

Perspectives and features of mentoring

Introduction

An overview of the phenomenon of mentoring in teacher education is not easy to give.

Still we try in this first stage of the MINT project to describe and analyse the different aspects and characteristics of the theory and the practice of mentoring in the profession of educators in the Netherlands.

1. Perspectives of mentoring

Basic principle for mentoring is that it is a learning relationship between two professionals, one more experienced than the other. Both learn from their relationship, both develop their professional identity. The focus anyway, is on the mentee in teaching.

1.1. Contexts of mentoring

Mentoring in the Netherlands can take place in different contexts.

- In initial teacher training
- In the induction phase of the teacher
- In the case of new challenges the mentee meets [other age of children or required innovative change in the classroom, preparation for leading positions]
- In the case of problems [complaints from pupils and parents, personal problems, problems in processes of organizational change, stress and fatigue.

New developments in the context of teacher training influence the position of the mentor in the school in the Netherlands.

We see a development towards the emphasis on learning-how-to-be-a teacher in the schools itself. The person of the mentor in the school becomes more dominant and the mentor as a model and a coach is more important than the teacher trainer of the teacher training institute. This new development in cooperation between the field of education and the teacher training institutes asks for a intensive training for mentoring and research. When we look for how mentoring is organized in the Netherlands we can see the following.

1.2. Who can be a mentee?

1. Student teachers/ educational assistants
 2. Beginning teacher/ educational assistants [first year]
 3. Experienced teacher with a special developmental focus [teaching skills, leadership]
Experienced teacher/ educational assistant but weak performer or with problems [stress or in a reintegration process after illness].
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1. Beginning school leader
 2. Experienced school leader with a special developmental focus.
 3. Experienced school leader but weak performer or with problems [stress, or in a reintegration process after illness].

1.3. Who can be a mentor?

1. Teacher trainer from the Teacher Training Institute for the student.
2. Experienced teacher in the school for the student
Experienced teacher in the school for the colleague teacher that needs mentoring
Experienced teacher from another school
3. Member of the school management
4. External advisor or consultant

1.4. Goals and mentoring

When the mentee is a student, the goals of mentoring are different from when the mentee is an experienced teacher with time management problems or a school leader who has problems in carrying out his or her leadership competencies.

Goals have to be defined before the mentoring process starts.

1. Institutional goals.

There are goals from the teacher training institute when the mentee is a student.

There are also institutional goals or a set of goals beforehand when the mentee is already a professional worker but weak performer or has problems or wants to get back in the profession after a period of illness.

The mentoring process here supports also the assessment of the mentee afterwards. Setting goals beforehand can help the transparency of the assessment in the mentoring process.

2. Developmental goals.

Developmental goals have to be set by the mentee together with the mentor. If the mentee is already a professional educational worker and personal development is the main focus, there may be only developmental goals to work on. Developmental goals are also important to discuss and write down in an action plan when the mentoring is offered to the mentee to prevent failure in the profession or to make progress in a problematic situation. The discussion about developmental goals of the mentee serves also the purpose of enhancement of the personal concern of the mentee.

1.5. Types of mentoring

1. Mentoring can be focused on direct technical support, giving advice and tips for better results.
2. Mentoring can be focused on giving direct and indirect emotional support, like giving positive feedback and guiding the mentee to other sources of support.
3. Mentoring can be focused on the development of the professional identity of the mentee.

This kind of mentoring could make the mentee a more reflective and more autonomous learner and is related to coaching or counseling.

Reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action is necessary for classroom actions in teaching, but also in individual theories and working concepts underlying the active performance of the mentee.

1.6. Mentoring and coaching

In some literature only the manager/schoolleader can be a 'coach' for the professional worker. This 'coaching' contains in itself the dualism of support and assessment. I prefer to think of coaching as a special form of help concerning the personal and professional development of the other person. The mentor must be a well developed professional to include coaching activities in the mentoring work.

Veenman, De Laat en Staring in their Dutch training program for coaching skills for mentors in primary education say that coaching is the more developed stage of what at first was mentoring.

Mentoring is a putting-in activity, coaching is a pulling-out activity [MacLennan, 1995]. Mentoring is seen here as giving information and advise [local guide] and coaching is seen as the stimulus to self reflection and self problem solving.

Coaching is the help the coach provides for the development of the self reflective, self problem solving and self assessing capacities of the other person.

Good mentoring consists among other interventions also of aspects of coaching to help a person develop into a learning professional in a learning organization.

2. Features of good mentoring

2.1. Conditions for mentoring in the organization

Mentoring is not an activity that can exist on its own like personal therapy or counseling. mentoring takes place in a certain organizational context like a school for primary or secondary education. So there are important conditions to make mentoring 'work' and lead to success. Some conditions are described now.

1. The mentoring must be embedded in the vision on educational change of the organization.
2. The mentor works under the responsibility of the management of the organization and this has been clearly communicated to all concerned.
3. The purpose of mentoring system is known to all members of the organization.
4. The role of the mentor has some status.
5. The mentor is carefully selected and is fitting the mentoring standards of the organization.
6. The mentor gets training in mentoring skills and mentoring attitudes.
7. The mentor takes part in intervision sessions for personal support with other mentors [peer mentoring and peer review].
8. The mentor can be offered coaching or supervision on the mentoring process for extra personal support.
9. Evaluation of the mentoring process takes place on a regular basis with the responsible manager and mentee.
10. Evaluation of the mentoring system in the organization takes place once a year.
11. The mentor makes agreements with the mentee on confidentiality of reports.

2.2. The monitoring of the mentoring process

Good monitoring of the mentoring process enhances the transparency for the mentee and the mentor. Some of the important monitoring features are stated below.

1. The goals of the planned mentoring process must be fixed before the start of the mentoring.
2. These goals for the development of the mentee must be the result of a dialogue between mentee, mentor and teacher training institute or the manager of the organization /school.
3. The 'match' between the mentor and the mentee must be agreed on by both.
4. The written action plan contains also an agreement on which activities will take place [classroom observation with or without the use of video, personal dialogue moments etc.].
5. If the mentee is a teacher the mentor writes reports on the process of mentoring consisting the strong points and the developmental points of the mentee, after each classroom visit and feedback dialogue, and writes also private reflection logs. These logs can be discussed in intervision and supervision of the mentor.
6. The mentee writes also reflective logs that marks the process of professional growth.
7. The mentoring process is evaluated in between and in the end by all participants concerned.

2.2. The mentor as a person

A mentor is a special person that can make a great difference in the professional development of the other person, so not everyone can be a mentor just like that. There are competences and qualities, attitudes and skills that a mentor must possess.

“If we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same”[Nelson Mandela quotes M. Williamson in 1994.]

2.2.1. Conditions in the attitude of a mentor

1. The mentor must understand her or his own attitudes, values, needs and competences as well as her or his limitations. Intersession, peer mentoring and peer review contribute to this. Also this should be a part of mentor training.
2. A mentor must show patience and a positive and hopeful attitude towards the learning capacities of the mentee.
3. A mentor keeps the balance between intimacy and concern on one side and keeping an professional distance on the other side. The mentor therefore must have some knowledge about the phenomenon of transference and counter transference in professional relationships.
4. The mentor is capable of being open and sensitive in the relationship with the mentee and can also cope with criticism of the mentee.

2.2.2. Skills of a mentor

1. *Observing skills:* The mentor of a teacher can make a thorough observation of didactic and pedagogic processes in the classroom and can make a difference between clear observation and her or his own interpretation.
2. *Listening skills:* The mentor can make use of open questioning and paraphrasing and can show empathy.

**“Treasures are people that look into my eyes and see my heart”
[Rick Betz]**

3. *Advising skills:* The mentor can give information and can make the mentee reflective on solving her or his own problems. If the mentee is a manager the mentor has knowledge of the field of management and management skills.
4. *Feedback skills:* The mentor can give feedback in a constructive way, with a right balance between positive and negative feedback. The mentor can also handle criticism of the mentee in an effective way.
5. *Confronting skills:* The mentor can confront the mentee with ineffective behaviour in the field of didactic or pedagogic situations or management and leadership situations and cope effectively with the reactions of the mentee on the pain felt because of the 'bad' news.

2.3. Results from mentoring

After the process of mentoring there are results to be expected if mentors really make a difference! The mentor and the mentee as an evaluation activity pay attention to the action plan with the goals and activities of the once planned mentoring process, perhaps in the presence of the manager or the teacher trainer of the teacher trainer institute. Results could be the following.

2.3.1. Results for the mentee

1. The mentee has become a reflective learner. In the case of the student or the newly qualified teacher Korthagen in 1987 says that “student teachers can be armed against socialization into established patterns of school practice. The student teacher must first gain some idea of who he or she is of what he or she wants, and above all, of the ways in which one can take responsibility for one’s own learning”.
2. The mentee has awareness on her or his values and norms in education or leadership, and the role they play in her or his behaviour.

“Consciously we teach what we know, unconsciously we teach who we are” [Hamacheck]

3. The mentee is aware of her or his strong and underdeveloped competences.
4. The mentee feels confident about her or his strong competencies and is motivated to bring growth into the underdeveloped competencies.
5. The mentee has increased knowledge of and skills in didactic and pedagogic aspects of teaching and leadership than before the mentoring process.
6. The mentee has reached a state of relatively well being and is on her or his way towards being a self confident professional with feelings of satisfaction about her or his teaching or management practice.

2.3.2. Results for the mentor

- The beginning teacher brings in new developments and ideas and this keeps the mentor well informed in the teaching business.
- The work of mentoring gives the mentor continuous professional learning.
- The challenging work of mentoring can contribute to a more satisfying feeling about one’s career in teaching or management.

2.3.3. Results for future education

Although we were mostly referring to the benefit that mentoring gives to individual workers, mentoring has also its influence on the teaching and school management profession as such.

Hargreaves and Fullan emphasize in their article 'Mentoring in the New Millennium' that mentoring can not be seen apart from the challenges the future presents to education.

Mentor programs must be seen as instruments for school reculturing and mentoring should be seen as a way of preparing teachers to become change agents who are committed to making a difference in the lives of young people. Mentoring seen this way is not a way to support individual teachers but a way to help transform schools and the teaching profession. The needs of all teachers must be met, not only the new, to find the answers for the emerging realities of the postmodern age.

Will the teaching profession become a force for social change and justice? Can it develop its own visions of educational and social change instead of reacting to the change agenda of others?

Mentoring can make the difference because the impact of good mentoring is powerful!

"The more that teachers know about themselves [the private curriculum within] the better their personal decisions are apt to be about how to pave the way for better teaching". [Korthagen]

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