

# Mentoring Practices of Cooperating Teachers of English in Selected Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

In the conduct of practice teaching in the Philippines, mentoring refers to a nurturing process in which a highly skilled or experienced teacher provides support and encouragement to a young Pre-Service teacher. A mentor or cooperating teacher refers to a teacher who is assigned to guide the student teacher in the development of professional competencies, attitudes, and behaviors. Mentoring plays a very significant role in the Pre-Service teachers' practicum journey as it enables them to be under the supervision of an experienced teacher in terms of classroom management, lesson planning, use of varied teaching strategies, and assessment. Traditional evaluation procedures usually entail downward movement which is the evaluation of cooperating teachers or mentors on the overall performance of the teacher trainees in the teaching-learning process during practicum. Pre-Service teachers are not often given the voice to assess the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers, rendering the student teachers silent in the process of assessment. This study aimed to challenge the tradition by allowing Pre-Service teachers to assess the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers through survey and focus group discussion. The study revealed that Pre-Service teachers of English find the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers to be very satisfactory. This research ends with recommendations for improvement of cooperating teachers in mentoring the 21st century Pre-Service teachers.

**Key Words:** Mentoring Practices, Cooperating Teachers, English, Secondary Schools

## 1. Introduction

Mentoring is generally described as the process whereby an expert provides wisdom and guidance to a less experienced one. This process usually involves advising, coaching, and counseling which aims to build good relationship between a mentor and mentee and focuses on the mentee's growth and development. In the context of teacher education, mentoring plays a vital role in developing teacher expertise. Fairbanks, Freedman and Kahn (2000) define mentoring in teacher education as complex social interactions that mentor teachers and student teachers' construct and negotiate for a variety of professional purposes. In addition, Maphalala (2013) says that mentor teachers are key players in launching student teachers into the teaching profession. Furthermore, mentors or cooperating teachers are recognized for their practical knowledge of the profession, which validates the theoretical knowledge learned by the Pre-Service teachers from school. Thus, the development of Pre-Service teachers in the field depends on the quality of mentoring provided by cooperating teachers.

Mentoring helps teachers improve classroom practices, deepen their knowledge, and learn professional responsibilities. Graham (2006) mentions that two components are crucial to the success of the practice teaching experience: First, the mentor teachers who guide and support the Pre-Service teachers and second, the location where the teaching experiences occur. According to the Teacher Induction and Mentoring Brief

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of the American Institute for Research, mentoring Pre-Service teachers, the role of the mentor is to regularly conduct classroom observations, reflection and collaboration and problem solving, in order to get things done very well.

Moreover, the Teacher Induction Mentoring Brief of the American Institute for Research in 2015 describes effective mentors as not only good in teaching, but also able to articulate the art of teaching—to convey what they do and why to achieve positive results. It further explains that mentors must have strong interpersonal skills, the ability to build a trusting rapport, and the capacity to respond to the challenges faced by teachers taking on new assignments so they can transfer that knowledge to beginning teachers. Moreover, effective mentors should be responsive to a wide range of communication styles, adept in problem solving, engaged in self-reflection, and active listeners.

A national nonprofit organization in the United States of America named New Teacher Center (NTC) is dedicated to strengthening the practice of beginning teachers and on improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders at all levels. In 1988, this organization was founded by teachers and built capacity within districts and district partners to drive student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and teacher and leadership development. Also, it conducts research, develops and administers induction and mentoring programs for new teachers and school administrators, and consults with organizations, educational leaders, and policymakers on issues related to new educator support.

In line with the implementation of Pre-Service teacher training in the Philippines, mentoring refers to a nurturing process in which a more-experienced teacher or cooperating teacher extends expertise to a teacher trainee, especially in the development of effective classroom competencies, professional attitudes and behaviors. Hence, mentoring plays a big role in preparing Pre-Service teachers in the actual world of teaching. Primarily, the aim of pairing a Pre-Service teacher with a skilled teacher or mentor during practice teaching is to establish good mentor-mentee relationship and deepen their understanding of classroom management, lesson planning, teaching methods and strategies, assessment, etc.

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) CMO No. 3, series of 2004, highlights experiential learning courses—field study and practice teaching as integral components of the New Teacher Curriculum. These experiential learning courses are intended to provide Pre-Service teachers with practical learning experiences in which they can observe, verify, reflect on, and actually experience different components of the teaching learning processes in actual school settings.

Practice teaching, according to Ulla (2016), is an integral part of any teacher education curriculum as it is a good avenue for practicing teachers to apply the theories, they learned in the real classroom setting. Thus, to make sure that Pre-Service teachers receive optimum teacher training, the Guidelines in the Deployment of Pre-Service Teachers on Experiential Learning also known as Department of Education (DepEd) Order No. 3, series of 2007 states that a student teacher from a Teacher Education Institution (TEI) must be assigned to a qualified cooperating teacher/mentor of the respective partner school. Also, it presents the specific duties and responsibilities of cooperating teachers in Pre-Service teacher training. According to Mangila (2018), the quality of education in the Philippines will be improved through producing teachers who are adequately prepared to perform their varied roles and functions.

Effective mentoring plays a significant role in a Pre-Service teacher's practice teaching experience. Hidayu Shafie, Ahmad-Sultani, Roselan, & Noori (2017) explain that mentoring styles of a supervisor will have effects towards the supervisee either in his work or his own personal growth. Moreover, Spencer (1996) adds that there are different mentoring approaches practiced by supervisors, namely: 1) The **letting go style** where the supervisor gives the supervisee enough time to accomplish things, thus avoiding rush and pressure; 2) The **active listening style** where the supervisor asks the mentee questions during their mentoring session and gives him the chance to summarize and assess his progress; 3) The **advisory style** where the supervisor provides suggestions to the supervisee on how to solve problems encountered and suggests alternatives to improve performance; 4) The **prescribing style** in which the supervisor provides specific instructions to the supervisee on how to deal with difficulties; and 5) The **cooperative style** where the supervisor involves the supervisee in identifying solutions to solve problems as they share opinions and ideas freely.

The cooperating teacher, according to Bell and Gilbert (1994) should have opportunities to share ideas, successes, and challenges as a way of developing their own professional practice. Also, Constantinescu (2015) concludes that mentoring represents an opportunity for experienced teachers to increase their professional status. Thus, in order to become teacher-mentors they should complete specific training courses. Also, the study found out that the main competencies necessary for a teacher-mentor are effective communication, practical activities than theoretical activities, social and relational competencies, and competencies in planning, organizing, and analyzing.

In addition, the study of Izadinia (2016) on mentor teacher and Pre-service Teacher relationship reveals that mentor teachers do create changes, however small, in aspects of Pre-Service teachers' identity such as confidence and voice. Moreover, it is through maintaining a supportive and positive relationship with Pre-Service teachers that they can develop a stronger sense of teacher identity. Furthermore, she also argues that teachers having their voice and confidence are associated with teacher retention. Hence, efficient mentor teachers are important in honing the teachers-to-be.

According to Sayesi and Paulsen (2012) identification of specific mentoring practices of cooperating teachers by the student teachers across a range of teaching areas shall be taken into consideration. This idea only suggests that it is one significant aspect of Pre-Service teacher training, thus, it is also important to assess the quality of mentoring practices provided by cooperating teachers to Pre-Service teachers during practice teaching. However, evaluation in Pre-Service teacher training in the Philippines commonly entails downward movement, that is, assessment of cooperating teachers on the overall performance of the student teacher in the Pre-Service teacher training. Hence, this study is a move to assess the mentoring practices and styles of cooperating teachers in practice teaching.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The study primarily aimed to evaluate the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers as perceived by Pre-Service teachers of English.

Specifically, it sought to determine the : ( a) level of satisfaction of Pre-Service teachers on the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers; and ( b) the mentoring style practiced by the cooperating teachers.

## I. Methodology

### A. Research Design

The study made use of the descriptive research design and mixed- method research designs. Quantitative method is applied in gathering data using survey, while qualitative method was done to enrich the study through focused group discussion with selected respondents.

### B. Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

This study involved the participation of thirty-seven (37) Pre-Service teachers from one of the sections of Bachelor of Secondary Education, major in English at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines, School Year 2017-2018. These Pre-Service teachers were deployed in different DepEd public secondary schools in Metro Manila during their practice teaching.

### C. Research Instrument

The study utilized a modified-survey questionnaire to identify the level of satisfaction of Pre-Service teachers of English on the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers or mentors during practice teaching, as well as the dominant mentoring style they practiced. Another instrument was a set of interview questions used in Focus Group Discussion.

In order to gather qualitative data as support to quantitative data, the researcher randomly selected 10 out of 37 students who participated in the Focus Group Discussion. This aimed to provide the participants' further insights and opinions to enrich the study. The Focus Group Discussion involved questions with emphasis on ways as to how the cooperating teachers mentor their student teachers.

### D. Data-Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the Pre-Service teachers of English to conduct a short survey about the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers during their practice teaching. First, the respondents were asked to assess their level of satisfaction on the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers using a 10-item questionnaire. Then, they also answered a five-item questionnaire which asked about how often the Pre-Service teachers encounter certain mentoring styles of cooperating teachers.

After tabulating and analyzing the quantitative data, ten students were randomly selected who agreed to participate in the Focus Group Discussion. Each of the partner schools where the Pre-Service teachers of English had their practice teaching ,was represented. The purpose of the FGD was to gather qualitative data to further analyze the survey responses of the Pre-Service teachers on the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers.

### E. Statistical Treatment of Data

This study used weighted mean as statistical tool to analyze the collected data on the level of satisfaction of the Pre-Service teachers of English on the mentoring practices, was well as the mentoring style mostly practiced by the cooperating teachers.

## II. Results and Discussion

| <b>Table 1</b> Level of Satisfaction of Pre-Service Teachers on the Mentoring Practices of Cooperating Teachers |                      |                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Mentoring Practices</b>                                                                                      | <b>Weighted Mean</b> | <b>Verbal Interpretation</b> |
| 1. My cooperating teacher and I meet on a regular basis.                                                        | 4.81                 | Extremely Satisfied          |
| 2. My cooperating teacher introduces me to instructional approaches/strategies that I am not aware of.          | 4.08                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 3. My cooperating teacher and I collaborate to plan instruction for our students.                               | 4.08                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 4. My cooperating teacher consistently anticipates the things I need to improve.                                | 4.41                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 5. My cooperating teacher always expects me to bring up the topics/problems we discuss.                         | 3.97                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 6. My cooperating teacher is always willing to listen to me.                                                    | 4.38                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 7. My cooperating teacher encourages me to think and reflect about the effectiveness of my teaching.            | 4.27                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 8. I receive meaningful feedback about my teaching from my cooperating teacher.                                 | 4.27                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 9. My cooperating teacher helps me grow as a professional teacher.                                              | 4.43                 | Very Satisfied               |
| 10. I am very satisfied with the level of support I receive from my mentor teacher.                             | 4.43                 | Very Satisfied               |
| <b>General Weighted Mean</b>                                                                                    | <b>4.31</b>          | <b>Very Satisfied</b>        |

Table 1 presents the level of satisfaction of Pre-Service teachers of English on the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers. As shown in the Table 1, the Pre-Service teachers of English are extremely satisfied on the practice that their cooperating teachers meet them on a regular basis during practicum, which obtained a weighted mean of 4.81. The rest of the mentoring practices items are rated as “very satisfied,” with weighted means 4.08, 4.41, 3.97, 4.38, 4.27, and 4.43, respectively. This means that the cooperating teachers of the Pre-Service teachers of English are efficient in mentoring in the aspects of collaboration, giving feedback, solving problems, reflection, and others. Therefore, the level of satisfaction of Pre-Service teachers on the mentoring practices of cooperating teachers obtained a general weighted mean of 4.31, with verbal interpretation of “very satisfied”.

The Pre-Service teachers show agreement to the results. Their responses in the Focus Group Discussion reveal they are satisfied with their cooperating teachers because they are very supportive, always willing to

listen to them, and provide them tips to improve their teaching performance. Some of the notable responses in the Focus Group Discussion are as follows:

“My cooperating teacher trusts me and fully supports me in my activities in the classroom.”

“He is an admirable teacher. He unselfishly shares with me the teaching techniques and strategies he knows.”

“She never fails to listen to me. She teaches me real life lessons in teaching.”

“I really appreciate my mentor. She fully supports me in my practice teaching journey.”

“I love the way my cooperating teacher gives feedback. She tells me the things I need to hear, which pushes me to do better.”

“He is very good at giving me feedback, which he consistently does. My mentor’s constructive criticisms helped me improve my classroom performance.”

“Whenever my cooperating teacher and I reflect on my classroom performance, I learn a lot.”

“In my case, my cooperating teacher always helps me in finding solutions for some problems encountered during my practice teaching. She is very hands on.”

“My cooperating teacher does not just tell me what to do. She listens to my suggestions and ideas in teaching.”

“She lets me reflect on my everyday teaching and she values my emotions whenever we have consultations.”

These above-stated findings found similarity in the results of the study of Ambrossetti (2010), which concludes that student teacher-mentees prefer a mentoring relationship that is supportive and comfortable. Moreover, they want a mentor from whom they can learn rather than judging them, and they prefer a mentor who provides them lots of opportunities for learning.

| <b>Table 2     Mentoring Style of Cooperating Teachers Mostly Encountered by the Pre-Service Teachers</b> |                      |                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Mentoring Style</b>                                                                                    | <b>Weighted Mean</b> | <b>Verbal Interpretation</b> |
| Letting Go Style                                                                                          | 4.21                 | Often                        |
| Active Listening Style                                                                                    | 4.19                 | Often                        |
| Advisory Style                                                                                            | 4.24                 | Often                        |
| Prescribing Style                                                                                         | 4.27                 | Often                        |
| Cooperative Style                                                                                         | 4.14                 | Often                        |
| General Weighted Mean                                                                                     | 4.21                 | Often                        |

Table 2 shows the mentoring style of the cooperating teachers, mostly encountered by the Pre-Service teachers of English. As presented, the five mentoring styles, namely: letting go style, active listening style,

advisory style, prescribing style and cooperative style got weighted means of 4.21, 4.24, 4.19, 4.27, and 4.14, respectively. These are all interpreted as “often”, thus, the general weighted mean of 4.21 is also interpreted as “often.” These findings imply that the Pre-Service teachers perceive a balance among the mentoring styles practiced by the cooperating teachers.

After getting additional insight from the respondents through the Focus Group Discussion, their responses explain that the cooperating teachers serve as good role models who unselfishly share their own teaching experiences, and at the same time give the student teachers freewill to do things on their own. Some of the quoted responses are:

“He lets me explore different classroom strategies and always approaches me whenever there are things that I need to improve.”

“I like how my cooperating teacher gives me freewill to decide on my own classroom strategies, but still monitoring whether what I delivered was good or not.”

“My teacher allows me to develop my own instructional materials and classroom activities. Also, I like her because she is always there to listen when I reflect about my performance.”

“I am properly guided by my cooperating teacher when it comes to mentoring me. She always gives me lots of good suggestions on how to improve my classroom performance.”

“She allows me to think and formulate ideas for our lessons and she taught me to be strong and independent in this practice teaching journey.”

“We regularly have consultation after my daily performance. After assessing my teaching, my cooperating teacher and I collaborate in preparing classroom activities.”

“I felt empowered in my practice teaching. First, my teacher taught me everything, then gave me the freedom to execute those things.”

“I really like it when my cooperating teacher makes me feel that I am free to design my own lesson and activities.”

“My cooperating teacher is a very good coach and role model. She tried her best to make me a better teacher as compared with my performance during my first month of practice teaching experience.”

“I guess my cooperating teacher’s mentoring style is unique. He gives suggestions for my lesson plan, lets me execute it, then lets me evaluate the outcome. After this, we solve problems together and plan for improvement.”

The given results are relevant to the findings of the study of Sayesi and Paulsen (2012), which reveals that student teachers desire to experience both direct modeling and freedom to experiment. The student teachers compliment those cooperating teachers who serve as great models of teaching strategies and give freedom to try new things and experiment within the classroom. Furthermore, their study concludes that high-quality cooperating teachers not only coached and supported their student teachers, but also provided an example of how to be a good teacher.

### III. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, it concludes that Pre-Service teachers of English are very satisfied with the mentoring practices of their cooperating teachers during practice teaching. In addition, results show that there is balance among the mentoring styles practiced by the cooperating teachers as they are often experienced by the Pre-Service teachers of English.

However, the study recommends conducting additional professional development workshops and INSET trainings for cooperating teachers to further enhance their skills to attain exemplary mentoring in all aspects. One of these activities may focus on mastering the best mentoring approach or style to properly mentor today's 21<sup>st</sup> century Pre-Service teachers—for them to grow holistically and deliver optimum teaching performance in today's dynamic learner-centered classrooms.

For further evaluation of the mentoring practices, the researcher also suggests that another study of a wider scope may be conducted among college coordinators, who serve as the mentors of Pre-Service teachers in the Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).

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