Developing teacher educators in Uganda using a mentoring approach

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This research looks at how mentor work was perceived, undertaken and assessed, in an intercultural education setting in Uganda by two main professional groups – mentors (senior educators from several different countries) and centre co-ordinating tutors (CCTs – outreach primary teacher training tutors).

In Uganda, the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has increased considerably the number of children in primary schools. That expansion has highlighted that teaching quality has to be addressed if children are to benefit from greater access to school-based education.

The typical mode of teaching in Uganda is didactic: call and response, chalk and talk. This prevails in schools and in teacher training colleges. In 2010 an international aid and development organisation sought to improve teaching quality through using mentoring as a key strategy in a teacher education programme.

Mentors were recruited internationally – from England, India, the Philippines, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands. They were volunteers, senior educators and were contracted to be in a placement for, typically, two years. Mentors worked from core primary teacher training colleges (PTC) across Uganda, working alongside a range of local education professionals including CCTs, district education staff and government officials. The researcher was one of the volunteer educator group.

The data analysis is identifying differences in perceptions of the mentor role within the volunteer teacher educator group. Some of this difference might be attributed to the working definitions of ‘mentor’ and ‘mentoring’ within the volunteers’ country of origin. The CCTs had a more coherent and homogeneous understanding of ‘mentor’ and ‘mentoring’ but did not necessarily expect that that was the role that the volunteer teacher educator had come to fulfil. The cultural and intercultural dimensions which set the context for the work contributed to the several interpretations of the teacher education programme in action.

The responses from CCTs and from volunteer educators suggest that the flexible approach that was the predominant mode of implementing the programme had the potential to be productive. There would be benefits from clarification of the definition of the programme’s strategic mode (mentoring) to enable expectations to be better managed.

Data collection included semi-structured interviews with CCTs and mentors, participant observation, research journal and narrative reflections.