

Teaching Practice Purpose and Implementation: A Concept Paper

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ABSTRACT This is a concept paper on teaching practice or school experience. It attempts to unravel what teaching practice is, its purpose and how it is implemented. Teaching Practice models used by various states are given. The South African context is also highlighted in the paper. School experience models from other countries can be used to inform practice in South Africa. Adaptations can be made in order to strengthen present endeavours. However, the researchers would not recommend wholesale adoption of the models, but those elements that are relevant to the South African context.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching practice or school experience as it is commonly referred to in the researchers' institution, is an essential and compulsory component of the student teacher's programme of study in teacher training (Ngara et al. 2013). It is offered by institutions of higher learning (teacher training colleges or universities. The literature review that ensues covers areas such as; the concept of teaching practice, the rationale for teaching practice, the implementation of teaching practice internationally and in South Africa.

The Concept of Teaching Practice / School Experience

Teaching practice or school experience is an integral element of becoming a teacher (Ngara et al. 2013). It provides an opportunity for student teachers to gain knowledge in the real teaching and learning milieu (Ngidi and Sibaya 2003; Marais and Meier 2004; Quick and Sieborger 2005; Kiggundu and Nayimuli 2009). During teaching practice, a trainee teacher is given the chance to practice the skill of teaching before getting exposure in the real teaching vocation (Kasanda 1995; Kiggundu et al. 2009; Ngwaru 2013). Student teachers perceive teaching practice or school experience as the core of their grounding

for the teaching career since it provides for the actual encounter between studenthood initiation into teaching (Quick and Sieborger 2005; Marais and Meier 2004; Kiggundu 2007). Resultantly, teaching practice or school experience creates "a mixture of anticipation, anxiety, excitement and apprehension in the student teachers as they commence their teaching practice" or school experience (Quick and Sieborger 2005: 4). Caner (2010: 80) also regards teaching practice as a course for Bachelor of Education students that is planned to offer "critical opportunity for pre-service teachers to demonstrate their ability to write lesson plans, deliver individualised instruction and manage the classroom It is a triadic developmental process which involves pre-service teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers." The cooperating teacher is also referred to as a host teacher (Heeralal 2014) or mentor (du Plessis 2013). Each of these stakeholders has definite roles and responsibilities. Different terms are used to name the phenomenon such as "practicum, field studies, in field experience, school based experience, teaching practice, student teaching and internship (Gujjar 2009). For this study, the terms teaching practice and school experience would be used interchangeably.

Marais and Meier (2004: 221) in Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009) state that "the term *teaching practice or school experience*" represents the variety of practices to which trainee teachers are exposed to when they subsequently work in school settings. Consequently, according to Marais and Meir (2004: 221), there has been a shift in the literature from "the concept of teaching practice (associated with an ap-

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prenticeship model) to the concept of field/school experience (associated with an experiential model)". The "notion of teaching practice is rooted in experience-based learning initiated by Dewey (1938), Vygotsky's (1978) social cognitive theory and founded in the principle of situated learning" (Kiggundu et al. 2009: 32). Dewey postulated presciently that education is both theoretical and practical experience (Feiman-Nemser 2001) and hence, teachers should base learning on concrete life experiences of an individual that involve interaction, experimenting and have a purpose (Dewey 1938). Moreover, South African Norms and Standards for Educators outline that teaching practice is "meant to provide for the authentic context within which student teachers are exposed to experience the complexities and richness of the reality of being a teacher" (Republic of South Africa 2000: 12).

Purpose/ Rationale for Teaching Practice

Ngara et al. (2013) aver that teaching practice offers pre-service teachers or teachers in initial teacher training with an opportunity to relate the knowledge and theories learned on campus to the actual classroom environment. During school experience teachers in training are expected to fuse theoretical knowledge gained in in University lectures with the practical experience they gain in schools (Fraser et al. in Ntsaluba and Chireshe 2013). Furthermore, the rationale for school practice is to cultivate the numerous capabilities in teacher training which include: relational, instructional, intercultural and mental proficiencies (Furlong et al. 1988 in Gujjar 2009). In attestation, the teaching practice period offers student teachers opportunity to develop their own personal and professional identity; develop their mission, forge relationships with other staff; identify with educational ethos of the school and the national education imperatives (Frick et al. 2010). Likewise, Gujjar (2009) adds that teaching practice grants the beginning teachers with the chance to be socialised into the profession and make them connect with the culture of teaching. This implies that during school experience student teachers become initiated into the rigours of the multifaceted teaching profession. For example, student teachers are initiated or prepared for their role in the usage of teaching approaches, teaching strategies, teaching principles, teaching tech-

niques, different activities and the general school life. They are given the chance to practise teaching in an actual school environment (Ngidi and Sibaya in Ntsaluba and Chireshe 2013). One wonders if the trials do not reduce learners under the care of student teachers into guinea pigs used for the purpose of trying out new methods and would also question whether this does not dampen the children's chances for future success.

Implementation of School Experience Internationally

The implementation of teaching practice varies according to national and institutional prescriptions. For instance, Pakistan offers different programmes in teacher education of which teaching practice is compulsory except for Master of Education. The duration of teaching practice is 4 to 8 weeks or 60 to 75 lessons (Gujjar 2009) and the maximum number of days for this activity was pegged at 90 days (Yadav 2011). According to Gujjar (2009), the time allocated for school experience is short and hence the students only concentrate on classroom teaching and not the other school activities outside the classroom. The author sums up by indicating that student teachers are taught how to introduce lessons, how to deal with class control issues, how to keep watch of children as the teacher is writing on the board. This is only to emphasise the narrowness of what the trainee teachers experience during school practice.

In Trinidad and Tobago student teachers are exposed two years of on the job training prior to going for college based programmes so as to acquire basic competencies of teaching (Lewin 2004). A comparative study on teacher education by Yadav (2011) in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka found that the duration and organisation of school experience varied according to country. In India teaching practice is done in all categories of schools, that is, government schools, private and demonstration schools during the first and second half of the year. In Bangladesh, school practice is organised in private schools only, while in Pakistan the or in organisation is different as it occurs in demonstration schools. Furthermore, in India twenty-four lessons from two subjects are delivered during forty-five days by student teachers while, forty-five lessons are delivered dur-

ing ninety days in Bangladesh (Yadav 2011). The intensity of teaching practice differs from country to country. In Pakistan, eleven lessons are conducted in a period of thirty days. Yet, in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the minimum duration of the school experience programme ranges from 35-60 days, whereas the maximum number of days for Pakistan is 90. For Sri Lanka, a minimum of 5-6 lessons should be delivered during practice teaching, whereas, a maximum of 90 lessons are required in Pakistan (Yadav 2011). What is also common about these countries is that students are exposed to some form of teaching experience before teaching practice. This means that in all the four countries, student teachers are prepared by faculty members or outside experts for practice teaching through demonstration lessons before sending them to the actual classroom situation. In this regard, microteaching and simulated lessons are arranged. All the four countries select about twenty schools for use during practice teaching. In Sri Lanka, supervisors observed 2 – 3 lessons, whereas in Bangladesh up to 60 lessons are observed. The researchers wonder how feasible this is. The study revealed that there were challenges in the system of practice teaching. However, in some of these countries, schools did not collaborate fully in arranging for teaching practice and this hindered the natural observation of the behaviour of trainee teachers during this practice period (Yadav 2011). These Asian experiences can be contrasted to the teaching practice implementation in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe teaching practice for primary pre-service teachers is implemented under the 2-5-2 model (Ngara et al. 2013; Tshuma and Ndebele 2015). The model entails two terms residential or in campus phase for theory acquisition; five terms presumably under the tutelage of qualified teacher mentors, with college lecturers making follow up supervision; the final two terms serve to consolidate the practice gained with the theory; reflections on teaching practice are made. The duration of teaching practice is considerably longer than the one in the Asian countries discussed above. However, its implementation has also been criticised for being uncoordinated since each institution has its own supervision instrument (Ngara et al. 2013). This may warrant considering standardised instruments for use in the different colleges and universities. However, one has to consider the dif-

ferent programmes and their diversities before instituting the single supervision instrument. Another bone of contention with the Zimbabwe teaching practice context was lack of proper mentoring (Maphosa et al. 2007). Ngara et al. (2013) attribute this to lack of mentor motivation ostensibly due to lack of mentor incentives or allowances.

Sometimes implementation decisions though made in order to solve certain problems may have adverse consequences in the overall running of the programme. For example, as attested by Mulkeen (2010), in Zambia student teachers were deployed in remote rural areas as a way of providing teachers to these areas. However, this turned out to have bad repercussions as it posed serious logistical challenges. There were limited resources to promote supervision of the student teachers, for instance, transport to these areas was scarce. This notion is raised by Kigundu (2007) cited in Heeralal and Bayaga (2011: 99) who intoned that “... the effectiveness of the teaching practice can be diminished or eroded by geographical distance.” Hence, the students lacked the supervision that is needed during teaching practice. Another case in point is Malawi, the institutions set high targets on supervision, such as visiting students. However this effort was curtailed by lack of resources (Mulkeen 2010). What seems evident is that implementation of teaching practice is marred by resource constraints. Lewin (2004: 3) also posits that Malawi adopted the Malawi Integrated in Training Programme (MIITEP) “mixed mode system (three months in college followed by 20 months in school with distance support and local in-service seminars, culminating in one month in college and final examinations).” In a study on views of teachers in pre-service training concerning the teacher training programme in Botswana, Major and Tiro (2012) found that more time was allocated for theory at the expense of practicals. The duration of the course is 3 years. First year is dedicated to theory, in second year six weeks of the first term and in third year six weeks of the third year is allocated to teaching practice. Trainee teacher respondents recommended that more time be scheduled for teaching practice as time allocated for it was short. They also lambasted the duplication of content they were taught in Junior Certificate and Ordinary level in teacher training college.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of School Experience in South Africa

School experience is the integral part of teacher education since it exposes student teachers to the real life of their profession. Universities and colleges worldwide are producing teachers every year. However, there is a cry about the quality of education that many countries produce (Lewin 2004). Research has been incapable of determining the best way of preparing teachers for the teaching task (Levine 2006).

Stemming from the closure of Colleges of Education, universities or Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs) in South Africa have been under pressure to produce teachers (Mushoriwa and Mavuso 2014). This also meant the need to intensify Post Graduate Certificate in Education and Bachelor of Education programmes. This was done to heed the call by South Africa government to produce more teachers. The School Experience (SE) programme being an integral part of teacher education had to be structured in such a way that competent teachers are produced by these universities (Mushoriwa and Mavuso 2014). The intention was to close the gap between theory which was previously a focus of teacher education in universities and practice or training which the Colleges of education focused on. Perhaps, this was informed by Dewey's (1966) postulation that education is both theoretical and practical. It could be that the scholars of teacher education were weary of theorising teacher education and were now seeing the need to 'practicalising' teacher education.

Moyo and Modiba (2013:4) argue that:

"Knowledge for practice seeks to improve teaching with particular focus on how teachers implement, translate or put in practice the knowledge they acquire from experts outside the classroom via pre service and professional development. Knowledge in practice is based on the idea that knowledge comes from reflection and inquiry in and on practice. It helps teachers to value their ideas based on evidence they collect within their own school or classroom. Knowledge of practice implies that both knowledge generation and knowledge use are seen as inherently problematic, where teachers play a central role in generating sites of inquiry. In this nexus teachers link their work in

schools to larger issues and take a critical perspective on the theory and research of others."

From the above excerpt it can be argued that training gained during the pre-service or in-service programme may not always necessarily be relevant to practice and this may not impact on how teachers are likely to teach upon completion of their university training. Though there have been a number of studies on school experience little if any is emerging from the findings of how universities implement school experience. Most writers focus on perceptions of student teachers on the school experience programme (Chikunda 2005; Kiggunda and Nayimuli 2009; Mushoriwa and Mavuso 2014; Wambugu, et al. 2013). Chikunda (2005) and Wambugu et al. (2013) for instance, concentrated on student teachers' views of teaching practice. On the other hand, Kiggunda and Nayimuli (2009) and Mushoriwa and Mavuso (2014) conducted studies on how teaching practice impacts on the perceptions of student teachers with regard to the teaching career in urban and rural context respectively. Heeralal and Bayaga (2011) focused on experiences of quality of teaching practice in a South African university and found that school experience was inundated by many challenges including learner discipline, interruptions at schools, too much clerical work during planning of lessons, general maintenance of the teaching practice file and shortage of time.

According to Heeralal and Bayaga (2011), initial teacher education programmes in South Africa mostly last for four years. Teaching Practice methodology course is offered from 1st to 4th year of study through lectures, seminars and is taught on a weekly basis to equip trainee teachers with the theory and prerequisite skills needed for teaching. School experience is sometimes offered in one block of six or eight weeks. Students are assigned to a school to do classroom observation of mentor, writing observation reports in preparation for their engagement in teaching themselves, maintaining teaching practice files that house critique forms by principals, mentors and university supervisors, records of learner's progress, lesson plans and time tables (Heeralal and Bayaga 2011). The duration of the teaching practice may not be adequate by Darling-Hammond's (2006) in Major and Tiro (2012: 65) standard. The author claims that "extended clinical experiences- at least 30 weeks of supervised practicum and student teaching oppor-

tunities in each program” can assist trainee teachers to acquire expert teaching skills.

School experience in South Africa is also fraught with challenges in its implementation (Dos Reis 2012). In a study on the teaching of Accounting, the author, found that teachers in pre-service training did not receive sufficient mentoring during the time of their practicum. Dos Reis (2012) also revealed that trainee teachers were sometimes supervised by lectures who were not specialists in their area. The study also found that lecturers were supposed to visit the trainees twice in each subject during the six months of their teaching practice and this was deemed inadequate to give valuable feedback by the researcher. Furthermore, the study established that students were assigned to teachers irrespective of the mentor being qualified to teach the subject or experienced in teaching the subjects taught by mentee (Dos Reis 2012). The study implores universities to be more committed to the advancement of mentoring. This assertion is further corroborated by Bhebhe and Tshuma (2015) who indicate that mentoring should benefit the trainee teacher and their placement should help them develop professionally.

A study by du Plessis (2013) brings in unique experiences of school experience as it reveals the intricacies of teaching practice in the context of Distance Education. Student teachers are said to select schools of their own choice from a list provided by the institution (UNISA) and lecturers or trained supervisors visit them there. According to du Plessis (2013), international students come to South Africa to do teaching practice at the selected schools. To support teaching practice, the UNISA staff design workbooks, visit schools during school experience and are ready to render assistance to teacher trainees. The study revealed the following challenges associated with Distance Education: placing of student teachers at approved schools, mentoring and supervising them, assessment and feedback, overcoming transactional (pedagogical) distance and building relationships with various stakeholders. The recommendations by the Higher Education Quality Council were to improve “selection of schools, placement of student teachers, training of mentors and mentoring during teaching practice period and assessment of student teachers’ competence and feedback to the university” (du Plessis 2013: 30).

THEORIES AND MODELS OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Reeves et al. (2008: 337) opine that,

Theories provide complex and comprehensive conceptual understandings of things that cannot be pinned down: how societies work, how organizations operate, why people interact in certain ways. Theories give researchers different “lenses” through which to look at complicated problems and social issues, focusing their attention on different aspects of the data and proving a framework within which to conduct their analysis.

In this case the issue under discussion is teaching practice. Thus, this review presents theories that can serve as lenses through which teaching practice can be viewed. In line with this, du Plessis (2013: 33) avers that “Theoretical frameworks serve as epistemological guides that help to interpret the knowledge presented in a study.” The study’s findings would, thus, be weighed against the theory to judge if there are consistencies, convergences, congruencies or divergences.

The “notion of teaching practice is rooted in experience-based learning initiated by Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky’s (1978) social cognitive theory and founded in the principle of situated learning” (Kiggundu et al. 2009: 32).

Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory/Model

This paper is informed by the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory/Model. The theory stems from the social learning theories and is a theory of situated learning from a knowledgeable expert within a real life context (Dennen and Burner 2007). These authors further describe Cognitive Apprenticeship as “a process by which learners learn from a more experienced person by way of cognitive or meta-cognitive skills and processes ... rather than physical skills and processes” (Dennen and Burner 2007: 426-427). Cognitive Apprenticeship differs from traditional apprenticeship in that it is mental, internal and of the cognitive domain, whereas the latter is physical, external and psychomotor. This implies that the actions of cognitive apprentices are not as visible as those of the traditional apprenticeship which emphasised on manual activity. Cognitive apprenticeship involves being under the tutelage of a more knowledgeable and experi-

enced person who assists a less knowledgeable one by demonstrating, supporting and giving examples. For instance in teaching practice a student teacher is under a mentor's guidance (Makura and Zireva 2013) who ideally has a role of demonstrating to, supporting and giving examples to.

Cognitive apprenticeship is anchored on situatedness and Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Situatedness is a context of significant events and features governing and shaping life of humans (Dennen and Burner 2007). Zone of proximal development (ZPD) terms the space between the learner's present skill level and the ensuing skill level that a student cannot reach without help. ZPD is when a more competent other gives sufficient assistance to the less capable other so that the later gains skills and knowledge suitable for the task at hand (Petty 2009). It can be concluded that in teaching practice a trainee teacher can get to a school with some theory on how to handle situations and gains the practical reality of handling the situation under the guidance of the mentor. Cognitive apprenticeship thrives depending on demonstration by an expert (modelling) and receiving guidance (coaching). The basic instructional steps of cognitive apprenticeship are: modelling, coaching, scaffolding, articulation, reflection and exploration (Petty 2009).

Modelling implies demonstrating the thinking process. Coaching involves helping the trainee through a task at hand by assisting and supporting the learner's cognitive activities. Scaffolding is intermediate support given to assist trainees to attain skill levels beyond their current abilities (Dennen and Burner 2007). Thus, students move from being observers to active practice. Reflection is self-analysis and self-assessment. For example trainee teachers can compare their methods with those of other students or experts in order to improve their performance. Articulation involves verbalising acts of reflection and thus exposing folly. In their evaluations, student teachers, for instance, indicate weaknesses and proffer suggestions for improvement. Exploration, on the other hand involves students searching for information themselves and trying out new tasks through the guidance of an expert (Dennen and Burner 2007). However, expert guidance fades gradually as the student teacher gains knowhow and confidence and is only given as and when it is required.

Dennen and Burner (2007:427-429) bring forth the following four concepts that are associated with cognitive apprenticeship: "situatedness, legitimate peripheral participation, guided participation and membership in community of practice". These are discussed in ensuing sections.

Situatedness

Situatedness is active learning that occurs through one's participation in an authentic task or setting (Lave and Wenger in Dennen and Burner 2007). Context or situatedness reflects the way in which historical, cultural and institutional factors influence the people's actions in everyday life, including learning. This brings in the theory suggested by Lave and Wenger in Fairbanks and Merrit (1998:48), the Activity Theory which "focuses on the integration of knowledge and practice. It argues that learning is situated within contexts that both transform knowledge and the context itself as practitioners carry out their activities." The context is thus fluid and not constant as it changes. All activities, including learning, are situated. Learning is affected by context and also context is shaped by people's actions. In relation to teaching practice, the fundamental premise in learning is to become an expert and not learning about practice. Hence, for learning to occur the context should present conducive conditions for the right type of learning. According to Denner and Burner (2007), universities are criticised for separating learning from practice resulting in products who are not sufficiently prepared for job performance. The other concept of cognitive apprenticeship is legitimate peripheral participation.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Legitimate peripheral participation implies that a newcomer in a situation has an observation role and is referred to as a legitimate peripheral participant (Denner and Burner 2007). An apprentice gains initial experience through observing and can move from peripheral to active participation. This can be achieved through doing smaller tasks and receiving scaffolding feedback from an experienced mentor (Fairbanks and Merrit 1998; Lave and Wenger 1991). Trainee teachers thus become inbound as they identify with insiders of the community's practice. The concept of community of practice is discussed next.

Community of Practice

Cognitive apprenticeship naturally occurs within a community of practice, that is, a collection of people (formally or informally bound) who engage and identify themselves with a common practice (Denner and Burner 2007). An example is teachers in school. Members in a community of practice are brought together by:

“Mutual engagement- a shared task or interest and resulting identity

Joint enterprise- a common set of community standards and expectations.

Shared repertoire- a common vocabulary that differentiates the particular community from others” (Denner and Burner 2007: 428).

Guided Participation

Guided participation is the social component of cognitive apprenticeship. For it to be efficacious it should take place within a learner’s zone of proximal development (Denner and Burner 2007). As alluded to earlier, this is a space between the learner’s actual performance and the potential performance and it is assessed through communication between trainee and a more skilled mentor.

As indicated by du Plessis (2013), the findings of the intended study would, thus, be weighed against the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory/Model to judge if there are consistencies, convergences, congruencies or divergences.

Literature accessed indicates the various models of teaching practice in South Africa and other countries. The models noted include, among others, the South African one in which some universities send students out for a 6-8 week long stint (Heeralal and Bayaga 2011); the 2-5-2 model for Zimbabwe (Tshuma and Ndebele 2015), with one year eight months of teaching practice and eight months of theory. In terms of exposure, the Zimbabwean context provides the trainee teachers with more contact hours with mentors and children. This may be worth emulating in South Africa against a backdrop of concerns in terms of time (Heeralal and Bayaga 2011; Major and Tiro 2012).

As indicated by Mushoriwa and Mavuso (2014), the closure of teachers’ colleges in South Africa exerted pressure on universities’ service delivery and hence this has a negative impact on teaching practice. In addition to content sub-

jects, universities were now supposed to train teachers. For example, the University of Fort Hare, Faculty of Education Prospectus (2016) stipulates that trainee teachers for the Further Education and Training band are required to study Education modules as well as Specialising Teaching Subjects from the offerings of other Faculties. The University’s Education Department would then have to conform to the time tables of the other faculties, albeit its need to send students for school experience. The researchers feel there is need to reconsider having separate teacher training institutions.

Research also reveals that teaching practice is fraught with challenges regarding mentoring (Bhebhe and Tshuma 2015; Dos Reis 2012; Mukeredzi et al. 2015). For example, Mukeredzi et al. (2016), found that some mentors were there for tokenism, just to pass their duty. In some cases mentors lack training and information on their responsibilities and are therefore not sure how they would provide support to student teachers (Mukeredzi et al. 2015) contradicts the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory/Model’s view that the experienced and knowledgeable other should guide the less experienced protégé. This opens more avenues for debate.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching practice or school experience is an essential constituent of teacher training and should be granted due space in terms of time, financial resources, human capacity, material resources and other resources. Various teaching practice models, both international and nationally, are noted in the paper. The literature thus, leaves one with some unanswered questions such as: *Which model would be most appropriate for the South African context? In view of the Cognitive Apprenticeship Theory/Model, how is teaching practice/school experience implemented in South Africa?* These questions, among others, can be answered through carrying out further research in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature analysis, the paper recommends that field research be carried out on school experience in South Africa so as to inform policy and thus improve on the quality of practice. The paper also recommends that more

focus be put on provision of resources by universities and the government to enhance service provision in Teaching Practice. For instance, student teachers need to be attached to mentors with proper qualifications who can guide them in their endeavour to achieve teaching skills.

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