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Students-Teacher Perspectives on The Qualities of Mentor-Teachers

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Abstract

Where policy-makers generally focus on the importance of outcomes in terms of competencies, many researchers emphasize the more personal characteristics of teachers (Tickle, 1999). In this pilot study we wanted to identify the essential qualities of a mentor. Students were asked to reflect on positive and negative personal attributes related to being „good mentors”, and list 10 essential attributes for each. The student-teachers (80) interacted for 2 semesters with 12 teacher-mentors in high schools and learned teaching from a model teacher. The reflection is based on the experience of mentoring (external influences), personal conception (internal influences) about a good mentor and attributes incompatible with mentoring.

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1. Introduction

N. Mitrofan (1988) states that every profession requires some personality traits making the profession determine some „modeling” of personality, and outlining some common personality traits, some points near the physiognomy of psychological profiles of individuals engaged in that profession. Due to internal influences, patterns of personality and professional conduct are often very different. The teacher's personality is stronger, and harmonious traits have a formative influence on learners (Mitrofan, 1988).

Most studies were translated into concrete competencies that should be acquired by teachers, known as the „performance based” or „competency based” models in teacher education. A contrasting view known as Humanistic Based Teacher Education (HBTE) was directed towards the person of the teacher, a perspective adopted by Fred A. J. Korthagen (2004) in the field of mentoring. Policy-makers generally focus on the importance of outcomes in terms of competencies and just some researchers are preoccupied by personal characteristics (Tickle, 1999).

A. J. Korthagen (2004) explains the onion model when people's personal qualities are mentioned to the deepest levels (from the outer layer of personality to the deepest one: environment, behavior, beliefs, personal identity and mission). In this view, L. Tickle (1999) mentions some personal qualities of mentors: creativity, trust, care, courage, sensitivity, decisiveness, spontaneity, commitment, and flexibility and remarks „In policy and practice the identification and development of personal qualities, at the interface between aspects of one's personal virtues and

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one's professional life, between personhood and teacherhood, have had scant attention" (Tickle, 1999, pp 123). A good definition of personal qualities belongs to B. Beijaard (1995, apud Korthagen, 2004, pp. 82) and is, "Who or what someone is, the various meanings people can attach to themselves, or the meanings attributed by others".

These are rarely included in official lists of teacher competencies and assessment procedures. In our case, The Methodology for teacher-mentors coordinating teaching training (2011) mentions the following criteria for assessment: (1) Skills and methods: knowledge, execution, communication, capturing and keeping student interest and ability for differentiated activities; and (2) Social skills and personality (sociability, clearance, different registers of language, emotional balance, stress resistance, ingenuity, flexibility, determination, tolerance, rigor, objectivity, availability).

P. Hudson (2004) proposes the Five-factor model for specific subject mentoring: (1) The mentor's Personal Attributes for facilitating the mentoring process; (2) Mentoring related to the essential System Requirements; (3) The mentor's Pedagogical Knowledge; (4) The mentor's Modeling of teaching practices, and (5) Quality Feedback provided by the mentor. In relation to Personal Attributes, based on many studies, mentors need to be: (a) supportive; (b) attentive; (c) comfortable with talking about specific primary teaching practices; (d) instill positive attitudes in their mentees; (e) instill confidence in their mentees and (f) assist the mentee to reflect more positively on practices for improving the teaching of specific primary subject areas.

J. McDonald (2002) said that a good mentor needs to have: (1) interpersonal skills; (2) knowledge about organization, field or profession, including technical competence; (3) teaching skills (4) management skills; (5) commitment to the mentor role and (6) other personal attributes, namely: considerable experience, adaptability, awareness of own personal strengths and weaknesses (Bernard, 1996), receptiveness to new ideas (Carruthers, 1993), and the ability to communicate hope and optimism to the mentee (Rowley, 1999), willing to take calculated risks, and supportive if the mentee falters (Murray, 1991).

These studies show that it is necessary to organize information on the qualities of good mentors into categories that capture all aspects of mentoring.

2. Methods

Educational programs in Romania for the certification of the teaching profession provide during the third year of study (Initial teacher training) two semesters of Teaching practice in compulsory secondary school (78 hours). *The mentor-teacher for pedagogical practice* has the responsibility to guide teaching practice students who are preparing for a teaching career in the BA cycle. A teacher-mentor has the following summarized responsibilities in relation to teacher-students (Mazilescu & Popescu-Mitroi, 2008): Manages the student's activities; Supports the use of curriculum documents; Supports the design and implementation of lessons; Provides feedback for each task in the design phase and after implementation; Develops self-reflection and self-assessment of students; Draws up an evaluation report which mentions the evolution of students. In this context we wanted to find what are the personal qualities appreciated by students who have experimented with one year of teaching practice.

The 80 student-teachers involved in the study, from the Faculty of Computer Sciences (N=55), Faculty of Electrical and Power Engineering (N=12) and Faculty of Electronics and Telecommunications Engineering (N=13), interacted for 2 semesters with 12 teacher-mentors in two top high schools. In the first step, students mentioned 10 characteristics of teacher-mentors from each the following questions: What qualities should a good teacher-mentor have? What attributes are incompatible with being a good teacher-mentor?

Data processing was performed using the SPSS13 program. We calculated the frequency of each feature mentioned by students. We selected for each category 25 features and we removed the features mentioned below 5% percent. Personal attributes of a good teacher-mentor (personal reflection on the role of mentor) in decreasing order of frequency are: Professional/specialist, Pedagogical tact, Model/integrity, Passionate/enthusiastic, Tolerant, Sociable, Communicative, Decided, Balanced emotional, Upright, Patient, Empathic, Active, Confident, Calm, Agreeable, Cooperative, Self-learning/driver training, Incentive, Available, Kind, Credible, Flexible, Serious and Helpful.

Personal attributes that are not compatible with being a mentor in decreasing order of frequency are: Inequitable/Unjust, Indifferent, Apathetic, Formal/distant, Indulgent, Demanding, Expeditious, Coldness/hardness, Critical, Intolerant, Aggressive, Disinterested, Misinformed, Uncertain, Make mistakes, Sprawling in teaching, Disincentives, Emotional, Permissive, Inflexible, Conservative, Severe, Superficial, Elliptical and Rigid.

Based on the literature and comparing the features for a good mentor mentioned by the B. Žarkovic & C. Bizjak (2010), J. B. Rawley (1999), R.L. Davis (1991) and on the field of mentoring, we found 4 types of support, because mentor's personal attributes include being supportive of the mentee: Informational support (1), Instrumental support (2), Evaluative support (3) and Emotional support (4).

Table 1. The 4 type of support of mentor-teachers for mentee

Features of a good mentor	B. Žarkovic & C. Bizjak (2010) – 6 features	J. B. Rawley (1999) - 5 features	R.L. Davis (1991) – 7 features
Informational support (1)	Life long learning	To be a model of a continuous learner (curiosity, open mind).	
Instrumental support (2)	Teaching skills and knowledge Interpersonal communication	To be effective in different interpersonal contexts (communication style & self-regulation). To be skilled at providing instructional support (coaching).	Therefore, the mentor is providing instructional and psychological support. Integrity within the meaning of the mentor is a model by profession.
Evaluative support (3)	Positive and open attitude	To be committed to the role of mentoring (belief).	Hardness tender (sensitive) involving objectivity and honesty of the mentor. Ability to use failures as source of learning. Wisdom is a combination of value judgment and bravery. Perseverance in achieving personal development of mentee.
Emotional support (4)	Ability to build trust	To be accepting of the beginning teacher (empathy). To communicate hope and optimism (hope).	Motivation involving that investment confidence in mentee gives it self-confidence.

We tried to describe the 4 types of support mentioned:

(1) Informational support - support the mentee towards developing appropriate professional knowledge and expertise, continuous learning, the mentor is responsible for the development of mentee knowledge of important issues facing the field; The mentor's personal attributes include: being supportive at all stages of learning how to teach and talking about scientific teaching.

(2) Instrumental support – support the mentee offering instructional support, shared experience, teamwork and collegial dialogue towards developing at mentee psycho-pedagogical skills; The mentor's personal attributes include: assists mentees to make the transition from „student to practicing professional”, know how to share that experience with others, talk about practice, assist mentees to reflect on their teaching practices, develop self-efficacy and confidence in the mentee, required for facilitating effective scientific teaching.

(3) Evaluative support - support the mentee towards developing positive attitudes. The mentor's personal attributes include personal attributes for facilitating self-confidence of mentees about teaching and professional-development, and have a strong sense of the situation in order to respond in the most appropriate manner in all

situations. They have management skills, appraise performance, recognize and acknowledge achievements of others and share credit.

(4) Emotional support - support the mentee towards building emotional support, a climate of trust releasing tension and helping people to see things from a different perspective, helping others to recognize and achieve their potential. The mentor's personal attributes include attributes for facilitating the mentee's commitment and motivation for teaching. Mentors manifest high professional self-esteem.

In the second step, we presented the 50 characteristics identified by students to a group of five experts in education sciences from the Department for Teaching Training who distributed them in the 4 categories of support mentioned. After that we have attached to each feature a percentage calculated by the number of references given by students.

3. Results

The results of this study reveal both the qualities and non-qualities of a good mentor. For this reason, besides selecting the most relevant data, non-qualities were transformed into their opposites. Basically we integrated the two perspectives on what students mean by a good mentor. The results can be framed as follows:

Table 2. The mentor-teacher qualities

Type of support	Positive attributes	Negative attributes
Informational support	Professional/ specialist (75%), Self-learning/driver training (25%), Credible (15%)	Disinterested (30%), Misinformed (30%), Uncertain (25%), Make mistakes (25%), Conservative (10%), Superficial (5%) and Elliptical (5%).
Instrumental support	Pedagogical tact (60%), Model/integrity (60%), Passionate/enthusiastic (55%), Sociable (45%), Communicative (45%), Decided (40%), Upright (40%), Patient (35%), Active (35%), Confident (35%), Cooperative (30%), Available (25%), Flexible (20%), Seriously (10%)	Formal/ distant (70%)
Evaluative support	Tolerant (45%), Incentive (25%), Helpful (5%)	Apathetic (90%), Indulgent (70%), Demanding (60%), Critical (50%), Intolerant (45%), Disincentives (20%), Permissive (15%) and Severe (5%).
Emotional support	Balanced emotional (40%), Empathic (35%), Calm (30%), Agreeable (25%), Kind (15%)	4. Coldness / hardness (55%), Aggressive (45%) and Emotional (15%).

A radiograph of the attributes that were mentioned in the percentage of over 50% indicates the most important qualities of a teacher-mentor (Figure 1): Expert (informational support), Pedagogical tact, Model/integrity, Passionate /enthusiastic and in opposition to the rejected attributes Formal/distant – Involved (instructional support), Apathetic-Dynamic, Indulgent - Rigorous, Demanding - Reasonable and Critical – Appreciative (evaluative support) and Coldness / hardness - Sensitive and Aggressive - Non-aggressive (emotional support) .

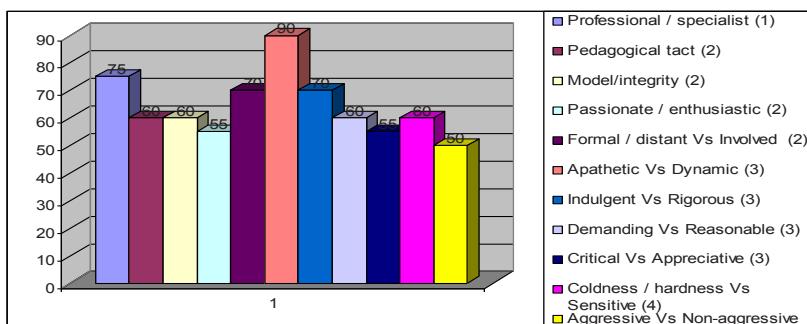


Figure 1. A short radiography of mentor-teacher qualities mentioned by students

5. Conclusions

Support is essential for mentoring, so we identified four types of support based on literature in the field. Later we described these types of support and utilized them in the organization of qualities and non-qualities mentioned by students.

Research has shown that students believe that a good mentor is in the decreasing order of frequency: (1) Dynamic (Evaluative support), (2) Professional/specialist (Informational support), (3) Involved (Instrumental support), (4) Rigorous (Evaluative support), (5) Pedagogical tact and (6) Model integrity (Instrumental support), (7) Reasonable (Evaluative support), (8) Sensitive (Emotional support), (9) Passionate/enthusiastic (Instrumental support), (10) Appreciative (Evaluative support) and (11) Non-aggressive (Emotional support).

These are student expectations about the good qualities of a mentor. But questions may arise concerning: What are the mentor qualities that ensure efficient activities of mentoring? What are the characteristics of a structured mentoring program that determine personality traits necessary to be an effective mentor?

These qualities may constitute relevant information in selecting candidates for admission in mentoring programs. They can also contribute to the development of training curricula for mentors, but also in the evaluation process of the teacher - mentors performance.

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