Transitioning from Teacher Education Colleges to the Real Classroom: Experiences of Student Teachers on Teaching Practice at Primary Schools in the Lower Gweru District of Zimbabwe

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Abstract:
Transitioning from teacher education colleges to the real classroom situation is an important stage in the training of a teacher. This study explores the experiences of ten (10) student teachers on teaching practice at primary schools in the Lower Gweru district of Zimbabwe. Three (3) primary schools were purposively sampled for this study. In this qualitative study semi-structured interviews with participants were audio-recorded and transcribed. The findings of the study revealed that most student teachers were adequately prepared with respect to drawing up schemes and lesson plans. Sequencing of lessons and subject content mastery remain a challenge to student teachers on teaching practice. Additionally, quite a sizeable number of student teachers felt challenged in disciplining and motivating pupils during teaching and learning. Interacting with parents, handling learners with disabilities, setting differentiated tasks, marking constructively and unhelpful mentors continue to pose challenges to student teachers in their attempt to fit into the school culture and ethos. The study recommends an introspection by both schools and teacher education colleges in respect of their roles in preparing student teachers for a smooth transition from teacher education colleges to the reality of the classroom.

Keywords: Transitioning, teacher education, teaching practice, microteaching, induction mechanisms.

1. Introduction
The elation which student teachers feel when they conduct microteaching and when colleges of education prepare them for Teaching Practice (TP) deployment into schools is usually tempered by the realization that now they have to teach real pupils in real classrooms. While microteaching is usually conducted in schools where teachers and learners are accustomed to hosting student teachers, conditions in teaching practice schools are not always similar to schools where microteaching is conducted. As Davison (1997) observes the prospect of beginning TP can create a mixture of excitement, eager anticipation and slight trepidation. Thus, the transition from college- based student to real classroom practitioner, during TP, can be difficult. It may lead to what Harris (2012) calls 'school and classroom culture shock.' It is therefore important that student teachers are not only inducted for their teaching roles, but also for the transition from being college based student to one on TP.

1.1. Background and Theoretical Framework
Teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe are affiliated to the University of Zimbabwe under the Department of Teacher Education (DTE). As a result colleges follow the same curriculum prescribed by the DTE. The curriculum incorporates four major areas which are Main Subject, Professional Studies, Theory of Education and Teaching Practice. These four major areas provide both the theoretical and practical (pedagogical) needs of the teaching environment. Thus a student teacher from college is expected to cope with the practical management and organisation of instruction in the classroom, as well as the theoretical aspects of child development (Ahmed 2012). This is so, as (Mule, 2006) observes, because during pre-service training student teachers are expected to 'grow up' professionally, through involvement in practical training, knowledge construction and behaviour acquisition. Preservice education thus provides a balanced blend of theory and practice (Brian, 2007 in Ahmed 2012).Teacher education primary colleges in Zimbabwe have currently adopted a 2-5-2 model (that is initial two terms in college, five terms out of college on teaching practice and then final two terms in the college).The initial two terms in college are meant to equip student teachers with theory for teaching. Sentiments from the Ministry of Education and educational practitioners seem to suggest that the initial two terms in college are not adequate to prepare teachers for

realities of public schools. Levine (2006), writing about teacher education programmes in Pakistan points out that scores of primary school teachers have been passed out from teacher education colleges with insufficient grasp over the school content and methodologies. From the foregoing, it would appear that the quality of teacher training programmes should, as much as possible, take into account school contextual realities as well as the demands of the modern teaching world (Ahmed 2009).

In Zimbabwe student teachers from primary teacher education colleges spend five terms on teaching practice. Teaching practice provides student teachers with experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Ngidi & Sibaya,2008:18, Marais & Meier,2004:220;Perry,2004:2).When student teachers go for teaching practice, they are given the opportunity to try out the art of teaching before they actually get into the real world of teaching (Kasanda,1995 in Kiggundu & Nayimuli, 2009).This teaching practice programme which represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools (Marais & Meier,2004:221) needs proper transitional mechanisms from teacher education colleges to primary schools. Through the study of Professional Studies, student teachers are expected to handle real classroom situations having been exposed to microteaching at the college.

Microteaching implies a condensed and simplified teaching situation and provides teacher candidates with opportunities to systematically study and practice specific teaching behaviours in a simulated environment...the trainee studies a specific teaching skill,...attempts to apply the skill in a five to ten-minute lesson taught to between three and seven pupils...the trainee receives feedback from supervisor and written evaluations from pupils taught...the trainee uses information from the feedback phase to re-plan and re-teach the lesson (Manis 1973).

From the foregoing microteaching, which is a training context in which a teaching situation has been reduced in scope and/or simplified in some systematic way...is usually conceived of as occurring in three or four distinct stages: the "briefing", the "teach", the "critique" and the "reteach"(Wallace 1991). Additionally, microteaching is the practical training technique which gives students and teachers the opportunity to master the skills inherent in teaching in a laboratory environment before actual class experience. Furthermore, microteaching provides student teachers with opportunities to practice teaching skills, so that they can obtain feedback in non-judgmental environments (Yusuf 2006). From the foregoing, this study explores how student teachers cope with real classes which require them to teach as many as 50 learners in a class and a number of time tabled subjects demanding application of various teaching skills within a normal time frame of a lesson. The "reteach" stage (Wallace 1991) which is done during microteaching whereby the student teacher practices the same skill again in the light of the discussion made with the supervisor does not always apply given the tight schedule which prevails in schools. It is at this stage that education colleges should also play a key role in ensuring that student teachers on teaching practice manage to translate theory and training gained in college into practice. Preparing student teachers to teach effectively and to reflect on the sequence and consequences of their teaching actions is a prominent issue among teacher educators who must facilitate the integration of theory and practice (Pultorak 1996).

2. Rationale for Induction

The teaching practice period is recognized as a very crucial period in the lives of student teachers because it lays the foundation for future professional development. The student teacher leaves the college of education with some basic teaching skills. He/she needs practice under supervision in order to further develop these skills and to relate the theory mastered to professional practice (Darling-Hammond, 1998).   Such induction involves assisting student teachers to go through what Loucks and Hall (2001) call stages of concern. According to Zimpler and Howey (1990) student teachers have among others, classroom survival concerns, concerns of coping with school and classroom challenges as well as concerns of how they can raise learner outcomes. The above concerns suggest that colleges of education and primary schools should ensure that student teachers are properly inducted so that their teaching practice session becomes a fruitful and worthwhile learning experience. It should, however be pointed out that while induction is a learning process, the nature of its content, mode of organisation, delivery and evaluation is crucial to its effectiveness (Tickle, 2004). This study provides an overview of induction experiences of student teachers operating in primary schools in the Lower Gweru district of Zimbabwe. The purpose of the study was to find out student teachers' expectations with respect to their induction by both colleges of education and the schools where they were deployed for TP.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study captures student teachers' induction experiences through semi-structured interviews. Thirty (30) student teachers doing their second term of TP were purposively sampled from ten (10) Lower Gweru primary schools. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (Merriam, 2009). These were taken back to the interviewees for comments and endorsement (member-checking). The data were then coded into thematic categories (Litchman, 2010). *Verbatum* data were used not only to illustrate these themes, but also to allow student teachers to speak for themselves.

4. Findings

Student teachers' responses to interview items on their induction by colleges of education and primary schools were categorized into five sub-themes. The sub-themes are identified and discussed below:

- Theme 1: Student Teachers Felt Well Prepared For The Following at the Beginning of Their TP

4.1. Planning and Preparation of Lessons
Student teachers felt that colleges of education provided them with the requisite skills to prepare and plan lessons. According to most students Professional Studies laid a strong foundation for the development of the foregoing skills. One student teacher observed that:
At college we were given assignments from each of the Professional studies subject areas taught in primary schools to scheme for two weeks and write a detailed lesson plan using a selected schemed topic. The schemes of work and lesson plans were thoroughly marked and we were given the chance to correct and use them during microteaching.
Corroborating the view that student teachers were adequately prepared by teachers colleges a female student from one primary school had this to say:
We may fail to teach as expected by the school and the college but one thing that we are clear and confident about is planning and scheming.
Notwithstanding the foregoing, seven student teachers indicated that although the college did much to prepare them on how to plan and scheme, they still find it very difficult to write detailed lesson plans and schemes of work

4.2. Sequencing of Lessons
Twenty - four student teachers felt that the flow of the lesson was not an issue since they were being guided by detailed lesson plans which they constantly referred to during the lesson so as not to miss a single lesson step. Furthermore ways of structuring content for various subjects was well tackled during Professional Studies. According to the students, Psychology of Education, covered under Theory of Education, assisted them to structure content to the level of primary school leaners.
The rest of the interviewed student teachers echoed that they had problems in sequencing lesson steps. They indicated that in most cases they failed to complete their lessons within the stipulated time. One of the student teachers had this to say: "At times the bell for completing a lesson rings when I am almost half way the lesson and I end up rushing through to complete the lesson. Surprisingly in some instances I finish a 30 minutes lesson in 20 minutes."

4.3. Content Mastery
At teacher education colleges, primary school subject content is covered during Professional Studies. The syllabi and topics taught for each subject at various grade levels are looked into during Professional Studies periods. Twenty - six student teachers indicated that they had good content mastery of Ndebele, English, Social Studies, Mathematics and Environmental Science. The remaining four student teachers suggested that they were not competent enough with some concepts and topics in Religious and Moral Education as well as HIV and AIDS. They also noted having deficiency in practical skills which limited them to demonstrate some skills in Home Economics, Music, Physical Education and Art Education. The above sentiments concur with Levine's (2006) observation on Pakistan teacher education colleges where he pointed out that some primary school teachers have been passed out from teacher education colleges with insufficient grasp of the school content and methodologies.

- Theme 2: Student Teachers Did Not Feel Well Prepared for the Following:

4.4. Class Control/ Discipline Related Issues
Highlighting student concerns with respect to class control and discipline one student from had this to say:
Since it is the first time to handle a full class, l feel very challenged in disciplining pupils. When l start teaching, some pupils will be chatting with their friends. Even if l caution them they do not take hid because they know that student teachers are not supposed to beat them.
Surprisingly the class teacher/mentor has no discipline problems at all. Once she begins teaching pupils pay full attention and participate effectively. It would seem that student teachers have challenges in maintaining class discipline in the teaching and learning situation. Young (1990) suggested that effective teachers plan and execute interesting lessons using a variety of methods, monitor student learning and behaviour, and maintain rapport with students. Sometimes student teachers may have problems in disciplining pupils due to inadequate lesson preparation and planning. Kelly and Brandes (2001:438-439) noted that teacher candidates " struggle to articulate a teaching philosophy, hone subject matter knowledge, select from and improvise within curricular guidelines, and develop effective and equitable discipline and assessment strategies."

4.5. Motivating Learners
Effective learning depends on, among other things, the extent to which learners have been motivated. At colleges of education student teachers are taught various theories of motivation and how to apply them in teaching/learning situations. Emphasizing challenges which student teachers have with respect to class motivation one student teacher said:
It is very difficult to motivate pupils because of the big class l teach. Whenever my mentor is delivering his lessons, pupils are kept busy and interact with him in a jovial mood. As soon as l take over the lesson from him, most pupils are not keen to learn at all. At college we were taught Maslow's theory of motivation but l am finding it difficult to apply it to a class of 47 pupils.
Pahm (2006) in Bumatay et al (2009:62) noted that motivation is important in eliciting learning among students.She further acknowledged that generally students at all levels increased their participation in class and boosted their moral and self confidence when motivated.Bumatay, et al (2009) basing on student teacher's accounts, observed that motivation was elicited through the application of effective communication such as the use of visual aids, encouraging words, and affirmations. Cole and McNay (1989)

as well as Dolloff (2003) noted that beginning teachers often experience difficulty reconciling theory and practice. Indeed theory seldom informs their practice. "Many times teachers do not perceive theory taught in education courses as particularly relevant to the reality of teaching. Theory is even sometimes seen as contrary to the needs and reality of practice. There exists in the minds of students, therefore, a dissonance between teacher education and teacher practice." (Dolloff 2003:23).

4.6. Dealing with Parents
In teaching contexts there will always be interaction between teachers and parents. When student teachers are deployed for teaching practice they invariably interact with parents. Expressing a challenge in dealing with parents a student teacher at one Lower Gweru primary school had this to say:
Sociology of Education briefly exposed us to interaction patterns. It was our hope that mentors were supposed to assist us grow professionally. To our surprise, most of the time they are out of the classroom leaving us in charge of the full class. When parents come with their queries they expose us in front of their children accussing us of not being fit to handle classes. Some even say it openly that they do not want their pupils to be taught by student teachers because they doubt our competence levels. It becomes very difficult for us to deal with parents since it is our first time to come into contact with them in a teaching- learning environment.
In a study by Reddy cited in Lewin et al (2003) South African fourth year teacher education students expressed concern with their preparation on classroom administration as well as dealing with parents. It would thus seem that student teachers require training in handling parents.

4.7. Handling Learners with Disabilities
Whenever student teachers are deployed into schools they are likely to teach learners with varied abilities and competencies. At college students covered special education in Theory of Education. Unfortunately during microteaching student teachers are not exposed to learners with disabilities so as learn how to handle them. One student teacher had this to say: "I have a pupil with hearing impairment who will always smile at me as l teach. My mentor whom l am supposed to learn from seems not to care about the pupil saying she is not a specialist teacher." Another student retorted: "I have a partially blind pupil who finds it difficult to read from the textbook. Each time I conduct individual reading I omit her." Mentors are seen as the go-between persons in times of student teacher's need, they have the experience and skills to offer help and advice in any situation.The mentor acts as a role model who should provide a good example to the student teacher (Anderson, 2007). It must be noted that students with speech, language and cognitive impairments demand educators to be more imaginative in their teaching (Goodley, 2001).

4.8. Setting Differentiated Tasks
Preparing student teachers to become effective primary school teachers involves, among other skills, demonstrating the existence of learner individual differences. One way in which learner differences can be portrayed is by setting tasks that are consistent with learner abilities. A student teacher at one primary school observed: "We learnt about individual differences during Psychology of Education. I am observing different abilities among my pupils. Out of a class of 45 pupils, l am finding difficulties of coming up with tasks which cater for different abilities. I find it difficult to group pupils according to ability because l am afraid of labelling learners."
It must be noted however that student teachers are expected to cope with the practical management and organisation of instruction in the classroom, as well as the theoretical aspects of child development (Ahmed 2012).Host schools and teacher education colleges should make deliberate efforts to demonstrate, to student teachers, how catering for learners with different abilities is operationalized in teaching/ learning situations.

4.9. Marking Constructively
One way of exhibiting individualised teaching is through marking exercises written by learners. Most scholars in education are agreed that good marking should reflect learners' strengths, weaknesses as well as suggestions for future improvement. It takes a lot of training to be able to consistently mark conscientiously. In the context of this study student teachers are expected to teach three lessons daily for the first three terms on teaching practice and then four lessons daily during the last two terms of teaching practice. Student teachers are expected to give daily written exercises in all the subjects they teach and this may be too demanding on the part of the student. Concurring with the latter part of the above observation one student remarked:
Marking a set of three piles of 48 exercise books daily is not easy for me because of the other responsibilities l am having at school. Most of the times l just look for the answer and put a big tick close to it. To make matters worse my mentor at times forces me to teach and mark additional subjects which l will not have planned for on that particular day. When college lecturers come to supervise us teaching they insist on seeing our pupils' exercise books. We are supposed to sign wherever we mark and put constructive comments but l am finding it difficult to comment against each and every exercise because of the heavy load. l have problems when parents come for consultation days to see their children's work especially so when my mentor is away. Some parents feel offended by some of the comments, which I occasionally write in their children's exercise books.
The above observations are a clear testimony that student teachers require mentorship on marking from both the parent - college and school based mentor. Students should be assisted to devise positive approaches to marking. It must be noted that teaching practice provides student teachers with experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Ngidi and Sibaya,2008:18, Marais and Meier, 2004:2).
- Theme 3: Additions to Teacher Education Course Which Student Teachers Felt Could Have Better Prepared Them for TP.

4.10. Encountering slow Learners
While student teachers felt that colleges of education adequately prepared them in several respects, they however suggested a number of additions to the current teacher education programme. In their view such additions would better prepare them for conditions in primary schools. One such addition which student teachers advocated for was a course on dealing with slow learners. According to the student teachers while Psychology of Education covered some aspects on Special Education it was imperative that teacher education programmes introduce a course or module on handling slow learners. One student had this to say:
I would want the college to assist us further in dealing with slow learners. I am teaching a class of 51 pupils and find it difficult to attend to slow learners since l will be racing to finish the lesson in 30 minutes. Some of these slow learners are not cooperative at all. When l assign them tasks to do whilst attending to fast learners they do not work on it. I think it is better to have more peer and micro teaching sessions which will focus on handling slow learners as a skill.
The above sentiments seem to suggest that converting theoretical knowledge into practice will always remain a challenge and learning to teach is a complex process(Solomon, Worthy and Carter as cited in Farrell, 2002). Student teachers need more sessions of microteaching. This implies that they advocate for a condensed and simplified teaching situation which will provide them with opportunities to systematically study and practice specific teaching behaviours in a simulated environment (Manis,1973).

4.11. Educating Children with Special Needs
Besides introducing a course in handling slow learners student teachers seemed not adequately prepared for handling other special needs situations in teaching and learning. A male student at one Lower Gweru primary school had this to say:
Various ways of teaching children with special needs should be exposed to us. I have a partially blind pupil who struggles all the time to read from the chalkboard. My mentor also does not know what to do with the pupil. Since the policy of inclusion is the in thing nowadays in our education system, the area of handling pupils with special needs should be addressed seriously in colleges.
From the foregoing it is evident that both the mentor and the student cannot handle all special needs situations in schools. The students do acknowledge that in Psychology of Education they covered some aspects of Special Education. That they find it difficult to address such situations may be reflective of a college programme that requires to be aligned to realities in primary schools. Additionally, classroom mentors too may require workshops and refresher courses on how to handle special education cases in schools. This way they will be able to assist student teachers assigned to them in the future. This is not to suggest that there should not be any challenges in teaching as an appropriate mix of challenge and support contributes to students' positive experiences during their practicum (Tang, 2003).

4.12. Teaching Grades 6 and 7 (Examination Classes)
One area in which student teachers require guidance and assistance is the teaching of examination classes such as grades 6 and 7. According to them there does not seem to be a deliberate arrangement in colleges of education to prepare them for examination classes. When student teachers get to schools there are no sessions or programmes to prepare them on how to teach grade 7 learners. Confirming these fears one female student had this to say:
We feel very challenged to teach grades 6 and 7 classes because during micro-teaching we are advised to avoid selecting these classes yet during teaching practice we are allocated these classes to teach. College education should equip us with skills to deal with exam classes. The fact that our lecturers at college discourage us from teaching grade 6 and 7 during teaching practice makes me to think that we are not equipped and prepared enough during training to handle the classes. It becomes a shock when l am asked to teach grade 7 without enough preparation.
This phenomenon of suddenly being exposed to adverse elements has been described as "reality shock" by some researchers (Wagenaar 2007). This term is used to describe inadequacy in transition from the possession of declarative knowledge by student teachers to the application therof in the actual field (Chepyator- Thomson and Liu, 2003). Schools seem to heighten the shock by also assigning student teachers grade 7 classes without first orienting them on grade 7 teaching expectations. If improvement of student teachers ' effectiveness is a key concern of both teacher education institutions and schools then the college curriculum should introduce a unit on how to teach examination classes. Schools, on the other hand should ensure that whenever student teachers are assigned to an examination class, one or two experienced teachers should induct the student teacher on expectations at that level (Chepyator- Thomson and Liu (2003).

4.13. Being Accepted by Other Teachers and Parents
School programmes are implemented by teachers. Thus when student teachers are deployed into primary schools they will find other teachers who they will interact with. While colleges of education emphasize teacher-pupil interaction very little attention is given to teacher-teacher interaction and teacher-parent interaction. As one student pointed out: "We require considerable exposure to high level interaction skills so that we can improve our relationships with both the teachers and parents." This could be done in Professional Studies (at college) and during initial induction at school level.

- Theme 4: Nature of School Support during Teaching Practice

4.14. Being Assigned to a Mentor
Any neonate teacher requires guidance from experienced and qualified mentors. The following excerpts demonstrate the variability of support from one school to another. A student teacher in one Lpwer Gweru school had this to say:
The school assigned me to a mentor who does not assist me much in terms of informing me what to do in the classroom and how to do it. My mentor constantly remarks that l should be knowing better than she does. If l ask her what l am supposed to do, she tells me to do that which the college instructed me to do. Sometimes she is moody and avoids speaking to me.
The situation described above shows the extent to which student teachers can be neglected in a school set up. Clearly the swim or sink philosophy is evident from the foregoing observation. Schools where there are mentors of this calibre could be assisted through holding workshops on the role of the mentor in student supervision.
In another school a male student teacher had this to say:
My mentor is very helpful. He took me through the classroom ethics and demonstrated classroom management skills. He effectively demonstrates teaching of Mathematics, English, Ndebele, Social Studies and Environmental Science. He doesn't like teaching Religious and Moral Education, Physical Education, Music and Art Education. He assigns me to teach these subjects. I feel much challenged and stressed to teach them without having a role model.
Lack of role clarification, not knowing the expectations of the host teacher, feeling the need to fit into existing practices and teaching styles, the lack of time to talk to the host teacher as well as the actual evaluation procedure were seen as the main reasons that student teachers felt under constant pressure by MacDonald(1992:21).It must also be noted that for student teachers to teach a particular subject effectively, their mentor should not only demonstrate best practices in that subject but should also supervise the student teacher teaching that subject. This gives student teachers confidence to teach. Ngidi and Sibaya (2003:21) are of the opinion that,"effective supervision and guidance from subject teachers at their schools of placement can play an important role in reducing anxiety among student teachers". Wagenaar (2007) noted that eighty-eight out of a hundred student teachers in a South African study ranked watching other teachers working as valuable models highest in providing effective teaching skills. (Samuel and Pillay as cited in Lewin et al.,2003).

4.15. Informal Discussions with Mentor, T.I.C., Deputy Head and School Head.
Teaching is conducted in formal school situations but there is no reason why qualified teachers, teachers-in-charge, deputy school heads and school heads cannot discuss student teachers' experiences in an informal set up. Out of the three selected primary schools all students in one school indicated that they were not provided with opportunities to informally discuss how they should go about the business of teaching. A student leader at this particular school had this to say:
There are times when during extra-curricular activities, like ball games or athletics, that some of us have tried to informally engage either the teacher-in-charge, deputy head or school head with respect to how we can be assisted to interact with parents, to improve our teaching or how we can be assisted to motivate our learners. We have not quite been answered as these officials tell us that the subjects we were raising require discussion in staff meetings or staff development sessions. When we attend staff meetings such issues are never discussed and so we now keep quiet about our challenges
The foregoing observation is an indictment on teacher education colleges and host schools. Teacher education colleges that workshop staff at host schools about their role in student supervision will necessarily address issues that relate to student teacher – qualified teacher interaction. It is in respect that Darling – Hammond (1998) raises issues on schools being communities of practice where school administrators and teachers create an environment of collegiality. Such an environment enables teachers to communicate their challenges and successes for the benefit of learners.

4.16. Provision of Some Textbooks and Stationery
Student teacher support, at school level, comes in various ways. Twenty – eight student teachers interviewed expressed the need for support from both the school and teacher education colleges. From the former student teachers expected to be provided with enough textbooks and exercise books. One student leader at a school in Lower Gweru had this to say:
We are expected to teach effectively but there are only three textbooks for each of the subjects which we teach. I do not know how, in languages for instance, we are expected to teach reading for comprehension. Complicating the issue is that exercises which learners are supposed to do are in these textbooks. We also expect to be supported with respect to provision of stationery but schools do not seem to have the resources to do so. We end up using part of the meagre allowance we get to buy pens and writing paper. Colleges, on the other hand, should also allow us to borrow library books for use   teaching practice.
The above excerpt portrays a gloomy picture in terms of student support in the form of textbooks and stationery. It is true that effective teaching depends on, among other things, the availability of books and stationery. What is also true is that schools where student teachers are doing teaching practice continue to produce good results. Perhaps student teachers can learn from experienced teachers how they are coping in a situation where such resources are not plentiful. Additionally, student teachers could also raise the question of library books with their respective colleges to see if an arrangement can be put in place to allow student teachers to borrow textbooks for short durations since other students at colleges of education will also require the same textbooks.

- Theme 5: Student Teachers' Suggestions on the Management of Their Induction by Teacher Education Colleges and Primary Schools

4.17. Formalized Induction Sessions by the School Head. Deputy Head, T.I.C., and Mentors
Student teachers proposed the establishment of formalized induction programmes in schools. This proposition was borne out of the realisation that such an arrangement did not exist in primary schools. As one student recounting her first experience at a Lower Gweru primary school observed:
The school head seemed to have a tight schedule on the day we arrived at this school with my two colleagues. He handed us over to the deputy head who later on introduced us to the Teacher In Charge. We were allocated mentors and later on introduced to them. We were introduced to the rest of the staff and pupils during the assembly. No one took trouble to show us the surroundings of the school. We had to find our way through asking every time which was a bit stressing. I suggest that schools should appoint someone who is responsible for inducting new comers so that they fit well within the school systems.
At another mission primary school one student observed:
My mentor did not even offer me a desk to use saying they are in short supply. I was introduced to the pupils and was happy that my name was also put on the door together with the mentor's name. If the furniture is in short supply, I suggest that mentors share what they have with student teachers so that they feel honoured.
At the third primary school this this is what the student leader had to say:
The T.I.C. welcomed us during our first meeting as infant teachers and urged our mentors to show us around the school and to brief us on school ethics. My mentor had to alert me on cultural and religious aspects observed by the community so that I give appropriate examples and activities during the teaching and learning. This practice is good and I feel it should be maintained.
From the foregoing it should be noted that while induction is a learning process, the nature of its content, mode of organisation, delivery and evaluation is crucial to its effectiveness (Tickle, 2004). Dovey,(1984:26) has this to say, "It is thus imperative that teacher education faculties and host schools concede, in practice as well as in rhetoric, the political nature of schooling and assist teachers-in –training in becoming "culturally literate" and thereby empower them to negotiate the values, assumptions, and myths that underlie the "official" definitions of education within their specific school contexts". Corroborating the above Mwamwenda (1996:412-413) in Wagenaar (2007) echoed that, "Knowledge of African childrearing practices makes teachers of African children sensitive to and aware of some of the values that have shaped them ... While teachers may not agree with all the practices, they should nevertheless treat them with respect and understanding so that they do not make their students feel that they are inferior simply because they are different".
Formal induction is very critical in ensuring stability, comfort and confidence in student teachers. MacDonald (1992:23) in Wagenaar(2007) noted that student teachers identify "little extras" done by the host teacher as going a long way towards making them feel comfortable and welcome and even affecting their perception of the entire teaching practice experience. Little things such as organizing a desk for the student, showing them around the school and introducing them to colleagues, inviting the student to staff lunches, putting the student's name on the door make the student feel a sense of belonging to the school organisation (Hord and Hall, 2004.)

4.18. Regular Meetings with Mentors to Discuss Student Teachers' Concerns
Student teachers in this study expressed the desire to have regular meetings with mentors so as to discuss teaching and learning issues that affect them. In this connection one student teacher suggests: "Personally l feel that there is need to have regular meetings with my mentor so that we discuss areas which are difficult for me such as introducing a lesson, lesson evaluation, making teaching and learning media, pacing the lesson and managing pupils' discipline." MacDonald (1992:23) notes that "... if helping preservice teachers become more reflective and active is a worthwhile goal, then it is more important to find co-operating teachers who support an experimental approach to student teaching who can facilitate an open exchange of ideas."

4.19. Regular Communication and Feedback on How to Survive in Schools from Colleges of Education
Teacher education institutions have adopted an approach where teacher preparation involves accompanying the student teacher. Consequently when student teachers are out on teaching practice they require guidance on how to survive in the teaching world. Such guidance, according to the students in this study, can be partly facilitated through regular communication between college authorities and student teachers. Such communication can be provided orally when lecturers visit student teachers for supervision or through regular circulars on expectations during teaching practice. Close partnership between the college of education lecturers and student teachers must be maintained as alluded to by Fallan (2003:489) when he observes that "we need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to teach teacher-candidates how to survive in the volatile world of work, gain confidence in the quality of their teaching, and how to develop their skills to continue to improve their teaching throughout their careers.

4.20. Meetings between Student Teachers and Parents' Representatives (SDA/SDC)
Student teachers, in Lower Gweru also suggested that they meet parents representatives (School Development Association/SDA or School Development Committee/SDC) so that they can be briefed on specific local expectations in terms of what is regarded as normative behaviour in the region where the school is located. It was the contention of these student teachers that since they come from different geographical areas in Zimbabwe they needed to be made aware of the dos and don't's of Lower Gweru area. As one student teacher opined: "There are some days when the local community performs its rituals together with their children. I need to be aware of that so that I do not heavily penalize a learner who does not attend lessons because he/she will have joined other community members in performing rituals which the community hold dearly.

4.21. Joint Teacher Education Colleges and Schools Workshops on Student Teacher Induction
Joint teacher education college and school workshops on hoe to supervise student teachers on teaching practice was suggested as one of the ways in which colleges and schools can establish a common vision on student supervision. At such workshops school heads, deputy heads, teachers-in-charge and mentors have an opportunity to interact at a personal level. Questions that college lecturers and teacher mentors might have on handling specific teaching practice issues can be addressed. Whatever doubts existed between the parent college and the school can be cleared through such an arrangement. In this way both college lecturers and teacher mentors become change agents who facilitate the growth and development of student teachers on teaching practice (Marsh and Willis,2004)..

5. Limitations
This study acknowledges a number of limitations. Firstly, while the study made use of interviews only other methods of data collection could have been utilised for triangulation purposes. Secondly, the sample size was small and all participants were from one district. This makes it difficult to generalize the results. The study, however, provides hard data, from students' own voices, which can be used as a basis for reflecting on student teacher induction policy and practice in Zimbabwean colleges of education and primary schools.

6. Concluding Remarks
While student teachers in this study were provided with some basic teaching skills by teacher education colleges, it is evident from their experiences that they need continuing induction sessions by both the college of education and schools. Such induction should be largely formalized so that lecturers in teacher education colleges, school heads, teachers'-in- charge, parents, school teachers and mentors can work together in order to ensure that student teachers benefit. At the moment, however, student teachers' experiences in Lower Gweru reflect that there are no formal college and school induction activities to assist student teachers to, not only blend, but also take off with ease in their teaching practice. The colleges and schools should further assist student teachers on how to write detailed lesson plans and schemes of work. Mentors should be tasked to assist student teachers to mark constructively. Colleges and schools should conduct workshops to enhance both mentors and student teachers' skills in teaching learners with disabilities as well as teaching subjects which are practically oriented.

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