LEARNING TO TEACH: TEACHER CANDIDATES REFLECT ON THE RELATIONAL, CONCEPTUAL, AND CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCES OF RESPONSIVE MENTORSHIP

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Using interviews, focus groups, and observations, I examined teacher candidates' experiences with their mentoring teachers over two student teaching periods. Using Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen's (1997) mentorship model of guiding teacher learning, I investigated the relational, conceptual, and contextual aspects of the student teaching experience. Results suggest that opportunities to question teaching practices as well as co-planning and co-teaching with associates supported the development of self-reflection and educational philosophies. Data suggest that mentor beliefs and pressures to maintain board and provincial standardized curriculum reforms prevented teacher candidates from exploring social justice, constructivist, and inquiry-oriented pedagogies.

Key words: preservice teacher education, conceptual orientation, field-based education, mentorship

À l'aide d'entrevues, de groupes de discussion et d'observations, l'auteur a étudié les expériences de stagiaires en enseignement avec leurs professeurs d'accueil au cours de deux périodes d'enseignement. Se servant du modèle de mentorat de Feiman-Nemser et Rosaen (1997) pour guider l'apprentissage des enseignants, l'auteur a analysé les aspects relationnels, conceptuels et contextuels de l'expérience pédagogique de ces stagiaires. Les résultats semblent indiquer que la possibilité de remettre en question les méthodes pédagogiques ainsi que la coplanification et le coenseignement avec des enseignants associés contribuent au développement de l'autoréflexion et de philosophies de l'éducation. Les données laissent supposer que les croyances des professeurs d'accueil et les pressions pour maintenir en place les réformes des programmes standards à l'échelle des conseils scolaires et de la province ont empêché les stagiaires en enseignement d'explorer des pédagogies constructivistes, axées sur la justice sociale et orientées vers la recherche.

Mots clés : formation à l'enseignement, orientation conceptuelle, stages d'enseignement, mentorat.

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A key component of teacher education programs is the practicum. Associate teachers (AT) are key players in giving substance and support to such experiences (Clarke, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Shulman, 2004). Stanulis (1995) writes, "[I]t is the classroom teacher who, because of the close interaction during the practice of teaching, potentially exerts the greatest influence on the development of a perspective teacher" (p. 331). Given the central role the classroom plays in the practicum setting, it is disheartening to see that research grounded in the perceptions of student teachers to the role their mentors played in their journey as teachers has not thrived as a research area. However, a number of teacher educators call for more extensive research in this area (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).[1]

Where does knowledge to teach come from? And who is best suited to teach it to the novice? I believe the narratives of six teacher candidates (TCs) presented in this study unearth important findings that may bring clarity to these questions. Exploring the relational aspects of mentorship will bring educators closer to challenging past assumptions and create new opportunities for advancing teaching mentorship.

THE SPREAD OF MENTORING

Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, numerous education reformers saw mentoring as a viable vehicle to reform teaching and teacher education (Wang & Odell, 2002)., They hoped that on-site assistance for beginning teachers with seasoned teachers acting as mentors would counter the high attrition rate of new teachers in the first three years of their work. With respect to teacher candidates, they hoped that seasoned teachers would be models to guide novices in learning new pedagogies and to socialize them to new professional norms (Shulman, 2004).

In October, 2005 the Ontario Ministry of Education announced the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP), devised to curb the abrupt and unassisted entry into the profession that many novices report. Although the numbers might vary in different contexts, 20-30 per cent of beginning teachers leave the field within the first three years, and after about five years, an estimated 50 per cent have left the profession entirely (Brewster & Railsback, 2001). However, although the ministry of education may regard this as a "new initiative," mentorship programs of this nature have existed in North America for the last two decades. In reviewing

such initiatives, researchers like Sharon Feiman-Nemser (2001) and Edwin Ralph (2003) both independently conclude that enthusiasm of policy makers for mentoring new teachers has not been matched with empirical clarity from the academic community as to what constitutes effective mentorship. Research is needed to clarify what mentors are envisioned to do, what they actually do, and what novices learn as a consequence. In the absence of such clarity, new mentoring initiatives run the risk of becoming new pathways that lead back to old cul-de-sacs where the conservative influence of cooperating teachers and school cultures promote conventional norms and practices. Such ends limit faculties of education developing programs that promote the development of new teachers who see themselves as intellectual leaders responsible for progressive social reforms (Volante & Earl, 2002).

EXPECTED ROLES FOR MENTORS

Wang and Odell (2002), having conducted an extensive literature review of the expected role of teaching mentors in times of standards-based learning, have identified four global expectations that faculties of education currently hold for associate teachers (expectations endorsed by the preservice program in which this study took place). The four expectations can be summarized in the following manner:

1. Mentors need to guide and support novice teachers to pose questions about current teaching practices to uncover the assumptions underlying curriculum and practices and encourage them to reconstruct curriculum and practices to suit the teaching contexts in which they find themselves.

2. Mentors are encouraged to assist novices in developing mastery of subject matter, and connect subject matter knowledge to meet the needs of diverse linguistic and cultural populations.

3. In the current climate of the standards-based movement, student teaching should not be reduced to the singular focus of developing specific teaching techniques and procedures, but to develop a strong understanding of the relationship between teaching principles and practice.

4. Finally, mentors will not simply impart teaching knowledge to novices, but that teaching knowledge would be achieved as a

product of inquiry and reflection about one's own teaching. Novices need to be guided to discover of knowledge rather than be imparted with it.

GUIDING TEACHER LEARNING: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Numerous educational scholars have proposed a number of conceptual orientations that would assist in studying the mentorship needs and experiences of TCs (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Franke & Dahlgren, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Little, 1990; Zeichener, 1996). There is substantial overlap among these frameworks, specifically in their ability to explore the complexity of mentoring in relation to such variables as academic role of mentors (teachers as scholars); the technical expertise mentors are required to offer; the personal issues mediating the mentor/novice relationship; and the critical social elements of teaching (the critiquing of schooling and envisioning possible reforms from such critique). Learning to teach is a meaning-making process, mediated by time, place, and the relationships that exist between novices and mentors. The primary objective of this study was to draw upon the experiences of teacher candidates to determine the contextual, conceptual, and relational aspects of student teaching that supported their learning. For this reason I used the Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen (1997) framework, Guiding Teacher Learning, in this study because it provided a comprehensive mentorship framework to explore the mentor-novice relationship in relation to the aforementioned variables. The insights distilled from the experiences of the teacher candidates offer important implications for teacher-education programs in supporting the learning of their TCs and those who supervise them in on and off campus sites.

RESEARCH QUESTION

With respect to the issues of effective mentorship by associate teachers, I posed the following question: How did the mentorship experiences of TCs shape their teaching and learning? This question required a conceptual framework capable of accommodating multiple schema and variables potentially influencing the process of mentoring. Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen's (1997) framework brought resolution to these

needs. Of equal importance is the fact that the framework proved an ideal categorization system for examining the perception the mentoring of TC's in relation to the relational, conceptual, and contextual influences upon their work. Learning to teach is a socio-cultural process, situated in complex and diverse communities of practices and mediated by multiple variables. Hence, the structure of Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen framework provided a consistent and organized approach to data gathering and analysis of teacher candidates' perceptions.

Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen's (1997) framework, entitled Guiding Teacher Learning, focuses on the influence between internal factors such as dispositions and beliefs as well as external factors such as program philosophies and school cultures and the effect these may have upon mentor-novice relations. The framework is composed of five elements, which I have summarized in the following manner:

1. Mentoring Relationship – In the mentor, student teacher relationship is an important unit of analysis, particularly to explore issues of power between mentor and novice.

2. Goals and Purposes – The teacher candidate should be guided to (a) seek new visions and possibilities in their daily teaching, (b) implement new or novel curricular experiences and teaching strategies, (c) be guided to reflect and study their practice and those of their mentor in systematic ways through activities such observation, conferencing, and reflective journal writing, and (d) restructure their teaching based on reflections.

3. Practices – Associates teachers need to guide TCs through observation, co-planning, and co-teaching.

4. Context – The tone, tact, and character of mentorship/guidance are shaped by the contexts in which it takes place − the classroom, school, program, community, and larger culture. How these contexts constrain or support the work of beginning teachers can prove to be of significant empirical significance for the improvement of teaching and teacher education.

5. Conceptual underpinnings – The work of ATs and the ethos of student teaching classrooms are informed by the personal beliefs ATs bring to their work. (pp. 8-19)

METHOD

Research Site

I conducted my study in a one-year, post-baccalaureate teacher-education program. The program enrolled approximately 1200 student teachers, 500 of whom were in the in elementary division (K-8) which was divided into cohorts of about 65 students, each with two coordinators and one faculty team of four to six preservice instructors. Each cohort coordinator dealt directly with about 10 to 12 schools. Co-coordinators directly worked with school principals requesting the number of ATs and classrooms that would be required for practice teaching sessions. Principals sought and selected ATs willing to participate in the practicum mentoring.

The six students who participated in this study were drawn from a preservice teaching class of 32 primary junior and 34 junior intermediate teacher candidates. The entire class consisted of 12 male and 54 female teacher candidates. The study was comprised of three male and three female TCs. Two candidates had advanced graduate degrees: One held a Ph.D. in biology while the other held a masters degree in psychology. The remaining candidates held undergraduate degrees in arts and science.

Students in the cohort engaged in a four to five week practice teaching session in the same classroom (a practicum classroom consisted of one TC in a single class for five weeks). TCs were required to complete two practicum sessions to meet degree program requirements and provincial licensing requirements. They completed each practicum session in different schools. At the end of each practicum block, students received a detailed evaluation of their performance by their ATs. These summative evaluations not only helped students reflect on the effectiveness of their skills, but were used by boards of education in evaluating student teachers for potential employment.

Field Work

I collected field notes in practice teaching classrooms from the first week in October to the first week in April. In each of the two practicum sessions, each participant was visited twice in their respective

classrooms. Each visitation was approximately 2-3 hours in length. Using Merriam's (1988) outline of participant observation, my field notes drew upon the following elements: the physical setting, the participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors (informal and unplanned activities, symbolic and connotative meaning of words, nonverbal communication), as well as reflections of my own behaviour during the observation sessions. During visitations, I was at times an observer (practicum supervisor observing lessons and providing feedback) as well as a participant (I was often encouraged by TCs to participate in class activities with their pupils). Opportunities to fully participate were crucial to my building rapport with TCs and ATs in the sphere of interaction. All participants in the study were supervised by another faculty allowing me to interact with associate teachers and teacher candidates, free from ethical issues associated with supervising and researching one's own students.

Interviews

Data collection procedures incorporated field work, focus groups, reflection journals, and semi-structured interviews. However, the individual and group interviews provideD the richest data and have become the centrepiece of the study.

I conducted a total of six individual interviews (1-2 hour sessions) with each participant. For each of the two required practicum sessions, I interviewed participants prior to the beginning of each student-teaching session, at the midpoint in the practicum, and immediately following the student-teaching sessions. During final interviews, I gave students their transcripts (review of their transcripts in this manner allowed an opportunity for them to provide input on the categories and themes identified by the researcher in analysis of transcripts, field notes, and document analysis).

Participants were involved in three focus group sessions, in which they discussed commonalities and differences in their student-teaching experiences, as well as the perspectives shared in their individual interviews. Group sessions followed the same interview protocol as the individual interviews. The interview protocol contained two main questions:

- To what extent (if any) have your initial conceptions of what it means to be a teacher changed as a result of your mentoring and teaching experiences with your associate teacher? Three probing questions were used to elicit detailed answers to the primary question: How have your practicum experiences influenced your educational philosophy? How have your practicum experiences nurtured your instructional and theoretical understanding of teaching? Thinking back on your working relationship with associates, what factors liberated or constrained your ability to adhere to your teaching beliefs and philosophies?
- Reflecting on your experiences with your associate teacher, how did he or she facilitate your learning in the following areas: (a) interpretation of curriculum mandates, (b) planning and instructional support, (c) classroom management and relationship with students, (d) diversity and social justice, (e) evaluation and feedback of your daily work, and (f) reflection on daily work and personal beliefs

Data Analysis

The analysis of all data sources followed the simultaneous analysis method outlined by Merriam (1988). This process of constant comparison involving the simultaneous analysis of all data sources is similar to data analysis protocols traditionally suggested by Glesne and Peshkin (1992). In this method researchers develop an inductive stance to data analysis, that is, researchers redefine and reformulate the category to fit data drawn from the perspectives of participants rather than selecting data to match predetermined categories.

In reviewing transcripts and developing themes and codes, I again drew upon the procedures outlined by Merriam (1988, pp.183-184). My analysis began by reading participant interview transcripts, group transcripts, and field notes. I assigned codes to emerging themes that I placed directly in the margins of the transcripts. I then merged entries with codes of similar meaning into a new category. I reread transcripts several times to check the reliability of the codes created and then merged items in the various thematic categories.

I cross-referenced codes assigned to data sources of individual participants with transcripts and material from other participants. Crossing-referencing responses and questions was important because this process provided a generalized understanding of student responses to each question, which in turn helped identify themes that were held commonly by all the participants, as well as those that were in contrast to one another.

I repeated this process carrying codes from the first field notes transcript to the second and so forth. I also used this process for the transcripts from each of the focus group interviews. I then compared all students across each of the data sources, using this procedure.

FINDINGS

Mentoring Relationships

Throughout all data sources, participants felt that one of the most significant aspects of student teaching was a caring associate. When asked to define a caring associate, teacher candidates provided a clear statement of the kind of teacher associate who would make an ideal supervisor.

A caring associate is one who is open-hearted and open-minded. Open-hearted in the sense that they want you to be in their class, and open-minded to accepting the kind of person you are and the teacher you want to become. They want to get to know you. My first associate teacher on the first observation day had a bulletin board with balloons on it, welcoming me to her class. And my first job was to use the board to teach her and the students about me. (TC, practicum interview)

I hate when she [referring to AT] interrupts my lessons throwing in her two cents worth. The kids just look at me with smirks like, "she got you." It really makes me feel incompetent in front of the class. I wish she would intervene with her insights when I'm planning my lessons. I have come to believe that a caring associate is one who knows the difference between independence and abandonment. Associates should plan with their student teachers and set them up for success in front of the class instead of making you feel stupid and small. (TC, practicum interview)

All participants reported that receiving emotional support and experiencing a sense of acceptance was critical in developing a positive working relationship with their ATs. This comment proves to be a consistent finding in the literature (Odell & Wang, 2002; Sanders, Dowson & Sinclair, 2005). Knowing that they were welcome and wanted in their practice teaching classrooms helped them find their sense of place in someone else's domain and provided a sense of security in dealing with the uncertainties of classroom management, lesson planning, and the anxieties of being evaluated throughout the practicum.

During group sessions, participants expressed that caring and emotionally supportive associates were conscious of the power differentials in their relationship with TCs. Those associates who were identified as caring took the opportunity to discuss these issues with their TCs to assure them that they were sensitive to their anxieties and would work to be fair and compassionate in balancing their roles with regards to assistance and evaluation. ATs identified as caring actively made evaluation a collaborative activity with their TCs and encouraged TCs to voice their opinions concerning their own progress, while ATs who were not described as caring used their roles as evaluator to maintain power over TCs.

The relationship between associate and student teacher is inherently asymmetrical in terms of power and status (Britzman, 1991). The sentiments expressed by the participants were consistent with the work of Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen (1997) and Christensen and Conway (1991) who suggest that if novices are to feel supported, mentoring teachers need to seek ways that students can express their opinions, experiment with their teaching, and share their anxieties without running the risk of a bad teaching evaluation.

Goal and Purposes

In interviews before the first practicum, all participants consistently indicated that an associate teacher provided technical guidance, procedural guidance related to school routines and policies, and encouragement during their teaching. They saw their teaching as their responsibility and the associates were to be supportive guides who

modeled effective teaching and offered solutions and resources when teaching problems were encountered.

Truthfully, I don't know what to expect. But, I do see the practicum as the place where you can see if you can cut it as a teacher. I am hoping that my associate will leave me to teach, figure things out, but also be around when things go south [laughing to self]. I see them teaching me everything from the curriculum for the grade to managing student behaviour. (TC, practicum interview)

As the year progressed and students approached the end of their second practicum, their interviews, focus group sessions, and field work indicated major shifts in their goals and expectations for associates. Although the theme of caring and support remained a priority, expectations and goals strayed from technical and procedural support to other philosophical matters. Four of the six participants desired the role of mentor to make stronger connections with assignments and philosophical issues they were encountering in their various faculty courses and their own emerging teaching styles and philosophies.

I asked my associate about comparing weapons and technological advancement in other countries during the medieval period [in reference to the issue of Eurocentrism]. She just shut me down and said, "We can't teach them the whole world." What does that mean? You need to find associates who believe in the stuff we are learning in the faculty. You need associates who can help you to ask the question "why?" Why do we teach this stuff? Why are these kids doing well? Why are these kids failing? Why are we teaching this way? (TC, practicum focus group interview)

TCs in which this study was conducted, participated in an action research capstone assignment. Grades for the assignment were shared by all methods courses in their cohort section. TCs, with guidance of faculty supervisors and ATs, conducted research on the curricular impact of their teaching on students.

My associate feels that this action research assignment is taking too much time away from the stuff we really need to know like reading assessment and report cards; which meant that I had to rely on someone who did not seem to think action research was worth while. (TC, practicum interview)

In contrast, one candidate, whose associate was in the process of completing a master's degree in education, had a different experience.

My associate showed me her graduate school research with gender issues in math. She gave me a ton of help with my action research, like designing my objectives, helping me with interview questions for the kids, and analyzing the data. She taught me so much about action research. She was so excited about the assignment she was almost doing the assignment for me. (TC, practicum interview)

As their teaching experiences and knowledge broadened, TCs saw the role of associates as not only providing technical support, but in exploring and critiquing their emerging teaching philosophies and practices as teachers. Mentors played crucial roles in assisting them to use knowledge of pupils to mitigate and reconstruct prior beliefs and images of teaching in critical and theoretical ways.

Practices: Finding Openings for Curricular Planning and Reflection

In interview and focus group sessions reflecting on mentoring relations, participants felt that supportive associates vigorously engaged in creating openings for TCs to guide and model the many nuances associated with thoughtful reflection and curricular planning.

I think that one of the successes of my work with my associate was the fact that we talked about everything. After she taught a lesson she would ask questions getting me to deconstruct her work. At first she would even ask me for my opinions about improving her lessons. At first I found it hard to judge her work; I thought it was a trap. But I realized that she really wanted me to reflect and critique what we did as teachers in her class. My ability to reflect grew because I had an associate who did it herself and valued open communication with her students. (TC, practicum interview)

My associate would read over my lesson plans and ask me questions to justify my rationale and decisions. Sometimes he would say "right-on kid", or "we need to think this over." At first we would sit around a blank lesson plan sheet and plan my lesson together. Later he would make me re-teach a lesson helping me to make modifications based on my reflections and what didn't work in the lessons. At the faculty we talk about the importance of reflection, but never really

do it. My associate helped me to live reflective practice. (TC, practicum focus group interview)

Some TCs reflecting on their experiences described effective mentoring as a duet, where both associates and teachers candidates discussed each other's teaching success and problems as avenues to develop grounded theories about teaching and learning. In contrast, others described being faced with ATs who held a sink-or-swim mentality to introduce them to the realities of teacher work. These sentiments are congruent with Lortie's (1975) observances that teaching is one of the few professions in which new teachers experience an abruptness to take on the full responsibilities of a professional role. My own field notes reflected numerous notations where associates described their work with TCs as helping TCs to fend for themselves by leaving TCs to cope with large amounts of classroom responsibility on their own with little to no guidance. When I shared these sentiments with TCs during a focus group session, one remarked:

I worked with an associate who felt that the best way to teach was to jump into teaching headfirst. He provided little help planning and left the room when I taught. The only thing I learned from him was the effects of abandonment on learning. (TC, practicum focus group interview)

All data sources indicate that ATs who placed an emphasis on observation, conversation, co-planning, and co-teaching can help novices pin-point problems and deepen novice thinking about their work in analytical ways. For TCs, the process of being guided to frame problems in their teaching became an important attribute of what it meant to be reflective about one's practice.

Context

Successful mentorship does not occur in a vacuum. Its nature and quality are shaped by the context in which it takes place (Feiman-Nemser & Rosaen, 1997). Many TCs expressed that mentorship was not only defined by the associates they were assigned, but by all the teachers in the school. Not surprisingly, when ATs encouraged TCs to visit and

observe multiple classes, TC's felt that that their awareness of multiple teaching styles, philosophies, and practices was significantly broadened.

Today I got to spend the afternoon in Mr. Richies' [pseudonym] class. I'm glad I got a chance to visit. My associate is amazing at art and language arts. She is passionate, but stays away from political things like social justice and equity. Mr. Richie deals with things like race and homelessness straight on. The kids in his class were working on posters and poems to raise awareness of the homeless in the neighborhood. I really got a chance to see how literacy skills could be developed in the context of social issues, while Mr. Richies' TCs got to see all the great visual arts activities my associate does with her students and me. If I didn't have an associate who encouraged me to explore other classrooms I would not have gotten to see things like social justice activities. The school is filled with talented teachers, and it would be a loss to TCs to be confined to one class and not be allowed to benefit from the collective experiences of all the teachers in the school. (TC, practicum interview)

A number of the students noted that their associates were not only guides in the classroom but to the whole school and local community; such was the case of AT Mr. Fritz (pseudonym):

Mr. Fritz made sure that I got to visit as many different classrooms as possible during the practicum. The best thing he did was after school he took me for a ride through the neighborhood. As we drove he pointed to some subsidized housing complexes where some of the kids came from. Seeing where some of the kids lived gave me a whole new understanding about the children I was teaching. (TC, practicum focus group interview)

Isolation is an enemy to the work of teachers. As Little (1990) expresses, teachers often work in the privacy of their own classrooms, with little opportunity to discuss and observe the work of their colleagues. Although some teachers prefer the autonomy and privacy of their work, such conditions become environments of isolation for teacher candidates who develop a narrow view of teaching and schooling emerging out of the narrow, bounded work of individual classrooms and the highly contextualized discussions found within them.

Conceptual Orientations

Results from interview, focus-group, and field work data indicated the beliefs held by the ATs in the value of teaching from constructivist practices and anti-racist and social justice pedagogy greatly influenced TCs opportunities to teach from such perspectives. Solomon and Allen (2001) identify two key factors at play in such circumstances: the associates' politics of practice in relation to their commitment to diversity; the pressure ATs felt to adhere to standardized curriculum practices. Such curriculum leads many associates to believe that time constraints prevented them from pursuing such issues. This understanding is clearly reflected in the following interview responses.

I wanted to explore the issue of racism with my students. My associate just looked at me and said stick to Pioneers. I tried to convince him that yesterday's pioneers are today's refugees and kids need to wrestle with these issues. He just said it was too controversial and I should stick to what was in the standard curriculum. In the class we had at least five kids who were refugees. Controversy! It was the reality of those kids' lives. He was fixated on sticking to every aspect the provincial curriculum and getting them ready for standardized tests. (TC, practicum interview)

I really fell in love with constructivist teaching practices [in reference to university classes]. I wanted to explore constructivist activities in math class. But my associate told me that the math series we were using was designed to help students with the standardized tests they are expected to take. I tried to convince her but she just said constructivism is a faculty thing which does not work when you are responsible for preparing students to succeed in standardized test. I just gave up. (TC, practicum interview)

Not surprisingly, other participants felt their ATs, many of whom at one time taught from constructivist perspectives or dealt with issues of equity, abandoned these practices when standardized curricular reforms took place. Students reported being forced to teach similar curriculum and take up teaching practices that would maintain consistency in teaching the standardized grade level curriculum. TCs had little opportunity to pursue autonomously some of the teaching orientations like constructivism modeled at the faculty, reducing philosophy of this

nature as ideals better suited for discussion and exploration in faculty courses.

DISCUSSION

I return to the research question: How did the mentorship experiences of TCs shape their teaching and learning? The findings of the study address this question in the following manner.

Liberating Circumstances

Participants reported that having an associate who was emotionally supportive and accepting of their faculty program was crucial in meeting their personal teaching goals and successfully making connections with what they were learning in their university courses. This statement proves to be a consistent finding in the literature (Sanders, Dawson & Sinclair, 2005; Odell & Wang, 2002). Findings from these studies suggest that knowing that they were welcome and wanted in their practice teaching classrooms helped TCs find their sense of place in someone else's domain of authority. Knowing that they were wanted in their practice teaching classrooms helped them psychologically deal with uncertainties of classroom management, lesson planning, and the anxieties of being evaluated throughout the practicum. TCs repeatedly mentioned that ATs who placed a consistent emphasis on guiding them to reflect on their teaching practices through observation, conversation, co-planning, and co-teaching helped them to identify problems and deepen their reflective thinking about their teaching. Feiman-Nemser (2001), working with effective mentors, defined such practices as opportunities to "co-think" about the complexities of teaching (p. 20). Her study suggests that invitations for productive consultations where mentors guide TCs' thinking about their daily work through open-ended questioning, in the context of safe, open conversations, can move the notion of reflective practice from the realm of abstraction to that of the tangible.

TCs emphasized that effective mentors acted as local guides to broaden not only their understanding of individual classrooms, but the communities in which their host schools were located. These opportunities broadened the perspectives of novices to the socio-

economic and cultural influences communities place on local schools. In addition, such opportunities created opportunity for TCs to envision new possibilities for educational reform that could benefit their pupils and school communities Zeichner (1996) argues that one goal of an educative practicum is to help TCs become researchers of their own practice within the context of their own classrooms, and to go beyond the idiosyncratic confines of single classrooms to observe multiple teaching styles in a school and explore the communities within which schools are situated.

Participants of the study indicated that effective mentorship was a role fulfilled not only by individual associates but was supported as a vision that the whole host school held. When the entire staff (administrators, ATs, and support personnel) was committed to being mentors, TCs were exposed to numerous teaching styles and practices. This support helped to breach the isolation and narrowness of experiences many TCs experienced by working with a single associate and her or his students.

Constraining Aspects of Mentorship and Practice Teaching

TCs reported that associates who did not attempt to create a collaborative, democratic partnership limited their opportunities for critical reflective teaching. Such mentors also proved ineffective in guiding TCs to question and reform their beliefs and practices. During group interviews, participants felt that some associates were best at providing technical input, but were ineffective in helping them to analyze their emerging thoughts and personal philosophies about teaching. One teacher candidate candidly described her situation where she felt trapped between her classroom context and university expectations, between theory and practice.

I am sandwiched between professors who tell me theory is very practical and associates who tell me that theory should be left at the faculty. There is no point talking to my associate about my action research project and philosophy of education paper. It would just trigger the same old rant from her. I would love to meet these classroom teachers who teach, reflect and do action research to inform their classroom practice ─ Maybe the reason why I can't find them is because they all teach us in the faculty. (TC, practicum reflection log)

These realities, in turn, increase the gap between theory and practice, as is consistently reported in the literature. Stanulis (1995), for instance, urges faculties of education to encourage mentoring teachers to see theory as a guide to frame and interpret daily teaching experiences.

TCs described ineffective mentors as those who created an ethos of subservience in their working relations by not attempting to balance the asymmetrical power relations in their roles. Such circumstances severely restricted opportunities for TCs to pursue their own ideals and passions for teaching. To question these imbalances of power lead to conflict situations that many TCs felt would have negative consequences to their teaching evaluations. Consequently, many tolerate these imbalances in silence and intimidation (see, Grant & Zozakiewicz, 1995; Solomon and Allen, 2001). Similarly, Volante and Earl (2002), investigating the perceptions of TCs and the conceptual orientations, found in faculty reports of practicum experiences that participants expressed frustration with not being able to experiment with issues like constructivist teaching practices as well as social justice and equity pedagogy. Pressures and attitudes directed to support teaching practices maintaining standardized curriculum and testing procedures contradicted the faculty's initiatives to encourage TCs to create and adapt curriculum to explore issues like social justice or equity through constructivist methods. Participants reported that associates justified their reluctance to support such teaching paradigms because they did not reflect true realities of teaching and would not be beneficial to candidates' development as teachers.

 A review of candidates' lived experiences, as presented in this study, indicates that their practicum experiences revealed strong tensions between personal intentions, individual politics, and contradicting institutional objectives. The work of the TCs was sandwiched between the education faculty, who sought inquiry and critical social commentary and reflection, and ATs who demanded practical orientations directed to deepening technical expertise to support accountability demands of the Ministry.

Feiman-Nemser and Rosaen's (1991) model, Guiding Teacher Learning, provides a suitable conceptual framework for assisting individual ATs and TCs to develop and mediate working relations that

honour the vision and practices of both groups. However, although their model has the potential to foster powerful learning partnerships, TCs need opportunity to break free from the confinement of individual classrooms where the propensity of mentors to perpetuate standard teaching practices and reinforce norms of individualism remains high. The complexities of teaching cannot be reduced to isolated experiences and forms of knowledge that are localized to individual classrooms. The experiences of the teacher candidates in this study suggest that effective mentorship requires support by multiple relationships, with all the members of the practice-teaching school community. Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice offers a dynamic framework for broadening and deepening the mentorship experiences of TCs. Their book, *Situated Learning: Legitimated Peripheral Participation,* describes the community of practice as ideally characterized by three dimensions: (a) community as a joint enterprise, continually renegotiated by its members, (b) within the community of practice the experienced and the novice are engaged in mutual engagement, which in turn binds members together into a social entity, and (c) within this activity the novice and the experienced teachers shared a repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles) that members have developed over time.

It is unfair to place the issue of effective mentorship solely in the laps of classroom teachers working under the pressures of accountability-based curricular reforms. These realities continue to be persistent burrs that have often irritated the bonds between faculties of education and partnering practicum schools—community dialogue is a necessary balm if such institutional bonds are to heal and strengthen. Community dialogue in the form of ongoing liaison meetings between faculty, ATs, and TCs can be seen as opportunities for supporting personal and organizational transformation. Such dialogue is fundamental to increase capacities in the following areas: inquiry-based teaching and learning, diversity, conflict exploration, decision making and problem solving, leadership, organizational planning, and the blending of institutional cultures.

Antonek, Matthews, and Levin (2005) suggest that the practicum is not only a time for TCs to explore the complexities of classroom

teaching, but it is a time for ATs to explore the complexities of teaching adults. In light of the experiences of participants, researchers need to explore the process of teacher mentoring with respect to the following issues: (a) Examine the role of standardized curriculum and teaching in relation to reform-minded teaching; (b) Model and challenge associates to reflect on critical moments of teaching and learning that can bring about alternative interpretations and solutions that compensate for the short comings and contraints of standards-based teaching; (c) ATs need to communicate consistently and flexibly in a manner that helps TCs to interpret and reinterpret how conceptual orientations like social justice, inquiry-based teaching, and constructivism fit with standards-based teaching.

In an era of standardized teaching practices and curriculum, this study emphasizes the need for faculties of education to assist ATs, to guide TCs to raise questions concerning the impact of prevailing curriculum and teaching practices on democratic ideals. Mentorship devoted to assisting new teachers in becoming transformative intellectuals who do not compromise the needs of their students to justify the latest educational trend is of great importance to the vision of democratic teaching. Solomon and Allen (2001) remind educators, "Democratic ideals cannot be maintained through compromise" (p. 241).

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NOTES

[1] In this article the term associate teacher (AT) and mentor will be used interchangeably. Equivalent terms in other contexts are supervising teacher, co-operating teacher, mentor teacher, and master teacher.

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