

## IMPROVED SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS FOR BETTER TEACHING PRACTICE AND TEACHERS WELL-PREPARED FOR THE CLASSROOM

### INTRODUCTION

Global educators recognise that it is vital for a Beginning Teacher to have had substantial experience of a real classroom when they start work as teachers. In Ghana, this has become a priority for the teacher education sector. The rigour and extent of Teaching Practice (TP) has not been sufficient at Colleges of Education (CoEs) until now.

Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) is working with the institutions responsible for the teacher education sector to concentrate on improving school partnerships between CoEs, the district education offices and partner schools. This is a crucial step to ensuring student teachers get the best possible preparation for a career dedicated to improving the lives of young learners in the classroom.

### WHAT ARE THE ISSUES WE ARE ADDRESSING TO IMPROVE TEACHING PRACTICE?

Prior to T-TEL, a study identified a few issues regarding student teachers' practice of the classroom environment while studying to become a teacher. These areas of concern have informed T-TEL's interventions. They are:

#### INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN COES IN PROCEDURES AND TIMING OF EACH TEACHING PRACTICE ACROSS YEARS

This leads to a fragmented experience for student teachers, reducing the benefits they gain from directly interacting with school children.

### WEAK CONNECTIONS BETWEEN COES AND DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS

This has led to poor communication and coordination over the years, meaning that Teaching Practice sessions are often not properly planned and therefore of less benefit to student teachers.



## INSUFFICIENT PREPARATION OF STUDENT TEACHERS BEFORE THE START OF TEACHING PRACTICE BY CoEs

Inadequate preparation means that student teachers are not properly oriented for their Teaching Practice experience. This can lead to not only professional issues, but also serious social and cultural problems. From a teaching and learning perspective, not prioritising Teaching Practice means that student teachers are unprepared for the dynamics of a real classroom and the challenges faced by teachers when teaching students with different knowledge, capability and behavioural levels.



## LACK OF CONSISTENT MENTOR SUPPORT, SUPERVISION AND ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT TEACHERS DURING EACH TEACHING PRACTICE

Inadequate supervision and assessment has reduced the motivation for student teachers to prioritise their Teaching Practice and doesn't help the district education officers and colleges to monitor their progress effectively. Insufficient support from mentors in schools is another key issue.

## POOR FOLLOW-UP BY COES AFTER STUDENT TEACHERS COMPLETE EACH TEACHING PRACTICE SESSION

Feedback in the form of reflective practice is vital to helping student teachers understand what techniques, methods and approaches are successful and unsuccessful in the classroom. It is also a part of building their confidence and self-esteem as capable teachers. The concept of reflective practice is relatively new in Ghana so is seldom used during or after teaching practice.



## WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

To address these issues, T-TEL has been producing **Teaching Practice Handbooks and Guidelines** for student teachers, CoE tutors and mentors drawn from in-service headteachers and teachers in schools, who are responsible for mentoring student teachers during Teaching Practice in the classroom. These materials are interrelated and focus on guiding student teachers, mentors and tutors on how they are expected to work to transform Teaching Practice, improve its quality and strengthen the role of mentors.

The structure of the handbooks match those of the Teaching Practice itself and are based on the Ghana Education Service's Beginning Teacher Competencies and the current Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) curriculum. For example, the resources provide structure to the Teaching Practice as a learning tool. In Year 1, students experience 10 days of observation with an activity each day to focus on a particular teaching area. Years 2 and 3 include periods of actual practice. The resources provide activities organised into themes for each week's session.

In addition, T-TEL has introduced a series of **Guidelines for key stakeholders** who will support the implementation of many of the Teaching Practice activities. These Guidelines have been developed for:

- Teaching Practice Coordinators (based in the CoEs)
- Classroom Teachers (for those teachers supporting Year 1 student teachers in their Classroom Observation)
- Circuit Supervisors (for those involved in supervising and supporting student and new teachers)
- Girls' Education Officers (involved in supporting female student teachers in particular)
- Lead Mentors/ mentors (Principals and classroom teachers responsible for the professional development of Year 3 student teachers when they take part in their off-campus Teaching Practice).

To support the use of these materials, T-TEL has also been conducting orientation and training workshops for key stakeholders on how to use them and implement the recommendations. These are targeted at those responsible for guiding student teachers during Teaching Practice sessions: Principals and District Directors of Education, Teaching Practice Coordinators, Lead Mentors and Mentors (In-service teachers), Girls' Education Officers, Circuit Supervisors, College of Education Tutors.



## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THESE TEACHING PRACTICE MATERIALS?

These materials, orientation workshops and ongoing training and support are designed to create tangible benefits in the improvement of Teaching Practice in CoEs in partnership with district education offices and schools, thus producing teachers better prepared for the school environment. Our resources are:

- **Structured to provide consistency and uniformity** across all CoE and TP schools for clearer instruction and fair and positive impact
- Enable Teaching Practice Coordinators and tutors, Lead mentors, mentors, Circuit Supervisors and Girls' Education Officers to **understand their distinct roles and fulfil them more effectively**
- **Structured to provide a progression in development of teacher competencies** by student teachers throughout their 3-Year DBE course
- **Reflective of the current teacher competencies used in assessment of student teachers** to understand if they are adequate or need improving
- **Aligned with the Tutor Professional Development (TPD) teaching and learning pedagogies** for greater consistency in education of student teachers.

## KEY OUTCOMES

T-TEL is already seeing results from our interventions to improve how Teaching Practice is planned and conducted between CoEs and schools. These are summarised below:

- 38 CoEs are now implementing the T-TEL Teaching Practice systems and activities **leading to stronger educational outcomes**
- There is uniformity and consistency across the country regarding Teaching Practice in CoEs and the partner schools **creating a more streamlined teacher education system and better educational results**
- The School Partnership Advisors (SPAs), T-TEL's agents responsible for supporting Teaching Practice Coordinators in colleges with coaching programmes and visiting partner schools) are enabling the building of relationships across the key institutes responsible for student teachers and their TP by ensuring the **successful implementation of TP systems, structure and activities** as they work with the 38 Teaching Practice Coordinators at the CoEs and also with the district Circuit Supervisors, and Girl Child Education Officers, Lead Mentors and mentors.



This relationship building is being sustained through the following activities:

- Workshops at regional and district level
- Regular SPA visits (2-3 visits per term) to the CoEs to support either training of tutors in TP systems and activities and also to mentor and coach TPCs and tutors when they work with student teachers on activities during years 1-3 of the DBE Curriculum
- Post TP activities (Years 1-3) where they support Y1 and Y2 - even though Y2 student teachers are only supposed to do their training on-campus, they have joined Year 1 TP as a result of the positive outcomes – and Y3 in the schools where they work with the Lead Mentors and mentors to build better relationships and support.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The SPAs will continue their support at all levels to strengthen the capacity of the Teaching Practice system and those key stakeholders involved in making sure it sufficiently prepares student teachers to excel in the classroom.

Our work has identified that CoEs are currently implementing the Teaching Practice system and activities outside normal curriculum hours. It is envisaged that, T-TEL's current support to institutions working to reform the DBE curriculum will integrate this revised Teaching Practice structure. Crucially, this would also include the assessment system, which in the past has not considered Year 1 and Year 2 student teachers. T-TEL is ensuring that Teaching Practice will be assessed each year from now on, but it requires further institutional and policy support to ensure it becomes a stable and sustainable element of the teacher education curriculum.

