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**MENTORSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BULGARIA**

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**Abstract:** The report makes a brief analysis of the psychological and pedagogical literature on the issue of *mentorship* with teachers in the context of the inclusive education and the definitions of the term. Mentorship in the field of the inclusive education of teachers is a strategy of individual and institutional support which is fulfilled by the collaboration for learning of two persons and is predominantly targeted to professional development. It is a partnership, normally between two persons (mentor and mentee), who work in one sphere and share common experiences. Their partnership is based on beneficial relations, trust (confidentiality), protection, mutual confidence and respect. It emphasizes on the necessity to ensure effective mentorship for newly employed young teachers in order to develop their professional skills through a motivating environment in the process of inclusion of students with special educational needs.

Socio-economic changes in the country and the modernization of training require a new approach to teachers' professional competence. Their professionalism is becoming a decisive factor in ensuring the quality of education.

Main priority is to create conditions for developing the personality of the teacher, self-realization of his / her abilities, further training and development of his / her professional qualities.

The professional training and development of future teachers is a unified, continuous and continuous process aimed at building personal qualities, professional competences, knowledge, skills and habits, adequate to his / her personal needs as well as to the qualification requirements for the occupation.

Along with the motivational factors, the mentoring system plays a significant role in the development and improvement of teachers as professionals which is an integral part of the young professional's adaptation to the profession, its overall development and improvement.

Often the words "mentor" and "perceptor" are used as synonyms and no distinction is made in their meaningful sound. Mentoring is a method that enables in particular disadvantaged groups to become more easily integrated into education or work. Mentoring has a relatively long history and is one of the first forms of learning and transferring socio-cultural experience.

**Keywords:** mentorship, inclusive education, special educational needs.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Mentorship is a powerful and popular method for people to gain knowledge about their personal and professional skills and abilities and it has been one of the oldest forms of imposing influence. The target of the process of mentorship is to make a change at individual and organizational level, therefore the educational institution needs to support and accept positively the change. The social and economic changes in the country and the modernization of education require an alternative approach to the professional competence of teachers. The requirements of priority are the suitable conditions for the development of the personality of the teacher, self-realization of their potential, further training and his professional skills.

According to the Oxford dictionary the word „*mentor*“ was mentioned for the **first** time in the English language in 1750 by F. Chesterfield in „Letters to My Son“ [10]. The Bulgarian uni-lingual dictionary states that the mentor is „a person who tutors someone, advises them“<sup>28</sup>, whereas according to the Dictionary of Synonyms – „a teacher, a pedagogue, a tutor, instructor, an advisor guardian, a mentor“<sup>29</sup>. The words „*mentor*“ and „*tutor*“ are frequently used as synonyms and there is no difference in their meaning. Mentorship is a method which gives an opportunity, more specifically to the groups in unequal position, to become more easily involved in education or professional employment.

Mentorship has a relatively long-term **history** and it is one of the first forms of education and passing of social and cultural experience. The word itself originates from the ancient Greek mythology and Homer. Before leaving his home to go to war, Odysseus asks his old friend and wise man Mentor to take care of his son Telemachus in his absence while he sets off to win in the Trojan War. Mentorship was widely practiced in ancient Greece and Rome. Socrates was a mentor to Plato and many other ancient Greek philosophers were mentors who earned their living by

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<sup>28</sup> Uni-lingual Dictionary, <http://www.t-rechnik.info/home/search>

<sup>29</sup> Dictionary of Synonyms, <http://sinonimen.onlinerechnik.com/duma>.

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taking care of the upbringing and education of youths. However, the history of the origin of the term and its first written record appeared in the book of the French writer F. Fénelon<sup>30</sup> „*Les Aventures de Telemaque*“, who was also a teacher. The idea of the book coincides with the classical Homer's „*Odyssey*“. Mentorship is also connected with Christianity. Since the creation of man, God and his son – Jesus Christ – after him, and later – the religious leaders, assume the roles of tutors by assisting, supporting, directing the spiritual life of people along their road to truth [11]. According to ACU, HOME OFFICE 2001 mentorship is „a voluntary partnership between two persons where one of them (the mentor) voluntarily offers his free time in order to support and encourage the other one (the mentee)“<sup>2</sup>. Therefore mentorship is a form of learning, very similar to personal relationships between the mentor and the mentee. It doesn't tolerate any uncoordinated or previously undetermined results; it doesn't allow any negligent attitude towards the achievement of the ultimate result.

## 2. FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

Mentorship is the striving to transfer experience and knowledge from more experience to inexperienced people. It is a voluntary connection between the two of them (mentor and mentee) which aims to improve the professional training, the acquisition of new skills and experience, as well as the personal development of the person through processes in which the mentor supports his/ her professional and personal growth. One of the most frequently discussed roles of the teacher is the one of a tutor (trainer) when he provides the necessary assistance of students „in the shape of advice, instructions, feedback, alternative solutions („jokers“), so that they will be able to manage with tasks on themselves, but to develop a sense of responsibility for the precise execution of the assigned tasks as well“. [5]

Starting point – in connection with the research problem is the formulation of the problem, according to which it is the mentor who assumes a significantly important role in the process of involvement and support of the children and the students in a general education environment on the practical training level for the realization of the complex and multifunctional teaching activity. In the contemporary aspect, according to K. Zlatkova-Doncheva, mentorship means „a process of guiding, instructing, advising individuals to build up certain skills and knowledge which assist their personal development“ [8]. T. Valova notes that „**mentorship** happens as a **process of interaction** between the instructor and the instructed where the instructor has personal superiority in the specific subject area and exercises qualified and professional influence on the thinking, behavior and actions of the instructed“ [3]. **Mentorship** may significantly **contribute** to the personal and social progress and growth of students and teachers. In connection to this fact T. Valova emphasizes that „life-long learning calls for the acquisition of new and improvement of already acquired skills that might be transferred in real-life situations of knowledge and experience, which are becoming more valuable on the European labor market. The basic competences for overcoming the challenges of the contemporary information, communication, economic, cultural and media environment of living and education are the ambition for constant learning and the ability to manage the organization of our own study process“ [2]. Bulgarian teachers confront the trial to solve a multitude of problems and this fact necessitates the actualization of „the personal and professional profile of the pedagogue respective to the needs of the external and the internal pedagogical environment in such a way so that the processes he is directly responsible for are projected in advance on the public life“ [4]. Zh. Savova analyses the possibilities of universities with pedagogical majors to form general attitude of understanding about the importance of mentorship and to strengthen the idea of its significance [12]. At present in countries such as Austria, Great Britain, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Italy, Cypress, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, France, Croatia, Sweden, etc. there are compulsory structural programmes assisting the introduction of new teachers. Their aim is to help teachers adapt to the profession, as well as to reduce the risk of changing their job in shortly after.

Mentorship, studied in the light of *life-long learning*, ensures valuable professional experience by developing of previously adopted and the adding new key skills, which are regulated in *REGULATION No12 from 01.09.2016 of the statute and the professional development of teachers, principals and other pedagogical specialist*.<sup>5</sup> The main **accents** are pointed in **Art. 7** The positions of „senior teacher“ and „head teacher“ include function, related to **1. „mentorship“**: a) to **assist** the newly employed teachers and giving **methodical support** to get effectively involved

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<sup>30</sup> François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (06.08.1651 r. – 07.01.1715) – French writer, theologian and philosopher. Famous for being one of the first supporters of 'quietism' in philosophy and as the writer of the „*The Adventures of Telemachus*“, first published in 1699, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois\\_F%C3%A9nelon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran%C3%A7ois_F%C3%A9nelon)> (11.09.2016).

in the educational process, motivation for professional **elaboration** and career development as a mentor; b) as a „tutoring teacher“ through guidance of the **independent** participation in the process of education of „trainee teachers“; c) to give **methodical and organizational support** to teachers with low grades at the evaluation. 2. **consultation and assistance** to people on the position „a teacher“ for the purpose of career development; 3. **working out** school syllabi, curricula, innovative and **genuine** programme systems in cases stipulated for the state educational standards; 4. **organization and coordination** of activities of projects working out and taking part in their execution“. The next art. 10 (4) reads that „the persons occupying the position „senior tutor“ and „head tutor“ also execute functions related to 1. mentorship in order to a) assist and consult of people who occupy the position „tutor“ by offering them support to adapt to the environmental environment and to effectively involve in the educational process; b) give methodical and organizational support to people who occupy the position „tutor“ with low grades at the evaluation. 2. organization and carrying out competitions, contests, planners and other interest classes as well as activities related to the type of the institution within the framework of the pre-school and school educational system; organization and coordination of activities of projects working out and taking part in their execution“.

#### *Communicative competence*

It has been pointed out that a teacher has to possess the following **knowledge, skills and attitudes of the teacher**: „A teacher gives methodical and organizational support to newly employed teachers/ tutors and/ or executes mentoring functions with regard to trainee teachers“.

**The knowledge, skills and attitudes of the principal of a kindergarten, a school or a center for personal development support** come next: *Academic competences – Life-long learning* „they possess readiness and skills to organize, exchange and apply the good practices and innovations in order to share good experience, to strengthen the position of mentorship as a form of methodical and organizational support. (p. 92). *Resource management* – they encourage the process of mentorship and organize assistance to newly employed teachers by ensuring mentors and supporting consultation. *Communicative competences* – they are acquainted with and encourage the application of appropriate forms of behavior with a view to effective and constructive team work, support mentorship towards young and newly employed pedagogical specialists“.

**The required knowledge, skills and attitudes of a deputy principal of an institution** are: *Academic competences: Long-life learning* „They display positive attitude towards sharing experience, good practices and innovations in they participate in the organization and strengthening the position of mentorship as a form of methodical and organizational support. *Organizational and management competences* – they give methodical and pedagogical support to pedagogical specialists, they carry out of the process of mentorship. *Organizational competences: Skills for interested sides collaboration* – they are acquainted with mentorship programmers and give methodical and organizational assistance to young and newly employed colleagues“.

**Inclusion in education** is a process which is targeted at the abolition of any forms of segregation in education and to include the vulnerable and isolated for one reason or another, children and to encourage and facilitate the participation of every child in the educational process. With this regard M. Baeva shares that the purpose of the inclusive education is „to meet the needs of every child by paying special attention to these groups of children who are in danger of becoming socially isolated or excluded from the general educational system“ [1]. In this context the author brings to the front the ideas that “inclusion does not refer only to the education of disabled children, however, it concerns the qualitative conditions of the education of all children. The nine leading principles for promoting quality of the inclusive education, which were sanctioned by the Alliance of inclusive education in March 2002, are based on the idea of **respect to every individual**: 1. Any person is valuable, regardless of their abilities or their achievements. 2. Any human being is capable of feeling and thinking. 3. Any human being has the right to communicate to be heard. 4. People need each other. 5. True education can only happen through true relationships. 6. Every individual needs support and friendly attitude from people their age. 7. The progress in education can only be achieved through upgrading of what a person does, not of what a person can. 8. Differences bring solidity of the public relationships. 9. Cooperation is preferable to competitiveness” (also there). With this respect D. Dimitrova underlines the significance of mentorship for the teacher who works with students of Romani ethnic origin, that can be defined as „determining a positive attitude of spirit concerning differences; acquiring various types of knowledge about the language, the culture, the everyday life and traditions of the Romani people and of the community as a whole; competence concerning the requirements of the work in such environment; tolerance, patience and respect during the communication relationships; expressed concern and interest to the others and overcoming prejudices“ [6]. The inclusion means reorganization of the policies, practices and culture of the Bulgarian school, so that it will be able to meet the various educational needs of the children who attend it and to encourage their active participation. In terms of school equipment it means providing accessible architectural environment, qualified

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pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff, individual plans of education, consistent with the potential of every child, well-equipped specialized school rooms, permanently employed resource teachers, psychologists, speech therapists and other necessary specialists.

Inclusive education undoubtedly goes beyond the sheer spatial mixing of children and emphasizes on the access to quality education, i.e. on the possibility of every child to develop their capacity at the most and to study and educate together with other students their age. Inclusion **strives** for a change in the system itself so that it will be able to meet adequately the variety of students with different needs. It **includes** accessibility to general educational schools not only as a physical ability for all students to attend school, but also as accessibility and adequacy of the curriculum and school content, of subject teaching.

The **effective** inclusion, according to I. Ivanov, is an incessant process which requires a broad view on the personal development and the activity of a person. [9]. To realize the idea it is essential that all forms of exclusive should be abolished, all barriers hindering the game and the participation of all children. Inclusion presupposes to acknowledge both the differences and the similarities between all children and youths. The conception gives a meaning to the beliefs and values we base our work and actions on. They are closely connected to the principles of inclusion: equality and justice, honesty and integrity, significance of the participation, building up communities and observing the right of quality services in the community, empathy, respect to differences and care to ensure a better future for our children.

*The ideas of the inclusive education receive official recognition in the 90ies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the international community and they are underlying in a number of documents.* The beliefs that are underlying in the UN Standard Rules for Equalization and Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities are realized in **the Statement and the Framework for action from Salamanca** (from 10.06.1994) concerning the education of children with special needs adopted during the World conference for education of our children with specific features. The Statement explicitly points out that „every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and needs, related to studying; educational systems should be designed and syllabi should be able to register the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs; general education schools with the above-mentioned inclusive orientation are the most effective means of struggle against the discrimination attitudes by creating hospitable communities, building inclusive communities and ensuring education for everyone“. These ideas are expressed in the **UN Convention for Disabled People**. Art.24 discusses education whose main principle is the adequate and effective participation and the involvement of disabled people in the society. With a view to realizing this right with no discrimination and at equal possibilities the sides on the Convention are obliged to ensure the comprehensive educational system to all levels and possibilities for life-long learning. Their ideal „*education for everyone*“ makes efforts to achieve education for every person in the decades after the resolution of the Universal Statement. The attempts to introduce the education for every person are diminished in the 80ies. With this regard, the **World Conference on Education for All** in the town of Jomtien (Thailand, 1990) attempts to solve quickly a part of these problems. The forum approves *the World Declaration on Education for All – the satisfaction of the basic educational needs*. It further develops the Universal Statement in article III, which is dedicated to „*the universalization of access and realization of equality*“ and acknowledges the fact that there is inequality in education and that a number of different groups are threatened by their vulnerability to be discriminated or excluded (including the disabled children). Another important document is **the UN Standard rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities**, approved by the UN General Assembly on 20.12.1993. It reflects the global priorities of disabled people and their position in society. **Rule 6** supports the inclusive education which was named at that time *integrative education*. It discusses the commitments of the countries concerning the education of the disabled people. *The access to education* is presented both in the form of integrative education in a general school and as the access to education regardless of the type and level of disability. The key focus is that the obligatory nature of education, regulated by the state, involves the opportunity „to be guaranteed for people with all types of disabilities, even in their most severe form, regardless of their sex and age“ [14]. The most important document, dedicated to the principles and the practice of inclusive education, is **the Declaration of Salamanca**, with the accompanying Framework for Action in Education for People with Special Needs (1994). It contains new and fundamental principles of the inclusion that were absent in the previous documents „schools should ensure such conditions so that all children are included; the participation of community is fundamental for the inclusion; the pedagogical approach, oriented to the child, is of key significance for the inclusion; the inclusion has to be provided for with the required resources and assistance; the inclusion is essential with regard to human dignity and the complete consideration of human rights; the inclusive schools are beneficial for all children because they help building inclusive society“ [13]. With this regard, art. 2 contains a paragraph which explicitly confirms the inclusive education: „general schools

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which are oriented towards inclusion are the most effective means of overcoming the discrimination attitudes, the development of an inclusive society and education for everyone“ [13].

**The first international seminar in the town of Agra (India)** in 1998 worked out a **characterization of inclusive education**: „it encompasses more activities than the formal school education (includes activities at home, in the community, non-formal and unofficial systems); all children are subject to learning; it assists educational structures, systems and methodologies so that they can meet the needs of all children; it acknowledges and respects the differences between children concerning their age, sex, ethnic belonging, language, disabilities, HIV/ AIDS, etc.“ [13]. After it the **World Education Forum** was held in Dakar (Senegal, 26-28 April 2000). **The Framework for Action** was voted there: Education for everyone – let’s keep our collective commitments“. Governments and institutions commit themselves with it „to create a safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resource-provided educational system which offers quality education“ (article 8).

One of the main priorities, underlying in **Millennium Development Goals**, voted at the summit of UN in September 2000 by the World Bank are overcoming the extreme poverty and famine and achieving primary education for everyone. With this regard, The Framework for action from Dakar emphasizes on the relationship between overcoming poverty and achieving education for all people. The World Forum in Dakar approves the Statement form Salamanka as „a way to achieving universal education and the millennium goals“.

The „*Education for All*“ Priority programme in the area of the disabled started in the end of 2001. Its **goal** is to include *the issues of the disabled on the agenda of the development and recognition programmes of inclusive education as the basic approach to achieving universal education*. The initiative is motivated by the belief that „inclusive education offers a strategy for the introduction of effective universal education because it means establishing schools capable of meeting the actual diverse needs of children and communities. It means both access and quality“ [13]. „**Education 2030 Framework for Action** is an extremely valuable document and of a paper of present interest, related to inclusive education: „*Towards an inclusive and equal in rights quality education and life-long learning for all*“. Its main goal is „to ensure inclusive and equal in rights quality education and to encourage the opportunities for life-long learning for all“.

It is the first time that the law of school and pre-school education in Bulgaria includes standards which actually give an opportunity for a change. The child/ student with their individual specific features, needs and abilities is placed at the heart of the educational system. The transitional and final provisions of the law regulate that inclusive education is „a process of becoming aware, accepting and supporting the individuality of every single child or student and the diversity of the needs of all children and students through the activation and inclusion of resources which aim to remove all the barriers before studying and learning and towards creating opportunities for development and participation of the children and students in every aspect of community life“. The new reform in the education legislation guarantees that the inclusion is the central principle in the process of the legislation changes in education and it has the potential to result in a real change for all disabled children. These changes are in unison with *the UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities* and with the idea that **all children should have access to the general education kindergarten and school and to support**.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The professional training of a teacher is an integrated, continuous and incessant process which is aimed to shape personal qualities, professional competences, knowledge, skills and habits, adequate both to their personal needs and to the qualification requirements of the occupied position. Along with the motivation factors, the crucial role in the process of the shaping of a teacher plays the mentorship system, which is an integral part of the adaptation course of a young specialist to the profession of a teacher, their complete development and elaboration. Mentorship in the inclusion process gives practical and theoretical assistance at the working place and meanwhile it helps the new teacher to adapt to the requirements of the position and motivates them to professional growth.

In order to provide access not only to education but to provide a meaningful involvement of all children/ students in the comprehensive school environment, regardless of their weak or strong sides, it is of great significance that all directly involved institutions, the governmental sector and the teacher community work in close collaboration and are equally responsible and empathic so that they can realize the inclusion. It is the right place and the right time to emphasize that **mentorship is love and responsibility – for you, for the profession, for the young person, for the institution we work for**. We might summarize that we believe in the development of mentorship and its application as an innovation method for the realization of the inclusion process. When mentors become aware of the fact that they turn into a model of imitation they will be eager to show the best of them.

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