

Mentoring and Professional Development: A Gateway to Professionalism

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Abstract

This article presents ideas on mentoring and professional development. It briefly describes the needs, practices and benefits of mentoring for the professional development of teachers. It discusses teaching as a profession and teacher development. Both mentoring and professional development go hand in hand to maximize teaching and learning process. In teaching profession, mentoring is a process in which a more experienced senior teacher supports the novice teachers by providing required guidance, counseling, ideas and information on carrying out the professional responsibilities successfully. The article concludes with the idea that mentoring helps novice teachers to grow and develop personally, professionally and institutionally. Mentoring is one of the great means to achieve professionalism in teaching.

Keywords: Mentoring Practices, Mentee, Professional, Teacher Development and Professionalism

A. Introduction

A mentor is an experienced person who helps guides and counsels the mentees or the novice people in general and teachers in particular. Teachers can adopt various methods and tools in order to develop themselves. Practice on different recent technologies, researches on Second Language Acquisition (SLA), teacher training, and collaboration with partner help teachers to update their knowledge. Among them the practice of collaborative learning is one of the most powerful tools for teachers' professional development. Collaborative learning as 'mentoring' is an old idea but a new concept in teacher development. It is the process through which an experience professional helps novice or less experience (mentee) for the latter's professional development. Mentoring is the means of assessing and guiding the works of others (Daresh, 2003). Mentoring is a complex interactive process occurring between individuals of differing level of experience and expertise which incorporates interpersonal or psycho social development, career and/or educational development and socialization.

To my understanding, mentoring means not only supporting to the juniors in their performance but also giving them the psychological back-up by which their performance can be better. It is to help and support people to manage their own learning in order to maximize individual potential, skills, performance and personal development. It can best facilitate professional growth and can be said as learning partnership between an experienced

employee (mentor) and a less experienced employee (mentee) for sharing knowledge and information. It provides all employees with the opportunity and access to professional growth and development.

Therefore, mentoring is a process by which an older and more experienced person takes younger person under his/her section freely offering advice and encouragement. A mentor is a more experienced individual willing to share his/her knowledge with someone less experienced in a relationship of mutual trust. In teaching profession, mentoring is a process in which a more experienced senior teacher (a mentor) supports and assists the novice teachers (a mentee) by providing required guidance, counseling, ideas and information on carrying out the professional responsibilities successfully.

The idea of mentoring can be linked with the idea of (Villegas-Reimers, 2003) who asserts that mentoring is a form of coaching that tends to be short terms (for a beginning teacher or for someone new to a school or a system, for example). She provides a list of roles that the mentors have to fulfill. It includes sharing information, providing access to resources, role modeling, and counseling, coaching, encouraging reflection, advising in career moves and supporting new teachers (2003, p. 116). Like collaborative learning, mentoring too requires a good relationship between the mentor and the mentee, mutual trust, an interaction to learn and respect to each other.

Mentoring is a more structure, sustained relationship for supporting professional learners at the early stage of their career, through a career transmission or when facing a particular challenge. Tomlinson (2001) states “mentoring is itself a form of professional capacity to which teachers bring all sorts of existing ideas, assumptions and capabilities, and then teacher-mentors too need to adapt a reflective approach to their own activities and learning.”

It is to help and support people to manage their own learning in order to maximize individual potential, skills, performance and personal development. The purpose of mentoring is to share wisdom gained from experience and learning, which involves engaging the motivation and commitment of students towards achieving such capability and to those processes likely to be effective for their acquisition. (Alred et al. 2003) says that mentoring offers support and advice to someone as a person, and may touch any aspect of their life (as cited in Goddard, 2004). The mentor may offer coaching or training from time to time as appropriate, but may also encourage the mentee to seek help from specialists in these roles.

Villegas-Reimers (2003), defines mentoring as, “a form of professional development, mentoring affects both the novice teachers who are being mentored, and the experienced teachers who will serves as mentors”. So, is not only a valuable resource for novice teachers but it can also be useful as a professional growth and development for mentors themselves, i.e. novice as well as experienced both can be mentee. A mentee is a person who is both a recipient of assistance and a participant in comprehensive effort towards becoming self-reliant and accountable professional.

In this manner, mentoring has become one of the most common responses of school leaders to the needs of novice teachers, though it is popular with both mentors and novice teachers. Similarly, it includes, on the one hand, a career progress-oriented dimension and, on the other hand, psychological development functions, incorporating, counseling and friendship.

Professional Development

First, I consider teaching as a profession. Then, I discuss professional development of teacher in particular.

Teaching as a Profession

Profession means any sorts of occupation, vocation or career where specialized knowledge of a subject, field or science is applied. It requires prolonged academic training and a formal qualification. A professional activity involves systematic knowledge and proficiency; and requires knowledge of some type of learning. Likewise development means change and growth (Head & Taylor, 1997). It is the change and growth of any individual personally and professionally.

In general sense, profession, occupation, and job are taken synonymously but they are not completely synonymous. Profession differs from other two in the sense that it is not the job or occupation which is simply engaged in profit, because it also carries a sense of public service and personal dedication. It deals with a special field of knowledge, its practitioners must have had special training in the field, and its member belongs to an organization that makes provision for the licensing and certification of its members. So, in the words of (Roberts, 1998), "A 'professional' is someone in a nominal occupation who is highly trained, skilled and self-disciplined (p.38)".

Professionalism

The term 'professionalism' is used to refer to practitioners' knowledge, skills and conduct. It is a collection of the conduct, qualities, skills, knowledge and attitude that makes a profession. It includes training, skill, self-discipline, self-regulations, high social status and restricted status. Regarding this, Wallace states that in 'profession' we have a kind of occupation which can only be practiced after long and rigorous academic study, which should be well rewarded because of the difficulty in attaining it and public good it brings, but which is not simply engaged in for profit, because it also carries a sense of public service and personal dedication (2010, p. 5). So, professionalism means having expertise and skills in the areas like; basis of scientific knowledge, a period of rigorous study which is formally assessed, a sense of public service, high standards of professional conduct, and an ability to perform socially useful tasks.

Teaching and learning provides leadership, service and support in the development, implementation and dissemination of research-based teaching and learning resources. Teaching learning process is purely human activity where different factors involve for accomplishing it. To enhance the process, first teaching in itself should be in complete form. The complete form of essence is that while teaching, the teacher has to use different technique/model according to the context, students' nature, etc. The teacher must use different models while teaching in the classroom. If the teacher cannot use different models, then he or she cannot achieve the desired goals. For the first, the teacher must develop himself or herself then only he/she can expect the achievements from his or her teaching. According to the demand of time, the teacher has to make the students up to date, and be aware of the different techniques, strategies, and models of teaching.

There has been a debate over years and throughout nation as to whether teachers are professionals as opposed to mere 'workers' and whether teaching is a profession and not just an 'occupation' (Hoyle, 1998, as cited in Villegas Reimers, 2003). In the past, teaching was usually regarded simply as other occupations and teachers as mere workers. They were not provided any training, other types of support programs etc. In that scenario, how they can uplift their quality and their professional efficiency. Regarding this, (Villegas Reimers, 2003) says that most people agree that professionalization of teacher is prerequisite for successful improvement of the quality of education (Holmes group, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1999) and is, thus, of great interest to policy-maker and educator. Fortunately, the tendency over the last and few years has been to begin accept teaching as a profession and, consequently, the transformation from the teaching training to teacher professional development (p. 36). So, in order to enhance the status of education in general and teacher in particular, we should develop teaching as profession.

Teachers are the persons like other professions as doctors, engineers, pilots and others who require special type of skills to accomplish their job. So, there is no problem in treating teaching as a profession. Khaniya (2006) supports this thought and opines "Teachers, professors, engineers, lawyers, etc. are regarded as professionals. professional is one who performs tasks involving not only skills and knowledge but also expertise" (p. 7). Teaching is also a profession because it has all the characteristics that any profession should have. Teachers do specialize in particular subject areas and also study education in depth. They also have special training in the field, in the form of teaching practice and they have to pass examination in order to be qualified trained teachers. For example, in Nepal, NELTA is a professional organization which conducts different workshops, seminars and publishes journals as required.

Professional Development

Underhill (1988) states that development means keeping myself on the same side of the learning fence as my students. This is the only way that I can keep alive with a sense of challenge and adventure in my career, and avoid getting in a rut. If I am in a rut, then so is my teaching, and then so are my students, and learning from a rut is tedious, slow and uninspiring.

Teacher Professional Development (TPD) is an endless process through which the teachers grow with the span of time or it is ongoing processes through which the teachers keep growing. It enhances competence of all members in a learning community to pursuit their lifelong learning. TPD is an evolving process in the field of teaching and learning. It is not like something that gets stagnated after a fixed tenure. "Teacher Development is the process of becoming the best kind of teacher that I personally can be" (Underhill, 1986, as Cited in Head & Taylor, 1997).

Teacher development, as we understand it, draws on the teacher's own inner resource for change. It is center on personal awareness of the possibilities for change, and of what influences the change process. It builds on the past, because recognizing how past experiences have or have not been developmental helps identify opportunities for change in the present and future. It also draws on the present, in encouraging a fuller awareness of the kind of teacher you are now and of other people's responses to you. It is self-reflective

process, because it is through questioning old habits that alternative ways of being and doing are able to emerge (Head & Taylor, 1997).

Similarly, professional development is an ongoing, self-directed and autonomous effort of teachers to acquire new knowledge and skill in their career. For teachers to develop professionally, teaching demands various roles of the teachers. It requires sound knowledge on children psychology, subject matter, teaching learning and also the rules and regulations of the particular institutions. So, teachers are too often the servant of heads, advisors, researchers, text books, curriculum developers, and examination board or the Department of Education and Science.

(Richards & Farrell, 2005) state professional development is a process that takes place over time; starts and ends with formal training or graduate education. According to them, language teacher may rely on a number of learning strategies like workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analyzing critical incidents, case analysis, peer coaching, team teaching and action research which assist them for their professional development.

This article aims to explore the need and relevance of mentoring for teachers professional development; to find out the practices of mentoring in teacher professional development; and to derive ideas on mentoring and professional development.

B. Method

The available literature has been reviewed, interpreted, and analyzed to explore ideas, needs and importance of mentoring for the professional development of teachers. Intensive theories have been reviewed to arrive at the conclusions.

C. Results and Discussion

The analysis of the study is presented in the following themes of monitoring and professional development of teachers:

Perspectives on Mentoring

Portner (1998) says that mentoring is a powerful and effective way to provide support and assistances to neophyte teachers during their first year on the job. And it holds as a vehicle for educational reforms. Mentoring is an old idea but a new concept in teacher development. Mentoring is the process through which an experienced professional helps novice or less experienced (mentee) for the latter's professional and or personal development (Tomlinson, 2001).

Need for Mentoring

Mentoring provides a chance to be learnt in and become adjusted to a new system more easily. In this sense, it has become increasingly popular over the past few years and has been advertised as necessary in order for students and employees to flourish in their environment.

It is one of the prominent ways through which the teachers get exposed to the experience ones and develop them personally and professionally.

The novice teachers are those who do not have prior teaching experience. Mentoring has been the focus of much attention in the recent literature on initial teacher education, induction and approaches to professional development for inexperienced teachers. They should have a conceptual framework that allows them to organize content and pedagogical content knowledge in a way that facilitate their ability to retrieve and act upon their knowledge. Teacher education must help novice teachers learn to take control to their own learning and manage the complexities like in classroom through the tools of reflective practice, inquiry and analysis.

The Role of a Mentor

Mentor is a trusted counselor or guide or a wise, loyal advisor or coach where mentoring is a process of one-to-one, work place-based, contingent and personally appropriate support for the person during their professional acclimatization or integration, learning, growth and development. Mentors aim to train or develop their mentee's professional thinking skills (on, for and in action) and support mentees in aspect of the process of professional decision making or learning. According to (Malderez and Bodoczky , 1999), mentors are 'models' of a way of teaching, but more importantly of 'being a teacher' in the context, 'acculturators' enabling the mentee to become fully integrated into a specific context and community, 'supporters' of the mentee as a person during the often emotionally charged process of transformation that the learning can require, 'champions' or 'sponsors' of their mentee in terms of doing everything they can to ensure both the mentee's acceptance into the professional community and the availability of optimal conditions for learning, and finally, 'educators' in the sense of scaffolding the processes of mentee learning for becoming or being a teacher, for teaching and for learning teaching.

Mentoring is the two way process, i.e. mentor and mentee involvement. The success of mentoring depends upon the intentional and collaborative involvement of mentor and mentee. There must be mutual trust between mentor and mentee, where mentors' primary role is to bring a mentee to others experienced teachers' level of professionalism. Thus, mentor should have strong educational background, knowledge of mentoring context areas, skills and experience with working with adult learners, related professional experience, and commitment to a code of conduct and confidentiality of work.

In a mentoring relationship the mentor shares knowledge, skills, information, and perspectives to foster the personal and professional growth of the mentee. Thus, supporting and guiding the novices in their profession, willing to share information, respectful and committed to providing time to be with the new teacher, providing advice and information, and being reflective about own practice, etc. are the roles that the mentors have to perform.

Benefits of Mentoring

Mentoring is defined as "a relationship between two people with learning and development as its purpose" (Megginson & Garvey, 2004 as cited in Brockbank McGill, 2006). They further state that mentoring is primarily for the mentee as the mentee's dream" is central to mentoring. Though, the benefits of mentoring do not only confine novice teachers, it is

helpful to mentors and for School environment as well. Benefits of mentoring for novice teachers are: it improves self- confidence, offers professional development, provides advice and information, encourages reflection on practice, provides personal support, improves effectiveness, develop awareness of culture, politics, and philosophy of the organizations. Similarly, for experienced teacher (mentor) mentoring refreshes their own view of work, enhances job satisfaction, and develops professional relationship.

Mentoring helps people to understand how an institution's values are realized in the institutions. It helps people feel that they are making a worthwhile contribution, and has strategic development implications and often supports an institution's development and training strategy. It can make a contribution to the delivery of the mission and strategy and the achievement of an institution's objectives and further helps to uphold the organizational values of a school.

Ultimately, mentoring helps individuals to develop within an organizational framework. Furthermore, this process encourages the mentor to more clearly identify their own practice, good practice, good, strategies, and practice for communicating to mentees. Mentors benefit by acquiring improved ways of working with people and satisfying the desire to help others; and the mentees benefit by developing confidence, learning more effectively and quickly, and acquiring new perspectives. In this manner, mentoring is helpful for both in the relationship.

Practices of Mentoring

Mentoring is the key for professional development of language teachers. It is regarded as the new concept in teacher development, though it is not totally a new concept because some aspects of mentoring have been implemented in the field of TD when the concept of education started. Various studies and practices of mentoring around the world have been carried out a lot in various educational institutions either formally or informally. Over the last two decades, mentoring has been very popular especially in teacher development in America, Europe and Australia which is effective for students' learning as well.

The practice of mentoring beginning teachers emerged in the 1980 as a professional development strategy (Policy Research Report, 2000) for achieving a variety of goals. One goal focuses solely on teachers who are just entering the profession, while two others extend the benefits of mentoring to other educators in the school and district community.

Teacher Development

Development in general term refers to the gradual improvement of a situation to some better state. The concept of teacher development is not so old. Teacher development is a never ending process. In the words of Underhill (1986, as cited in Head & Taylor, 1997), teacher development (TD) is a process of becoming "the best kind of teacher that I personally can be" (p.1). It is a continuous process, not a onetime seminar. Teacher development is centered on personal awareness of the possibilities for change and of what influences change process. It is motivated by teachers' own questioning of who they are and what they do rather than by any external agenda.

Teacher development starts from the very beginning and continues until the retirement professionally. Teacher development cannot be complete; it is a lifelong process. According

to (Rossner 1992, as cited in Gnawali, 2008), teacher development has the following key areas: Developing language and other skills like counseling, meditation and computing; New experiences, challenges and opportunities for teachers to broaden their repertoire and take on new challenges and responsibilities; Needs and wants of the individual teacher in ways that suit that individual; and a bottom-up approach in decision making about what developing teachers need.

So, teacher development is not a short process but a long and continuous one. It serves a long term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of teachers' understanding of teaching and of themselves as teachers. Teachers may be involved in self- reflection and evaluation, develop specialized knowledge and skills about many aspects of teaching, expand their knowledge through research, taking various roles and responsibilities, etc. to develop their professionalism.

In the words of (Head and Taylor, 1997), teacher development can prepare teachers for such situations as it is “a reflective way of approaching whatever it is that we are doing as teachers, and at whatever level of experience we are doing it”. According to them (1997, p. 4), some of the characteristics of teacher development are as follows:

It deals with the needs and wants of the individual teacher in ways that suit that individual. The needs may be many and diverse- from confidence- building to language awareness or technical expertise.

Much of the TD is seen as relating to new experiences, new challenges, and the opportunity for teachers to broaden their repertoire and take on new responsibilities and challenges. This helps them to fight a feeling of jadedness and also to develop their careers as well as themselves.

TD is not just to do with language teaching or event teaching: it's also about language development (particularly for teachers whose native language is not English), counseling skills, assertiveness training, confidence-building, computing, meditation, cultural broadening- almost anything, in fact.

TD, in most teachers' opinions, has to be 'bottom up', not dished out by managers according to their own view of what development teachers need. This does not mean to say that managers have no role in it nor does it mean that managers should stop organizing in-service or other training courses.

Teacher Career Cycle

Profession is a vocation which carries the sense of public service and personal development. Like other profession, teaching is also the profession since it is also dedicated to public good. They have also their own life cycle which is called teachers' professional life cycle.

Regarding the phases of teachers' professional life cycle, Tsui (2003) outlines in the following ways as:

This is the first stage of teacher life cycle. Beginner teachers go through the 'survival' stage where they are preoccupied with their own survival in the classroom. They feel diffident, inadequate, and ill-prepared. (Huberman, 1993a) observes this is also "a phase of discovery where teachers are excited by the fact that they are now a teacher with their own students" (as cited in Tsui, 2003). This is also the phase of "exploration".

Stabilization phase

In this stage, teachers consolidate their experience from the first phase, gain confidence in teaching, and master teaching skills. They are more flexible in their classroom management and better to handle unpredictable situations. According to (Tsui 2003), "This phase is marked by a move away from concerns about self to concerns about instruction and the impact of their instruction on students". In this phase, teachers became committed to teaching. Negative experience in this phase could lead to a phase of self- doubt.

Experimentation and diversification phase

According to Huberman (1993a), some teachers go to a phase of "experimentation" and "diversification". After crossing the second phase, teachers get motivated the wish to increase their impact in the classroom and to seek new challenges they conduct personal experiments using different instructional methods and materials as well as a variety of classroom management skills. Teachers in this stage experiment and get diversified because of their desire to change themselves in their profession. In the words of(Katz 1972, as cited in Tsui, 2003), "This phase corresponds to what some other teacher-development studies have referred to as a "renewal stage" where teacher look for innovation". Huberman refers to this phase as "reassessment" phase.

Serenity phase

Here, teachers are less vulnerable to others' perceptions of them. This is the age of "Serenity" in which teachers speak of "being able to accept myself as I am not as others would have me be" (Huberman, 1993a, as cited in Tsui, *ibid.*). There is decline in professional investment and enthusiasm, but greater confidence, more tolerance, and spontaneity is seen in the classroom. It is the stage where teachers' relationship with students becomes more distanced. Teachers are also followed by a conservatism and resistance to and skepticism about innovation, increased complaints about students and colleagues. Though this conservatism is closely related to age in most cases, it is not always the right. A Swiss data in Huberman's study shows that the most conservative teachers in his study were actually the youngest teachers.

Disengagement phase

In this stage teachers want to disengage themselves from professional commitments and allow more time for their own personal engagements. Disengagement can take the form of withdrawing and investing their time and effort elsewhere as a result of disappointment with the system or reconciling the reconciling between what they had set out to achieve and what

they have actually achieved. The disengagement can be "bitter" or "serene" (Huberman, 1993b, as cited in Tsui, 2003)

D. Conclusion

From the available literature it is concluded that mentoring is helping, guiding, assisting and coaching to novice teachers by the experienced one. It helps them to develop their self-confidence, improve their personal and professional well-being, and enhance commitment to students, school and profession. With the help of mentoring novice teachers can get ideas about practical aspects of the profession. Novice teachers require theoretical knowledge about how to teach in the classroom, which method they should use and how to address students but they do not know how to implement that knowledge into practice. In this case teacher mentoring is essential. It is equally important for both novice and experienced teachers. Novice teachers need help and there is the great relevance of mentoring in every educational institution of Nepal. English language teachers usually take help from senior teachers. They take help from school administration, students, parents, members from a society, and head teachers. Mentoring helps people grow professionally and personally. Mentoring guides, coaches and helps the beginners for their better performance in the classroom and helps them to manage their school off time management and economic management with better preparation of their lessons.

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