Chapter 5
Teacher Liaison In-Service Training Through Mentorship

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ABSTRACT

Teachers who are charged with the role of collaborating learners’ affairs require guidance and support for effectively discharging their responsibilities. However, their initial training does not empower them to handle this challenge. Providing an in-service training that incorporates structured mentorship program when in practice presents them with an opportunity to harmonize relationships, oversee learner activities for good cooperate governance, and enable the school to yield conducive teaching and learning environment. Drawing from social learning approach whose essence is action, reflection, communication, and co-operation, the benefits of a mentorship program have a potential of enhancing learner activities in schools. Accordingly, making provision for both formal and informal mentoring can empower and inspire courageous acts of contributing towards a sound school social order.

INTRODUCTION

The education profession will always have a demand for teachers who can connect with learners, by guiding and supporting their course above teaching and learning. Teachers who can connect with learners remain a draw card for every school leader who wants to provide adequate guidance and support to learners generally as well as learner leadership in high schools. Additionally, maintaining professional, sound and agreeable relationships between teachers and learners has to be a major goal of any school in which learners’ success is a priority. As learner leadership becomes a significance in high schools, particularly in schools that seek to maintain discipline and order, it is imperative for the school leadership to realise that although important, guidance and coaching for learner leadership involves more than having keen teachers who connect with young people. For that reason, they have need to supplement teacher training with mentorship, particularly of teachers supervising learner activities.

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Teachers training curricula does not provide training for mentorship of teachers responsible for managing learners' affairs. Additionally, there is no evidence of empirical research in this regard despite the fact that these teachers are stranded when in practice. Although Phaswana (2010) conducted a study on learner councillor’s perspectives, focus in this study was on learners’ participation. A study by the Department of Education and Skills (2004) have coverage of adults working with learner representatives, however focus is on them overseeing that learners’ involvement and inputs in educational matters happen as enacted. The two studies overlooked the role played by teachers supervising learner leaders. These teachers have need for support and guidance in the form of mentorship to cope with the intricate tasks of learner liaising and activities. In the midst of the changing education landscape, the support and guidance received or offered impacts on the decisions made (University of South Africa, 2012) particularly by teachers. Those who are specifically charged with additional responsibilities to work with learners beyond teaching require or have to realise the need to themselves be supported in order to keep up with the demands of guiding learners, especially those in leadership positions. This further extends to other learner groups such as sports and other related activities.

Most schools tend to prefer younger teachers to liaise with learners, particularly learner leadership in schools. The argument mainly is that these teachers tend to connect better with learners than their older counterparts. In some instances, older teachers are preferred because of their experience. Either way, teachers who deal with learners outside teaching themselves require guidance, counselling and development to continue offering successful support and guidance of learners and performance of the liaison role. Mentorship serves as a basic continued teacher training activity. The majority of young teachers are themselves inexperienced and still need to be under senior teachers’ tutelage. These teachers need experienced people whom they can approach when overcome by challenges encountered because of their liaison role and guidance of learner leadership in schools. This marks the initiation of instilling values of care, cooperation, support and working together among stakeholders, particularly with learners and points to the significance of social learning. The chapter propagates that teacher training goes beyond teacher training colleges and university, to continued teacher training in schools through mentorship. The chapter further highlights the significance to include teacher liaison officers’ (TLO) mentorship programmes as a continued in-service teacher training for enhancing learner leadership development and other learner activities by teachers generally and liaison teachers’ or supervisors of learner activities in particular. Teacher liaison education in-service training through mentorship is discussed through the following headings: understanding teacher liaison responsibilities in schools; teacher liaison role; current challenges facing teachers guiding learners TLOs; and finally gives solutions and recommendations.

UNDERSTANDING TEACHER LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES IN SCHOOLS

Teachers carrying out the responsibility of liaison as with all other teachers have to perform their fiduciary duties of teaching, even though they have no prior training to handle the responsibility of liaising. The role of learner leadership liaison and support came about in the early years of the dawn of a new era in the South African political landscape. Prior to Democracy, schools were divided along the colour line, various racial groupings, their Departments of Education operated differently, and similarly handled learners’ matters in a different way (Christie, 2010). Mncube (2008) elaborates that at the height of seg-