MENTORING IN TEACHER TRAINING PRACTICE:
THE INTERPRETATION OF MENTORS' ROLE IN THE TRIADIC RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

Teacher training is a key element of the quality of the education system. Staying in the teaching career is determined by many factors, however, overcoming the so-called praxis-shock means the first step for beginner teachers. For teacher students, mentoring during practical training is the main support, that is why it is important to know how the triadic relationship between the school mentor, the teacher and the university works. In our heuristic research, interactions between mentors, students and university actors, as elements of the mentoring process were examined.

During our research (2021-2022) we asked mentors working in Hungarian teacher training and student teachers who had just completed their coherent teacher training practice. Research was carried out with mixed methods, qualitative (scientific literature exploration, focus group interview in 4x8 groups) and quantitative (self -developed questionnaire based on the results of focus group interviews with 280 mentors and 351 students.

In our lecture we present one segment of mentors: how the role interpretation of mentors is influenced by organizational support, and also by the communication with the student teacher and the university (intensity, content).

For the role interpretation of the mentors, we made a scale based on different models, which refer to different elements of the pedagogical process and the relationship with the mentor.

Our correlation and cluster analysis also shows that the wide range of role interpretation is influenced by two factors: the intensity of supportive environment and communication with universities, as a result of which not only subject-matter knowledge, but also pedagogical content knowledge got in the focus of mentoring. The intensive communication with candidates results in the strengthening of their mental and emotional support, the strength of the correlation depends significantly on the mentor gender. Based on our results, recommendations may be articulated for each party regarding the triadic relationship: the more intense the communication between the actors and the more supportive the school environment is, the more effectively mentors and teacher candidates can participate in the mentoring progress.

*Keywords: Mentoring in teacher training, triadic relationship, school mentors' role, mixed method.*

1. Introduction

Text Nowadays, educational systems and its important pillars of teacher training are experiencing constant changes. In public education, quality and efficiency have become the key words of the last decade. In addition, it is also stated that the quality of education is basically determined by the quality of the teachers (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, McKinsey, 2007). Mentoring as a program is a key element of effective teacher training, both for students and beginner teachers (Posny, 2012, Ambrosetti, 2013, Li & Hammer, 2015,). In the so –called induction phase (the first phase of the career), mentor as a colleague, consultant, trainer helps the teacher candidate and the new graduate teacher (novice teacher) understand that teaching is a continuous learning process, in which the pre-service period of teacher training was the very first step. With regard to the role of mentors, it is often pointed out that it falls on mentors and university supervisors cooperating with them to bridge the gap between the university and the school as theoretical and practical learning scenes (McLeskey & Waldron, 2004; Ritter, 2012; Landau Wright, 2015; Bruneel & Vanassche, 2021). Thus, the most important actors of teacher training are practical (tutoring) university lecturers and school mentors, senior teachers, and their cooperation is a key issue for the effectiveness of training.

Different models were created to interpret the university-school teacher candidate triad, and all the actors agree that communication between the parties is the basis of cooperation. Not only individuals (mentor, teacher candidate, university supervisor), but also organizations (school organization and university departments) are present in this communication and cooperative space. Lynch and Yeigh (2013) underline the problem that the relationship between teacher training institutions and schools is missing or very weak. One consequence of this is that some kind of gap is formed instead of cooperation. Universities also try to control teaching practice, questioning the ability of schools to do so in the right quality. As a result, the duality between "what we know" and "what we do" has become more and more determining, which has had an influence on the quality of teacher training, in terms of schools and universities. As a solution, in the Australian teacher training the so-called Teaching School Model was worked out, which strengthens the cooperation between the university and the school by giving the school a strong permission to organize teacher training. In the model mentor teachers have a significant role, who are important actors in the practice of graduate students, leading consultations, making lesson plans, being in charge of the teaching practice and evaluation. Meanwhile, the mentor also has the opportunity to enhance his own professional development, as by constant self -reflection he has to evaluate himself, so mentoring also develops a kind of practicing community (Lynch & Yeigh, 2013). The teaching school model represents a partnership between the university and the school where the school provides a real life environment under the guidance of senior educators.

The following figure shows how teacher training and practical training are interconnected, and their similar role in the process of teacher training.

Figure 1. Triadic relationship in Teaching School Model.
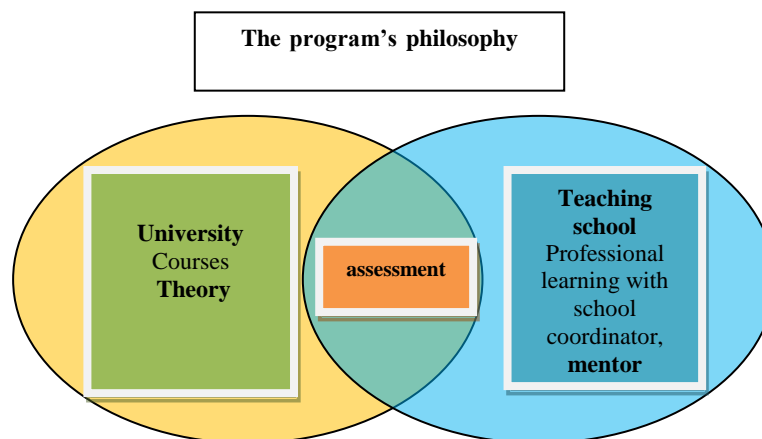
Source: Knight, Turner,& Dekkers (2013). 71.

The so-called "Third Space" model is recommended by many authors to enhance the productivity of cooperation and partnership (Ikpeze, Broikou, Hildenbrand & Gladstone-Brown, 2012; Arhar et al., 2013; Klein et al., 2013; Taylor, Klein & Abrams, 2014), which makes cooperation smooth among students, mentors and instructors. The "third space" is the venue where the culture of school practice is actually matched with the theoretical education system of the university.

However, the "third space" model does not count on the fact that students are very often forced into compliance with their mentor and their university instructor because of different expectations, which results in many conflicts in the cooperation (Chambers & Armour, 2011; Taylor et al. 2014).

As a solution, Lillejord and Børte (2016) shows a model that focuses on the student's learning activities, thus, through student activities, both mentors and university instructors should synchronize practice and theory. The solutions are important to build a less hierarchical, rather horizontal relationship (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015). This assumes that when the actors of the triad seek cooperation, they must keep in mind the different needs of participants in the partnership, namely the needs of the school, the university and the students (Lillejord & Børte , 2016).

2. The context and methodology of the research

Our research began in 2020 and has examined the effects of the mentoring process. We have applied mixed method research, in accordance with the method of triangulation, the tools of literature processing, qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (self -developed student and mentoring) were used.

The sample was selected by expert sampling from the basic population of graduate students and the mentors of school practices, following the research ethics rules of the University of Debrecen. The mentor questionnaire consisted of 6 panels and 143 items, the average Cronbach's alpha was 0.894 and the data processing was done with SPSS 29. The mentor sample contains 280 people and 74.9 %of the sample are women (representative). In our lecture, we present the results of the mentor's role based on the mentor questionnaire data and the results related to the mentor student, mentor-university relationship.

3. Data analysis and discussions

It is the task of mentors to perceive student needs, to judge and develop their teacher competences. It is therefore important how mentoring roles are interpreted and what activities they consider the most important ones. From our research data on students, we know that for students strengthening self -confidence and mental abilities are almost as important as the narrowly interpreted methodological help from the mentor.

The mentors interviewed apply the elements of the activity repertoire with different frequencies. (Table 1):

Table 1. The frequency of mentor's activity elements N:280, 5 grade Likert scale.

	Mean
giving feedback	4,81
providing personal assistance	4,81
efficient cooperation	4,79 (0,263**)
analysis and evaluation of observed lessons,	4,77
evaluation of candidate's work	4,71
providing methodological support	4,70
helping candidates handle students' behavioural issues	4,66
presenting good practices	4,57
developing candidate's reflectivity	4,54
developing candidate's competences	4,47
helping candidates gain experience (lesson observation, consultations, extracurricular events, etc.)	4,42
presenting the bright side of teaching profession	4,05 (0,239**)
rating evaluation of candidate's work	4,04
precise interpretation of teacher competences for candidate	3,97
providing professional support	3,96

*Source: own database   **Pearson corr, sign.:<0,001 (a nőknél gyakoribb elemek)*

Each of the activities listed is a regular element of mentoring activities, in case of two elements there is a significant difference in favour of women, in their case cooperation and the presentation of the bright side of teacher's career are more common. There are other differences between male and female mentors as well, although the correlations are in the low-moderately strong range, the difference is significant.

The basic medium of mentoring activity is communication with the student, which must reflect on the student's activities as well as his personal attitudes and emotions.

Table 2 shows what the common content elements of communication are and what their frequency is.

Table 2. Topics of mentor-student teacher discussions (3 grade scale, 1: almost never …3: regularly, daily based).

	Mean
communication with children	2,9214 (0,208**)
methodological ideas and solutions	2,8607 (0,304**)
we have a consultation after each lesson held	2,7554 (0,148**)
children-related tasks	2,6786 (0,349**)
we discuss every lesson plan in details	2,6250 (0,148**)
professional contents of lessons	2,6232 (- 0,157**)
mentee's emotional state	2,4321 (0,278**)
extracurricular activities	2,1536 (0,276**)
cooperation with colleagues	2,1403
keeping contact and communication with parents	1,8214 (0,173**)
we only agree on basic principles related to lessons	1,7185 (-0,207**)
we mainly discuss deficiencies	1,6014 (-0,146**)

*Source: own database, **Pearson corr., sig.: <0,001, - sign: more frequent element with men*

From the table it can be clearly read that basically there are two elements at the centre of the discussions: children and lesson-related tasks. Mentors discuss every lesson plan and each lesson held with the candidate on a daily basis. This is the basis for the development of reflectivity (this coincides with the data on the development of reflectivity in Table 1.).

The correlation values indicated in brackets in the Mean column show that there are elements more typical of male mentors. Male mentors are rather focused on the curriculum content and, in particular, they agree on the basic principles with the candidate, and provide less detailed methodological assistance. Frequency values do not show a significant difference broken down by genders (also due to the 3-point scale), and the correlation values, although in the weak-medium category, have a high significance value, so they are definitely suitable for trend formulation.

Female mentors are more likely to keep track of their mentees precisely and continuously, it is especially true for methodological solutions and child-related tasks. The role- interpretation of mentors is also influenced by the organizational context, which means the involvement of school management in the mentoring process. The data show that the participation of management reinforces certain mentoring activities. We have created a four -element aggregate management supporting indicator (the head of school visits, evaluates the student and helps the mentor and the student). This indicator correlates with presenting the beauties of the career (Pearson Corr.: 0.429, Sig.: <0.001) and interpreting teacher competences (Pearson Corr.: 0.295, Sig.: <0.001) in case of both genders. As this is exactly what we experience regarding women, too, we can assume with good reason that the involvement of the school management does not mean that mentors should be supervised. On the contrary, the school as an environment might become more supportive, which allows mentors a wider teacher role interpretation and this appears more frequently when presenting the beauty of the career and teacher competences. This conjecture must be confirmed with further data analysis.

4. Conclusions

The role of mentors is the most important issue of practical teacher training because school practices have a strong socialization effect on teacher candidates. Hungarian mentors are characterized by the focus of direct classroom work (classroom management), and the contexts beyond that appear less, which pushes the mediated career in a more closed and subject-centric direction. It can help if the school management is present in the mentoring process more intensely, and presumably this is not a direct impact, but rather an impact deriving from organizational culture. According to our data so far, there seems to be typical, though not very strong differences between male and female mentors. These differences may be worth considering when assigning students to mentor. Our results can mainly be useful for organizational actors in the triadic relationship (university administration, preparing mentors and school management).

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