

Preservice Teachers' Feedback on Issues and Ideas for Improvement on Mentoring Practice During Clinical Experience Program

Suzana Mohd Ali, Mohd Razali Mohd Zain

Politeknik Kuala Terengganu, Jalan Sultan Ismail, Terengganu, Malaysia
English Language Teaching Centre, Ministry of Education Malaysia

Received: June 14, 2016
Accepted: August 29, 2016

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to obtain student teachers' view on the mentoring treatments they received from their mentor teachers during their 16 week clinical experience program (CEP). This study involved 30 student teachers who had just completed their 16 CEP in the previous week. The program only comprised of 30 student teachers who attended CEP for that particular semester. Thus, small numbers of participants taking part in this study were unavoidable and unintentional. The design of the study utilized qualitative methods based on the written feedback on the issues faced during their CEP. The student teachers' feedback was analyzed using thematic content analysis to look for emergent themes. The emergent themes for issues faced during CEP were mentoring action plan, doubted pedagogical skills, personality, students' teachers' issues and communication. Out of the 30 responses on ideas of improvement, the researcher was able to classify them into 5 main areas. The areas identified were to have a supervised mentoring program, standardized lesson, improving leadership quality and time management. A few of the participants were contacted via telephone as participant data-check procedure or to clarify so ambiguous responses. The discussion of the findings was linked to Hudson's Five Factor Mentoring Model to create theoretical awareness for other practitioners about mentoring practices. This study values student teachers' feedback them by taking into account issues and their ideas for improvement. It is hoped by better understanding mentoring practices during clinical experience for pre-service teachers can help in improving the quality of mentoring during CEP.

KEYWORDS: Mentor Teachers (MT), Cooperating teachers (CT) Student Teachers (ST) Clinical Experience Program (CEP).

INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century Education Standard has moved citizen of the world to strive for the best education. The fast changing trends and expectations in education are phenomenal. Education, teacher education included has to be prepared to face the escalating needs and demand of the century. Teachers are the factor of a successful nation. The teacher is acknowledged as a centerpiece in any educational changes [1]. Realizing the important role of teachers, teacher education is seen as pivotal in developing competent teachers who are fit to be on the fast lane of educational changes. Mentoring has been recognized as one of the best approaches in shaping preservice teachers in the professions. Mentoring currently plays an important role in the teacher education scenes [2].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Preservice teacher mentoring is a type of structured mentorship model that pairs experienced teachers with preservice teachers for short periods of time within a teacher education program. During the CEP, there are 3 major players involve actively in making the pairing works. They are preservice teachers, the supervisors who provide the foundational knowledge and the practicing teachers who serve as mentor teachers [3]. Each player also has distinctive roles in making the collaboration work [4].

Mentoring helps teachers to develop the capacity to identify, analyze and evaluate their own actions and practices to improve upon students' learning [5]. As novices establish themselves as teachers and gain confidence in their practices and professionalism, they gradually decrease their need for mentorship. The benefits of mentoring do not cease to exist when the mentoring experience ends. In fact, mentoring experiences is described as "relationships that multiply learning opportunities". "After successful mentoring experiences, many share their knowledge and expertise with others". Mentoring is thus a powerful tool for engaging school staff in continuous professional development. Mentoring experiences at the preservice stage are important because they help preservice teachers to become accustomed to working in classrooms and schools, allowing them to face professional challenges in a safe and supported environment [6].

Mentor Teachers (MT) Role

The role of a mentor is varied according to the purpose of the mentoring practice. A mentor usually guides, support and facilitate the mentee throughout the practice. Such as listening, questioning [7] and enhancing, rather than telling, directing and restricting [8] are more applicable to the practice. Most of the mentoring scholars noted that the vital parts of the mentors' role are providing guidance, giving advice and having counsel sessions [9,10] with the mentee. These roles are crucial in helping mentees to analyze their own strengths and weaknesses, as to further develop their skills and knowledge for their own professional development [11]. It is agreeable that mentoring involves two parties whom the mentors should be seniors as they are more matured, resourceful as for them to give advice as well as to counsel the mentee [12].

Many roles can be played by mentors. As such, they can be described as a guide, advisor, counselor, instructor, sharer, supporter and even encourager [13, 14, 15]. In teaching education, mentors must not solely utilize the time in giving pedagogical guidance, emotional support and professional socialization but also need to be empathy and serve as role models [16] to their mentees. These roles are varied as such it begins with the teaching of the knowledge and skills, which need to be structured according to the event. It should be based on the context and eventually put it into practice in a real situation [17]. In short, mentor teachers have to perform multiple roles.

Mentor teachers guide and nurture preservice teachers through the field experience, customizing each teaching and learning component while the post-secondary faculty supervisor assists in matching preservice and mentor teachers that acts as a liaison between them [4]. Mentor teacher is valuable for all participants as it offers universities access to classrooms and mentorships, while also giving schools additional resources in the form of "inexpensive professional labor" [18]. When recognized as part of a greater professional development process, there is potential for shared learning and professional growth for all involved [19].

Mutual understanding between mentor and mentee is one of the success factors in mentoring. Hence, mentor teachers need to have the concerns and agreement from the mentees as to make sure that the roles and the strategies they use are suitable for the mentees' current stages of professional development. Thus, mentors and pre-service teachers can develop teaching knowledge while cooperating in a school context collectively [20].

A good mentor is a mentor who is capable to play the roles effectively. In the context of training a student to be a teacher, mentor has to play two roles i.e. general roles and leading roles. Generally, both mentors and mentees need to set the goals which are achievable for both of them. In establishing these goals, mentors need to provide resources and look for opportunities for development, help learners set high but achievable goals, make realistic plans, monitor progress, give feedback [21], be a role model [7] enhance the skills, assist the learner in solving problems and provide personal support and always motivate them [9]. Some of the leading roles are (1) training students in teaching particular subjects; (2) developing their understanding of how pupils learn; (3) training them in managing classes and assessing pupils; (4) supervising them in relation to school-based elements of the course; and (5) assessing their competence in subject application and classroom skills [10, 22]. Therefore, a mentor needs to be fully prepared to become a mentor to a student teacher as the success of school-based teacher training and teacher development highly depends on the knowledge, skill and personal qualities of the mentor [21].

As such, a mentor will need to understand (which may be partly intuitive) what a learner wants to achieve. As a matter of fact, the knowledge and the real experience of being in the organization are of the great help to the student teachers in developing the relationship [23]. Good mentors are (1) good motivators, perceptive and supportive besides fulfil their responsibilities to the mentees; (2) high performers, feel secured and unlikely to feel threatened by or denying the mentee's opportunity; (3) able to commit a responsibility for mentoring as part of their job description; (4) able to establish an appropriate professional relationship, sympathetic, accessible and knowledgeable especially about mentees' area of interest; (5) sufficiently senior in order to garner support from corporate structure, sharing the company's values and enable the mentee to access to resources and information; (6) good teachers in giving advice and instruction with less interference; (7) good moderators and negotiators [8].

Furthermore, a mentor should possess excellent interpersonal skills. A mentor must show that he is credible and dependable. The open approach should be practiced as this will demonstrate the accessibility of the openness of the mentor during the mentoring process. Other key behaviors such as personal organization or a managerial style must be clearly shown so that a learner might be able to develop the skills [7]. The art of questioning and observing are extremely important in developing the interpersonal skills. In addition, the analytical skills such as interpretation [24] and creative thinking [12] are partially required to become a good mentor. Most importantly, good mentors are reasonably committed and strive to better at their job. The qualities and skills of a mentor are vital to the effectiveness of the relationship because these brought a great influenced to the mentee and will depict the qualities of the linked mentor as well [7].

Nevertheless, a mentor needs to be supportive during the development process unconditionally. Regardless of either specific functional or technical skills at the end of the mentoring process, a mentee will be able to (1)

employ learning skills; (2) set own goals; (3) identify own learning needs and requirements; (4) plan own learning strategies; (5) listen attentively; (6) accept help and feedback; (7) take and manage the risks [7]. All in all, mentoring is not an additional management task. In fact, it serves as to enhance performance and to support people development naturally. As noted by [25], when someone mentors, one of the best ways one can pay back the favor is to mentor someone oneself. The good deed in the cycle of mentoring is about learning from someone and passing the wisdom along to someone else.

Hudson’s Five Factor Mentoring Model

The mentoring model, which was developed by Peter Hudson entails 5 main factors for quality mentoring [26]. The notion of educative mentoring which is “mentoring that helps novices learn to teach and develop skills and dispositions in order to continue learning in and from their practice” is embedded in this model [27].

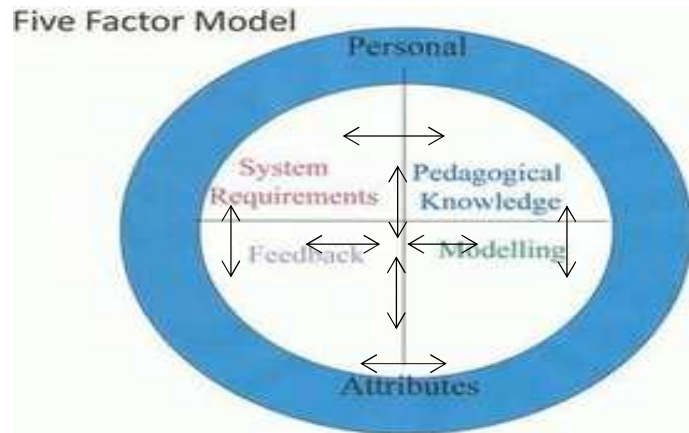


Figure 1: Hudson’s five factor mentoring model

This Five-Factor Mentoring Model has been widely and rigorously tested with significant numbers of mentors and mentees over a 10-year period. This model explains the intertwined relationship of the essential education system requirements, which lead to the need of pedagogical knowledge in order to enable mentors to model their effective teaching practices. In the process of professional development, mentors must provide an impressive feedback for the mentees’ continuous quality improvement. The model also depicts that personal attributes are extremely important and significant as this factor will facilitate the whole mentoring process [28].

METHODOLOGY

The design of the study utilized qualitative methods based on the written feedback on the issues faced during their CEP. The student teachers’ feedback was analyzed using thematic content analysis to look for emergent themes. The emergent themes for issues faced during CEP were mentoring action plan, doubted pedagogical skills, personality, students’ teachers’ issues and communication. Out of the 30 responses on ideas of improvement, the researcher was able to classify them into 5 main areas. The areas identified were to have a supervised mentoring program, standardized lesson, improving leadership quality and time management. A few of the participants were contacted via telephone as participant data-check procedure or to clarify some ambiguous responses. The discussion of the findings was linked to Hudson’s Five Factor Mentoring Model to create theoretical awareness for other practitioners about mentoring practices. This study values student teacher feedback on issues and their ideas for improvement as they are the 30 individuals who experienced the process hands-on.

Demographic Information

This section graphically presents a demographic overview of the 30 participants involved in the study.

Major/Specialization

Table 1: Number of respondents

Major	Frequency	Percentage
TESL	30	100.0

Age

Table 2: Frequency of age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
23	7	23.3
24	23	76.7
Total	30	100.0

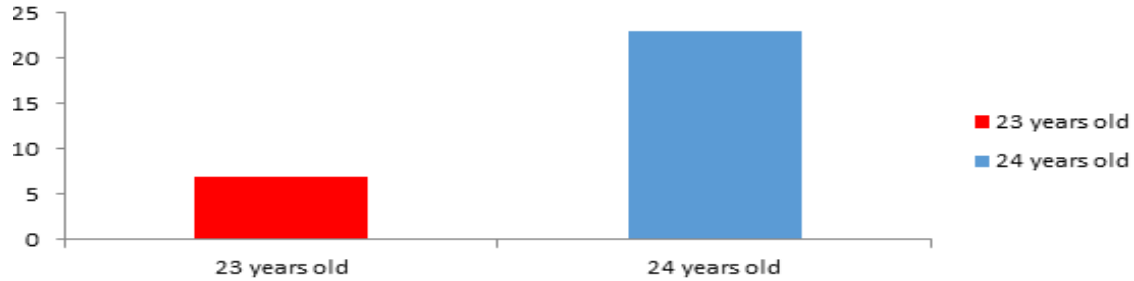


Figure 2: Age of respondents

Gender

Table 3: Type of gender

Gender	Frequency
Male	16
Female	14
Total	30

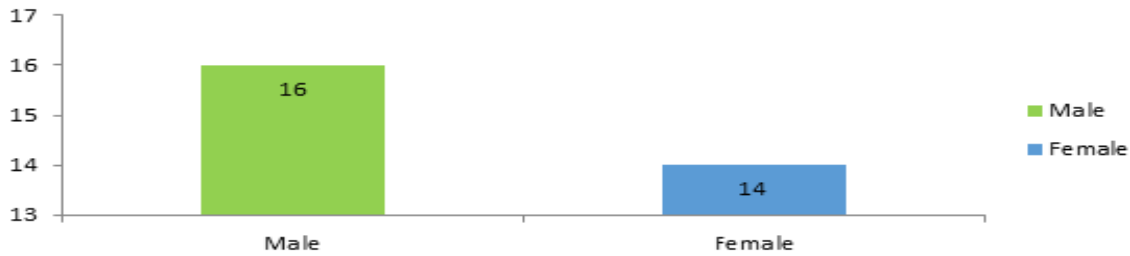


Figure 3: Number of respondent according to gender

Data Collection and Analysis

The study is designed by utilizing qualitative methods based on the written feedback on the issues faced during their CEP. A few of the participants were contacted via telephone as participant data-check procedure or to clarify some ambiguous responses. The discussion of the findings was linked to Hudson’s Five Factor Mentoring Model to create theoretical awareness for other practitioners about mentoring practices. This study values student teacher feedback on issues and their ideas for improvement as they are the 30 individuals who experienced the process hands-on.

FINDINGS

The emergent themes for issues faced during CEP were:

- Lack mentoring action plans
- Doubted pedagogical skills
- Mentor’s personality
- Students’ teachers’ personal issues
- Communication

Out of the 30 responses on ideas of improvement, the researcher was able to classify them into 5 main areas. The areas identified were as follows:

- To have a supervised mentoring program
- To plan standardized lesson
- To pay attention on improving leadership quality

- To improve time management skills

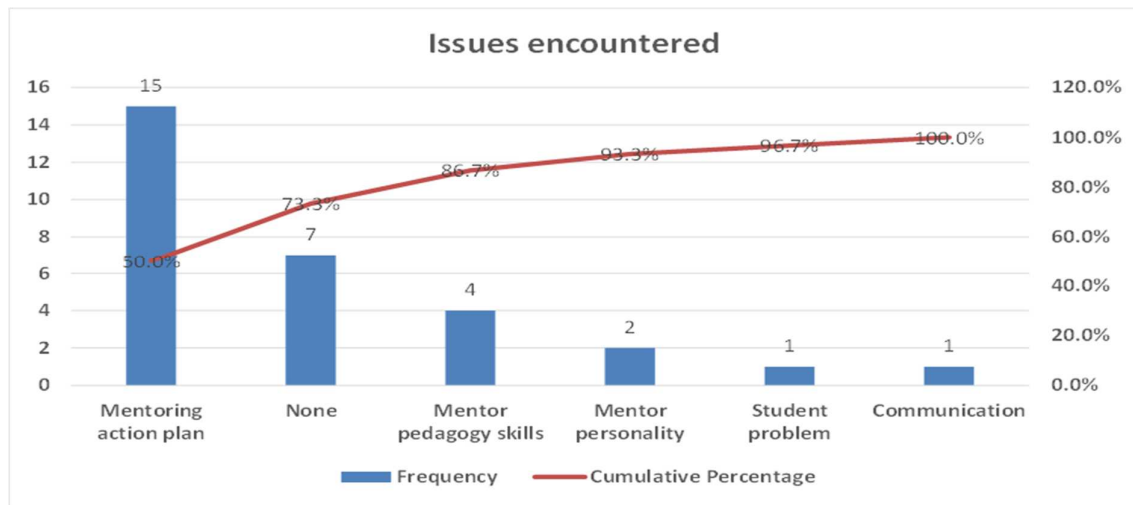


Figure 4: Frequency of issue encountered by the respondents

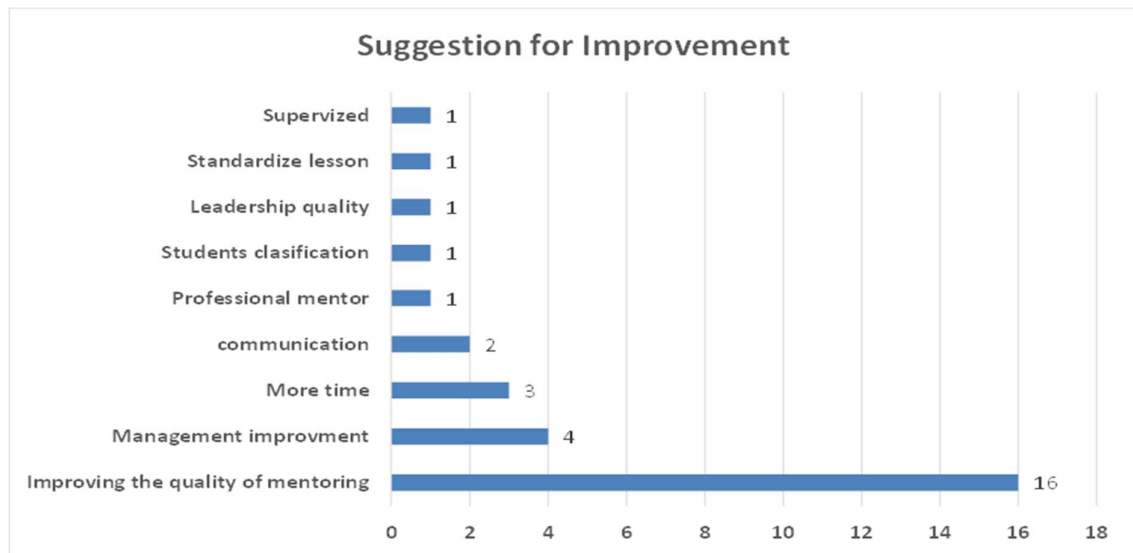


Figure 5: Number of suggestions for the improvement of the program

DISCUSSION

This section will link the findings presented with Hudson's Five Factor Mentoring Model. There are 5 major issues suggested by the findings and they are:

- Lack mentoring action plans
- Doubted pedagogical skills
- Mentor's personality
- Students' teachers' personal issues
- Communication

As for the pedagogical skills, the following pedagogical knowledge practices were identified in the literature for the experienced mentors to plan the strategies in order to enhance each practice:

- Planning
- Timetabling
- Preparation

- Teaching strategies
- Content knowledge
- Problem solving
- Classroom management
- Questioning skills
- Implementation
- Assessment
- Viewpoints [28]

The feedback also mentioned about mentor teachers' personality and communication as among issues that the student teachers faced during their CE. These two issues are related to the personal attributes of the mentor teachers. Comparatively, the following responses were gathered from the many MET programs which were delivered across Australia. These are the personal attributes of mentors noted by teachers, which are needed to assist the development of the preservice teachers.

Supportive-being supportive requires mentors who are approachable, making time by being there and always be in the same page and regard them as a team. Mentors need to be an active listener. Mentors should be able to scaffold the listening and providing feedback for improvement. Occasionally, mentors need to praise and reward the mentees for some good work or their progressive development and acknowledge their effort honestly. By having a positive body language, it shows encouragement without any words uttered. Mentors need to take risks, willing to share resources and knowledge besides, always welcome the new ideas, understanding and treat mentees as the whole person. Be sincere, tactful with the words used, provide ample time and allow some spaces for them to take their ownership. Being honest, understanding and passionate.

Reflective-always reflect own self and mentor. Be a critical friend and avoid the act of blaming. It is good to practice open dialogue when it comes to dispute. Mentors should be able to modelled process questions or provide written feedback whenever necessary. Both mentors and mentees should be involved in planning, especially in setting goals and objectives. Having a set focus, set goals and set challenges are crucial in order to arrive at the same destination. Couple with good communication, empathy, honest and kind in offering suggestions or problem solving may create a conducive mentoring environment.

Attentive listening-lend me your ears is the best to describe the act of listening. Avoiding a habit of not just wanting to speak at all time. Practice a two way street communication. Similarly, the elements of non-verbal communication such as eye contact and body language should be carefully observed. Allotting time sincerely, set time and place, eliminate distractions and always listen first. As much as possible, gather and value the input. In short, show some empathy by listening attentively.

Instill positive attitudes-Mentors who are professional should model positive attitudes. They are normally assertive and not aggressive. Mentees tend to be easily influenced by the style of their mentors. Therefore, mentors need to model how to give and accept feedback, the kind of specific language used as well as provide constructive criticism. Modelling encouragement with the use of positive praises and always looking for positive rather than focusing on the negative sides of the mentees. Avoiding cynicism and sarcasm because it will jeopardize the relationship. Mentors should display passion and develop interrelationships with student teachers. Student teachers even they are new, they might have some good and creative ideas, alas by allowing them to develop some parts of pedagogy, this may set up for the success of the mentoring.

Comfortable with talking-Comfortable and conducive atmosphere will lead to ongoing, natural, balanced and regular discussion. Be comfortable with the talking, be open and pose the right questions purposeful, openly and honestly. Try to speak clearly and concisely. Stay focussed, show interest and create a good social communication situation. Be happy and ever willing to share confidentiality.

Instill confidence-mistakes are usually made during the learning process. Mentees need not to worry about making the mistakes along the way. They must signal for help to the mentor. The mentor may interrupt the lesson first, then correct them. Sharing of experiences and best practices are forms of constructive feedback, which gradually provide some confidence to the mentees or student teachers [29].

CONCLUSION

Mentoring in teacher education is a practice which serves as a tool for developing educators. The issues about planning and pedagogical skills listed above are closely connected to the pedagogical skills dimension in the benchmarked model. However, mentoring for teaching is not only about pedagogical knowledge and skills per se. It involves other elements which are beyond the classroom boundaries. As such, this mentoring should be able to facilitate knowledge and skills especially in handling the real teaching situation. Student teachers require more than knowledge in the textbook. Mentoring enhances these student teachers with real life situation and most importantly to tell them that they are not alone. Mentors offer help, guidance and feedback or view points about the teaching. By and large the quality of mentoring practices does not merely depend on the specific roles

of the mentor and by following the rigid content of the mentoring program per se. Simultaneously, more collaborative efforts and accompanied with the personal touch will contribute more to the success of the mentoring process. Thus, it may turn out to be part of a quality professional teaching education development for both mentor and protege.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The deepest thanks to the Director of Politeknik Kuala Terengganu and English Language Teaching Centre for taking part in useful decision and giving necessary advices and guidance and arranged all facilities needed. Last but not least, millions thanks to the wonderful and supportive colleagues for making this study happen.

REFERENCES

1. Datnow, A. and M. Castellano, 2000. Teachers' Responses to Success For All: How Beliefs, Experiences, and Adaptations Shape Implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(3): 775-799.
2. Martin, S., 1994. The Mentoring Process in Pre-Service Teacher Education. *School Organisation*, 14(3): 269-277.
3. Campbell, M.R. and V.M. Brummett, 2007. Mentoring Preservice Teachers for Development and Growth of Professional Knowledge. *Music Educators Journal*, 93 (3): 50-55.
4. Edwards, K. and D. Dendler, 2007. Mentoring Student Teachers in the Music Classroom. *Music Educators Journal*, 93 (5): 44-50.
5. Glickman, C., 1991. Pretending Not to Know What We Know. *Educational Leadership*, 48 (8): 4-10.
6. Coffey, D.J., 2010. Mentoring Promotes Qualities that Lead to Teacher Satisfaction. *College Reading Association Yearbook*, 31: 179-199.
7. Carter, S. and G. Lewis, 1994. The Four Bases of Mentoring. In the Proceedings of the 1994 1st European Mentoring Conference.
8. E. Parsloe, 1999. The manager as coach and mentor. CIPD Publishing.
9. R. Shaw, 1992. Can mentoring raise achievement in schools: Mentoring in schools. Kogan Page.
10. M. Wilkin, 1992. Mentoring in schools. Kogan Page Limited.
11. Mountford, B., 1993. Mentoring and initial teacher education. In: *Mentoring in the Effective School* (eds P. Smith and J. West-Burnham) pp. 29-39. Longman, London.
12. V. Brooks, Christopher T. Husbands and P. Sikes, 1997. The good mentor guide: Initial teacher education in secondary schools. Open University Press.
13. Bray, L. and P. Nettleton, 2006. Assessor or Mentor? Role Confusion in Professional Education. *Nurse Education Today*, 27 (8): 848-855.
14. Sundli, L., 2007. Mentoring-A New Mantra for Education? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(2): 201-214.
15. Hall, K.M., R.J. Draper, L.K. Smith and R.V. Bullough Jr, 2008. More Than a Place Teach: Exploring the Perceptions of the Roles and Responsibilities of Mentor Teachers. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 16 (3): 328-345.
16. Ambrosetti, A. and J. Dekkers, 2010. The Interconnectedness of the Roles of Mentors and Mentees in Pre-Service Teacher Education Mentoring Relationships. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(6): 42-55.
17. Kessels, J.P.A.M. and F.A. Korthagen, 1996. The Relationship between Theory and Practice: Back to the Classics. *Educational Researcher*, 25(3): 17-22.
18. Hamel, F.L. and H.A. Jaasko-Fisher, 2011. Hidden Labor in the Mentoring of Pre-Service Teachers: Notes from a Mentor Teacher Advisory Council. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2): 434-442.
19. Maltas, C.J. and J. McCarty-Clair, 2006. Once a Student, Now a Mentor: Preparing to be a Cooperating Teacher. *Music Educators Journal*, 93 (2): 48-52.
20. Nilsson, P. and J. van Driel, 2010. Teaching Together and Learning Together-Primary Science Student Teachers' and Their Mentors' Joint Teaching and Learning in the Primary Classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(6): 1309-1318.
21. Smith, R., 1989. Research Degrees and Supervision in Polytechnics. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 13(1): 76-83.

22. Kirkham, G., 1993. Mentoring and head teachers. In: *Mentoring in the Effective School* (eds P. Smith and J. West-Burnham) pp. 29-39. Longman, London.
23. M. Brankin and T. Bailey, 1992. *Establishing criteria for mentoring: Mentoring in schools*. Kogan Page Limited.
24. B. Fisher, 1994. *Mentoring*. Library Association Publishing.
25. Aldisert, L., 2001. The Value of Mentoring. *Bank Marketing*, 33(3): 40.
26. Hudson, P.B., 2004. From Generic to Specific Mentoring: A Five-Factor Model for Developing Primary Teaching Practices. In the *Proceedings of the 2004 AARE Annual Conference*, pp: 1-10.
27. Feimen-Nemser, S., 1998. Teachers as Teacher Educators. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 21 (1): 61-74.
28. MET Online, 2016. Pedagogical knowledge. Retrieved from <http://tedd.net.au/mentoring-for-effective-teaching/pedagogical-knowledge/>.
29. MET Online, 2016. Personal attributes. Retrieved from <http://tedd.net.au/mentoring-for-effective-teaching/personal-attributes/>.