THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF HOST SCHOOLS ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY OF TEACHER TRAINEES

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ABSTRACT

The paper reports on the findings of a study that investigated the impact of leadership and management on the construction of professional identity of teacher trainees. The writer argues that the overall leadership and management of the host schools, where student teachers do experiential training (teaching practice), has an impact on the construction of their professional identity. The host schools provide different learning experiences (environment) which may either enhance or hinder the development of a positive professional identity. A questionnaire comprising of open-ended questions was administered to 40 teacher trainees at the School of Teacher Education, Central University of Technology, Free State. The students had just return from a six-month period of experiential training. The aim of the questionnaire was to examine their views on their experiences and expectations of the teaching practice, and whether or not the leadership and management of the school has had an impact on the construction of their professional identity. The findings revealed that a supportive and enabling environment within the host school provided a good learning experience and consequently enhanced the development of a positive professional identity whereas a non-welcoming and threatening environment had the opposite effect. Suggestions and recommendations for providing a supportive and enabling environment for all students are made.

Key words: Professional identity, Experiential training, Communities of practice, Social Learning Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher trainees are expected to do experiential training before they eventually complete their initial teacher training (ITT) at tertiary institutions and become permanently absorbed into the teaching fraternity. This practice aims at exposing and socialising the students into the real teaching environment. Experiential training could also be viewed as part of the induction process. The host schools, where the teacher trainees are placed for a particular period of experiential training, present different learning experiences for them. Some experiences could be exciting and constructive depending on the supportive and enabling nature of the school environment, while others could be traumatic or harsh and inadvertently force them to abandon their choice of teaching as a career.

Different institutions follow different policies and procedures when placing student teachers at various schools for experiential learning. In some institutions the unit that trains teachers selects schools and liaises with particular contact persons in the selected schools. In others, the department of co-operative education, which runs separately to the unit that trains teachers, is responsible for placing the students. Irrespective of which procedure is followed, the students usually do not have a choice in their placements.

Students from the training institutions usually experience problems in adjusting to the schools where they do the experiential training. The problems may include feelings of alienation by the management of the school, negative attitudes and unrealistic demands made by the head of department together with the subject teacher, misconduct of learners, shortage or lack of resources within the schools and a lack of physical space (temporary staff room) for the student teachers. All these problems affect the student teacher's development of a professional identity. The experiences, however, will vary from school to school.

Since the school environment and situations in which learners find themselves have an impact on their construction of professional identity, it then becomes the responsibility of the management and leadership of both the training institution and the host school to ensure that student teachers are provided with the opportunity to participate in the activities of the school. According to Wenger (1998) they should be helped to move from peripheral to full participation in the activities of a particular organisation. Participation in communities of practice can help in this progression from peripheral to central participation. The question is how can this be done effectively?

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES BASED ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is organised around the following key questions that the study sought to answer.

*   How do the teacher trainees perceive their experiential training?
*   What are the teacher trainees' expectations and thoughts about teaching as a profession?
*   What is the impact/role of the management and leadership of a school in the teacher trainees' construction of professional identity?

The literature review begins by defining the key concepts within the study and then goes on to discuss the social learning theories, the various models of teacher development and the different management and leadership styles of school managers.

2.1   Definition of Concepts

In a study of this nature it is imperative to define the concepts that may have different notions of interpretation and understanding.

These are identity, professional identity, community of practice, identity construction, experiential training, as well as   management and leadership within the context of constructing or developing professional identity.

2.1.1   Identity as a Concept

The American heritage dictionaries (2007: Online) define identity as:

•   The set of behavioural or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognisable as a member of a group.
•   The quality or condition of being the same as something else.
•   The distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity; individuality.   http:// www.answers.com. (Accessed 14 August 2007).

The first definition explains the identity of an individual in relation to a group. This explanation is in line with Wenger's argument of what determines identity. Wenger (2000:239) defines identity as, "What we know, what is foreign and what we choose to know, as well as how we know it. Our identities determine with whom we will interact in a knowledge sharing activity, and our willingness and capacity to engage in boundary interactions."

Robson and Viskovic (2001:225) bring another dimension in the definition of identity. They assert that the concept of "identity" implies amongst others the following:

•   belonging to communities (personal or professional) gives the development of identity a social character;
•   identity development is a process and is not limited to one period of our lives;
•   since we bring together our various forms of membership into one identity, identity can be viewed as a "nexus of multi-membership";
•   we define who we are by where we have been and where we are going thus leading one to an understanding of identity as a learning process that incorporates both the past and the future experiences into the meaning of the present;
•   identity is a relationship between the local and the global; we define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader groups.

Identity therefore involves knowing and understanding who we are, as this has implications for the type of people with whom one associates and interacts, and the type of person one aspires to develop into. The role models to whom the students are entrusted and the experiences that they encounter during the experiential training can shape their identity. If this is true then experiential training ought to modify behaviour, as it should involve skills and knowledge acquisition.

2.1.2 Professional Identity

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (2001) defines "professional" as relating to or belonging to a profession; engaged in an activity as a paid occupation rather than as an amateur; a professional person is a person having impressive competence in a particular activity.

Becoming a professional occurs on two levels, the external and the internal levels. The external level has to do with the formal and educational prerequisites for entry into the profession (in this case first, second and third years of ITT). The internal level has to do with the subjective self-conceptualisation associated with the role (how one perceives one's role) (Brott & Kajs, 2007).

In line with the argument that becoming a profession occurs on two levels, Beijaard (2006) argues that the teacher's professional identity implies both a cognitive psychological and a sociological perspective. Taking the argument further, Beijaard (2006) asserts that people develop their identity in interaction with others (sociological perspective), but express their professional identity in their perceptions of "who they are" and who they want to become as a result of this interaction (cognitive psychological perspective).

Similarly, Sachs (1999:9) identifies two distinct kinds of identity, namely, the entrepreneurial identity and the activist identity. "*The managerial discourse gives rise to an entrepreneurial identity in which the market and issues of accountability, economy, efficiency and effectiveness shape how teachers individually and collectively construct their professional identity. Democratic discourses, which are in distinct contrast to the managerialist ones give rise to an activist professional identity in which collaborative cultures are an integral part of teachers' work practices*." Sachs (1999) recommends movement away from the entrepreneurial identity which is market-driven towards an activist professional identity in which collaborative cultures are part of teacher's work practices.

Professional development models which involve deep learning for teachers and real problem-solving activities within on-going collegial groups support teachers in developing a professional identity, a sense of responsibility for other teacher learners and educational change for the benefit of students and the wider community (Sarason, 2003:369), hence teacher learning communities or collegial teams, and workplace study groups are perceived as communities of practice.

Construction of teacher identity should start during initial teacher preparation and continue throughout all the stages of the teacher's career cycle. The student identity in initial vocational training involves the integration of workplace and school learning. Learners should be able to merge identity as a learner in the school, a learner in the workplace and as a practitioner in the workplace.

The same is true of teacher trainees as prospective teachers. Teachers have different roles which they have to integrate and they should learn to develop identities with respect to all expected roles.

From the foregoing exposition, it is evident that professional identity needs to be developed over time. There are both external and internal factors or cognitive-psychological and sociological factors that have a bearing on the development of the teacher's professional identity. Since this construction or development of professional identity should start during the initial teacher preparation, it becomes imperative that teacher trainees be exposed to situations which develop their identity rather than those which destroy them as individuals and as professionals. Hence, mentoring of teacher trainees and formation of working groups or communities of practice is of vital importance. Mentoring should start during teacher preparation and be augmented during experiential training to ensure a smooth transition from the training institution to the workplace, that is, schools. Since the central focus of study is the impact of leadership and management on the construction of the professional identity of teacher trainees, it thus becomes necessary to look into the different management tasks in the school context and leadership styles.

2.2   Leadership and management in schools

Schools exist for a particular purpose, that is, to teach learners. Educational management within a school context centres on creating a culture of life-long learning and teaching (COLTS) through effective value-driven education (van Deventer, 2003). This could be achieved through the expert guidance and leadership of school management in mainly three aspects: managing the human, financial and physical resources of the school. To be able to carry out these tasks successfully, more specific tasks such as planning, organising, leading and evaluating have to be performed. While all these management tasks are important, the study will focus on the leadership role of school management.

Leadership in schools is not confined to the principal, but is distributed or devolved to other members of staff such as the deputy principal, heads of department and educators. In line with the distribution of leadership among other stakeholders, all South African schools have Senior Management Teams (SMT's). The School Management Team consists of the principal, the deputy principal, the heads of department and senior teachers. All these stakeholders have an important leadership and management role to perform either as a member of the management team or as individuals performing specific leadership tasks.

The head of department, for example, is a member of the SMT, but he/she is expected to provide expert professional guidance in a particular learning area. Educators are expected to perform the seven roles that are stipulated by the Norms and Standards for Educators (2000). Important to note is that management and leadership of a learning area is one of the roles of the educator.

From the foregoing discussion it becomes evident that educational management in schools occurs at different levels, namely: individual level (self management); level of the classroom (Micro-level); school level (Meso-level) and at district, provincial or national level (Macro-level), which falls beyond the control of the school. The quality of leadership and management determines the success or failure of a school, hence principals, HODs and educators should be both managers and leaders. The school principal, however, should steer the ship in the right direction by directing school activities as well as motivating and inspiring staff. In this study, leadership and management focuses on all levels, as problems on one level will filter down to other levels.

When teacher trainees are placed in schools they then come across different levels of leadership and management, which will invariably have an influence on their perception of experiential training and subsequent professional identities that could emerge from such experiences. Ideally, the leadership and management of the school is expected to create a supportive and enabling environment for teacher trainees to develop their professional skills. Rhodes (2006) argues that leadership and management of a school has an impact on the construction of professional identity. While Rhodes focussed on school mentors, the argument also holds for teacher trainees. If the school-based mentors experience leadership and management problems, such problems could filter down to the teacher trainees who the mentor should be guiding. Effective practice in school-based mentoring often reflects a whole-school commitment to supporting trainee teachers (Estyn Report, September: 2001).

It has already been stated that schools exist in order to offer opportunities for effective teaching and learning. For schools to achieve their goals and objectives, school leaders are expected to perform specific roles. The roles have been broken down into categories, which are interrelated. Table 1 gives a summary of the role of a leader, as opposed to that of a manager in empowering colleagues in any organisation, including the school.

Table 1. Empowerment role of the leader

Moving from management	Moving toward leadership
Punishment	Reward
Demands "respect"	Invites speaking out
Drill sergeant	Motivator
Limits and defines	Empowers
Imposes discipline	Values creativity
"Here's what we're going to do!"	"How can I serve you?"
Bottomline	Vision

http:// www.itstime.com

Table1 shows a shift from a task-oriented to a person-oriented leadership style. This is in line with the principle of "*Putting People First*". From the table, it becomes evident that a leader is a person who rewards performance, solicits people's views, motivates colleagues, empowers people, and values creativity. A leader should consult with members of staff, instead of imposing his/her viewpoint and should be a visionary. This is the type of leadership that would foster a positive professional identity to the student teachers.

The following table shows the movement of a manager from an autocratic to a democratic leadership style.

Table 2.   Restructuring role of a leader

Moving from management:	Moving toward leadership:
Control	Change
Rank	Connection
Hierarchy	Network
Rigid	Flexible
Automatic annual raises	Pay for performance
Performance review	Mutual contract for results
Mechanistic	Holistic
Compartmental	Systemic

http:// www.itstime.com

From Table 2, it becomes evident that a leader has to be a change agent, has to forge links and networks with other people and organisations, has to be flexible in applying rules and regulations and has to look at issues holistically. While a school by nature is a bureaucratic organisation with graded levels of authority, policies and curricula prescribed by the National Department of Education, successful implementation of changes in education requires a leader that will be able to create a favourable climate for change. A collabo rative leadership approach which fosters teamwork, participation and involvement of staff in decision making, is crucial in this regard, as it can reduce resistance to change if the stakeholders are made aware of the reasons and benefits of change. Table 2 therefore shows movement from a bureaucratic to a democratic leadership style.

Furthermore, a leader has to be a role model. As shown in Table 3, a leader has to act as a role model and instead of demanding unquestioning obedience, he/she has to coach and mentor others. Newly-appointed educators, together with other educators in transition from one position to the next within the school's hierarchy, need guidance and nurturing by the leadership and management of the school. This can be achieved through a formal mentoring programme.

Table 3.   Leader as a role model

Moving from management:	Moving toward leadership:
Issues orders	Acts as role model
Demands unquestioning obedience	Coaches and mentors others

http:// www.itstime.com

Table 4 elicits the relationship of the leader with colleagues. A leader has to create an environment which is conducive to dialogue and suggestions. Leaders should adopt an "open door policy", should be approachable and be open to suggestions.

Table 4 Openness as the role of the leader

Moving from management:	Moving toward leadership:
Keeping people on their toes	Nourishing environment for growth
Reach up/down	Reach out
Information control	Information availability

The qualities of a leader depicted in Tables 1-4 and discussed above, although not an exhaustive list, do give an idea of the kind of leadership that promotes growth and development to those that are being led.

The next section deals with communities of practice. This section has been included since communities of practice are advocated as encouraging feelings of belonging, encouraging participation of members in the activities of an organisation and fostering the development of positive professional identity. Within the context of the study, the leadership and management of the school could play an important role in encouraging feelings of belonging and active engagement of teacher trainees in the activities of the schools during experiential training through the cultivation of communities of practice.

2.3   Communities of Practice

Wenger (1998:2) defines a community of practice as "a group of people who are mutually bound by what they do together". Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In all communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn to do it better as they interact on a regular basis.

Within the context of Teacher Education teachers doing experiential training in a specific area of study could come and work together in preparing their lessons, doing team teaching, assessing learners and identifying one another's strengths and weaknesses. The mentors to whom the teacher trainees are entrusted can play a leadership role in ensuring that the members of the team work towards realising their goal. Wenger (1998) stresses purpose, functions and capability as the three main dimensions of communities of practice. He argues that purpose involves the joint enterprises and values which are understood and continually renegotiated by members over time. Functions involve the mutual engagement that binds long-term members and newcomers into a social entity through regeneration and commitment to shared ideas. Capability is what is produced and the shared repertoire of communal resources consisting of routines, sensibilities, vocabulary and artefacts produced over time.

Communities of practice focus on learning rather than on tasks, teams, business units and networks. Knowledge is created, shared, organised, revised and passed on within and among communities. The focus for learning is on a self-organising system, with leadership being distributed across a network of people, and the learning culture involving on-going professional development, collaborative, interrogating existing practices and celebrating success (Halverson, 2003).

Another important feature regarding communities of practice is the reproduction of the community as new members work alongside other competent more established members in the community of practitioners. Newcomers begin as apprentices within the community, negotiate meanings and move towards a more central position in the community. Lave and Wenger (1998) refer to "peripheral participation" of newcomers which involves gradual negotiation of meanings as the learner progressively moves towards a more central role. What is the role of the manager as a leader in this case? How can the newcomers be helped to achieve that central role?

Within the context of Teacher Education how can teacher trainees in the host schools be moved from feelings of isolation to integration into the school community so that they are part of the teaching fraternity? In other words, how can they be enabled to realise their self worth as professionals?

2.4   Communities of Practice within the Social Theory of Learning

The notion of a community of practice is premised on a social theory of learning proposed by Wenger (1998: 4-5) that views learning as social participation in the "practices of a social community and the constructing of identities in relation to these communities". Communities of practice are "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis." (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002:4).

Communities of practice are based on the following assumptions:

*   Learning is fundamentally a social phenomenon.
*   Knowledge is integrated in the life of communities that share values, beliefs, languages, and ways of doing things. Real knowledge is integrated in the doing, social relations, and expertise of these communities.
*   The process of learning and membership in a community of practice are inseparable. Since learning is intertwined with community membership, it is what lets us belong to and adjust our status in the group. As we change our learning, our identity and our relationship to the group changes.
*   Knowledge is inseparable from practice. It is not possible to know without doing. By doing, we learn.
*   Empowerment or the ability to contribute to a community creates the potential for learning.

2.5   Communities of Practice and Teacher Education

Barab, Barnett and Squire (2002) report on a community approach to learning within the context of teacher education. The study focuses on the participatory process of learning in a community-based, teacher education programme called: a Community of Teachers (CoT). CoT is a preparation programme for pre-service teachers working toward secondary teacher certification, in which they join an on-going community and remain a part of this community from 2 to 4 years.

The study points to a shift from an individualistic approach to teaching to that of a participatory and collaborative approach in learning communities. In these communities teachers are afforded the freedom to experiment with alternative approaches and strategies while being supported by their peers.

Another theme which is emerging within the context of teacher education is the transformation of teacher education programmes' course contexts into communities of learners that link the learning of pre-service teachers with the learning of experienced teachers and teacher educators (Barab, Squire & Dueber, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Such interventions bring together practising teachers, prospective teachers, and teacher educators, a situation which develops and strengthen relationships among the different stakeholders involved with teacher education, relationships which not only involve teaching but also focus on ways of transforming current practices (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Learning which takes place in communities of practice fosters active engagement of the participants, stimulates creativity and independent thought. Such communities however, will only thrive within organisations if they are supported by the leadership and management of such organisations, as the next section indicates.

2.6   The role of leadership in nurturing the Community of Practice

While Wenger and Snyder (2000) argue that Communities of Practice arise naturally and are essentially self-sustaining in nature, Wenger (2004) contends that there are considerable benefits to be gained by leadership nurturing of the community. This occurs through involvement of experts and inspirational internal day-to-day leaders and organisers, although the leadership style must ensure that self-organisation is not smothered. Nurturing learning within Communities of Practice may involve leaders in legitimising participation through creating time for member activities and providing resources.

In schools, Halverson (2003) notes the role of leadership in nurturing communities of practice as involving the creation of social networks and a positive culture of professional development while encouraging shared leadership, as well as examining artefacts such as programmes, procedures and policies. Through deconstructing the cultural artefacts of rituals, stories and formal policies which may constrain learning, a new set of artefacts can be developed which support teacher and school development. School leaders therefore construct the conditions for professional community/community of practice/system of practice in their schools. Likewise, Robson and Viskovic (2001) stress the importance of supporting and facilitating the vocational teacher's participation in and membership of relevant communities of practice.

2.7   Conceptual Framework for the Study

From the literature review the following deductions were made:

*   Teaching practice is a learning experience and the situations in which learners find themselves are very important in developing their professional identity.

*   The leadership and management style of the schools during the period of experiential training have a bearing on the kind of learning experiences that the students could use as building blocks for their professional growth.

*   It thus becomes the responsibility of both the institutions that provide training together with the schools that offer experiential training to cultivate a sense of belonging in student teachers by ensuring their active participation in the activities of the schools.

The next section looks into the research methodology that was followed in this study.

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach followed in this study includes both a qualitative literature study and an empirical investigation. The empirical investigation involves a case study of student teachers at the Central University of Technology, Free State. This was the first group of students to get to the final year of the four-year B.Ed programme.

The population for the study comprised all the fourth year B.Ed (FET) students in 2007. The students had recently come back from the six months experiential training which took place at different schools across the Free State province. Participation in the study was voluntary and forty (40) out of 65 students who had gone for experiential training answered the questionnaire. The students were made aware of the purpose of the investigation.

A questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions was administered to the students. Open-ended questions were used in order to get first hand information from the respondents. The aim was to avoid entertaining pre-conceived ideas about what was happening in the schools regarding the management and leadership of the schools as well as the experiences and expectations of the teacher trainees.

The questions included items on school management and leadership, subject-related questions and general questions on their experiences and possible solutions to the problems they had experienced, if any. The aim was to collect information on different stakeholders.   Since all the questions in the questionnaire were open-ended, qualitative data analysis was followed. The data were grouped into themes and categories that emerged. The following section presents the findings of the study.

4.   FINDINGS

Depending on the respondents' responses, the findings were categorised into positive and negative characteristics.

4.1   Positive characteristics of school leadership and management

An analysis of the positive characteristics of the principals and deputy principals of the schools, as identified by the respondents, included the following:

•   Approachability and open channels of communication
•   Fostering team work within the school
•   Fostering good working relations among colleagues
•   Punctuality and time management
•   Securing space for the teacher trainees
•   Involvement of student teachers in school meetings
•   Encouraging participation of student teachers in extra-mural activities
•   Allowing student teachers to participate in administrative duties
•   Dress code of the school managers
•   Respect of the school managers for student teachers
•   Support from managers and teachers

The positive characteristics that have been identified by the respondents are in agreement with some of the qualities of a leader discussed earlier on (Tables 1 to 4). For example, reaching out to learners by being approachable and opening up to the student teachers is commendable. Involving student teachers in school meetings, administrative duties such as marking of registers and recording of learners' marks as well as in extra mural activities clearly demonstrate to the students that teaching and learning goes beyond the confines of a classroom.   The schools where teamwork and good working relations between the school management and educators were evident, provided a good learning environment for the students.

It was easy for them to settle in as there was no tension. The physical space which was allocated to them, whether in the same staffroom or a separate room, was highly appreciated. Sharing a staffroom might mean easy integration and socialisation in the school situation, while being given a separate room might mean isolation. What is important here is that they were happy that space was being provided for them.

The following excerpts clarify issues of approachability, pleasant disposition of managers, a welcoming environment, involvement and participation of student teachers in various school activities:

> *"I was able to go to him and ask him about anything that I wanted to know because he was easy to approach. His attitude towards me as a student teacher was very much positive and welcoming."*

> *"I had a huge learning experience because I was taught about the school management, marking the register, doing students' reports, and also engaged in meetings."*

Respect and support were other factors that were identified. The students felt respected and supported by both the management of the school and the subject teachers. Planning of lessons together with the teacher, having the teacher observing their classes and giving constructive feedback afterwards had had a positive effect on the student teachers. Their morale was boosted, they learnt to manage their time effectively and have since realised that thorough planning with the teacher the day before (the previous day) saves time and builds confidence in their presentation and facilitation skills. This has also instilled the values of putting concerted effort in their daily tasks and also taking pride in their work.

In some schools the respect the school managers showed the student teachers filtered down to classroom management. Student teachers in these circumstances did not experience any problems in disciplining the learners. They were encouraged to be friendly but firm in maintaining discipline, to monitor and mark the homework when it was given and ensure participation of all the learners in class activities.

During this period of experiential training some students identified role models that they wish to emulate when they actually join the teaching profession. They admired the principals and teachers who dressed formally. They associated a formal dress code with professionalism.

The positive characteristics have helped to create a favourable school environment for the student teachers. Students felt that they were part and parcel of the school and that they had something to contribute. They were not allowed to remain at the periphery of the activities taking place in the schools but were helped to move towards playing a central role. Since Identity is about a sense of belonging and engagement or participation in activities that are of importance to one, the school environment created was conducive to the development of the student's positive professional identity. Their selfworth was developed. What remains to be done is for the leadership and management of the schools to set up mechanisms that will ensure the sustainability of students' positive professional identity when they finally take up positions as permanent teachers in these schools. Cultivation of communities of practice and development of social networks could be encouraged. Halverson (2003) has noted the role of leadership in nurturing communities of practice as involving the creation of social networks and a positive culture of professional development while encouraging shared leadership, and examining artefacts such as programmes, procedures and policies. When the student teachers arrived at the schools, the school programmes were rearranged to accommodate them.

They were introduced to heads of department and subject teachers who had to support them during the experiential training. The learning experiences to which they were exposed proved worthwhile and might encourage them to establish good relations with the school leadership, educators and learners of the respective schools.

The next section looks into the negative characteristics that were identified.

4.2   Negative Characteristics of the school management

In some schools the management and leadership did not create a favourable climate for the students. The negative characteristics that were identified by the teacher trainees included the following:

- Feelings of not being welcomed into the school
- Lack of support for teacher trainees
- Lack of respect for teacher trainees by school management
- Feelings of being ignored or undermined
- Lack of involvement in meetings and extra-mural activities
- Not providing the necessary resources for the student teachers
- Teachers who transfer all their teaching duties to student teachers
- Teachers who discouraged students from joining the teaching profession
- Lazy teachers
- Gossip in the staffroom
- Use of corporal punishment
- Learner misbehaviour
- Use of corporal punishment
- Male teachers who "date" school girls

Feelings of isolation and alienation came up very strongly in the students' views. Although they wanted to participate fully in the activities of the school, they were denied that opportunity. The following excerpt clarifies this point:

> "*They did not tell us about the things that are happening in and around the school, for example, when there are meetings or when the learners visit other schools to play sport, so that we can attend as students. During the tea break we sit outside (*probably because no space was provided for them*) and not in the staff room.*"

Another student said,

"*I would like them to involve us more in extra mural activities*.

When student teachers start their experiential training they assume that all the schools are well resourced. The problem of a lack of resources that is coupled with lack of support and respect by both the school management and subject teachers caused feelings of resentment and frustration for the student teachers.

Some subject teachers did not provide the necessary support and mentoring that was required by the student teachers. The students complained about the teachers who completely abdicated their responsibilities once the student teachers arrived. They were thus thrown in the deep end and had to learn to swim on their own. Such a situation is untenable.

The staffroom, in some cases, did not provide a suitable and comfortable venue for the students as there was much gossip and insults regarding the management of the school. Some male teachers talked openly about their love relationships with the school girls. Students got entangled in such unprofessional behaviour. Much to their surprise, some schools still use corporal punishment. Even if the learners misbehave there is no justification for the use of corporal punishment as this was abolished. There are alternatives to corporal punishment such as manual work and detention.

The students who were placed in private schools were subjected to different forms of experiences. This particular student was not happy at all as he/she felt that there was too much rigidity in the way things were done. The student remarked:

> "*He makes me to be afraid of working in the private schools because I might be in this similar situation again. He makes me to hate to go to that kind of school.*" (sic)

The same student was satisfied with the interactions he/she had with the subject teacher and learners.

Learner discipline also created problems for the student teachers. A pattern that emerged here is that where there was a favourable school climate, learner discipline was also good. In instances where there was no co-operation between the school management and teachers, the learners also misbehaved in class. One student maintained:

> "*The whole school is corrupt. One could not differentiate between the school and a tavern.*"

The above excerpt did not portray a good picture or image of the school and its leadership and management, and consequently, did not provide a good experience for the teacher trainee.

4.3 A mismatch of students' expectations and real experiences of teaching practice

The negative experiences highlighted above did not match the students' expectations of teaching practice. These have been categorised into the following: lack of support, encouragement and welcome; lack of co-operation between senior management and teachers; lack of mentoring in the specific subjects and general lack of discipline in the schools.

> "*I was expecting support and encouragement from the principal and the staff of the school.*"

> "*I was expecting a warm welcome from the principal and even the teachers, but the teachers were treating us as if they had never been student teachers before.*"

> "*In the beginning I did not have a mentor of any subject that I was offering in that school. The only thing that they did was just to give me the classes and that was it.*"

> "*The school where I did my experiential training demotivated me from becoming a teacher. There is no co-operation between teachers and senior management.*"

Subject-related problems involved lesson plans. Disparities in the format of lesson plans created problems for student teachers. The format of lesson plans that the schools use and the one used at the institution are not the same and that created problems for the student teachers. This calls for more coordination of activities between the schools, the teaching practice co-ordinator and subject lecturers at the training institutions.

The students did not only identify problems, they also formulated solutions on how the identified problems could be rectified.

5.   POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

It has already been stated that students do not have much say in where they are placed. The students felt strongly that they should be allowed to choose the schools as they were exposed to different experiences and problems.

Constant monitoring of the progress of students regarding their adjustment to the school environment, and subject-related issues such as progress in lesson preparations, development of facilitation skills, questioning skills and classroom management skills by the Central University of Technology, Free State was raised as one of the solutions to the problems encountered.   Students expressed a concern that they were not visited regularly by the university lecturers and that, for the greater part of the period of experiential learning, they were left at the mercy of the schools.

The Central University of Technology, Free State should introduce a system of formal mentoring instead of letting the students depend on the subject teachers at the host schools.   This should be done in collaboration with other roleplayers, for example, the Free State Provincial Department of Education and the schools themselves.

CUT should set up a well established resource centre for teacher trainees so that they do not depend on the resources of the host schools. Some of these schools do not have the requisite resources.   Sometimes, even if the resources are available, they might not be accessible to teacher trainees as it has been indicated in some of the concerns raised by the students.

Further, CUT should set up formal partnerships with the schools in order to share resources and to encourage the formation of collaborative teaching groups in order to establish real communities of practice, where teacher trainees could work alongside competent and more established members of the teaching fraternity within the host schools.

6.   RECOMMENDATIONS

Teaching practice is an important part of initial teacher preparation or pre-service education.   It is meant to provide work-based experience for teacher trainees. The learning experiences of some of the students tend to demoralise rather than help them to develop a positive professional identity. Practices in schools where student teachers felt trusted, welcomed, respected, where they shared the same staffroom with teachers of the particular school and became involved in different activities of the school had boosted the morale of student teachers. Such students are looking forward to join the teaching fraternity and these fine practices need to be encouraged. The practices which veered towards belittling teacher trainees are a cause for concern. It is on the basis of such unacceptable practices of some of the schools that the following recommendations are suggested.

Student teachers need to be made to belong to and be part and parcel of the host schools during teaching practice. They need to participate in the activities of the school. Their active participation requires support and encouragement from the school managers and the subject teachers. Support is also needed from the university lecturers and teaching practice co-ordinators. For the constant monitoring and nurturing of the teacher trainees, a system of formal coaching and mentoring is necessary.

Since the leadership and management of the schools from the principal down to the subject teacher have been found to have an impact on the development of the professional identity of teachers, working groups or communities of practice should be encouraged both at the universities, universities of technology and at the schools. Student teachers can be encouraged to belong to groups which will help them to plan lessons together, discuss their problems and come up with strategies to resolve these. Shared leadership in cultivating and nurturing these communities will be needed to ensure that learning takes place. These groups need not occur at the fourth-year level. The fourth years should be absorbed in already existing groups.

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