Mentoring is Paramount for English Language Teachers’ Development
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Abstract: The quality of input from current English teachers can be enhanced by mentoring, as mentoring can scaffold the learning process of language teachers. A mentor is defined by Hudson as “one who is more knowledgeable on teaching practices and through explicit mentoring processes develops pedagogical self-efficacy in the mentee towards autonomous teaching practices” (Hudson, 2004b, pp. 216-217). English teachers require specialized knowledge and skills and they must cease to work in isolation. The current focus is on continuous improvement in teachers’ knowledge, skills and teaching methods so as to enhance students’ academic performance. Mentoring is not simply resource support but it is a “means of fostering stronger connections among the teaching staff, leading to a more positive and cohesive learning environment for students.” (Brewster and Railsback) Effective mentoring is considered paramount for a language teacher’s development and it is an essential aspect of ELT programmes as it helps in assisting improving teaching practice. The most important role of a mentor in an English class would be that of a motivator. The mentor should be very articulate in motivating the students in learning the English language. It is imperative that English teachers must be competent users of the language themselves. Mentoring is a process to help develop teaching practices involving and nurturing relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person who provides guidance as a role model and advisor. Finally, mentoring is an integral part of English Language Teaching and has by and large heightened the value of trained English Teachers. To conclude, mentees, English teachers in this case, expect versatile mentor attributes and practices which include; developing personal inter-personal relationships; specific pedagogical knowledge; modeling teaching practices and articulating feedback on such practices.

Key Words: mentor, mentee, motivator, protégé, specialized knowledge

I. Introduction
In the present scenario where proficiency in English is mandatory for employability, the teaching of English is in the limelight. English teachers face increasing pressures arising from larger class sizes, greater student diversity, and stronger demands from the institutions/students for value-for money. At the same time, one cannot escape the fact that with no formal training the teachers lack the skill to be effective language teachers. Without appropriate training, many teachers feel inadequate and incapable of meeting students’ needs and become disenchanted with their profession.
English teachers require specialized knowledge and skills and they must cease to work in isolation. The current focus is on continuous improvement in teachers’ knowledge, skills and teaching methods so as to enhance students’ academic performance. Educators and institutions are looking for ways to ensure that all teachers are well trained and competent to produce the expected learning outcome. Mentoring provides a means for teachers to enhance their teaching skills and it has been the keyword in educational reforms since the early 1980s. Mentoring has often been portrayed as an intentional, nurturing, instructive and supportive activity by an older, more experienced person that helps shape the growth and development of a younger, less experienced person. Such experienced / trained teachers have the specialized knowledge, skill and experience required to teach students with limited English proficiency and they are in the best position to mentor the less experienced English teachers in effective teaching practices. Mentoring is not simply resource support but it is a “means of fostering stronger connections among the teaching staff, leading to a more positive and cohesive learning environment for students.” (Brewster and Railsback) It involves working closely with experienced and well trained teachers, hence, widening the support received by novice teachers. Mentoring will be effective only if the mentor demonstrates a willingness to nurture another person, be open-minded, flexible and empathetic. New English teachers are faced with fresh challenges on a daily basis especially in a heterogeneous class. The
mentor must promote opportunities for observation and conversation about appropriate teaching practices, second language acquisition etc.

II. Qualities of a Mentor
Not every teacher can be a mentor. A good teacher does not automatically qualify to be a mentor. A good mentor requires both personal and professional skills to facilitate a symbiotic relationship between the mentor and his protégé. The mentor should be honest, committed, sensitive, and enthusiastic and possess a sense of humor. The mentor should be willing to self-reflect and communicate effectively. He should be a good listener and criticize constructively. Quality mentoring should result in improved student learning and better mentor teaching skills. A humanistic approach is needed to facilitate the interpersonal relationship between the mentor and the mentee. There are two types of mentors, informal mentors and formal mentors. Informal mentors are colleagues whom teachers turn to for advice and whose opinions are respected by others. In this sense, a mentor can be anyone who is helpful and gives supportive advice. Formal mentors are those with a specific mentoring responsibility assigned by the institutions.

III. Requisite Professional Qualities and Knowledge for a Mentor
The mentor, the English teacher in this case, must be an expert user of the language. The mentor should possess a good, if not, an outstanding record of a teacher. He should demonstrate a thoroughly successful classroom practice. The mentor besides being well versed in English must train their mentees in planning and teaching of lessons. Further, they should observe the lessons objectively and analytically. Sherman et al (2000:19) in their respective research identified specific skills and knowledge areas needed by competent mentors such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill/Knowledge</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Are amiable, patient, empathetic, honest, self-confident and open</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Can pick up mentees’ verbal and non-verbal cues. Recognize and understand different communication skills. Are skilled in conflict resolution.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>Are active listeners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content Area</td>
<td>Are experts in the areas in which mentees requires assistance. Have a broad knowledge base in their field. Keep up with current trends and latest research.</td>
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<td>Awareness of diversity</td>
<td>Are sensitive to mentees’ individual learning styles. Are comfortable with people of diverse backgrounds Can accept different points of view</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflective supervision skills</td>
<td>Have strong skills in observing and giving feedback Engage in self-reflection Build on past experience to advise and assist mentees with their current dilemmas.</td>
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IV. English Teachers as Mentors
Effective mentoring is considered paramount for a language teacher’s development and it is an essential aspect of ELT programmes as it helps in assisting improving teaching practice. Mentoring also helps in exploring the supervisory skills of the mentors and consequently contributes to the enrichment of the teaching-learning process. Mentoring English teachers share their teaching experiences and facilitate professional growth. But mentors need competent knowledge, skills and professional proficiency in the teaching of the English language. They should provide information and assistance and model appropriate teaching practice and provide feedback about the mentees’ development and progress. Besides mentor-mentee training sessions, the mentor should observe the classes of the mentees. The mentor should provide positive and sensitive feedback with suggestions for further improvement, where necessary. The mentor should understand the needs of the institutions, students and the mentees. The mentor should practically demonstrate an introductory English class, time management, how to deal with common errors committed by students and classroom management depending on the language activities carried out in the classroom.

The most important role of a mentor in an English class would be that of a motivator. The mentor should be very articulate in motivating the students in learning the English language. It is imperative that English teachers must be competent users of the language themselves. The mentor must possess high-quality communication skills to improve instructional practices and ultimately enhance learning outcomes. Mentees rely upon their mentors’ English language skills to assist in developing personally and pedagogically. The mentees would look upon the mentors as role models particularly in the mentor and manner of delivery and pronunciation of the English language.

Apart from hands-on training sessions, the mentor should let his protégé observe the lessons by the mentor. Before the class begins, the mentor and the mentee should discuss the lesson that will be taught by the mentor. Both should discuss the lesson taught after the class. The next stage is where the mentee plans the lesson with the mentor and gets the mentor’s suggestions. The mentor observes the mentees’ class and gives feedback. The mentor should ensure that his protégé has developed the required knowledge and skills to co-ordinate the
transition of lessons. Teaching English to students from diverse backgrounds is a daunting task. And the language teacher finds it all the more challenging because of the large number of students, inadequate infrastructure and poor English language proficiency of the students. Hence, rigorous mentoring is also needed to prepare appropriate resource materials. The mentors should encourage the teachers to use locally available materials and deployment of suitable materials in the classroom.

The mentors should brief the mentees on the usage of a variety of evaluation tools – written, oral, observation and group activities. They inculcate in their protégés the culture of knowledge oriented teaching instead of exam oriented teaching. Mentors should guide the mentees in successful management of classroom activities. They should instill in them the habit of developing productive work habits. Mentoring provides the new English teachers with opportunities to integrate theory and practice and learn collaboratively from teachers. Mentees observe their mentors at work so as to learn about teaching skills, strategies and classroom achievements. Together, the mentors and the mentees evaluate their own teaching experiences through conferencing with teachers and through self-reflection, implement a variety of approaches, strategies and skills with a view to bring about meaningful learning. In this way, the mentees gain experience in preparing lesson plan, carrying out appropriate language based tasks in the classroom and managing and evaluating class work. As a result, the mentees find their own teaching style and personality and develop an identity of their own.

V. Conclusion
Mentoring is a process to help develop teaching practices involving and nurturing relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person who provides guidance as a role model and advisor. Mentoring is an effective way to train teachers to adopt new practices, but changes cannot spring out solely from one or two training sessions. It is of paramount importance that the gap between mentors’ practices and mentees’ needs should be bridged. The mentors, especially the English teachers, should be highly proficient teachers with specialized knowledge in teaching practices. Effective mentoring results in mentees improving their teaching-related knowledge and skills to develop a positive attitude towards teaching profession. Moreover, it provides valuable professional development for both new and experienced teachers. The mentors also would grow professionally as they could experiment with new ideas with their protégé.

Finally, mentoring is an integral part of English Language Teaching and has by and large heightened the value of trained English Teachers. Mentoring is an indispensable component which provides opportunities to prospective teachers to implement their instructional techniques and learn and share the experiences for developing confidence, teaching attitudes and skills under the supervision and guidance of the expert educators. Mentoring of English teachers will expose the new teachers to processes of learning through preparing work plan, linkage with the institutions, work performance, professional relationships and personal role. Mentoring offers the new teachers ample opportunities to contribute and introspect on their own experiences which can be helpful perceptions and opinions. The new teachers develop self-confidence as well. It also prepares new teachers for future challenges through acquisition of relevant skills. It is therefore important to focus on approaches of English language teaching, by English language teachers. Experienced teachers should impart knowledge rather than skill enhancing strategies, discourage exam oriented culture of teaching and mentor their protégés to prepare appropriate resource materials needed for English language teaching.

Mentoring cannot solve all teaching problems, nor can it satisfy every need, but it can definitely serve as a support system for the new teachers and it improves the quality of teaching. It can teach the mentees how to shape their instruction so that it is helpful to students who learn in a variety of ways. When successful integration between the mentors and mentees takes place, it benefits the learners and they will be successful in acquiring the language. The institutions must also play an important role in facilitating such mentoring programs. The evolving needs of the society and the demands of the industry have necessitated mentoring programs for English teachers. In India, most educational institutions do not devise mentoring programs for English teachers. But there is certainly a need to focus on skills and the delivery of skills through competent teaching. Hence, the institutions must design humanistic, learner-centered training that can help maintain the soul of teacher mentoring so that it caters to the needs of an industrialized society. English language teachers must be given enough training on lesson plan preparation, presentation, class management, communication skills, evaluation and project work in order to improve English language teaching. There has to be an in-depth study of the effectiveness of the teaching practice in English language teaching. To conclude, mentees, English teachers in this case, expect versatile mentor attributes and practices which include; developing personal interpersonal relationships; specific pedagogical knowledge; modeling teaching practices and articulating feedback on such practices. Mentoring new teachers requires an enthusiastic, helpful, and knowledgeable mentor with communicative competence. As mentioned earlier, mentees rely upon their mentors’ English language skills to assist in developing personally and pedagogically. Experienced teachers who are mentors need to share their teaching experiences and check their mentees’ lesson plans before teaching an English lesson.
References