The characteristics of the role of early childhood education mentors in Jordan
Fathi M. Ihmeideh a; Akram A. Al-Basheer b; Ahmad M. Qablan a

a Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, The Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan
b Faculty of Educational Sciences, The Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan

Online Publication Date: 01 March 2008

To cite this Article Ihmeideh, Fathi M., Al-Basheer, Akram A. and Qablan, Ahmad M.(2008)'The characteristics of the role of early childhood education mentors in Jordan',Research in Post-Compulsory Education,13:1,19 — 38

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13596740801903489
URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13596740801903489

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
The characteristics of the role of early childhood education mentors in Jordan

Fathi M. Ihmeideh, Akram A. Al-Basheer and Ahmad M. Qablan

Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, The Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan; Faculty of Educational Sciences, The Hashemite University, Zarqa, Jordan

(Received October 2007; final version received January 2008)

This study aims to explore empirically how far the roles adopted by the mentors of early childhood education students teaching in Jordan coincide with a model of roles suggested in the literature of teacher training. This study is an attempt to draw from the literature as many views about the role of the mentor as possible and then to attempt to develop a comprehensive model to describe mentoring. Such a model can then be explored empirically in the context of a Jordanian teacher education programme. The results of this study are reported in respect of two qualitative research techniques using evidence from three rounds of interviews with eleven early childhood education mentors and their fourteen student teachers, and the observation and field notes taken during fieldwork.

Keywords: mentors; student teachers; early childhood education; student induction; teacher training

Introduction

Over recent years mentoring, as part of the training and induction process in many professions, has come to be seen as making a vital contribution to the development of the student or trainee. Increasing attention has been given to the issue of mentoring, which has given rise to a growth in research in the field, which in turn has promoted mentoring as a valued process. Much of the research has concluded that mentoring is a necessary factor in career development and advancement (Elliott and Calderhead 1993; Maynard and Furlong 1993; Zanting et al. 1998; Oberski et al. 1999; Kwan and Lopez-Real 2005). In line with this general trend, mentoring has become a prominent feature of teacher education in Jordan and further afield and indeed in many respects has come to be seen as a key to the future of the teaching profession. This is in part because, in addition to the value accrued by trainees from working with a mentor, the contribution to the professional development of the teacher mentor is also highly valued. Consequently, it has been argued that involvement in mentoring by experienced teachers provides opportunities for them to develop their philosophy and practice of teaching (Jones, Reid and Bevins 1997; Gratch 1998; Grisham, Ferguson and Brink 2004). On the one hand, the opportunity of creating good teaching may reflect positively on pupils’ learning in the classroom. On the other hand, experience in the school can play an effective role in shaping the beliefs and perceptions that student teachers hold about teaching and schools. As a consequence, it has been argued that mentoring, by improving the quality of education in schools, may contribute to the development of a society as whole (Gay and Stephenson 1998).
This study focuses on the roles of mentors in initial teacher training. However, the identification of key elements in that role is dependent on the view of the teacher that the training seeks to promote. Once it is accepted that, in order to be effective, teachers need to be trained, then the question as to what model of teaching is used to direct the training process arises. Furthermore, the role of the mentor in the training process will be influenced by the particular context in which the courses are developed.

Having established that a review of the literature on the role of the mentor in initial teacher training (ITT) was intended to generate a comprehensive model rather than one specific to any one approach, the literature revealed that the role, however it is characterised, is a complex and diverse one. It encompasses the various professional and personal responsibilities that mentors have at different stages of student development (Gay and Stephenson 1998; Goodwin, Stevens and Bellamy 1998; Jones 2001; Kwan and Lopez-Real 2005). The literature indicates that all mentoring responsibilities are professional in nature. However, since undertaking some of these functions is dependant on the nature of the personal and social relationship between the mentor and his/her student, it was decided in this study to deal with it under different dimensions. Thus, the role of the mentor can be viewed as being divided into two main dimensions: the professional and the personal. In each dimension, there are several sub-roles, which are woven together in an intricate web that characterise the mentoring role (Figure 1). In the professional dimension, the mentor may undertake several responsibilities during the student’s induction. These responsibilities include that of organiser, role model, trainer, observer, provider of feedback, reflective practitioner, provider of professional development and assessor, while in the personal dimension, the mentor has other responsibilities and activities through the induction process. These responsibilities include that of counsellor, guide, communicator, supporter and friend. Both dimensions need a base of knowledge that plays a central part in enabling and guiding mentors in their roles in student induction. This is not surprising since it can be argued that the role adopted by the mentors has its base in a body of knowledge about mentoring, influenced by the individual’s experiences, perceptions of the role and their understanding and experience of teaching. Thus, the mentor role rests on the knowledge about teaching and about mentoring that the individual brings. All elements of the role must be influenced or informed by that knowledge base. In this suggested model, it is expected that the roles of the mentor in each dimension are not distinct in practice.

1. The professional dimension

As discussed above, there have been several attempts to describe the various roles of a mentor within the field of teacher education. Different authors tend to adopt different stances and to focus to a lesser or greater extent on different aspects of the mentor role depending on the views of teaching, of teacher education and of the school–higher education institute (HEI) relationship that they perceive to be the most effective. On the whole there is general agreement on the labels to attach to each of these various roles. What follows is an attempt to draw from the literature as many views about the role of the mentor as possible and then to attempt to impose a structure on this. The first dichotomy in terms of the description of the mentor role is between the professional and the personal dimension. This section will deal with the various ways in which the professional dimension of the mentor role has been articulated. This aspect is discussed first because the professional dimension is often the main focus of concern in the literature. As Cameron-Jones (1993) stated, if the professions are interested in mentors they must take a view about the essentials of the mentor’s role. A teacher who wishes to be involved in school-based mentoring needs to have a professional responsibility to assist student teachers to think open-mindedly about the many basic values involved in the teaching context (Tomlinson 1995). The study reported here
Research in Post-Compulsory Education

Aims to explore empirically the actual roles adopted by mentors in Jordanian kindergartens and how they develop during the different stages of the training.

The mentor as an organiser

Wherever partnerships between HEI and schools operate the role of the school-based mentor is important. Whatever the particular relationship between schools and HEIs, it can be argued that the organising role is fundamental since it underpins and ensures the implementation of the other roles that mentors may undertake in the student training. In most cases, it is the mentor’s...
responsibility to arrange a schedule for the field experience of their students. Many researchers emphasise the organising role as one of the most important functions of the mentor. Goodwyn (1997), for example, asserted that when he discussed the maximising of students’ learning in the school he found that one of the mentor’s roles might be described as ‘orchestrating; that is, organising a series of experiences and contexts for student teachers in order to provide them with powerful, but also protected, learning opportunities’ (59). Elliott and Calderhead (1993) found that the mentors interviewed in their study often referred to their roles in terms of being an organiser of experience for the students throughout the school in order to enable them to complete a range of tasks set by the university. Brookes and Sikes (1997), writing for mentors and teacher educators point out that the role of organiser is a crucial speciality of the mentor for, as they say:

The subject mentor arranges a programme of observation, discussion and practice teaching designed to introduce student teachers to a range of teaching styles and practice within the department. (45)

The mentor as a role model

Many writers on mentoring, in defining the mentoring process, frequently describe this function as one of most important roles of the mentor (Vonk 1993; Morton-Cooper and Palmer 1993; Furlong and Maynard 1995; Koki 1998). This seems to be the case whatever the particular characteristics of the ITT course are because all teaching involves the application of many strategies and techniques. In the first stage of student training a major part of the mentors’ role would involve helping students to become aware of this variety. Maynard and Furlong (1993) argued that in the early stages of student training, when students are still learning from observation, mentors need to work alongside them acting as a model. Goodwyn (1997) stated that:

Being a role model goes beyond a mentor. It requires more of the individual and stretches that individual in every way... A role model is not therefore saying ‘Look how good I am’ but, instead ‘Look, this is really difficult, let us look together at how to do it. (129)

The mentor as a trainer

The mentor as a trainer is considered a central role that mentors can play during the induction process (Kane and Campbell 1993; Geen, Bassett and Douglas 1999). This role was used extensively among writers who discussed and explored the competency-based model in mentoring (Furlong and Maynard 1995; Brookes and Sikes 1997). The trainer in this model is seen as a person who possesses numerous skills and capacities that students must develop. The mentor bears a great responsibility for providing a systematic programme of instruction, observing students using pre-defined competency criteria, and providing them with constructive feedback (Furlong and Maynard 1995; Brookes and Sikes 1997).

As trainers, mentors may need to be able to provide students with frequent opportunities to observe them modelling a variety of teaching skills and techniques. This can help students to understand and be aware of the different teaching approaches that mentors have. Geen, Bassett and Douglas (1999) found that the vast majority of students in their study appreciated the guidance they received from their mentors as trainers in mastering the competencies and skills in relation to the application of subject matter. Therefore, being a trainer is vital and the responsibilities of mentors are extremely demanding. Duff (1988) found that:

To be a trainer, you must know the technique, know why it is effective, be able to articulate or convey that understanding to others, and know how it relates to other aspects of teaching. (112)
The mentor as an observer

Observation of students’ lessons is considered an essential activity of the mentor in student teacher training in a wide variety of the literature (Perks and Prestige 1994; Kellet 1994; Hagger, Burn and McIntyre 1993; Brookes and Sikes 1997). On the one hand, it is important because observation may enable mentors to highlight different points in the lesson which the students are not aware of and may raise new issues in the lesson to be considered in future classes (Perks and Prestiage 1994). On the other hand, observation could be seen as essential in enabling mentors to fulfil their other roles successfully. The information that mentors pick up through observation of students’ lessons could be considered fundamental to the whole role of the mentor, whether in the professional or personal dimension.

Turneu et al. (1982) considered the mentor as an observer to be one of five important sub-roles that mentors have in the student training (cited in Vonk 1993, 38). As an observer, particularly where lists of specific competencies form the basis of ITT, the mentor may need to be aware of and be precise about what is to be observed in order to set the students in the right direction through each stage of the training. The literature on teacher training emphasises that mentors may act as observers for the students when they attempt to practice what they have been shown by their mentors (Kellet 1994; Hagger, Burn and McIntyre 1993; Brookes and Sikes 1997; Geen, Bassett and Douglas 1999). This, in a sense, acts as the counterpoint to the role of role model adopted by many mentors. For instance, Brookes and Sikes (1997) mention that ‘observation continues to be a central feature of most forms of initial teacher education whether it is students observing experienced teachers or mentors observing students.

The mentor as a provider of feedback

High quality feedback by mentor to student is of central importance in the mentoring role (Kwan and Lopez-Real 2005). It is essential that a student is directed to aspects of their teaching that are not successful and to features that are good and need to be built on. Mentor feedback, particularly where a reflective practice model is used, is one of the most powerful sources of learning about teaching that the student can have. It immediately, as Goodwyn (1997) argues, informs the review and planning activities of the student helping him/her put things into some kind of meaningful perspective. Cameron-Jones and O’Hara (1995) pointed out that the help that mentors gave to the students consisted of supporting them in a positive way through providing them with continued feedback and being a professional model (198). The value of quality feedback cannot be over-estimated. Therefore as many writers have suggested, training of mentors in providing more effective feedback is likely to bear rich fruit (Kane and Campbell 1993; Harvard and Dunne 1992; Kwan and Lopez-Real 2005).

The mentor as a reflective practitioner

The reflective practitioner is one who can think while acting and thus can respond to the uncertainty, uniqueness and conflict involved in the situations in which professionals practice.

(Schon 1987, cited in Adler 1991, 140)

Recent research in teacher education where the view of teaching based on a reflective practice model emphasised the importance of mentors being reflective practitioners. Goodwyn (1997), for example, emphasises that by being a true reflective practitioner the mentor can make much more conscious use of the remarkable skills that are required for effective teaching (127). Tomlinson (1995) argues that the mentor should aspire to be a reflective practitioner (38). Similarly, Richert (1997) concluded that all teacher educators (mentors and tutors) need to be reflective practitioners.
(83). Field (1994) asserted that mentors need to be taught how to be reflective practitioners and how to observe what they are experiencing, or have experienced, objectively and then be able to talk with their students about it (28). In reflective practice, mentors will be able to critique, test and restructure their understanding about teaching practice (Schon 1983; Tomlinson 1995; Kwan and Lopez-Real 2005). Indeed, mentors will be able to deal more effectively with the complexity and variety that is inherent in the process of learning to teach. At the same time, according to Brubacher, Case and Reagan (1994), being a reflective practitioner can free mentors from impulsive or routine behaviour and allow them to act in a deliberate, intentional manner (25). Adler (1991) concluded that ‘mentors would be able to transcend every day experience, to imagine things as they ought to be, not simply accept things as they are’ (142).

The mentor as a provider of professional development
In contrast with other roles that the mentor has in student training, the role of provider of professional development is general and broad and it is therefore difficult to define in a specific context. According to the literature, this role is concerned with all the professional help and assistance that mentors provide students during their training in order to help them grow and develop as teachers. (Tomlinson 1995; Taylor 1996; Lauriala 1997; Hayes 1999; Moyles, Suschitsky and Chapman 1999; Snowber 2005). The mentor as a provider of professional development is seen to be one of the important functions that mentors have within the theoretical model suggested in this study. It is a vital feature that helps students to increase their awareness about teaching and improve their professional growth:

Mentors need to be able to focus on what went well in a lesson, and what did not go well, and be able to analyse and to interrogate the processes in a helpful way that will lead to the professional development of the student. They need to be able to set achievable targets for the student in line with the student’s performance each day. (Field 1994, 75)

The mentor as an assessor
Many mentoring researchers emphasised the importance of being an assessor for mentors when they undertake their responsibilities in student training. Crosson and Shiu (1994) suggested that it is a mentor’s responsibility to evaluate and assess the experience offered to the student during each stage of training. Gratch (1998) argued that in some teacher education programmes the role of the mentor is predominantly that of supervisor. In such, a construction of mentoring assessment is not problematic. It is simply summative in character. However, Gratch contended that in the wider view of mentoring adopted in many programmes assessment becomes broader and more problematic (126). Indeed, being an assessor is a critical and demanding process in which mentors need to be skilled in formative and summative assessment as Field (1994) asserted:

Mentors should have skills in both formative and summative assessment techniques. Because they have the students with them for such a long period of time, they should give constant feedback, set targets for the next lesson and the next day and the next week, and have sessions of formative evaluation as the practicum progresses. (75)

2. The personal dimension
The type of personal relationship between the mentor and student is considered a fundamental component in student teaching in many teacher education programmes (Vonk 1993; Gates 1994; Gratch 1998). Maynard (2000), who researched students’ perceptions of good practice in mentoring, concluded that when the relationship between the mentor and student is ineffective or destructive ‘the consequence for students’ sense of worth as a teacher, and as a person, appeared
With a personal dimension, the mentor can give students a safe place to try new ideas, skills and techniques with minimal risk. Thus the various roles identified in the literature in the personal dimension are considered as a separate dimension in the model. These roles are considered in detail below. Therefore, in this present research, it would be important to explore further this pivotal dimension in the mentoring role.

**The mentor as a guide**

Most recent studies in mentoring showed that the primary emphasis of many training programmes is in the guiding of students to be more skilled at teaching through facilitating the negotiation of barriers that may preclude or hinder their progress during the induction (Nolder, Smith and Melrose 1994; Gratch 1998; Portner 1998). According to these studies, the major objective of mentoring is likely to be guiding students during their training toward becoming competent professional teachers by providing them with tuition and guidance as necessary. Many writers have emphasised this personal function as one of the most significant roles of the mentor. For instance, Vonk (1993) pointed out that the mentor is a person who is assigned to guide the student. Watson (1994) reported that a mentor is a guide to students who are finding their way into the profession. Nolder, Smith and Melrose (1994) asserted that another important aspect of the mentor’s role is that ‘he is a guide for the student with regard to the social setting-school’ (49).

**The mentor as a friend**

Friendship in mentoring is likely to be an essential function of a developing rapport, trust and productive relationship between the mentor and student (Nolder, Smith and Melrose 1994; Jaworski and Watson 1994; Gardiner 1998). It is therefore important for mentors to establish a new type of personal relationship which depends on a mutual trust and respect for each other (Portner 1998). As friends, mentors may provide students with great opportunities and safe grounds for clear communication and fruitful relationships. It could be an effective relationship in which mentors help students to negotiate with ease the depth and complexity of teaching and engage in reflective dialogue. Many researchers emphasised the importance of friendship within the mentoring context. Maynard et al. (1997), for example, assert that friendship between the mentor and student can offer a comfort and security that students needed for ongoing professional growth at different stages of training. Gardiner (1998) concluded that an important function of the mentoring relationship is the need within it for friendship.

**The mentor as a communicator**

Undoubtedly, effective communication is a vital function in the mentoring role. It is considered key for the success of student teaching in schools (Watson 1994; Field 1994; Portner 1998; Snowber 2005). Many researchers have indicated the importance of communication function in the mentoring role. Watkins and Whalley (1993) asserted that ‘communication is needed at many levels and at various times during mentoring’ (121). Koerner (1993) found that all mentors, in his study, believed that because the personal relationship with their students is very important and taking a major part of their role in the induction, it was vital for them to establish the communication necessary to develop and nurture that relationship. Hayes (1999) found that when channels of communication between mentors and students are open, it creates an environment in which students are able to explain their fears and concerns through a more deliberated dialogue.
The mentor as a supporter

Being a supporter is likely to be one of the most valuable functions that mentors can perform at different stages of the student induction. It can help students to find out the knowledge and skills necessary for effective teaching in the classroom. Many researchers have indicated the importance of the supportive relationship between the mentor and student. Watt (1995) found that the majority of mentors, in her study, considered the supporting aspect in their role as a primary one. Shaw (1992) reported that the mentor has a major role in the support of the student in the classroom (260). Jubeh (1997) indicated that students frequently commented on the importance of the support they received from mentors during induction. Kerry and Mays (1995) reported that the supporting function of the mentor role is noted as a fundamental element in any definition of mentoring (9).

The mentor as a counsellor

The counselling role in mentoring is one of the most significant functions that the mentor can play in the student induction. Where mentors take responsibility for developing a warm relationship with their students, rewards for both can be significant (Goodwyn 1997; Kwan and Lopez-Real 2005; Snowber 2005). Many researchers have emphasised the importance of the counselling function in the mentor role. Jacques (1992), for example, found that ‘the role of mentor involves being an instructor, a teacher, a counsellor, and an assessor’ (112). Goodwyn (1997) believes that counselling is an important aspect of mentoring and one that needs to be considered more fully in student induction. Shaw (1992) asserts that the skills associated with the counselling function of the mentor role are important to successful induction. Anderson and Shannon (1988) considered counselling to be one of the main functions of the mentor role and therefore they defined it as ‘a problem-solving process that includes behaviours such as listening, probing, clarifying and advising’ (31). Booth (1993) found that great emphasis was given to the role of mentor as a counsellor by the students. This is not surprising since the mentor, as a counsellor, can relieve anxieties, difficulties, and stresses that students may encounter during the induction process. Indeed, the mentor can play a vital role in successful induction and may provide students with invaluable advice in ways that enable them to develop and grow as professional teachers.

3. The mentor’s knowledge base

Undoubtedly, the mentoring role needs mastery of a body of knowledge that can play a central role in enabling and guiding mentors to fulfil the responsibilities and roles in the student induction effectively (Vonk 1993; McIntyre and Hagger 1994; Turner 1993; Zanting et al. 1998; Grenfell 1998). This is not surprising since, as Turner (1993) and Vonk (1993) found, most mentors have little experience and knowledge with regard to skills required for successful mentoring into school. Therefore, many researchers who studied the process of learning to teach suggested it was extremely important that considerable preparation and training was needed for mentors to be able to undertake their roles in student induction.

Robinson (1994) found that mentors, in order to carry out their role in student induction effectively, need to be trained and developed. Moyle, Suschitsky and Chapman (1999) concluded that training is vital for mentors to understand students’ developing needs at different stages of their induction course. Maynard (2000) concluded that training for mentors is important to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to work effectively with students.

However, the knowledge embedded in mentoring is likely to be diverse and cover a wide range of functions that are necessary to the induction process. It is generally accepted that mentors need to be trained in order to have a broad and in-depth understanding of different kinds
of knowledge required for a mentoring role (Putman, Bradford and Cleminson 1993; McIntyre and Hagger 1994; Ormrod and Cole 1996). Vonk (1993) specified three issues that he argued are of major importance as elements of a mentor’s knowledge. These issues are:

- A clear view on the teacher’s role in the educational process
- A clear perspective on the role of theory in the mentoring process
- A proper knowledge of their students’ learning processes (33).

The mentor’s knowledge is still a crucial issue in teacher education programmes. It can be assumed that the mentors develop their professional knowledge through trial and error, since, as Vonk (1993) found, very few mentors have enough experience and are fully aware of the details of how students learn to teach (33). Indeed, when mentors attempt to induct students in different teaching and learning strategies, skills, and techniques without substantial knowledge, the process of induction can break down or be severely limited (Putman, Bradford and Cleminson 1993). Indeed, mentors may need to develop a unique repertoire of the knowledge of what is important in how students learn to teach. This knowledge can include different ways of knowing which are crucial for mentors’ role and necessary for successful students’ induction (Gudmundsdottir 1990). Many mentors in Devlin’s study (1995, 67) identified the following as important elements of knowledge within their academic subject. These could form the following guidelines for mentors:

- Teaching and academic ability
- Philosophical grasp of mentoring
- Experience of working with student teachers
- Experience of teaching

Because the sources of the mentor knowledge about teaching and training are varied, there are at least two major sources that can take a central part in structuring this knowledge (Shulman 1987; Ormrod and Cole 1996). The first source of mentor’s knowledge is content knowledge; the knowledge about the subject matter that will be taught (Shulman 1987; McNamara 1991). The second source is pedagogical knowledge; the knowledge of specific institutional strategies, skills and techniques for teaching a particular subject matter (Cochran, DeRuiter and King 1993; Marks 1990). At this stage, the pertinent question will be how a clear distinction can be made between the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of mentors. Indeed, what has emerged from much empirical research, as McNamara (1991) found, is that mentors’ subject knowledge and pedagogic knowledge are both necessary for successful practice teaching. However, McNamara concluded that no clear distinctions can be drawn between them. Since the sources that constitute both mentors’ content knowledge and pedagogic knowledge are likely to be different, it is probably reasonable to assume that both elements of knowledge can be shaped by mentors’ experience of teaching. Engagement with or reflection on their pedagogic knowledge and content knowledge through supporting student induction may help to develop the mentor as a reflective practitioner. It may be that through this process mentors will enhance and extend their understanding of the mentoring role (McNamara 1991; Zanting et al. 1998). In this present study it is, therefore, important to explore and map out the constituent parts of mentors’ knowledge and the kind of knowledge is needed to perform the role of mentor well.

**Aims of the study**

Research into the training of student teachers in Jordan is a newly developing area. Consequently, there is a limited amount of background knowledge arising out of research and practical experience which is directly relevant to the Jordanian context. It is therefore important that, for teacher
education to progress, empirical evidence about the way people think about and react to the new developments is gathered and considered. This present study was designed to explore empirically the characteristics of the roles adopted by mentors of student teachers of early childhood education in Jordan. The research questions for this study were designed to explore the perspectives of two parties involved in the teacher education programme at Hashemite University: the mentors and the students. It aims to explore the actual role that mentors adopted at each stage of the student induction and so to consider the knowledge and skills that mentors need to be trained in to enable them to perform the role of the mentor well. In particular, this present study aims to answer the following questions:

- How far do the roles adopted by mentors of early childhood education students in Jordan coincide with the model of roles suggested in the literature for different stages in the training of student teachers?
- What are the characteristics of the role of mentors in the eyes of early childhood education mentors in the different stages of the training process?
- What are the characteristics of the role of early childhood education mentors in the eyes of their student teachers in the different stages of the training process?
- What kinds of knowledge do mentors believe are needed to perform in the role well?
  (a) What are the training needs of the mentor in the eyes of mentors?
  (b) What are the training needs of the mentor in the eyes of their student teachers?

Method

Design of the study

According to Patton (1990) there are three main ways to gather qualitative data: interviews, direct observation and indirect documentation. The present study is composed of two parts as it followed a qualitative methodological approach. The first one included interviews with a sample of mentors of early childhood education and their student teachers involved in this study. The second one included the observation and field notes made soon after the interviews at each stage of student training in the kindergarten.

1. Interview

A semi-structured interview technique was adopted in this study for two practical reasons. It is a more flexible technique than other interview methods, such as structured and unstructured interviews since there is a list of predetermined questions linked to a theoretical model of roles as suggested in this research. With the semi-structured interview method, the researcher is able to explore, in-depth, interviewees’ perspectives and ideas as to what the role of the mentor actually is and what they believe it should be without any prior limitations or constraints on their answers. The second reason is that it is an appropriate technique in the case of this study because the free time for each participant, whether in kindergartens or university was limited and varied from one to another.

Interviewees were given a written copy of the questions to be asked in advance in order to give them an idea about the areas which they would be asked. This was found necessary for two reasons: firstly, because mentors and students wanted to know the nature of the project and we wanted them to feel confident. Secondly, it was because we wanted them to be ready to answer and provide us with as much information about the role of the mentor as possible. In the second and final round of interviews this problem disappeared. This was expected because the second and final round of interviews were likely to prove to be much more informative.
since all interviewees had time to think about the questions and had the chance to apply what they had learnt from the first interview.

2. Observation and field notes
Initially, the intention was to interview students and mentors in kindergarten three times each and to observe in kindergartens only a limited amount. However, my role in kindergartens as a participant observer became central to developing my own understanding. Field notes written up each evening were invaluable in gaining insights. Interviewees saw me as interested in their work and came to accept my presence. What this suggests is a desire on the part of both teachers and students, to reflect on the whole issue of teacher training.

Population and study sample
In institutional terms, the target population of the study included all the mentors of early childhood education teaching and their student teachers in Hashemite University in Jordan. This population was distributed within 10 cooperating teachers (all except for one were females) in Zarqa, the second city, after the capital Amman, in Jordan. The sample included 11 mentors out of a total of 27 mentors of early childhood education and 14 students out of a total of 36 student teachers involved in the practical education programme in Hashemite University.

Data analysis
All research methods (interviews and observation and field notes) used in this present study provided a source of qualitative data. After the transcription and translation stage all the findings of this present study were grouped and classified into categories in order to look for relationships within the data. For each round of interviews, the relevant data from each interview and observation and field notes were placed systematically under the related headings of the theoretical model. For each question, a number of categories were established.

Findings
This study was designed to explore the roles adopted by kindergarten based mentors of ITT students of early childhood education teaching. The approach adopted involved the use of a model of the roles involved in mentoring that was derived from the literature. The model was used to provide a framework to support discussion in interviews and to guide analysis of the data. In the first stage, the results of both interviews and observation and field notes showed that different weight was given to the mentors’ roles on both dimensions: the professional and personal. On the professional level, the roles of organiser, role model, and provider of professional development took a major place in mentors’ work during the early days of training.

During this stage my mentor re-arranged her timetable on Monday and Wednesday to give us the opportunity to observe her lessons in all teaching areas of early childhood education: literacy,...etc. and also she encouraged us to observe these functions with other early childhood teachers in the kindergarten. She always tried to give us the opportunity to observe a new ways of teaching. She did not like to let us observe any repeated lessons for her or for other teachers in the kindergarten.

(Student Teacher.3.1/ observation stage)

Yes, of course, I see myself as a role model for her. She will watch and observe me as a role model and she will take everything I do in the class: using formal early childhood education, how I teach in
different ways and methods, how I deal with the pupils in the class, and how I deal with pupils’ textbooks. From these aspects, she will focus so that she can learn from my experience.

(Mentor.3.2/observation stage)

Yes, of course, she is a role model of the early childhood teacher and I hope I will become like her in the future. First of all, she is competent in the subject matter and when she teaches her pupils any teaching areas of early childhood education, she teaches it perfectly and in unusual ways. Actually she has 14 years’ experience as a teacher so she is using formal early childhood education fluently and she deals with her pupils in the class fairly. And also she has good relations with her colleagues and head teacher.

(Student Teacher.3.2/observation stage)

As a provider of professional development I tried to make my student aware of issues like arriving at kindergarten on time and appearing committed to teaching. Once I told him that you have just two eyes to see but in front of you there are forty pupils with eighty eyes watching every thing that you do such as your movement and voice, your different reactions, and the clothes that you wear. Therefore, all these things are clear to the pupils but you may not have recognised it yet.

(Mentor.1.4/observation stage)

On the personal level, the social relationship between the mentors and their students was superficial so that the communication between them was limited to answering students’ requests on the academic side of the relationship:

In first stage of induction, I think it should be formal relationship not personal one between the mentor and student, because sometimes the personal relationship between them could prevent mentors telling the truth about negative comments in students’ work. Frankly, since I consider my student as a friend of mine, it is difficult for me to tell him about negative points in his work.

(Mentor.2.4/observation stage)

Otherwise, despite the importance afforded in the literature to mentors acting as trainers, reflective practitioners, and guides during the early stage of training, little weight was given to these roles by the mentors in this study.

It is a first time that I heard about this role. I thought my responsibility is limited to the class and if the student needs anything she will come and ask me, but to introduce myself as a guide it is a new experience for me.

(Mentor.2.3/observation stage)

In the second stage, the results showed that, in addition to an extension of the roles of organiser and provider of professional development, the roles of trainer, observer, provider of feedback, guide, supporter, communicator, and counsellor were added:

As a trainer, she was patient and never interfered in the class when I did the part of lesson that I coordinated with her to teach. She was never angry when I made mistakes or did not do my part well. Sometimes, she told me that ‘I would do your part in next class, so observe and watch how I will do it in order to enable you to improve your performance and know where you made mistakes’.

(Student Teacher.1.1/interim stage)

Frankly, I found myself as a critical observer for her so that I observed her seriously and watched everything she did. I have observed her way of teaching, how she managed and disciplined pupils in the class and how she used the blackboard and what information that she introduced to pupils. Usually, I did not interfere in her performance in the class but in few cases I interfered in an indirect...
way when she asked me to do that to correct wrong answers and giving more explanation when misunderstandings occurred in the lesson.

(Mentor.1.3/ interim stage)

As a counsellor, she usually supplies me with much advice and counselling on the academic level especially on the teaching method that I need to do my part in the lesson. Actually, she always encouraged me to ask her about anything related to my part in the lesson. So I used to ask her frequently before the class about how I could explain this concept or this exercise or about anything that I am not sure of it in the lesson.

(Student Teacher.1.3/interim stage)

In spite of the fact that an extension was evident in some roles on the personal level, the academic relationship still dominated in mentors’ and students’ interaction.

In the final stage, the results showed that the assessment role did not hold a major place in the mentors’ view. This was to be expected since the responsibility that the mentors have in student assessment at the Hashemite University is very limited:

Frankly, student assessment is still a problematic role for us. Last year when we assessed our students and put the final marks in their assessment reports the head teacher refused all of it and threw it in the bin. She argued that our assessment reports were unreliable. And when I told her that it was me who was with the student not you she became angry and told me that ‘do not talk to me about this matter please and if you want me to accept your final assessment report you should change it now’.

(Mentor.1.2/final stage)

From the observation and field notes taken, it was found that none of the mentors demonstrated any skills of reflection through dealing with their students during this stage. It was noticed that when they provided them with feedback, none of them encouraged their students to be a reflective practitioner or used a self-evaluation technique for their own practice. For example none of them asked their students after the class questions like ‘how do you feel?’ or ‘why do you think the lesson went in this way?’. The following conversation between one mentor and her student after the class explained that:

ST.1.1: what is your opinion on my performance today?
M.11: it was good and improvement on the last time. You spoke good formal early childhood education and you questioned the pupils well. Also, you used two teaching methods: the discussion and the cooperative learning approach. But on the other hand you still need to pay more attention to the pupils’ reading since they made many mistakes. Also you need to vary in your reinforcement to the pupils rather than using always words like excellent and good.

ST.1.1: Thanks, but as you know I was confused a little bit since this is the first time that I taught the reading lesson for the whole class. So the next class I think I will try to avoid all negative notes that you provided me.
M.11: okay, I hope you will do that.

(field notes and observation/ final stage)

Otherwise, extensions and changes happened in both dimensions to the roles of organiser, trainer, observer, provider of feedback, provider of professional development, and supporter. Almost unanimous support was given to the idea that all mentors would benefit from a training course before undertaking any responsibility for student training. Drawing on the evidence from interviews and observation and field notes, it can be concluded that the training needs of mentors are broad: encompassing the full range of roles in both dimensions suggested in this study and including the latest teaching methods, resources, and student assessment techniques:
I think mentors should be well trained before undertaking their roles in student induction. It is expected that mentor have enough knowledge and information about how they could deal with students in order to give them a chance to acquire teaching skills and competencies well during induction stages. Of course, this would give mentors more confidence in their work with students and at the same time they would not depend on their personal interpretations without any background knowledge about induction. At the same time, I think that if mentors attend some training sessions or at least regular meetings in the university, it would be helpful for them to match other experience and ideas that each participant had in induction.

(Mentor1.2/final stage)

However, training would need to be planned in line with course aims and in collaboration with university staff. For example discussion with a supervisor in kindergarten about the roles as they develop over the period of the placement could be a profitable way to train mentors. This would require the help and support of supervisors and appropriate resources being made available.

Frankly, I need to be familiar with everything that students need during each stage of induction and what are important things that I should emphasise in dealing with them. I also need to be acquainted with the latest teaching methods and assessment in order to avoid the contradiction between what methods and ways that I have and what students learnt in the university. Therefore, I think I will now pursue my postgraduate study in the education field since I am graduated from the faculty of arts and I have never studied any educational courses in teaching or assessment.

(Mentor.3.4/final stage)

In general the findings arising from this study suggest that in a number of cases the roles of mentors, as described in the literature, are reflected quite closely in the approach taken by Jordanian mentors. However, there are certain aspects of the roles that differ in the degree of importance from its theoretical frame outlined in this research.

Based on the analysis and discussion of the findings of interviews and observation and field notes taken during each stage of training, several conclusions can be derived from this study. These conclusions include two main sections: the role of the mentor in relation to a theoretical model suggested in this study, and the knowledge and training needs required for mentors to fulfil this role.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The results showed that there were few differences between the perspectives of mentors and students about the organising role of the mentor. This finding is similar to that of earlier writers (Elliott and Calderhead 1993; Watkins and Whalley 1993; Brookes and Sikes 1997; Field 1994) who based their studies on a competency paradigm, and found that organising a schedule for students to assume responsibilities and undertake specific tasks is one of the central roles of mentors in training. Regarding the mentor as a role model, the results showed that this function of the role of the mentor was given a great deal of attention during the first stage of induction. Whilst in the later stages, it was found that the emphasis was on keeping up the positive image of their own skills as a teacher that mentors impressed in their students’ minds. These results are similar to the findings of Harvard and Dunne (1992) and Maynard and Furlong (1993). The role of trainer as a function of the mentor role is considered very important and demanding at each stage of the student training, while the observation of students’ practice had little emphasis in the mentor work during the first stage of the student training. This was expected because at this stage students were not required to practice any teaching in class.

The findings of interviews showed that providing students with feedback was not a prominent part of the mentors’ role. This result could be due to the fact that many mentors think that providing
students with feedback takes place only when students start practising some teaching and taking responsibility for the pupils in the class during the later stages. Furthermore, this research provides firm evidence that the function of a reflective practitioner is crucial and difficult. This agrees with the findings of Brubacher, Case and Reagan (1994) and Schon (1983) where being a reflective practitioner requires a high level of skill and competence to be able to reflect on issues relevant to the teaching and training activities. The role of provider of professional development is an important role of the mentor at each stage of the training. These results agree with the findings of Huling-Austin (1992), Lauriala (1997), Hayes (1999), and Moyle, Suschitsky and Chapman (1999) where it is mentors’ responsibility to provide their students with what they need to enhance their professionalism. This might be true because the whole process of student training in schools, especially in a competence-based course, is, as Lauriala (1997) deemed, a first step for the student in the teaching profession.

The role of assessor did not have a major place in the mentor role. This result is different from the work of Vonk (1993), Field (1994), Crosson and Shiu (1994), and Devlin (1995). This was not surprising since in the Hashemite case, student assessment depends heavily on the judgement of the university tutor rather than the mentor. The results showed that little emphasis was given to guiding students to the new life and experience in schools during the first stage of the induction. Also, the friendship was not seen as important in the role of the mentor at any stage of student training. This result is consistent with the findings of Watkins and Whalley (1993) who found that friendship was a marginal and unimportant function of the role of the mentor.

The communication function was important. It was an ongoing role since enhancing and improving the relationship between mentors and students could reflect positively on their communication with each other. This result agrees with the findings of Watson (1994), Field (1994), Porter (1998) and Watkins and Whalley (1993) which showed that the communication function within the mentor role was considered a key for the success of the student induction in schools. This aspect of the mentor role took a major place in the mentors’ work during each stage of training. To some extent, the results of this study support the findings of Kerry and Mayes (1995), Watt (1995), Nolder, Smith and Melrose (1994) and Goodwyn (1997) who considered the mentor’s support a fundamental component of the mentor–student relationship. This is consistent with these present study findings in which supporting students’ professional development was given a different weight of emphasis at each stage of the induction. Despite a high degree of willingness of mentors during each stage for counselling students on both personal and professional levels, the results showed that most students appreciated only the advice and counsel that they received on the academic level.

An important conclusion, which has been derived from this study, is the emphasis of the role played by the mentor for the success of the process of student training. It was highlighted through the perspectives of mentors and students of the importance and sensitivity of the mentor’s role in student induction particularly in the context of Jordan. This is because they are involved in a demanding process in which several aspects and elements of their roles and responsibilities should be given a great deal of attention and consideration at different stages of student training. Based on the findings arising from this study, it could be concluded that in a number of cases the roles of mentors as described in the literature are reflected quite closely in the approach taken by Jordanian mentors. At the same time, there are certain aspects of the roles that differ in the degree of importance from its theoretical frame outlined within a model of roles suggested in this research. At this point, it is worth noting that the difficulties and problems that the results showed when mentors acted out their roles and responsibilities in student training are, in our view, not due to the shortcoming or deficiencies in the model itself. It is more likely due to the system of student training at the Hashemite University where all mentors are untrained and inexperienced in the field of mentoring. This gives this new suggested model more support and strength since
most of its aspects, especially on the professional dimension, are consistent with the findings of the majority of previous research conducted in other countries of the world such as UK and USA. The differences and disagreement with the findings of other previous research that the results show with regard to some aspects of the role may be due to the lack of the mentors’ knowledge base in mentoring, since it is still a new field of development in Jordan.

More analytically, important conclusions could be derived from interviews and observation and field notes taken during each stage of induction. In the first stage, the findings confirmed that weight should be given to the roles of organiser, role model, and provider of professional development. Despite limited weight being given to the roles of trainer, reflective practitioner, and guide by the mentors in this study, it seems important to give these roles further consideration and attention at this stage. Since the interaction between mentors and their students was limited to answering students’ requests on the academic level of the relationship rather than the personal, it could be concluded that lack of communication is responsible for the superficiality in the social relationship between them.

In the second stage, in addition to maintaining and extending the roles of organiser and provider of professional development, the roles of trainer, observer, provider of feedback, guide, supporter, communicator, and counsellor are important. The study showed that the reflective practitioner is an unfamiliar role for all mentors in this study and the assessor and friend function did not hold a major place in the mentors’ role by the end of the student induction. Lack of knowledge of reflection, limited responsibility in the students’ assessment, and difference of age and personality are most likely explanations for preventing mentors from running these roles. This implies that mentors need to acquire the skills of reflection, and consideration should be given to their responsibility in the student assessment being increased. In spite of the fact that an extension was evident in some roles on the personal level during the later stages, the academic relationship dominated in mentors’ and students’ interaction at this stage. This is thought to be a result of limited communication between the university and the mentors in kindergarten. Since the relationship between the Hashemite University and its cooperating schools was at a very low level and each worked in isolation, mentors did not have a clear picture about their roles and responsibilities in student induction or about what the students learnt in the university. At the same time, the university supervisor who rarely visited the kindergartens does not seem to be concerned with what mentors do. Therefore, one important implication of this study is a recommendation that establishing sound partnerships between the university and its cooperating teachers, and opening new communication channels between the two parties: the mentors and the university supervisor, would be useful. It would be important to make the expertise and explanations flow from each easier and more effective. Arranging regular meetings during each stage of the induction for mentors with the university supervisor to discuss the progress and needs of students and different matters related to the induction would also help to improve the interaction between all participants in the induction process. In this way mentors could understand and successfully perform their own roles and responsibilities at each stage of student training in kindergarten.

The knowledge base

A great deal of support was given to the idea that all mentors would benefit from a training course before they embarked on any responsibility for student training. It is therefore appropriate to conclude that training mentors is essential to the increased success of the induction process. Drawing on the evidence from interviews and observation and field notes, the training needs of mentors are broad: encompassing the full range of roles in both dimensions suggested in this study and the latest teaching methods, resources, and student assessment techniques. According
to these findings, another main implication for this study is that due to the absence of pre-training courses for the mentors within the Jordanian universities, providing mentors with a training course before they start working with the students should be established. Training mentors to the model of roles suggested in this study and other training needs mentioned above should be considered. Within such a training course, it is hoped that mentors would feel more confident about how to act their roles in an adequate way, and understand these roles and their consequences. It would also help new mentors to enhance their mentoring skills and know how to help their students to acquire new knowledge, experience, skills, and standards of professional competencies. Thus, it seems necessary to pay particular attention in the training course to the knowledge and skills required by the mentors to work effectively with students. Mentors should also be more informed about the theoretical part of teacher training and preparation within the university in order to be able to match theory with practice. With this emphasis on training, mentors would be able to apply and revise their university experience to meet the unique context of their roles at each stage of student training.

In the light of the findings of this study, recommendations for further research can be given. For the case of Jordan, more studies on mentoring programmes at all Jordanian universities are recommended to evaluate the content and strategies of training pre-service teachers. There is also a need to explore in more detail the role of the university supervisor and how that might be defined to match the changing needs and expectations of both students and mentors during each stage of student training. Finally, it is important to emphasise that the model of the mentor role suggested in this study was applied to the situation of a single mentoring programme in Jordan. It would be of interest to know whether this new model is fit for purpose and capable of being applied in other social contexts in different countries of the world.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Professor Geoffrey C Elliott, Editor of Research in Post-Compulsory Education, in preparing this article for publication.

Notes on contributors

Dr Fathi Ihmeideh is an assistant professor and assistant dean at Queen Rania Faculty for Childhood, Hashemite University, Jordan. He earned his PhD in early literacy development from the University of Huddersfield, UK in 2006. His research interest covers a wide range of topics including teaching reading and writing for children, early childhood teaching training and emergent literacy. Dr Ihmeideh’s email is fathi@hu.edu.jo

Dr Akram Al-Basheer is an assistant professor and chairman of the Curricula and Instruction Department at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Hashemite University, Jordan. He earned his PhD in methods of teaching Arabic from the University of Liverpool, UK in 2002. His research interest covers a wide range of topics including teaching Arabic language and Arabic teacher education. Dr Al-Basheer’s email is akram@hu.edu.jo

Dr Ahmad Qablan is an assistant professor of science education in the department of Curricula and Instruction at the Hashemite University, Jordan. He earned his PhD in science education from Florida State University, USA in 2005. He has contributed to over 25 publications in teachers’ preparation, education for sustainability, and environmental education. Dr Qabalan’s email is ahmadqablan@hotmail.com

References


