

MENTORING AS A FACTOR TO MAINTAIN YOUNG TEACHERS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract: The inclusion of young teachers in the education system requires logistical and emotional support, feedback and trustworthiness. Mentoring in education is refined as a multifaceted model and a factor for including and retaining young teachers in school. The professional development of teachers goes through stages: academic education, introductory stage, professional and career development. Mentoring is implemented through these three stages in different dimensions. At the stage of academic education, the role of the mentor includes: academic teachers and mentor-teachers in which the internship and the pre-graduate practice take place. At the introductory or initial stage, the role of the mentor is assumed by a senior colleague from the same school. At the stage of professional and career development, educators are also involved in the role of a mentor, apart from school colleagues. In the educational system, the mentoring of young teachers is influenced by factors such as motivation and the subjective well-being in practicing the teaching profession, school culture, time periods of the school year, experience transfer, geographic location, areas of mentoring, personal characteristics of mentor and mentee. It is important to take into account the stages of development of experience of new teachers. On the basis these influences semi-structured interviews are conducted with 30 young teachers / first year / and 30 students from pedagogical specialties from Bachelor and Master Programs. The focus of the interviews is the idea that young people have for the mentor. The obtained results show high expectation on future mentors, which is indicative of the fact that mentoring relations are a component of the development and the assessment of staff in an institution or organization. When young teachers start working in the school organization, challenges will appear. Young teachers are more creative, more dynamic, and with more current theoretical knowledge. They are about to gain experience, to meet the professional requirements and to be successful. All of the interviewed people (100%) respond positively to the question of whether they feel that it is necessary to have a mentor when start working. According to the respondents, the mentor should introduce the nature of the actual work (57%); to provide support (100%); to give guidance and advice (98%); be patient (87%), caring (57%); be ready and willing to share experiences (87%); to work in a team and understanding with the mentee (100%), to create and maintain good relationships and good interaction (100%), to be able to listen and encourage (64%); motivate and persuade (86%); to guide mentee when necessary to advise, not to impose personal approach (98%); to be able to evaluate the skills of mentees (32%); to create a sense of security (98%).

The respondents present real and pragmatic requirements to the current and future mentor. Participants in the study give a definition that the mentoring is a voluntary process in which the mentor provides assistance, support, information and guidance for carrying out work tasks and practical skills. With the clearly outlined vision of young teachers and students for the mentor, it is important that mentors themselves respond to needs and realize synergy between requirements and outcomes. Only in this context, mentoring will be a strong factor in involving and retaining young teachers in the education system.

Keywords: mentoring, young teachers, educational system

1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of future and young teachers for the personal and professional competences of the mentor is related to successful mentoring. The inclusion of young teachers in the education system inevitably requires logistical and emotional support, feedback and trustworthiness.

According to Sanders (1996), students who have had effective teachers for three years in a row show academic achievements that are 54% higher than those of ineffective teachers for three consecutive years. It is difficult for novice teachers to be as effective as possible. Beginning teachers often share that they have difficulties at the beginning of their professional career and are under stress, experiencing mental tension and emotional exhaustion. Teachers' professional development is a dynamic and flexible process that starts with the choice of the teaching profession and their university education at retirement. This process is conditionally differentiated into three stages: the academic education of teachers, mastering the main theoretical knowledge and competences, the first years of actually practiced teaching /the induction stage/, and the professional and career development of the teachers who remain to be teachers.

"A mentor is a key figure in the introductory program and supports the socialization of novice teachers in the school context and in their professional development" (Feiman-Nemser 2001, 2002). Mentoring is a broad scientific area in two aspects: teacher education and, programs for introducing and developing the teacher in a real working environment at school.

Mentoring in education has been identified as a method that can be used to keep beginner teachers at work and to measure their effectiveness in the classroom (Claycomb, 2000).

The specifics of mentoring in education can be addressed to:

Motivation and subjective well-being in the exercise of the profession

According to Veenman (1984), novice teachers experience a "real shock" as a state of mind when the professional requirements of the school become real to them. Veenman (1984) believes that the most important problems faced by novice teachers are: discipline in the classroom, motivation of students, coping with individual differences among students, assessment of student work, interaction with parents, organization of class work, getting enough materials for adequate training, dealing with students' personal problems, bulk training content with inadequate preparation time, and collaboration with colleagues. When novice teachers gain experience in the classroom and form a model of a relationship with the parents and the students, these needs become less stressful.

In 2002, Villani claims that the mentors need to help with the inevitable "real shock" of novice teachers as mentoring helps beginner teachers to experience fewer difficulties in the first year as "multi-tasking" teachers.

Transmitting experience

Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon (1995) assume that mentoring offers an opportunity for experienced teachers to provide individual and permanent professional support. However, according to Feiman-Nemser, Schwill, Carver, & Yusko (1999), effective mentoring as the most widespread form of support for novice teachers requires careful selection, training and support by the mentor.

Impact of school culture

Guyton & Hildago (1995) suggest that mentoring of novice teachers can be influenced by the culture and context of the school. Brock and Grady (2001) say that when new teachers assimilate school culture, share common goals and pleasure in working together, they are more likely to form a positive teaching experience. On the other hand, teachers who start their career in an unstructured environment are less satisfied with the positive climate and they even experience isolation. The lack of social support resulting from the isolation or unsupported school atmosphere determines the experiences of the novice teacher. This in a turn may lead to a pessimistic attitude of teachers towards students, and this way a negative impact on the teaching of the curriculum by the teacher appears.

Influence of the geographic location

In larger towns, there are more teachers in schools, and besides the mentor, the young teacher can also get experience from other colleagues. In smaller towns, the mentor is the main source of knowledge, the other colleagues are less experienced and therefore they can give less advise.

Fields of mentoring

According to Wang & Odell (2002), three key areas are crucial for the mentoring process for novice teachers:

- humanistic (personal assistance to sense the spirit of the profession),
- apprentice (helping to get into school culture and helping teachers to progress in a specific context),
- critical constructivist (reconstruction of teaching, questioning and analysis of existing teaching practices).

Influence of periods from the school year

Villani (2002) believes that the needs for survival of novice teachers are highest at the beginning and end of the school year. She highlights the fact that in the middle of the year (the time when the survival and needs of new teachers are the lowest); the training and mentoring needs of the curriculum are highest.

Characteristics of Beginner Teachers

Beginning teachers are novice teachers who believe they are talented and have answers to many educational issues, they are hardworking and committed to their teaching profession, addicted, creative, energetic and are willing to develop professionally (Wadsworth, 2001; Clement, Enz, Pawlas, 2000; Bartell, 2005).

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis - Future and young teachers are supposed to have a clear understanding of the mentor's personal and professional competencies so the mentoring can be successful.

Method of study

30 semi-structured interviews with students from “pre-school and primary school pedagogy”, “special pedagogy” and “social activities” and with 30 young teachers /first year/ were conducted. The main issues are related to the students' perception of the mentor in their future profession.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All respondents (100%) answered positively to the question whether they thought if it is necessary to have a mentor when starting work. Students in the third and fourth-year, have already been practicing in school, and are probably already aware of the need for support and guidance in synchronizing the knowledge gained at the university and the actual practice. Interesting are the answers of students who have been in practical training under the project "Student Practices" within 240 hours. Not only do they note the need for a mentor, but they even report in a timely manner that the mentor manages, teaches and supports academically, professionally and emotionally in a particular work environment.

The idea of a mentor for future teachers is marked with clear requirements for the mentoring process. 57% of the respondents note the need for "introducing the nature of the actual work by the mentor". 78% of the young teachers say that this is the most relevant relationship with the mentor, and 45% of the future teachers share this concept. The theoretical preparation and the conducted practical classes at school of students that are going to be teachers, with young teachers the successful start gives rise to a high self-esteem for the self-efficiency of their future teaching activity. Although it sounds flattering about what has been learned in the university, two more explanatory models are still allowed:

- the possibility that the respondents are not fully aware of all the activities of the teacher, such as administrative or work with parents,
- the strong self-confidence of youth, who is not afraid of the challenges and wants to cope independently and personally.

The second explanatory model is more acceptable because 98% of the respondents answer that the mentor should "guide me when necessary and not impose his personal approach." Obviously, the idea that a successful mentor will help for the learning of the mechanism and technology of working with examples, tips, alternative ways and personal attitudes, and generally improving performance is now clear. According to the respondents, the mentor's role is not to guide the implementation of the training. It is, however, noteworthy that the students as future teachers allow the mentor to transfer experience and guide the learning process, and in this sense they mix the role of a mentor, tutor and supervisor. In 32% of the responses, a mentor is asked to "asses the mentee's skills". A requirement that is more relevant to the supervisor's activity than to the mentor's activity. Probably, future teachers are still under the influence of university education as a first stage of mentoring, in which their teaching and practical work is evaluated by a teacher and a mentor during the various types of practical training. Such a requirement for the management of the learning process does not appear in young teachers.

At the same time, respondents do not give up on information about shared experience. As 98% of them said that the mentor should "be ready and willing to share experience with me", "give guidance and advice" (100%) and "give a sense of security (57%)". Shared information on the subjective sense of security is shown with in young teachers. Some elements of the so-called "real shock" that Veenman (1984) talks about or professional dimension according to Eisenschmidt (2006), in which the emphasis is on the support of the primary teacher to gain more confidence in the use of basic skills, including pedagogical knowledge and skills. The first experiences of the new teacher in the class are important because at this stage he is ready to learn, ready to create and change practices, and has high expectations for himself and the system itself. If the new teacher is appropriately supported at the introductory phase, the practice in the classroom is more likely to be successful (Breux, Wong, 2003).

There is a definition that the mentoring is a voluntary process in which the mentor helps, supports, informs and directs to carry out work tasks and practical skills.

Another underlying model from respondents draws attention to the need for selection of the mentors. The formal choice of a mentor is not acceptable. The respondents do not accept that mentoring can be formal. 98% of the future teachers, say that their mentor is a good professional but is much older than them and does not share the same life interests and values. Of the young teachers group, 67% feel they would like to have the opportunity to share leisure time and interests with their mentor outside the school environment but their mentor is older and has other interests and less leisure time. Obviously, respondents from both groups are confronted with situations in which the balance between the profession, career and family of the mentor does not leave open time parameters and interests, that include an interpersonal interaction of a mentor and mentored in an out-of-school environment. In this context,

mentors do not always have to be teachers with the most experience but with unacceptable personal qualities. Mentors can be younger, more communicative, more informed and more effective teachers, who are approved by the novice teachers.

Another area of respondents' answers is the personal qualities of the future mentor. The answers are "to be positive - 98%", "to be caring - 57%", "to be critical for gradation, not for demotivation - 30%", "to be patient - 87%", "To work with a team - 100%", "to work with understanding - 100%", "to have good relationships and good interaction - 100%", "to listen and encourage - 64%", "to motivate and convince - 86% ". In the shared requirements, the understanding of the mentor is evident mostly as a personal attitude. In this aspect, the requirements for the personal qualities of the mentor, which is simply a subjective sense of well-being from the rations, are indisputable. The sought-after qualities are life values, communicative and social skills. There are differences in the expressed claims to the mentor from the two groups. If the group of students - future teachers predominantly shares their own personal qualities such as positivity, caring, objective criticism, then the group of young teachers predominantly seeks understanding, team work and good social relationships. Obviously, the process of forming a personal identity of young teachers begins. Personal models and norms for social relationships with students, parents and colleagues are formed in this process. The teachings of young teachers about teaching and learning, about their responsibility to participate in these processes, are beginning to be structured. The young teachers' views on teaching and learning and about their responsibility to participate in these processes are beginning to be structured. The idea of the mentor of young teachers is no longer just emotional, but is also reflected in the self-efficacy and self-esteem of young teachers in the learning process.

An interesting fact is that the respondents give an idea of the overall quality of mentoring. The group of students - future teachers (67%) gives the idea that the mentor as a teacher who will help them integrate in school, get acquainted with the order in the respective school, to help them know the requirements and traditions. Young teachers (87%) emphasize support for "higher self-esteem not as a person but as a teacher" and "finding professional identity and professional well-being", "Better participation in school life" and "ability to cope with difficult situations such as aggression and violence." The two groups of respondents (98%) clarify the need for mentor support for specific applications of studied strategies for student groups for inclusive education. Requirements for the mentor to share "Indicate which strategies for students with special educational needs (SEN) or other ethnic backgrounds are most successful for the class and school concerned", "which techniques for students with SEN or other ethnic background have so far had the most effect", "How the school organization creates general and additional support", "what materials and techniques are used in the school for resource support." are demanded. It is clear that the respondents have cognitions and a positive attitude towards inclusive education and its specificities, but they are looking for the specificity of the school, the class, and the relevant cases in its implementation.

Regarding interactions with the parent community, differences are also noted in the two groups. The group of future teachers (87%) thinks that it can reason effectively with parents even among students with SEN and other difficult cases, while from the group of young teachers only 67% accepts the positive and effective interaction with parents of SEN pupils, another ethnic origin or aggressive acts.

In the information received by the response of the two groups the first phases of mentoring in education are clear, according to Moir (1999), identifying several phases of development, through which the experience of the novice teachers passes:

- a phase of expectation with idealistic views of teaching.
- stage of survival or ongoing struggle to cope.

The remaining Moir phases (1999): the phase of disappointment, the rejuvenation phase and the reflection phase appear later in the process of teaching, and can't be analyzed in this study.

In the conducted study, is visible the phase of the idealistic ideas in the respondents - future teachers, who have a mentor in the practical training during the period of the university education. The phase of survival or ongoing struggle for comparisons among respondents - young teachers - where teachers quickly overload, but tend to focus on the everyday aspects of teaching, also stands out.

Interesting are the respondents' perceptions regarding the mentor's place of work. The group of students - future teachers (98%) accepts that the mentor needs to be from the school they work in, and young teachers (46%) assume that the mentor can also be from another institution. Facts that suggest different formats for institutions that offer mentoring.

Against the need to evaluate the mentor, 98% of the respondents have an idea of the need to evaluate the mentor by saying that "not every teacher is a mentor," "assessment would improve the quality of mentoring," but also set requirements for that who evaluates. It is noted that "the assessment must be objective - 98%", "the

assessment must have clear criteria - 87%", "assessment should be internal (from school) and external (from other institutions)"(45 %). These results are in line with the respondents' perception of the mentors selection and express the perception of the respondents about the sole responsibility of the mentor about their own inclusion and retention in the school environment.

The most attractive answers have been received about the need to pay the mentor. The group of future teachers (98%) responded that "the mentor's pay is necessary", and the size of the answer is "one more salary," "even more than one salary if he spends more than one hour a day for mentoring ", " a higher salary than that of the principal". The group of young teachers is more skeptical, although the need for pay is accepted by 100% of the respondents. The amount refers to "10 percent of the salary", "a certain amount from the school budget", "a certain amount based on commitments", "a certain amount for difficult cases with pupils". The differences in the respective phases of mentoring in line with academic education and the real working environment at school are clearly visible.

4. CONCLUSION

The obtained results show high demands from future mentors, which is indicative of the fact that mentoring relationships are a component of the development and evaluation of young teachers in the educational institution or organization.

When beginner teachers start working in the school organization, challenges are emerging. Young teachers are more creative, more dynamic, with more up-to-date theoretical knowledge and more idealistic ideas for the teaching profession. They are going to master experience, meet professional requirements and achieve successful teaching activities. According to the respondents, mentoring is not just teaching, school situations, and learning environments in which the experienced teacher supports the novice teacher. Respondents' requirements for the mentor are related to a multifaceted pattern of life and professional models that can be passed on as an elegant, collegial, teamwork and without direct instructional design.

In this context, if mentoring is judged not only by the perceptions of scientists, mentors and educational leaders, but also by the mentee's understanding of mentoring, mentoring would indeed be a key factor in retaining young teachers in the education system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The article is funded by the project № FP17-PF-007 "Innovative Educational Environment", Bulgarian Science Fund by University of Plovdiv, Ministry of Education and Science.

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