



MENTOR AND BEGINNING TEACHER MEETINGS: IMPLEMENTATION AND INSIGHTS

ȘEDINȚELE ÎNTRE MENTOR ȘI PROFESORII DEBUTANȚI: IMPLIMENTARE ȘI PERSPECTIVE

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***Rezumat:** Articolul de față tratează problema interacțiunii dintre profesorii debutanți și mentori și cea a conținutului ședințelor de mentorat, din perspectiva mentorilor. S-a demonstrat că acestea trebuie să abordeze atât aspecte profesionale, cât și cele emoționale.*

***Cuvinte-cheie:** profesori debutanți, mentori, inducție, dificultăți, autodeterminare.*

Beginning teachers start their career full of hope and motivation, infused with a sense of mission and a desire to make an impact [7]. The encounter with the reality on the ground comes as a blow to them, forcing them to fight for their survival. The result is physical and emotional fatigue, causing burnout and even dropout [4], [10], [15]. In Israel a three-year program has been developed for the induction year, including workshops providing support and empowerment in parallel with support for mentors [14].

On entering the induction stage, beginning teachers are expected to integrate and show results, understand the organizational, cope with the demands, and exhibit a command of the subject matter [15]. These and other factors create many difficulties for them [3], [14]: (1) difficulties in adjustment to the system – the need to learn the organizational culture and internal politics of the school and integrate with the teaching staff [5]; (2) pedagogic difficulties – a lack of practical knowledge and class management skills, time spent in searching for relevant materials, understanding curricula, and developing differential teaching units [10]; (3) disciplinary problems, resulting in

a sense of helplessness, alienation and lack of respect in the face of students' insolence [6]; (4) difficulties in development of a professional identity due to the intense nature of the teaching profession, the pedagogic, emotional and administrative load [10].

"Growth Resources" – Induction Unit in the Kaye Academic College of Education

In the past two years induction stage units have been set up in colleges/universities, handling matters that range from the induction stage to training of mentors. The establishment of these units is a practical manifestation of the vision of continuity in professional development led by Israel's Teachers Administration, enabling dialogue between the different Administration departments [13]. Such a unit, advocating self-determination theory [2], has been set up at Kaye Academic College of Education. As an extension of this theory and in keeping with the concept of continuity, the staff of the unit has defined operative goals: (1) creation of a unique support system for the processes involved in professional development; (2) creation of a supportive professional community; (3) accompaniment of the beginning teachers in the

stages of developing a professional identity; (4) strengthening of the beginning teacher's self-determination [8]. Self-determination theory deals with an individual's internal processes, focusing on his proclivity for psychological growth and development. The theory relates to three basic psychological needs, satisfaction of which contributes to development of a professional identity: (1) the need for bonding and belonging; (2) the need for a feeling of competence; (3) the need for autonomy, guidance and self-regulation [1], [2]. Implementation of the self-determination approach is based on the belief in the potential for growth existing in the teacher, finding expression in courses [8], [1].

Mentors

Mentoring of beginning teachers may be defined as the most important strategy for meeting their needs [11], [4], [16]. The desired traits of the mentor are defined as follows:

- Knowledgeable and experienced in the field of teaching – Expertise on the pedagogic – subject content in parallel with generic aspects [15], [3], [18].
- Aware of the beginning teacher's need for belonging– the mentor must understand that cultivating a sense of belonging in the beginning teacher is a basic need, as stated in self-determination theory [2], and he must help to consolidate relations between the beginning teacher and the school staff [14].
- Able to provide emotional support – the mentor must heed the distress signals conveyed by the beginning teacher from a position of trust and empathy [3], [9].
- Available, accessible and consistent – the weekly meetings serve as a steady anchor, giving the be-

ginning teacher a feeling of confidence, professionalism and active involvement [3].

Contribution of Mentoring and Guidance to the Mentors Themselves

The work of the mentor is complex and accompanied by much deliberation due to its very nature: support and assistance vs. evaluation; understanding of the professional dependence of the beginning teacher vs. the need to cultivate personal autonomy; empathy and attentiveness vs. advice and practicality; permanent framework vs. flexibility; and orientation to the needs of the beginning teacher vs. commitment to the system [14]. Coping with this duality allows personal growth on the part of the mentors themselves in addition to acquiring beginning tools and ideas, boosting their self-confidence, improving their interpersonal relationships, and intensifying their own personal commitment to the school and the community.

The Beginning Teacher in the Research Literature

The research literature abounds with information on the induction stage in teaching, but does not make a distinction between novice teachers and teachers in their second year. In Israel the concept of internship has been in existence for 13 years, but a definition of the status of the new teacher has been known for only the past three years.

The Method

Content analysis was conducted on questionnaires submitted by 58% of the mentors. The central content in some of the subjects was identified as part of a thematic analysis and counted by means of a frequency analysis. Certain questions were eliminated from the final analysis since either the teachers

chose not to answer them, or their answers were not relevant or unclear.

Aims of the Content Analysis

In order to study processes from the mentors' point of view they were requested to fill in a questionnaire on the activities of new teachers, aimed at:

1. Identifying the content on which mentors focus with teachers during their first year following internship.
2. Identifying areas where the new teacher is in need of assistance in order to create a link between these needs and the workshop

| Subjects of meetings | N | % |
|---|----|-------|
| Class management and disciplinary problems | 86 | 68.8% |
| Work programs, curricula and personal programs | 76 | 60.8% |
| Issues relating to integration in the system and the school culture | 67 | 53.6% |
| Planning of teaching units and lessons | 61 | 48.8% |
| Subjects relating to Evaluation | 55 | 44% |
| Interaction with parents | 43 | 34.4% |
| Providing answers to students with special needs | 38 | 30.4% |
| Varying teaching strategies | 36 | 28.8% |

Note: The questionnaire contained additional subjects but these were not included as they were referred to by less than 20% of the teachers.

Difficulties in mentoring: a total of 63 mentors (54%) wrote that there were no difficulties at all in the mentoring process and 29 (23.2%) detailed or emphasized problems in timing: "The difficulty was to find a suitable and proper time for dialogue" (respondent 120); "There was not enough time to sit together and talk about the issues" (respondent 112). Eleven mentors (8.8%) stated that there were a few difficulties at the start of the process, which no longer existed the moment a

relationship of trust was established.

3. Identifying the contribution of the mentoring process to the mentors themselves.
4. Examining whether a correspondence exists between the work of mentoring and the perspective of the Teachers Induction Unit at Kaye Academic College.

Findings

Following is a distribution of the themes that arose from the subjects discussed at meetings between mentors and novice teachers:

| Subjects of meetings | N | % |
|---|----|-------|
| Use of teleprocessing and technology | 28 | 22.4% |
| Observing and feedback | 27 | 21.6% |
| Emotional support and assistance in cultivating personal competence | 25 | 20% |
| Special initiatives and activities in the classroom and the school | 25 | 20% |
| Teacher-student relations | 21 | 16.8% |
| Reflection and professional development | 20 | 16% |
| Cultivation of a class climate and inculcation of values | 20 | 16% |

relationship of trust was established. Two teachers (1.6%) stated that there were difficulties throughout. All the respondents, with the exception of six, believe that it is preferable to provide guidance to a teacher from the same school for reasons of accessibility and availability, and facility in easing his integration into the school staff.

Sixty-one mentors (48.8%) did not state insights or proposals for improvement; 23 mentors (18.4%) wrote about the need for contact between them and the college staff; 14 mentors (11.2%) emphasized pedagogic content; 13 mentors (10.4%) wrote about the need for additional hours for guidance; and 9

mentors (7.2%) referred to the fact that the process involved helping the absorption of the new teacher and contributing to his self-confidence. All the remaining issues raised by the mentors ranged from 0.8% to 4%.

Contribution of the process to the mentors themselves – 57 respondents (59% of the teachers who answered this question) stated one or two contributions, and the rest referred to 3-4 subjects from which they had benefited:

| Contribution of the mentoring process to the mentors | N | % |
|--|----|-------|
| Professional development | 38 | 30.4% |
| Peer study | 38 | 30.4% |
| Self-reflection | 29 | 23.2% |
| Acquisition of new tools | 26 | 20.8% |
| In-depth study | 24 | 19.2% |
| Sense of satisfaction / achievement | 15 | 12% |
| Coping with challenges | 12 | 9.6% |
| More meaningful attention to the induction stage | 12 | 9.6% |
| Mentoring – processes, skill and importance | 11 | 8.8% |
| Strengthening of personal status in the school | 3 | 2.4% |

Some of the respondents stated in their answers: "I learn about myself all the time through the new teachers. I uphold and reinforce positive aspects and improve aspects that need improvement ... this process has helped me greatly to develop and improve both professionally and personally" (respondent 3); "... new experiences, new situations ... Widening of professional development and motivation to develop professionally ... development of discussions and development of understanding and more consideration to the matter of mentoring new teachers" (respondent 5); "the very fact that I carried out observations ... made me gain insights into my own learning method. This made me think about acts that we perform automatically ..." (respondent 10).

Discussion

From an analysis of the meetings between the beginning teacher and the mentor it may be seen that there is a correspondence between the aims of mentoring, as defined by the Ministry of Education, and the actions on the ground. The Director-General's Circular

2009 presents the roles of the mentor: "... The mentor is an experienced teacher who has been trained for the job and he is part of the teaching staff and is involved in educational activities ... his impact on optimal absorption of the intern ... may be manifested in three areas: professionally, environmentally and emotionally." Indeed, mentors emphasize content associated with three goals: subjects relating to **professional aspects** are distributed throughout the table of subjects (class management, working with curricula, teaching units and lesson structures, evaluation and teaching strategies); "integration into the staff and the school system" refers to **environmental aspects** and represents an answer to the need for contact and belonging as presented by self-determination theory [2]; 25 mentors referred directly to **emotional aspects** while it constituted in addition an integral part of other subjects (assistance in integration into the staff; interaction with parents; students with special needs; and teacher-student relations) [2], [11], [14].

It appears that despite the different professional situation of the teacher in the first year of teaching and the professional experience gained during the internship year, mentors still place great emphasis on pedagogic aspects. It is possible that this stems from the readiness of the beginning teacher to acquire more hands-on tools that will allow him to develop professionally. It is also possible that it is a question of the desire to prove himself and his capabilities and that this is his way of strengthening his professional identity. Another possibility is the confidence placed by the beginning teacher in the staff of the college unit that he will be helped to obtain the emotional support he needs, such that he will be able to meet the needs of the hour.

An additional aspect that derives from the findings deals with the issue of timing and coordination of mentoring meetings. A total of 23.2% of the mentors emphasized coordination of meetings as being problematic due to the lack of time. Others perhaps did not emphasize this, but 91 respondents stated that it was preferable to work in the same school for reasons of availability. Mention of this fact by mentors supports the statements of Shaz-Openheimer & Zilbershtrom that while it is an anchor that gives the beginning teacher a feeling of confidence, it is also a source of aggravation because the educational system does not devote sufficient attention to the subject and exhibits a lack of understanding of the fact that a regular framework of meetings gives novice teachers a sense of security [3].

The last issue addresses the mentor himself. Hagger & McIntyre present the personal contribution of mentoring to professional development of the mentor, and indeed, the findings

confirm their claim and underscore the issue of professional development, peer study, self-reflection, and acceptance of new tools. Altogether 15 teachers make a mention of the sense of satisfaction and achievement they feel, as stated by Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson. Furthermore, mention of the need by 23 mentors for contact with the college supports the statements of the above researchers regarding the desire to study and develop. The statements of the mentors shed light on the place they occupy, their vision, work and study methods, as well as the significance behind the frequency analysis. There is no doubt that the words of the Teaching Staff Administration director are a direct reflection on the quality of these teachers' work: "... teachers are the spearhead of the educational system and they lead meaningful teaching and learning processes in schools. The quality of the educational system depends on the quality of its teachers" [13].

Recommendations:

The present research signals the start of a process of familiarization with the status of mentoring in the first year of teaching (following internship) and with ways to establish relationships based on trust and communication with mentors. The findings and the insights deriving from them lead to the following recommendations: (1) in order to continue cultivating contact with mentors, at least one study day should be fixed in the college for this purpose. In addition, careful attention should be paid to ongoing personal contact with the mentors for them to feel relevance and care on the part of the unit staff; (2) the problem of the timing of meetings should be presented to

boards of directors, enabling them to discuss the need, the significance, and

the logistic and emotional problems stemming from them.

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