



Original Research Article

Experiences of student-teachers on placement

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This paper, using case-study research approach and informed by phenomenological and social constructivist theoretical perspectives, shares experiences of five purposively student-teachers who were video-taped practicing teaching in the Eastern Province of Kenya. Findings indicate that student-teachers appreciate the quality and relevance of their teacher preparation courses and the central importance of their relationships with significant others. The study highlights also student-teachers' preoccupations and concerns with their developing identities as 'teachers' and the ample opportunities provided while practicing teaching for them to try out pedagogical content knowledge, skills, values and attitudes learnt during teacher preparation. Challenges experienced by the student teachers and/or participating schools are also discussed. Implications for teacher educators, supervisors, student teachers and teaching practice schools are made.

Key words: Placement, student -teachers, teacher education, teaching practice, video-cases

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, pre-service teacher education programs equip student-teachers with pedagogical content knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for successful teaching in their areas of specialization at various levels of the education system. The hallmark of all pre-service teacher education programs is student-teacher placement in educational institutions for practice and honing budding teaching skills. This is commonly referred to in Kenya as *teaching practice* (Aksu et al., 2014; Digolo, 2002; OECD, 2009; Creasy et al., 2012). The gap between theory and practice is bridged by teaching practice. Student-teachers (also referred to as teaching practice students) get ample time to 'try out' pedagogical content knowledge, skills, values and attitudes and any other interesting ideas learnt about the teaching-learning process (Chong and Cheah, 2009; Digolo, 2002; Hudson et al., 2015; Igaga, 1978). Specifically, student-teachers get opportunities to: Explore the situational framework of teaching; examine purposes of teaching; select materials and resources for teaching; analyze procedures of teaching; and evaluate the results of teaching.

The culminating teaching practice experience has a significant impact on the student teacher who must juggle

the responsibilities of teaching and all that it entails (Hobson et al., 2008). The student teacher has to establish and maintain working relationships with the teaching practice school and their supervisors from the university. Student teachers are surrounded not only by other adults who share in certain power relationships with them but also with students with whom they share a different sort of power relationship (Hargreaves, 2000). Thus, student teaching is a complicated emotional and interpersonal experience that is often critically important to the making of a teacher (Hobson et al., 2008). Many teachers claim that the most important elements in their professional education are the school experiences found in student teaching (Guyton and McIntyre, 1990).

Teacher educators often follow student-teachers into the field to supervise them. Teaching practice supervision involves examining a student-teacher's documents (lesson plans, schemes of work, record of work covered, and student records) as well as observing them teach in their respective subject areas and grading them. An additional responsibility of the supervisor is to impress upon the student teacher the obligations of the teaching profession,

and to make them become aware of the demands, rewards, and frustrations of their chosen field of endeavor. The student teacher therefore has the responsibility to learn, question, accept criticism and generally do the best they can; or even change their choice of a profession (Koerner and O'Connell, 2002).

The University of Nairobi (UoN) has had its teacher education program running for over twenty years now. In the last 10 years or so, the context within which would-be teachers are prepared for entry into the teaching profession in Kenya has changed remarkably. In particular, people have witnessed several programs rolled out to suit different students aspiring to be teachers or those wishing to take advanced courses in teacher education. Furthermore, there has been a diversification of pathways into the teaching profession, including the establishment of school-based routes alongside undergraduate and postgraduate university-administered routes. This means also that UoN students going out for teaching practice has increased tremendously over the past ten years.

Studies overseas have examined different aspects of student teachers' experiences including student teacher: development and concerns (Conway and Clark, 2003), experiences of mentoring (Edwards and Ogden, 1998), thinking (Burn et al., 2000); and experiences of stress (Head et al., 1996). Other studies have suggested that student teachers may experience variation in their experiences of teacher preparation according to a number of factors, such as the teacher preparation route they follow (O'Hara and Cameron-Jones, 1997) or their ethnicity (Carrington and Tomlin, 2000).

It is important, and necessary, for supervisors from the university to follow student teachers into the field to assess and grade them. However, this information is necessary but insufficient if student teachers' perspectives regarding teaching practice experiences is lacking. What makes for a good teaching practice experience? Do student teachers' opinions about teaching practice differ from those of participating school principals and supervisors from the university? In this article, the researchers explore and discuss what good teaching experience means. Are there any benefits accruing from the teaching practice experience and challenges, if any, experienced by student teachers? The purpose of this qualitative video-case research study was thus to document student-teachers' teaching practice experiences, including the extent to which they 'try out' what they have been taught in their teacher education courses.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

1. describe the experiences of University of Nairobi student-teachers on teaching practice.
2. discuss the impact of the teacher education programs on University of Nairobi student teachers' teaching practice experiences.

3. identify challenges encountered by University of Nairobi student teachers during teaching practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative case study (Staver, 1994; Yin, 1994) research design. One of the major strengths of qualitative research is that it is "fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives" (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Individuals' perspectives emerge in qualitative research in response to questions that focus on the assumptions people make about their lives and things that they take for granted (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

Two particular perspectives are visible in this research design. First, the study has a phenomenological slant to investigate human experience (that of student teachers) from the perspective of the individual actor (Hobson et al., 2008; Hycner, 1985). In fact value was placed on "experience, confessions, and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process" (Hooks, 1994). Second, the design of the study was informed by social constructivist theoretical perspectives. The researchers operated from the implicit assumption that perspectives on student teaching placements are shaped not so much by the physical setting as by the ways in which the various participants in the experience interpret their roles in action (Erickson, 1986; Hatch, 1985). Learners view and interpret new information and experiences through their existing network of knowledge, experience and beliefs (Fosnot, 1996; Richardson, 1997). The project's design thus acknowledges and anticipates that beginner teachers' experiences may be shaped, at least in part, by what they 'bring' to those experiences, including reasons behind their initial choices to enter the profession, and their prior conceptions and expectations about teaching (Hollingsworth, 1989; Wideen et al., 1998). The insights shared in this paper are thus an outgrowth of the interchange of ideas co-constructed and shared with participants in the teaching practice schools visited. Each teaching practice lesson observed and videotaped was treated as a researchable moment and conscious efforts made to collect as much data as was feasible.

Participant selection

Purposive selection was used to identify five schools in Eastern Kenya where student-teachers had been posted for teaching practice in the 2007/2008 academic year. Purposive selection was used also to identify one student-teacher per school identified - for a total of five student teachers. Consent to participate in the interview was sought from all the participants and participating teaching practice schools. All participants were assured that the information shared would be treated confidentially and shared only with the research team and future conference participants. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names.

Data were collected through:

1. Participant observations of two lessons per student-teacher (for a total of 10 lessons) using an observation schedule (see appendices A).
2. In-depth semi-structured personal and focus group interviews (see appendices C and D).
3. Thematic analysis of secondary documents including:
 - a. Lesson plans for each subject observed. The lesson plan included the following sections: Objectives of the lesson, content section, learning activities section and learning resources section (see Appendix E).
 - b. Schemes of work which laid out the areas to be covered within a specified period of time.
 - c. Record of work.
 - d. Student Records.
 - e. Student Diaries
4. Several replays and close analyses of video-taped lessons using an observation guide (see appendix B).
5. Field notes written during lesson observations, video shoots and interviews.
6. Other data gleaned from participants' informal comments, observations and reflections during meals and refreshments.

Data analysis and interpretation of findings

Data analysis drew on grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Specifically, and after transcription of (individual and focus group) interview and video-tape data, the researchers used a system of constant comparisons (Charmaz, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to get key ideas and emerging themes and to develop video-cases that capture the perspectives of the participants and provide a more holistic understanding of the lived experiences of student teachers. These key ideas and emerging themes were compared across data sources for triangulation of information (Denzin, 1978). Member-checks (Merriam, 1988) and peer debriefings (Seidman, 1998) were done with co-researchers and head teachers of institutions visited. Triangulation, member-checks and peer-debriefings were useful for trustworthiness (as opposed to validity and reliability) of information provided in this paper. Implications about student placement and teacher education were made.

The researchers acknowledged the ever-present pitfalls of interpretive research in which the participant's qualitative responses are bound by historical and contextual representations (Garavuso, 2007; Garrick, 1999) and that our personal narratives are "inevitably ideologically loaded and frequently tainted with multifarious social implications" (Kanpol, 1999).

Video-Case 1: Maranga (Pseudonym)

Maranga taught an oral literature lesson to Form 1 students in a girls' boarding school. He was very enthusiastic about

his subject. He employed several teaching aids (including charts and radio cassette) to support his teaching and enhance student learning. At first Maranga seemed to move through one teaching aid to another rather quickly, raising questions about their effectiveness. However, he kept going back and forth through the teaching aids to solidify key ideas he hoped to advance in the lesson. He thus effectively combined these teaching aids with the chalkboard to conduct a very successful lesson. This is in spite of Maranga holding the teaching aids in his hands as he taught. Hanging them on the chalkboard did not help either as they kept sliding off. His love for music was obvious from the very beginning. His lesson was punctuated by songs relevant to the topic of discussion: *Types of Songs*. For instance, when discussing lullabies, Maranga asked students to pretend the person sitting next to them was a child and to sing an identified lullaby as they would to a real child. The students seemed to thoroughly enjoy participating in these activities. Maranga was well groomed and exuded a lot of confidence and knowledge about his area of specialization. The learners were actively engaged throughout the lesson. He tapped into and activated students' prior knowledge about the topic of the day. He constantly gauged their level of attention by asking, "*Are we together?*" Although his disposition was great, Maranga's main challenge was related to his ability to use questions effectively. He asked only lower-order questions. In addition, he did not provide enough wait time after he posed questions to students and after they answered the questions. His oral communication skills were generally good although he could improve on pronunciation and/or articulation of words. He however varied his voice and his non-verbal communication was consistent with the mood of the lesson, which was generally happy. He self-reported that he enjoyed his teaching practice experience and was receiving support from his host school. The headteacher of the school affirmed that Maranga was indeed a good and disciplined teacher and that the response from his students was positive. The headteacher stated also that Maranga helped in co-curricular activities like drama, choir and did not discriminate in regards to religious activities. The teacher reported that Maranga had fitted into the school system very well.

Video Case 2: Rabera (Pseudonym)

Rabera taught a mathematics lesson in a Form Two class in a girls' school. The topic of the day was *Volume of Solids*. The sub-topic was *Volume of Cones*. Rabera reviewed the previous lesson in which she had taught on how to find the volume of pyramids and prisms and effectively linked it with the lesson of the day. Rabera used a model of a cone and the chalkboard to teach about calculating the volume of a cone. The lesson progressed smoothly in three distinct stages: teacher demonstration, teacher and student practice and independent practice by students. Rabera emphasized key things to consider when calculating the volume of a cone, such as the fact that the base is circular. Rabera's oral

communication skills were very good. She was audible, varied her tone and adopted a good pace to advance her lesson. When she gave an incorrect formula and was corrected by a student, she accepted her mistake and made the correction without being defensive. Although Rabera framed her questions clearly and unambiguously, she used only lower order questions throughout the lesson. In addition, she did not let students discover what is common in the formulae for calculating cones, pyramids and prisms but told them instead. Towards the end of the lesson, she dictated the independent practice exercise for students instead of writing the information on the chalkboard.

Rabera's second lesson was radically different from her first in regards to methods of instruction. In the Business Studies lesson, she relied mainly on the lecture method to teach the lesson on *Consumer Protection*. The only activities students engaged in were taking down notes and recapitulating key points at the end of the lesson. There were several opportunities within the lesson where students could have been involved in whole class and/or small-group discussion. It is unclear whether or not Rabera was aware of these teachable moments. As in the first lesson, Rabera used lower order questions to guide students in recapitulating the day's lesson. In both lessons, she did not explicitly link the topics of the day with the students' daily lives. In general, Rabera's two lessons were good. Rabera's school principal was especially proud of her. She said Rabera was disciplined and an excellent role model for the girls, more so because of her background as a math teacher. Rabera concurred, stating that student attitudes towards mathematics and performance in the subject had improved since her arrival in the school. She hoped the trend would continue even after she leaves once the teaching practice exercise is over. She commented also that she had enjoyed the whole teaching practice experience and had learned "a great deal."

Video Case 3: Gakii (Pseudonym)

Gakii taught literature (poetry) to Form Two students in a boys' secondary school. At the start of the lesson, she put up two charts on which two poems had been written. She asked volunteers to read each poem aloud. She then led the whole class through a choral read-aloud of the poems. She guided students in the discussion on the features of style they had covered in a previous lesson. She reminded the students that they would be identifying those features in the poems they had just read. Gakii actively involved her students throughout the lesson in not only identifying the stylistic features in the poem but also in stating their effect on the general understanding of the poems. Gakii further enhanced student understanding by providing background information on the poets. She probed student responses by asking questions such as, "Are you sure?" "Is it really true?" "Is it possible?" "Do we agree?" These questions cast doubt and invited student discussion and consideration of alternative viewpoints as well as enable Gakii to clarify student thinking and the answers they gave regarding the

topic. She encouraged all students to participate in the lesson by asking "Any one who has not answered a question?" She appropriately reinforced her students throughout the lesson. She gauged their level of understanding by asking "Are we together?" Gakii taught her second lesson in which students read a passage, first silently and then again using students volunteering to read aloud. The students had enough texts – shared one between two students. She led students to identify mistakes made during "read-alouds", including mispronunciations of words and audibility or the lack of. She encouraged students to articulate words as expected and to consult the dictionary if they were unsure about how a word is pronounced.

Gakii led students to determine the meaning of words based on the context within which they were used. This seemed an appropriate strategy as students gave correct definitions of words such as 'pioneer.' Students were further involved in constructing their own sentences using the words identified from the passage, something which seemed to solidify students' understanding of the words. Just like Rabera and Maranga, Gakii used lower order questions some of the time. For instance she asked, "Who will tell us what the passage is talking about?" "Do you think you can be able to get the meaning of words without using the dictionary?" "Do you think this is a very interesting poem?" "Is it a political poem?" "Do you think they have been satisfied by the system of governance?" "Is the style of writing familiar to you?" These questions encouraged the usual Yes or No answers, prompting Gakii to ask additional questions to solicit more in-depth responses. Like Rabera, she did not make an explicit link between the topic of discussion and students' own real life experiences. Noteworthy, one of the poems was about love. Perhaps Gakii would have inquired into students' experiences with love and used that as basis for enhancing student understanding of the poem. Generally speaking, Gakii's lessons were good.

Gakii's school principal commented about the benefits of teaching practice students to his school. He stated for instance that teaching practice students brought "variety" to the school apart from filling the staff shortage gap. He said also that the teaching practice students in his school were role models to students given they were closer in age to the students and that they bridged the "generational gap" between students and regular teachers. He said also that the students were finding it easier to relate with the teaching practice teachers and were more willing to consult them on academic as well as personal matters. He stated also that he had not heard any negative comments from students in regards to teaching practice students. He hoped the University of Nairobi would continue sending teaching practice students to his school. Gakii concurred with the principal by stating that many students talked with her and she often guided and counseled them on how to deal with any issues they were encountering. She stated also that she had learned a great deal not only from the students but also from regular teachers whom she termed as "very helpful." She said also that she had learned "a lot about teaching as a

discipline” and that she was a “*better teacher*” than she was at the beginning of the teaching practice exercise. She noted also that she had been involved in several co-curricular activities in the school. She concluded her interview by saying she had “*learned a lot,*” was “*a better person*” and felt “*qualified to teach.*”

Video Case 4: Muthoni (Pseudonym)

Muthoni was video-taped teaching an English lesson on adjectives. She began her lesson by asking, “*Do you know what are adjectives?*” She then led students in discussing what adjectives are. Muthoni took out a chart on which she had written information on different types of adjectives. Unlike Maranga who had held the charts in his hands while teaching, Muthoni called a student and asked him to hold the chart while she taught from it and wrote notes on the chalkboard. Students were involved in constructing sentences using different types of adjectives even though in general their level of participation was rather low. Muthoni appeared apprehensive almost throughout the lesson. Towards the end when she could not get students to answer questions, she appeared frustrated and almost lashed out at them. Instead she said, “*Can you construct a sentence to show that you have understood?*” Like Maranga, Rabera and Gakii, Muthoni’s lessons were punctuated with lower order questions. In general, Muthoni’s lessons were fair. Muthoni’s school principal commented that she provided “*fresh*” and “*new*” ideas to the school. He said she was a crucial link between students and regular teachers, citing proximity in age between Muthoni and the students. He said that students were enjoying their interaction with Muthoni. He added also that regular teachers were learning from TP students about “*new changes*” in the education system. Muthoni concurred and stated that she had benefited from the experience in many ways. She cited for instance that TP had provided her opportunities to actualize what she had “*been doing*” in college. She added also that regular teachers had bolstered her confidence and often guided her on many things she did not know. In turn, she had earned respect from students who took time to ask questions about subject matter and about university life. She said also that she had enjoyed taking students out for co-curricular activities.

Video Case 5: Kanini (Pseudonym)

Kanini was videotaped conducting what she called a “*revision lesson*” to students taking a diploma course in human resource management in one of the technical training institutes in Eastern Kenya. Her whole lesson was developed using a question-and-answer approach. Unfortunately, she too asked only lower order questions such as, “*What is Maslow’s Need Theory?*” The level of enthusiasm among students was rather low, perhaps based on the topic of discussion. Kanini tried her level best to interest the students and to have them participate actively. She used the chalkboard very well to summarize key points

about the topic. In general, Kanini had a great disposition. Her oral communication skills were good. She, however, would need to work on the pronunciation of words with /r/ and /l/ sounds in them. At the end of the lesson, her Head of Department talked about how instrumental TP students had been to address the acute staff shortage the institute was experiencing. He added also that TP students had been major assets in certain areas of the syllabus such as financial accounting where they provided newer approaches to handling the topic. He hoped the institute would continue their cooperation with the University of Nairobi on this important exercise – TP. During a personal interview with Kanini, she concurred that the institute had benefited from TP students in many ways. She, however, concentrated on how she had benefited by getting opportunities to apply the many techniques learned in college. She said the TP experience had developed her “*all-round*” and that she was a “*better person better placed*” to use what she had learned in future.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this qualitative case-study research, the researchers were keen to discern student perspectives on the sensitive issue of what makes a good student teaching placement and how that knowledge shapes and influences the interaction of the various participants in the dance of teacher preparation (Koerner and O’Connell, 2002). Through their inquiry, the researchers sought to extend their understanding of the dynamics of student teaching in an effort to tease out the characteristics of good student teaching placements and experiences. The researchers’ approach to this issue involved developing semi-structured interview questions that offered them the opportunity to learn from the participants themselves about their perceptions of good student teaching placements and experiences. Classroom observation, video-tapes of lessons and other secondary artifacts provided immense insights on curriculum in action that the researchers hope will be beneficial to many stakeholders interested and/or working in the teacher education arena in Kenya and beyond (Republic of Kenya). The study can serve as a reference point for future reforms in teacher education for sustainable development.

The decision to use the video-tape to capture teaching practice experiences is important in several ways. Using video is a conscious attempt to employ technology in teacher education programs in response to technological changes experienced in the world today. The video tapes provide a permanent record of the experiences of a purposively selected few teaching practice students - immortalizing that experience for posterity. Captured on the video-tapes also are the physical environments where the student teachers worked in. The video tapes are useful in enabling the researchers to observe some of the important details that escaped our attention the first time they observed the lessons. For instance, the researchers can

see each student teacher's non-verbal communication as well as students' reactions as each lesson progresses. During data analysis, the videotapes were replayed severally to glean for and capture any nuances related to teaching not observed the first time, including the non-verbal communication. In a sense, with each replay, the researchers got a fresh look at each school, and each lesson, from many vantage-points.

Four main features were found to be characteristic of the experience of student teachers in the study: Appreciation of high quality and relevant teacher education courses and level of teacher preparation; the central importance of student teachers' relationships with significant others; student teachers' preoccupations and concerns with their developing senses of being a teacher or with their identities as 'teachers;' and challenges experienced by student teachers and/or participating schools. One cross-cutting theme - benefits accruing from teaching practice - was collapsed into the first three of four themes cited above.

Teaching Practice Students' Level of Preparedness

Many inferences about the level of preparedness can be made from the five teaching practice students observed and video-taped teaching. The student teachers appear to have been well prepared for teaching at two levels: 1) During their preparation before teaching practice placement and 2) In terms of the amount of time they had spent preparing for the lessons observed. Preparedness on the two levels appeared to be generally high. One interesting finding lending credence to the high caliber of preparedness was the student teachers' willingness and ability to apply and bridge theory with practice (Department of Educational Communication and Technology, University of Nairobi, 1996).

There is an argument that the conscious use, by student teachers, of conceptual tools (or 'theory') in the practices of teaching (e.g. planning, using teaching aids, actively engaging students) facilitates both the creation of appropriate in-class teaching methodologies for different settings and the informed management of their own learning and development as teachers (Furlong and Maynard 1995; Hobson et al., 2008; Pollard 2002). This argument held sway in this study. Student teachers observed were able to plan judiciously, conduct lively lessons and to actively engage their students throughout the lessons. They showed enthusiasm for their subjects and were innovative in bringing in various teaching aids to enhance student learning. Student teachers showed willingness to try out "*all the things*" they had learned while in college. Furthermore, they promised '*to use them in their future career*' as teachers.

The five student teachers' in this study made conscious efforts to employ innovative pedagogical approaches taught to them during teacher training. This appeared contrary to previous research. For instance, Lortie (1975) posits that many student teachers draw on an apprenticeship of observation (those years of being a student in a classroom

observing and experiencing teachers at work) to guide their actual practice as student teachers and later as teachers - than they do the curriculum of teacher education. Britzman (1988) suggests that student teachers draw on educational myths to make sense of some of the critical dilemmas of teaching.

The argument advanced above should not, however, be misconstrued to mean the researchers ignore what students bring to the teaching practice experience. The researchers recognize that student teachers' experiences are part-shaped by their prior experiences, preconceptions and expectations (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1989; Fosnot, 1996; Hycner, 1985; Korthagen et al., 2001; Richardson, 1997), and that their prior beliefs can create barriers to their receptivity to component parts of teacher preparation programs (Sugrue, 1996). It is incumbent upon us as educators to guide student teachers to surface and examine their prior beliefs and assumptions, as is the possibility of, where appropriate, subjecting some such beliefs and assumptions to challenge (Loughran and Russell, 1997).

Relationships with Significant Others

The professional relationships in which a student teacher is engaged are crucial to their development (Hargreaves, 2000; Hobson, et al., 2008; McNally, et al., 1997) as future teachers. Apart from the values of a teacher education program and its desired outcomes for student teaching placements, the context of a placement itself has potentially powerful shaping effects on the ways in which student teaching placements are enacted (Hobson et al., 2008; LaBoskey et al., 2001).

The five student teachers in this study self-reported that they prefer to work in a collegial, open and friendly environment. These student teachers' desire for a sense of belonging was evident in the findings revealing their hopes for collegiality. All five student teachers procured enjoyment of teaching practice through the development of productive relationships - with pupils, teacher colleagues, teaching practice school administration and the university. They reported having '*good working relationships.*' They said the schools were '*very supportive*' in providing all instructional materials and resources needed to make the teaching practice experience successful. In addition, the schools provided housing enabling the student teachers to further enjoy the teaching practice experience. They all claimed to have '*fit in well.*' All Head Teachers interviewed concurred and said also that TP students provided unique services to various TP schools by, for instance, addressing staffing shortages and creating variety among the teaching staff.

These findings appear consistent with other research (such as Hargreaves, 2000; Hobson et al., 2008; McNally et al., 1997). McNally et al. (1997), in a study investigating the interactions between student teachers and school staff and their relationship to successful processes of becoming teachers, found that supportive relationships in secondary schools centred around subject departments, and that

trainees who were judged to be relatively competent reported feeling part of a team. These findings, and others (e.g. Hayes 2003), tend to support this research in suggesting a need for all teachers (and other staff) in schools receiving student teachers to have opportunities to prepare themselves for their part in fostering a supportive school ethos (Digolo and Okanga, 1991; Hobson et al., 2008).

All five student teachers acknowledged getting guidance and pieces of advice from regular teachers about how to teach certain topics. This is an area future research might inquire into. Regular teachers are likely to "set the affective and intellectual tone and also shape what student teachers learn by the way they conceive and carry out their roles as teacher educators" (Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann, 1987). Some regular teachers often allow student teachers into their classrooms as participant observers (Pollard, 2002). Still others see student teachers as colleagues in their own professional development. More salient than being effective models of good pedagogy and classroom management, regular teachers can be caring, active listeners who are sensitive to the views of others and who are able and willing to articulate the intricacies of their craft and the subtleties of the school culture to student teachers (Digolo, 2002).

Another study by Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) expands the notion of regular (or cooperating) teacher as mentor. They compared two programs for mentoring beginning teachers. Their work suggests that contextual factors affect the benefits mentees receive from their mentors. They found that formal expectations, working conditions, selection, and preparation were particularly important in determining what roles mentors assume. In addition to socializing functions, mentor teachers may serve as educational companions who help student or beginning teachers reflect on their experiences in order to gain insights that will support development of their teaching skills (Pollard, 2002). Mentor teachers who act as agents of change seek to break down barriers that prevent teachers from sharing, inquiring, and collaborating about their teaching.

An equally complex role is that played by the supervisor from the university (Snyder and D'Emidio-Gaston, 2001). In the triad of the student teaching or practicum experience, the participant who generally receives the least recognition and has been least studied is the university supervisor (Griffin, 1985). Yet previous research suggests that the influence of supervisors transcends their position as a go-between for the university and teaching practice schools. They can play a critical role in the success of the experience and in helping student teachers make sense of their work in ways that will translate into future practice (Orland, 2001). Supervisors often serve as translators of the values and beliefs of the teacher education program (Koerner and Rust, 2000). Supervisors tend also to hold tacit images of the good student teacher that may only be articulated in situations that challenge those ideals (Snyder and D'Emidio-Gaston, 2001) especially during assessment and

grading of lessons. Researching the UoN supervisor is critical considering the fact that selection is sometimes done on the basis of availability rather than on the basis of experience and credentials. Some supervisors may come to the job having learned to supervise as craft from a skilled mentor; others may come with formal academic course work; still others may rely completely on their experience as teachers and their memories of student teaching. It would be interesting, for instance, to find out whether or not supervisors need to be prepared specifically for this role.

There is no doubt that every role in the student teaching experience is important to the emerging practice of a new teacher (Hobson et al., 2008; Koerner and O'Connell, 2002). Student teachers themselves know this. "The future teacher," writes Cruikshank (1977), "attempts to identify and meet expectations which come from self, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, students and society in general". Student teachers reported positive outcomes from the teaching practice experience with comments such as, "*TP has made me better*" or how regular teachers had helped them become '*effective*' or '*more confident*'. One student teacher, Gakii, talked of now being a '*real*' teacher following the teaching practice experience. This sentiment captures the notion that this student had developed an identity as a teacher. Further studies might follow these student-teachers to find out if they still maintain high levels of professionalism upon graduation and when they take up formal employment. One head teacher captured this sentiment thus: Student-teachers "*need to carry on teaching practice into regular practice.*" Teacher educators need to find effective ways to support all student teachers in discovering the teacher within, or transforming themselves from non-teacher into teacher, whether through mentoring, the use of stories, or other methods (Hobson et al., 2008).

Challenges: Teaching Practice Students and Schools

One challenge identified by participating schools was related to staffing needs in those schools. Fortunately, student teachers satisfied that need. Noteworthy, no indiscipline cases were reported, perhaps a reflection that the student teachers sampled for this study were generally disciplined.

Student teachers walk a delicate line (Hobson et al., 2008; Koerner and O'Connell, 2002; Sifuna and Otiende, 1994). On the one hand, they are students learning about a profession, its language, its practice. On the other hand, they are novice professionals and are expected to know something of practice, to take initiative, and to demonstrate competence. It can be challenging to balance these roles.

The findings of this and other studies (e.g., Hayes, 2003; Hobson et al., 2008; McNally et al., 1994, 1997), lead us to the suggestion that professional preparation needs to take more account of trainees' emotional states and welfare, and that teacher preparation providers should seek to ensure that they provide effective support which helps trainees

navigate the inevitably emotionally charged process of becoming a teacher, starting with that of becoming a student teacher.

Study findings indicate that some student teachers are limited somewhat in their ability to guide students in making explicit connections between the content being taught and their real life experiences. Some of the student-teachers also need to improve their oral communication skills. Noteworthy, one student-teacher's lesson focused on fluency in oral reading. She encouraged students to identify words mispronounced and state the correct pronunciation. She advised them to consult the dictionary to see the correct pronunciation of words.

This teacher recognizes the importance of fluency in oral reading and was doing the right thing to enable students to articulate words with the right stress and intonation. The fact that her students were able to self-correct as well as identify each others' mispronunciation further illustrates their improvements in word pronunciation. Efforts such as these can have positive effects on oral communication, assuming that if one can read fluently s/he can speak fluently as well.

The biggest pedagogical challenge noted was the use of questions. Asking students questions is a fairly typical assessment activity during teaching/learning process (Chiapetta and Koballa, 2006). Student-teachers observed used questions that were mainly of lower order. One student-teacher, Gakii, attempted to use questions and probes that encouraged students to explore multiple perspectives. Asking different types and levels of questions and making connections (Bruning et al., 2004) is a concept that needs to be embraced by all teachers, including student-teachers. This is because different types and levels of questions stimulate and expand thinking. More importantly perhaps, learners can be taught to formulate their own questions. Promoting student questioning (i.e., students asking questions) can go along way towards expanding student learning (Chiapetta and Koballa, 2006). Such a subtle difference can have enormous impact on the dynamics of classroom interaction. Student teachers need support and encouragement to explore the value of asking different types and levels of questions and having students generate their own questions.

The idea generally would be to encourage student teachers to consciously think about how they are using their questions and what they hope to achieve. Allowing time for thoughtful answers (wait-time) needs also to be embraced (Chiapetta and Koballa, 2006). Traditionally, teachers call on a learner (assess the learner), get a response, and move on. If a pupil doesn't know the answer, the teacher provides it and moves on without explanation or further instruction. Wait time encourages a teacher to pose questions, wait a few seconds before appointing someone to answer and once someone has answered, to wait another couple of seconds before going on. The wait time allows students to reflect not only on the question asked but also on the answer supplied by a student (Chiapetta and Koballa, 2006).

CONCLUSION

This study is important in several ways. It calls attention to the importance of conversation as a means of exploring the ways in which student teachers think about teaching and about their relationships with the teaching practice schools. Relationships are important for developing trust and establishing confidence and effective communication among the various stakeholders in the teacher education program. It is clear also that the five student teachers are willing to try out ideas learned during their teacher education courses. They self-reported that they enjoyed the whole teaching practice experience. Video-taped lessons will remain a permanent record and testimony to the positive outcomes related to teaching practice placement. The study also offers guidance on some of the areas teacher education might focus on in their bid to churn high quality professional teachers including the use of different types and levels of questions. While the researchers acknowledge the importance of craft in teaching, this study makes clear that pushing beyond craft requires a higher level of discourse about practice. A general re-shaping of teaching practices will require an explicit commitment on the part of teacher educators to raise the level of discourse within their programs through shared professional development with teaching practice schools teachers and supervisors from the university. These efforts will strengthen teacher education that will, in turn, contribute to sustainable development in the education sector. A teacher affects eternity; one cannot pinpoint where his influence begins and ends.

Implications from the study

The following are implications from the study:

- The University continuing to post students for teaching practice to schools with a supportive and conducive environment –such as the ones sampled for this study.
- The University to continue churning out highly qualified and professional teachers such as those observed in this study. However, teacher educators to encourage student-teachers to think of innovative ways for their students to make meaningful connections between the content taught and their real lives and circumstances. In addition, teacher educators to continue guiding student-teachers on how to identify teachable moments within their classes to emphasize key concepts as well as to actively involve students.
- Teacher education programs to be strengthened in several areas including: Use of different types of questions to achieve educational objectives. This might be done through inclusion of topics on effective use of questions, especially those requiring higher order mental operations (e.g. synthesis, analysis, application and evaluation) and how to ask clear and unambiguous questions. Higher order questions are likely to nurture and /or hone students'

critical thinking skills and enhance student learning.

- More emphasis to be made on the effective use of teaching aids including where to hang them, when to introduce and when to switch between the teaching aids. Teachers to be dissuaded from having students hold up a teaching aid while others are learning and taking notes down. Students to be encouraged to adopt multimedia and multimodal technologies in teaching.

- Teacher educators to look into possibilities of guiding students to improve their oral communication skills, a skill indispensable to any classroom teacher.

- Teacher educators to develop a triad of collaboration and support for student teachers who more often than not are emergent meaning-making practitioners. This triad can be built upon mentoring, action research, and study groups.

- Future research to capture secondary school students' perspectives about student-teachers on teaching practice. This is because the school principals kept saying students had not said anything negative about the five student-teachers. Noteworthy also, some regular teachers stated they were learning "a lot" from student-teachers. Future research might explore this apparent role-reversal.

- This study to be replicated with a larger sample with the possibility of developing a book on student-teacher video-cases for future use in teacher education and classroom instruction.

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Appendix A: Lesson Observation Guide

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
 COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL STUDIES
 TEACHING PRACTICE ASSESSMENT REPORT

NAME..... REG No. SCHOOL.....
 FORM..... DATE..... TIME.....
 SUBJECT.....ZONE.....
 TOPIC.....

Preparation (20)
Lesson Plan: Concurrence with Schemes of work and objectives, sequence of content, learning activities, time estimate, instructional resources.

Introduction (15)
Statement of topic. Entering behavior (Motivation, review and use of learners' experiences etc)

Lesson Development (25)
Mastery, treatment and sequence of content, appropriate methods: lecture, discussion etc, learner involvement.

Resources (10)
Organized use of chalkboard, charts, class text, realia, etc.

Classroom Management (10)
Control, discipline, organization, knowledge of students by names, checking and marking classwork.

Summary/Conclusion (10)
Review, Evaluation, Assignment, Achievement of Objectives.

Personal Factors (10)
Appearance, mannerism, communication, innovation, confidence.

Comments

Other Remarks

Total Marks.....
 Name of Supervisor.....
 Signature.....

Appendix B: Video Tape Observation Guide

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL STUDIES

NAME.....
SCHOOL.....
FORM.....
SUBJECT.....
TOPIC.....

Introduction
Statement of topic. Entering behavior
(Motivation, review and use of learners'
experiences etc)

Lesson Development
Mastery, treatment and sequence of content,
appropriate methods: lecture, discussion etc,
learner involvement.

Resources
Organized use of chalkboard, charts, class
text, realia, etc.

Classroom Management
Control, discipline, organization, knowledge
of students by names, checking and marking
classwork.

Summary/Conclusion
Review, Evaluation, Assignment,
Achievement of Objectives.

Personal Factors
Appearance, mannerism, communication,
innovation, confidence.

Comments

Other Remarks

Total Marks.....

Name of Observer.....

Signature.....

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teaching Practice Student

Please tell me your name.
 Please tell me the subjects you teach.
 Describe for me your teaching practice experience (use probes).
 Identify benefits, if any, derived from your teaching practice experience.
 Identify challenges, if any, encountered during your teaching practice experience.
 Any other comment?

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Head Teacher/ Head of Department or Section

Please tell me your name.
 Describe for me what teaching practice entails.
 Discuss benefits, if any, derived from our students on teaching practice here.
 Identify challenges, if any, encountered from our students on teaching practice here.
 Any other comment?

Appendix E: Lesson Plan Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
 COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND EXTERNAL STUDIES
 TEACHING PRACTICE LESSON PLAN

REG. NO..... NAME..... SCHOOL.....
 CLASS..... NO. OF STUDENTS..... DATE..... TIME.....
 SUBJECT..... TOPIC..... SUB-TOPIC.....
SCHEME OF WORK: WEEK..... LESSON.....

OBJECTIVES.....

TIME	CONTENT	LEARNING ACTIVITIES	LEARNING RESOURCES/REFS