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Perspectives and Features of Mentoring

1. Introduction

Historically the term mentor implied someone who was responsible for educating but at the same time also served as a counsellor, guide, support and confidant. Over time the range of responsibilities has varied. The term mentor has its roots in Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus before leaving Troy entrusted his son Telemachus to Mentor. Mentor was responsible not only for the education but also the parenting of Telemachus. At times, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, manifested herself in Mentor and Mentor became counsellor, confidant and role model for Telemachus. (Howey 2001)

In education the term mentor is employed to identify experienced teachers who are selected to assist novice teachers to adjust to their first year(s) of teaching. But due to the changes in our society the role of a teacher has changed dramatically. As a consequence the role of a mentor has also undergone various changes.

2. Context of mentoring

2.1. The nature of teaching

Every profession with a high level of professionalism has four general characteristics (Hawke 1999): in-depth specialist knowledge (that the layman is lacking in), autonomy in taking decisions, economic status and clear criteria for acquiring licences for undertaking work independently. All four criteria are closely linked. Highly professional professions have precisely defined knowledge, defined with clear standards and codes. His/her professionalism provides the specialist with the right and opportunity to take decisions knowledge, standards and codes are the basis for acquiring licences. Lately groups of experts have been clearly defining the professional knowledge required by teachers for shaping their competence. This process can be seen as an aspiration for greater professionalisation of the teacher's profession. Clear definition of competence and setting standards and criteria for its assessment enables planning and systemisation in the induction of novices and at least a minimum guarantee of the quality society demands of experts in a certain area as well as prevents abuse of the autonomy of decision-making in professional situations and provides for a high level of professionalism in making these decisions. Planning allows every novice to acquire experience in all areas concerning his/her work and develop all competences that define that work.

Again when novice teachers are introduced to independent work it is also necessary to look at the nature of the teacher's work. Tomlinson (1995; summary by Maldez, Bodoczky, 1999) defines teaching as an activity whose purpose is to encourage learning. It has two characteristics – complexity and openness. The greatest proof of the complexity of teaching is the teacher must work at simultaneously at many different things with a large number of pupils. Openness means the same results can be achieved in many different ways. Elliot (1999) thinks similarly. The school situation to be managed by each teacher is described as having four characteristics – vagueness,

unpredictability, instability and complexity. The teacher is an autonomous expert who is able to take decisions independently and efficiently in this complex situation.

The third factor is that the professional reality of teachers has opened towards new horizons. Hargreaves and Fullan (2000) claim that developments in the science of teaching, like constructivism, cooperative learning, spread of ICT, adapting instruction to the needs and learning styles of students from diverse backgrounds and with special needs, etc. influence the expansion of a teacher's classroom repertoire. Similar conclusions were drawn in a report of the expert group A that presented the results of the work undertaken in the period September 2002 - June 2003 dealing with the topic of improving education of teachers and trainers in Europe. This thematic group was set up by the European Commission within the framework of the follow-up of the Detailed Work Programme (DWP) for the future objectives of European education and training systems. (2003)

The group has identified the main aspects of changes in student intake and in teaching and training environment that imply a re-organisation of learning processes. Teachers need to adapt their teaching to the social, cultural and ethnic diversity of pupils' needs and to the classroom heterogeneity including children with special needs. Teachers are increasingly becoming the organisers of learning environments and the facilitators of learning processes. They are using cooperative, experiential, project and work-based learning opportunities and are taking over the role of a guide of the learning process, rather than a transmitter of knowledge. In the classroom they work increasingly as members of a team and they are also increasingly required to assume collective responsibility for curriculum and school organisation. The school functions as an open learning environment, where teachers no longer work only with their colleagues but also need to collaborate with the wider community, families, higher education institutions, the social partners and colleagues from other schools at home and abroad. Teachers increasingly integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) in formal learning situations and in all professional practices.

A common characteristic underlies these changes: teachers need to use problem-solving approaches to develop context related practices capable of achieving appropriate results. Standard approaches are no longer sufficient. Teaching should be seen less and less as a *technical* and increasingly as a *professional* activity. It is an activity that requires a careful analysis of learning situations, choice of objectives, development and monitoring of suitable learning opportunities, evaluation of their impact on students' achievement, responsiveness to students' learning needs, and a personal or collective reflection on the whole process, in order to develop a *corpus* of professional knowledge. Continued professional development throughout their career is crucial in ensuring that teachers develop and maintain the capacity for innovative practice.

2.2. How teachers teach

Training for the profession of teacher starts with the student entering the faculty of education. Each student choosing this profession starts off his/her training with a vast experience of school, teaching and learning. Even those not having contact with schools during their time of study have over many years acquired a good idea of how lessons are run and the role of the teacher in this

process This lay concept (viewpoint, conviction, value) is often so automatic that it forms unawares a personal theory of teaching.

In the course of his/her studies a student acquires scientific theories in parallel with lay theories. If study is so organised as to link the personally held theories with scientific concepts then there is a form of integration of the two types of theory otherwise it is found they have nothing in common. The third factor for the development of competence is experience. This is a complete model of understanding and operating closely connected to the actual situation (context) and is a vital addition to theory acquired. Elliot (1999) says that the wisdom of practice is comprised of a collection of past events, experienced responses to these and the results of their decisions. Every professional decision and its implementation is the result of an integration of all three factors – *knowing scientific concepts, personal theories and experience gained in practical models* of understanding and action. The educating of a teacher must therefore take place in all three dimensions. Without consideration of all three the teacher will not be able to actualise teaching in practice and will be unable to adapt to different contexts and will do everything “by the book”. The integration of the three viewpoints into one integrated whole, or professional thinking and acting, its development and expanding complexity are the goals of the lifetime professional development of the teacher. The period of induction is only the second level in this process and as such it should be understood.

3. Features of mentoring

3.1. Changing roles of teachers – changing roles of mentors

In the world where teaching is undergoing profound changes the role of mentoring is also facing new challenges. Hargreaves describes four phases in teacher’s professionalism and its characteristics that also imply the changing role of a mentor. (Hargreaves and Fullan 2000)

1. Pre professional age: teachers learn to teach by watching others, mentors offer encouragement and tips.
2. The age of autonomous professional: individualism, teachers can manage themselves, only incompetent need help.
3. The age of the collegial professional: increased complexities, knowledge explosion, new challenges, collaborative, learning cultures, new roles, continuous learning from/by/with colleagues.
4. Post modern professional age: diversity, new partnerships, beyond schools, mutual learning – mentors grow in the process of learning, benefit on both sides.

We will try to answer the following questions: What is the definition of mentoring? What kind of a mentor do we need today, what are his/her features and what is his/her role? What kind of relationship should a mentoring process stand for and what are the perspectives of mentoring in the new millennium?

3.2. The role of a Mentor

The Mentor is a role, which is very old in our cultural tradition. The name is synonymous with wise, experienced and trustworthy councillor. The mentor is a person that on the one hand encourages, gives tasks, prepares his/her

protégé for new challenges and organises possibilities for acquiring experience and on the other hand helps, makes work and learning easier and protects against the more serious mistakes and other consequences of inexperience (Smith, West-Burnham, 1993).

The relationship between mentor and mentee should be based on a model of professional growth. The objective is to help each individual become the very best teacher. In our environment the emphasis has been always on developing a quality school system. The difference in a model of professional growth is the philosophy of this model, the question of how change what is wrong into what is right. In this model of professional growth the mentor's task is to help the mentee develop his own style of teaching – not to copy the mentor's style. The mentor will help the novice to understand in a complex way what is happening when teaching, how he influences events and how effective is his influence. He will help him understand his personal theory of teaching that leads his activity and helps him develop as wide a repertoire as possible he can then use in mastering the unexpected, complex and unclear professional situation.

This focus requires of the mentor that he/she masters different roles (Fullerton, Malderez, 1998; summary by: Malderez, Bodóczy, 1999):

ROLE	FUNCTIONS
1. Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides inspiration, • Demonstrates professional thinking and acting
2. "Acculturator"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows the mentee opportunities for inclusion into a social network • Helps the mentee to get used to the particular professional culture
3. Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "opens doors" • presents the mentee to the "right people" • uses his social power (ability to make things happen) to the service of the mentee
4. Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is constantly present • provides safe conditions for the mentee to let off steam/release emotions • listens to and reflects what was heard with the intention of unburdening the novice
5. Educator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listens and reflects what was heard with the intent of articulating ideas • creates suitable opportunities for the mentee to learn • to achieve professional learning objectives

3.3. What Makes a Good Mentor

Features of good mentor could be condensed into five salient characteristics: positive and open attitude, skills and knowledge, interpersonal communication, life long learning and ability to build trust.

- positive and open attitude

A good mentor is a teacher who loves his job and has high professional self-esteem. He is a professional who radiates enthusiasm and has a natural eagerness for learning and inquiry. He is committed to his mentoring role and believes it makes the difference. He is able to accept other people without making judgements. One of his characteristics is openness, not only to people but also to change.

- skills and knowledge

A good mentor is skilled in offering instructional support in the field of design and delivery. His knowledge covers the content of subject matter, adult learning and pedagogy. The good mentor provides the opportunities for shared experience, team work and collegial dialogue.

- interpersonal communication

A good mentor adjusts his communication to meet the needs of the individual mentee. He possesses listening, advising, feed backing and problem solving skills.

- life-long learning

A good mentor recognises the importance of continuous learning. He understands that professional development is everybody's responsibility. As Loucks-Horsley (2001) says: " Thus, everyone in the school is responsible for her or his own learning, school leaders are responsible for all professional staff, and individual teachers are responsible for the development of new teachers and of their peers."

- trust building

It is expected that novice teacher moves smoothly into the teaching profession. One of the conditions is emotional support provided by a mentor, which can be developed only in the climate of trust. A good mentor is able to create an open climate of trust, which serves as a safe environment for emotional support, nurturing, collegial feedback, supervision and mutual learning.

4. New Approaches to Mentoring in Induction

Induction is the period where the mentor must help the mentee to develop a professional way of thinking and acting and integrate the two into a complete whole. This places the mentor in a completely different position than that of trainer in complex skills. The mentor is no longer the expert that knows all solutions but someone who helps expand the complex understanding of practical situations and with his/her experience creates room for manoeuvre in taking actions.

The process of induction must be understood in a wider context than the relationship between mentor and mentee. It must be placed in a wider context with two characteristics:

1. Induction of the teacher into independent work is not some special process but an integrated part of aspirations for constant professional development of the teacher.
2. Nowadays the need to change the position of the teacher in school is emphasised along with the consequential transition from individual to member of a team that will cooperate in an interdisciplinary way with colleagues of different expertise. In this the school culture is introduced to the novice. Work with mentee is not only the responsibility of the mentor and head teacher but of the collective and all in institutions responsible for the professional development of teachers (faculties, institutes for education, etc.). In this way the role of mentor is shared between more than one individual and rather defines relationships that encourage the professional development of not only novices but also more experienced colleagues.

Society that is responsible for developing the school system must come up with a clear strategy of professional development of teachers and inducting teachers into work that is an integral part of it. The system must include clearly defined competences, criteria and standards of development and procedures for their development. All institutions responsible for the development of teachers must be included – the ministry, faculties, professional institutes and schools. They must work in harmony meet with each other and be a model of interdisciplinary action. This system must allow for evaluations and self-regulation at all levels from state authorities to individual schools and work in harmony. The mentor is a special element in this system who must have a clearly defined task and strategies for developing competences and a model of organising induction at each school. Mentors should be trained not only in content but also in processes and supported and allowed to exchange experience with others. The role of mentor is not restricted to development but includes that of coordinator, planner and includer into school culture.

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