

# **A SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEYS**

## **Joint Mentoring Project, September 2011**

### **A Preliminary Report prepared by Clarence G Williams**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The 21 mentees on the programme were employed at 14 schools during the first action research cycle of the Joint Mentoring Project (JMP) which lasted from July to December 2011. These 14 schools are located in Belhar (3), Delft (5), Manenberg/Heideveld (2), Mitchell's Plain (2) and Eerste River/Mfuleni (2). The purpose of the School Questionnaire was to obtain basic information about the schools at which the mentees are being employed in order to understand the context within which the mentees are required to function, and to inform the planning of the project. Of the 14 school principals who were requested to complete the School Questionnaire 13 responded. This represents a response rate of 93% which can be considered to be acceptable. According to the mentors the rest of the school principals have welcomed the JMP and are fully committed to ensure the success of the project at their schools.

Of the 21 mentees on the programme 18 completed the questionnaire that was aimed specifically at them. Unfortunately some had completed earlier versions of the questionnaire, while two completed the final version of the questionnaire with a number of pages missing. This meant that the responses were uneven, and comparisons of the responses to some of the questions are onerous.

This report is also based on the initial reflective reports of those mentors who had submitted their reports by 9 September. These reports cover only 9 of the 14 schools.

## **SECTION A: THE SCHOOLS**

### **The profile of the 13 participatory schools**

Eight of the schools were established prior to 2000 while one school was established as recently as 2009. The majority of schools can therefore be regarded to be schools that have had an opportunity to establish themselves over a period of more than ten years. All these schools are primary schools and accommodate Grades R to 7. Eleven of the 13 schools have enrolments of more than a thousand learners, while two have enrolments of approximately 500 learners. Not one of the 13 schools has special admission requirements or a special 'magnet' programme to attract learners to the school. Some schools are the preferred choice of the parents due to their academic profile and extra-curricular achievements. From January to July the enrolment at all but one of the schools has been consistent, with only a handful of learners not having enrolled during the third quarter of the year. The one exception is the school where 46 (3.5%) learners who were enrolled in January 2011 did not return to school during the third quarter. At only one of the schools there was a slight increase of the numbers of learners enrolled during the third quarter.

One of the 13 school principals opted not to provide the demographic profile of his/her school. I assume that he/she is objecting to the notion of racial classification. No white learner attended any of the remaining 12 schools, while 11 Asian learners attended three of the primary schools. At one school only African learners were enrolled. At the remaining schools there was a mixture of African and coloured learners. At only 1 of these schools the African learners outnumbered their coloured counterparts. The demographic composition of the schools determines the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) at the 12 schools. The 1 school where all the learners are African the LOLT in the Foundation Phase is IsiXhosa and from grades 4 to 7 it is English. At the 1 school where the majority of learners are African the LOLT is English. At the remaining 10 schools the LOLT is Afrikaans and English. It is important to note that the African learners are not necessarily Xhosa speakers, but have other African languages as their mother tongue. The

question inevitably arises whether the demographic composition of the learners has an influence on the language proficiency of the learners in the LOLT. At the school where the African learners are in the majority as well as the school where the learners are exclusively African approximately 40% of learners are experiencing proficiency problems in the LOLT. In the exclusively coloured school 60% of the learners are experiencing proficiency problems in the LOLT. There does not seem to be a correlation between the demographic composition of the school and the proficiency of the learners in the LOLT. All schools experience proficiency problems to a lesser (5%) or greater (60%) extent. Most of the 13 schools have special programmes to overcome the language proficiency problems. The majority of them depend on the ELSEN teacher to remedy these problems, while others have instituted extra classes in basic English to remedy the problem. Code switching is also used. At only one school where only 5% of the learners are purported to be experiencing language proficiency problems is the situation is not regarded as serious enough to warrant special attention.

According to the school principals between 5% and 30% of the learners are experiencing other barriers to learners. Five of the respondents indicated a percentage of 20% which is highly significant. The main barriers to learning identified are poverty and hunger, domestic violence, lack of parental involvement, foetal alcohol syndrome, mild retardation, mild dyslexia, struggling with basic concepts, problems, and poor school attendance. Most of these are related directly or indirectly to socio-economic circumstances. Other barriers to learning identified by the school principals are large classes, lack of proper facilities, and the low morale of teachers. At 3 of the schools no remedial action is taken to remedy the situation, while the majority of schools tend to refer the most severe cases to the Intervention Learner Support Team (ILST) or the ELSEN teacher.

At 5 of the primary schools no attempt is made to provide support to parents/caregivers to assist their children with school work. At the other schools the regular parent meetings are utilized to inform parents/caregivers how they can assist their children. At 2 of the schools special programmes are run after school to support parents.

All 13 schools have access to basic requirements like electricity and water, and 11 of the school have a functioning computer laboratory. What is sorely lacking at many of the schools are a functioning library (8), ample storage space (10), sufficient textbooks, stationery, desks, etc. (5), buildings in a good condition (7).

### **The importance placed on educational goals**

According to the responses of 5 school principals the following educational goals, in order of importance, are generally regarded to be the most important:

- Building basic literacy skills
- Encouraging academic excellence
- Promoting good work habits and self-discipline
- Promoting personal growth
- Promoting vocational skills
- Promoting human relations skills
- Promoting multicultural awareness of understanding
- Fostering religious or spiritual development

### **Factors impacting negatively on the learning and teaching programme**

Based on the responses of the 13 school principals discipline does not seem to be a major problem at their schools. The majority of the 12 discipline problems listed in the questionnaire do not occur at all at their schools or occur very infrequently. The discipline problems that do occur to some extent or a lot are, in order of responses: bullying (9), physical conflict (8), vandalism (5), robbery or theft (4), learner use of alcohol (2), verbal abuse of educators (2), learners' acts of disrespect for educators (2), gang activities (2), widespread disorder in the classrooms (1), sexual activity (1) and smoking (1). This is borne out by the fact that at all 13 schools not one learner had been expelled from school in 2010

and only 15 had been suspended for misdemeanors ranging from involvement in gangsterism, smoking, disruptive behaviour and vandalism.

School principals were required to indicate the extent to which the following 17 factors impacted negatively on the teaching and learning programmes at their schools. The factors that have been indicated to influence the teaching and learning negatively to some extent or a lot are the following:

- Learners coming from poor home environments (12)
- Lack of parental support for learner learning at home (11)
- High learner absenteeism (8)
- Disruption of classes by learners (7)
- Educators not meeting individual learners' needs (7)
- Not enough teaching time (7)
- Learners intimidating or bullying other learners (7)
- Learners skipping class (6)
- Low expectations of educators (6)
- High educator turnover (5)
- Educator absenteeism (5)
- Learners not being encouraged to achieve their full potential (5)
- Poor learner-educator relations (4)
- Learners' lack of respect for educators (4)
- Insufficient support from circuit or district teams (4)
- Staff resisting change (3)
- Educators not being strict enough with learners (2)

An analysis of these responses indicates that according to the school principals most of the factors that impact negatively on the learning and teaching programmes of their schools are learner-related, followed by educator-related factors.

The schools generally have stable staff establishments with relatively few posts occupied on a temporary basis. In 11 of the schools between 80 to 100% of the post level 1 positions are occupied on a permanent basis. At all schools concerted efforts have been made to ensure employment equity. These efforts have been relatively successful as far as gender equity in promotion posts is concerned. All schools struggle to attract male educators to apply for post level 1 positions – this is a situation that is common to all South African primary schools. The primary schools that have Afrikaans and English as LOLT struggle to attract African applicants. The staff establishments of most of these schools are thus generally not representative of the demographics of the learner population.

At all 13 primary schools some form of evaluation of educator performance takes place on a regular basis – at some schools on a quarterly basis and at other schools on a weekly or monthly basis. This is done routinely as part of the IQMS which is a WCED requirement.

At 12 of the primary schools between 60 and 100% of the staff had attended a programme of professional development during the first two quarters of 2011. Within the schools the school management teams are primarily assigned this responsibility, while at 2 of the schools a deputy principal had been appointed as curriculum coordinator and this responsibility had been assigned to them. At two of the schools very little professional development takes place due to staff constraints. Other agencies involved in the professional development of educators are primarily WCED as well as a number of NGOs like Thuthukani, Health Kick, LoveLife, SANLAM.

Four of the school principals indicated that the professional development programmes are sufficient to meet the needs of the educators, while the rest responded negatively. Areas that still require attention is minimizing the misbehaviour of learners and helping learners to overcome learning barriers.

Ten of the school principals indicated that the first-time teachers on the JMP have generally not been adequately prepared for the teaching profession. The general criticism is that the teacher education has been too theoretical without due emphasis on practical teaching. The following – in order of priority – have been identified by the school principals as the most pressing needs of first-time teachers that have been appointed at their schools in recent years:

- Classroom management and discipline
- Daily and weekly planning
- Time management – coping with the workload
- Teaching large classes
- Understanding and dealing with children with learning barriers
- Assessment
- Insufficient content knowledge
- Knowledge of school policy and curriculum
- Involvement in extra-curricular activities
- Teaching other learning areas for which they were not specifically trained
- Administrative ability
- Ensuring parental involvement
- Understanding and accepting authority
- Collegial relationships

In spite of acknowledging these needs of first-time teachers 8 of the primary schools had no special induction programme for first-time teachers at the school. At 2 of the other schools it was expected that first-time teachers should utilize the professional development programmes that are available to all educators. At the remaining 3 schools mentors are assigned to the first-time teachers to provide them with guidance and to induct them into the school.

### **Expectations of the JMP**

In general, the school principals expressed various expectations regarding how they wish their schools and the first-time teachers to benefit from their school's involvement in the JMP. These include the following:

- The project will help the schools to acquire science and mathematics resources.
- First-time teachers will be developed to become excellent and reflective teachers.
- Hopefully with more confidence the first-time teachers will lead learners to more focused, disciplined and independent.
- By being more empowered the first-time teachers will hopefully have a positive influence on the entire school.
- The first-time teachers will be encouraged to stay in the profession.
- First-time teachers will be empowered w.r.t. the interpretation of the curriculum, lesson planning, assessment, and the interpretation and analysis of assessment results.
- First-time teachers will develop a passion for teaching and learn to adapt to the changing environment.

## **SECTION B: THE MENTEES**

### **A profile of the mentees**

All 18 students completed their teacher education in the Faculty of Education of UWC. Twelve are in possession of the four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), 6 have a B.A. and 1 a B.Sc. plus a Post Graduate Certificate in Education. One of the mentees in possession of the B.Ed. had previously completed a B.A. in Social Science. With the exception of 1 mentee, all the mentees completed their teacher education in 2011. The following are the two method subjects which the mentees did as part of their teacher education:

- Life Orientation and English or Afrikaans: 11
- Mathematics and Physical Science: 2
- Mathematics and General Science: 1
- Life Orientation and General Science: 1
- Life Orientation and Consumer Studies: 1
- Biology and General Science: 1
- Economic and Management Science and English: 1.

Ten of the mentees are required to do class teaching at their schools. This means they are required to teach Afrikaans, English, Arts and Culture, Economic and Management Science, Life Orientation, Mathematics, Natural Science and Technology to the grade 4, 5, 6 and 7 learners that have been assigned to them. At the schools where some measure of subject teaching occurs, the mentees have been assigned the two subjects in which they had received teacher education plus at least two other subjects. Only 1 mentee was assigned only the subjects in which he had received teacher education. In essence this means that the mentees are required to teach subjects in which they had received no specific teacher education other than the preparation in the fundamentals of instruction. Of the 18 mentees only 4 had received teacher education in Mathematics and Science, and 1 had received teacher education in only Science. This has major implications for the JMP. Ten of the mentees are also required to be involved in extramural activities in which they have had no teacher education. Ironically the student with a BA in Sports Management has been appointed at a school that offers no extramural activities. Eight of the mentees are employed at schools that do not participate in any form of extramural activity.

The grades that have been assigned to the mentees are grade 4 (7 mentees), grades 4 and 5 (1 mentee); grade 5 (4 mentees), grades 4, 5 and 6 (1 mentee), grade 6 (2), grades 6 and 7 (1) and grade 7 (2). The tendency at most of the schools seems to be to assign the lower grades to the first-time teachers. The classes vary in size from 30 to 60. The average size of the classes that have been assigned to the mentees is 40.6 learners per class. Contrary to general research findings (Shakwa, 2001; Sabar, 2004; and Schultze and Steyn, 2005) it seems as if the mentees on the JMP had not been given the most problematic and biggest classes.

Four of the mentees indicated that the UWC Faculty of Education had prepared them adequately for the teaching profession, and one gave a mixed response. According to the remaining mentees the main shortcomings of their teacher education are the following:

- They have not been trained to teach all subjects/learning areas, and to provide leadership in extra-mural activities.

- Too much emphasis was placed on theory and not enough on preparing them for the realities of teaching. Special mention is made of the neglect of the administrative functions they are required to fulfill. Their classroom management skills are also inadequate to deal with the various contextual factors that impact negatively on the general behaviour of the learners. Often what was taught to them as part of their teacher education is at variance with WCED directives. Many mentees indicated that greater emphasis should have been placed on teaching practice.

The responses of the first-time teachers are not unexpected. Researchers like Green (2006), Sabar (2004), Ulvik, *et al.* (2009) and Veenman (1984) claim that teacher education programmes at universities do not generally prepare novices for the reality of everyday life at schools. These programmes are overly theoretical and do not always consider the practical problems that may occur in the classroom. Schultze and Steyn (2005) conducted an investigation into the problems experienced by beginner teachers in South Africa. They used questionnaires to ascertain whether the problems beginner teacher experience were linked to gender, age and years of experience, amongst others. They found that beginner teachers across the board complained about lack of subject knowledge and skills, difficulty with the use of appropriate teaching methods and time and classroom management irrespective of the pre-service training they had received. Shakwa (2001) states that there is a gap between the theory taught as part of teacher education and the practice of teaching. Phurutse and Arends (2009) also aver that there should be a balance between practical teaching skills and theory or subject knowledge.

### **The needs of the first-time teacher**

The first-time teachers were required to indicate their level of need for assistance with regard to their expectations, teaching, classroom management and relationships. The following are the areas in which the first-time teachers expressed high or very high needs:

#### *Expectations*

- Finding out what are the policies and expectations of the district officials (WCED) (12 first-time teachers);
- Finding out what is expected of me by the parents (10 first-time teachers)

- Finding out what is expected of me by the learners (7 first-time teachers)
- Finding out what are the policies and expectations of the school governing body (6 first-time teachers)
- Finding out what are the policies and expectations of the school principal and the rest of the school management team (4 first-time teachers)
- Finding out what are the policies and expectations of the head of department/ grade head/ subject head/ learning area head (4 first-time teachers)

### *Teaching*

- Assisting learners with special needs (15 first-time teachers)
- Preparing learners for national and/or provincial tests (14 first-time teachers)
- Obtaining curriculum guides, teaching resources and materials (13 first-time teachers)
- Understanding the curriculum (10 first-time teachers)
- Effective use of and teaching resources (like textbooks) and materials (10 first-time teachers)
- Dealing with individual differences amongst learners (10 first-time teachers)
- Diagnosing learner needs (9 first-time teachers)
- Using a variety of teaching methods (9 first-time teachers)
- Creating and administering summative assessments (8 first-time teachers)
- Analyzing test and examination results – evaluating the progress of the learners (8 first-time teachers)
- Completing administrative paperwork (8 first-time teachers)
- Developing and administering formative assessments (7 first-time teachers)
- Lesson planning (6 first-time teachers)

### *Classroom management*

- Teaching large classes (9 first-time teachers)
- Organizing and managing the classroom (8 first-time teachers)
- Time and work management (8 first-time teachers)
- Maintaining learner discipline (8 first-time teachers)

- Facilitating group discussion and work (7 first-time teachers)
- Motivating the learners (7 first-time teachers)

### *Relationships*

- Establishing rapport with the district officials (WCED) (9 first-time teachers)
- Establishing rapport with the school governing body (9 first-time teachers)
- Establishing rapport with the school principal and the rest of the school management team (6 first-time teachers)
- Establishing rapport with the parents/caregivers (5 first-time teachers)
- Establishing rapport with the head of department/ grade head/ subject head/ learning area head (3 first-time teachers)
- Establishing rapport with the learners and maintaining authority (3 first-time teachers)
- Establishing rapport with other members of staff (2 first-time teachers)

Although the mentees indicated the lack of teaching materials and textbooks as well as the general neglect at some of the schools, they did not indicate this as a need. Seemingly they accept their working conditions as being inevitable. This is a matter of concern.

### **The induction of the first-time teachers**

The responses to the question which policy documents they are currently being used in their planning and presentation of the curriculum were varied. Based on their responses it is obvious that the first-time teachers did not have access to all official policy documents. Most of the first-time teachers have access to WCED's Blue Boxes, but not to the official CAPS document. Some of them were not even aware of the existence of some of these documents. It is also surprising how few first-time teachers have access to all their school's policy documents. The possibility does however exist that the some of the schools do not have policy documents covering some of the areas of policy listed even though it is an official requirement that such policies should have been formulated.

At all the schools some form of support is provided to staff members by the school even though no formal induction programmes for first-time teachers exist. According to Flores (2006) there is a mistaken assumption that first-time teachers had the basic knowledge and skills required of them; they therefore do not require preferential treatment as far as professional development is concerned. At one school an induction programme for first-time teacher does exist, but due to the heavy teaching load of the teachers there is no free time to bring the programme to full fruition. The persons generally responsible for providing support to educators are the grade heads, heads of departments and occasionally the deputy principals and school principals. Two of the first-time teachers indicated that their school principals maintain an open door policy, which means that first-time teachers can consult them whenever the need arises. The grade heads and occasionally the heads of departments are also the persons responsible for overseeing the work of all teachers. This supervision - in most cases - entails taking in and signing written work, and that happens weekly, fortnightly or once or twice per term.

Staff meetings are held at all schools. At most schools the daily staff meetings are held for debriefing, while general staff meetings are scheduled more infrequently (once or twice a term) to discuss matters of general concern to the staff and to inform staff of the latest developments in the education system. Based on the responses of the first-time teachers it seems as if staff meetings are generally not regarded as staff development opportunities with the exception of one school.

At all schools a high level of collaboration exists. The peer support which happens primarily within the grades is generally welcomed by the first-time teachers. This contradicts the research of Schultze and Steyn (2005) and Shakwa (2001) that found that first-time teachers are compelled to function in relative isolation as a result of veterans who believe that first-time teachers should experience what they had experienced and that it is not their responsibility to render assistance to first-time teachers.

Except for 4, the first-time teachers indicated that they had received no support from the district office. This correlates with the research findings of Sabar (2004) and Schultze and Steyn (2005). This response is however surprising as most of the school principals had indicated that District offices run workshops on a regular basis and most of the staff members had been exposed to some or other form of professional development and that the WCED had primarily been responsible for providing these. It could be that the first-time teachers are expecting district officials to be providing personal support to them.

The fact that the first-time teachers on the JMP are involved on a voluntary basis does indicate a deep-rooted need for some form of professional development support beyond what the school and WCED are currently offering. Some of the ways that they hope to benefit from their involvement in the JMP include the following, in no particular order:

- to share their experiences in a peer support network;
- to broaden their subject knowledge base, especially in those subjects in which they received no teacher training;
- to improve their classroom management skills;
- to become more effective teachers by being exposed to different teaching methods;
- to be empowered to deal with the many and varied challenges they are faced with on a daily basis; and
- to improve their planning skills.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In the broadest sense, Cherubini (2007:2) defines teacher induction as: “the support and guidance provided to novice teachers in the early years of their teaching careers”. Mentoring is often confused and conflated with the concept of the induction of first-time teachers. It is important to realize that the induction of first-time teachers consists of a multiple of activities of which mentoring is but one. Although no mentoring programme exists at most of the schools

that form part of the JMP one or other form of induction is taking place. The importance of induction programmes cannot be overemphasized. The reason why many first-time teachers leave the profession can be ascribed to insufficient support and training. First-time teachers who struggle on their own often succumb to depression and lack of commitment. Often - in desperation - they develop various negative survival mechanisms like authoritarianism, denial and avoidance. The JMP is thus a most welcome form of intervention. Hopefully the mentoring will form part of bigger collaborative effort aimed at inducting the first-time teachers into the teaching profession. In order to do so a holistic approach is required so that the efforts of the district office, the school and the JMP are not at variance but compliment each other.

Some crucial issues have not been investigated in the two questionnaire surveys. In future the impact of part-time studies as well as the lack of permanency on the induction of these first-time teachers should be investigated.

It would be imprudent to proffer the JMP as the panacea for all the ills facing first-time teachers in South Africa. In countries that are much better resourced than South Africa various forms of induction are being implemented. These include a form of internship in countries like New Zealand in which the first two years of teaching is regarded as a continuation of the pre-service training of teachers as well as the system in Japan where first-time teachers are given reduced workloads, attend in-school service training twice a week and out-of-school training once a week. At most the JMP should be regarded as a stop gap measure intended to supplement other efforts.

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