

# Features and Perspectives of Mentoring in Teacher Education

Results from reviewing research literature

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The MINT project is aiming at a research and development process on mentoring in different settings of teacher education. In the first stage of the project we are looking for key issues to describe and analyse the different aspects of mentoring: features or characteristics of good mentoring and perspectives or types/ basic principles under which mentoring can be summarised.

These key issues may help to compose the (national) case studies as well as to compare them afterwards.

## I. Features

### 1. Institutional context/ Organisational frames

The leading question in this aspect is: How is mentoring understood in different contexts of teacher education?

There could be a *difference* between mentoring student teachers during an internship, novice teachers during the induction phase, or mentoring the career development of a teacher.

The formal/ administrative arrangement and the *amount of time* spent in the mentor-mentee-relationship is a crucial factor.

Although the individual school is the very location where mentoring takes place, the *responsibility* for the mentoring policy is not a subject of the school in any case.

The *relationship* between the different institutions involved (school, seminar, teacher education institute, higher education college, in-service agencies) should be mentioned to find out any overarching understanding of the teaching profession.

### 2. Functions and goals of mentoring

If mentoring is dedicated to help novice teachers learn how to teach a certain subject in a classroom, then the goal is narrowed to the *individualistic* needs of a person.

Some additional goals broaden the scope of *functions*:

- to improve teacher retention rates, to keep talented teachers on the job
- to attract the very best candidates for schools
- to care for emotional and technical support for beginners
- to ensure access to the accumulated practical knowledge of experienced teachers
- to arrange basic experiences in collaborative teaching
- to influence the school's communication culture/ the professional interaction
- to prepare teachers to become change agents, improving teaching and learning.

Different goals and functions are related to different *competencies* of mentors. A qualified mentor will not only serve as a model-teacher who is able to practice, model, analyse, reflect on content focused and learner oriented teaching-in-action. But also be able to mentor: to practice, model, analyse, reflect on the mentoring process itself and its outcomes.

One of the leading questions:

How can the mentor-mentee-relationship become an integrative subject of school development processes?

### 3. Competency profile and tools of mentors

Leading question: Which kinds of competencies are involved in "good" mentoring?

Different goals and functions will provide for different *tools* a mentor can make use of:

- *observation* of instruction, classroom management, realisation of students' needs,

- *feedback procedures*
- *communication and interpersonal skills*
- *supervisory tools*
- *assessment of teaching practice*
- *professional thinking*, discussion of beliefs about teaching and learning
- *explication of practical knowledge*
- *content focused coaching*

The difference between teaching and mentoring should become part of a mentor training programme.

Mentors' perceptions / images of teaching, knowledge, and learning play a role in mentors' competencies / knowledge of

- how to support novices in posing problems for current teaching practice,
- deeper understanding of subject matter and how to relate it to diverse students' population,
- relationship between principled knowledge and teaching practice,
- how to inquire systematically about and reflect on novice's teaching practice,
- how to engage novices in learning to teach through similar inquiry and reflection.

#### 4. Roles of a mentor

Research on mentoring novice teachers gives evidence to the self-esteem of mentors in different roles:

- Mentor acting as a **local guide**, giving *emotional* support to the novice teacher. The Austrian "5-C Model of mentoring" (Klement/Teml 1996) is an advice to guide practical reflection of a novice teacher by means of certain habits: cooperation, criterion-orientation, context-relation, continuity and creativity.
- Mentor acting as an **educational companion**, giving *technical* support to the novice teacher by means of feedback, reflection-on-action, reflection about the what – how – why of lesson events. The mentor refers to the development of the professional self of a mentee. The "3-level-mentoring" (Niggli 2003), referring to the classroom-action of the mentee (level 1), the reflection on action (level 2) and the development of professional competencies (level 3) gives advice to a differentiated mentoring programme.
- Mentor acting as a **change agent**, working together with a mentee by means of collaborative inquiry to teaching and learning of students. The model of *cognitive coaching* is addressed to curriculum planning as well as direct intervention of the coach in the classroom. The aspect of change is not only referring to classroom practice but also to the development of a professional culture in a school.

#### 5. Types of mentoring

Underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, and schooling in general differ. Wang/Odell (2002) came out with three types in existing mentoring programs which show certain advantages and pitfalls.

- The **Humanistic perspective** on teacher mentoring deals primarily with emotional support, to help the novice teacher to deal with the "reality shock" in a school, to reduce psychological stress, to empower self-esteem. The mentor is a *counsellor* who helps by giving personal support and encouragement. Mentor training programs refer to communication skills, positive feedback and supervision techniques. Mentoring is more or less a process of adjustment to the situation, not an innovative approach.
- The **situated apprentice perspective** on teacher mentoring is concentrated on giving field-related technical support, develop situated knowledge in a process of observation, modelling, demonstration, and reflection. The mentor acts as a *guide* who helps to develop practical teaching skills and knowledge. The mentor-mentee-relationship is hierarchical, aiming at a

functional adaption to an existing teaching practise. Alternative approaches on teacher's learning are not in mind.

- In a **critical constructivist perspective** on teacher mentoring the processes of learning are shaped according to assimilation and accommodation. Critical reflection, explication of "practical knowledge" (Zanting et al 1998) and the collaborative work of the mentor and the mentee are dedicated to change existing practice. Inquiry oriented learning is preferred. The mentor is acting like a *change agent*. Mentor training programs will focus on "cognitive coaching". The notion of change is challenging, but creating uncertainty. The potential of denouncing existing knowledge and practice in general could cause troubles.

The three different types will not occur in pure shapes, and there will be bridges between them in reality. According to McIntyre/Hagger (1996) these types are formed in a successively complex way: the personal relationship with emotional support is a basic involvement of the mentee; on a second level mentoring involves active guidance and technical support; on a third level mentoring is including collaboration and change. The types are stages in a development process of mentoring.

What is important is the differentiation of underlying assumptions about teaching, learning, and how one can learn how to teach.

## II. Perspectives

What has to be developed in the second phase of the MINT project depends on the analysis of the case-studies and analysis of mentoring programs to train mentors ("Mentoring the Mentors").

**1. A Framework for quality mentoring:** Different models of training the mentors should be collected and analysed to find out cross cultural similarities and differences.

Standards of qualified teaching have been developed in some countries (i.e. Scotland), but we have to find out in which way professional standards work in the mentor-mentee relationship and in mentors' training programmes.

### 2. Standards (Standard-oriented mentoring)

Are the provisional guidelines an attempt to set up standards of "good" mentoring itself?

Does the notion of teaching standards help to develop different mentor training programme?

Will the MINT group be able to agree on basic standards of mentoring?

Successful teacher education programmes offer novice teachers opportunities

- to reason and to examine concepts of teaching and learning
- to discuss students' learning, pedagogical knowledge of learners
- to work in supportive teaching cultures that rely on individual reflectivity and collaborative inquiry,
- to reach these teaching standards requires substantial mentoring and coaching, follow up, resources and time.

### 3. Mentoring teams

According to Randall L. Turk (1999), the mentoring team is an alternative mentoring model.

How do models of peer assistance / peer review work in mentoring teams?

How can we get more informations about how mentoring teams work in practice?

### 4. Career Mentoring

Most literature is on mentoring beginning or novice teachers.

The component of staff development could give another accent to mentoring, keeping continuous professional development in view.

Career mentoring is an increasingly important perspective in teacher education. The land Hestia/Germany has recently created a new programme on career mentoring to prepare teachers/ women teachers for leadership positions.

### **5. Institutionalized Partnership**

Mentoring takes place in school sites, but responsibilities for successful processes and outcomes go with universities, teacher education institutes, teacher in-service agencies and others. Mentor training programmes are developed in different institutional contexts. Which kind of cooperation works under which conditions? How can an equal partnership between schools and teacher training institutes be established?

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