AUTHOR:
Ruben Abraham Stephen Daniels[1]
Lucinda Du Plooy[2]

AFFILIATION:
[1]Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa
[2]University of the Western Cape, South Africa

DOI: https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v42i2.7339

e-ISSN 2519-593X
Perspectives in Education
2024 42(2): 77-92

PUBLISHED:
28 June 2024

RECEIVED:
18 May 2023

ACCEPTED:
25 March 2024

Crossing boundaries: Beginner teachers transitioning from university graduates to fully legitimate participants in the teaching profession

Abstract

This article stems from a broader study that foregrounded an existing mentoring programme against the backdrop of low teacher retention in the South African schooling system. It works from the premise that beginner teachers exit the teaching profession within the first three to five years of teaching. This research suggests that one way of addressing low teacher retention is through a formal mentoring programme that will assist in the transition from university graduates into school practitioners. Data were produced through semi-structured individual and group interviews with a principal, two mentors, and two mentees from a purposively sampled high school. Theoretically, we drew on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) whose constructs of Community of Practice (CoP) and Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) were used as analytical tools to frame this study conceptually. The data revealed that beginner teachers came into the profession with marked shortcomings stemming from their initial training at universities, which meant that they were insufficiently prepared for the realities of teaching at high school level. To overcome this, the data reveal multiple and overlapping CoPs in operation, pointing to viewing mentoring as multidimensional and not only in dyadic terms as a relationship between a mentor and mentee as it has traditionally been viewed.

Keywords: *beginner teacher, community of practice, legitimate peripheral participation, mentee, mentor, mentoring programme*

1. Introduction

Globally, the low retention of beginner teachers or novice teachers in the teaching profession is concerning. The retention of teachers encompasses whether teachers stay in the profession, move to another school, or leave the profession long before retirement. Literature (McCann, Johannessen & Ricca, 2005; Hobson *et al.*, 2009; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011) suggests that there is an alarming increase in the number of beginner teachers exiting the teaching

Published by the UFS
http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie

profession. The reasons for the exodus of beginner teachers from the teaching profession appear to be multi-pronged and complex. In South Africa, it has been reported that teachers under the age of 30 tend to resign in significant numbers in comparison to older teachers (Arends & Phurutse, 2009: 2). The reasons for low teacher retention have been attributed to low salaries, arbitrary teacher deployment systems, unattractive work locations, lack of professional deployment opportunities, insufficient supportive supervision and disintegration of discipline, amongst other things (DoE, 2006; Chakandinakira, 2016). Xaba (2003) provides a more popular reason, especially amongst teachers in urban areas, highlighting that younger teachers normally leave for greener pastures elsewhere, opting to teach in other countries for more competitive salaries.

In this article, we suggest that one way of addressing low teacher retention is through a formalised mentoring programme aimed at facilitating the transition of beginner teachers from university graduates into school practitioners. Literature (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Waterman & He, 2011) supports the idea that beginner teacher mentoring has a positive outcome on teacher retention, even though this potential is often unrealised. Ingersoll and Strong (2011: 201), in their review that scrutinised 15 empirical studies, found that "support and assistance for beginner teachers have a positive impact on three sets of outcomes: teacher commitment and retention, teacher classroom instructional practices and student achievement". Although there is an extensive body of knowledge on the benefits of mentoring programmes for retaining teachers, these are mainly situated in the UK and USA. In a South African context, empirical research on the benefits of mentoring programmes is very limited and therefore warrants further research. Maringe (2016: 120) concurs that research in South Africa focusing on mentoring programmes and their assumed benefits for retaining young teachers in the teaching profession is "patchy, uncoordinated and under-theorised and tends to be informal".

The purpose of this article is therefore to throw the analytical spotlight on the inner logic of an existing formalised mentoring programme to demonstrate how beginner teachers move from the periphery to becoming fully legitimate participants in the teaching profession. The article shows that beginner teachers do not naturally become fully legitimate participants in the teaching profession. The findings suggest that novice teachers come into the profession with severe deficiencies due to their initial training at universities which insufficiently prepared them for the realities of schooling. Furthermore, the data reveals multiple and overlapping CoPs in operation. This points to viewing mentoring as multidimensional and not only in dyadic terms as a relationship between a mentor and mentee, as it has traditionally been viewed.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theoretical framework

In order to understand the inner logic of the mentoring programme and how it could assist in the transition of beginner teachers from university graduates to school practitioners, we turned to Lave and Wenger's (1991) construct of Community of Practice (CoP) and their notion of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP).

The term CoP was first coined by anthropologist Jean Lave and Ettienne Wenger in 1991 while studying apprenticeship as a learning model. Its origin is rooted in the Social Learning Theory, which considers learning as a situated practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) describe

a CoP as a group of people who share a common concern or a passion for something, and who interact regularly in a process of collective learning in a shared domain. For Wenger (2000: 23-24), all CoPs share a basic structure in that they possess three interlocking and mutually constituent elements: the domain (the shared enterprise that the community is engaged in), the community (refers to those who engage in the shared enterprise articulated by the domain), and the practice (the specific knowledge which the community establishes – through language, stories and documents that are shared by its members). Wenger (1998) is of the view that some CoPs are deliberately designed and others institutionally intended, whilst others have an emergent quality that is forged through interaction and negotiation. Furthermore, when individuals engage in a CoP it always entails a process of negotiation of meaning. In other words, two processes converge, namely participation (involves acting and interacting) and reification (involves producing artefacts around which negotiation of meaning is organised) (Wenger, White & Smith, 2009; Smith, Hayes & Shea, 2017). In addition, it is through participation and reification that a CoP develops and negotiates "a set of criteria and expectations by which they recognise membership" (Wenger, 2010: 180). The set of criteria includes joint enterprise (a collective understanding of what the community is about), mutual engagement (interacting and establishing norms, expectations and relationships), and shared repertoires (using communal resources, such as language, artefacts, tools, concepts, methods and standards). It is through these sets of criteria that one gets to understand how learning happens within a CoP.

The knowledgeable question to ask is: How do participants, in this case, beginner teachers, make sense of their involvement and engagement within the CoP? For Wenger (1998), the concept of practice is useful in addressing this question. It is through negotiated meaning that beginner teachers get to understand the practices within the community and can gain full participation and legitimacy within a profession. This brings us to an explanation of Lave and Wenger's notion of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), which now follows.

One cannot speak about CoPs without understanding the logic of how newcomers, through their engagement in these communities of practice, become full participants in the community. Lave and Wenger's notion of LPP is central to understanding what happens when newcomers enter a profession, institution or organisation and find themselves on the periphery, a region that is neither fully inside nor fully outside, and how, through engagement, interaction, collaboration and the learning of knowledgeable skills they can move to the centre and become 'old-timers' and fully legitimate participants within the community. For Lave and Wenger (1991: 29), "Legitimate Peripheral Participation provides a way to speak about relations between newcomers and old-timers, about activities, identities, artefacts and communities of knowledge and practice". Figure 1 that follows provides a diagrammatical representation of LPP.

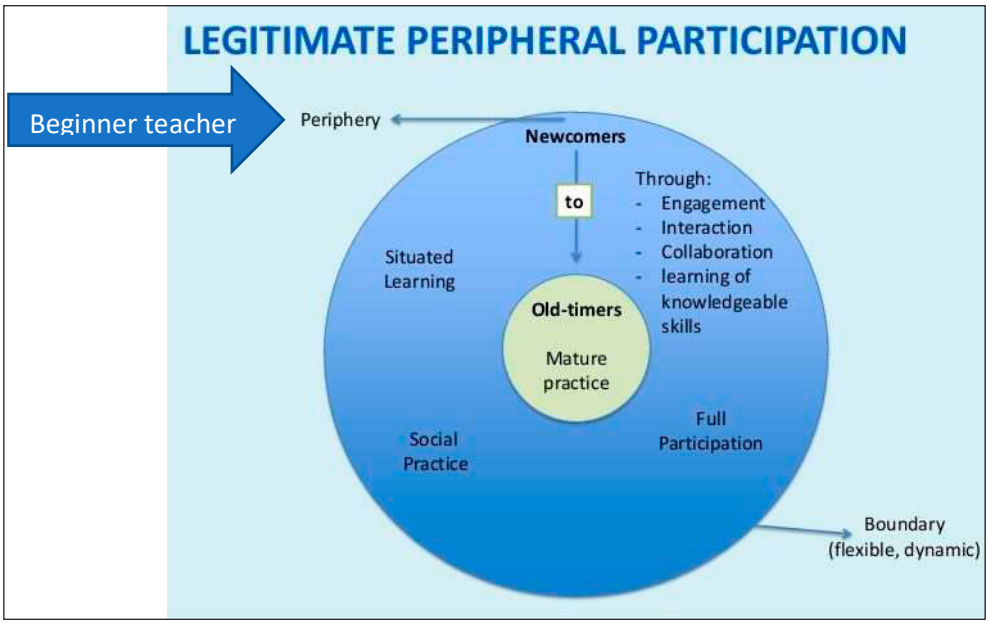

Figure 1: Legitimate peripheral participation (Lave &Wenger, 1991: 56)

Both constructs – CoP and LPP – are used in this article as analytical tools to explore the complexities surrounding ways to understand how beginner teachers are able to gain legitimate and full participation within the teaching profession.

2.2 Research design and methodology

This study is exploratory, situated within a qualitative interpretivist research paradigm, and is based on a single case-study design. For Yin (2009: 18), a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. In this case, the contemporary phenomenon is the mentoring programme and the real-life context is the school setting (Glendarme Secondary School: a pseudonym). The multiple sources of evidence or three data sources are the principal, two mentors and two mentees. Data were produced through individual and group interviews. The following illustration (Figure 2) is a diagrammatical representation of the bounded cases and their embedded cases (multiple units of analysis).

Methodologically, this qualitative interpretative case study's unit of analysis is an existing mentoring programme and the embedded cases are the principal (as part of the management of the school), two mentors and two mentees. Data were produced through individual and group semi-structured interviews. Although the case is small and the findings not generalisable, the case holds intrinsic value and is warranted, given the fact that this area of study, as mentioned, is poorly researched. We will show that beginner teachers, in spite of being highly

qualified and possessing strong content knowledge, did not naturally become fully legitimate participants in the teaching profession. The data revealed that beginner teachers come into the profession with marked inadequacies stemming from their initial training at universities, which prepared them insufficiently for the realities of schooling. Furthermore, the data reveal multiple and overlapping CoPs in operation pointing to viewing mentoring as multidimensional and not only in dyadic terms as a relationship between a mentor and mentee, as it has traditionally been viewed.

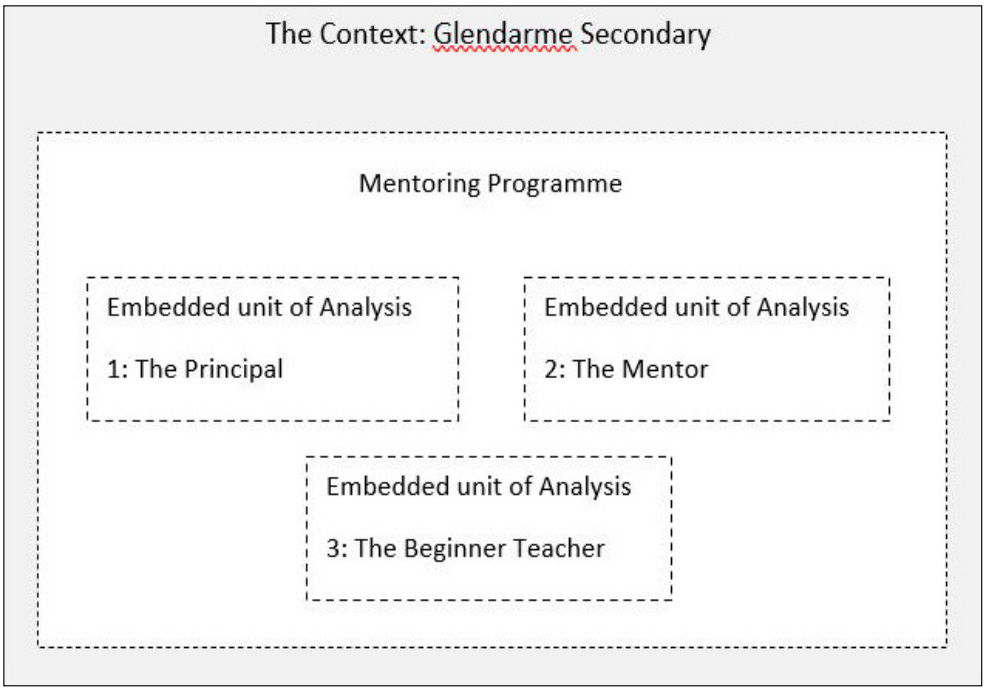

Figure 2: A diagrammatical representation of the multiple units of analysis (Adapted from Yin (1984: 46)

The school, Glendarme Secondary, was purposefully selected, since it is one of a few schools in the Western Cape that has a functioning mentoring programme for its novice teachers. According to Patton (2002: 203),

> the logic and power of purposive sampling, lies in selecting information-rich cases for the study in depth. Information-rich cases are those one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of inquiry …

The multiple units of analysis – the principal, two mentors and two mentees – were selected based on their experiences and engagement within the mentoring programme. Table 1 below which provides an overview of the sample used in the study.

Table 1: An overview of the study participants

Criteria	Principal	Mentor 1	Mentor 2	Mentee 1	Mentee 2
Age	62 years	29 years	29 years	24 years	26 years
Institution where they studied	Peninsula Technicon UNISA and UWC	University of Technology	University of Technology	University	University of Technology
Teaching qualifications	Advanced Technical Education and ACE	B Ed and Honours	B Ed	PGCE	B Ed
Post level	4	2	2	1	1
Subject specialisation (method subjects)	Business Economics, Accounting and Typing	Business Studies	Accounting and Computer Application Technology (CAT)	Mathematics and Accounting	Business Studies, Economics and EMS
Subjects they currently teach	None	Business Studies	Accounting and CAT	Mathematic s	Business Studies and EMS
Years' teaching experience	41 years	6 years	7 years	1 year & 6 months	6 months

Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), Bachelor of Education (BEd), Computer Application Technology (CAT), Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), University of South Africa (UNISA), University of the Western Cape (UWC).

As mentioned, data were produced through individual and group semi-structured interviews. The interviews were based on a flexible interview schedule. They lasted 45 minutes and were audio recorded. The principal was interviewed as part of the management team to gauge her views on the need for and essence of the mentoring programme, the mentor-mentee pairing, and the benefits and challenges relating to the programme, amongst other things. In addition, the principal's interview provided a more holistic picture of the school context, the nature of the mentoring programme and the insights into the school's institutional culture. The mentors and mentees (beginner teachers, as we refer to them in this article) were individually interviewed inter alia to gauge their initial expectations, lived experiences of their involvement in the programme, their roles and responsibilities, and problems encountered. The focus-group interviews followed the individual interviews where the principal, mentors and mentees were interviewed in a group. The focus-group interviews were beneficial in terms of clarifying issues that arose from the individual interviews and probing issues that arose for a better understanding of the functioning of the mentoring programme. Patton (2002) is of the view that the object of focus-group interviews is to get high-quality data within a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others.

Careful attention was paid during the analysis process, since for Henning (2004: 19), "the analysis process is the heartbeat of the research process which requires quality of thinking on the side of the researcher". Merriam (2009: 176) concurs that "data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data to abstract concepts,

between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation". In addition, Yin (1984: 127) explains that "data analysis consists of examining, categorising, tabulating, testing or otherwise recombining evidence to draw empirically based conclusions". The following is a step-by-step process of the data analysis process informed by Merriam (2009: 178-207), which includes snapshots of actual work during this sense-making exercise.

Step 1 – Planning phase

This involved outlining in terms of data production and making sense of how to work with multiple data sources. Furthermore, it meant converting the raw interview data into a readable text by transcribing the interviews.

Step 2 – Category construction A

This involved moving from open coding to descriptive coding. Listening to interviews whilst transcribing and jotting down notes formed the beginning stages of analysis, or what Merriam (2009) refers to as "rudimentary analysis". The following snapshot (see Figure 3) depicting the initial coding of the data was taken from the first data set, namely the principal interview data. It involved making notations next to sections of data that strike one as potentially relevant to answering the research questions.

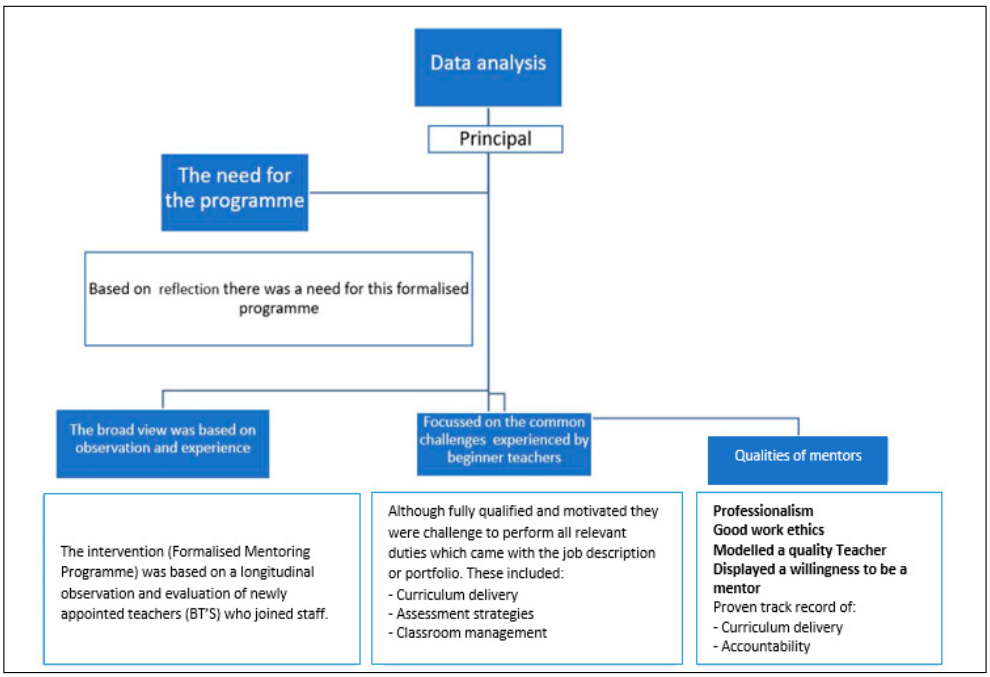

Figure 3: Open or descriptive coding

Step 3: Category construction B

This involved moving from descriptive coding as illustrated in Step 2 to analytical coding by making linkages within and across the data sets. The snapshot (see Figure 4) below is an illustration of the type of modelling that can arise during the inductive analysis process.

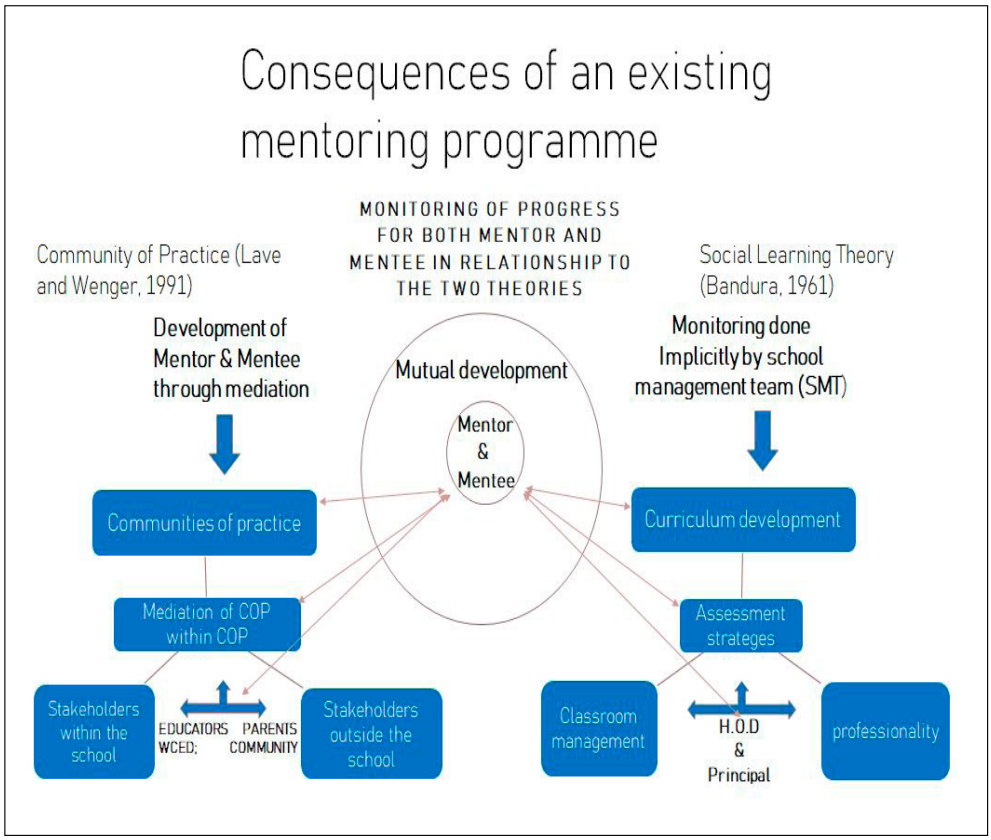

Figure 4: Category construction – moving from descriptive coding to analytical coding

By labouring in this way – breaking texts into segments, writing notations (as in Step 1), assigning descriptive codes (as in Step 2), and uncovering linkages and patterns within and across data sets (as in Step 3) – one is able to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of research, especially research based on a single case. The findings of the case, being a single case, might not be generalisable, but they hold some intrinsic value to those who might find themselves in similar settings or are doing research using similar data instruments. Next follows a discussion of the themes that emanated from this inductive analysis process.

2.3 Findings

The purpose of this section is to unveil the themes that evolved from the analysis process. The analysis provided a thematic view of the way participants do things based on their knowledge and give meaning and makes meaning of their local experiences. Our exploration of the participants' interpretations (their verbatim responses) allowed for the uncovering of the conceptual structures that informed participants' actions to become visible or to be uncovered (Denzin, 1989: 110). Next follows a discussion of the multiple sites that comprise the mentoring programme.

Site 1 – The mentor and beginner teacher in the classroom space

This site involves the mentor entering the classroom of the beginner teacher with the purpose of doing an initial needs assessment to discover what he/she enters with, what he/she needs to develop in, and what is needed in order to grow, amongst other things. This initial phase in the mentoring process is governed by questions aimed at developing a personal development plan. All three data sets show that beginner teachers enter the schools with some inadequacies stemming from their initial teacher training. As the principal put it,

> *New teachers starting are very enthusiastic and well-qualified but once they are in the classroom, they struggle a lot with managing those classes. Ill-disciplined learners can break a new teacher's enthusiasm and even though they are well-qualified they would lose; the teaching profession will lose them because they can become despondent.*

The principal further added,

> *They (beginner teachers) are not fully qualified in performing all the duties that go with teaching … teaching is not only about delivering the curriculum, it's about drawing up question papers, it's how to interpret the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), how to simplify your lessons and how to prepare for a lesson to make it interesting, and how to manage your classroom. I just feel that their initial training somehow, somehow it is missed.*

Mentor 1 concurred with the principal by noting,

> *Very, very little of the things that they cover in university you actually apply except for the content knowledge but the day-to-day coping with the class, coping with the delivery of the content, coping with the workload and actually setting those papers and those things, they (university) are not there to teach you. For me, it was trial and error. So, when someone comes new into my department I want to try and make their life as easy as possible.*

Beginner teachers also expressed their experience of their initial teacher education programmes:

> *I only had one year … the PGCE. I only had one term of practical (referring to exposure to teaching in a classroom) and it was not enough at all. I mean, naturally, an undergraduate is supposed to teach you all the theory content that you need but with the practical side and other school challenges, I felt like I hit the water so deep* [BT1].

BT2, who had more exposure to school-based teaching being part of the B.Ed programme, felt that she was prepared, but it was still not enough, as she expressed,

> *So, for me to come here I did have some experiences on what to expect but it was still overwhelming …*

The mentor, guided by each mentee's individual personal development plan, goes about addressing the identifiable gaps with which the mentee enters the teaching profession. In the Mentor 1's own words,

> … my *role as a mentor is to gradually guide the new person, my mentee, into being able to complete the tasks they do need to be able to do so that when I'm done with them they can perform these tasks on their own. But it's all about gradually phasing it in and assisting. A massive part of mentoring, except for the workload, is just being there as someone that they can talk to.*

From the verbatim responses offered it is clear that the beginner teacher enters the classroom with initial shortcomings such as curriculum delivery, assessment-related issues, classroom management and time management, which the mentor gradually addresses through questions and demonstrations and by providing guidance, motivation and support.

Site 2 – Weekly meetings with the Senior Management Team (SMT)

This site refers to beginner teachers entering the space of the Senior Management Team (SMT). The SMT consists of the principal, deputy principal and HODs, which include mentor teachers. These weekly sessions have a dual purpose: firstly, to monitor the mentoring process and, secondly, to groom beginner teachers for possible leadership roles as senior teachers, grade heads, or heads of department. During one interview session the principal noted that,

> *… in my top structure meetings which I have weekly, I would ask them (the mentors) to give feedback. I specifically focus on the new teachers. I would ask them (the mentors), "So what is your findings with Miss X (a mentee)? … and what do you see at the moment are her shortcomings?" so that we could collectively, collectively decide how we can address these and what type of support we can provide that specific challenge.*

It appears from the extract that these weekly meetings are held specifically to provide feedback relating to what the mentors found in terms of their one-on-one engagements with beginner teachers in the previous site (the classroom space). There appears to be a shift in the mentoring approach where the approach in the classroom is more one-on-one, while the mentoring approach in these weekly meetings appears to be more collegial and collective by nature, as the principal explained how they go about addressing particular 'shortcomings' "*so that we could collectively, collectively address these*".

In addition, the data reveal that the principal purposefully includes the beginner teachers in SMT meetings, not only to monitor progress and provide feedback, but it also serves as a grooming role. As the principal put it,

> *I mean Miss X is a '*sprekende voorbeeld' *[a good example]. She is the person that struggled with classroom discipline as she was also in my office crying and in tears. Now I'm grooming her to serve on the management team. She's just gained confidence, benefiting from her attendance at these weekly meetings.*

Although the principal narrated the benefits of the beginner teachers' involvement in the mentoring programme, she warned about an unexpectedly negative consequence of the programme. The principal reported,

> *Look as a result of the enhancement of their (beginner teachers') performance, being part of the mentoring programme … I discovered that my teachers are becoming marketable and that's why other schools are now tapping into stealing them away …*

The head-hunting of newly groomed teachers could become problematic for the school, forcing the principal to find alternative ways of retaining these teachers at her school. As she expressed,

> *I've decided my next step is developing a management developmental group so I want to gear all those young teachers, that we are busy developing together and I want to tell them "look I see the potential of leadership in you … are you interested in being developed for management so that we can develop you so that you can now shadow a manager so we can groom and gear you for management?*

The extract demonstrates how this negative consequence (losing teachers to other schools) turned into a positive spin-off (gearing young teachers for management) and opened up possibilities for new forms of learning.

Site 3 – District support

This site comprises two levels of support. Firstly, there is support from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) through an initial induction programme in which all new teachers have to attend. This once-off induction programme is mandatory for all new teachers and focuses on school safety, communication, school attendance, inclusive education and medical support, resources and professionalism, and classroom management (DBE, 2010: ii). Secondly, there is support from subject advisors, which takes the form of ongoing support, especially when particular challenges arise that the SMT is unable to address. The latter form of support normally takes the form of interventions, especially in terms of curriculum challenges. During her interview session, the principal shared the willingness of subject advisors to assist teachers to become more proficient in teaching certain subjects. She noted,

> *… curriculum advisors do play a big role … a supportive role to the school. The verification procedures that they have in place also assist me in ensuring that our beginner teachers are adhering to what is expected.*

Site 4 – Virtual space

This refers to the mentor and beginner teacher using technology (a virtual space) to communicate. Faced with their own teaching demands, mentors shared their own challenges, one of which is that they are not always able to assist the beginner teacher when support is needed as they have their own curricular responsibilities. Mentor 1 expressed her frustrations when she was faced with not having enough time to mentor,

> *My biggest problem I've experienced is I don't feel like I always get enough time to spend with them or enough time to pay attention to them, and what's really going on because I'm not just a mentor, I'm assistant coordinator, I'm a grade head … I don't always feel like I have enough time to invest in them as I really want too. I tried but from my side I feel I sometimes I just do not have enough time in the day or I feel I can hear you struggling with a class … and I desperately want to get to you but I have a Grade 12 maths class in exactly the same time slot and I cannot leave a Grade 12 class.*

This problem of not being able to be available at all times leads to alternative ways of communicating which is more immediate. As she further explained,

> *…we created little WhatsApp groups where we can talk, where I can give advice without having to leave my own class. In the end it is basically emotional support … and then also you can't fit everything in one school day.*

The use of WhatsApp conversations between the mentor and beginner teacher allows the mentor to provide immediate responses and assistance without compromising the mentor's academic and leadership responsibilities. In addition, these virtual conversations become a necessary tool to offer emotional support to the beginner teacher.

3. Discussion

What follows is a discussion of the recurring themes that cut across all three data sets and that bring us closer to understanding how, through a formal mentoring programme, beginner teachers move from being newcomers in the teaching profession to becoming old-timers, legitimate participants, in the teaching profession.

4. Disjuncture between the initial teacher training and the real-school context

From the data it is clear that these beginner teacher participants enter the school with strong content knowledge; yet are unable to deal with the realities of the school context. The shortcomings they experienced relate to the following:

Curriculum delivery: although they enter schooling with strong content knowledge, they appear to lack pedagogical knowledge, especially in terms of curriculum delivery and how to teach.

Assessment procedures: they seem to struggle with setting question papers, moderation, and understanding assessment.

Time management: in terms of dealing with the CAPS documents, planning to teach over the two-week cycle, and dealing with homework and feedback to learners.

Classroom management: handling ill-disciplined learners and dealing with behavioural problems.

There is sufficient literature (Arends & Phurutse, 2009; Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2009; Maringe, 2016; King, 2016) that supports this finding. Arends and Phurutse (2009), in particular, question whether institutions of higher learning do indeed prepare students sufficiently for the teaching profession. For Botha and Rens (2018), the disjuncture that exists between their initial training and the realities of schooling can be likened to what they call "reality shock". According to Botha and Rens (2018), the expectation is clear that they will transition successfully from a theory-orientated pre-service teacher to a well-rounded, practice-based teacher within the first few years of employment. Reality shock, however, often quickly sets in for most of them; beginner teachers find themselves to be directly confronted with the gap between theory and practice (Botha & Rens, 2018: 1).

The beginner teachers come into schools having been trained in varying programmes (BEd or PGCE), each exposing them differently to the practices of teaching. As one teacher put it, "*the university prepares you in one direction and you enter school and it is a different reality*". Universities world-wide are often blamed for not adequately preparing teachers for the schooling system "due to the academic bias of their teacher education programmes" (Gravett, 2012: 2). Gravett, Henning and Eislen (2011) warn, however, that expectations that universities should deliver a fully prepared teacher is unrealistic. Gravett (2012: 3) argues that "no teacher education programme can prepare teachers for the full complexity of the real classrooms, where they take full responsibility for the first time". Feiman-Nemser (2001: 1026) supports this view by noting,

> New teachers have two jobs-they have to teach and they have to learn to teach. … The pre-service experience lays the foundation and offers practice in teaching. The first encounter with the real teaching occurs when the beginner teachers step into their own classrooms. Then learning to teach begins with earnest.

Prominent studies on beginner teachers highlight the sudden and sometimes dramatic experiences of beginner teachers as they transition from university graduates to novice teachers (Feinman-Nemser, 2001; Botha & Rens, 2018). Beginner teachers and mentors' verbatim responses reveal learning through "*trial and error"* or "*I hit the water so deep"*, which dovetail with Danielson's (1999) notion of having to "sink or swim in the deep end of the pool".

5. Linkages between the mentoring site and the mentoring approach

It appears from the data that the mentoring sites were based on the type of engagements and mentoring activities. The mentoring approaches were traditional or multidimensional. For Dixon (2012: 37) 'traditional' mentoring has been viewed as "an intense dyadic relationship in which a more senior and experienced person (mentor) provides support and assistance to a more junior, less experienced colleague, referred to as a protégé or mentee". Landefeld (2009) views this dyadic relationship as a one-way process, noting that one-on-one mentoring works the best, as the mentoring process is really all about personalisation and individualism. Hobson *et al*. (2009: 207) describe this process as

> [t]he one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner [mentor], designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession [in this case teaching], and into the specific local context [the school and classroom].

This traditional form of mentoring, the one-on-one mentoring, dominates as a mentoring approach at Site 1 and Site 4. It is at these sites that learning is more intense, personalised or individualised – as is evident with the mentor doing the needs assessment with the purpose of developing the beginner teacher's personal development plan (see Site 1), and where the mentor is able to offer emotional support and immediate feedback via WhatsApp (see Site 4). Something different, however, happens at Sites 2 and 3. Here the mentoring approach appears to be multidimensional, which represents shared thinking and collective feedback. This multidimensional approach to mentoring can be viewed as a democratic culture of collaboration and mutual trust enhancing the professional development of both the mentor and the mentee. Switching from traditional to multidimensional approaches in the mentoring process provides a more holistic approach to understanding how beginner teachers move from newcomers to becoming confident participants in the teaching profession.

6. Multiple and overlapping CoPs: The creation of new and alternative sites of learning

The graphic representation, the modelling of multiple and overlapping CoPs in action, which is depicted in the snapshot (see method section, Step 3), gives us an overview of the complexities that surround the mentoring process. Each mentoring site or CoP (represented by Sites 1, 2, 3 and 4) can be regarded as a bounded space – in these spaces particular forms of involvement, collaboration and the learning of knowledgeable skills that are unique to each site or space take place. Wenger (2000: 232) notes that "shared practices by its very nature create boundaries". However, the boundaries of these spaces are, as Wenger (2000)

suggests, “flexible and dynamic”. The flexibility and permeability of these boundaries not only facilitate the movement of beginner teachers from the periphery to the centre but “create new learning in a variety of dimensions”. The interaction – crossing of boundaries from Site 1 (mentor and mentee in the classroom) to Site 2 (SMT, mentor and mentee involvement in the weekly meetings) – demonstrates how the boundaries between these two mentoring sites or CoPs are bridged. It shows that through coordination (practices are shared across boundaries), transparency (dimensions of analysis and evaluation) and negotiability (such as one-way or two-way connections) boundaries are bridged, and new possibilities arise (Wenger, 2000). In other words, the boundary interactions not only sustain the boundaries between these mentoring sites, but also create new possibilities for learning, for example, beginner teachers being groomed for senior management positions, which appears to facilitate their transition from newcomers to becoming fully legitimate participants, old-timers or legitimate school-based practitioners.

7. Conclusion

We started out by arguing that beginner teachers exit the teaching profession within the first three to five years of teaching at an alarming rate. Literature suggests that one way of addressing the problem of low teacher retention is through a formal mentoring programme. We found, however, that even though there is a vast body of Western literature on the benefits of mentoring, particularly with respect to teacher retention, there is very little empirical evidence on the benefits of such mentoring within a South African context, thus warranting this study. Although the sample is small and this article is based on one case, a formal mentoring programme aimed at beginner teachers, the case itself can have value to others experiencing similar problems in similar settings. This article shows that a disjuncture exists between the beginner teacher’s initial teacher training and the realities and expectations of the profession, which adds to the extensive knowledge of the theory-practice divide. Furthermore, we were able to demonstrate how their engagement in multiple learning sites that comprise this mentoring programme enabled them to transition smoothly from theory-based practitioners into practical, school-based practitioners. In addition, their movement in and out of these multiple and overlapping mentoring spaces allowed for new learning possibilities, which in turn become key in potentially addressing the problem of low teacher retention.

References

Arends, F. & Phurutse, M. 2009. *Beginner teachers in South Africa: school readiness, knowledge and skills* (Teacher Education in South Africa Series). Cape Town: HSRC Press. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11910/4958

Botha, C.S. & Rens, J. 2018. Are they really ‘ready, willing and able’? Exploring reality shock in beginner teachers in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(3): 1546. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v38n3a1546

Chakandinakira, J. 2016. The role of school-based teacher incentives to improve student achievement: Experiences from selected secondary schools in Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. Doctoral dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa. http://hdl.handle.net/10500/22007

Danielson, C. 1999. Mentoring beginning teachers: The case for mentoring. *Teaching and Change*, 6(3): 251-57. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?doi=ec9ea390c74170d070f2f228d229459b5523438c&type=pdf

Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R.C., Andree, A., Richardson, N. & Orphanos, S. 2009. Professional learning in the learning profession. *Washington, DC: National Staff Development Council*, 12. https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/professional-learning-learning-profession-status-report-teacher-development-us-and-abroad.pdf

Department of Basic Education [DBE]. South Africa 2011. *New teacher induction guidelines for the orientation programme*. Pretoria Government Printers. https://www.education.gov.za/Portals/0/Documents/Manuals/New%20Teacher%20Orientation%20Booklet.pdf?ver=2016-12-06-130520-543

Department of Education [DoE]. South Africa 2006. *The national policy framework four teacher education and development in South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printers. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/teachereducdev0.pdf

Denzin, N.K. 1989. *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods* (2nd Ed). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Dixon, K. 2012. Strengthening foundation phase teacher education through mentoring. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 2(1): 16. https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2023.2273268

Feiman-Nemser, S. 2001. From preparation to practice: Designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching. *Teachers College Record*, 106(6). https://www.brandeis.edu/mandel/questcase/Documents/Readings/Feiman_Nemser.pdf. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810110300601

Gravett, S. 2012. Crossing the "theory-practice divide": Learning to be(come) a teacher. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 2(2): 9. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v2i2.9

Gravett, S., Henning, E. & Eiselen, R. 2011. New teachers look back on their university education: Prepared for teaching, but not for life in the classroom. *Education as Change*, 15(sup1): S123-S142. https://doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2011.643636

Henning, E. 2004. *Finding your way in Qualitative Research*. South Africa: Van Schaik Publishers.

Hobson, A.J., Ashby, P., Malderez, A. & Tomlinson, P.D. 2009. Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(1): 207-216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.09.001

Ingersoll, R. & Kralik, J.M. 2004. The impact of mentoring on teacher retention: What the research says. GSE Publications, 127. https://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/rmi/ECS-RMI-2004.pdf

Ingersoll, R.M. & Strong, M. 2011. The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2): 201-233. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323

King, M. 2016. *Process control: a practical approach*. New York: Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470976562

Landefeld, I.D. 2009. The role of implicit leadership theories on leader-member exchange and follower self-efficacy. Doctoral dissertation. Minneapolis: Walden University.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. 1991. Situated learning, legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355

Maringe, F. 2016. Transforming the post-school sector in South Africa: Limits of a skills-driven agenda. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(5): 120-140. https://doi.org/10.20853/30-5-616

McCann, T.M., Johannessen, L.R. & Ricca, B.P. 2005. *Supporting beginning English teachers: Research and implications for teacher induction*. Urbana, IL : The National Council of Teachers of English.

Merriam, S.B. 2009. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*: Revised and expanded from qualitative research and case study applications in education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, M.Q. 2002. Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: A personal, experiential perspective. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(3): 221-263. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325002001003636

Smith, S.U., Hayes, S. & Shea, P. 2017. A critical review of the use of Wenger's community of practice (CoP) Theoretical Framework in Online and Blended Learning Research, 2000-2014. *Online Learning*, 21(1): 209-237. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1140262.pdf. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v21i1.963

Waterman, S. & He, Y. 2011. Effects of mentoring programs on new teacher retention: A literature review. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 19(2): 139-156. https://doi.org/10.1080/13611267.2011.564348

Wenger, E. 1998. Communities of practice: Learning as a social system. *Systems Thinker*, 9(5): 2-3. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932

Wenger, E. 2000. Communities of practice and social learning systems. *Organization*, *7*(2): 225-246. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002

Wenger, E. 2010. Communities of practice and social learning systems: the career of a concept. In C. Blackmore (Ed.), *Social learning systems and communities of practice*. London: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2_11

Wenger, E., White, N. & Smith, J. D. 2009. *Digital habitats: Stewarding technology for communities*. Portland: CP square. https://doi.org/10.26203/jtm1-6v96

Xaba, M.I. 2003. Managing teacher turnover. *South African Journal Education of Education*, 23(4): 287-291. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC31961

Yin, R.K. 1984. *Case studies research design: design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Yin, R.K. 2009. *Case study research, design and methods* (4th ed). New York: SAGE Publications, Inc.