in the boundary processes that give access to the meanings they have in various practices (Wenger 2000:234). This means that the mentors and student teachers must listen, explain and exchange their knowledge. Third, negotiability is important during the boundary processes to provide a two-way connection for the mentors and student teachers to exchange ideas and learn from each other. It is more sensible to enable multiple practices, in this research schools and ODL institutions, to negotiate their relationships and connect their perspectives. . These three elements, coupled with the schools' needs being borne in mind by ODL institutions, can only result in better qualified teachers. Members of communities of practice contribute their competence by participating in cross-functional projects and teams that combine the knowledge of multiple practices to get something done (Wenger 2000:237).

Furthermore, according to the situated learning theory, identities are shaped by participation in these systems. All participants have their own relationships in these communities that enable them to build their own knowledge system to “know”. Learning is therefore defined as an interplay between social competence and personal experience; a dynamic two-way relationship between mentors, student teachers and the social systems (Wenger 2000:27) as well as ODL institutions in which they participate. The benefit according to Murthy (2011:289) is leverages on the millennial need for social connectivity on 24/7 daily bases. According to Eckert (Wenger 2000:238), sharing knowledge is not abstract but part of belonging. This principle is very applicable during LPs where mentors, student teachers and ODL institutions should work as a team, sharing knowledge and skills. While multi-membership of different communities of practice is an inherent aspect of everybody’s identities, some crucial qualities must coexist to constitute a healthy social identity. This would support nurturing positive attitudes and impacting behavioural transformation (Wenger 2000:289).

Another principle of the situated learning theory is connectedness. Connectedness implies that a strong identity involves deep connections with others through shared learning experiences, reciprocity, affection and mutual commitment (Wenger 2000:239). Connectedness will involve multi-membership and it will cross multiple boundaries (Wenger 2000:240). The multi-members will be the school or mentor teachers, the student teachers and the ODL institutions. A community identity will show effectiveness or functionality through action and participation, in order to socially empower all the participating members (Wenger 2000:240).

Schools, as communities of practice, offer an opportunity to negotiate competence for student teachers through direct participation in teaching activities. As a consequence, schools, as communities of practice, remain important social units of learning within larger communities, such as ODL institutions, as a system of constellations of interrelated communities of practice.

THE NATURE OF A LEARNERSHIP PROGRAMME

A learnership can be defined as a mode of delivering a learning programme that combines work-based experience with structured learning (Clark 2007:20).

Poor employability of university graduates and their lack of industry readiness has been a cause for concern across the globe (Murthy 2011:289). While the skills-gap in university graduates is one side of the malaise, it is apparent that learning approaches in academia are too unsynchronised with the lifestyle changes of the Millennials or Generation Y (present day students born after 1980) to be effective. Prensky in Murthy (2011:289) opines ‘today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach’. Generation Y students, who are narcissistic and self-centred, expect to see immediate results and have a sense of entitlement in their learning activities. They have mutated to adapt to an age of abundance and an environment characterised by high technology, they interact the whole day and will change jobs frequently, not willing to work for future benefits (Stein 2013:31-33; Booysen 2013:22).

These students seem to learn more when they are active participants in their own learning activities, in contrast to listening to their professors’ teaching (Scarboro 2012:59). Facing these facts may offer an important starting point when considering alternative routes to becoming a teacher. Teaching and teachers have to evolve in relation to developments in technology, knowledge growth as well as social opportunities and developments (Sykes, Bird and Kennedy 2010:465). The question to address would be: On what basis might teacher education be founded to encourage more students to join the profession?

LPs (as communities of practice) support part-time students in becoming teachers as LPs allow them to study and work in a community of practice, the schools, while earning a basic salary to support themselves. There are already several occupations that have compulsory apprenticeships, for example, artisans, or internships, such as lawyers and accountants, or workplace learning, such as health professions and engineering. Different terms are, however, used to denote these periods, for example, ‘externship’ (as a mini-internship or a one week job-shadowing), ‘practicum’, ‘placement’, ‘internship’ or ‘learnership’, depending on the occupation and the conditions of the LPs. Service learning is a form of project-based learning (PJBL) that connects students with communities, service partners, and academic experts (Engel-Hills et.al, 2010:2). The workplace therefore serves both as a learning resource and as a benchmark of practice.

A LP for teacher training is based on an internship that assists people like student teachers to gain learning experience situated in a school environment. Participating in an internship is a great low-risk opportunity to build a résumé and explore career options (Clark 2007). A student teacher works as an assistant with a qualified teacher, acting as the mentor, in a classroom. An

LP therefore combines practical work-integrated experience with theoretical knowledge gained from the modules presented by teacher training institutions. An LP is also strongly or weakly integrated into a formal learning programme, depending on the service provider.

The benefits for the student teacher who accepts a learnership would be the following:

- to acquire both theory from the ODL institute and practical WBL experiences at the same time;
- to receive a nationally recognised qualification registered on the National Quality Framework (NQF);
- to address the skills shortages of the country;
- to produce teachers that are well-trained and qualified to contribute to the economic growth and development of the country (Gauteng Province 2014:1).

SETA:ETDP was originally established to offer financial support to student teachers by means of LPs. This would have been one of the means of addressing the shortage of teachers, especially in certain subjects. However, due to internal operational problems SETA has not dealt with this objective adequately. As SETA is not presently fulfilling their task of supporting the training of student teachers, many schools already familiar with LPs have stepped in to support student teachers in their quest to become teachers. These schools presently run their own LPs for student teachers, based on the original idea of the SETA LPs. Some of these schools originally participated in the LPs supported by the SETA: ETDP.

Although these adapted LPs differ from school to school they all have the following features in common: skills development, duration, financial support, and needs and expectations of the school as well as the student teacher. As these LPs are mostly run and financially supported by the schools themselves, the schools and their governing bodies could determine the basis on which their internal LPs function. LPs do not require central planning and bureaucratic agencies, but could be run by individual schools while producing highly variable results (Sykes et al. 2010:465). Innovating LPs should be encouraged and integrated with traditional teacher education, as a means of developing occupational competence in teachers.

A solution for the current shortage of skilled qualified teachers would be for LPs to step into the shoes of SETA: ETDP. LPs could accommodate a large number of student teachers studying through ODL institutions. This could lead the way to vocational education for future teachers in

a way that makes sense to them, namely as student teachers situated in a school, experiencing WBL.

Against the background of the theoretical frameworks and the literature review, the following methodology was deemed suitable for investigating the experiences of LP student teachers in order to empower them towards a career in teaching.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In keeping with the qualitative research approach, phenomenology as qualitative research design was chosen as the method by which to obtain data. De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011:316) make the point that a phenomenological research design allows the researcher to investigate the meaning of a research phenomenon (in this case, experiences of LP student teachers) as accurately as possible while remaining true to the facts found in the conscious experiences of everyday life and social action (in schools).

As mentioned, a qualitative research approach was followed in this exploratory research project. An important reason for this approach is that it enables the researcher to focus on understanding the real-life experiences of the participants, rather than explaining the problem under review.

BEd (Intermediate & Senior Phase) and BEd (Early Childhood Education) as well as PGCE student teachers, involved in LPs, participated in this research and were approached for their personal opinions and experiences. Two LPs were associated with very diverse schools, namely a former Model C government school in Gauteng, now called 'Section 21 Schools' (School A), and a private school in KwaZulu-Natal (School B).

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA) provides a uniform system for organisation, governance and funding of schools. Since the schools are subject to this act, the LPs had to operate within the act's parameters (Clark 2007:33). In both cases the participants were briefed about the school culture, rules, policies, ethics, code of conduct and discipline. Both schools assigned a mentor teacher to each student teacher on a one to one basis, under the auspices of the main mentor overseeing the LPs. To indicate how different or similar these two schools and their LPs are, a brief overview is tabled below.

Table: Quantitative profiling of School A and B

	SCHOOL A Former Model C urban school (N19)	SCHOOL B Private urban school (N16)
GENDER		
Male	2	2
Female	17	14
AGES		
19-25		9
20-25	11	1
26-30	5	2
Over 30	3	4
COMPENSATION TO STUDENT TEACHERS IN THE LP		
From the school	• competitive salary • incentive bonuses for modules passed • bigger bonus for distinctions • 13th cheque when qualification is obtained • access to interest free loans	• solely funded by the school • lower salary than School A
From SETA	Occasional funded	No funds
REGISTERD WITH A PROFESSIONAL BODY		
South African Council of Education (SACE)	Provisionally registered	Not registered

Data were collected by means of 35 individual interviews (19 from school A and 16 from school B). Four questions were asked, namely:(1)*Why did you sign up for the LP?* (2)*How did the LP*

suit your personal and academic needs and expectations? (3) What was your best experience in the LP? (4) What was your worst experience in the LP?

To ensure reliability, validity and trustworthiness, the data were analysed and interpreted according to Lincoln & Guba's strategies as cited in De Vos et al(2011:419-422), namely(1) assembling and organising data; (2) method of data analysis; and (3) reporting the findings. The method of assembling and organising data involved audiotaping and verbatim transcription of interviews. Data assembled in the field notes were organised into personal and analytical logs. A personal log is a descriptive report on the participants, their settings, field notes and methodological matters. An analytical log is a detailed investigation of the research questions and proposals emerging as the study progresses. De Vos et al (2002:346) conclude that organising data is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of data collected. Data analysis was conducted by clustering similar topics together in all the interviews. Data were compared to establish themes, trends and patterns. Findings were reported on in a narrative discussion rather than a scientific report.

Ethical measures were adhered to because participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained at all times. Moreover, participation was not compulsory: all participants were fully informed at a general meeting that their participation was voluntary and that their honest feedback about the LP would be invaluable for determining the benefits or not of this LP. The participants also had the option to withdraw at any stage of the research project. The requirement for trustworthiness was met to by subjecting the research to peer review by two lecturers who are also involved in LPs. The researchers also did their best to avoid bias by subjecting themselves to continuous self-monitoring. Analysis of the data led to the findings discussed below.

FINDINGS

The findings are discussed with reference to the theoretical framework, namely situated learning, as well as the literature and were organised for discussion according to the following four themes: *(1) participants' reasons for signing up for the LP, (2) participants' perceptions of their academic needs and expectations through LP, (3) participants' positive experiences in the LP (4) challenges experienced by the participants.*

Participants' reasons for signing up for the LP

The first question was intended to discover the reason why the participants signed up for the LP. The participants indicated that they wanted to become teachers while getting a salary and they made use of an opportunity that was available. Most of them stated that they would not otherwise have been able to study to become a teacher, as personal circumstances or financial constraints prevented their pursuing other options. The following illustrative comments were made:

- *I could not study without an income so this programme suited all my needs.*
- *I would not have been able to study full time as I am a mother and wife. And this has been the ideal way for me to juggle my career, my family responsibility and my desire to get my degree.*
- *It helped most definitely financially, educationally, inspirationally.*
- *It helped me to pay my studies off and get the experience and studying needed.*
- *I am now a young woman who is financially independent, mature professional and a teacher in the making.*
- *No loans were ever needed – I felt lucky.*
- *I could pay off another student loan.*
- *The ODL institution offers a more affordable alternative to me.*

From the answers it was clear that LPshelped students to organise their studies and their personal lives. It also addressed most of their financial obstacles as they could study part time while working and this helped them to manage their personal life, results that are confirmed in literature. Engel-Hills et al (2010:2) confirm that LPs (as a community of practice) support part-time students to become teachers as they allow them to study and work in a community of practice, namely schools, while earning a basic salary to support themselves. Furthermore, the situated learning theory sees knowledge as dependent on society and context. Education and training can be used to adjust and strengthen the desired culture needed to support the new environment (Creth 1986:5). For these student teachers the abstract instruction of the ODL modules, coordinated with practical classroom activities, was an ideal way of mastering teaching and learning activities as well as their personal and private environments where they have to face unique responsibilities. When student teachers get into LPsthey have to deal with everyday academic needs and expectations in different ways, with different accountabilities.

Participants' perceptions of their academic needs and expectations through LPs

The second question posed to the participants had the objective of identifying participants' academic needs and expectations during the LP. The student teachers expressed the following comments:

- *I would never have had so much experience once I qualified if it was not for this programme.*
- *It is helping me to get the practical experience, knowledge and attitude needed to become a great teacher.*
- *I have been given the most incredible opportunity to do what I've always wanted (to study), and the bonus of all is that I get to be a teacher.*
- *It is wonderful to learn from and observe some of the most experienced and dedicated teachers.*
- *It was a hands-on experience.*
- *It was a valuable learning experience.*

The findings of this research demonstrate that their academic needs were addressed by ample opportunities for practical experience which enabled them to gain knowledge, and to acquire the requisite professional attitude and consciousness. The importance of applied learning experiences was also pointed out by the participants. Furthermore, they appreciated the guidance and support from the mentor teachers. These advantages of LPs are in accordance with the situated learning theory. Learning, according to Lave (2014:1), occurs only if a learner or student teacher is placed into an authentic real-world situation or context, and experience interaction with other people. Wenger (2002:226) refers to "communities of practice". They have to acknowledge joint ownership between the student teachers and the mentor teachers (Murthy 2011:289). Furthermore, mutual engagement between student teachers and mentor teachers will result in sound relationships with other staff members, as well as adherence to the norms within which the school functions (Wenger 2000:229). This in turn promotes and inspires communication and teamwork. Through this collaboration student teachers will eventually become competent and able to engage with teaching staff in order to become full-fledged partners in these interactions. Student teachers will transform knowledge into achievement through experiential learning and simulated role plays (Murthy 2011:289). In addition to

participants' perceptions of their academic needs and expectations through LPs, the responses also bore witness to positive experiences.

Participants' positive experiences in the LPs

The third question posed to the participants was intended to identify their positive LP experiences. The participants' answers reflect their own feelings as well as their observations of other members. They described their experiences as follows:

- *Some parents voiced concerns that were addressed after a few weeks when they were reassured.*
- *The practical experience assisted me with writing examinations.*
- *I draw on practical experiences to answer questions in the examinations when I got stuck.*
- *The mentor teacher helped me grow and reach my potential as a leader.*
- *I became more confident in trying out different teaching techniques and styles.*

This section of the findings of the research reveals that the direct encounter between role players effected understanding. Participants testified that they experienced sound relationships with parents after they learnt to understand parents' concerns. Student teachers agreed they could not learn it in any other context. Moreover, participants showed evidence of outcomes such as critical thinking and logical reasoning and mentioned that they were able to apply their practical experiences in written examination papers. They admitted that taking part in all the teaching activities promoted their professional development in terms of leadership skills, teaching methods, and teaching styles. This relates to Wenger's (1998:149) proposal that, "as newcomers participate, their identities develop according to how they experience themselves and the feedback and acceptance they receive from others". It seems that LPs have a significant and wide impact on the students' personal and professional development. The personal and professional development could further be strengthened by the academic work expected of the student teachers by the ODL institutions.

Participant responses that focus on support from mentor teachers are supported by the situation learning theory. As the reconfiguration of the relationship between competence of the mentors (as representatives of the community) and the experiences of the student teachers is an important aspect of learning, a fine balance can be maintained in the learning process. Expertise from the

mentors depends on a convergence between experience and competence while innovative learning requires their divergence. This not only implies that the mentors' competence must anchor the process but that the competences need to interact with that which student teachers have to offer, for example, new innovations in teaching and learning. This is attained when mentor teachers and student teachers listen to each other, while explaining and exchanging knowledge (Wenger 2000:234). Through negotiation a two-way connection for the mentors and student teachers is provided in order to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

It is therefore sensible to enable multiple practices, such as LPs and ODL institutions, to negotiate their relationships and connect their perspectives (Wenger 2000:236). This can only result in better qualified teachers (if the needs of the schools are kept in mind by the ODL institutions involved with LPs). Members of communities of practice contribute their competence by participating in cross-functional projects and teams that combine the knowledge of multiple practices to enhance teacher training. Contrary to the above where specific positive aspects were identified, the participants also identified several challenges during the LPs at schools.

Challenges experienced by the participants

In answering the last question the participants had to reflect on the challenges they had experienced during their LPs. The following were statements by the participants in this regard:

- *Some mentor teachers are totally against the programme and it can sometimes get uncomfortable.*
- *Sometimes the learnerships are looked down on by other teachers. I believe it was jealousy at times.*
- *Sometimes it is difficult to do assignments and have the duties of a full-time teacher.*

Participants experienced challenges regarding relationships with other teachers and also with regard to workload. It would appear that not all teaching staff supported the student teachers in LPs. Some participants experienced a negative attitude from the mentor teachers. Implications such as a lack of trust, feeling pressured and having to deal with a sense of inferiority contributed to participants' negative experiences. They also felt that they could not cope with a heavy workload due to study responsibilities and having to teach full time.

CONCLUSION

It was stated at the beginning of this article that the aim of this research project was to investigate the experiences of student teachers in LPs as a means to empower student teachers for a career in teaching. Learnership students appreciated the opportunity to be involved in teaching and to gain practical experience with the support of mentor teachers. Direct encounters between role players resulted in knowledge building, and learnership students agreed that they would not have been able to learn teaching skills before graduating without this programme.

It also seems that LPs have a significant and wide impact on students' personal and professional development. Learnership students admitted that taking part in all the teaching activities promoted their professional development in so far as leadership skills, teaching methods, and teaching styles were concerned. Their personal and professional development could further be strengthened by the academic work that ODL institutions expect of student teachers. ODL can be used very successfully, as learnership students can easily teach in schools and study at the same time. While learnership students are involved in everyday teaching activities ODL institutions interact with them by means of purposely designed printed and online materials, SMS communication for instant feedback, tips or urgent announcements, satellite broadcasts as well as video conferencing (Mabunda 2010:232–234). Technology contributes to the globalisation of higher education because it makes the transfer of knowledge borderless (Lategan 2002:92). Continuous collaboration and communication would be an essential feature to make LPs work. The mission of ODL institutions with regard to teacher training is to enhance student success and retention through LPs.

Furthermore, LPs can be used to address the shortage of teachers. Mentor teachers do contribute towards the training of student teachers through LPs to a great extent by accepting learnership students into their classrooms. Through a LP both the school and the student teacher benefit. From the findings of the research it can be concluded that schools that can afford LPs should be encouraged to implement such programmes as they will be investing in the future of the teaching profession and will simultaneously entice more students to the teaching profession. LPs can be seen as the way forward in teacher training.

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