AN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE INSPIRED TEACHER PILOTMENTORING SCHEME IN BOTSWANA: A PROPOSAL

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ABSTRACT

Teaching practice, which comprises a teaching internship and/or fieldwork undertaken by prospective teachers for an annual period of seven weeks, is an essential component of all the teacher education programmes offered at the University of Botswana's Faculty of Education. The general aim of teaching practice is to introduce prospective teachers to real teaching situations and routines under the guidance of suitably qualified professionals. In view of changes such as semesterization, escalating enrolments and rising costs of teaching practice, which threaten to compromise quality, the paper argues that there is need to establish a school-based mentoring scheme that will provide the needed teaching supervision expertise at school level. The scheme will be informed by lessons from African customary education. Such a scheme will not be altogether new, as in the Botswana of yesterday, indigenous knowledge systems and institutions such as bogwera and bojale, the tribe, the kgotla and family formed the basis of creating and sustaining knowledge. Graduates from these institutions included traditional doctors, priests, teachers, nurses, legislators, economists and many other people of outstanding responsibility in their communities.

Keywords: Teaching practice, internship, African traditional education, mentoring, indigenous knowledge systems, Botswana.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes briefly the structure, aims and objectives of the current teaching practice process as practised in the Faculty of Education of the University of Botswana. It looks at the concept of indigenous knowledge and the structure, aims and objectives of the customary education system in Africa, with special emphasis on Botswana, and how these sustained traditional societies. The paper then draws conclusions on how the two can be fused to inform a school-based mentoring system for prospective teachers. Lessons from other sources are also taken into account.

THE CURRENT MODEL OF TEACHING PRACTICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

The model followed by the Faculty of Education at the University of Botswana has been in place since the inception of teaching practice at the institution. However, some unprecedented changes in higher education, resulting from the increased demand for student participation in their own education, escalating expenses, shrinking budgets and growing enrolment in teacher education courses have also affected the model over the years. In the 2002/2003 academic year, there were 15 programmes involved in teaching practice, with a total of 723 student teachers, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: 2002/03 student teachers and programmes involved in teaching practice in the Faculty of Education, University of Botswana

NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PROGRAMME
304	PGDE
61	B.Ed Sc 111
79	B.Ed Sc 11
23	DSE 111
31	DSE 11
22	B.Ed 1V Home Economics
10	B.Ed 111 Home Economics
15	B.Ed 11 Home Economics
18	DIPLOMA 111 Home Economics
28	DIPLOMA 11 Home Economics
14	B.Ed 1V Physical Education
30	B.Ed 111 Physical Education
24	B.Ed 11 Physical Education
40	B.Ed 11 Special Education
24	B.Ed 111 Special Education

The expenditure on these programmes amounted to P924 000 (pula) for staff travel and accommodation, more than P2 000 000 in student allowances and more than P150 000 for other logistics and materials related to teaching practice.

In the model currently followed at the University of Botswana, student teachers are posted to cooperating schools and have to find their own accommodation for a block of time (seven weeks). During this period lecturers from the University of Botswana and school-based cooperating teachers assess their teaching performance and award them a grade (Legese 1992; Morara 2000). According to Koosimile, Monyatsi, Ngwako & Chakalisa (2003), the aims and objectives of teaching practice are to:

- Promote teaching practice as an opportunity for self-realization, *enabling* student teachers to proactively read classroom transactions, *assess* different interpretations of teaching practice, form views and express them in a reflective manner, and *enhancing* a student teacher's career potential and breadth of experience;
- Foster and promote positive attitudes to teaching practice, defined broadly as an attempt to clarify and interrelate important areas of knowledge in the practical context of developing and nurturing work-related skills;
- Foster collaboration of all stakeholders in teaching practice in a way that will contribute towards the quality and throughput of teacher preparation in the Faculty of Education;
- Bring together different supervisors with their varied skills and experiences to facilitate the provision of high quality supervision and mentoring in teaching practice, and enable student teachers to critically examine both educational theory and practice within the appropriate contemporary educational framework of Botswana;
- Equip student teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to enable them to meaningfully extend their professional role to education and human resource development in Botswana.

Chipeta & Mannathoko (1993) further point out that teaching practice provides an opportunity for student teachers not only to put into practice the theoretical knowledge acquired from coursework programmes, but also to be supervised and assessed accordingly by teacher educators and experienced teachers. It can therefore be argued that the general aim of teaching practice should be to introduce prospective teachers to teaching and its routines under the guidance of a qualified professional within a broader framework of developing skills, attitudes and competencies in the profession.

Although literature review reveals many models of teaching practice and internship followed by different professions worldwide, the current model used at the University of Botswana borrows heavily from the competency-based model. This point is emphasized by Nicholls (2002: 138), who claims that "increasingly competency models are emerging in many of the professions including the training of nurse practitioners and teachers". The model according to Nicholls (2002) starts from the premise that the skills to be learnt for a given profession are a set of pre-defined competencies that each individual has to master and display competence in. The assessors and supervisors (in this case lecturers and school-based cooperating teachers) take on the role of a systematic trainer, observing the student teacher on the basis of a predetermined observation schedule (Lesson Observation Report Form) and then provide feedback to the student. What the supervisors are doing is coaching the student teacher in a list of agreed behaviours that form part of a list of competencies specified by the Teaching Practice Committee and/or departmental boards.

The main stakeholders in the current model are the Ministry of Education as the sponsor, the schools as the hosts of student teachers, the students themselves,

and the University of Botswana as teacher educators. A partnership among these stakeholders has grown over the years, and has somehow developed into a policy that is recognized by all. For instance, in the cooperating schools, there is a school-based Teaching Practice Coordinator, who should be a member of the senior management team so that he or she is in a position to influence decisions. In the new dispensation, schools carry out the orientation of their student teachers instead of the university in recognition of the fact that schools and their environments differ considerably; and have different expectations, a fact that adds quality in diversity. This practice also empowers schools to train their prospective colleagues.

THE NATURE OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

In this paper, indigenous education is used in a similar context to African traditional/customary education, the aims of which include:

- Preserving the cultural heritage of the extended family, clan and tribe;
- Adapting members of the new generation to their physical environment and teaching them how to control and use it;
- Explaining to them that their own future, and that of their community, depends on the understanding and perpetuation of the institution, laws, language and values inherited from the past (Datta 1984; Vanqa 1996).

According to Vanqa (1996), "traditional education was essentially practical training which was intended to enable the individual to play a successful role in society". It involved all the human senses, while emphasizing a hands-on approach. Children participated in the social process of adult activities by identification and imitation, and learnt through observing adult practices and emulating them. Skill acquisition dominated traditional education, and these skills were generally acquired through observation and imitation of adults by the learners. The education of children was so important that it was shared by the society, parents and other children.

Datta (1984) posits that the content of African customary education grew out of the physical, and more importantly, the social, situation. As elsewhere in the world, education in Africa was holistic and socially determined. It emphasized practical over theoretical modes of skills acquisition and knowledge generation. Indigenous education was generated through practical means; emulation of elders by youngsters was the main mode of learning, which entailed a hands-on approach. Tribal legends and proverbs were told and retold by the fireside in the evenings, and through them much was transmitted to the younger generation and kept alive. This is emphasized by Datta (1984: 3) who declares that:

> Riddles were used to test the children's judgement, myths to explain the origins of the tribe and the genesis of man. Oral tradition, narrated with care and repetition, also constituted the African child's learning.

Activities such as herding goats and cattle, farming and hunting provided scenarios for boys that are today provided in the form of libraries, laboratories,

classrooms and educational tours or excursions, as it was during such activities that they learnt the names of plants, trees, animals and insects, as well as their uses and the dangers associated with them. These activities took place under the watchful, experienced and sometimes professional eyes of fathers and uncles, including personal doctors or diviners. The kitchens, forests where firewood was collected, river ponds where water was fetched and fields where harvests were collected all provided learning experiences for the girls, who were also under the watchful, educated, experienced and professional eyes of the mothers and aunts, including the grandmothers, most of whom were professional midwives in their own way. In this way, not only skills but also accepted behaviours and attitudes were inculcated into the young.

Among the Sotho-Tswana peoples, initiation schools offered organized instruction within the indigenous or traditional customary system of education. Schapera (1994) describes in detail the initiation ceremonies of *bogwera* and *bojale*. Referring to *bogwera,* he argues that it marked the transition from boyhood to manhood, with all its privileges and responsibilities. A man who had not passed through the ceremony was always regarded as a boy, no matter how old he was. He could not participate in many of the tribal activities meant for men, such as tribal discussions and marriages, and women regarded him with contempt. According to Schapera (1994: 104), some of the essential features of *bogwera* were:

- All eligible boys were initiated simultaneously in groups away from the villages for a period of three months;
- At the camp, they were first circumcised by well-trained elders of varying but relevant professions, such as doctors, diviners, nurses, teachers and hunters;
- They were then taught a number of secret formulae and songs, admonishing them to honour, obey and support the chief, to be ready to endure hardships and even death for the sake of the tribe, to honour and ungrudgingly obey old people, and to abandon all boyish practices;
- They were taught tribal traditions and religious beliefs, the tribal songs of war and self-glorification, and were made to participate in symbolic dances of many kinds;
- They were subjected to starvation and blows, discomfort and actual torture, and rigorous and irksome taboos of many kinds;
- They were made to participate in strenuous hunting expeditions, all with the objective of hardening them.

All these activities were done under the guidance and supervision of experienced elders representing all segments of society. The curriculum was diversified to cater for the various needs of society, and as Datta (1984: 9) points out, “it was during the ceremony and the accompanying training that a major part of the tribal mythology, accumulated knowledge and skills, and appropriate attitudes were transferred to the young initiates”. Adults had to be in attendance in order to impress upon the participants the significance of the occasion.

The girls also underwent a similar process called *bojale*. The ceremony had scope for physiological, social and moral education; for example, the physiological education under the senior, experienced, knowledgeable and professional women of the community included teaching healthy sex habits and knowledge of the procreation process. Some of the training aspects dealt with:

- The rights and obligations of women in relation to the whole community
- Moral training, which involved instruction in the art of self-discipline and control and trials of courage.

From the day the girl left the initiation ceremony, she was expected to behave in a different way. The long separation of about six weeks to two months, the training the girl received and the different role expectations of society had such a psychological impact on the girl that she would really feel and behave like a grown up woman.

THE PROPOSED MENTORSHIP MODEL

Before exploring the proposed model, the paper operationalizes the concept of 'mentorship'. According to Morara (2000: 14), "mentorship is a process of staff development where an expert guides a novice to develop comprehensively and understand what is entailed in the profession". Carmin (1993: 10) defines mentoring as a complex, interactive process, occurring between individuals of differing levels of experience and expertise, which incorporates interpersonal or psychological development, career and/or educational development, and socialization functions into relationships". To the extent that the parameters of mutuality and comparability exist in the relationship, the potential outcomes of respect, professionalism, collegiality and role fulfilment will result. Moreover, the mentoring process occurs in a dynamic relationship within a given milieu.

McIntyre & Hagger (1996: 147) contend that mentoring can be conceptualized in the following three ways:

- It involves a personal relationship in which a relative novice is supported by a more experienced peer in coming to terms with a new role.
- It involves active guidance, teaching and challenging of the protégé by the mentor, who accordingly needs to claim some expertise, wisdom and authority.
- It involves the management and implementation of a planned curriculum, tailored to the needs of the individual.

Nicholls (2002: 133) sees mentoring as an intentional and nurturing process that fosters the growth and development of an individual. For him, it is an insightful process in which the wisdom of the member is acquired and applied by the protégé; it is a supportive and protective process and is about being a role model.

The foregoing definitions and characteristics of mentoring reveal similarities with the aims and objectives of African customary education in many respects.

Another aspect that may be of significance to the envisaged model is the fact that culturally, most of the local student teachers were brought up in an environment conducive to mentoring.

The incorporation of some of the principles of customary education into the current teaching practice programme may go a long way towards meeting some of its aims and objectives. Firstly, as illustrated, customary education was essentially practical training, during which trainees learnt by observing adult practices and emulating them. For instance, girls were under the tutelage of experienced women, while boys were guided by the men. The adults who stayed with the trainees were responsible for the overall education of the children for the entire duration of *bogwera* and *bojale*. The education of the young under these experienced adults included the transfer of tribal mythology, accumulated knowledge and skills, and appropriate attitudes. Although the present teaching practice model also attempts to take cognizance of such features, there are some shortcomings, which could be addressed by the application of certain of the principles of customary education. For instance, although in the present dispensation there are cooperating teachers in the schools, they are not all equally experienced and qualified to train prospective teachers, as most of them have themselves only recently graduated from college or university. They are mere classroom teachers who are subject specialists, but are lacking in methodology, and are therefore not capable of effectively training other teachers. For the process to be effective, there is need for training, as it incorporates personal support and the more rigorous notion of professional development, leading to enhanced competence. The cooperating schools and their teachers need to be empowered to be at least on an equal footing with the university. The weighting of their assessment should be enhanced, as they are in a position to make informed decisions related to all aspects of the student teacher, by virtue of the length of time they spend with them. Their role should be magnified and recognized to the extent that it should be made part of their job description and taken into consideration during performance appraisal.

It should also be considered that teaching practice is limited to just seven weeks, whereas the ceremonies of *bogwera* and *bojale* lasted for longer periods, which suggests that there is need for more time if student teachers are to gain from the process. Even before the initiates engaged in these traditional ceremonies, it was the duty of every parent, and indeed every member of society, to prepare the child for adulthood. Unfortunately, in pre-service teacher education programmes at the University of Botswana, foundation courses and their concerns for the aims of education are unrelated to methods courses, with their emphasis on means. Method courses are also disconnected from curriculum courses, while both are separated from practice. The secondary teacher education programme within which we are working is disjointed, fragmented and confusing, as it is aimed at training based on a delivery conception of teaching, with emphasis on learning and practising discrete skills.

To address such discrepancies, it would be more effective if courses leading to teaching practice are related and involve significant training and fieldwork practice, with students being encouraged to visit schools of their own free will

throughout the year and conduct mini research projects and studies, with their lecturers giving guidance and support. For instance, issues such as lesson planning and the concept of learner-centred approaches should not be tackled in a theoretical manner only, when schools are so readily accessible. The lecturers should also desist from the 'do as I tell you, not as I do' syndrome and practise what they teach. They should be role models, which is another very important aspect of mentoring. Student teachers need the guidance and support of veteran teachers and lecturers; they need nurturing, rather than classroom observation in situations without clear and well-defined supporting structures or personnel. Cooperating teachers should play their role in moulding prospective teachers.

It should be borne in mind that indigenous knowledge developed out of the physical environment and the social needs of communities. It comprised mainly practical skills in preparation for the duties of adult life. Learning was meant to take place in close contact with nature, and self-restraint, endurance of hardship and pride in membership in the group were stressed.

With respect to social needs, teaching practice should be based on current needs and the dictates of human resources requirements and market forces, rather than political or other whims. Teachers in teaching practice should be trained in what is expected of the ideal practitioner, similar to the growing child in traditional education, which stressed at every stage the importance of strict adherence to the accepted moral code. In other words, the role of the teacher in the community and school should reflect the teacher as a surrogate of middle-class morality, as reflected in such attributes as correct speech, good manners, modesty, prudence, honesty, responsibility and friendliness. He or she should be a person of refined taste and sophistication, an explorer in the world of ideas, and an expert in child development. These are the expectations of communities. Teaching practice is the practical component of teacher education and should be treated as such. In customary education, boys staged mock battles and made model huts and cattle pens; girls made dolls, played the role of a responsible wife and cooked imaginary meals. In other words, they were taught to be creative and they practised that. Unlike the Spartan situation, where the child was exposed to risks and dangers at certain times in order to test his or her courage and endurance, honesty and sense of responsibility, student teachers are denied the opportunity of being creative and original by being expected to render unto the lecturers what they were taught at the university. For instance they are provided with a certain number of manila sheets, lesson plan formats, and other stationery, which predetermine what the lecturer expects, rather than the situation as assessed by the student teacher. These formats are also determined by the demands of the lesson observation report form, which is very prescriptive.

It is a truism that individual schools differ from one another and that their demands are therefore also different. As in the traditional scenario, where trainees were expected to adapt to their physical environment in order to use it fully to their own benefit and that of the community, student teachers should thus be allowed, within the most professional of parameters, to practise with minimum hindrance from professional bureaucracy. As Segall (2002:4) explains,

pre-service teacher education should take cognizance of the knowledge that student teachers possess before they indulge in teaching practice or internship because:

> Years of primary, secondary, and tertiary schooling as well as interactions outside of school with the media and other socializing environments have already provided student teachers with a multitude of experiences and images as to what it means to teach and be taught.

In the past, trainees learnt through listening to stories, wandering into the bushes, among the hills, and along streams or rivers from a tender age, and experimenting and testing new grounds, in which situations, the adult hand was never very far away. By the same token, student teachers should be encouraged to explore different and varied methods, including research, in order to consolidate their knowledge bases. Student teachers have been observed trying to draw green grass in summer instead of harnessing the provisions of nature, or distorting the genealogy of the local chiefs when the chief is in his office. Our student teachers should be allowed to harmonize their knowledge with the way local communities survive, rather than attempt to transform societies and adapt new outlooks by altogether discarding the traditional ones. Prospective teachers should, in addition to teaching, be expected to become active members of their host communities through self-initiated secondary projects; they could attend community meetings or volunteer at the local nursery school or in many community projects. Such involvement would open their eyes to what adult and independent life entails. The communities in which schools are situated are rich in knowledge and skills that could help in the development of student teachers' knowledge. Our student teachers should be made to learn and appreciate the roles of parent teacher associations and boards of governors in the schools, and the reasons why the Botswana government is involving them in the education of the child. They can only thoroughly appreciate and harness this by being involved as members of the communities in which they live. Their involvement should be recognized by being reflected in the final grades they get for teaching practice. In the past, the environment was a laboratory that was used with great care but liberally. In the past, education was meant to build and mould the whole being, adopting a holistic approach to human development. Today, the situation is so different that a student teacher who attends a lesson inappropriately dressed could probably still pass if he or she got the content and competencies right. Some of the aspects that were emphasized in customary education, such as responsibility, respect for authority and adherence to the dictates of the job, are sometimes regarded as secondary by the current model and are neglected in most cases. Segall (2002) emphasizes that, as with any socializing environment, pre-service education should help build the attitudes prospective teachers are enticed to assume, the sensitivities they are encouraged to develop, and the things they learn to see, feel and value. They learn these because the environment is organized in such a way that it permits or encourages them to learn, or even insists that they do so.

The foregoing arguments support the view that prospective teachers should be under the guidance of experts, or mentors, as they are referred to. As Nleya (2003: 137) posits, initiation institutions, like modern schools, were responsible for skills training, with specialists in selected areas imparting skills such as weaving, carving, hunting, fighting and farming to the youth, so that the demands of their societies could be met. Given the background on how indigenous knowledge systems sustained societies in Africa and how the current teaching practice is structured and carried out at the University of Botswana, a school-based mentoring model, tailored according to the apprenticeship model, would be ideal. According to Maynard & Furlong (1995), the apprenticeship model was propounded by Aristotle, whereby "some skills, including many that are difficult, complex and of high moral and cultural value, are best learnt by emulation of experienced practitioners and by supervised practice under guidance". The role of the mentor is to give firsthand experience in real situations; for instance, student teachers engage in real teaching situations, experience and interact with real students in real full-profile classrooms, and apply real and suitable classroom strategies and subject matter. The importance of such an approach, according to Maynard & Furlong (1995: 79), is that in the early stages of teacher training, the purpose of that practical experience is to allow trainees to start from concepts, schemas or scripts of the process of teaching. In order to begin to 'see', however, trainees need an interpreter. They need to work alongside a mentor who can explain the significance of what is happening. In the proposed model, the student teachers work alongside the cooperating experienced teachers in the schools (the mentors), taking responsibility for a small part of the work and gradually gaining confidence and skills, so that the reliance on the mentor becomes less as the student teacher (the mentee) becomes more competent. The experienced teachers in the schools share their expertise with the trainees.

The expansion of the education system of Botswana in the mid 1980s gave rise to a demand for teachers, especially at secondary school level. The Botswana government therefore built two new colleges to train teachers for the junior secondary level. The old teacher training colleges for primary school level, which in the past had issued certificates, were upgraded to diploma level. The two new colleges and the old teacher training colleges were then referred to as colleges of education. These colleges have long been using schools to train teachers and have developed a mutually cordial relationship. This forms a potential base that the university could utilize. Nleya (1999: 155) recommends that the catchment areas of the colleges are prime grounds for a Teacher Pilot Mentoring Scheme (TPMS). The scheme could serve as a stronghold for the provision of early field experiences for students before embarking on teaching practice, and during teaching practice in real classrooms where they handle large numbers of pupils. The TPMS could coordinate with and support the efforts of the colleges in the provision of early field experiences and general professional skills development for the students. The catchment areas of the colleges of education are essentially the same as those that students from the University of Botswana use during their teaching practice, and these recommendations thus have implications for the teaching practice programme at the university.

CONCLUSION

In order to facilitate this model, the assessment mode should be reviewed, and perhaps even redesigned and focused anew, in order not to rely on classroom observation alone. A good hunter was not judged by polishing the gun on a particular day and killing an animal, but by being a good hunter, in a holistic manner. Dedicated, experienced and qualified lecturers from the University of Botswana could be allowed to augment what the schools are doing by visiting the schools once only during the teaching practice period as a quality assurance measure, and having classroom observations and scheduled interviews with student teachers and their mentors. They would then assign a mark. The bulk of the training should be left to the schools. Fifty per cent of the assessment should be based on a research project compiled by the student under the guidance of the mentor. Such a model would save the university millions of pula, as very few lecturers would be involved in the supervision of student teachers. Another advantage is that quality would be assured, as someone who had been with the student as a mentor on a daily basis, giving informed guidance, would not assess him or her on the basis of classroom performance alone, but would take other aspects of teaching into account.

Mentoring is not only needed for prospective teachers, but also plays a vital role in the staff development of qualified teachers. If properly done, the schools, and ultimately the system, could benefit from a pool of well-trained mentors who could serve the staff development needs of other colleagues. Such mentoring could also benefit pupils. It is developmental in approach, and could complement current methods that are encouraged, such as the learner-centred approach, in which the teacher (as classroom manager) facilitates and supports pupils' learning, as opposed to the situation in the past, when the teacher was feared and disliked for using the old trademark of teaching, the stick.

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