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INTRODUCTION

The volume "Sharing and Learning for Mentoring in Education" integrates the proceedings of the International Conference "SHARING AND LEARNING FOR MENTORING IN EDUCATION" - ICSLME 2023, organized by the Ministry of National Education in the framework of the strategic project on the development of the teaching career - "Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF" - project ID: POCU/904/6/6/25/146587, in partnership with "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Transilvania University of Brasov, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galati, "George Emil Palade" University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology of Târgu Mureș.

The authors of the paper are higher education teachers, pre-university teachers, educational researchers, experts in initial and in-service teacher training, and specialists in the field of mentoring.

The central message of the volume is that mentoring is a complex, multidimensional, inclusive process of guiding, influencing and supporting - cognitive, metacognitive and non-cognitive (affective, psychomotor and social) - a person at various stages of development in a teaching career (internship, beginning, development and professional evolution, towards the end of the career). As an institutionalized, legislatively and procedurally regulated form of guidance by an experienced teacher (mentor) for teachers at various stages of their professional development, mentoring has the following major aims: facilitating socio-professional integration; providing support for professional, personal and social development; preparing them professionally: educationally, didactically, methodologically and relationally.

Operationalizing this message, the authors of the present volume approach the issue of mentoring from a pragmatic perspective, referring to the new legislative (in Romania and Europe), theoretical and methodological frameworks. The papers include references to national and European policies to support the teaching career in all its stages, starting from the initial training of teachers, continuing with socio-professional insertion, then with continuous professional development, with emphasis on providing motivation for the development of the teaching career. In this respect, modern educational and curricular paradigms are highlighted and good practice systems and mentoring strategies tested and validated in national and international contexts are proposed as responses to the specific challenges of mentoring processes.

Some of the papers present reflections, experiences, practices, investigations and results, arising from the authors' involvement in the strategic project "Professionalisation of the teaching career - PROF" - Project ID: POCU/904/6/6/25/146587.

The volume interests to various actors and professionals involved in or interested in mentoring processes - teachers involved in training, teachers, educational researchers, mentors, school principals, representatives of educational organizations, educational decision-makers, and stakeholders.

MENTORS AS SIGNIFICANT OTHERS – RELEVANCE OF BIOGRAPHICAL WORK IN THE CONTEXT OF MENTORING PROGRAMMES IN SCHOOL-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION

André EPP[1]

Abstract: *Current findings underline that biographical work contributes to the habitualisation of teachers' reflexive engagement with profession-related issues. Socialising into a reflective attitude and supporting biographical professionalization is an explicit goal of mentoring programmes in school-based teacher education. However, elements of biographical work have not yet been used in mentoring. The article not only points out relations between biographical work and mentoring (e.g., the basis of both is a trusting working relationship), but also highlights challenges (such as the hierarchical gap). Especially the latter must be given greater consideration in the context of a more widespread use of biographical work in mentoring.*

Key words: *Biographical work, professionalization, reflections, school-based teacher education, mentoring*

1. Introduction

Mentoring within the framework of practical teacher training has established itself internationally (Clarke, Triggs & Nielsen, 2014; Freiman-Nemser, 1998; Holmes Group, 1995; Stanulis &Floden, 2009). It is a central component of teacher education and is considered an important place for developing professionalism (e.g. Arnold et al., 2011; Schnebel, 2014, Wang & Odell, 2002). From a student perspective, mentors within the framework of practical teacher training make one of the greatest contributions to professional development (Clarke et al., 2014). Nevertheless, its effects are also discussed controversy (Hascher, 2012).

School-based mentoring is characterised through a long-term, dyadic working relationship between an experienced (mentor) and a trainee teacher (mentee). The aim of this (working) relationship is to support and promote the personal and professional development of the mentee (through the expertise and experience of the mentor) in a sense of a socialisation into the profession. These mentors work as regular teachers in their everyday professional lives and are also entrusted with teacher education tasks (Führer & Cramer, 2020, p. 748f.). According to Wang and Odell (2002, p. 498), they act as "agent[s] of change" who can not only initiate a further development of teaching, but in particular promote a reflective attitude and support a professional biographical professionalization.

The ability to reflect is highly valued in teacher education and training and is considered a central

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competence of the teaching profession (Brendt, Häcker & Leonhard, 2017; Schön, 1983, 1987). Schön's concept of the reflexive practitioner has become the guiding principle of teacher education (Leonhard & Abels, 2017, p. 46). It is considered as the gravitational centre of professional teacher work (Neuweg, 2021, p. 460).

The fact that teachers' ways of seeing and looking at things are influenced by their own biographical experiences and that these also have an effect on their reflexivity or reflexive gaze has been documented in particular in biographically oriented studies (Epp, 2022; Fabel-Lamla, 2004). In this regard, not only teachers' own school experiences are currently considered relevant (e.g. Helsper, 2018), but increasingly also those of their private biography (Epp, 2022; Junge, 2020, p. 226), i.e. experiences outside of professional and own school socialisation as a pupil and as a teacher. For professionalization processes, for which reflexivity is constitutive, the linking of professional and private biographies is therefore considered central (Terhart, 2011, p. 208): the overall biography (Fabel-Lamla, 2018). This takes into account that a person's history, which is addressed in one of their roles as a teacher, is also relevant for reflexive references in the context of pedagogical action practice (Junge & Siegert, 2021, p. 160).

With regard to the importance of one's own biographical experiences in terms of reflexivity, current empirical findings (e.g. Epp, 2022) illustrate that biographical work not only promotes a professional distance to one's own biographical experiences (including those of professional constitution) and the reflexive confrontation with one's own being, but that the resulting resonances are also reflected in the professional actions of teachers and become apparent, for example, in the continuous reflexive confrontation with one's own actions. Accordingly, biographical work can also contribute to the habitualisation of teachers' reflexive consideration of profession-related issues (Epp, 2022; Junge & Siegert, 2021), as the examination of one's own biography is part of the professionalization process (Junge & Siegert, 2021, p. 162).

Although biographical work is currently considered particularly relevant with regard to the reflexive examination of one's own actions, it receives – in contrast to other pedagogically oriented study programmes, where it has a long tradition, such as in social work (e.g. Hölzle, 2011; Jansen, 2011) – little attention in teacher training yet (Beier & Piva, 2021; Miethe, 2021). So far only a few developed practical approaches in the context of teacher training exists. These are currently limited to seminar contexts in particular (e.g. Epp, 2023a; Junge & Siegert, 2021, Klomfass, 2021) and have not yet found their way into mentoring programmes. This is surprising, as mentoring programmes in the context of school placements are perceived as important places for the development of professionalism (Arnold et al., 2011; Schnebel, 2014) – especially if they are biographically linked back (Arnold et al., 2011, p. 9). Even if the relevance of biography is emphasized in the context of practical teacher training, it has so far only been addressed marginally. The focus is especially on didactic planning and debriefing of lessons and less on one's own biographical interconnectedness with one's own (teaching) actions. If the biographical dimension is nevertheless addressed, it remains predominantly at the instructional level, as the following question illustrate: “Which lessons have particularly enhanced my learning?” (Arnold et al., 2011, p. 9).

Due to the blank space outlined in broad strokes, the following will focus on the extent to which school placements are at all suitable for establishing (in-depth) biographical references by means of biographical work. First of all, characteristics of biographical work are outlined (2), which are then

related to central premises of mentoring programmes in school-based teacher education in order to show how the former can be used to initiate a professionalization process within the framework of the latter (3). Subsequently, the considerations are critically examined (4).

2. Biographical Work

Biographical work is a pedagogical approach that focuses on working on and with the biography based on a holistic view of the human being. Within this framework, a wide variety of methods are used to stimulate structured self-reflections (Miethe, 2014, p. 24). Reflections on the past serves to understand and shape the present and future. Embedding one's own life story in the historical and social context not only counteracts a truncated view, but also makes it possible to open up new perspectives (Miethe 2014, p. 24), (re)remember what has been forgotten (Epp, 2023b) and thus expand the potential for action (Miethe, 2014, p. 24). In short, (failure) experiences and expectations can be viewed from a different perspective, arranged differently and reinterpreted, i.e. reorganised (Dausien 2005, p. 6).

In addition to productive lines and dynamics of identity development, barriers, problems and dead ends – i.e. processes of failure and crises – can also be explored and addressed and worked on in an inner conversation with oneself (Schütze, 2009). Biographical work can be initiated from the outside (e.g. mentors), for example by supporting individuals in preparing certain actions, but the actual biographical work – as indicated by the inner conversation with oneself – has to be done by the individuals (e.g. mentees) themselves (Epp, 2018, p. 983).

The core of biographical work is directed towards biographical understanding and the further development of the biographers themselves. It supports understanding the having become. How one became the way one is and not otherwise. This understanding of one's own development in turn sensitises one to one's own actions, which also include professional actions. It makes it possible to understand why one acts the way one does and not in a different way - to understand why a situation is viewed and interpreted from that perspective and not from another. Accordingly, biographical work makes it possible to become aware that biographical experiences and the ways of seeing and viewing constituted from them and that they have a selection function or a filter effect (Junge & Siegert, 2021, p. 161), whereby something is not seen or cannot be seen at first. This consequently sensitises to the potential contingency of ways of seeing and looking at things and also keeps questions virulent as to what extent one's own interpretations can be perceived as appropriate at all. Against the background of this attitude, it is thus possible to change or differentiate previous ways of seeing and viewing in the medium of self-reflexive insights and references and thus also to rethink strategies of action.

Biographical work can take place in both formal and informal settings. The former takes place in pedagogical arrangements (e.g. in courses), in which the focus is on conscious biographical work on the part of the leadership and the participants. Biography is thus explicitly named as a topic. In addition, mutual agreements can be made and a clear time frame with start and end is defined. For the latter it is characteristic that it happens in a professional context though, but in everyday situations (e.g. during a conversation in a residential group, during a school break). Thus, quasi incidentally and without those who are the focus of the biographical work necessarily being aware of

it. This is also referred to as implicit biographical work (Miethe, 2014, p. 31f.). Despite these differences, it is essential for both forms that people interact or work together over a longer period of time so that a trusting relationship can be built (Miethe, 2014, p. 35f.).

3. Relations between Biographical Work and Mentoring in School Based Teacher Education

For both biographical work (Miethe, 2014, p. 35f.) and for mentoring in the context of school-based teacher education (Awaya et al., 2003; Stanulis & Russel, 2000; Wenz & Cramer, 2019), relationship work unfolds a fundamental relevance. Since school-practical mentoring involves working together dyadically over a longer period of time, a basic prerequisite for biographical work is given. Accordingly, a sustainable relationship can be established, which is considered important for the students' willingness to open up to learning opportunities in school practice (Führer & Cramer, 2020, p. 748) and (in this setting) also to deal with their own biography.

However, a trusting working relationship does not automatically unfold professionalising effects on the part of the students, but requires challenging learning opportunities, which can be created in pre- and post-teaching discussions (Hobson et al., 2009; Staub & Kreis, 2013). These can not only be used to reflect on the (didactic) development of teaching, but in particular to try to track down biographical elements in professional action and to deal with them reflexively. On the one hand, mentors can illustrate how their own biography condense in their professional actions and how they try to become aware of it. In this context, they can use narrations to communicate their own professional reflection experiences (e.g. to show how they have reflectively dealt with moments of failure in their professional work). On the other hand, they can encourage shifts in perspectives and support the mentees to habitualise reflection processes that oscillate between biographically and professional oriented ones. The mentors can show the mentees how professional action is interwoven with their own biography and why it is so important to reflect this.

Mentors can thus in principle become so-called significant others, i.e. those who have a significant influence on the mentees, as they can socialise them into a reflexive mode with biographical work, the resonances of which are also reflected in professional perspectives and ways of looking at things (far beyond the school placement). This can be done in the sense of formal as well as informal biographical work. Nevertheless, this requires that the mentees are willed to get involved in their own biography and also reveal (excerpts) from it (to the mentors). Furthermore, also the mentors need to have specific knowledge about biographical work (also about possible risks – see below). Although further training courses are not obligatory for mentors many universities offer them (Arnold et al., 2011, p. 62) which must also be supplemented in the future with regard to biographical work.

This is followed by the question which competences mentors need in order to implement suitable biography-oriented didactic approaches – especially against the background of the difficult demarcation of the term biographical work in the direction of (psycho)therapy. Similar to therapeutic approaches biographical work focuses on the biography and the reflexive confrontation with it and also borrowed a large part of its methodological spectrum from it. Despite different relations to each other, biographical work, in contrast to therapeutic settings, nevertheless works more with biographical themes that are consciously accessible and can be reorganised and reinterpreted, or it

deals with preconscious areas, i.e. biographical themes that are not immediately accessible but can be communicated through specific methods or through biographical narration and thus also made more conscious (Miethe, 2014, p. 28ff.). In short: Just as the school placements settings should not be transformed into a kind of master apprenticeship (Arnold et al., 2011, p. 62), biographical work should as well not slide into a therapeutic setting within that framework.

Moreover, not only the mentees need to narrate parts of their biography but also the mentors to illustrate connections between their biography and their actions and to emphasise how they reflexively traced these. This means that both have to open up to communicate biographical experiences.

However, biographical work in the context of school placements must also be critically examined. As already mentioned, the mentors can stimulate certain discussions (with parts of the own biography), but the actual biographical work must be done by the mentees. Accordingly, mentees may also refuse to do biographical work or only pretend to do it in order to maintain the appearance of reflective practice, as this was prescribed. However, more seminaristic contexts are also confronted with this challenge (Langer, 2023).

The fact that biographical work has not yet been used as a didactic tool in the context of school-based mentoring in teacher education may also be related to the manifold challenges that go hand in hand with making one's own (educational) biography and life-historical experiences the subject of reflections. Biographical work cannot be prescribed or forced – especially not in the context of school-based mentoring in teacher education, as this can be perceived as encroaching and even trigger stress due to possible sensitive or hurtful private topics of the students (see as well Epp, 2022, 2023a). Furthermore, the dynamics of biographical work cannot always be clearly anticipated, so that processes can be triggered that were not intended in this way (Miethe, 2014, p. 28). For this reason, ethical concerns are often expressed with regard to implementing biographical work in mentoring programmes of school placements or in seminar-based university teaching. In addition, pedagogically designed spaces do not necessarily have to anticipate biographical work, but can also prevent it (Dausien, 2011, p. 115) – even when working with well-considered and reflected didactic approaches. Despite a trusting working relationship, it should not be neglected that the mentor-mentee relationship is fundamentally characterised by a hierarchical and asymmetrical gradient which can also complicate biographical work.

4. Conclusion and Outlook

It was outlined that mentoring within the framework of practical teacher training provides excellent conditions for implementing biographical work (e.g. longer joint working relationship). Nevertheless, there are also challenges that must be addressed and not neglected. The extent to which biographical work, with which self-/reflections can be promoted, will increasingly find its way into the mentoring programme in the future depends not only on the challenges, but also on the extent to which certain (further) trainings are obligatory for the mentors in order to realise the most professional initiation possible. In addition, mentoring programmes that use biographical work need to be researched in order to empirically clarify the extent to which those settings promote students' professionalization processes.

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TRANSITION FROM MENTEE TO MENTOR

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Abstract: *This is a significant milestone in the professional growth and development of individuals in various fields. This paper aims to explore and analyze the process, challenges, and key factors involved in the journey from being a mentee to becoming a mentor. Drawing from existing literature, empirical research, and personal experiences, this paper provides insights into the multifaceted aspects of this transition and offers recommendations for supporting individuals in their developmental journey. The paper highlights the importance of self-reflection, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and mindset shift as critical elements in the successful transition from a mentee to a mentor.*

Key words: *mentorship, personal growth, professional development, leadership skills, communication skills, lifelong learning*

1. Introduction

The transition from a mentee to a mentor marks a crucial phase in an individual's professional journey, signifying significant growth, development, and the assumption of new responsibilities. This transition occurs across various domains, including academia, corporate settings, healthcare, and many others, where mentorship plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' careers and fostering professional success.

The purpose of this paper is to delve into the process, challenges, and key factors involved in the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor. By exploring the existing literature, empirical research, and personal experiences, we aim to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations to support individuals on their developmental journey from mentee to mentor.

Within the field of mentoring, ample attention has been given to the benefits and dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationship. However, there is a dearth of comprehensive exploration regarding the transition from mentee to mentor, which necessitates a focused investigation. Understanding this transition is crucial as it enables individuals to effectively navigate the shift in roles, responsibilities, and expectations, ultimately maximizing their impact as mentors.

Throughout this paper, we will examine the theoretical underpinnings of mentoring and professional development, identifying key concepts and constructs that inform the mentee-to-mentor transition. We will explore the stages or phases involved in this transition, highlighting the milestones, challenges, and factors that influence the process.

Additionally, we will investigate the role of self-reflection and personal growth, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and continuous development. Acquiring knowledge and developing

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essential skills will be explored as integral components of the transition, elucidating the competencies required for effective mentoring.

Furthermore, we will analyse the mindset shifts and role identity that occur during the transition, emphasizing the transformation of individuals' perspectives, beliefs, and self-perception. The influence of mentoring relationships, both formal and informal, will be examined, considering the dynamics, support, and guidance provided by experienced mentors.

Moreover, the paper will acknowledge the significance of organizational support and contextual factors in facilitating or impeding the mentee-to-mentor transition. Cultural, institutional, and environmental aspects will be explored to better understand the complexities inherent in this transition process.

By providing a comprehensive analysis of the mentee-to-mentor transition, this paper aims to contribute to the existing literature, offering valuable insights and practical implications for individuals, organizations, and mentoring programs. It is our hope that this exploration will assist individuals in successfully navigating this important developmental phase and enable organizations to create supportive environments that foster effective mentorship.

The mentor-mentee relationship provides a unique opportunity for individuals to acquire knowledge, skills, and guidance from experienced mentors who have traversed similar paths (Kram, K. E., 1985). Mentees benefit from the wisdom, expertise, and support of their mentors, enabling them to navigate challenges, set goals, and achieve their full potential. However, as mentees progress in their journey, they often find themselves at a pivotal point where they can transition from being a mentee to assuming the role of a mentor (Allen, T. D., 2004).

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this paper are twofold: first, to explore and analyse the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor, and second, to provide insights and recommendations to support individuals on their developmental journey during this transition.

To achieve these objectives, the paper will:

1. Examine existing literature and empirical research on the mentee-to-mentor transition, drawing from a range of disciplines and professional contexts.
2. Identify and discuss the stages, milestones, and challenges involved in the mentee-to-mentor transition.
3. Explore the key factors and influences that shape the transition process, including personal growth, skill development, mindset shifts, and socialization.
4. Investigate the role of mentoring relationships, both formal and informal, in facilitating the transition and fostering mentorship capabilities.
5. Analyse the impact of organizational support and contextual factors on the mentee-to-mentor transition.
6. Provide practical recommendations and implications for individuals, organizations, and mentoring programs to support a successful transition from mentee to mentor.
7. Highlight areas for further research and exploration in understanding the dynamics of the mentee-to-mentor transition.

The scope of the paper is to explore the transformative journey from being a mentee to becoming a mentor and shed light on the profound impact of mentorship on personal and professional growth. However, it is important to note that the paper does not cover every aspect related to mentorship or delve into specific mentoring programs or interventions in detail. Instead, it provides a broad overview and analysis of the mentee-to-mentor transition, aiming to contribute to the existing literature and stimulate further research in this area.

Understanding the evolution from mentee to mentor is vital not only for individuals embarking on this transition but also for organizations and institutions seeking to foster a culture of mentorship and growth. By examining the challenges and opportunities inherent in this journey, this paper will provide valuable insights into how mentorship can be harnessed to cultivate a cadre of effective mentors capable of nurturing the next generation of talented individuals.

Through this exploration, we aim to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on mentorship by shedding light on the unique dynamics, benefits, and challenges associated with the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor. By doing so, we seek to inspire individuals to embark on this journey and encourage organizations and institutions to recognize the importance of mentorship in fostering personal and professional growth.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

To understand the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor, it is important to explore relevant theoretical models and frameworks that shed light on mentoring relationships, professional development, and identity formation. The following theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for analysing the mentee-to-mentor transition:

1. Social Cognitive Theory: Social Cognitive Theory, developed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the role of observational learning, self-efficacy, and personal agency in shaping behaviour (Bandura, A., 1986). Applying this theory to the mentee-to-mentor transition, individuals observe and learn from their mentors' behaviours, develop self-efficacy beliefs in their own mentoring abilities, and exercise agency in assuming the mentor role.

2. Stages of Professional Development: Various models propose distinct stages of professional development, including the novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert stages. These models, such as Dreyfus and Dreyfus's Skill Acquisition Model or Gartner's Five Stages of Mentoring Development, provide a framework for understanding the progression from being a mentee in the novice stage to becoming a mentor in the expert stage.

3. Identity Theory: Identity theory explores the development of personal and professional identities (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In the context of the mentee-to-mentor transition, identity theory helps explain how individuals navigate the transformation of their role identity, integrating the mentor role into their self-concept and professional identity.

4. Socialization Theory: Socialization theory examines how individuals internalize the values, norms, and practices of a specific social group or profession. As individuals transition from mentee to mentor, they undergo a process of socialization, adapting to the expectations and responsibilities associated with the mentor role within their specific professional context.

5. Transformational Learning Theory: developed by Jack Mezirow, focuses on the process of

transformative learning that occurs through critical reflection, challenging assumptions, and reconstructing meaning. This theory is relevant to the mentee-to-mentor transition as individuals critically reflect on their own learning experiences, challenge their existing beliefs and assumptions, and construct new understandings to guide their mentoring practice.

6. Relational Mentoring Framework: was proposed by Rhodes and DuBois and highlights the importance of relational processes in mentoring. It emphasizes the mentor's role in providing emotional support, guidance, and opportunities for mentees to develop their own expertise. Understanding this framework assists in examining how individuals transition from receiving mentorship to actively engaging in reciprocal relationships as mentors.

These theoretical perspectives provide a lens through which to analyse the mentee-to-mentor transition, considering the cognitive, developmental, identity-related, socialization, and relational aspects involved. By drawing on these frameworks, we can gain deeper insights into the factors, challenges, and transformative processes that occur as individuals progress along their mentoring journey.

The mentor-mentee relationship it is characterized by a mutual commitment to learning growth, and development. The mentor assumes the role of a guide, advisor, and role model, offering support, guidance, and sharing valuable insights based on their own experiences and expertise. The mentee, on the other hand, seeks knowledge, advice, and guidance from the mentor to navigate their personal and professional journey (Clutterbuck, D. (2019).

The dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationship are characterized by trust, respect, and open communication. Mentors create a safe and supportive environment where mentees feel comfortable sharing their aspirations, challenges, and goals. Through regular interactions, mentors provide guidance, offer feedback, and help mentees identify areas for improvement (Ragins, B. R., Kram, K. E., 2007).

2.2. Role of Mentorship in Personal and Professional Development

The mentor-mentee relationship plays a pivotal role in personal and professional development. Mentors serve as catalysts for growth, helping mentees build self-confidence, develop critical skills, and expand their knowledge base (Ragins, B. R., Kram, K. E., 2007). Through their guidance and support, mentors offer mentees access to valuable networks, resources, and opportunities for personal and professional advancement (Goodsett, M., 2021).

In the realm of personal development, mentors help mentees identify their strengths, talents, and areas for improvement. They provide guidance on goal setting, time management, and self-reflection, enabling mentees to enhance their self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Mentors also help mentees navigate challenges, providing a valuable sounding board for problem-solving and decision-making.

Professionally, mentors assist mentees in developing key skills necessary for success in their chosen field. They offer insights into industry trends, best practices, and potential career paths. Mentors may provide feedback on projects, help mentees expand their professional networks, and offer recommendations for further training or educational opportunities (Roche, G., Haar, J., 2017). The mentor-mentee relationship fosters a supportive environment that nurtures mentees' professional growth and empowers them to achieve their career aspirations.

The mentor-mentee relationship is a symbiotic one, with both parties benefiting from the interaction. Mentors find fulfilment in imparting knowledge, contributing to the growth of the mentees, and leaving a lasting impact on their lives. Mentees gain from the wealth of experience, expertise, and guidance offered by mentors, propelling their personal and professional growth (Roche, G., Haar, J., 2017).

As mentors embark on their journey, they must cultivate and enhance their leadership and communication skills. Effective mentors possess the ability to listen actively, ask thought-provoking questions, and provide constructive feedback. They create an atmosphere that encourages mentees to openly express their ideas, concerns, and aspirations.

Mentors also foster leadership skills in their mentees by providing opportunities for them to take on new responsibilities, make decisions, and lead projects. Through mentoring, mentors help mentees develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities. They encourage mentees to set goals, create action plans, and monitor their progress. Mentors serve as role models, showcasing effective leadership practices and guiding mentees towards developing their own leadership style (Allen, T. and others, 2004).

One of the significant benefits of serving as a mentor is the opportunity to reinforce and expand one's own knowledge and expertise. By sharing their knowledge with mentees, mentors reinforce their own understanding and gain a fresh perspective on their field of expertise (Allen, T. D., and others ,2004).

As mentors engage with mentees who may bring new ideas or approaches, mentors are exposed to different viewpoints and innovative thinking (Meschitti, V., and others, 2014). This exposure can spark new ideas, challenge existing beliefs, and encourage mentors to continue their own professional development.

3. The Journey and Transition Process for Becoming a Mentor

The transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor is a significant milestone in one's personal and professional journey. Mentors who have experienced the benefits of mentorship first-hand are often inspired to give back and contribute to the growth of others. This transition involves a shift in mindset from receiving guidance and support to actively providing it (Zachary, L. J., 2012).

Mentors draw on their own experiences, successes, and failures to guide and support their mentees. They reflect on their journey and identify the lessons learned, seeking to impart these insights to the next generation. Mentors embrace their role as teachers, advisors, and role models, recognizing the impact they can have on their mentees' lives (Garringer, M., MacRae, P., 2008).

This transition involves a dynamic and multifaceted process, encompassing various stages, milestones, and challenges. Understanding this transition process is essential for individuals aiming to navigate and succeed in their new role as mentors.

There are different stages of transition. Many models propose distinct stages or phases involved in the transition from mentee to mentor. For instance, Dreyfus and Dreyfus's Skill Acquisition Model suggests a progression from novice to expert, while Gartner's Five Stages of Mentoring Development (2006) highlights stages such as initiation, cultivation, and separation. These models provide valuable

insights into the developmental journey from mentee to mentor (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986; Gartner, 2006).

Throughout the transition, individuals encounter significant milestones and face various challenges. These may include establishing a new professional identity as a mentor, managing increased responsibility and accountability, adapting to changing relationships with former mentors, and developing the necessary skills to guide and support mentees effectively.

There are several factors which influence the successful transition from mentee to mentor. These factors encompass personal growth, self-reflection, and the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Chen and Liu (2014) emphasize the role of self-reflection in facilitating the mentee-to-mentor transition. Additionally, Davis and Williams (2012) examine the impact of knowledge acquisition and skill development on mentorship effectiveness.

The mentor-mentee relationship plays a critical role during the transition process. As individuals shift from being mentees to mentors, the nature of their relationship with former mentors evolves. Anderson and Shannon (1988) investigate the influence of mentoring relationships on professional development during this transition, highlighting the importance of ongoing support and guidance from experienced mentors.

The availability of organizational support and the broader contextual environment significantly influence the mentee-to-mentor transition. Organizational support may include mentorship training programs, resources for professional development, and opportunities for networking.

The journey of becoming a mentor begins with recognizing the potential of individuals who would benefit from guidance and support (Clutterbuck, D., 2019). Mentors often possess a keen ability to identify promising mentees who demonstrate a thirst for knowledge, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to learn and grow. They seek individuals who exhibit passion, drive, and a commitment to their personal and professional development.

Identifying mentee potential involves observing individuals within one's network or community who show potential for growth and advancement (Allen, T. and others, 2004). Mentors may look for qualities such as curiosity, motivation, and a willingness to take on challenges. It is important for mentors to recognize that potential can exist in individuals from various backgrounds and experiences, and to be opened to mentoring individuals who may differ from themselves (Ragins, B. R., Kram, K. E., 2007).

Acquisition of knowledge and skill development are essential aspects of the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor. Mentors need to continuously expand their knowledge base, acquire new skills, and refine existing ones in order to effectively guide and support their mentees. They are different types of acquisitions:

1. Knowledge Acquisition: Mentors must possess a solid foundation of subject matter expertise and a thorough understanding of relevant theories, research, and best practices in their respective fields. They should stay updated with current trends, emerging technologies, and advancements in their areas of expertise. Knowledge acquisition can be achieved through various means, such as attending conferences, workshops, and seminars, engaging in further education or advanced training programs, and staying connected to scholarly literature in their field. By continuously expanding their knowledge, mentors can provide accurate and up-to-date information to their mentees, fostering a supportive learning environment.

2. Skill Development: Alongside knowledge acquisition, mentors must develop a range of skills that are crucial for effective mentoring. These skills include active listening, effective communication, empathy, problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability. Skill development can be facilitated through mentorship training programs, professional development workshops, and mentor support networks. Mentors can also engage in reflective practice, seeking feedback from mentees and colleagues to identify areas for improvement and growth. By honing their skills, mentors become better equipped to guide and support mentees in their personal and professional development journeys.

3. Reflective Practice: Reflective practice plays a significant role in the acquisition of knowledge and skill development. Mentors should engage in self-reflection and critically evaluate their own mentoring practices. Reflective practice involves examining one's actions, experiences, and outcomes to gain insights and make improvements. Mentors can reflect on their interactions with mentees, identify effective strategies and areas for improvement, and adapt their approaches accordingly. Through reflective practice, mentors can enhance their self-awareness, refine their mentoring techniques, and continuously learn and grow in their role.

4. Ongoing Learning: The acquisition of knowledge and skill development should be viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Mentors should cultivate a growth mindset, embracing a lifelong learning approach. They should actively seek out opportunities for professional development, engage in mentoring networks and communities of practice, and collaborate with colleagues to share experiences and exchange ideas. By prioritizing continuous learning, mentors can remain at the forefront of their field and provide the most relevant and impactful guidance to their mentees.

4 Overcoming Challenges in the Mentor-Mentee Relationship. Mindset shift

The mentor-mentee relationship is not without its challenges. Mentors must navigate potential obstacles such as generational differences, varying expectations, and communication styles. They strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment that respects the mentees' unique perspectives and backgrounds.

Mentors also face the challenge of balancing their own commitments and responsibilities while providing adequate time and attention to their mentees. It is crucial for mentors to establish clear boundaries and expectations to ensure a healthy and sustainable mentorship relationship.

Furthermore, mentors may encounter mentees who face obstacles and setbacks in their journey. Mentors play a crucial role in providing support, encouragement, and guidance during these challenging times. They help mentees develop resilience, perseverance, and problem-solving skills to overcome obstacles and continue their growth (Clutterbuck, D., 2019).

By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, mentors ensure the longevity and effectiveness of the mentor-mentee relationship, fostering an environment conducive to growth and development.

Mindset shifts and role identity are significant aspects of the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor. As individuals progress in their mentoring journey, they undergo transformative changes in their thinking patterns, beliefs, and self-perception.

1. Mindset Shifts: Mindset refers to the underlying beliefs and attitudes that shape an individual's behaviour, motivation, and approach to challenges. During the mentee-to-mentor transition, individuals often experience mindset shifts that impact their mindset from that of a learner to that of a guide or facilitator (Hattie, J., 2012). Some key mindset shifts include:

a. Expertise Mindset: Mentors develop a mindset that recognizes and values their expertise and the knowledge they have gained through their experiences. They shift from seeking knowledge and guidance to sharing their expertise with mentees.

b. Growth Mindset: Mentors embrace a growth mindset, believing in their own capacity for continuous learning, improvement, and development. They see challenges as opportunities for growth and view mistakes as valuable learning experiences.

c. Empowerment Mindset: Mentors adopt an empowerment mindset, focusing on empowering their mentees to take ownership of their learning, make decisions, and achieve their goals. They shift from a dependency on guidance to fostering independence and self-efficacy in their mentees.

2. Role Identity: Role identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves in a specific social role or position. During the mentee-to-mentor transition, individuals undergo a transformation in their role identity as they move from being mentees to assuming the responsibilities and expectations of a mentor (Covey, S. R., 2004). Some key aspects of role identity in the transition include:

a. Integration of Mentee and Mentor Identities: Mentors find a way to integrate their experiences as mentees into their emerging identity as mentors. They draw upon their own experiences as mentees to empathize with and better understand the needs and challenges of their mentees.

b. Self-Perception as a Guide and Supporter: Mentors develop a self-perception that they are guides and supporters for their mentees, providing guidance, advice, and a safe space for mentees to explore, reflect, and grow. They see themselves as facilitators of learning and development.

c. Responsibility and Accountability: Mentors embrace a sense of responsibility and accountability for the growth and success of their mentees. They recognize that their actions and guidance directly impact the mentees' development and take ownership of their role in supporting and mentoring others.

3. Professional Identity Formation: The mentee-to-mentor transition also contributes to the formation of a professional identity as mentors. Mentors develop a sense of belonging to the community of mentors within their field, adopting the values, ethics, and practices associated with effective mentoring. They align their professional identity with the goals and expectations of their profession, establishing themselves as trusted and respected mentors.

Mindset shifts and role identity are transformative processes that occur during the mentee-to-mentor transition. By embracing a mindset of expertise, growth, and empowerment, and developing a strong role identity as a mentor, individuals are better equipped to navigate their new responsibilities and positively impact the growth and development of their mentees.

Finally, mindset shifts, and role identity are critical aspects of the mentee-to-mentor transition. Mentors undergo transformative changes in their mindset, embracing expertise, growth, and empowerment. They also develop a distinct role identity, integrating their mentee experiences, perceiving themselves as guides and supporters, and taking on responsibility and accountability. These shifts in mindset and role identity contribute to the formation of a professional identity as mentors, enabling them to effectively mentor and guide their mentees.

4.1. Self-reflection, Personal Growth and Professional Recognition

Self-reflection and personal growth play crucial roles in the transition from being a mentee to becoming a mentor. Self-reflection refers to the process of introspection and examining one's thoughts, emotions, and experiences (Schön, D. A., 1983). It involves looking inward to gain self-awareness, critically evaluate one's strengths and areas for improvement, and make meaning of one's experiences (Hatton, N., Smith, D., 1995). Personal growth, on the other hand, entails the intentional and continuous development of one's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs.

During the mentee-to-mentor transition, self-reflection serves as a powerful tool for individuals to gain insights into their own experiences as mentees and how those experiences can shape their future mentoring practices. It allows mentors to reflect on their own strengths, weaknesses, and values, enabling them to better understand how they can contribute to the growth and development of their mentees. Self-reflection also helps mentors identify biases, assumptions, and blind spots that may influence their interactions with mentees, allowing them to actively work on addressing and overcoming these challenges (Hatton, N., Smith, D., 1995).

Personal growth is closely intertwined with self-reflection, as it requires individuals to engage in intentional efforts to expand their knowledge base, develop new skills, and enhance their abilities as mentors. Mentors who are committed to personal growth actively seek opportunities for professional development, such as attending workshops, conferences, or engaging in further education. They continuously seek feedback from their mentees and colleagues, embracing a growth mindset that allows them to learn from both successes and challenges.

Engaging in self-reflection and personal growth also fosters mentors' ability to adapt to the evolving needs and expectations of their mentees. By regularly reflecting on their own growth, mentors can stay informed about current trends, research, and best practices in their respective fields (Moon, J. A., 1999). They are better equipped to provide up-to-date guidance, advice, and support to their mentees.

Self-reflection and personal growth are not isolated activities; they are ongoing processes that require dedication, openness, and a commitment to continuous learning. Mentors who actively engage in self-reflection and personal growth are more likely to model these behaviours to their mentees, inspiring them to embark on their own journeys of self-discovery and professional development.

Finally, self-reflection and personal growth are integral components of the mentee-to-mentor transition. They empower mentors to gain self-awareness, challenge their assumptions, and continuously develop their knowledge and skills. By nurturing these practices, mentors can enhance their effectiveness, build meaningful relationships with their mentees, and contribute to their mentees' growth and success.

Mentorship provides mentors with an opportunity to enhance their professional reputation and recognition within their field. By actively contributing to the growth and development of others, mentors establish themselves as leaders and experts in their respective domains. This recognition can lead to increased visibility, career advancement opportunities, and a broader network of professional connections (Allen, T., and others, 2004).

Furthermore, mentoring can serve as a platform for mentors to showcase their leadership and mentoring skills. The ability to effectively guide, inspire, and empower others is highly valued in many professional settings. Mentoring experiences can be highlighted on resumes, during job interviews, and in professional profiles, demonstrating a commitment to continuous learning and a willingness to invest in the success of others (Zachary, L. J., 2012).

Mentoring is often a deeply rewarding and fulfilling experience for mentors. Witnessing the growth and success of mentees and knowing that one has made a positive impact on their lives, brings a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Mentors derive a sense of fulfilment from knowing that they have played a role in shaping the future generation of professionals (Zachary, L. J., 2012, Roche, G., & Haar, J., 2017).

Mentoring relationships often foster long-lasting connections and friendships, providing mentors with a valuable support network and a sense of belonging (Zachary, L. J., 2012).

The skills developed through mentoring, such as effective communication, leadership, and empathy, can have a positive impact on other areas of mentors' personal and professional lives.

Fostering successful mentorship relationships is crucial for the growth and development of both mentors and mentees. A strong and supportive mentorship bond contributes to effective knowledge transfer, skill development, and personal and professional growth (Kram, K.E., 1985).

Each mentee is unique, with different strengths, aspirations, and areas for improvement. Successful mentors recognize and embrace these individual differences. They take the time to understand the specific needs and goals of their mentees and tailor their guidance and support accordingly. Mentors provide personalized advice, resources, and opportunities that align with the mentees' interests and aspirations. This tailored approach fosters a sense of relevance and investment, enabling mentees to maximize their growth potential.

4.2. Mentorship as a Vehicle for Diversity and Inclusion

Mentorship can indeed serve as a powerful vehicle for promoting diversity and inclusion in various contexts, including workplaces, educational institutions, and communities. Here are some keyways in which mentorship can contribute to diversity and inclusion:

a) Access to Networks: Mentoring provides access to established networks and connections that may otherwise be difficult for individuals from marginalized groups to access. This exposure can open doors to new opportunities, collaborations, and professional development.

b) Skill Development: Mentors can offer guidance and share their knowledge and expertise, helping mentees develop essential skills and competencies. This mentorship-driven skill development can enhance the mentees' confidence, competence, and readiness for leadership positions.

c) Increased Representation: Mentors from underrepresented groups can serve as role models, demonstrating that success is attainable regardless of one's background. Visible representation can inspire mentees and foster a sense of belonging, motivating them to pursue their goals and aspirations.

d) Overcoming Bias and Stereotypes: Mentorship can challenge and counteract unconscious bias and stereotypes that may limit the opportunities available to individuals from diverse backgrounds. By building relationships based on mutual trust and respect, mentors can help mentees navigate these challenges and build resilience.

e) Cultural Competence: Through mentorship, individuals can gain exposure to different perspectives, experiences, and cultural contexts. This exposure fosters cultural competence, empathy, and an inclusive mindset, creating a more diverse and inclusive environment overall.

f) Breaking Barriers: Mentors can help mentees navigate institutional barriers and systemic challenges they may face, providing insights and strategies for success. This support can be instrumental in breaking down barriers and advancing the representation of marginalized groups.

g) Long-term Impact: The positive effects of mentorship can extend beyond the immediate mentoring relationship. Mentees who have benefited from mentoring often become mentors themselves, creating a ripple effect and promoting a culture of diversity, inclusion, and support.

It is important to note that effective mentorship programs should be intentional in their design, ensuring that mentors are trained in cultural competence and understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by mentees from underrepresented groups. Additionally, organizations should create an inclusive and supportive environment that values diversity and actively promotes mentorship opportunities for all individuals.

Mentorship plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of lifelong learning. It encourages individuals to embrace continuous learning and personal development throughout their lives. Mentors serve as catalysts for growth, inspiring mentees to seek new knowledge, acquire new skills, and adapt to evolving circumstances. By modelling a commitment to learning, mentors instil a mindset of curiosity and continuous improvement in their mentees.

Mentorship relationships provide mentees with valuable learning opportunities beyond formal education. Mentors share practical insights, real-world experiences, and wisdom gained over years of professional practice (Zachary, L. J., 2012). This informal and experiential learning complements formal education, allowing mentees to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Mentorship plays a crucial role in knowledge transfer and succession planning within organizations and industries. Experienced mentors pass down their expertise, institutional knowledge, and best practices to the next generation of professionals. This transfer of knowledge ensures continuity and preserves valuable insights that might otherwise be lost with retirements or transitions (Garringer, M., MacRae, P., 2008).

By actively engaging in mentorship, organizations and industries can cultivate a pipeline of skilled individuals ready to assume leadership positions. Mentors groom mentees for future roles, nurturing their potential and preparing them for the challenges and responsibilities that lie ahead. Mentorship serves as a mechanism for preserving and transferring the collective wisdom and expertise accumulated over time.

5. Implications, recommendations, and conclusion

Some of the implications for the mentoring process are presented here:

1. Mentor Preparation: Mentors need proper preparation to transition from being mentees to mentors successfully. This includes acquiring knowledge and skills specific to mentoring, understanding the roles and responsibilities of mentors, and developing self-awareness about their strengths and areas for growth as mentors.

2. Ongoing Support: Mentors require ongoing support throughout the mentee-to-mentor transition process. This support can be in the form of mentor training programs, access to resources and materials, networking opportunities with other mentors, and opportunities for mentor reflection and continuous learning.

3. Organizational Commitment: Organizations should demonstrate a commitment to mentoring by providing resources, creating a mentoring-friendly culture, and implementing mentoring policies and guidelines. This commitment reinforces the importance of mentoring and creates a supportive environment for mentors to thrive.

4. Recognition and Rewards: Recognizing and rewarding mentors for their contributions can enhance their motivation and engagement in the mentoring process. This can be done through acknowledging their efforts, providing opportunities for professional growth and development, and celebrating their successes as mentors.

Recommendations:

1. Mentorship Programs: Organizations should establish formal mentorship programs that facilitate the mentee-to-mentor transition. These programs should provide mentor training, match mentors with mentees based on relevant criteria, and offer ongoing support and resources for mentors.

2. Mentoring Networks and Communities: Creating mentoring networks and communities within the organization or professional field can provide mentors with additional support, opportunities for collaboration, and sharing of best practices. Peer mentoring and mentor support groups can foster a sense of belonging and continuous learning among mentors.

3. Feedback and Evaluation: Organizations should implement feedback and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of mentoring relationships and identify areas for improvement. Regular feedback from both mentors and mentees can help refine mentoring practices and enhance the overall mentoring experience.

4. Mentee Empowerment: Mentees should be empowered to take an active role in their own mentoring process. They should be encouraged to articulate their goals, seek feedback, and actively engage in the mentoring relationship. Mentees can develop their mentoring skills by reflecting on their experiences and seeking opportunities for reciprocal learning with their mentors.

5. Continuous Professional Development: Mentors should engage in continuous professional development activities to enhance their mentoring skills and stay updated on best practices. This can include attending workshops, conferences, or webinars focused on mentoring, participating in mentorship training programs, or pursuing relevant certifications.

6. Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusion: Mentoring programs should be sensitive to cultural differences and promote inclusivity. Recognizing and valuing diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences can enrich the mentoring relationship and contribute to its effectiveness.

This paper has explored the transformative journey from being a mentee to becoming a mentor, highlighting the profound impact of mentorship on personal and professional growth. We examined the dynamics of the mentor-mentee relationship, emphasizing the importance of trust, respect, and open communication. The journey of becoming a mentor involves identifying mentee potential, nurturing leadership and communication skills, and transitioning from the mentee role to that of a mentor (Clutterbuck, D., 2019).

We also discussed the benefits for mentors, including the reinforcement and expansion of knowledge, professional recognition and growth, and personal fulfilment and satisfaction. Successful

mentorship relationships were found to be fostered through the establishment of clear expectations and boundaries, tailored mentorship to individual needs, providing constructive feedback and support, and creating opportunities for skill development.

While this paper has provided insights into the journey from mentee to mentor, there are several avenues for future research. Further exploration is needed to understand the long-term impact of mentorship on the careers and personal lives of individuals who have transitioned from mentees to mentors. Additionally, investigating the specific skills and qualities that make individuals effective mentors can provide valuable guidance for mentorship programs and initiatives.

Furthermore, research can delve into the intersectionality of mentorship, examining how factors such as gender, race, and cultural backgrounds influence mentorship dynamics and outcomes. Understanding the diverse experiences and perspectives within mentorship relationships can inform strategies for promoting inclusivity and equality.

Mentorship is a powerful vehicle for personal and professional growth, both for mentees and mentors. As individuals transition from being mentees to taking on the role of mentors, they embark on a journey that involves sharing their knowledge, experiences, and insights to guide and empower others. The reciprocal nature of mentorship reinforces and expands the mentors' own knowledge and skills, while also providing them with a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction.

Creating a culture of mentorship is essential for fostering lifelong learning and development. Organizations, institutions, and communities should recognize the importance of mentorship in nurturing talent, promoting diversity and inclusion, and cultivating a supportive environment for growth. By investing in mentorship programs and initiatives, we can harness the potential of mentorship to shape the future generation of professionals and foster continuous learning and advancement.

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(RE)THINKING THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN SPAIN: CHALLENGES AND PROPOSALS FOR INITIAL AND CONTINUED TEACHER TRAINING

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Abstract: *Teacher training is fundamental to a well-functioning school system. Indeed, teachers are one of the most influential factors in the quality of school education (Hattie, 2003) and are the key tool for pupils' learning and for providing them with the best preparation for adult life and society (European Commission, 2018, 2021). This chapter describes and analyses the situation of teacher training in Spain, and in particular in the Balearic Islands, using an example of a teacher training improvement plan based on values such as environmental sustainability and interculturality in order to adapt to a constantly changing reality. In conclusion, some proposals for improvement and future scenarios for teacher training are presented.*

Key words: *Initial Teacher Education, In-Service Teacher Education, Continuing Professional Development, Environmental Education, Intercultural Education.*

1. Introduction

Teacher education is fundamental to the proper functioning of the school system. In fact, teachers have been identified as one of the most influential factors in the quality of school education (Hattie, 2003). The most recent reports of the European Commission recognise teachers as the key tool for students' learning and for providing them with the best preparation for adult life and society (European Commission, 2018, 2021). However, these reports also highlight that the teaching profession is becoming unattractive and in demand by young people: the teaching profession continues to be socially undervalued, undervalued, underpaid and under-supported (UNESCO, 2021). Hence the need to redesign the professional career of teachers, reformulating it on the basis of full cohesion between initial and in-service teacher training; training that guarantees competence, professional development and commitment to the inclusive nature of education, which means guaranteeing the right to quality education for all children, young people and adults, and bearing in mind at all times that this will be the only way to achieve, as a society, a sustainable collective future.

In this sense, Higher Education institutions, the universities, have the responsibility to train new educational professionals capable of transforming this devalued image of the teacher while at the same time transforming their own environment. This is because Higher Education institutions, given their socio-cultural role (UNESCO, 2021), must in fact promote the valuing of cultural diversity, the

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commitment to the defence of human rights and intolerance towards racism, sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and discrimination in all its forms.

On the other hand, it should be borne in mind that, in Spain, the 1978 Constitution establishes a model of public administration that acts in accordance with the principles of efficiency, hierarchy, decentralisation, deconcentration and coordination, with the exercise of educational competences being distributed among all administrative levels (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2023). In this way, educational competences are distributed among the General State Administration (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training), the Autonomous Communities (through Regional Ministries or Departments of Education), the local administrations (with the Councils of Education or Municipal Institutes of Education) and, finally, the educational centres (thanks to the autonomy they have at the pedagogical level and in the economic management of resources).

In turn, and based on the recent implementation of what is known as LOMLOE (Ley Orgánica 3/2020), it should be taken into account that this law (in an attempt to respond to new social demands) considers essential the inclusion of a specific area or subject of Education in Civic and Ethical Values, with content related to Human and Children's Rights, sustainable development and global citizenship, as well as values such as respect for diversity. In addition, the Act also promotes values such as the recognition of the culture and history of ethnic minorities, especially the Roma people. In this way, legislation is simply adapting to the social and educational needs of reality, promoting key aspects among citizens such as environmental sustainability (through Environmental Education -EE-) and ethnocultural diversity (based on Attention to Diversity -AD-).

Within this model and taking into account the distribution of educational competences described above, this chapter will review the initial training (provided by universities) and in-service training (mainly, but not only, provided by the educational administration itself) of teaching professionals at infant, primary and secondary education levels. This will make it possible to show, based on some of the needs detected in the training system itself, an example of an improvement plan carried out in the particular context of the Autonomous Community of the Balearic Islands, in order to finally conclude on possible strategic lines of action that will enable further progress to be made in guaranteeing the quality of teacher training.

1.1. Initial Teacher Training

Initial teacher education for pre-school, primary and secondary school teachers is provided at universities. The first two trainings are bachelor's degrees. That of secondary teachers, is a master's degree which is carried out based on the specialisation of the student's bachelor's degree. In Spain, this training is regulated by different educational regulations set at a national level which each university, within its margin of autonomy, must transpose into their respective curricula.

With regard to the curriculum for the training of early childhood education teachers, the regulations establish that students of the degree must acquire two competences that could be considered to be related to environmental sustainability and cultural diversity (Order ECI/3854/2007). As for primary education teachers, it is established by law that they must acquire up to three competences related to sustainability and cultural diversity (Order ECI/3857/2007). However, a study carried out in 2013 (Sureda, Oliver, Catalán, Comas and Álvarez, 2013) analysing

the treatment of Environmental Education (EE) in primary teacher training curricula concluded that of the 23 universities analysed, only 39% of them included it, either as a specific subject or in the content of other subjects. On the other hand, with regard to the treatment of ethnic minorities, a total of 12 universities that offer a degree in early childhood education do not have any specific subject referring to attention to families and cultural diversity (Morey-López, Oliver-Barceló, Ferrer-Ribot & Vecina-Merchante, 2022).

Finally, the regulations governing the initial training of secondary education teachers establish a competence related to environmental sustainability and also only one related to attention to cultural diversity (Order ECI/3858/2007). It should be noted at this point that each of these regulatory frameworks (corresponding ECI Order) determines the number of credits of the degree, with 240 ECTS for teaching in Early Childhood Education or Primary Education, while the degree required for teaching in Secondary Education has only 60 ECTS (one academic year).

In this way, and once the reference framework has been contextualised, the way in which these competences are transferred in each of the early childhood, primary and secondary education teacher training qualifications will therefore depend on the curricula of each university, and it will be these (the higher education institutions) which will design and prioritise the elements which they consider most significant when defining the profile of teachers they want for their closest territorial context.

1.2. Continuing Professional Development

In Spain, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training can be non-formal or formal. At the formal one, depends on and is managed by the education administrations of each Autonomous Community - the regions into which the Spanish State is subdivided - in collaboration with schools and teacher training centres. Their objective is training in specific subjects (information and communication technologies or foreign language training) or more focused on pedagogical issues (methodology, or attention to diversity); but following the guidelines of the European Union, they are aimed at supporting teaching staff to increase the key competences of students (OJEU/04/06/2018).

Continuing Professional Development takes place through courses, seminars and peer observation; or, in some cases, through teacher networks. Such training can sometimes lead to additional qualifications that help teachers to achieve salary increases or better professional status. To facilitate this training, incentives such as free training or paid study leave are foreseen (Eurydice España-REDIE, 2023).

The pedagogical approach to EE and in attention to CD depends on the design of the training itself and the organisation that develops it. Some examples of the different types of this training are the implementation of specific programmes aimed at the scientific and didactic updating of teachers carried out by the National Institute of Educational Technologies and Teacher Training (INTEF, in Spanish), which depends on the Ministry of Education and which has some of the offers are related to sustainability and intercultural education. Likewise, the National Centre for Environmental Education (CENEAM, in Spanish), with an specific training for teachers and some other specific training in EE by public administrations or private entities aimed at different training groups, among which teachers can participate.

In addition to these training tools for in-service teachers, it should be noted that the Organic Law 3/2020 will provide specific training in EE for active teachers, but also in initial training. This law states that EE "[…] will be considered in teacher training processes and in access to the teaching profession. Accordingly, by 2022, knowledge, skills and attitudes related to education for sustainable development and global citizenship will be incorporated into the system of access to the teaching profession" (p. 122943). So that, it is expected that with the development of this norms the training offer for EE courses and environmental issues courses will be increased and even compulsory for all pre-service and in-service teachers.

With regard to the training on offer, it should be pointed out that, although most of the training is offered by the education authorities, there are also different organisations that offer their activities to teachers. Many of these entities apply for recognition of this training by the administration and are considered to be collaborators. The presence in this group of collaborating entities of different universities allows a connection to exist between the world of university academia (especially related to the faculties of Education) and non-university teaching, which should perhaps become more intense, because of its contribution to ensuring that training in evidence-based education reaches teachers (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2022).

2. Teacher Training in the Balearic Islands

In our closest context, the autonomous community of the Balearic Islands, the teacher training is managed by the competent educational administration and the University of the Balearic Islands. From this university, and in particular from the Faculty of Education, a process of transformation has been carried out for teacher training with the aim of applying the most appropriate strategies to improve access to the teaching profession and to ensure training that guarantees the quality of the teaching profession in the classroom.

A description of this process will be given below in order to show what the transformation consists of and to open a debate (rather than conclusions) on where we should go if, in line with European guidelines, we want to redesign the teaching profession.

2.1. Starting point: diagnosis

Since the 2013-2014 academic year, the Balearic Islands have seen a decrease in the number of primary and early childhood teachers, and 65.4% of the active teaching staff were in the 40-60+ age group (Departament de pedagogía Aplicada i Psicologia de l'Educació, 2015). However, it was (and still is today) a degree whose demand for places is much higher than its supply.

The data from this study showed that this profession is highly valued by society. These data are at odds with the teachers' own perception of their profession and the perception of the education system. Among other evaluations, it was considered that access to a teaching career would require tests to select the most qualified people for the profession.

This diagnosis identified the gaps, but also the potential that existed (models of good practice in the territory itself, but also examples from other autonomous communities that shared the same training line).

Then, in 2017, the second report was published (Departament de pedagogia Aplicada i Psicologia de l'Educació, 2017) which included, based on a Delphi panel, the opinion of the teaching staff (both university and schools) about various areas and aspects of initial teacher training: teaching innovation, student profile, teacher profile, practices and even the content of the degree subjects.

Finally, in 2018, an intensive literature review was carried out (Facultat d'Educació de la Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2018) which culminated in different workshops (in which teachers from different territorial contexts participated) with the aim of analysing good practices at international and national level. All of this in order to assess the standards and competences that were intended (and needed) to be assessed in the admission tests for teaching degrees (Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education and Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education[4]).

As a result of these diagnoses and the study and analysis of various European education systems as a model, a process of transformation of initial teacher training for pre-primary and primary school teachers was initiated which is currently being transferred, as a roadmap, to Secondary teacher training, i.e. the Official Master's Degree in Teacher Training. The following is a summary of the axes on which this transformation pivots and some of the lines of action that are being carried out.

2.2. Transformation project for teacher training

Thus, and on the basis of these diagnoses, at the Faculty of Education of the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB), the centre's project pivots on a process of educational transformation of shared and pedagogical leadership. It is a process of transformation from and within the Faculty itself which, in principle, starting from the same scheme, was intended to be implemented in the different studies that trained for the teaching profession: firstly, the Bachelor's Degrees in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education. Then (pending the design of the corresponding adaptation and implementation) in the Master's Degree in Teacher Training (which, as mentioned above, is the qualification that in Spain qualifies for the teaching profession at the secondary education level).

To this end, it promotes an organisational, methodological and curricular structure that seeks to align itself with the challenges that mark educational environments in 21st century society, activating, for example, the participation of students and teaching staff in the centre's decisions and promoting values such as culture, identity, equality, sustainability, digital competence and professionalism, among others (Facultat d'Educació de la Universitat de les Illes Balears, 2020a, 2020b). In its efforts to promote these values among the future teaching staff, it aims to promote, through different objectives and actions, EA and education for equality and equity in its classrooms and in its academic structures, as well as in the environmental and egalitarian management of the Faculty as a whole. Thus, and coinciding with UNESCO (2022), the Faculty of Education considers it essential to redesign teacher training (both initial and continuous) to adjust it to the educational priorities and thus be able to orient it towards the new emerging social challenges, which implies its

[4] This made it possible to design and develop the admission tests, validate them and carry out a pilot study. Finally, in the 2021-22 academic year, for the first time, these tests were implemented and required to be taken and passed by all students intending to access university degrees in Early Childhood Education or Primary Education.

commitment and active participation as an educational institution in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

The main axes on which the transformation of the training of future teachers is proposed are:

- The involvement and commitment of the university, the regional government and the educational community in the improvement of the initial training system.
- The improvement of the initial training and the academic and practical performance of students in schools.
- Optimising the system of access to education-related university degrees and the number of students per group.
- Linking the initial training system to the processes of selection and secondment of teachers to the workplace.
- Blurring the boundaries between initial and in-service training.
- The implementation of policies for the social revaluation of teachers and the teaching profession.

This has meant, among other actions, that from the beginning of each of the degree courses involved, students have been in contact and immersed in educational centres (to link them from the start with the teaching profession that will be their future), all accompanied by a change in the teacher-student paradigm and focused on "realistic learning", which praises and encourages the student's curiosity and eagerness to discover (and which has meant very intense training of the teaching staff who teach in these first courses of the degree course). On the other hand, in the upper years (3rd and 4th), a transformation has also been carried out in the work placements: a selection of work placement centres has been made (centres in which teaching innovation projects are carried out, as a fundamental requirement, for example) and this has also been accompanied by rigorous training of the tutor teaching staff (both from the university and from the schools), all of this to allow the student to accompany them in the construction of their own image as a teacher. Finally, and as the culminating point of this entire initial training process, the conclusion of this entire academic journey has been designed in a Final Degree Project (a final degree project) that allows the student to immerse themselves in research as a fundamental part of their training, constructing this research that allows them to collect and obtain evidence to transform their own teaching practice in the future.

Evidently, these actions have been accompanied by a series of sub-projects at different levels which have enabled the achievement of the proposed objectives and which have meant a qualitative coherence in the design and development of the transforming axes, such as the following: the creation of a network of innovative centres in educational practice so that they can host students on work experience; the implementation of a training programme for university teaching staff and the teaching staff of the centres where students carry out teaching practice; the rationalisation and coordination of a system for assigning work experience and end-of-degree projects; improving the sense of belonging of the teaching staff who teach in the degree courses through meetings, encounters and seminars that are both formative and relational; Redesigning timetables and the allocation of teaching, considering a modular training system, more focused on the development of curiosity and the learning pace of students; creating a programme for the incorporation of the

Sustainable Development Goals into the teaching of the Faculty; strengthening and boosting mobility programmes, both national and international.

3. Proposals for the future

Despite the transformation that has taken place so far, there are still many gaps, pitfalls and barriers to overcome, and we do not want to stop on the road already travelled. We must bear in mind that the data is there: according to Eurydice (2021) a high proportion of lower secondary teachers participate in CPD. For this reason, we consider it essential to improve in-service teacher training on issues such as environmental sustainability or interculturality through this type of training offer. As already reported by other authors (Anyolo et al., 2018; Pegalajar et al., 2022), the perceptions of future teachers towards Education for Sustainable Development and Interculturality influence their professional competences and, therefore, their teaching practice and the way in which they prepare their students to face the problems of today and tomorrow.

In this way, and albeit synthetically, we can specify our future proposals for intervention in 4 strategic lines that aim, in fact, to open or provoke debate at different levels:

Line 1. We must prioritise the need to design a training and assessment plan for mentors, for teachers who carry out the tutorial function for new teachers in educational centres; this is the only way to guarantee, on the one hand, coherence and connection with the initial training received and, on the other, the joint conception and construction of the teacher profile that we, as a Society, want to have (what teacher do we need/want to accompany the new generations in their teaching and learning process?) This is where we could link continuous teacher training, which would also involve constant feedback of the initial training itself, which would serve to permanently redefine it on the values of environmental sustainability and interculturality as a basis for adapting to constant social and environmental transformations.

Line 2. Furthermore, the management teams and the rest of the professionals in the educational centres cannot be left aside: an optimal reception and an optimal transfer of the centre's values (based on sensitivity and respect for the environment and cultural diversity) will only be possible if the teaching staff has also been trained for this and, in turn, the reception process, both in the period of curricular and professional practices, is constantly being evaluated and reviewed.

Line 3: It is essential to establish close collaboration with the education administration. Only through such collaboration will it be possible to develop joint analyses and proposals beyond the initial training offered by universities. Policies at state level must be in line and coherent with the measures that are carried out and implemented at territorial level in the different contexts of the country; in turn, the measures themselves and the needs of the context must promote change and transformation of the educational policies of an entire country. Without this connection, the education system becomes irretrievably obsolete and does not respond to the social, cultural, economic and developmental demands of the individuals who make it up. Hence the now imperative need to incorporate Environmental Education and Intercultural Education into the basis of these policies, in order to guarantee a social conscience that rejects the injustice and unsustainability of the prevailing neo-liberal economic and cultural models.

Line 4: The design of structural, organisational and content coherence between initial and in-service training cannot be delayed any longer. Continuing teacher training must cease to be conceived as the "little sister" or the "complement to"; if we do not design coherent continuing training, not with the gaps or deficits of initial training, but with the foundations of initial training itself, as a continuity of it (a lifelong extension), the only thing that will be perpetuated will be the conception of continuing professional development only as a compulsory element imposed by the educational administration.

Finally, and combining each and every one of the axes, it cannot be overlooked that these are ALWAYS framed within the needs, characteristics, demands and profile of a specific community. It is the community (the territory and the people who make it up) in which the educational centre is located that must be responded to with each of these axes. Therefore, we must NEVER forget that we train teachers to accompany the community in its own continuous process of improvement and transformation, to empower citizens and to build a society based on values such as environmental sustainability, inclusion and equity.

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ETHICS OF PEDAGOGICAL RELATIONS IN MENTORING

Robert PFÜTZNER[5]

Abstract: *Pedagogical ethics is not only relevant in the relations between teachers and students and therefore as a topic in teacher education. It is also of practical importance in the training of teachers and in mentoring in the first phase of professional teaching activity. This is because mentors act not only as explicit learning supporters, but also as professional role models from whom learning is implicit. This article outlines the relevance of pedagogical ethics in menorate relationships. Based on the Reckahner Reflections on the Ethics of Pedagogical Relations, central issues of mentoring ethics are discussed.*

Key words: *Reckahner Reflections, Professional Ethics, Pedagogical Relation*

1. Introduction

When we talk about ethics, we could have three different scientific perspectives in mind: (1) Descriptive ethics is dedicated to the task of exploring and describing ethical concepts found among people, without judging them. In contrast, (2) normative ethics seeks to develop justified theories of action that are judged to be good. The third research perspective, (3) metaethics, raises the epistemological question of how to think about ethics.

In the sense of normative ethics, this article will make a proposal for an ethics of 'good mentorship' in the field of initial and secondary teacher education. This is a first, somewhat speculative proposal. Further discussion and development of a well-founded ethics of pedagogical mentoring relationships would require studies of a descriptive nature and meta-ethical considerations, as well as a review of the wider literature on mentorship and the ethics of mentoring in other fields, e.g. psychology.

My aim is not to 'invent' an entirely new ethics of mentorship, but to draw attention to what is specific to mentoring relationships in teacher education.

First, I will describe the general connection between ethics and education (2.1.) in order to present a particular model of pedagogical ethics on this basis: Rekahn's reflections on the ethics of pedagogical relationships (2.2.). I will then relate these to the mentoring relationship in teacher education (3.). The paper concludes with an outline of future research and conceptual needs (4).

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2. Ethics and Education

2.1. General remarks

The reflection on ethics in education has a long tradition that goes back to ancient Greece. This is not the place to recapitulate this long history. For our context, it seems to be a useful first step to point out that the current Romanian law on school and preschool education (Legea 198/2023 a învățământului preuniversitar), like its predecessor (Legea 1/2011 a educației naționale) formulates ethical principles that should guide the educational system. In the new law of 2023, they are laid down in art. 3 and 4.

Now, we must be careful not to directly recognise legal norms as the basis for good ethical behaviour. Laws can also be unethical in the sense that they set standards for actions that can be judged bad for good reasons. For example, there are many reasons, both virtue-based and consequentialist, to criticise laws that discriminate against or permit violence against children.

In order to evaluate the ethical quality of laws as an educator, an independent educational ethics is needed. There are many suggestions for this. There are, of course, many other concepts of ethical action in education, such as the Code of Ethics for Educators of the US National Education Association (NEA, 2020) or the Declaration of Professional Ethics of Education International (IE, 2017). The Reckahner Reflections on the Ethics of Pedagogical Relationships is a current, well-founded concept.

The need for such concepts is great: Recent studies show the need for professional ethics and mechanisms to monitor compliance. For example, Prengel and colleagues were able to prove for the German context that about 20% of all pedagogical interactions are slightly violated and 5% are strongly violated (Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, 2017, p. 12). There is no such data for Romania. However, in 2013, Salvați Copiii presented figures that give cause for concern: According to them, 7% of children report being hit by teachers and 33% report being humiliated by teachers in front of their classmates when they make mistakes (Salvați Copiii, 2019, p. 165).

The very nature of pedagogical relationships carries the risk of abuse of pedagogical power: “When teachers' capacity to act is in crisis because of structural antinomies, the relationship of power is challenged because it can turn into coercion and violence. In my view, pedagogical ethos is a response to this crisis of power. Pedagogical ethos does not abolish power, but it resists the temptation to turn power into authority.” (Obex, 2021, p. 103, translation RP)

Ethical guidelines are needed to prevent this. A convincing attempt to do this is the Reckahner Reflections.

2.2. Reckahner Reflections on the Ethics of Educational Relations

The Reckahner Reflections on the Ethics of Pedagogical Relationships were developed in an intensive interdisciplinary exchange between experts from pedagogical practice, educational studies and educational and human rights politics in the framework of the Arbeitskreises Menschenrechtsbildung at the Rochow-Museum in Reckahn (a small village not far from Berlin) and the Akademie für bildungsgeschichtliche und zeitdiagnostische Forschung at University of Potsdam.

The Reckahner Reflections are based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and intend to strengthen "mutual respect for the dignity of all members of schools and institutions", to "stimulate reflection and serve as orientation for sustainable professional development at the relational level" (Reckahner Reflexionen, 2021). The following 10 guidelines form the core of the Reckahner Reflections:

"What is ethically founded

1. Children and youth are addressed and treated with appreciation.
2. Teachers and educational professionals listen to children and adolescents.
3. Learning achievements are recognized in order to discuss further steps and necessary support.
4. Behavioural achievements are recognized. Steps for further positive development are agreed upon. A sense of belonging in the community is encouraged in everyone.
5. Teachers and educational specialists are aware of the interests, joys, needs, difficulties, pains and sorrows of children and adolescents. They consider their concerns and the subjective meaning of their behavior.
6. Children and adolescents are guided toward self-esteem and the recognition of others.

What is ethically impermissible

7. It is impermissible for teachers and educational professionals to treat children and adolescents discriminatorily, disrespectfully, humiliatingly, intrusively or impolitely.
8. It is impermissible for teachers and educational professionals to comment on the products and services of children and adolescents in a devaluing and disheartening manner.
9. It is impermissible for teachers and educational practitioners to react in a degrading, overwhelming or marginal way to the behavior of children and adolescents.
10. It is impermissible for teachers and educational practitioners to ignore verbal, violent or media-related violations between children and adolescents." (Reckahner Reflexionen, 2017)

This is not the place to discuss the implications of these guidelines in extenso; and I am convinced that the ten guidelines speak for themselves. But it is also true that the application of this codex in everyday pedagogical work is neither self-evident nor easy. It is a constant challenge for newcomers as well as for experienced teachers.

3. Mentorship and Educational Training

Thinking about pedagogical ethics in the context of teacher training and mentoring in initial training and the first phase of professional work is even more complex than the complexity of the pedagogical relationship. The mentor has to consider not only his or her relationship with the mentee, but also his or her relationship with the students and the subject. So it is a triple relationship that he or she has to take care of: 1. the relationship with the mentee; 2. the relationship between the mentee and the students; 3. the relationship between the mentee and the subject.

3.1. Relation between the mentor and the mentee

In this first relationship, the Reckahner Reflections (or any other code of conduct) could be applied directly, because mentoring is a classic pedagogical relationship. In the new and highly uncertain

situations faced by newcomers to the teaching profession, guidance and professional support are needed. However, the implementation of an appropriate way of support is neither easy nor does a single solution exist for all teachers or situations. Therefore, the quality of the pedagogical relationship between mentor and mentee is crucial. As Annedore Prengel has explained in a different context: "If the quality of the relationship is poor, the quality of all the other dimensions is also impaired, because how well the objectives of the pedagogical action are achieved always depends also on the quality of the pedagogical relationships." (Prengel, 2019, p. 18, translation RP).

As with any pedagogical relationship, it is important to remember that the mentoring relationship will come to an end, and that the end is the point of the relationship. The aim of mentoring is to develop the new teacher's independence, to enable him or her to plan, deliver and reflect (ideally in a collegial way) on lessons independently. The aim should not be to pass on supposedly helpful, tried and tested 'tricks' or to train successors to do exactly what the mentor did. This should be the basic ethical assumption of a mentorship.

As far as the relationship between mentor and mentee is concerned, I think that the Reckahner Reflections can be directly applied. This also has the advantage that through this type of relationship the mentee can learn their practical application almost implicitly (although they should still be addressed explicitly).

3.2. Relation between the mentor and the mentees relation to the pupil(s)

The mentor needs to support the mentee in developing a good, professional relationship with students. In doing so, he/she can refer to the various professional standards mentioned above. The mentor also supports the mentee in addressing and reducing unethical behaviour by the mentee that is harmful to students. This is a difficult biographical task, as most teachers were influenced by such harmful behaviour in their own childhood and often unconsciously use it later on with students. These experiences must not be taboo, but must be made available for reflection and change.

In concrete terms, the following behaviours should be reduced in the mentoring process Attribution of undesirable characteristics; embarrassment, reproaches in front of the class; physical exclusion; intimidation, demotivation; physical harm; shouting, verbal abuse, insults; ridiculing and shaming (making fun of mistakes); ignoring, disregarding; unfair behaviour (unequal treatment, favouritism); violation of personal rights (invasion of privacy); disclosure of information (in class); accusations of misconduct or crimes (accusations). According to Krumm & Eckstein (2003), these are some of the most common forms of harmful behaviour by teachers towards their students (Prengel, 2019, p. 80).

3.3. Relation between the mentor and the mentees relation to the subject

In this third, more or less objective relationship, the mentor has to be concerned about the professional skills, the correctness of the content taught, its didactic preparation and the use of appropriate methods by the mentee.

This last aspect is perhaps the least critical because it can be based on a long tradition of educational 'craftsmanship', especially since there are many sophisticated (subject) didactic concepts

and models to draw on. Mentoring in this area will be less challenging than in the first two areas (3.1. and 3.2.) because content and its didactics are part of the recognised 'core business' of teachers. Ethical considerations seem to play a lesser role here. It should be undeniable that the content taught must conform to the principle of truthfulness. Even if it has to be didactically reduced in order to be conveyed in class, it must not distort reality.

Unfortunately, in the age of fake news and post-factual discourse, this has to be pointed out. But the supposed security of didactics is also eroding under the influence of digital technologies (of control) and the increasing use of psychotropic drugs in schools.

4. Conclusions

The issues discussed in the previous pages should have highlighted the challenges faced by an ethical relationship between mentors and mentees in (initial or continuing) teacher education. There is a need for a clear professional framework of ethical behaviour for teachers and mentors of young teachers. This should be based on the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and other fundamental rights. It should also be informed by developmental psychology and the needs and developmental tasks of children, adolescents and young adults. A clear understanding of these principles should form the core of a professional ethic in education. Taking into account the different political, social, cultural or religious backgrounds of pupils and teachers - in short, their plurality - the development of such a framework is challenging.

The development of such an ethical framework requires interdisciplinary research, informed by other more experienced fields of mentoring. However, it must not lose sight of the specificities of the pedagogical field in which it is situated if it is to remain educational research and not run the risk of becoming a pseudo-educational science.

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IN-SERVICE TRAINING OF THE TUTOR FOR NEWLY HIRED TEACHERS IN ITALY: AN ECOSYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *This contribution develops a line of research on the mentorship of newly hired teachers in Italy, initiated within the Department of Educational Sciences (DSF) at the University of Roma Tre (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019, 2022). The collected evidence is the result of a multi-year collaboration with the Regional School Office for Lazio, which allowed conducting a blended training path with mentor teachers serving in schools of the Lazio Region. From the school year 2017-2018 to 2022-2023, five editions have been carried out, with an interruption in the year 2020-2021 due to the Covid-19 health emergency. This contribution proposes an ecosystemic, open, multi-actor, and inclusive perspective to help understand the professional actions of mentors and focuses on the perception of their own beliefs and competencies.*

Key words: Italian tutor education, Ecosystemic perspective, Mentoring, Perception, Teacher induction.

1. Introduction

The period of the Covid-19 health emergency and the uncertainty it brought about have severely tested the well-being of individuals, the healthcare system, social relationships, the world of work, education, and training. On one hand, the health emergency made the traditional flaws of the Italian education and training system even more visible, particularly relating to bureaucracy, formalism, and overall lack of accountability that characterize the system itself. On the other hand, it allowed us to discover with favor the remarkable resilience demonstrated by many educational institutions. The crisis management, in fact, revealed the schools' rootedness in their respective territories, serving as a resource and "strength" that enabled them to counter the emergency phase by relying on their adaptive capabilities and vitality in responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Investigations conducted in Italy have indeed revealed the inherent limitations of Distance Learning (DL) and Integrated Digital Teaching (IDT), aspects that were already well-known and extensively described by educational research prior to the health emergency. However, they have also highlighted the positive and systemic actions of those who exercised roles and functions of educational leadership in schools and educational services (Lucisano, 2020a).

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It is important to reflect on the positive events that occurred during the emergency period to draw insights from the lived experience that may prove useful in the future for reorganizing schools and redesigning educational activities. During the most challenging phase, no one could have foreseen that the people involved in education, instead of passively waiting for desired and urgently solicited top-down directives, would take matters into their own hands, "re-making" the school, adopting a bottom-up approach, fully exercising autonomy, and making the school visible and operational.

Not surprisingly, following the emergency period, the vocabulary of educational discourse has enriched itself, and terms such as "school-family alliance" and "school-family co-responsibility" (Moretti, Briceag & Morini, 2021; Moretti & Morini, 2021b) have been added to indicate a more specific and meaningful direction to be pursued, even rediscovering the strength of the expression "educating community."

For these reasons, it would be a grave mistake to consider the current phase as just overcoming a temporary incident and to think that everything will naturally return to how it was before. The perspective of the authors of this contribution, taking into account the multiple research evidence collected during the pandemic period and the post-pandemic period of slow emergence from the emergency (Batini et al., 2020; Nirchi; 2020; Moretti & Morini, 2021a; 2021b), aims to enhance the exercise of distributed educational leadership (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2014; Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012) in schools and educational services, which should be characterized as situated and democratic (Moretti, 2022). In this perspective, which we define as ecosystemic (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ellerani, 2022), we believe that various professional functions or positions currently identified, especially that of mentor for newly hired teachers, should be placed and therefore reconfigured for its strategic value. For themes related to the organization of school autonomy in Italy and the organization of the training and probationary year for new teachers and mentors in Italy, we refer the reader to the contribution by Fiorucci and Moretti (2022) published in the volume "Mentoring for Successful Teaching Career" (Petrache, Mara, & Velea, 2022).

2. Development of the ecosystemic stance of the mentor for newly hired teachers

The health emergency has shown that one cannot survive alone; it has also demonstrated that the action of "making school" can be interrupted and compromised in the face of unforeseen events that can lead to such uncertain situations that the urgent decision to "remake school" requires more than ever the ability to cooperate, share objectives, plan flexibly and participatively, and take personal responsibility and risks associated with the decisions made.

In this sense, the development of the ecosystemic stance of the mentor for newly hired teachers can represent an emblematic action as it can enhance, capitalize on, and make available to peers, from a collective perspective - at the mesosystem and microsystem levels - the reflection based on professional experience gained by teachers over the years in their working environment (Schön, 1983).

We can define the mentor's stance as ecosystemic when it combines the ability to respond specifically to the educational, methodological-didactic, organizational, communicative, and normative needs and adaptability to the school environment demonstrated by the newly hired teacher, with the ability to act consciously at a systemic level, representing the school organization in

a multilevel (macro, meso, and micro) and multi-actor form, integrating the actions of organizational actors and their perspectives with the behaviors and perspectives followed by social and territorial actors of reference (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977).

The distinction between different levels of the system is part of the more general tendency to outline multilevel and multi-actor representations of educational systems and training (Scheerens, 2018). Such forms of representation "aim, first of all, to describe the complexity of the system and its sub-systems clearly, and secondly, they aim to highlight the positive or negative relationships that exist between the large number of interacting variables to be examined" (Moretti, 2022).

Taking an approach in this contribution that intends to enhance the exercise of distributed educational leadership, it is interesting to refer to the CIPP model (Stufflebeam, 1971; 1981; 2001) [7], which allows outlining a comprehensive, systemic, and multilevel framework (articulated at the macro, meso, and microsystem levels) capable of representing the organizational dynamics specific to each school unit (Domenici & Moretti, 2011). Understanding the CIPP model enables the mentor to have a unified and deep understanding of the dynamics characterizing the school organization and can contribute in particular to:

- Observing the dynamics of what happens (What) in the educational and training context to which they belong, understood as a complex and open system, and the ways in which the dynamics involved manifest (How).
- Understanding the possible organizational, didactic, professional, and educational actions that can be promoted in their own work context, which is the same as that of the newly hired teacher, ensuring that processes of change and innovations are participatory, sustainable, and feasible within established timelines.
- Evaluating and understanding the actual quality of the processes activated at the school and class or section level by the newly hired teacher in relation to the actions also taken by other actors directly or indirectly involved in that particular context, with particular reference to those who have specific responsibilities or perform leadership tasks and functions at the mesosystem and microsystem levels (e.g., principals, vice principals, teachers holding instrumental functions or intermediate roles, department heads, and coordinators of working groups).

Of particular interest is also the multilevel educational model by Scheerens (2018), characterized by a dynamic tension between top-down control and bottom-up autonomy. The model identifies four levels: the system, the school, the class or groups of students, the student.

The model is multilevel and hierarchical in the sense that each higher level influences and controls the lower ones, but at the same time, the lower levels remain relatively autonomous and have the power to influence the higher ones. Furthermore, processes at the lower levels can enjoy considerable freedom, as is the case with the activity of teachers in the classroom.

[7] The acronym CIPP refers to four concepts - Context, Inputs, Process, Product -, each of which designates four different classes of variables: context variables (Context), relating to: social demands, regulations, constraints, expectations, etc.; the resource variables (Inputs), relating to: human, instrumental/technological, economic resources, etc.; process variables (Process), related to: processes at school or class level; the product variables (Product) relating to: results achieved by the school by the classes or by individual pupils in the short, medium and long term.

The mentor adopting an ecosystemic stance opts for a personal service and support approach with peers, exercising it from a global perspective, paying particular attention to: the environmental and social sustainability of educational work (United Nations, 2015; Barzanò et al., 2019); fostering the construction of an appropriate cooperative and democratic climate; formulating effective responses for the work context and reference territory, as well as for the newly hired teacher.

The ecosystemic stance of the mentor, therefore, implies the ability to exercise distributed educational leadership and to interpret it so that it is democratic, situated, and inclusive.

3. Implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) and the establishment of Teaching and Learning Centers in Italy

In Italy, the PNRR, in Mission 4, Component C1, establishes "strengthening the provision of education services: from nurseries to universities." Among the identified goals, we find the "Expansion of skills and enhancement of infrastructures," with reference to the need to qualify teaching and learning processes, requalify and innovate learning environments. The PNRR allocates resources to establish three Digital Education Hubs (DEH) and three Teaching and Learning Centers (TLC) at the national level. The TLCs will be activated in the form of university networks or consortia, distributed in the three regional macro-areas of the country: North, Center, South, and Islands, in order to meet the specific needs of the reference territories.

The Società Italia di Ricerca Didattica (Italian Society of Educational Research) has contributed to the public debate on the tasks and functions to be assigned to TLCs by preparing a document that dedicates ample space to the training of mentors and newly hired teachers, as well as to that of experienced and systemic figures, and more generally to teachers in schools of all levels and universities (SIRD, 2022, pp. 8-9).

The TLCs, considering the functions that will be effectively assigned to them, will be able to operate by preparing action plans related to their macro-area, to be subjected to prior evaluation by the Ministry of Education, University, and Research (MUR). In this sense, considering that the University of Roma Tre is a candidate as the leader of the university networks responsible for the activation of the Teaching and Learning Center of the Central regional macro-area, there are good reasons to hope that the research and training experience developed during four editions of training for mentors of newly hired teachers in the Lazio Region can help design and implement additional and innovative training actions for mentors of newly hired teachers capable of promoting an ecosystemic stance, which has been confirmed and further strengthened following the 2022 and 2023 editions, developed in the post-pandemic period.

The ecosystemic stance of the mentor, but in general of any teacher, is closely related to the recognition of the value of the educational relationship, a deep knowledge of the context in which one operates, the ability to situate one's professional action in the context of belonging, with a clear understanding of the systemic complexity - multilevel and multi-actor - of the environment in which negotiation, decision-making, and inclusion processes take place (Moretti, 2019a). The development of an ecosystemic stance, which enhances the relationship between mentor and newly hired teacher, is an objective to be seriously considered even following the repeated reorganization and redesign

interventions required during the emergency period and in the post-emergency period to provide targeted and dedicated responses to the educational and training needs expressed by the territorial communities of reference (Domenici, 2020a, 2020b; Lucisano, 2020a, 2020b; Moretti & Morini, 2021a).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that Decree Law 36/2022, article 44, regarding initial and continuous training of secondary school teachers, explicitly refers to the objective of developing "the ability to design, also through group programming and peer tutoring activities, flexible and appropriate educational paths based on the abilities and talents of students to promote in the school context, in synergy with the territory and the educating community, critical and conscious learning, orientation, as well as the acquisition of transversal skills by students, taking into account the specific educational needs and subjectivities of each student." The regulations suggest considering the specific and subjective needs of students and promote the exercise of distributed and situated educational leadership (Moretti, 2022), focusing on individuals, contexts, and territories. The direction to follow is to design personalized interventions and organize teaching in a way that provides students with formative feedback (Shute, 2008) that supports self-regulation processes, the development of personal skills, and a sense of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000; Pellerey, 2006) while also exercising leadership functions with peers, exchanging formative feedback based on reliable observations and evidence to reflect together and develop professional learning communities (Earley, 2013; Bubb & Earley, 2010, 2013).

4. The Multi-Year Training Path for Tutors

The University of Roma Tre, Department of Education Sciences, in collaboration with the University of Cassino and the Regional School Office of Lazio, initiated a training project from the academic year 2017-2018, involving 7530 mentors of teachers in their training and probationary year at state schools in Lazio (Fig. 1). The first year of the initiative involved around 1,000 mentor teachers through predominantly in-person activities and online deepening. In the academic year 2018-2019, a second edition was proposed, with 669 mentor teachers participating (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019), and in the academic year 2019-2020, a third edition was prepared with 679 mentor teachers participating. The initiative was interrupted in the year 2020-2021 due to the health emergency, but in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023, the activities were restructured, taking into account some constraints in the public call prepared by the reference school.

Figure 1. *Editions of the professional development path aimed at mentors of newly hired teachers in the Lazio Region, Italy.*

The main objective of each training path was to consolidate and develop the professional knowledge and skills of mentors. Starting from the academic year 2021-2022, a blended path was designed to promote in mentor teachers the ability to perform mentoring, counseling, and professional supervision functions, taking into account the specific goals and characteristics of educational and school contexts. In the two-year period, 6181 mentors from the sixteen territorial areas of Rome, two of Rieti, and two of Viterbo were involved, covering mentor teachers from all levels of schools. Regardless of the composition of the recipients, the training was organized to encourage interaction among mentors in a heterogeneous group, without distinguishing between taught disciplines and schools of origin.

The training project of Roma Tre was structured with three hours of synchronous activities using the Microsoft Teams platform and seven hours of asynchronous activities with access to online resources for study and in-depth work on the DSF platform (https://crisfad.uniroma3.it/docentitutor/).

The synchronous training activities particularly focused on: the function and activities of mentor teachers in the training year, peer observation in the school context, peer-to-peer training and reflection on professional practices, knowledge of operational tools and methodologies of professional supervision (classroom observation criteria, peer review, didactic documentation, professional counseling, etc.), and the knowledge of dialogical and collaborative didactic strategies and devices.

The asynchronous training activities were conducted through the Moodle e-learning platform with restricted access, and they involved the in-depth study of thematic areas presented in the synchronous activities. For each thematic area, mentors were provided with study and in-depth materials, data and information gathering tools, among which mentor teachers could choose the most suitable for their work in the field. The proposed tools included:

- Checklists in the form of hetero-observation and self-assessment used by both mentor teachers and newly hired teachers for classroom observation.
- Peer observation practices to accompany learning and professional development using Microteaching or Video Analysis.
- Counseling with self-reflection on professional experience.
- Questionnaire on Perception of their Competencies and Beliefs (QPCC) useful for reflecting on the self-image in relation to some competencies and beliefs that characterize professional action in the work context.
- Tri-focal observation, conducted in the "classroom context," involving the mentor teacher, the mentee teacher (newly hired), and the students.

The path included mentors identifying at least one tool or device to be studied in-depth and used in carrying out their mentoring functions. For each tool or device, mentors were provided with descriptions, usage instructions, and some theoretical deepening materials. At the end of the training path, mentors were asked to prepare a summary report of the activities carried out, including considerations on the use of the chosen tool or device and general reflections (Fig. 2).

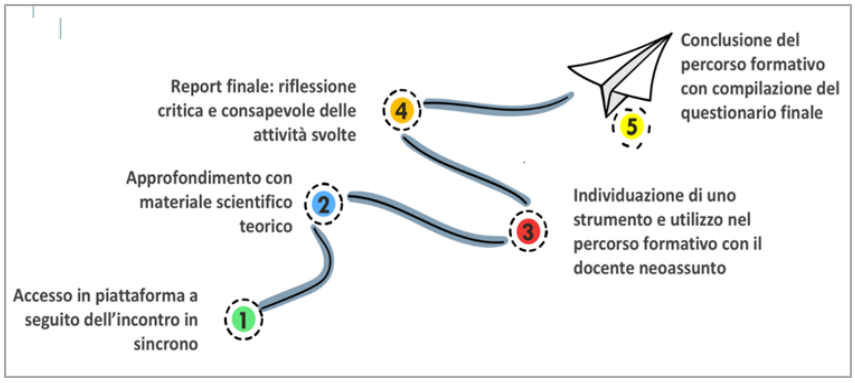


Figure 2. *Phases of the asynchronous deepening path (2023)*

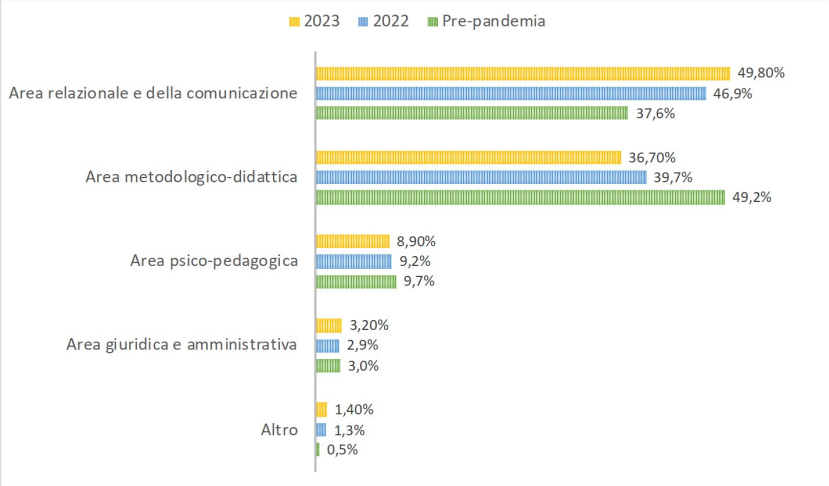
In the fifth edition in 2023, 2,642 mentors requested registration for the online deepening environment; 86.5% of them were female teachers, and the majority (60.5%) performed the role of mentor for newly hired teachers for the first time, with almost all (87.1%) mentoring only one newly hired teacher. 41.4% of them also held other positions within the middle management of the school (e.g., vice-principal, instrumental function, etc.). For the first time in the five editions, the majority of mentors came from secondary schools (34.2%), followed by primary schools (30.7%), lower secondary schools (23.8%), and preschools (11.3%).

Graphic 1. *The frequency of participation in the training path and what it contributed to the effectiveness perception of mentors (2023)*

Overall, the mentor teachers who completed the asynchronous activities and submitted reports by the end of April 2023 were 2,090, a significant number considering that the online environment was left available to participating mentors to complete the requested activities with more relaxed times based on the received requests.

5. Recognizing the Value of the Educational Relationship and Emotional Dimension in Exercising Leadership

The emergency experience has questioned many aspects of school organization, especially with the widespread adoption of Distance Learning (DaD) or Hybrid Distance Instruction (DDI), which forced all parties involved to suddenly rethink the educational relationship. The effects of this exceptional situation became evident in the responses provided by teachers when asked about the areas of training of greatest interest for performing the role of tutor. Figure 2, which compares data collected in the pre and post-emergency periods, highlights that in 2022, the area of interest for training that experienced the most significant increase was "relational and communication" which rose from 37.6% in the pre-pandemic period to 46.4% and then 49.8% in 2023. The "methodological-didactic" area, while still attracting a large number of choices, saw a decrease from 49.2% in the pre-pandemic period to 36.7% in 2023. The "psycho-pedagogical" and "juridical-administrative" areas remained relatively stable. The percentage of those indicating "Other" slightly increased from 0.5% to 1.4% in 2023. Overall, the emergency situation polarized training interests towards communication and relational aspects as a response to a prolonged period characterized by physical, social, and emotional distancing.



Graphic 2. *Areas in which tutor-teachers consider tutoring activities for newly hired teachers more effective, pre and post-health emergency comparison (2019-2023)*

Therefore, the ecosystemic posture of tutors for newly hired teachers requires an understanding of the context of their work and the appreciation of the emotional dimension in exercising educational leadership. This involves nurturing aspects like sensitivity, empathy, creativity, flexibility in human behavior, and the ability to motivate and engage people, as explicitly mentioned by Goleman (Goleman, et al., 2013). In this sense, the practice of distributed educational leadership by tutors is fully situated in a particular context and must account for the emotional and relational dynamics accompanying the interactions between a tutor (with their own motivations, experiences, and feelings) and a newly hired teacher, who brings their own specific needs and knowledge into the equation. Tutors must exercise democratic leadership, characterized by equal and respectful relationships, fully embracing the human aspects of the professional and educational relationship, which inherently involve accepting the presence of doubt, fears, reconsiderations, enthusiasm, and shared emotional experiences.

The ecosystemic posture of tutors does not solely focus on the dyadic tutor-newly hired teacher relationship; instead, it is best expressed through their systemic ability to generate professional behaviors inspired by complex representations of the school, acknowledging the multilevel and multi-actor relationships that characterize it. For these reasons, engaging in discussions with school principals and among tutors working in the same school is crucial.

Furthermore, the ecosystemic, multilevel, and multi-actor view of the tutor justifies the invitation that should be constantly extended to the newly hired teachers to collaborate and cooperate, tackling uncertainty and challenges as a community arising from present or future emergencies (Batini et al., 2020; Capperucci, 2020; Domenici, 2020b; Lucisano, 2020a; Nirchi, 2020; Moretti & Morini, 2021a).

Today, in an era where digital technologies are increasingly pervasive, we understand that emotions, like technologies, ideas, and other factors, have shaped individuals, contexts, and the world. Unlike machines or artificial intelligence, it is people who recognize emotions in others by

observing their body or facial movements and, most importantly, the contexts in which those gestures and expressions occur (Firth-Godbehere, 2021). Understanding and expressing "emotions in context" help us attribute meaning to the world around us, enrich the educational relationship, and make sustainable decisions on environmental, social, and even economic levels (doing more and better with fewer resources).

6. Perception of Personal Beliefs and Competencies by Tutors

The professionalism of a teacher is characterized by a complex interaction between cultural, educational, social, and specifically didactic competencies, resulting from a well-orchestrated interplay of knowledge, skills, beliefs, and internal dispositions. Often, mediation is also discussed as a distinctive feature of a teacher's professional action. Competent behavior is always the result of reinterpretation and reworking of behaviors that involve cognitive, affective, motivational, volitional, and social dimensions, expressing not only one's professional but also personal identity.

Professional identity can be considered as a set of competencies, skills, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors referring to a work context and resulting from a process of construction by the individual, certainly within educational and professional settings, but within a framework of self-awareness and responsibility. Building one's own identity would imply, for teachers, the possibility of developing spaces and practices of narration and reflexivity around their professional actions, which can be effectively promoted through laboratory activities and supervised internships.

Regarding a teacher or trainer's professional identity, it is essential to explore adequately the constructive process that, especially today, shapes it. Studies in this regard oscillate between an identity determined, in its fundamental configuration, by demands from the current education and training system and the functions defining a role as a public administration employee, required to comply with current regulations. Moreover, a teacher's professional identity is influenced by constant tension due to the ongoing changes in the school and professional training context, both at the organizational level and in terms of teaching content, as a response to educational and training demands from society, families, and the job market. This further complicates the need for teacher training, not only in terms of initial training but also continuous training, as these progressive tensions affect the planning, implementation, and evaluation of teaching activities. Consequently, the demand for skills becomes complex and extensive, particularly concerning transversality.

The primary architect of designing one's professionalism is the teacher themselves, being a reflective professional according to Schön (1983), aware of their role, capable of promoting and self-regulating their learning process, both individually and through communities of practice and practice networks (Bandini & others, 2015). The area of competence related to the ability to design (self-determination) and conduct (self-regulation) one's professional development implies awareness of its personal meaning and the perspective guiding fundamental choices, deep aspirations, goals to be achieved, already acquired skills, skills to be acquired, motivations already present, and motivations to be acquired (Pellerey, 2019).

Particularly significant, in this direction, is the ability to develop critical reflection on one's learning and work experiences. To activate and make this reflective process fruitful, the educational context must stimulate, guide, and support it for an adequate period until the individual becomes capable of

initiating it independently and effectively. In this case, a central mode of developing self-regulation skills involves engaging in inner dialogue in response to different encountered situations.

Currently, several self-assessment tools based on self-perception questionnaires are available, based on theoretical developments referring to emerging needs in the work environment. In our research, a freely accessible digital platform www.competenzestrategiche.it (Pellerey, M., Grządziel, D., Margottini, M., Epifani, F., & Ottone E., 2013; Margottini, 2017) was progressively implemented, including a set of self-assessment questionnaires of strategic competencies, among which the QPCC - Questionnaire of Perception of One's Competencies and Convictions (Pellerey, 2001) is included. The questionnaire is aimed at adult subjects engaged in relational work contexts, which is typically the professional context of a teacher. It stimulates reflective processes regarding the self-image and the quality of personal competencies and convictions determining one's professional actions.

Regarding the concept of competence referred to in the QPCC, it is necessary to emphasize that it refers to the ability to orchestrate and mobilize different personal resources (cognitive, affective, volitional, motivational, beliefs, and convictions) to face various life and professional situations. Convictions are understood as a set of cultural aspects, internalized experiences, critical and constructive reflection, and emotional resonance that provide interpretative frameworks guiding decision-making and facing new challenges (Pellerey, 2001). In this sense, the QPCC assesses four fundamental dimensions of professional action: cognitive, affective-emotional, motivational, and volitional. It consists of 63 items grouped into 10 scales.

The questionnaire aims to investigate some competencies and convictions that can be considered foundational for professional actions in relational contexts. The items are written as descriptions of recurrent actions or behaviors in a professional performance, and participants respond through a four-level graduated scale: almost never or rarely, sometimes, often, almost always, or always. The questionnaire is administered digitally through the platform competenzestrategiche.it, and upon completion, a graphical profile with textual comments is provided, enabling reflection on the investigated competency dimensions. If applied in educational settings, the proposal is to facilitate reflective processes converging in narrative practices, leading to the preparation of professional diaries or, as also suggested in the regulations concerning newly hired teachers, the development of an e-portfolio. These practices can significantly contribute to the construction of one's professional identity (Margottini, 2019; La Rocca, Margottini, 2017).

Completing the QPCC provides immediate feedback, with a graphical profile presented after questionnaire completion.

Fattore	Descrizione	Valutazione
A1	Ansia di parlare in pubblico	8
A2	Senso di insicurezza	6
A3	Senso di inadeguatezza	6
V1	Autoregolazione e perseveranza sul lavoro	5
V2	Far fronte alle sfide personali (Coping)	4
C1	Competenze elaborative	6
C2	Competenza comunicativa	4
M1	Percezione di competenza	3
M2	Orientamento all'io	6
M3	Attribuzioni causali (locus of control interno)	4

LEGENDA: = nella media; = sotto/sopra la media (punto di forza); = sotto/sopra la media (punto di debolezza)

Indicazioni per interpretare i risultati

Fattore	Descrizione
A1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **alto** per l'**ansietà** che sperimenti ogniqualvolta ti esprimi di fronte a un pubblico uditore/interlocutore. *Un elevato stato ansioso, che percepisci difficile da controllare, potrebbe portarti ad evitare ogni occasione in cui sia richiesta una simile esposizione, specialmente se il pubblico è composto di sconosciuti, percepito come contrario alle tue argomentazioni, o molto numeroso. Ricorda che il parlare in pubblico, anche quando sei preparato, comporta normalmente un certo livello di ragionevole ansietà, ma nei casi più estremi rifletti sull'origine del disagio che sperimenti (o che immagini di sperimentare) in situazioni simili, individua i pensieri che ti creano una tensione eccessiva e prova a modificarli.*
A2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per il **senso di insicurezza e incertezza** che provi quando devi far fronte a richieste improvvise, e/o assumere la responsabilità di effettuare, in tempi brevi e senza preavviso, una scelta che senti come importante, oppure ancora, affrontare compiti particolarmente impegnativi.
A3	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per il **senso di inadeguatezza** nel portare a termine in maniera valida ed efficace compiti e attività in contesti relazionali, anche se non necessariamente connotati come molto impegnativi, come convincere gli altri della validità di un'idea o condurre a termine una discussione.
V1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per la **capacità di assumere e portare a termine gli impegni**, cioè di mettere in atto strategie che proteggono e sostengono l'esecuzione delle decisioni prese anche in presenza di fatica e/o disinteresse rispetto all'impegno preso.
V2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per la capacità di **saper affrontare in modo positivo situazioni difficili**, emotivamente coinvolgenti, in qualche modo minacciose dal punto di vista dell'apprezzamento sociale.
C1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per la capacità mettere in atto **processi e strategie elaborative** che facilitano il ricordo e l'integrazione di quanto acquisisci di nuovo con il patrimonio di conoscenze che già possiedi, al fine di poterlo riutilizzare per la risoluzione di problemi, anche in contesti diversi.
C2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per la **capacità di** organizzare in modo efficiente ed efficace sia l'aspetto attivo della **comunicazione** (come il pronunciare discorsi e fornire spiegazioni ad altri) sia l'aspetto passivo ad esso correlato (come ascoltare e leggere).
M1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **basso** per la **percezione** di avere conseguito, nella tua attività professionale, livelli di competenza tali da garantire il conseguimento di risultati positivi nell'assolvimento dei vari impegni; e per la capacità di appropriarti in maniera valida e significativa di tutto ciò che è utile per migliorare la tua professionalità. *Un basso punteggio denota una scarsa fiducia nelle proprie capacità e competenze e potrebbe avere un effetto negativo sulla disponibilità a impegnarsi con costanza e dedizione. Si suggerisce di lavorare per accrescere la percezione di saper compiere progressi e acquisire nuove competenze socialmente riscontrabili.*
M2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per l'**orientamento motivazionale** che ti spinge a perseguire risultati positivi con energia e impegno proporzionali al loro grado di riconoscibilità e gradimento sociali. La ricerca di visibilità, apprezzamento, ed esaltazione di sé di fronte agli altri, entro certi limiti tende ad avere conseguenze positive anche in contesti collaborativi, in cui cercherai una posizione da leader e potrai fungere da stimolo per l'impegno del gruppo verso gli obiettivi condivisi.
M3	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per l'**attribuzione causale** che si riferisce al tipo di spiegazione che fornisci rispetto a successi e fallimenti, e le loro rispettive cause. A seconda del tipo di causa che attribuisci al successo/fallimento, vedi condizionate le tue previsioni di successo e fallimento per il futuro. Legare un fallimento a fattori che puoi controllare ti induce ad assumerti la responsabilità per l'errore commesso, e a convincerti che attraverso un maggiore sforzo o la scelta di diverse strategie, nella prossima occasione potrai raggiungere l'obiettivo prefissato.

https://www.competenzestrategiche.it/mod/url/view.php?id=21&frameset=t... Invia questa pagina a questo indirizzo e-mail: Invia

Figure 3. *Example of QPCC Profile*

The profile is easily interpretable and displayed in graphical form, using a standardized nine-interval scale, stanines, allowing participants to assess their position immediately. Critical aspects are highlighted in yellow, making it easy to identify dimensions that require particular attention. The textual comments provide explicit indications, albeit expressed in a generic form, as they are generated through automated interpretation.

Finally, the application of the QPCC to teacher tutors concluded with a request for a concise judgment on the activity performed. The following is a representation of the frequency of words contained in their judgments, using the word cloud methodology, i.e., an image composed of words, the size of which varies based on their frequency, containing all the words from the judgments expressed by the teachers.

Figure 4. *Word cloud of judgments expressed by the tutor teachers*

7. Conclusive Reflections and Development Perspectives

We can identify some points for reflection and directions to continue the training activities in the future, concerning the overall training program, the research conducted on the induction phase, the role and function of the teacher tutor, and the current phase with the establishment of three Teaching and Learning Centers (TLCs) in Italy, with the University of Roma Tre as the lead institution for the Central Italy area. Regarding the fifth edition of the training program in 2023, some key highlights include:

1. The effectiveness of the blended training program and the expressed interest by teacher tutors (%) in developing communication and relational skills.
2. The confirmation of previous editions' objectives, such as developing essential skills necessary for consistently performing the role of tutor or tutor coordinator, tackling uncertainty and emergency situations, and the ability to adapt or redesign educational activities.
3. Promoting the conscious use of valid and reliable data collection tools by teachers.
4. Strengthening the figure of the teacher-researcher as a professional who reflects in action (Schön, 1983), aware of their own perceptions and makes decisions based on gathered evidence.
5. Involving young or less experienced teacher tutors and schools with principals who value training in Research-Formation (R-F) (Asquini, 2018).

Regarding the research conducted by the group of teachers and researchers at the University of Roma Tre:

1. There is significant effort in collecting strategic data on the figure of the teacher tutor and validating some tools used by teachers, which are considered effective in the teacher-tutor and new teacher relationships.
2. The DSF (Department of Educational Sciences) is committed to disseminating research findings at the national and international level, contributing to the debates within the

National Conference of Educational Sciences (Cunsf, 2019), and collaborating on an international project with the University of Sibiu, Romania (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2022b).

The outcomes confirm the importance of adopting an ecosystemic perspective and suggest continuing the training initiative and developing it further with Research-Formation modalities in collaboration between the USR (Regional Education Office) for Lazio, School Networks, and Universities, leveraging the new Teaching and Learning Center infrastructure that is currently being established in Italy.

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OPINIONS REGARDING THE SOCIAL PRESTIGE OF THE TEACHER IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Our paper analyses the perception of the social prestige of the teaching profession based on the opinions of numerous teachers, compared with what the specialized literature on this topic reflects. We conducted a research study based on a qualitative method in order to interpret the content of the opinions expressed by 227 teachers from different parts of Romania. Proceeding from the method of analyzing official documents developed by international bodies and the method of analysing the content of the subjects' answers, we found that the data agree, namely that the social status of teachers is in decline and that the prestige of the teaching profession has been fading. The proposed solutions end the paper on an optimistic note.*

Key words: *teacher, social status of the teaching profession, prestige of the teacher.*

1. Introduction

In order to discuss the prestige of a teacher in Romania, we must clarify the term *professional prestige*. According to the well-known definition of Hoyle (2001, p.139), occupational prestige is defined as the public perception of the relative position of an occupation in a hierarchy of occupations.

Given the importance of teaching in society, it is expected that the teaching profession should have a high and implicit prestige, and a high status, as well as that it should enjoy special esteem. "Occupational esteem is here defined as the regard in which an occupation is held by the general public by virtue of the personal qualities which members are perceived as bringing to their core task. These qualities can perhaps be grouped into three areas: dedication, competence and care" (Hoyle, 2001, p. 147).

However, studies conducted on how the teaching profession is perceived by the public reveal that being a teacher is not considered one of the most attractive professions (Gheorghe, 2017, p. 13; 2016, p. 1), teaching (especially at primary levels) is not perceived in society as a high-ranking profession (Halai, 2007, p. 101), teaching was not valued in society (Hargreaves, Flutter, 2019).

By definition, *profession* designates a type of social activity that is exercised on the basis of professional training and of a qualification and a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills acquired by a person through training and is conveyed through the trade and/or specialisation acquired (Zamfir, Vlăsceanu, 1993, p. 456).

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We were intrigued by the fact that in several studies we found that teaching is questioned and debated as to whether it should be classified as a "profession" (Hargreaves, Flutter, 2019) or the fact that on asking directly the question 'Is teaching a profession?' they answer "only in a very limited way". Hoyle states that "*Profession* is a contested concept" (2001, p. 144). "In comparison to such professions as medicine and engineering, teaching does not enjoy the status of a full fledged profession; instead, it is a quasi profession" Halai noted (2007, p.104). This approach emphasizes the fact that a university graduate can easily become a teacher, more often neglecting the complex nature of the didactic activity, which requires specialized knowledge and special skills. Thus, this view affects the teaching profession prestige and the social status of the teacher.

2. Literature background regarding the prestige of the teaching profession and the teachers' status

The paper *The Status of the Teacher: a Global Analysis* outlines the degree of respect for teachers (Delgado, 2019, p. 2). According to the new edition of the *Global Teacher Status Index 2018*, teachers are highly respected in the following ten countries: China, Malaysia, Taiwan, Russia, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey, India, New Zeeland, and Singapore, while the ten countries where the teacher is least respected are: Brazil, Israel, Italy, Ghana, Argentina, Czech Republic, Hungary, Uganda, Spain, and Colombia.

The status of the teaching profession, according to teachers' perception, is affected by a series of factors that have been grouped into factors related to the profession itself and factors not related to the profession (Aydin, Demir, Erdemli 2015; Mutluer, Yüksel 2019). In the first category, the salary level and conditions for entering the profession were mentioned as ranking first and second; among the non-professional factors, the first ones mentioned were: the personal characteristics of the teachers, including their education; the value given to education in society, the image of the profession created by the media and leaders. The fact that negative aspects frequently appear in the media, which undermine the reputation of teachers and perhaps even the feminisation of the profession (Mutluer, Yüksel, 2019, p. 98), lead to an insidious weakening of the status of teachers.

Although the issue of payment is not the only deciding factor, it often comes up. We render here Halay's statement (2007, p. 103) according to which by comparison with other professions, especially with the new professions related to mass media and computer technology, the teaching profession does not enjoy the same status, which is evidenced by the increasing weight of the remuneration of other professions. The quality of teacher training, the low status of the profession and the low income of teachers are aspects that discourage the development of school education (Nadirova, 2017).

Refering to teaching, the chapter *Boosting the prestige and standing of the profession* was part of the developed OECD document 2020, based on the results of the TALIS 2018 survey. From its data, based on the method of document analysis, we have selected some comparative aspects, including Romania.

Teachers' perceptions of the value of the teaching profession is shown in Fig 1. This presents the results of the teachers' and principals' answers when asked to express their agreement ("strongly agree"; "agree"; "disagree" and "strongly disagree") regarding the statement that *The teaching profession is valued in society*. Across the OECD countries and economies included in the TALIS research, on average only 26% of teachers "agree" or "strongly agree" that their profession is valued

in society. In Romania, this percentage slightly exceeds 40%, from which we can conclude that the impression related to the social prestige of their own profession was more favorable, compared to the average values, but this was the situation recorded 5 years ago.

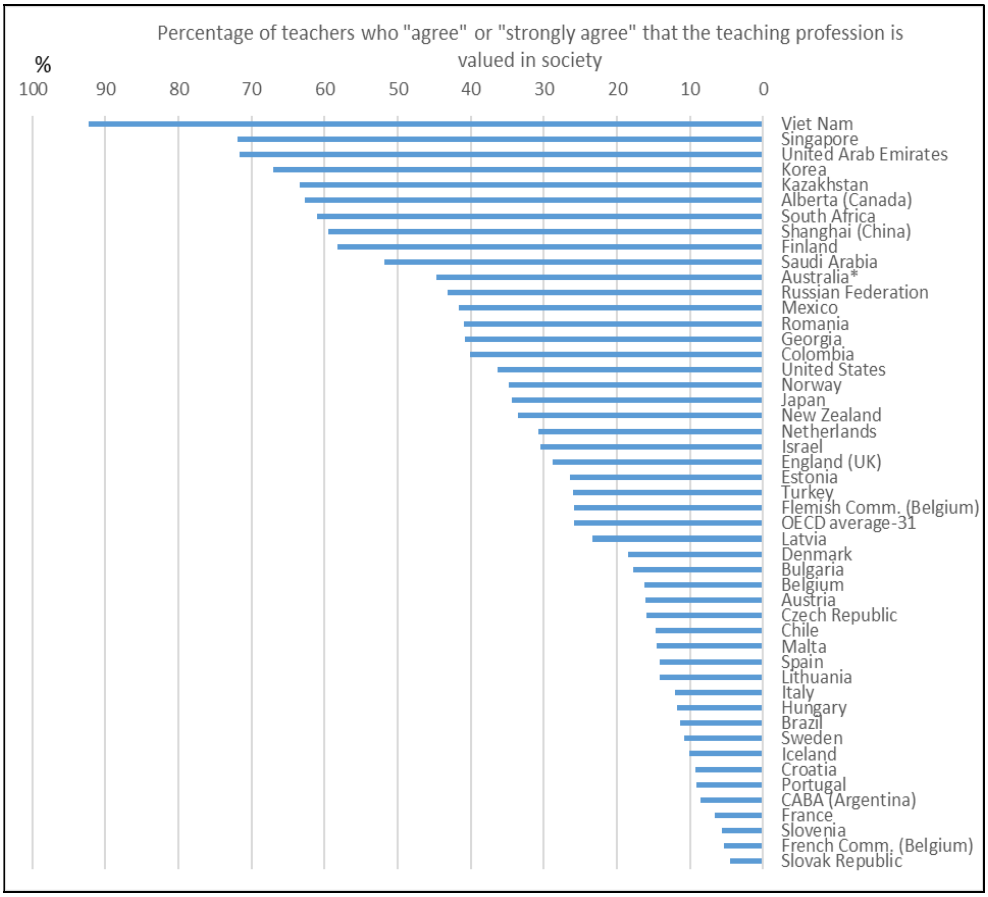

Figure 1. *The teachers' opinion about how society appreciates their profession*
Source: OECD 2020 – Boosting the prestige and standing of the profession

A lot of studies reveal that teachers are perceived as of low status when compared with other professions, and this situation adversely affects the teachers' abilities to perform their duties (Aydin, Demir, Erdemli, 2015, p. 149).

The status and image of a profession are important elements in determining its attractiveness for young people and in maintaining competent, qualified employees (Zubenschi, p. 272). From this angle, we can see that numerous teachers intend to leave the profession within the next 5 years, as it results from the answers of the TALIS 2018 survey. Among the factors that contribute to the intention to leave the profession, stress plays an important part. Teachers who believe that they face a lot of stress at work will show a greater desire to leave the profession in the next 5 years.

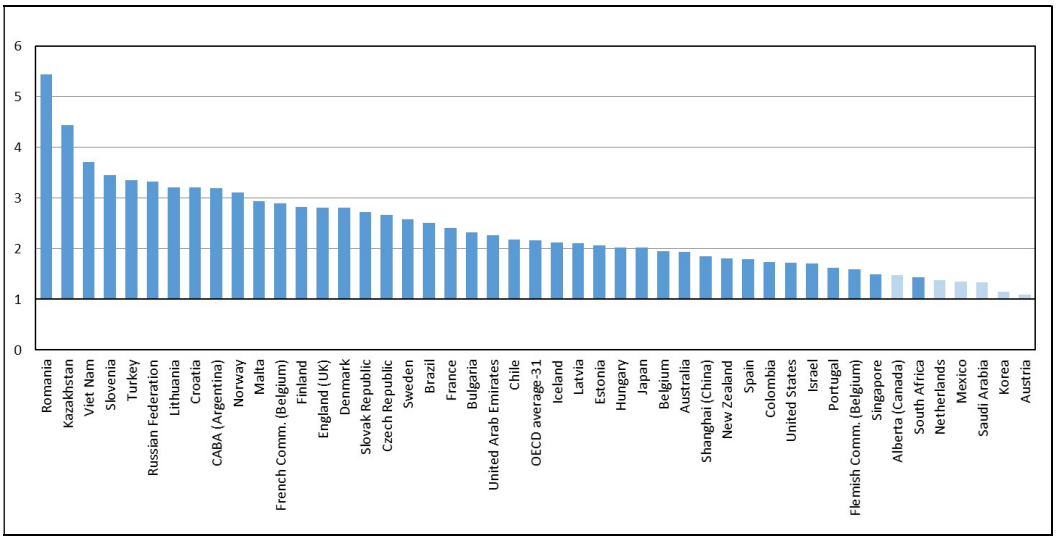

Figure 2. *Relationship between wanting to leave teaching within the next five years and experiencing stress at work*

Source: OECD 2020 – Boosting the prestige and standing of the profession

Figure 2 shows that the countries and economic areas that entered the study are positioned downwards, from the perpective of the hierarchy of the probability of teachers who estimate that they face "a lot" of stress to leave the profession. It can be seen that, from this point of view, Romania was in first place, which is a warning sign.

As for the attractiveness of the teaching profession for the younger generations, the results of the study undertaken in 2021 on 127 subjects and published by Thompson in *The Global Report 2021 on the Status of Teachers* are not too gratifying, as can be seen in Table 1.

Is the teaching profession an attractive one for the young? Table 1

		Frequency	Per cent
Valid	Yes	38	29,9
	Don't know	3	2,4
	No	61	48,0
	Total	102	80,3
Missing	System	25	19,7
	Total	127	100,00

Source: Thompson, 2021, p. 34

Almost half of the respondents, namely 48%, believe that this profession is not attractive for young people. Among the reasons that can explain this perception is that due to the administrative tasks, the workload has increased, as well as the burden of responsibilities, aspect about which 66.2% of the 127 subjects answered "agree" and "strongly agree" (Thompson, 2021, p. 55).

Among the sources of the loss of attractiveness of the teaching profession in France, the following are mentioned: "the proliferation of school reforms and/or training courses blurring the professional missions, the feeling of insufficient consideration and degradation of the image of the profession in society, the feeling of insufficient consideration of the tangible difficulties of the profession, the uncertainty of teachers in relation to their 'purchasing power', and also their perception of social declassification, the negative discourses related to working conditions, the massive job cuts, the feeling that starting a teaching career is difficult" (Guillet-Descas et al., 2020, p. 286).

Trying to delineate the problem of teachers' status today, The *Global Report 2021 on the Status of Teachers* considers that their status is constantly undermined by the interaction of the factors highlighted, as: "Remuneration is too low, conditions are deteriorating, the infrastructure for teaching and learning is not a priority for government investment. There is an obvious lack of respect in the way teachers and teaching are viewed by governments and elements of the mass-media. Work has intensified and many unions are reporting concerns about it" (Thompson, 2021, p. 16).

The members' well-being is affected due to the stress generated by a more complex workplace and is aggravated by increasing expectations. Currently many teachers face precarious employment prospects as permanent jobs are replaced by casual and short-term contracts. More accessible and free continuous professional development remains a priority for many unions.

At the same time, this important aspect should be taken into account - the sense of well-being of the teachers, which impacts the learning environment of the students and implicitly, their well-being and development (Schleicher, 2018).

3. Romanian teachers' opinions regarding a teacher's social status

3.1. Research design

The study aims to investigate the opinions of teachers working in various pre-university educational institutions, from high school to kindergarten level, in various parts of the country, regarding the social status of teachers, and to find solutions to the inherent problems.

The objectives of the study

1. To ascertain whether the perception of teachers in Romania regarding the social status of the teacher agrees with or differs from that presented in international studies;
2. To find out if the perceived social status has kept or changed its position over time;
3. To request proposals for improving the status of the teacher.

The study group

The research was conducted on 227 teaching staff participating in the project titled *The Professionalization of the Teaching Career- PROF2 - Pedagogical Practice Mentorship*. They come from seven counties in different areas: Botoșani, Constanța, Harghita, Iași, Mureș, Sibiu, Suceava. The data collection period was February-May 2022.

Method

We used a qualitative method, i.e., content analysis. This consists in interpreting the content of the subjects' responses to the following requests:

1. Build the profile of the teacher in Romania, as it is perceived from a social point of view.

2. Propose at least two solutions to increase the social prestige of Romanian teachers.

In order to maximize the credibility of the study, many teachers' points of view were cited, similarly to procedures in international studies (Aydin, Demir, Erdemli, 2015; Mutluer, Yüksel, 2019). We made a selection of the most representative ones.

3.2. The results – a teacher's profile as it is perceived from social perspective

Regarding the first targeted objective, we will find from the answers that the discrepancy between the teachers' self-positioning and the position given to them by the social environment is well-acknowledged. "If I try to build a profile of the teaching professional in Romania, from my perspective, that of a teaching professional, I consider that my profession is honorable, important for society. For this reason, I am willing to make material/financial sacrifices because I enjoy my role, my importance in the smooth-running of society; I consider that I play an important role in the future of my students (besides their parents, of course!). But what does society have to say? Society does not see things the same as the teachers do, it does not value their choice, in one word, it is oblivious to the sacrifice that the teacher thinks that he/she is making." (P.M. - Sibiu)

We discover a sense of frustration in the face of the diminished, negativized social status. "The perception of the teacher is mostly negative from a social point of view. A number of perspectives contribute to this: that of the students (who show a deep lack of respect, and teachers often have no coping mechanism from the legal point of view), that of the parents (who have a total lack of trust in the state system and the quality of the teaching activity), that of the school management (characterised by a lack of dialogue, communication being mostly unilateral), that of the teachers themselves (who must adapt individually through training courses that they often pay for themselves) and, not least, that of the mass media (which is only interested in the sensational)." (A.A. - Constanța)

As a mentality, all responsibility lies on the shoulders of the teachers, bypassing the students. "An example of the perception of a teacher can be found in my 12th grade management class, while analysing the factors of school achievements and success in exams. I asked the students for an estimate, in approximate percentages, of the teachers' contribution and the students' contribution to their success. Most of them believe that more than 60% is the teacher's work (some even said 80-90%) and only 40% or less, the student's contribution. We have debated this topic and, unfortunately, they do not realize the importance of their own effort. The same is found in the national analysis of exam results. The involvement of students in the act of learning is not emphasized, only the work of teachers is considered: consultations, remedial classes, measures, procedures, etc." (M.K. - Harghita)

The different aspects that mark the status of the teaching staff are summarized: "The socio-professional status of the teaching staff is significantly marked by several forms of pressure. First, despite the ever-renewed promises, the income remains modest, which affects not only one's motivation and enthusiasm for school activities, but also the public prestige. A major difficulty in the instructional-educational performance and in the psycho-social comfort of the teaching staff is the size of the student classes, usually over 30, while in most European countries it is up to 25. Educational efficiency is also conditioned by the psycho-emotional climate during the lessons and

from the school in general, which should be free from abuse and violence, including verbal ones. Then there is the pressure coming from the students' parents. And here, with the informational emancipation occasioned mainly by the social media, all kinds of expert illusions are created." (G.M. - Constanța)

Among the factors that influence their status, Romanian teachers also mentioned the power of the image created by the mass media: "More often than not, the image of the school and the teaching staff is 'constructed' through the reports that appear in the media. This could be one of the reasons why the teaching profession is undervalued by the other members of society." (A.M.V. - Constanța)

The teaching profession also is overshadowed by those without a clear calling, who find an outlet in education. "There are many people who choose to become teachers, in the absence of another source of income, without finding themselves in the profession, thus making a big mistake, both for themselves and for the students." (D.M. - Harghita)

3.3. The results – the position of the profession and its status over the last decades

The Romanian teachers' (as other countries teachers') feeling of the decline in the prestige of their profession, over the last few decades, has been thus poignantly expressed:

"I remember the olden days when students were still fascinated by the idea and the human being behind the teacher, by the life of such a person. I too was looking for role models, for landmarks in the people who came to the department. Today's students don't really seek for role models in us anymore, except perhaps from a moral point of view. But in a world where the teacher is but a Baudelairean albatross, scorned and humiliated by those around, the student will be more attracted to models who succeed in life in a different manner… Maybe the teachers themselves are affected at times by this aspect and forget their role as landmarks, as role models, turning into encyclopedias that only transmit information, without investing soul and heart in the connection between their selves and the student. Or, even worse, deviating from a certain moral conduct." (C.G. - Suceava)

"The status of the teacher in the mirror of today's society would have the following dominants: a far from advatageous profession – 'the cinderella' of the society; a disadvantaged and insufficiently financed socio-professional category; a social category that has been depreciated exceedingly much over the last 30 years, having today an eroded image, lacking the prestige of the past. The mass media also contributed decisively to the current profile of the teacher, by promoting, mainly, negative examples." (K.M. - Mureș)

It clearly follows that the position of the teacher in the hierarchy of the social space has not been upheld, on the contrary, it has dropped, inducing a feeling of dissatisfaction, especially to senior teachers, who experienced a different reality at the beginning of their careers.

3.4. Suggestions to enhance the social prestige of the teaching profession

Among the solutions that the teaching staff found, we mention a few.

"a) The elaboration of the statute of the teacher, with rights and duties, which is to emphasize their extremely important role in the education of the future generation,

b) A better remuneration to encourage teachers to deliver a higher quality performance

c) Positive advertising of education and of the teaching staff in the mass media, aimed at increasing the social prestige of the teacher." (A.E. - Mureș)

"I believe that changes can be brought about not only outside of us, through better media coverage of the many positive examples of teachers (a fact that would sensitize the public perception of the profession) and through activities meant to raise parents' awareness of the multitude of tasks successfully solved by the school, but also inside us, by continuing to keep a watchful eye on what is changing around us, to maintain ourselves alive and empathetic, to continuously develop both our psycho-pedagogical skills and (especially) our communication ones." (M.I.M. - Iași)

"I think that the main solution lies in the actual activity of each teacher. We can earn social prestige ourselves through our own activity! Each of us must find solutions that are as accurate as possible as well as appreciated by the students! " (G.C. - Constanța)

"Firstly, the rigorous selection of the teaching staff at the initial stage would be a clear message given to society as to the fact that quality education will be provided.

Secondly, the existence of clear and coherent initial training policies through quality mentoring programs would be a premise of professionalisation in the education system as well, similarly to other systems." (H.A.M. - Botoșani)

"The visibility of such communities as Aspire Teachers and SuperTeach, which deserve to be promoted with their mission, vision and work, is necessary. They are strong communities that bring together valuable teachers from all over the country and propose creative experiences of learning, improvement, contexts in which the sharing of good practices really works." (R.V.N. - Sibiu)

4. Discussion

In today's society, sharing knowledge seems to be a less valued competence than a technical or medical one, because people are not aware of the methodology that a good teacher masters. The social value of the teaching profession has decreased also because in the digital world the emphasis is no longer on the transmission of information, which can be easily obtained from the Internet. Learning has become the result of self-organization and teachers have not yet worked out a way not so much to produce learning as to generate it through a guiding system of good questions so that students find answers for themselves. It seems that in the digital age, the Maieutic method of Socrates should be resurrected, reinforced.

The 2021 Report has found the same challenges for the status of teachers as the 2018 Report, without improvements. As Thompson pointed out "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the extent to which it supports, sustains, and invests in the status of its teachers" (2021, p. 115). Regarding the decline of the social status of teachers, interesting points of view are worth addressing along with Dennery (2022), regarding the current reality. He states that "part of the feeling of social status decline is probably also due to worsened working conditions (school violence, little support from the hierarchy, and weaker students than in the past)". Some other non-budget aspects are: "violence around schools, aggressions from parents and schoolkids, the lack of support from the administration". Pay also needs to be addressed, insists Dennery. The author shows that the comparison should not be made between teachers' wage and the minimum or average salary in the economy, but with the wage of other categories of higher education graduates. Moreover, knowing that

on the labor market wage increases are justified by prior increases in productivity and that in education we cannot speak of such an aspect, the absence of increases in productivity should be counterbalanced by increases in budget allocations for education. In this respect, although Art. 8 of the National Education Law no. 1/2011 stipulates that a percentage of 6% of the Gross Domestic Product be allocated to education, we know that in Romania this percentage has never been allocated, although declaratively education was a national priority. There are international studies that explicitly mention the need to allocate 6% of GDP to education (Nadirova, 2017).

The limitations of our work consist in the impossibility of making generalizations based on a qualitative study method and taking into account a rather large, but still unrepresentative number of teachers included, but also the failure to discuss many opinions due to editorial space.

Conclusions

From the assessment of the international analyses and the undertaking of our own study, a consensus of perception resulted regarding the diminishing of the prestige of the teaching profession and the weakening of the status of teachers, although the public discourse states education is a priority. Since the teachers' perception does not confirm this fact, their proposals and those of the authors concerned ask for: support from the authorities through legislation that defends the teachers' rights, more substantial salaries, higher budget allocations, downsizing number in classes, career path support, quality mentoring programs, self-improvement, less administrative burdens, and the media and the governors to outline a more favorable image of this social category.

Rethinking the problem of the status of teachers remains an important task.

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(HOW) COULD THE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS EFFECTIVELY ACHIEVE THE ACTIVE TEACHING SKILLS? A PRACTICAL APPROACH AND A SWOT ANALYSIS

Irina POP-PĂCURAR[9], Miriam KENYERES[10]

Abstract: *Active teaching skills (ATS) represent a desirable concept for pre-service teachers to attain. The purpose of this study is to illustrate an example of a teaching training approach that potentially enhances the acquisition of these skills. The paper first provides a concise overview of the teacher training program in Romania. Following this, it presents an example of training ATS, encompassing the three key areas of a teacher's development: professional, personal, and social. Lastly, a SWOT analysis is conducted to discuss the educational significance of this training approach.*

Key words: *teacher training, active teaching skills, reflective practice, mentoring, teaching practice*

1. Introduction

Teacher training is a dynamic process that requires time, resources, and constant innovation. The main objective of this process is providing teachers significant skills and competencies to adequately respond to the needs of contemporary students and to adapt to the changes of the educational system. Active teaching skills (ATS) are one illustration of such abilities. However, what are ATS and how can they be developed? Active learning and learning methodologies are the subject of numerous studies (Diković and Gergorić, 2020; Konopka et al., 2015), but the process by which teachers can develop these competencies has not been sufficiently explored. In this paper, we address this challenge by suggesting that ATS are defined as a set of professional, social and personal skills. More specifically, these skills encompass knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that enable teachers to deliberately create and conduct interactive lessons using innovative methodologies and to effectively collaborate with both pupils and colleagues. Furthermore, ATS also entail the capacity for self-reflection on their teaching identity and experiences. The premise of this study is that the achievement of ATS is strongly related to the support required by beginning teachers, meaning the development of the three dimensions of a teacher (Table 1): professional, personal, and social (Bell and Gilbert, 1996; European Commission, 2010).

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Development of the dimensions of a beginning teacher (adapted after European commission, 2010)

Table 1

Dimensions	Aims	Resources and means
Professional	• developing teaching competencies and professionalism	• reflective-active lesson planning • peer teaching and mentoring • microteaching
Social	• promoting cooperation and collaborative learning	
Personal	• developing motivation and identity as teacher • reducing anxiety and stress • reinforcing competencies	

The main objective of this paper is to provide an example of effective training strategy with the purpose of attaining ATS, through the conceptualization of the three dimensions (Table 1). To accomplish this, we initially outline the framework for Biology teacher training in Romania. Subsequently, we present an illustration of a teaching training approach, a multifaceted experience, specifically designed to foster ATS of pre-service Biology teachers and, by extension, meet the developmental requirements of beginning teachers. Finally, we conduct a SWOT analysis to discuss the formative utility of this approach thoroughly.

2. Teacher education program in Romania

The teacher education program in Romania follows the country's National Education policy and is conducted in two levels, running concurrently with undergraduate and master's studies, within a period of five years. At Babeș-Bolyai University, Level I extends over three years and includes subjects centered on theoretical foundations such as Educational Psychology and Pedagogy, taught over the course of three semesters. Additionally, it covers subjects with a practical-applicative orientation, such as Biology Didactics, university-based Observational Teaching Practice (OTP), school-based Teaching Practice (TP), and Classroom Management. Level II extends over two years and comprises subjects that deepen the knowledge consolidated during Level I. The following ATS training approach is focused on the students from the second and third year of Level I training and the collaborative relationship established between them and the first-year students from Level II.

3. Guidelines for training active teaching skills at pre-service teachers

Pre-service teachers encounter a series of questions and needs during the early stages of their teacher training. According to Alberta Teachers' Association, 2003, these needs include: understanding the expected responsibilities of a teacher, effective instructional planning, curriculum comprehension, student motivation, communication with parents and colleagues, stress management, and more. To address these needs, we have developed a training approach targeting students in the second and last year of their pre-service teacher training, as well as students from the

first year of the second cycle, with a primary focus on prospective teachers. Based on evidence collected through systematic observations spanning over a decade, yielding promising results, this flexible teacher training approach aims the acquiring ATS, while considering the three dimensions of teacher development: professional, personal, and social. It encompasses the development of key concepts such as reflective and active lesson planning, peer teaching and mentoring, and microteaching, as well as how the cyclical interaction between these elements influences the attaining of ATS (Figure 1).

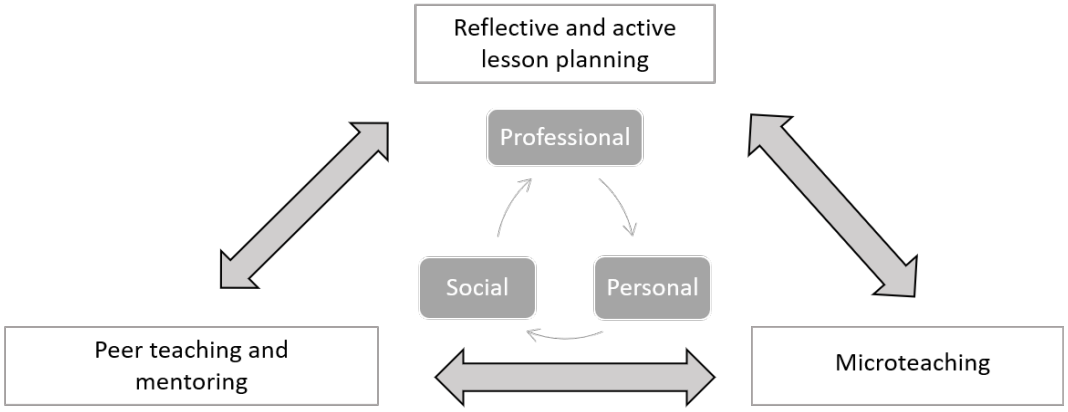

Figure 1. *The teaching training approach for achieving ATS in pre-service teachers* (original)

3.1. Reflective and active lesson planning

Lesson planning is an essential skill that pre-service teachers learn during their training. To achieve the educational objectives, the planning and structure of lessons should be closely aligned with and related to the components of the curriculum (van Diggele et al., 2020). Lesson plans serve as a valuable guide for effectively managing time, resources, materials, and techniques in the classroom (Iqbal et al., 2021). Our first question addressed was: how can pre-service teachers attain the skills and knowledge to design lessons consciously and meaningfully? The framework example presented above (Figure 1) proposes a cycle of interactions and concepts wherein students, initially, learn how to structure a lesson by using reflection (Mathew et al., 2017) and acquiring active pedagogical content knowledge. The latter encompasses the knowledge of instructional strategies and representations (Magnusson et al., 1999).

Reflection is a relevant process that enhances lifelong learning and awareness about professional identity (European Commission, 2010). Reflection is important for both professional and personal development. Specifically, *reflective teaching* is one of the teacher's most valuable skills. How does teaching-related reflection can be accomplished?

Based on our experiences and observations, we have noticed that some pre-service teachers may require additional support to achieve a deeper level of understanding of lesson planning. Engaging in reflective practices on instructional design can bring coherence and meaning to the process of lesson

planning (van Diggele et al., 2020). To employ reflection on the design process, our suggested method involves using guiding questions and resources like a teaching journal.

The process of questioning the lesson planning and, furthermore, the teaching approach (by asking "why, how, what?") aims to facilitate the establishment of connections between elements of the lesson plan and the components of the Biology curriculum, thereby adding significance to the act of teaching itself. In Romania, the National Curriculum is the main document that designates the educational content and defines the interdependencies between educational purposes, content, instructional, and assessment strategies. Withal, it is important to mention that, in Romania, the main educational purpose is the development of competencies, which, according to the Council of the European Union are a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The Biology curriculum encompasses various elements, including an introductory note, general competencies, specific competencies, examples of learning activities, practical work, and methodological suggestions (Figure 2).

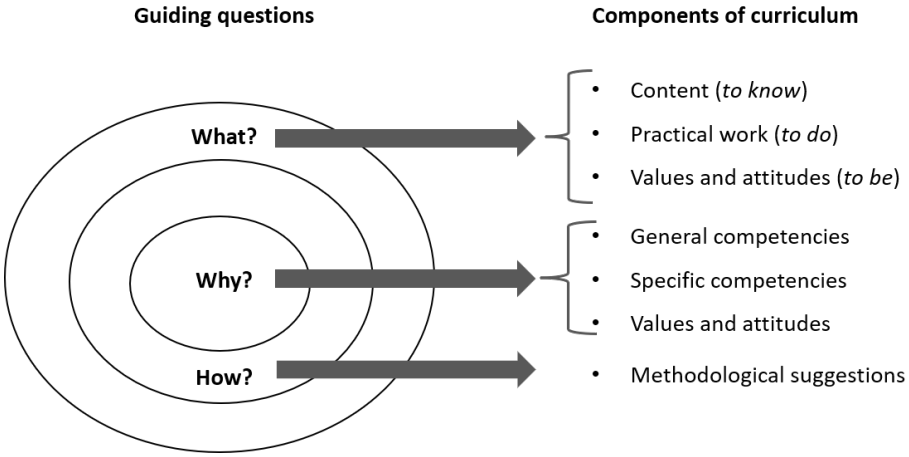

Figure 2. *Relationship between lesson planning guided questions and Biology curriculum* (original)

To optimize learning and maximize engagement of pre-service teachers we utilize an additional reflection tool: an adapted *teaching journal*, that accompanies students throughout their entire learning process, from the second year until the final year. The journal comprises a series of components such as:

- *The Teacher's Iceberg model* (Malderez and Bodóczky, 1999): a mentoring introspection tool destined to develop the teacher's professional identity and arouse students' motivation;
- *A list of traits of a good teacher:* a reflection exercise intended for identification of exemplary teaching models. In paired groups, students use the *Think-Pair-Share* (TPS), an active learning technique, to recall their best teachers and list their qualities;
- *Reading and worksheets for active learning techniques* linked to the ERR teaching framework (E-evocation, R-realization of meaning, R-reflection), such as *Value line*, *Jigsaw*, *The circle method*, and others (Pop-Păcurar, 2013);

- *Observation sheets*: template-like lesson-observation tools used by students for developing their own observation and reflection skills (concerning the practice of their own and their peers).

Observation is an important process for professional development, serving as a method for beginning teachers to internalize new teaching approaches, explore the impact of different strategies, and connect knowledge with practice (GTCE, 2006a:). It provides a context for pre-service teachers to contemplate the teaching process and reflect on the significant aspects of the lesson. However, during the early stages, observation is a complex process that requires focus and guidance. For second-year students, who are in the process of learning how to reflect on a lesson, we propose a *semi-structured observation approach*, with a focus on the AMC (Attitude and Communication, Methodology, and Content) (Table 2). Subsequently, in the final year, students will have the option to either use observation sheets with elements to be followed, or freely write down their impressions of the lesson.

Guidelines for lesson observation and reflection Table 2

Elements to be monitored	Guiding questions, comments, remarks
Attitude and communication	• how is the communication (verbal, nonverbal, paraverbal)? • how is the attitude of the speaker? • how was the dynamic of the teacher/pupils?
Methodology/didactic strategy	• what traditional and modern methods are used? • what and how are the resources integrated in the lesson? • what type of organization of the classroom is used?
Content	• how is the content processed: implicit or explicit? • how is structured? • is it adequate for pupils' age or knowledge level? • are presented/used all types of content (notional, procedural, axiological)?

Related to active lesson planning, we explored and searched for answers to the following reflection questions: *What is active learning? Why is it important to learn about it? How can we design active lessons*? According to Prince, 2004, p. 224: "active learning is the technical term for a set of pedagogical practices that address the students' learning process under a different perspective from that of classical methodologies". Therefore, active learning can only be accomplished through active lesson planning.

Why is important to learn about active lesson planning? According to a study conducted by Pop-Păcurar and Biriș-Dorhoi, in 2015, the findings revealed that pre-service teachers encountered difficulties in distinguishing between classical methods (e.g., modelling, demonstration, and experiment) which are part of traditional methodologies, and modern active techniques like *Cluster*, *Jigsaw*, or *The Cube*. Acquiring knowledge about new active instructional strategies is mandatory in the context of contemporary pupils. A recent study has indicated that students exhibit a lack of

engagement and boredom in classroom activities designed using traditional methodologies (Bergdahl et al., 2020).

How to design active lessons? Students learn about active techniques, in the suggested training approach, from two different perspectives. One perspective aligns with the concept of experiential learning, where students discover modern active techniques by applying them in various activities during the Biology Didactics practical course. For example, they explore the curriculum structure using *Jigsaw*: first, they form initial groups and collaboratively complete a task, then they reassemble into "groups of experts" to study specific components of the curriculum. Finally, students return to their original groups and share their knowledge about the curriculum with each other. Another already mentioned activity requires pre-service teachers, using the *Think-Pair-Share* technique, to list and discuss the traits of a good teacher. Despite our appreciation for new methods, we still acknowledge the value of classical methods. Thus, in workshops aimed at updating the knowledge acquired in previous Pedagogy courses, students present classic teaching methods in the form of posters displayed in the active technique: *Gallery walk*.

The second perspective through which students explore and familiarize themselves with active techniques, takes place during the OTP semester and is represented by the intervention of master's colleagues who conduct workshops and demonstrate the implementation of various active techniques like *The Cube*, *Star-bursting*, *Fishbone*, *Six Thinking Hats, Know-Want to know-Learned*, and others. The concept of peer teaching and mentoring is further developed in the subsequent section.

3.2. Peer teaching and mentoring

Peer teaching and mentoring is a time-honored form of learning which holds significant importance in teacher preparation. In Finland, a mentoring model called peer group mentoring (PGM) has been implemented for several years. PGM establishes connections between experienced teachers and novices, facilitating the knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences (Geeraerts et al., 2014). PGM relies on the integrative pedagogy model, encompassing four types of transmitted knowledge: theoretical, practical, self-regulative, and socio-cultural. "Therefore, personal experiential knowledge is used in combination with theoretical concepts and models" (Heikkinen et al., 2012).

In the training approach proposed by us, we employ the concept of peer teaching and mentoring through the establishment of a collaborative group that serves as a bridge between Level II (master) students, who possess limited experience, and pre-service teachers, students in the final year. This model's concept is based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory. *How does this interaction take place*? Level II students participate by showcasing examples of desirable teaching behaviors for final-year students. They demonstrate various active teaching methods, diverse types of classroom and group(s) management, and ways to effectively integrate resources into lessons.

Peer teaching and mentoring contribute to the acquisition of ATS with the aim of developing all three teacher's dimensions: professional, social, and personal. A study conducted by Geeraerts et al., in 2014, measured mentees' perception of the PGM's importance in the early stages of their teaching careers, as well as its impact on the three dimensions. Regarding the professional dimension, more than 50% of instructors indicated that PGM led to changes in their working methods, facilitated the

development of new pedagogical ideas, and provided valuable information to support their work. In terms of the personal dimension, over 80% of teachers reported that PGM strengthened their professional identity, by enhancing their ability to cope with work challenges and instilling self-confidence in their teaching duties. Lastly, concerning the social dimension, the PGM model had a significant impact, with more than 70% of respondents stating that it improved their collaboration skills and their capacity to generate ideas for the development of their work community.

The mentoring example we propose offers a range of benefits for both parties involved:

- the learning environment fosters a hierarchy-free learning zone, blurring the lines between formal, informal, and non-formal contexts (Geeraerts et al., 2014);
- students enhance their skills in designing and processing specialized content;
- knowledge is transferred from peer to peer through in-depth discussions, collaboration, and reflection;
- the concept of collaborative learning is strongly emphasized, as learning occurs in both directions.

3.3. Microteaching

Teaching practice is a fundamental stage for training pre-service teachers. Primary objectives of this concept include: introducing students to the learning and teaching environment; facilitating the transition from theory to practice; organizing, planning, and implementing lessons; fostering collaborative relationships with pupils and colleagues, and more (Saphier et al., 2008). In the training approach we outlined, teaching practice serves as the platform where all aspects related to reflective-active lesson planning, peer teaching, and mentoring are reunited. Students gain valuable experience in understanding the responsibilities of being a teacher, starting from the second semester of their second year of teaching training. After consolidating the theoretical knowledge, they group in teams of three to design, plan and implement "micro-lessons" with a duration of thirty minutes. These lessons are presented in a role-play format: the students who lead the instructional process act as teachers, while the rest of their colleagues assume a dual role as observers and pupils. Furthermore, throughout this OTP period, students undergo two practical teaching-observation experiences using the lesson observation professional tools (worksheets) as part of the OTP subject. Summarizing, this includes one individually microteaching activity, two guided lesson observations (per student), post teaching analysis and reflection, and participating in workshops organized by master's students.

These teaching experiences offer numerous advantages, granting students the opportunity to observe and internalize diverse teaching strategies, as well as to reflect on their teaching style. After teaching or observing the lesson, the instruction process is analyzed in groups or individually, either orally or in written form. Providing feedback has a significant impact on pre-service teachers, as it promotes learning by offering a comprehensive overview of their progress and areas for further development. Moreover, feedback serves as a motivation for students and encourages them to engage in self-reflection (van Diggele et al., 2020).

Verbal feedback encourages mentee's reflection and active listening by asking open-ended questions. In our approach, we follow the model proposed by Pendleton et al., 1984 (Figure 3).

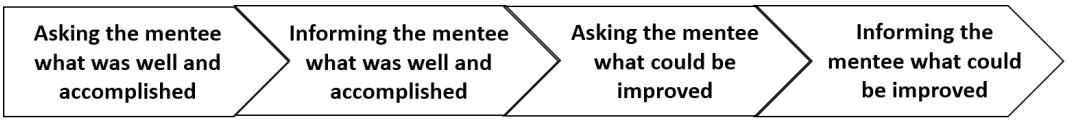

Figure 3. *Model for verbal feedback* (adapted after Pendleton et al., 1984)

Regarding the written feedback, our suggestion to students is to provide feedback while maintaining the roles from the role-play exercise: as both pupils and observers. Therefore, on one side of the paper, they write down a few ideas from the pupil's perspective, and on the other side, from the perspective of the observer-the mentee (Figure 4).

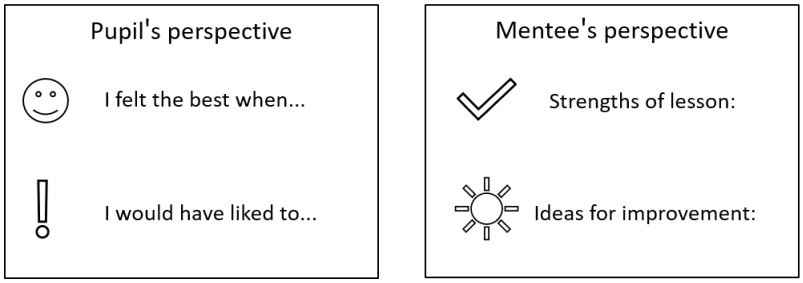

Figure 4. *An example for simple structure of written feedback*

4. A SWOT analysis of the teaching training approach

To discuss the formative utility of this teaching training approach, we conducted a SWOT analysis. The analysis identified a series of internal and external factors that can positively or negatively influence the success of our proposed approach (Figure 5). Based on these findings, the following conclusions can be drawn: our example of teaching training could foster the development of ATS, by providing a conducive environment for learning; one key area for improvement is a more careful selection of students who enroll in the teacher training program, based on their skills. Moreover, the university teaching-training curriculum has to assign more hours and opportunities for the practical training of teachers. This practical training would be recommended to start from the first academic year. Additionally, fostering a positive mentality among students will be instrumental in supporting them throughout their training.

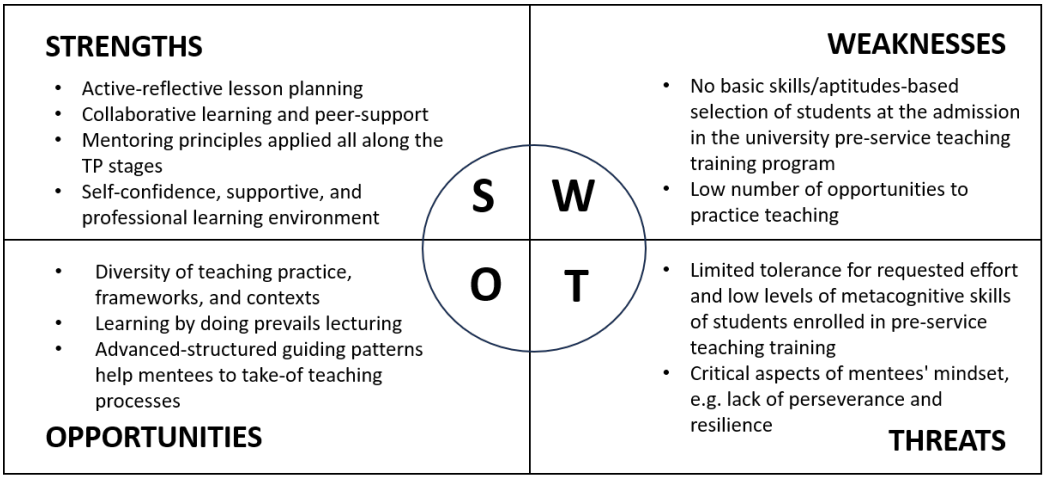

Figure 5. *SWOT analysis of the teaching training approach* (original)

5. Conclusions

This study sought to offer an example of teaching training approach that potentially enhances the acquisition of ATS. The acquisition of these skills is strongly related to the development of the three dimensions of a teacher: professional, social, and personal. The methods to attain ATS involve reflective-active practice, mentoring, and microteaching. The SWOT analysis of this teaching training approach has identified several positive aspects but it has also identified some adversities. However, potential solutions for solving these problems have been suggested.

Looking into the future, we firmly believe that there is an urgent need to deeply explore the meaning of active teaching skills and to verify by quantitative research the efficiency of the proposed teaching training approach. We should also continue to create conducive contexts where these skills can be nurtured and attained. By doing so, we can further improve the effectiveness of teaching training programs and better equip young teachers for their roles in the future.

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MENTORING IN VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Margareta M. THOMSON[11]

Abstract: *Mentoring can take various forms and mentoring models can be implementing in different settings, such as formal of non-formal contexts. The current article presents mentoring in various educational settings, with an emphasis on pre-service and in-service teacher mentoring. Additionally, two examples of educational projects with a mentoring component built in, featuring innovative science programs are described. Both programs aim at increasing STEM and science literacy among K-12 students and teachers. Additionally, the programs' structure and goals help develop academic motivation and specialized scientific knowledge and skills.*

Key words: *formal education, non-formal education, mentoring models, teaching mentoring.*

1. Introduction

Research shows that mentoring is an imperative activity related to personal and professional development of the mentee (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010; Thomson et al., 2020). Furthermore, research shows that mentoring is a significant learning opportunity for learners of all levels; practitioners such as teachers, students, educators, administrators, and other professionals have described mentoring as a key component in their academic and professional development (Abiddin & Hassan, 2012). In the current article, various mentoring models are presented along with examples of mentoring in non-formal and formal education settings in the United States. There are different mentoring approaches, thus different education mentoring models throughout the United States exists. Given the high flexibility to develop and implement mentoring models, each program is designed based on the program aims and goals, as well as the educational or professional needs of the mentees.

2. Formal Mentoring in Teaching

2.1. Prospective Teachers' Mentorship

A successful teacher education program includes in their design carefully constructed coursework, field experiences and a strong mentorship model. Each teacher education program is responsible for their prospective teachers' preparation and typically a mentorship model is implemented during the last years of teacher preparation when teacher candidates are engaged in fieldwork experiences in

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the K-12 classrooms. In the US, a four-year program is typical in a traditional teacher education program at a college or university. During their first and second year of studies (i.e., freshman and sophomore year), pre-service teachers' coursework consists of general education courses, core courses, and specialized courses in their field of studies. During their third and fourth year of studies (i.e., junior and senior year), pre-service teachers are introduced to methods coursework in their field of studies (i.e., science teaching, mathematics teaching, special education, or elementary education teaching). The methods courses combine specialized knowledge (e.g., math, biology, psychology) with education expertise, and field experiences. A well-designed methods course is carefully aligned with field experiences and generally, prospective teachers spend a considerable number of hours into the K-12 schools for their methods course projects. In addition to having the methods courses, in their last year of teacher preparation, prospective teachers spend one full semester immersed in field experiences, teaching K-12 students under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher, which is a mentor teacher assigned to the preservice teacher for that semester. Mentor teachers are selected among the most experienced and accomplished teachers in the school and undergo themselves a training with university faculty or a field experience supervisor/liaison. The relationship between the mentee and mentor during this time is shown by research to be crucial for the preservice teachers in their gain of pedagogical knowledge, attitudes to teaching professional identity development, and willingness commit to teaching (Carrier et al., 2017; Thomson et al., 2020).

2.2. Inservice Teachers' Mentorship

Research shows that a wide array of mentoring models and strategies help with teacher retention and quality instruction in the classroom (Abiddin, & Hassan, 2012). National reports and research findings point to the severe teacher attrition problem in the United States in the past decade, due to a multitude of factors such as emotional burden, lack of power, bureaucracy, and other school related factors (Tuxford, & Bradley, 2015). Novice teachers, especially those in their first 5 years of teaching, leave the profession at higher rates compared to more experienced teachers. To reduce teacher attrition and help retention, many schools and school districts adopted various models of teacher mentoring, in which novice teachers receive support not just from the school administration, but from other teachers, especially from more advanced, experienced teachers.

There are different approaches to mentoring in each state in the United States, and typically for the inservice teachers, their respective Department of Public Instruction (DPI), is responsible for overseeing teacher mentoring, and teacher professional development. In a typical formal mentoring program, novice teachers entering the profession are paired up with an experienced teacher during their early years in teaching (e.g., during their first 3 years into teaching). The mentor teacher receives training, and like in the case of preservice teachers mentoring, the bond between the mentee and mentor is crucial in the efforts of mentoring process.

3. Non-Formal Mentoring in Teaching and Professional Development

In their pursuit of professional growth, teachers oftentimes look for opportunities that provides them with professional experiences and mentoring in non-formal education settings. Examples of

non-formal programs that provide mentoring in addition to experiences in professional development, can be community-based programs led by government of non-government (i.e., NGO) funding agencies, regional or state sponsored projects, university based sponsored programs, or programs built around an established partnership between local universities and K-12 schools.

3.1. University Based Outreach and Research Projects Supporting Mentoring

An example of non-formal mentoring program can be a university-based project that combines outreach elements with research and professional training/mentoring for teachers. Typically, university professors or faculty researchers apply for funding to a funding agency with a plan or grant proposal for research/outreach. Once funded, these projects are implemented for a duration of 1-5 years, or more depending on the grant proposal's aim and funding plan. Teachers participate for a certain period or time (e.g., days, weeks) in such program and the focus is on enhancing specialized knowledge and skills in a particular domain. The research/outreach project builds in a component on teacher professional development, focusing on a specific area, such as developing mathematics teaching strategies, science teaching, environmental education, literacy, or diversity. The goal is to provide teachers with specialized domain and pedagogical knowledge that will improve their classroom teaching, which in turn will benefit students, and ultimately will benefit the community at large.

3.2. Community Based Outreach and Research Projects Supporting Mentoring

Like the university-based projects that can focus on teachers' professional development by combining outreach and research elements, the community-based programs aim at educating teachers as well in various types of non-formal educational settings. Generally, such programs adopt a comprehensive mixture of instructional methods and curriculum that mentors can use to better link the classroom curriculum to their communities, such as cultural heritage, history, literature, nature, or environmental issues. Oftentimes the focus of the programs is on outreach, by building a community-school partnership that benefits not just teachers, but students as well, and the wide community. Examples of community-based program can include, service-learning programs, experience-based career education, cooperative education, and apprenticeship programs.

4. Research Projects Supporting Mentoring

Two programs are briefly described in the following section to illustrate different educational settings and how mentoring is built in. Both programs are supported and funded by research, funded by federal agencies from the United States, namely the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the National Health Institutes (NIH). One of the programs described in the following section is called the *Environmental Health Research Experiences for Teachers* (EHRE) and describes a non-formal mentoring program for inservice teachers hosted by a major US university in partnership with two affiliated research centers. The other program described in the following section is called *Accomplished Teachers of Mathematics and Science* (ATOMS) and describes a teacher training program designed for pre-service teachers' education at a major university in the US.

4.1. Professional Development for Inservice Teachers: Non-Formal Educational Setting

The science mentoring program described in the current section, the *Environmental Health Research Experiences for Teachers* (EHRE) is a program funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a duration of 5 years. This professional development program is designed for high-school teachers who are selected and welcomed into the program on an annual basis. Novice teachers, from public schools experiencing high poverty are encouraged to apply, women and individuals of a minority group are encouraged to apply. The program provides teachers with professional opportunities to work in a mentoring program focused on a cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins A. (2006). Teachers spend a total of 40 hours per week in the 8-week summer professional development program working alongside their host lab team and the mentor scientist and participating in outreach activities such as seminars, workshops, and guided development of science curriculum.

A key component of the program is the individual mentored research experiences in host labs from two biomedical research centres affiliated with a major research university in the United States, namely, the Center for Human Health and the Environment (CHHE), and the Comparative Medicine Institute (CMI). Teachers are integrated into genuine research projects during their program attendance and participate in lab meetings and activities, gaining knowledge of how scientific research is conducted and learning specialized knowledge related to ongoing projects in their host lab. Each teacher is assigned to a mentor scientist and the scientist's lab is hosting the teacher for duration of the summer professional development program. During the apprenticeship in the lab and under the supervision of their mentor scientists, teachers benefit from learning specialized knowledge related to the environmental health research projects conducted in their host labs. Additionally, being engaged in authentic lab research, teachers gain knowledge of the practical, hands-on scientific procedures and gain understandings about scientific research, which is critical for supporting active learning in their classrooms (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

Additionally, each week, teachers participate in educational activities with specialists and scientists to enhance their knowledge in a variety of topics related to environmental health literacy, and learn how to convert their lab experiences into classroom teaching. The end of the program culminates in a public event reflecting multiple aspects of training in the program. In a mini symposium held at their main research host center teachers present their research projects and related curriculum development. Overall, the professional development program is characterized by the following features:

1) creates opportunities for teachers to witness the complex work of scientists;

2) engages teachers in complex research experiences, so they can experience first-hand and understand the scientific work;

3) provided ongoing support from mentor scientists, as teachers explore how to translate their research experiences into their classroom instruction.

The structure of the program includes a combination of immersive lab activities and instructional and outreach activities. Teachers spend four days per week in the host lab working on projects conducted by the faculty mentor scientist, and one day per week in outreach activities. The following are examples of these activities:

Lab immersion. During the professional development program, four days per week teachers work alongside mentor scientists and the lab team. This allows teachers to be genuinely immersed in

scientific research projects, learning how scientific research is designed and implemented. Each teacher works closely to their mentor scientist and the host lab team for the entire duration of their summer program. By working beside their lab team and their mentor scientists, teachers gain complex knowledge and research skills in environmental health science research.

Instructional and outreach activities. In addition to lab immersion activities, during the week, one day, teachers participate in group meetings outside their host labs, interacting with their peers, guest speakers, and other mentor scientists. The instructional and outreach sessions have a focus on current research in environmental health sciences, outreach activities involving the community, and related activities on environmental health science instruction. The weekly group meetings include interactive group activities and discussions, talks from guest speakers on a variety of scientific topics, environmental health science seminars, lab visits, and online activities.

There are numerous benefits of the mentoring model such as the EHRE program for the teacher professional development, for student achievement and for the community (Thomson et al., 2018). Programs like EHRE can support the development of scientific literacy in communities and schools, and help the public learn more about environmental health research topics. Additionally, such programs have the potential to engage communities in discussions about their local environmental health issues and in decision making for improved health policies (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Klein-Gardner, Johnston, & Benson, 2012).

4.2. Pre-Service Teachers' Preparation: Informal Educational Setting

Research into preparing the next generation of teachers, suggests that a successful teacher preparation program is characterized by rigor and has a focus on learners and learning, reflection on practice, assessment and feedback, coherence across features, and collaborative practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Research describes the importance of *field experiences that include carefully selected mentor teachers* and congruence between teaching practices advocated by the university instructors and those observed in the schools (Cochran-Smith et al., 2008).

Furthermore, national reports and research call for an urgency to provide quality teaching in the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to better respond to the fast-changing needs of our modern global society (Fulton & Britton, 2011). Responding to the call, STEM-focused teacher preparation programs have been developed in the past recent years, however mostly focused on teacher preparation at the secondary level (i.e., middle school and high-school teachers). Very few programs in the United States focus on STEM teaching and training teachers at the elementary level. The program described next, called *Accomplished Teachers of Mathematics and Science* (ATOMS) is one of the very few in the nation, developed at major university in the United States with the aim to train elementary teachers in STEM. This STEM-focused elementary teacher preparation program is distinctly characteristic for being highly innovative and easily sustainable with traditional university-based resources, even in difficult economic times. Sixty new elementary candidates are admitted into the STEM-focused program each year. The prospective teachers' program begins in their freshman year with a required education orientation class and multiple opportunities to participate in clubs and youth advocacy groups. The key features of the ATOMS model characterize a strong teacher education program, given its focus on (1) program coherence,

(2) rigor in the general education program, (3) innovative, conceptually focused methods courses, and 4) extensive field experiences aligned to coursework.

Particularly, *the extensive fieldwork and the quality of mentorship* in their field experiences makes the teacher preparation program strong. Among the most critical components of a quality teacher education program is the coherence between program coursework and field experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Faircloth, He, & Higgins, 2011). The early and intense fieldwork experiences, as well as the prolonged clinical work in schools, distinguish the ATOMS program from other teacher preparation programs. During the sophomore year, teacher candidates begin their fieldwork. In this first experience, they observe and interview teachers and students. During the junior year, the candidates spend 90 hours per semester working in schools. Importantly, the candidates are placed in K-2 classrooms during the fall semester and in Grade 3–classrooms during the spring semester to align with the grade-level focus of the methods courses. During their senior year, the candidates have yearlong placements in schools, which prepare them for full-time student teaching in the spring and afford them the opportunity to observe student growth across a year. In addition, the candidates receive extensive coaching from a supervisor. The coaching involves pre-observation planning meetings, written lesson plans, observations, and both written and face-to-face feedback on the lessons. Table 1 in Appendix A presents the program's features.

The field-based cognitive apprenticeship model (Collins, 2006) supports prospective teachers' developing understandings of the principles of learning and teaching and the development of their critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Faircloth et al., 2011). It is not merely extensive time in the field that prepares teachers but quality time. The candidates in the ATOMS program are placed, to the extent possible, with highly qualified mentor teachers who are viewed as experts. They are carefully selected by both school and university personnel, with candidate input as well, as recommended by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010). Additionally, the university supervisors, highly trained in their field, work closely not just with our ATOMS candidates but with the mentor teachers, conducting mentor training each summer for new mentor teachers. Table 2 in Appendix B presents fieldwork and courses alignments.

The program's design provides coherence to ensure an intentionally recursive experience for candidates, allowing for growth in understanding over time as topics are further developed rather than just repeated. The coherence also allows for candidates to make connections between the actual practice and materials used in public schools and the work completed in their university courses. Research indicates that teacher education programs with features like those of the ATOMS program would be characterized as powerful teacher education programs supporting the development of candidates' complex teaching skills (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010; Darling Hammond, 2010).

5. Conclusion

Research suggests that mentoring benefits greatly both the mentee and the mentor, and the development/refinement of their teaching identities (Carrier et al., 2027). And one of the most important aspects of mentoring is relatedness; building a strong professional relationship that represents the foundation for learning. The key role of a great mentor, and particularly that of a great teacher mentor is budling a professional relationship that encourages continuous support,

scaffolds a professional identity. A positive liaison between the mentor and mentee is essential for the mentee's ability to develop quality teaching practices. Particularly, for prospective teachers this aspect is important as they experience for the first time their teacher profession in real classrooms and are placed in schools during their extensive fieldwork under the supervision of a mentor teacher. The quality of mentorship in field experiences makes a teacher preparation program strong. Among the key factors influencing a teacher education program is the quality of mentorship and the alignment/coherence between program coursework and field experiences. For inservice teachers, the quality of their mentoring experiences is as important as the specialized knowledge they aim to gain. A strong mentorship enhances motivation for learning and provides a model for the teacher into their own relationships with current and future students.

Appendix A

Table 1. Program's features

	General Education Courses	Professional Studies Courses	Field Experiences
Time	Freshman & Sophomore years	Sophomore year (one class), Junior & Senior years	Sophomore, Junior, & Senior Years
Program Courses/ Structure	STEM courses: 27 credit hours General courses: calculus, physics or chemistry, earth or life science Optional courses in STEM: Mathematics for Elementary Teachers, Physical Sciences for Elementary Teachers, Materials in Engineering, Design Thinking	Methods courses in reading, science and mathematics One engineering design methods course which is focused on children's creativity Integrated science and mathematics courses with literacy, arts, and social studies In depth seminar classes covering the topics of classroom management, diversity, and backwards design	School placements providing mentoring with teachers demonstrating expertise in mathematics and science Gradually increasing teaching and planning responsibilities, coordinated across courses and semesters Classroom placements aligned with methods courses by grade level (K-2 in fall; 3-5 in spring) A year-long student teaching placement in senior year

Appendix B
Table 2. Fieldwork and courses

First and Second Years	
STEM knowledge: 9 courses (27 credit hours)	-Mathematics content: 4 courses (e.g., Calculus and Advanced Mathematics) -Science content: 4 courses (e.g., Conceptual Physics) -Engineering course: 1 course (e.g., Design)
Education and child development: 4 courses	-Intro to Education -Applied Child Development -Educational Psychology -Intro to Elementary Education (course content + 15 fieldwork hours in K-5 classroom)
Third Year	
STEM methods: 5 courses	-Science teaching: 2 courses (e.g., one course in K-2 methods and one course in K 3-5 methods) -Mathematics teaching: 2 courses (e.g., one course in K-2 methods and one course in K 3-5 methods) -Engineering: 1 course in design engineering (e.g., K-5 methods)
Mentoring for K-2 teaching	Field placement in K-2 classroom: 92 hours
Mentoring for K3-5 teaching	Field placement in K 3-5 classroom: 92 hours
Fourth Year	
STEM integration: 2 courses	-Arts in K-5 teaching -Instructional Design
Mentoring in Teaching and Fieldwork (yearlong)	Field placement: 727 hours

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CAREER INDUCTION PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CASE STUDY OF THE GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR IN SPAIN

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Abstract: *The induction phase is a current challenge in most European countries. A way is being sought to attract, support, and retain teachers, equipping them with the skills needed to improve educational quality and meet the challenges of education in the 21st century. The European model of teacher professional competences is presented and, in this context, the mentoring activities of teacher professional immersion programmes in 36 countries in Europe are examined. In addition, academic research highlighting the key difficulties faced by beginning teachers is explored, allowing for a more precise identification of the core competences that require further attention. The findings uncovered are subjected to further analysis through a case study using the SWOT technique. These results provide valuable insights for considering policies and deficiencies in the induction phase, with the aim of improving and refining existing programmes.*

Key words: *induction programmes; teacher education; teacher training competence; mentoring teacher; novel teacher.*

1. Introduction

Teacher training represents a fundamental pillar for an inclusive, effective, and quality education in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda. In Europe, the stage of induction or professional initiation of teachers has been increasingly recognized, driven by the imperative to strengthen and improve educational practices throughout the continent. Teacher training programmes have undergone a remarkable evolution from traditional content-focused approaches to more holistic competency-based paradigms. The Higher Education reforms initiated by the Bologna Plan and the results of the Eurydice reports highlight the importance of training teachers in the essential skills and abilities that help them address the emerging challenges of the 21st century school.

In this paper we offer a synthesis of the main challenges that countries face in training their teachers, especially in the critical phase of immersion or professional induction. To explore these findings further, we conducted a longitudinal case study on the professional profile of educational counsellors in this same phase. We selected this professional because in our educational context,

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one of his or her functions is to promote change towards more innovative teaching practices that facilitate inclusive education and the improvement of educational quality.

2. Theoretical framework: opportunities and challenges of the European professional teaching model of competency-based training.

The concept of competence is relatively new, at least in real practice, and assumes a holistic educational and pedagogical approach whose main objective is to develop in teachers a variety of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and integrated values, acquired from a practical dimension of execution, and enabling them to respond to problematic situations in their daily work (Perrenoud, 2004; Tejada, 2016). This model promotes the acquisition of skills such as curricular planning focused on learning situations, the design of pedagogical strategies with the diversity of students in mind, formative and summative assessment, the effective use of educational technologies, and continuous reflection on their own practice for the development and constant improvement of their professional practice. Since 2000, reports (OECD 2019, 2021) and research (Espinoza and Campuzano, 2019; Villa, 2020 and Egido, 2020) have consolidated a European model of professional teaching competences. This model is organized into five areas (to know; know how to be; know how to do what; know how to; known to be) which include ten teaching competences. The structure and competences assigned to the model can be seen in detail in the table below.

Professional competences of teachers based on European Model Table 1

To know:	Scientific competence.	It is related to knowledge and its management, both in the area of education and in the areas, subjects and curricular modules.
Know how to be:	Intrapersonal and interpersonal competence.	It refers to the way of being of the person and the way of treating others well, personal skills, tutorial action, orientation, and the promotion of values.
Know how to do what:	Didactic competence	It focuses on teaching, paying attention to the teaching-learning process. It is specified in the programming, specific didactics of areas, subjects, attention to the specific needs of the students, classroom management, resources and didactic materials and evaluation of the students.
	Organizational and management competence	It is linked to laws, planning, coordination, and quality management in the center.
	Competency in coexistence management.	Assertiveness, living with others and managing coexistence, Mediation and conflict resolution.
Know how to	Teamwork competence	Linked with the development of collaborative works with a common objective.
	Competence in innovation and improvement	It has to do with the development of processes to cope with change, its investigation and experimentation, as well as the diagnosis and evaluation to implement the educational improvement proposals.
	Communicative and linguistic competence	It facilitates the exchange of knowledge, ideas, thoughts, emotions, and feelings. It includes information management both in one's own language and in foreign languages.
	Digital competence (ICT).	It refers to the knowledge of information and communication technologies and the didactic use of them; management of teams and networks for professional development.
Know to be:	Social-relational competence	Focused on social relations between people, equity, and the participation of the entire educational community

The acquisition of these skills is a complex process which obviously cannot be achieved in initial training. Therefore, it is necessary to conceive a holistic model that considers the professional development of teachers throughout their entire professional career, in which the initial, induction and in-service phases of training must be systemically linked and share key principles and methodologies. This integrated model offers unquestionable opportunities as research results have shown (Poblete et al. 2016; Villa, 2020). However, to implement such a training model, it is necessary to understand the challenges that countries face in their training systems and the specificities of their teaching staff. In the 2018 Euridyce report, out of the 27 countries analysed, most European countries identify as main concerns: the lack of teachers (26 countries identify it as a problematic aspect, with the exception of Spain where there is an oversupply of teachers); the ageing of the teaching population is identified in 16 countries; the shortage of students in initial training (11 countries); eight countries identify high drop-out rates in the profession and four of them also in initial training (European Commission, 2018). Some of these barriers have their origin in an unequal distribution among teachers in different subjects or at different educational stages. In some countries the difficulties are related to difficult professional performance due to the characteristics of the geographical location of schools. Despite these challenges, most of the difficulties are related to the attractiveness of the profession in terms of working conditions and loss of prestige or social recognition.

From the difficulties outlined above, the need to address the existing challenges, especially at the beginning of the professional activity, can be seen. For this reason, most countries have designed, at least in their regulations, a phase of support and accompaniment for novice teachers to help them face with difficulties and facilitate their permanence in the system. The differences in these training activities between countries are found in their duration, the theoretical model that supports them or their actual scope and implementation.

3. Aims

- Analyze the main difficulties faced by new teachers by reviewing research on the subject and reports issued by national and European agencies.
- Carry out a summary of the characteristics of induction programmes offered by European countries in terms of their objectives, duration, and activities.
- Carry out a SWOT analysis by means of a case study referring to the professional immersion phase of educational counsellors in the Community of Castilla y León (Spain).

To achieve the above objectives, the reports on the subject issued by the European Commission in the Euridyce network were reviewed, as well as a review of the scientific literature of research on teacher induction with the terms: teacher induction programmes, beginning teachers, mentoring, teacher trainer. A thematic analysis of this literature review was carried out to obtain the main characteristics of these programmes and to detect the most relevant needs of novice teachers to make proposals for improvement for future programmes. In the case study presented here, the biographical-narrative technique was used with a counsellor with more than thirty years of experience, including twenty years of mentoring new counsellors in their initiation phase in the E.O.E.P. in the community of Castilla y León. The analysis of the data has been carried out with a

thematic classification of the emerging categories, presented in SWOT format to facilitate its comprehension given the limited space of the text.

4. Method

Different techniques of qualitative methodology, comparative documentary analysis and biographical-narrative techniques are used. The documentary analysis is carried out on the reports issued by the Euridyce network and the review of research on mentoring programmes in the teacher induction phase. The procedure consists of an initial data mining, followed by coding and emergent thematic analysis. It ends with a trend synthesis of the most relevant needs of novice teachers in their professional practice. The case study is carried out by means of an in-depth biographical interview with a key informant with more than thirty years of experience, including twenty years of mentoring new guidance counsellors in their initiation phase in the community of Castilla y León. Relevant fragments of the interview are identified by assigning labels or categories. We conclude the analysis with a thematic classification of the emerging categories, presented in SWOT format to facilitate their comprehension given the limited space of this text.

5. Results

5.1. Contributions from European research on the problems of beginning teachers

Veenman (1984) can be cited as the most relevant precursor of research on the difficulties teachers encounter at the beginning of teaching. He synthesised 83 studies carried out in the United States, Great Britain and Wales, the Netherlands, Canada, West Germany, and Australia on beginning teachers at primary and secondary level. He listed the 24 most important difficulties identified by teachers in their first year of professional socialisation. Subsequently, other authors (Voss and Kunter, 2020; Manso and Garrido, 2021; Schaefer et al. 2021; Cruz et al. 2022 and Napolitano et al., 2022) have made reviews and contributions to the subject, a summary of the most significant contributions classified by competence areas according to the European model referenced in the theoretical framework is presented in the table below.

Main challenges faced by novice teachers Table 2

Scope of competence	**Identified needs of novice teachers**
Scientific competence.	Master the content of the different subjects he/she must teach. Selecting the content to be taught
Intrapersonal and interpersonal competence.	Lack of personal free time Insecurity and need for emotional support.
Didactic competence	Knowing the causes that make learning easier or more difficult for students. Adapt the contents of the subjects to the conditions of the class and of each individual pupil. Determining the learning level of the pupils Adapt teaching to individual differences. Select appropriate materials for the development of the subject matter. Identifying the educational needs of learners. How to teach pupils of diverse cultural backgrounds and abilities. Encouraging pupils' participation in classroom activities.

Organizational and management competence	Coping with work overload. Getting involved in decision-making at school level. Managing time to prepare lessons. Carrying out bureaucratic work
Competency in coexistence management.	Maintaining order/discipline in the classroom. Dealing with problems with individual pupils. Promoting a positive learning environment.
Teamwork competence	No references found
Competence in innovation and improvement	Mastering different active teaching methods Use different ways of assessing learners.
Communicative and linguistic competen.	No references found
Digital competence (ICT).	Using information and communication technologies in the classroom
Social-relational competence	Motivating learners in class. Treating pupils in a differentiated and individualized way. Knowing pupils' satisfaction with teaching. Create an appropriate atmosphere through respectful relationships with students. To relate to the other teachers in the school.Liaising with the management team. Liaising with parents

The main difficulties faced by novice teachers at this induction stage are strongly related to the general and specific didactics of the subjects they teach. That is, how to organize all curricular elements in such a way as to meet the needs of each and every one of their students. The next group of strategies in which they have difficulties would be related to the socio-emotional competences of personal balance, social skills, and relationship with other members of the educational community in order to facilitate their participation. Finally, we highlight the competence of Management of Coexistence in the classroom, referring to the skills for mediating and resolving conflicts that arise in the classroom and promoting school coexistence.

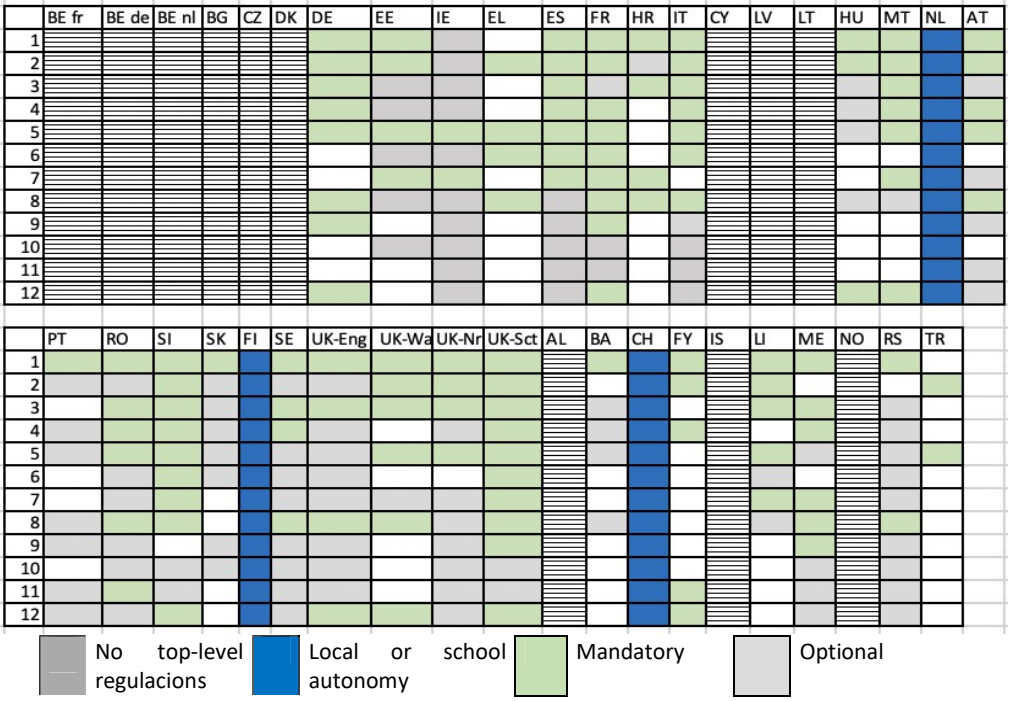
5.2. Main characteristics of Professional Induction Programmes (PIPs) in Europe

Because of the challenges faced by the novice teacher at the beginning of his or her professional adventure, induction programmes are of paramount importance. These programmes differ from country to country in their name (professional immersion phase, initiation, induction, induction, mentoring) and in the concept used. Even so, a common framework can be found which defines it as: the phase of structured support offered to teachers who have just entered the profession in which they perform all or most of the tasks of experienced teachers and receive a salary for this. The induction phase has training, personalized support, and counselling components.

The OECD (2021) describes in detail how novice teachers can be supported in their first years of teaching so that they can apply and deepen the learning started in their initial training. André et al. 2020; Beca and Boerr, 2020; Marcelo et al. (2021) have highlighted the importance of induction programmes to facilitate the effectiveness of novice teachers and counteract negative emotional effects that may reduce early leaving rates. These programmes provide opportunities for coaching and constructive feedback, offering advice and support from experienced teachers and fostering greater confidence in novice teachers. The important role of school management and other supportive roles such as educational counsellors in discussing progress, personal and professional problems and providing advice accordingly is also highlighted. The main objectives of these induction programmes are to socialize new teachers; to address their concerns by ensuring their professional development; to increase retention of new teachers; and ultimately to improve the quality of education.

The OECD reports (2018, 2021) identify the main support activities taking place in Europe analyzing 32 education systems. A close look at the graph below will help us to understand which activities are most frequent and those that need to be further explored. We note, moreover, that the official regulations indicated by educational representatives do not always correspond to actual practices, at least not with the intensity and care that would be needed. In some cases, they are merely bureaucratic processes or are offered upon reaching the position of civil servant or permanent teacher when these teachers already have a wealth of teaching experience.

Comparison of teacher professional immersion programmes activities Table 3



Code of activities of professional immersion programmes for teachers

1. Mentoring
2. Courses/seminars attended in person or online.
3. Schedule meeting with the school head and/or colleagues to discuss progress or problems.
4. Assistance with planning and assessment of lessons
5. Professional development
6. Peer review
7. Diaries/journals
8. Participation or observation other teachers' class
9. Team Teaching
10. Networking communities
11. Collaboration other schools
12. Reduced working/teaching load

However, the TALIS Report (OECD, 2019) highlights the difficulties in implementing these programs due to financial limitations and the lack of coordination between the institutions involved.

5.3. Contextualisation and results of the SWOT analysis of the case study referring to the professional immersion phase of educational counsellors.

In Spain, the induction phase for non-university teaching is part of the selective process of access to the teaching profession as a civil servant. It must be taken by candidates who have passed the written theoretical and practical tests of the competitive examination. The theoretical objective is to test their suitability for the profession by means of supervised teaching and training activities. National regulations establish the range of duration between one trimester and one school year. Each Autonomous Community establishes the duration and specific characteristics of this phase, in our case it is an academic year. The tutor in charge is a civil servant with teaching experience, proposed by the management of the centre, and from the same speciality as the applicant. This phase is common to all specialities with the specific adjustment of functions to the profile, in this case, the educational counsellor in the Educational and Psychopedagogical Guidance Teams (hereinafter E.O.E.P.). The duties of the tutor in the induction phase are: to advise and inform on the organisation and functioning of the EOEP and the schools in which they intervene; to guide them in the educational and management projects of the centres in which they intervene and in the specific performance of their duties as counsellor; to draw up a report assessing the aptitude of the trainee candidate to be sent to the final qualifying committee.

In addition to this report, the assessment of the management of the centre and the assigned inspector is also considered. The trainee guidance counsellor draws up a self-report of the functions and learning developed in his/her job, the accreditation of the compulsory training courses and a medical certificate of his/her aptitude for teaching.

Guidance in the E.O.E.P. according to the regulations (DECREE 5/2018) is a specialised service external to the centres, its purpose is to contribute from the educational centres themselves to their continuous improvement and, therefore, of the educational system, as well as to the personal, academic, vocational and professional development of all students, through technical advice, collaboration with the entire educational community and the participation and promotion of the coordinated and innovative work of all the educational and social agents involved in the process.

The regulations governing the organisation and functioning of the E.O.E.P. (Order Edu/987/2012) provides a broad and complex list of functions that guidance counsellors must carry out and which we group into four areas of intervention: Centre and teaching staff; pupils; families and other institutions involved in childcare. In each of these blocks, the counsellor must demonstrate professional competences in terms of knowing, knowing what, knowing how to know, knowing how to be, in which the advice and support of an experienced tutor will be key in their professional adaptation.

5.3.1. Results of the SWOT analysis of novice teachers from the experience of the guidance counsellor-mentor

Reflection on the experience of tutoring these new professionals allows for an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses, both external and internal, which can be summarised as follows:

Strengths: A broad and up-to-date theoretical, academic, scientific, and regulatory knowledge on the relevant topics of guidance and attention to diversity. In general, a high level of competence in the use of ICT. A medium-high level in a foreign language, English. *Weaknesses:* Lack of knowledge of many elements of guidance practice: planning, protocols, tests, documents. Poor ability to differentiate between "urgent/important" demands which can cause work planning problems. Insecurity and high level of stress in the face of multiple tasks and demands.

Opportunities: Mentoring and support by an expert guidance professional during the first year of placement. Joining a team of professionals in the same speciality performing similar tasks with whom to share their experience. The EOEPs have established criteria for an equitable distribution of the centres in their sector to avoid situations of overload for less experienced professionals. Easy access to a large bank of physical and online resources: stock of psycho-pedagogical tests, documents produced by the team, bibliography, protocols for action. These documents are organised in a library and in a shared folder in the EOEP's One Drive. Weekly meetings of the EOEP for planning and concrete guidelines of the priority tasks in that period and the necessary materials. *Threats:* The level of demand on their work is the same as for the rest of the professionals regardless of their experience. The image of inexperience that may be reflected in the educational centres and the consequent consideration of their work.

5.3.2. Results of the SWOT analysis of the role of the guidance counsellor-mentor

Strengths: Previous professional experience that provides knowledge of their functions and the tasks to be carried out. The security and prestige acquired throughout their professional career. The personal satisfaction of being able to provide help to the mentee for their professional improvement. *Weaknesses:* The addition of personal work without hourly or professional compensation for carrying out this task. *Opportunities:* The need for updating, training, to be a "good model" and a resource to help the professional who is starting out. The need to organise and prepare the topics and resources on which he/she must advise to facilitate their transmission. *Threats:* There is no time set aside in the tutor counsellor's timetable for this work.

5. Conclusion

We can conclude that professional induction programmes are a perceived and evidenced need to improve the quality of teacher training. But it cannot be understood as an isolated phase; it is a priority to conceive them within a global-systemic model, which includes all phases of teacher professional development. It is necessary to establish indicators with different levels of depth to establish the roadmap of key competences to be acquired or improved in each phase. Link training and research to learn and analyse competences in practical contexts, strengthening bridges between researchers and practitioners with participatory and inclusive research models.

At European level, there is a need to establish a detailed glossary of terms related to professional teacher education that respects cultural traditions but clarifies the models and practices they identify for in-depth comparative studies. Working together in institutional Erasmus-type Education Projects can increase the benefits of professional mentoring; sharing and disseminating specific protocols, resources, difficulties, and good practice is a shared enrichment. It contains positive elements for both parties, it provides support for professional initiation and in turn broadens and enhances the professional experience of the mentors. On a more local level, as a result of our case study, we observed the need to strengthen the involvement of the school management team and the Mentor Teachers with greater recognition and professional/financial compensation for their task. The new programmes must take into consideration the didactic and relational competences already mentioned as the priority need detected. We cannot forget to reinforce intrapersonal competences as well, because insecurity and the need for emotional balance produce a high level of stress in the face of the multiplicity of tasks and demands in diverse and uncertain contexts.

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SETTING UP THE MENTORS' PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR STYLE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This paper tried to underline the specific manner of which mentors' professional behaviour style in special education is structured. The study was conducted on 70 mentors in special education using two questionnaires created based on Bahri's conception of professional behaviour. The conclusions reveal that the core of a mentor's professional behaviour style is represented by making the mentoring program accessible for beginners. Implications are discussed.*

Keywords: *professional behaviour style, mentor, beginner teacher (mentee), special education.*

1. Introduction

Today, in a society based on increased demands for human resources, to any person is no longer enough to graduate in a specific field and attend specific training courses, and workshops- especially if this person is an entry-level.

Mentoring has come up as a solution for young graduates to fill their gaps in practice and facilitate their insertion into organizations.

The concept of mentoring was approached from different perspectives; some of them mentioned "mentors' roles, mentees' roles and "unclear expectations" (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021, p. 20).

Basically, mentoring signified a **specific training system for the employees** that involved a senior or more experienced person (called a mentor) who "acts as an advisor, counsellor, or guide" (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2020, p. 1) to a junior employee - (called mentee).

The term mentoring has two common uses: 1) to describe a professional development relationship between mentor and mentee and 2) to help an inexperienced employee develop his/ her potential, to "overcome some barriers or challenges". (Ganesh et al, 2015, p.18). Based on these two common uses, we can say the mentoring goal is to encourage "positive growth" (Hussey & Campbell-Meier, 2020, p.4) among young employees.

Mentoring is set on "specific goals, skills or competency development, psychosocial or socio-emotional support, and career development" (Montgomery, 2017, p.2); goals achieved during learning activities. During all mentoring activities, each mentor will understand the mentee's strengths and weaknesses which will help guide the mentee's actions in achieving his/ her personal growth and career goals (Montgomery, 2017). As such, mentoring became a person-centred approach and mentors became facilitators (Brooks, 2018).

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Mentoring implies a relationship developed between two actors present: the mentor- and the mentee that" must be bidirectional and is more like a partnership that is not necessarily intuitive" (DeMaria, 2020, p. 451).

The benefits of the mentoring process were and are revealed by different researchers. Honavar, in 2019 pointed out that, mentoring offers opportunities for: a) mentees: will get the balance between work, study, and life, constant informal feedback, critical assessment of their quality of work, avoiding errors; informal rules and professional contacts; b) mentors: will get peer recognition, professional, personal growth. An ideal mentorship has to be based on a baseline "chemistry between a mentor and a mentee" (Honavar, 2019, p.1916), on mutual trust and respect between mentor and mentee and on learning attitude (Mullen, 2012 cited by Templeton et al., 2021). Set on these elements, mentors are active listener; have abilities to use self-reflection and are set on building capacity in others (Templeton et al., 2021). At the same time, mentors are willing to adopt a specific code of conduct, to diversify their practices for improving mentees' performance and increase mentees' contribution to society (apud. Collings-Hughes et al., 2022). The entire mentorship process can become challenging in maintaining a "high-quality mentor–mentee relationship" (Hill et al., 2022, p. 557).

2. Material and methods

Educational sciences, in particular, special education is one of the fields where mentoring is more challenging than other fields. In the educational field, mentoring proposes the integration of academic and practical requirements in new ways that will determine the development of teacher education systems, and the development of skills to learn in practice and from practice (apud. Wang & Shibayama, 2022). Mentoring involves a relationship based on protecting the beginner-teacher, finding opportunities to learn, experiment and practice in order to increase self-confidence and develop independence, autonomy and maturity.

The mentor in educational sciences, in special education, is not a crutch and must not make the beginner- teachers dependent on him, but rather develop his independence and autonomy so that in the end he can even surpass his mentor. Each mentor has to have appropriate professional behaviour.

Bahri in 2009 pointed out that professional behaviour is a specific manner of somebody's action or reaction (either intentionally or unintentionally) related to his/her professional responsibilities and to his/her quality of services provided. Practically, "professional behaviour is a reflection of professionalism" (Bahri, 2009, p. 2).

The researchers in the educational field, are more and more concerned today in defining the dimensions of a mentor's professional behaviour.

So, taking into consideration that special education is a field where the interdisciplinary team has the goal to facilitate the social insertion of pupils with special educational needs/ or disabilities by developing individualized and personalized educational recovery programs for them, we wondered what defines the professional behaviour of mentors in special education.

In this study, we created two questionnaires using Bahri's conception (Bahri, 2009) on professional behaviour adapted for our research purposes: a) Questionnaire1 - Mentor's professional behaviour

toward oneself developed by us in 2021 (index fidelity =. 753, test-retest index= .735); 2) Questionnaire2- Mentor's professional behaviour toward mentee (beginner teacher) developed by us in 2021 (index fidelity =. 731, test-retest index= .710)

- Participants.

This study was performed between May 2022 and March 2023, on 70 Romanian mentors in special education, subjects aged 30- 61 years (with Mean = 45.4 and Std =5.3), 4 males and 66 females; 30% coming from Bucharest and 70% from different Romanian counties; seniority in the field between 11-32 years (with Mean = 16.5 and Std =4.8)

- Procedure.

This study was done in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU – GDPR. We informed each participant about the aim of the study, the tasks that s/he had to do during the study, our intention to publish an article related to the aspects that we investigated (respecting the code of ethics), and the intention to share the collected data with third parties. We asked for and obtained the participants' consent for collecting, processing, and analysing the data, and for publishing the article. However, the participants did not give us the consent to share the collected data with third parties.

- Stages of the study.

This study started in July 2020 with the creation of the questionnaires. Between January 2021 and May 2022 when the study started to be performed, we tested and restructured the items. The questionnaires were administered using the Google Forms format to investigate mentors.

3. Results

We found univariate atypical cases through the calculation of Z scores (Z > ±1.55 scores were considered atypical). We performed different statistics procedures: Pearson correlation index, Cohen index, Chi-squared, Tucker-Lewis Index, and regression model analysis. The values between .90 and .95 or higher for TLI were considered acceptable to excellent.

3.1. Mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself in special education

The mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself was asses on 7 dimensions; data are presented in Table no 1.

Dimensions of mentor's professional behaviour toward on-self in Special Education Table 1

Dimensions revealed	Mean	Std
Making the mentoring program accessible for beginners	22.53	2.326
Professional development	22.33	2.051
Team spirit	22.21	2.180
Vocation	22.09	2.394
Objectivity	18.34	1.817
Personal efficiency	20.80	2.922
Personal effectiveness	22.89	1.860

3.2. Mentor's professional behaviour toward mentee in special education

The mentor's professional behaviour toward beginner teachers was asses on 5 dimensions; data are presented in Table no 2:

Dimensions of mentor's professional behaviour toward mentee in Special Education Table 2

Dimensions revealed	Mean.	Std
Actional effectiveness	21.54	2.563
Managing the activities with the beginner	18.7	1.366
Actional efficiency	18.39	1.653
Beginner assessment and feedback	18.19	1.526
Beginner' support	17.67	1.939

4. Discussions

4.1. Mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself

From the data presented in Table No. 1, we can see that the core of the mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself is making the mentoring program accessible for beginners.

This means that the mentor in special education takes into account the fundamental benchmarks of the mentoring activity: the specific standards of the mentoring activity; the characteristics of the beginner's activity (the position he/she is employed in); the category of students with disabilities - age, type of disability, degree of disability, with whom the beginner works, previous experience of the beginner. In relation to these benchmarks, the mentor constantly seeks to adapt the mentoring program to the level of beginner's practical training o by identifying both the vulnerabilities of the beginner, especially the appropriate solutions.

We are actually talking about a continuous struggle (apud Hill et al., 2022) of the mentor to find those strategies and methods by which the beginner can develop his/her professional, practical-applicative skills. It is a complex operationalization process that the mentor in special education carries out both in terms of the design of the mentoring activities and their planning, but especially in terms of the staged organization of the process in relation to the degree of complexity of the assigned tasks. the beginner, by the beginner's implicit effort. The operationalization process requires constant professional development on the part of the mentor, especially through exchanges of good practices with other mentors, but also the development of partnerships with other categories of specialists involved in the development of human resources in special and/or integrated educational system.

In special education, the other dimensions on which the mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself is structured come to ensure the mentor's professional satisfaction.

4.2. Mentor's professional behaviour toward mentee

From the data presented in Table No. 2, we can see that the core of the mentor's professional behaviour toward the mentee is actional effectiveness.

This means that, in special education, in the relationship with the beginner, the mentor's professionalism is revealed by the specific way in which the specific objectives of the stages of the mentoring process were achieved, that the time management was efficient, that the practical-applicative skills of the beginner have reached an optimal level of functionality in the activity with pupils with disabilities / SEN.

We are actually talking about a method of critical-constructive objectification through which the partnership between the mentor and the beginner was structured and implemented through the differentiated approach to the beginner's needs in each stage of the mentoring process, through the differentiated allocation of all the resources available to the mentor.

On the other hand, in the equation of the analysis, especially education, of the mentor's professionalism towards the mentee, the support he gives the mentee, especially on an emotional level, comes into play as an element to make the mentor's activity more efficient. In reality, it is about two significant ones that are developed through the process of supporting the beginner by the mentor: the first is represented by the maximum valorisation of the beginner's resources by the mentor, and the second is represented by the training by the mentor for each beginner of professional identity, the feeling of belonging to the professional community - elements that will generate the formation of his professional brand.

4.3. Mentor's professional behaviour style?

The correlational analysis of the data allowed us to identify significant correlations between the analysed dimensions of the mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself and the mentor's professional behaviour toward the mentee (see table no.3), correlations that allow us to affirm that, in terms of seniority, we can speak structuring a professional behaviour style specific at mentors in special education.

Correlations between dimensions of mentor's professional behaviour toward oneself and dimensions of mentor's professional behaviour toward the mentee in special education Table 3

	Correlations				
	Actional effectiveness	Managing the activities with the beginner	Actional efficiency	Beginner assessment and feedback	Beginner' support
Making the mentoring program accessible for beginners	r=.865, p=.01	r=.821, p=.01	-r=.729, p=.05	-r=.681, p=.05	r=.871, p=.01

	Correlations				
	Actional effectiveness	Managing the activities with the beginner	Actional efficiency	Beginner assessment and feedback	Beginner' support
Professional development	r=.897, p=.05	-r=.830, p=.05	r=.865, p=.01	-r=.749, p=.05	-r=.888, p=.01
Team spirit	-r=.706, p=.01	-r=.718, p=.05	-r=.658, p=.05	-r=.752, p=.05	-r=.808, p=.05
Vocation	r=.889, p=.01	-r=.871, p=.01	-r=.802, p=.05	-r=.729, p=.05	-r=.846, p=.05
Objectivity	-r=.890, p=.01	r=.824, p=.05	-r=.865, p=.01	r=.819, p=.01	-r=.861, p=.05
Personal efficiency	r=.880, p=.05	r=.838, p=.05	r=.865, p=.01	-r=.834, p=.05	r=.820, p=.05
Personal effectiveness	r=.851, p=.05	r=.860, p=.05	direct, very significant- r=.845, p=.05	-r=.856, p=.05	-r=.879, p=.05

The model generated by the statistical processing reveals the specificity of the professional behaviour style of the mentors is revealed in the figure below:

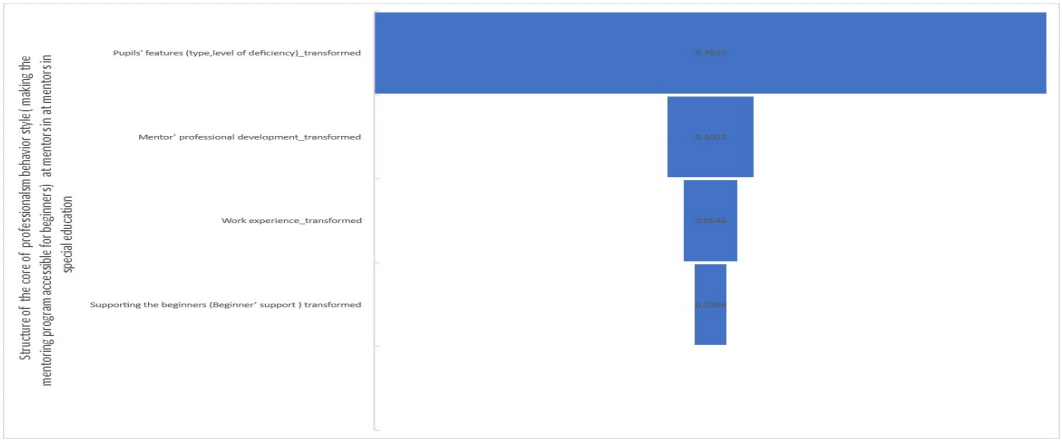

Figure 1. *The structure of the professional behaviour style of mentors in special education*

4.4. Limitations and future directions

One limitation of the current came from the type of subjects who participated. The group was dominated by female participants and did not take into account their resources. Future studies will be developed on a large number of participants with different proportions between male and female mentors.

A second limitation of the current study comes from not taking into consideration the archetype features of our participants. Future studies will be able to reveal elements that will complete the professional behaviour style of mentors in special education.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The main findings of this study are:

1. There is a professional behaviour style of mentor in special education
2. The core of the professional behaviour style of mentors in special education is marked by the need to make the mentoring program accessible for beginners
3. There is a specific dynamic of the professional behaviour style of the mentor depending on the type of pupils of disability (type, level) that the beginner is working with.
4. There is a specific dynamic of the professional behaviour style of the mentor depending on the specificity of the beginner's activity (the position he/she is employed in.
5. The professional behaviour style is constantly developing as the mentor experience grows. of mentor in special education

Our findings have the following implications for enhancing a mentor's career:

1. Developing training courses for improving the mentor's skills in assessing the beginner's vulnerabilities.
2. Developing workshops or training sessions for mentors in acquiring competencies for working in an interdisciplinary team
3. Developing professional networking between mentors from special education coming from different regions of the U.E
4. Raising awareness of mentors' role in special education in the process of increasing the efficiency of the social insertion of pupils with disabilities.

Our conclusions have the following theoretical implications:

1. The interdisciplinary approach of effective training of mentors of special education in integrated educational and labour contexts.
2. Better use of learning resources in the process of the continuing formation of mentors in educational sciences, special education.

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MENTORING LABORATORY – INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE SET UP WITHIN THE PROJECT PROF

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Abstract: *In this paper we present some of the arguments behind the establishment of the Mentoring Laboratory for the study of blended learning (ML), as an institutional structure belonging to the Centre for Psycho-pedagogical Research and Analysis of the Department for the Preparation of Teaching Staff of the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, to support the professional, personal and social development of Romanian teachers through (e-)mentoring. The context of the establishment of the ML was determined by the implementation of the Project "Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF", a project that aimed to change the paradigm of professional training for the teaching career in Romania. Through activities, meetings and workshops designed and implemented with specialists from Romania and abroad, the collaborative professional context was provided for the project experts and for the trained teachers, where dialogue, debate, reflection and feedback were the necessary ingredients for a modern and constructive approach to the issue of educational mentoring.*

Keywords: *project PROF, educational mentoring, Mentor Laboratory.*

1. Background to the establishment of the Mentor Lab (ML)

The project "Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF", with code POCU/904/6/25/146587, beneficiary Ministry of Education of Romania, implemented between 1 April 2021 and 31 December 2023, is one that changes the paradigm of professional training for the teaching career in Romania. The intervention it proposes is systemic, the directions of conceptualization, research and action targeting both the level of initial training - through practical internships - and the level of continuous training - through the creation of learning communities and flexible routes of access and evolution in the teaching career. https://www.edu.ro/PROF

The educational vision promoted is a modern one, which promotes collaboration and cooperation carried out systematically and in a natural, natural way, based on common educational concerns and efforts and the collective use of (e-)resources, intelligence and accumulated knowledge, in order to learn together and to act better and better. Thus, for both initial and in-service teacher training, the idea of collaboration, collaborative learning and the formation of learning communities and communities of practice, social structures capable of producing knowledge, has been promoted. The practical part of initial training, as well as in-service teacher training, as professional development, is carried out through pedagogical practice bases (PPB), which are school consortia bringing together,

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under the coordination of a school of application, various types of educational establishments. https://www.edu.ro/PROF

Collaborative learning is intended to be continuous and sustainable, deep and meaningful learning with meaning, which involves the co-creation of meaning and co-creation of learning and training, and the acquisition of diverse and complex learning.

The general objective of the project is: "To ensure professional mentoring throughout the entire teaching career in the pre-university education system, by creating a coherent and reliable national system of professional training and development of teaching competence, as psycho-pedagogical training, necessary to occupy and exercise a teaching position as well as to achieve pedagogical performance in pre-university education in Romania, in the teaching/training activity and in the educational management activity, in the context of the global process of digitalization of education systems". https://www.edu.ro/PROF

The major outcome of the project is "the elaboration and development of an institutional framework appropriate to the current mechanisms and standards for teacher education and development, in line with the recommendations and guidelines developed by the European Commission, in the field of teacher career/teacher education (...)". https://www.edu.ro/PROF

Given the significant implications of the PROF project for the entire Romanian educational system, for the design of educational and curricular policy guidelines, the need to ensure the sustainability of the project arose, i.e. the need to ensure the continuation of its effects and the exploitation of the results obtained after its completion. Thus, it was considered that an important lever for the sustainability of the project is a Mentor Laboratory (ML), in which theoretical and practical-applicative educational research is carried out in the field of teacher training, aiming, as a distant finality, to improve the quality of the educational process in Romania.

2. What is the Mentor Lab?

The Mentor Learning Laboratory (ML) is an institutional structure established in March 2023, within the Centre for Research and Psycho-pedagogical Analysis of the Department for Teacher Training of "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, in order to support the professional, personal and social development of Romanian teachers through (e-)mentoring. ML provides a space, a physical and material environment where professional activities and e-activities take place with teachers from different levels of education and from all parts of the country and abroad. At the same time, the ML provides a laboratory atmosphere, where knowledge is produced, professional consultations, practical (e-)mentoring and research activities are carried out in a positive, stimulating atmosphere, encouraging open, free interpersonal communication and the building of learning communities.

Thus, the term "laboratory" is used not only to highlight the changes in the physical and material environment in which activities specific to (e-)mentoring and research take place, but especially the active, cooperative, critical and creative spirit in which they are carried out. In this way, the ML can become a genuine laboratory for learning, modelling and professional and personal training in an experiential manner.

In fact, mentoring itself can be considered, simultaneously, an effect of creativity, a cause of creativity and a 'laboratory of creativity'.

3. Mission

ML's mission is to contribute to the specialized professional development of teaching staff in pre-university education, by promoting mentoring as an exceptional opportunity to facilitate the insertion of teachers in their professional life, their socio-professional insertion, to support them in their professional, personal and social development, by offering specific (e-)mentoring activities and by researching (e-)mentoring issues.

Thus, continuous professional development at school level and mentoring are two dimensions of the professionalization of the teaching career that the PROF project provides (Petrache, Mara, Velea, 2022).

4. Values and principles

The ML mission reflected in its activities is based on a set of values and principles, which ensures the axiological and normative dimension of the optimal functioning of the newly established structure. We present some of the values and principles based on which the action lines are designed and implemented:

- Building a climate of honesty, empathy, mutual respect, transparency, sincerity;
- To promote confidence in (e-)mentoring and in the professional and human relationship with the mentor;
- Facilitate access to (e-)mentoring opportunities for teachers through the involvement of mentors;
- Building strong, collaborative, partnership relationships between mentors and mentees based on professional, ethical and moral principles;
- Exchange of: scientific knowledge, ideas, opinions, teaching and mentoring practices, teaching experience, management experience, mentoring experience;
- Concern for professional, personal and social learning, training, development and evolution;
- Promotion of the membership of all actors involved in mentoring processes to a specific professional/learning/pedagogical community of practice;
- Building a regional, national and international mentoring network, by promoting professional collaborations between individuals, teams, groups, communities, institutional structures, institutions.
- It is through theoretical, practical and research activities and approaches guided by such a set of values and norms that learning communities, communities of practice and research communities can be achieved and developed, brought together and constructively related within the ML.

5. Psycho-pedagogical basis of ML activities

ML activities are based on the results of theoretical and practical-applied educational research on increasing the quality of the teacher training system (including mentoring), with an impact on improving the quality of the education process.

The educational paradigms used are modern scientifically based: visible learning, media literacy, metacognition, critical thinking, inclusive education. An important working principle is to relate these paradigms, the models and professional practices they promote, to the concrete learning needs of learners and to measure their impact on learners (Mara, 2022).

6. Objectives of the PROF project, to which the ML contributes

- OS1 of the project through the new model of mentoring based on sharing successful professional experiences and through professional reflection - dimensions that are seamlessly integrated into the teaching-learning activity in the classroom by approaching mentoring holistically: management, teachers, mentors, becoming a model that can be a source of inspiration and professional learning.
- OS3 of the project, on the training and professional development component for teachers in the 5 schools where the training and piloting of the institutional capacity assessment tools of the educational unit (including the target group members) was carried out, there is the possibility to carry out consistent analyses on the impact of the training on the professional practices of teachers and school principals.

7. ML objectives

The ML aims to support teachers' in-service training, building on the *Visible Learning-VL* model of sustainable professional development - a model of sustainable professional development at school level or in pedagogical practice bases, fully in line with the proposals in the OECD document.

The main objectives pursued are:

- Promote the idea that mentoring is a complementary activity required by the socio-professional integration of teachers (and not a parallel or competitive activity);
- The natural articulation and integration of the issue of mentoring into the strategic and cultural elements of the school organization (mission, vision, symbols, norms, values, principles);
- Carrying out theoretical research on mentoring in education;
- Carrying out practical and experimental research on different aspects of mentoring in education;
- Carrying out needs analyses, analyses of the reflections and expectations of teachers, at different levels of education, in order to support them effectively in the process of socio-professional integration;
- Development of curricular resources useful in mentoring activities: mentoring programs; tools for monitoring and evaluating the work of mentees; projects of educational activities; worksheets; psycho-pedagogical characterization sheets; educational films; audio-video clips; testimonials, etc.;
- Development of projects for the implementation and development of mentoring in educational institutions;

- Encouraging managers and teachers to promote a "mentoring culture" in educational institutions, highlighting the benefits of this formative activity and encouraging teachers to participate in it.

8. Visible Learning-VL Sustainable Professional Development Model - Fundamentals (John Hattie, 2014)

Visible learning promoted by Hattie is achieved when learning is guided by explicit goals, when it is driven by an appropriate challenge, when the teacher and student seek to determine whether and to what extent it achieves the challenging goal, when there is deliberate practical intent aimed at achieving the goal, when there is effective feedback, and when there are active, passionate and engaged people participating in the act of learning (Hattie, 2009, p. 22).

Visible learning:

- It aims at a "school equipped with visible learning" and an education system "equipped with visible learning", where teachers and schools assess their impact (of teaching, strategies, methods and tools) on student learning using specific tools;
- It proposes a paradigm shift from teaching for content and curriculum coverage to teaching for understanding and learning, supporting the measurement of the impact of teaching;
- Supports the idea that each student should learn not by chance, but as a result of making instructional design tailored to their educational needs;
- Visible teaching and visible learning occur when teachers see learning through students' eyes, have a strong influence on them, provide feedback on their learning, and help them become their own teachers;
- In the context of in-service teacher training, visible learning:
  - refers to the fact that teachers learn from other teachers, from collective reflections on professional practice and from professional discussions they have about instructional design, learning resources, educational goals, criteria for success, truly valuable learning, learning progression, and what it means to "be good at" a subject, etc.;
  - becomes a technique whereby teachers become the evaluators of their own teaching.
- In terms of professional development and mentoring at school level, it has some elements of innovation that Romanian teachers need in the process of professionalizing their teaching careers and transforming their teaching practice:
  - focus teaching on understanding and learning in students;
  - measuring the impact of teaching on students;
  - identifying the methods and tools that work best;
  - school-wide collaborative learning;
  - involving all teachers and school management in the learning process;
  - continuing implementation after the end of the PROF intervention, by training 4-5 resource persons in the school - mentors who will continue to support and mentor teachers;
  - providing tools that have proven to be effective and impactful;

– identifying the effects at pupil/classroom/school/community/system level, the benefits at target group level, both during implementation and post-implementation.

All actors in education (pupils, teachers and school leaders) need to be visibly aware of the impact they have on learning. Teaching should also be visible, i.e. it should support pupils in becoming their own teachers, which is the basic requirement for lifelong learning or self-education.

9. Theoretical and applied research topics

The main theoretical and practical research themes developed in the ML are:

- Teachers' perception of the professional integration process;
- Teachers' sense of belonging to the educational institution's community;
- Professional needs of new teachers;
- The construction of the theme of the meetings within the mentoring processes and other working tools;
- Management of mentoring development projects in educational institutions;
- The mentoring relationship: essence, characteristics, values promoted, development directions;
- Strategies for applying the Visible Learning-VL sustainable professional development model;
- Strategies for measuring the impact of teaching on students;
- Strategies for developing independence and autonomy of the mentee;
- Strategies for developing the mentee's capacity for self-regulation;
- Strategies to promote self-mentoring;
- Strategies to increase the mentee's self-efficacy;
- Ways to make the most of informal mentoring;
- Ways to provide positive and negative feedback in mentoring activities;
- Investigating the benefits and job satisfaction of the mentored teachers;
- New Information and Communication Technologies in mentoring and e-mentoring;
- Drawing up annual reports of mentoring activities in educational institutions.

These are just a few guidelines that can be developed through theoretical and practical approaches, carried out under the coordination of national and international experts, by involving teachers eager to progress in knowledge and action.

10. Scientific work and activities carried out within the ML (from March 2023 to November 2023)

In order to achieve the proposed goals, the following scientific activities and approaches have been undertaken, involving university and pre-university teaching staff from the country and abroad:

- Collective reflections
- Identification of problems
- Problematizations
- Case analyses
- Round tables
- Scientific (E-)workshops.

11. Presentation of (e-)workshops organized

The workshop held on 31 May 2023, *"MENTORING AND METACOGNITION - THEORETICAL REFERENCES AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS"*, was held by Professor Mușata Bocoș, from Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca and Professor Daniel Mara, from Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

The workshop was structured in two components (one theoretical, scientific and the other practical-applicative).

In the theoretical component, a structural-dynamic, multi-criteria and comparative approach between the mentoring process and metacognition was carried out, identifying common points and differentiating elements. In order to make the necessary clarifications, the components of metacognition (metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive strategies, metacognitive experiences) and their relationships were presented. The concept of metacognitive educability, defined as an attribute of the human personality, which designates a person's readiness to be educated or to (self-)educate from a metacognitive point of view, the person's possibility to be receptive to the shaping influences of metacognitive training, was also analyzed.

Two curricular products developed within the PROF project by a group of pre-university and university teachers were presented during the practical-applicative component, namely the School Curriculum of the subject "Metacognitive Strategies" and the Teacher's Guide, Optional subject "Metacognitive Strategies", 10th grade. Some metacognitive development tools from the Instrumental Enrichment Program (IEP), developed by Reuven Feuerstein, were also presented and applied collaboratively, and collective discussions were organized, during which metacognitive implications were highlighted and specific acquisitions in the field of metacognition were set.

The workshop held on 21 June 2023, *"ACTIVATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL MENTORING. WHAT? WHY? HOW?"*, was held by Professor Mușata Bocoș, PhD, from Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca and by PhD Candidate Ana-Maria Purcar, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca,

The workshop benefited from a logical-functional and operational structuring, allowing the participants to become familiar with the educational issue of activation in the context of mentoring. Thus, the issue was approached in an activating way, gradually, from simple to complex, the participants being encouraged to reflect, to ask questions, to problematize, to discover, to analyze the ideas presented and to apply the acquired knowledge.

The structure of ideas was as follows: "What is activity?", "What is activation?", "What is activation in educational mentoring?", "Activation in educational mentoring - perspectives of analysis", "The need for activation of mentees", "Pseudo activation", "Social activation".

Activation in educational mentoring was analyzed as a process of stimulating the conscious, active, interactive and full participation and involvement (cognitive/intellectual, psychomotor, affective and volitional) of the mentee in mentoring (e-)activities.

Activation is inextricably linked to activism, i.e. the mentee's taking of action, both mentally/internally, by engaging in thought, and behaviorally/ externally, by taking external/ externalized, practical action.

Activism is desirable as an attitude that involves the active and interactive involvement of the mentee in activities coordinated by the mentor/carried out under the guidance of the mentor and that promotes the mentee's external and/or internal actions in solving cognitive/intellectual and

practical/psychomotor tasks. Therefore, one can speak of external activism - related to concrete-sensory, physical, practical actions and internalized activism - related to self-observation and self-control of one's own activities, strategies and methods. There is a natural link between the two types of activism, i.e. external activism provides the material support for inner activism, which it enhances and accentuates.

The workshop held on 26 July 2023, entitled *"MENTORING IN INITIAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SPAIN – EXPERIENCES AND PROJECTS IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS"*, was held by Ms. Mercè Morey López, PhD, University Professor, University of the Balearic Islands, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.

The meeting presented the structure and organization of the Spanish education system and highlighted general aspects of initial and continuing training for the teaching profession (qualifications that allow access to the teaching profession and what they consist of). The way in which the first phase of professional experience, that of the beginning of the teaching career, carried out under the coordination of a tutor-mentor (an experienced teacher working in the same school as the mentor teacher), is evaluated was described and analyzed.

At the end, some considerations were presented on proposals for improving the mentoring process in the Balearic Islands region of Spain, proposals that generate useful reflections for any educational system. All these topics were proposed with the aim of providing an overview of the educational system in Spain, to debate the important aspects presented and to be able to foreshadow possible lines of action, at the level of educational policies in different countries.

During the discussions, critical and sensitive elements related to initial and in-service teacher training in Spain and other countries were identified, collective reflections were generated, common and differentiating elements were identified, problems were analyzed and solutions were anticipated.

The workshop held on 9 August 2023, entitled *"THINKING AND FEELING. METACOGNITION AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS IN EFFECTIVE MENTORING"*, was held by Professor PhD, psychotherapist Roberta Renati, NOAH Pavia, Italy.

The central focus of the workshop was on the analysis of mentoring from a relational and (self)reflective perspective, perspectives that led to highlighting the dynamic interdependence between pedagogical competence and socio-emotional competence in achieving effective mentoring.

Another central concept, logically and naturally related to the practice of (self)reflexivity, was the concept of metacognitive practice, applied in the context of mentoring. As this 'linking' of mentoring with metacognition is not found in the literature in the field, these analyses aroused much interest among the participants and generated constructive discussions.

The reflective and activating nature of the activity was emphasized by the use of effective ice-breaking, warm-up and activation techniques of group interaction.

A digital tool – Mentimeter (https://www.menti.com/) – was also used to create a series of interactive visual aids and opinion probing questions to obtain synchronous feedback from participants. Each participant logged on to menti.com using their own mobile phone and effectively participated in building and personalizing learning situations as part of the activity.

The questions posed by the workshop organizer were graded in complexity, starting with questions related to everyday life and moving on to questions in the field of education and then mentoring in education. Thus, key concepts, key phrases, key issues and key questions were identified in the issue of mentoring and in establishing and fostering mentoring relationships between the mentor teacher and the mentee teacher. Central places were held by: communication, teaching skills, (self)reflexivity, empathy, emotion management, digital skills, social skills, cultural skills, planning and designing mentoring activities, flexibility, commitment and passion, reliability.

One content element that generated constructive discussion was the phrase "the mentor is the safety belt of mentoring", a phrase that highlights the secure nature of the mentoring relationship. Such a secure relationship gives the mentee the certainty that he or she can rely on the mentor in the most diverse professional, personal and social life situations and that he or she can build patterns with which to model professional and interpersonal relationships in the future.

The workshop held on 28 September 2023, entitled *"TEACHING MENTORING IN INTERNSHIP/PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP. ANALYSIS OF THE TRAINING NEEDS OF BEGINNER TEACHERS"*, was presented by Daniel Mara, "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Mușata Bocoș, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Adrian Barbaroș, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca.

The workshop had as its central objective the comparative analytical presentation, but also the interrelation, in an operational manner, of the two main types of mentoring in education: teacher mentoring for internship/insertion and teacher mentoring for pedagogical practice. These analyses were carried out by taking into account the specificities of the subsystems of initial and in-service teacher training, and also by referring to the psycho-pedagogical issue of teachers' professional competencies. To support the workshop participants in the acquisition of skills, but also in their practical application, the facilitators proposed both theoretical approaches, which aimed at clarifying theoretical constructs, and practical approaches, which aimed at applying effective mentoring strategies according to the concrete training needs. Thus, the workshop was designed in two main content units: a) induction mentoring/induction teaching mentoring and b) training needs of beginning teachers - by disseminating the results of a pedagogical research.

In the approach of the second content unit, the stimulating nature of the workshop was emphasized by the collective analysis of the results of a descriptive research, in which more than 100 beginning teachers from primary education were questioned, in relation to their needs vocational training and with their opinions related to the mentoring activity.

During the workshop, the facilitators formulated suggestions for individual and collective reflection, asked participants questions, invitations to interventions, to express opinions, to make value judgments, to ensure the formative and informative character of the activity.

12. Conclusions

The Blended Learning Mentoring Laboratory (ML) represents an institutional framework for a theoretical and practical-applicative approach to the theme of educational mentoring in relation to all the components of the instructional-educational process and other pedagogical variables, which through the involvement of specialists in the educational field, and not only that, it can contribute to increasing the quality of training and education, ensuring an adaptation to the dynamics of today's

society. The formation and development of an educational community, with ML activities at the center, can represent not only a network of interested and competent specialists in the field of mentoring, but also a generator of new ideas and continuous progress.

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TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH MENTORING AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A FOCUS ON ACHIEVING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

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Abstract: *This article explores the intersection of mentoring and artificial intelligence (AI) in the field of education. We explore how mentoring's focus on guidance and support can work well with AI's abilities. We outline the individual advantages of mentoring and AI's transformative potential in educational settings. It suggests that technological advancements make it possible to apply these practices universally while still adapting them to each student's unique needs. The paper points out that mixing mentoring and AI improves education by making it more personalized and inclusive, which boosts student involvement and success. This paper shows how combining mentoring and AI can help achieve educational goals in today's digital world*

Key words: *Mentoring, Personalized and Universal education, Right to Education, Artificial Intelligence, Educational Innovation*

1. Introduction

In the constant search to achieve inclusive and quality education for all, the effective fulfillment of the right to education remains a fundamental imperative on the global educational agenda. In this context, the convergence of mentorship and artificial intelligence (AI) emerges as an innovative and promising approach to enhance educational outcomes and transform the way students' access and assimilate knowledge, substantially contributing to the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4: "Ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." Mentorship, rooted in human interaction and guidance, has long been a pillar in promoting individuals' personal and academic development. Its ability to provide emotional support, professional guidance, and skill development has been widely recognized. On the other hand, artificial intelligence has burst into the educational sphere, bringing the ability to analyze large volumes of data, personalize teaching, and offer adaptive learning experiences. This article aims to explore the intersection between mentorship and artificial intelligence in the educational context, with the purpose of understanding how this synergy can contribute to the more effective fulfillment of the objectives of the right to education and, ultimately, to the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In this regard, this work delves into an exhaustive review of academic literature and relevant technological advancements, with the aim of shedding light on the opportunities and

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challenges this convergence presents. The relevance of this analysis lies in the need to address current complexities in the educational field and find innovative solutions that allow overcoming traditional barriers. As information and communication technologies continue to reshape our society, it is imperative to explore how mentorship and artificial intelligence can come together to offer more personalized and effective learning experiences, thus contributing to the advancement of the United Nations-established Sustainable Development Goals.

2. The Right to Education: Current Challenges

As is well known, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that every person has the right to education with the aim of achieving the development of the human personality. More recently, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, updated by the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights presented in 2007 by the Observatory on Diversity and Cultural Rights, recognizes education as a cultural right[19].

This disruptive concept of considering education as a cultural right is a logical effect of globalization, pluralism, interculturalism, etc., which brings with it new citizenships and individualities in which we can find groups such as children[20], women[21], racial and cultural minorities, or immigrants[22], with the aim of protecting them from vulnerability and preventing their exclusion from educational systems. I agree with Pablo Meix Cereceda (2016, p. 362) that, indeed, if education is essential for the identity of groups and individuals, this essential right is what allows other rights and freedoms (empowerment right). Therefore, it is not only the State's responsibility to ensure that these rights are not violated, but it must also be proactive in budgeting the necessary economic allocations to make them a reality (Fernandez, 2009, pp. 529–544).

In the Spanish case, the right to education is protected under Article 27 of the Constitution, thus becoming a fundamental right. This article reflected the consensus of the Spanish people on educational matters between right-wing and left-wing political parties during the transition. Some were concerned with the right to freedom of education, and others with guaranteeing the right to education. Its first two sections state that:

> "Everyone has the right to education. Freedom of education is recognized... Education shall aim for the full development of the human personality in respect for democratic principles of coexistence and for fundamental rights and freedoms..."

This article was completed with the development of the Organic Law regulating the Right to Education, guaranteeing free provision at the levels considered mandatory and preventing

[19] This statement is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in such a way that cultural rights are part of human rights. On March 7, 2007, the Fribourg Declaration on Cultural Rights was made. Article 6 refers to the right to education as a cultural right, p. 7.

[20] Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. It aims to protect minors and expressly includes the right to education for all children.

[21] International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979. It emphasizes education as a tool to eliminate inequality between women and men.

[22] International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, adopted in 1990 and entered into force in 2003. However, few countries have ratified this agreement. Article 30 establishes the right of the children of migrant workers to access education in the host country under the same conditions as locals.

discrimination in the exercise of freedom of education. The LODE, in its second article, defines the objectives that educational activity must meet, very similar to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With the right to education and freedom of education, the aim is to guarantee education for all and to ensure educational pluralism by allowing private or subsidized education. The State is obliged to enforce the mandatory nature of basic education and must monitor and ensure compliance with this necessary condition to guarantee the development of the personality of everyone.

But it is of little use to have free and open education if it is not possible to achieve the expected objectives. It is also true that it is not easy to have a clear understanding of what personality development means to achieve this objective, and evidently, this becomes a controversial issue (Ara Pinilla, 2013, pp. 13–78).

Having come this far, it would be pertinent to assess whether Inhuman Intelligence can be useful in guaranteeing an education that allows for the development of the human personality. For this, it is necessary to take a small foray into the origins of the educational system.

2.1. Origin of the Educational System

The modern educational system has its roots in the period of "Enlightened Despotism"[23]. In 1775 France, under the reign of Louis XVI, Minister Turgot unveiled a comprehensive national education program that spanned the entire country and was intended for all social strata. The French Revolution further emphasized the role of texts and educational curricula, laying the foundations of modern pedagogy. Rationalist thought deeply influenced both social and political spheres, fostering an almost unbounded faith in the transformative power of education (Araujo, 2000, p. 81).

In this historical setting, there was a conscious effort to shape an obedient and industrially useful populace. This emphasis on education served to empower an emerging bourgeois class, which had hitherto been largely disenfranchised. The French Revolution was, to a significant extent, a triumph of the bourgeoisie over the aristocratic classes, with the former championing distinct political, economic, and social objectives that went largely unchallenged until the rise of proletarian movements.

Consequently, whether intentional or not, education became a tool of the new capitalist economic system. The aim was to augment a labour force capable of meeting the state's diverse needs, thereby nurturing professionals skilled in civil, military, and industrial sectors over the subsequent centuries.

Interestingly, education was initially not a product of social demand but rather a consequence of the First Industrial Revolution. The focus of education shifted from being an exclusive privilege of the elite to a public service accessible to all social classes. This transformation was fundamentally different from the objectives later set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unsurprisingly, the design of schooling imitated the mass production models of industrialization – mindset that persists among authorities, educators, students, families, and society at large.

[23] In 1763, with Frederick the Great's decree 'Generallandschulreglement,' it was mandated that all Prussian youths, both boys and girls, from ages five to fourteen, be schooled, thus initiating public and secular mandatory primary education. In 1819, 'Die Schule' (the school) began in Prussia. The centralized Prussian schooling system aimed to produce obedient soldiers for the army and subordinate civil servants, skilled workers for mines, factories, industries, and farms.

The educational system played an undeniably vital role in both sustaining the social changes instigated by the French Revolution and facilitating the rise of capitalism. During the Enlightenment, leading intellectuals of the era believed that such an approach to education would be beneficial for society as a whole, a notable departure from a time when educational control lay exclusively with religious institutions.

It was during this period that education for all became a state obligation, thereby transforming public instruction into a citizen's right. This was based on the belief that universal education would actualize the ideal of equal rights for all citizens.

Given these ambitious aims, it's not surprising that education was perceived as a potential equalizer in society, especially once primary education became compulsory. What is startling, however, is that despite the years, decades, and even centuries that have passed, the educational system largely retains the repetitive and homogeneous formats of its origins. These archaic methods stand in stark contrast to the needs of a society that has undergone profound social, economic, political, and cultural changes over the last few centuries (Moreira, 2015, p.172).

The significance of the educational system in supporting and perpetuating the transformations driven by both the French Revolution and the rise of capitalism is unquestionable. This system significantly contributed to optimizing the productive processes of its time.

During the Enlightenment, several prominent figures advocated that this educational approach would benefit society as a whole. Until then, education was largely under the control of religious authorities.

It was during this historical period that universal education became a state responsibility, and therefore, public instruction became a citizen's right[24]. It was believed that such education would make tangible the equality of rights for all individuals.

With this perspective on the potential achievements of education, it is not surprising that it was viewed as a crucial compensatory factor for social inequality, especially with the initiation of mandatory public primary education.

What is truly astonishing is that, despite the passage of time, the contemporary educational system still retains a format very similar to the original, where repetition and homogeneity continue to dominate. This system clearly needs to adopt more contemporary pedagogical approaches that are far removed from traditional models (Perez Brito, 2020, pp. 76–110)

This critique extends beyond merely pointing out the obvious – that new kinds of jobs are emerging, and that future employment will demand different skill sets. A more urgent call for reform is based on the need for individuals who have reached their fullest personal development, capable of resiliently handling the unpredictable challenges posed, in part, by the evolution of non-human intelligence (Perez Brito, 2021)

2.2. Current Challenges

The educational system faces ongoing and evolving challenges in fulfilling the objective of the Right to Education, reflecting broader societal changes. Below are some key challenges:

[24] The female population was excluded, unlike the case in Prussia, which did provide education for girls.

Globally, millions of children and young people still lack access to adequate education due to factors such as poverty, armed conflict, gender discrimination, or geographical location.

In the digital age, access to technology has become paramount. The digital divide can marginalize those lacking quality devices and connectivity. Furthermore, even if individuals have access to technology and adequate connectivity, the absence of specific training or knowledge on how to effectively use these tools can hinder personal development.

Despite strides made in increasing inclusivity, barriers continue to exist within many educational systems that prevent full participation. Certain groups, like ethnic minorities and indigenous communities, face additional challenges arising from linguistic and cultural barriers in educational settings.

Addressing these challenges and ensuring equitable access to education, aimed at individual personal development, requires sustained commitment that extends beyond the purview of state actions. Tackling these issues will, therefore, necessitate collaboration between governments, international organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders to create inclusive and effective educational systems that empower current and future generations. Mentorship emerges as a potent tool, seamlessly blending human intelligence with what I refer to as "Inhuman Intelligence," or artificial intelligence.

3. Academic and Professional Growth Through Mentorship

Mentorship is a relationship-driven process where an experienced individual, the mentor, offers guidance, advice, and support to a less experienced person, the mentee in their personal and/or professional development (Parsloe, 2009). This symbiotic relationship is grounded in mutual trust and commitment and aims at enabling the mentee to achieve specific objectives and acquire distinct skills.

Mentorship serves as a powerful bridge between experience and aspiration, allowing the mentee to explore, learn, and grow under the tutelage of a seasoned individual.

However, this relationship is not one-sided; mentors too can evolve and gain insights through the interaction. The collaborative and personalized nature of mentorship makes it an indispensable tool for human development across various sectors, including academia (Murrell & Blake-Beard, 2017).

3.1 Mentorship in Education

Within the educational landscape, mentorship has emerged as a potent tool for holistic student development. This approach transcends the mere transfer of academic knowledge to focus on guiding, inspiring, and empowering students in their personal and professional endeavors. As educational systems evolve and grapple with new challenges, mentorship becomes an effective strategy to address issues of educational equity, quality, and future preparedness.

Educational mentorship breaks down traditional barriers between teachers and students, centering not only on knowledge transmission but also on the comprehensive academic and personal development of the learner. The benefits are manifold. On one hand, it allows for personalized guidance as mentors tailor their approach to the unique needs of the mentees, thus enabling

targeted interventions for academic and personal challenges. Moreover, mentors not only impart knowledge but also model essential socio-emotional skills like empathy, effective communication, and resilience.

Through mentorship, mentors can offer mentees industry connections, academic networking, or service sector affiliations, thereby providing an otherwise inaccessible professional network. Additionally, mentors can facilitate practical, hands-on experiences related to the mentee's field of interest, expanding their horizons and enriching their academic journey (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

Importantly, mentors offer motivational support, which becomes particularly invaluable when the mentee faces hurdles and doubts their ability to overcome them. In our rapidly changing world, the significance of mentorship gains even greater prominence. Technological advancements, automation, and globalization are altering the employment landscape, requiring the cultivation of soft skills like critical thinking, adaptability, and problem-solving. A competent mentor becomes not just a knowledge source but an active listener, a provider of constructive feedback, and a creator of a trust-based environment. They serve as a role model and advocate for the mentee's success, encouraging them to fulfill their utmost potential.

In summary, mentorship in education extends beyond the simple transmission of academic knowledge. It aims to empower students, inspire their personal and professional growth, and equip them for a dynamically changing world. As educational institutions search for innovative ways to elevate the quality of education and tackle challenges like equity, mentorship will undoubtedly surface as a transformative and valuable strategy (Parsloe, 2009).

4. The Integration of Artificial Intelligence in Contemporary Education

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a disruptive force across a broad range of sectors, and education is no exception. Its ability to process vast amounts of data, identify underlying patterns, and adapt accordingly offers a revolutionary approach to teaching and learning. This technological leap presents both exhilarating opportunities and complex ethical and operational challenges, which educational systems must carefully navigate to positively transform the learning experience in the digital age.

One of the most notable advantages of AI in education is its capacity for personalizing the learning journey. By analyzing student performance data, AI algorithms can tailor instructional content and activities to meet individual needs. This facilitates students advancing at their own pace, reinforcing their strengths, and more effectively addressing their weaknesses (Zachary & Fain, 2000).

AI-based virtual teaching assistants are becoming increasingly prevalent in classrooms. They can answer student queries, furnish additional explanations, and offer pertinent examples. These assistants alleviate teachers from mundane tasks, allowing them to focus on deeper interactions and individualized guidance.

AI tools can discern patterns in student performance and behavior, signaling potential learning difficulties. Educators can then intervene timely, providing targeted support and specific strategies to overcome challenges.

AI can offer instant feedback on student tasks and assessments, expediting the learning process while enhancing understanding by promptly addressing mistakes and misconceptions.

AI algorithms can generate personalized learning content such as problems and exercises based on student skills and progress. They can also recommend auxiliary resources like related readings or videos to enrich subject understanding.

Despite its advantages, the integration of AI in education raises concerns. Data privacy and security are significant issues, given the extensive collection and utilization of students' personal information. Moreover, overreliance on technology may depersonalize education and undermine essential human interaction in the learning process.

Effective AI implementation in education necessitates adequate training for educators. Teachers must understand how to use these tools meaningfully and integrate them into their pedagogical practice to maximize positive impact (Murrell& Blake-Beard 2017).

AI adoption should not exacerbate the digital divide or exclude those lacking quality technology access. It should serve as a tool that enhances education for all students, regardless of their location or resources (Kaplan, 2022).

4.1. The Future of AI-Driven Education: A Multifaceted Transformation

Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds the extraordinary potential to revolutionize education by offering personalization, efficiency, and a focus on 21st-century skills. However, its deployment must be meticulously strategized, taking into account the long-term implications for pedagogy and society as a whole. Far from replacing educators, AI aims to empower them with tools that will enhance and enrich the learning experience, preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly technology-driven world.

4.2. Specific Examples of AI Implementation in Education

Artificial Intelligence is profoundly reshaping the educational landscape, acting as a catalyst for personalization, efficiency, and pedagogical innovation.

Platforms like Khan Academy[25] and Duolingo[26] leverage sophisticated algorithms to monitor students' performance and behavior, enabling the adaptation of educational content and activities to suit individual learning needs.

Beyond traditional teaching methods, intelligent virtual assistants such as ScribeSense[27] offer real-time academic support, evaluating writing patterns to provide constructive feedback on grammar and stylistic elements.

The automated grading of tests and assignments, facilitated by platforms like Turnitin[28], not only eases the administrative burden on educators but also ensures academic integrity through plagiarism detection.

In addition, emotional analytics tools decode behavioral and linguistic signals to give educators insight into students' emotional states, making educational engagement more nuanced and

[25]https://es.khanacademy.org/
[26]https://es.duolingo.com/
[27]https://scribehow.com/scribe-ai
[28]https://www.turnitin.com/solutions/ai-writing

empathetic. Predictive analytics harness historical academic data to foretell students' future performance, empowering educators to intervene and support those at risk of falling behind.

Real-time feedback, enabled by platforms like DreamBox[29], allows students to rectify mistakes instantaneously, solidifying their understanding of the subject matter.

AI even assists in content creation, generating educational material tailored to each student's learning level and pace, freeing educators to focus on complex pedagogical tasks.

Furthermore, AI-driven assistive technologies offer vital support in special education settings, adapting resources to meet diverse learning needs.

The technology also extends its reach into student engagement analytics, helping educators refine their teaching strategies for optimized outcomes.

Finally, platforms such as Pathfinder[30] employ AI to guide students in making informed decisions about academic programs and career paths, based on their unique skills and interests.

These examples represent just the tip of the iceberg in terms of how Artificial Intelligence is being implemented in education to enrich the learning experience while enabling greater personalization and efficiency in instruction (Chen, L., Chen, P., & Lin, 2020).

5. Synergy Between Mentorship and Artificial Intelligence in Education: A Holistic Approach to Student Development

The juxtaposition of mentorship with Artificial Intelligence (AI) within today's educational ecosystem is yielding unparalleled avenues for enriching the student learning experience. This fusion leverages the strengths of human expertise and AI-driven efficiency to cultivate well-rounded 21st-century learners (Firat, 2023).

The amalgamation of mentorship and Artificial Intelligence co-creates an integrated, holistic model for student learning and development. While AI contributes efficiency, personalization, and analytic rigor, mentors add a layer of empathy, bespoke guidance, and socio-emotional cultivation. Collectively, they forge a more robust and impactful educational journey, equipping students to navigate an increasingly complex and evolving world.

5.1. Customized Learning Experiences:

AI's sophisticated algorithms analyze student performance metrics and learning preferences to craft tailored educational content and experiences. When integrated with mentor-guided insight inspired by theories such as Carol Dweck's work on growth mindset, this creates a richly personalized learning pathway that addresses both the academic and affective domains of each student (2015).

5.2. Nuanced Feedback Mechanisms:

While AI systems can instantly generate objective feedback on academic tasks, the human mentor adds a layer of understanding and emotional intelligence that AI alone cannot capture. Mentors synthesize AI-produced data with pedagogical approaches, such as those posited by John Hattie, to

[29] https://www.dreambox.com/
[30] https://www.globalcareercounsellor.com/blog/how-to-guide-students-towards-the-right-career-path/

provide more nuanced, context-sensitive, and constructive feedback that considers each student's unique attributes (Perez Brito, 2022).

5.3. Development of Socio-Emotional Competencies:

Mentorship excels in fostering personal growth and nurturing socio-emotional capabilities like empathy, effective communication, and resilience. Leveraging insights from Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence (2018), AI can pinpoint areas for targeted socio-emotional skill development, while mentors guide the real-world application of these competencies.

5.4. Identifying Areas for Enhancement:

AI's data analytics capabilities can uncover recurring patterns in student performance, flagging areas for improvement. Mentors can utilize this data to devise targeted action plans, incorporating expert guidance and bespoke strategies informed by Edwin Locke's goal-setting theories.

5.5. Future-Proofing Career Paths:

AI-powered tools can identify emergent trends in the labor market and requisite skills for future vocations. Mentors can harness this data to provide informed counsel on academic and career trajectories, ensuring student readiness for the ever-changing job landscape, as elucidated by thinkers like Klaus Schwab in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

5.6. Harmonizing Technological Efficiency and Human Sensibilities:

While AI excels in streamlining tasks and delivering custom solutions, mentorship introduces a vital human element. By marrying AI's capabilities with the motivational and inspirational facets mentors offer, a balanced educational approach emerges. This aligns with human-centered design principles championed by experts like Don Norman.

Conclusion

This academic article comprehensively addresses two crucial elements in contemporary education: mentorship and artificial intelligence (AI). Through a strategic fusion of these disciplines, the viability of enriching the educational experience of students is demonstrated, thereby fostering their holistic development and preparing them for a world in constant flux. Mentorship emerges as an irreplaceable human component in this landscape, playing a vital role in guiding, inspiring, and supporting students in their personal, emotional, and academic journeys. Its relevance is particularly emphasized in a context where AI is assuming an increasingly significant function, offering a human dimension that technology cannot replicate.

In multiple sectors such as medicine, scientific research, engineering, and of course, education, inhuman intelligence has proven to be an invaluable tool. These technologies have the potential to

analyze data at a speed and scale that surpass human capabilities, leading to significant advancements. The synergy between mentorship and AI offers a balanced and comprehensive pathway towards enhanced education. Mentors can leverage the data and analysis generated by AI to provide more precise and strategic guidance. By integrating artificial intelligence with human understanding, personalization, efficiency, and depth in education are intensified.

This article underscores the importance of establishing a harmonious balance between technology and human elements to achieve the noble underlying purpose of the right to education: the comprehensive and full development of each individual. Far from being conflicting concepts, mentorship and artificial intelligence stand as synergistic collaborators that can offer a more personalized, enriching, and future-oriented education. This confluence of human and technological intelligence has the potential to transform education into a more meaningful and relevant experience in our era marked by the omnipresence of information and technology.

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A NEW WAY OF SEEING MENTORING FOR TEACHERS

ALINA G. MAG[31]

Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to identify various and consistent reasons why the mentoring system in Romania needs a systemic change, in the view of the trainers in the PROF project - Professionalization of the teaching career. It is time to rebuild the learning and improvement environment of teachers, from the beginning of their career, but also during their teaching career, to continuously find effective solutions directly related to the training needs of teachers. The teaching career is more challenging than ever, in the current socio-educational context. A society in crisis, dominated by conflicts and instability, primarily affects the quality of life, but also the way people react to any new situation. Today's children have different educational needs, and other patterns of behavior, that can only be managed by those who deeply understand how educational relationships work in schools. Today's mentors are the first to need consistent and performant training. This paper brings to the fore a focus on the new way of understanding and seeing mentoring for teachers, within the PROF project, with an accent on creating peer-learning communities in schools.*

Key words: *mentoring; teaching career; training needs; educational relationships; peer-learning.*

1. Introduction

We are currently facing a period of transition from a society governed by values that emerged during the technological revolution to a society based on a simultaneous explosion of information and globalization. New values and rules subject us to increasing stress of accumulating information in a short time: we are dealing with a lot of data, often contradictory, we are forced to communicate in several languages, to understand cultures and behaviours different from those in which we grew up, to learn as much technical professional knowledge as possible, economically, to manage new social crises, to cope with addictions to virtual screens from an increasingly young age, and all this in the fastest possible time.

Our schools have opened more and more debates and even social upheavals, being troubled by children's emotional and behavioral problems, in full growth, by teachers' strikes generated by underfunding education, by parents' unmanageable demands, families being strongly changed and hard tried to keep the balance necessary for raising children, in times affected by crisis of values. Under these circumstances, the teaching profession becomes more difficult than ever. First, the attractiveness of the teaching career is problematic, as the education system in Romania is chronically underfunded, subjected to numerous attempts at reforms, which have generated

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instability due to the incoherences of educational policies, changed too often. The teaching profession has grown in constant difficulty, and despite the times, those who have resisted over time and managed to be good teachers, have succeeded also because they had good mentors.

Mentoring is gaining new valences today and becomes of crucial importance in the school space. This paper presents new visions about mentoring for our teachers, who need to rediscover and rethink their collegial relationships, in small learning communities in schools, with the support of professional mentors. The project PROF (https://www.edu.ro/PROF), which is implemented between April 1, 2021, and December 31, 2023, at the systemic level, being led by our Ministry of Education, brings to the attention of the mentor training system a new vision – that of mentors who build and support the peer-learning community in each school. The mentors trained within the project went through innovative training programs, which put a new emphasis on the relationship between colleagues that are learning together, in peer-learning communities. To resort to such mentors, now, means to shorten the cycle of personal self-development and to find that support in school, from colleagues, and that is an essential personal and professional gain in the long run.

2. Theoretical foundation

The role of the mentor teacher within a learning community built, for starters, in the structure of the pedagogical practice base, becomes very important within the PROF project, implemented now at national level. The professional mentor identifies the training need, supports, mediates, validates, and disseminates the training, based on the training standards associated with the teacher's training profile.

The continuous training that helps teachers the most takes place directly in school, on the system of pedagogical practice, not outside it, not by removing teachers from courses and/or by placing them in learning contexts external to the educational process and involves the mentoring relationship, on a peer-learning model, in blended-learning system. All these changes are brought to the attention of the national mentor training system through this systemic project which involves mentoring experts from all over the country.

At the heart of the entire effort are numerous studies that have highlighted the qualities that an effective teacher must have, for students to be successful in school, with the support of highly trained teachers (Gordon & Burch, 2011; Robinson, 2015). Beyond the quality of students and the subject matter taught, lessons are successful or unsuccessful, and teachers are motivated or capped, depending on the quality of personal relationships, says Thomas Gordon (2011), creator of the Gordon program to improve the relationship with students by making teachers more efficient.

The revolution needed in all schools depends on the creative potential of students, highlighted by teachers who know how to celebrate diversity and creatively harness the huge potential of children. Ken Robinson believes that the future of education depends on teachers' ability to demonstrate to students that they care about them (Robinson, 2015). His vision of the global transformation of education systems, his clarity, passion, and deep understanding of the training needs of good teachers, is a powerful source of inspiration for the teams of trainers in the project. Creative schools are necessary for the survival and development of any organization and team of professionals (Robinson, 2011).

Teacher mentors must become those creative leaders who know how to highlight the human potential of mentored teachers. Augusto Cury believes that the brilliant minds of educators require strong emotional balance, he emphasizes the need for emotional and professional excellence, as important goals for those involved in education (Cury, 2012). The strong humanistic character in approaching professional training is essential, according to the international author Augusto Cury, who sensitively emphasizes how we can educate our ego, as a real administrator of our creative intuition, self-analysis, altruism, and malleability, indispensable in healthy educational relationships. Genuine empathy and building trust in oneself and others are needed for relationships between mentors and future teachers, or those already in practice, to become credible (Albu, 2005; Robu, 2008). In the competitive society we live in, education can only take place around this core of trust, says Gabriel Albu, in his work "*Education between self-confidence and trust in others*" (Albu, 2005).

Effective teaching requires a strong attachment bond, according to Cozzolino's conception (2017), and students' ability to learn well and deeply is directly and strongly influenced by the quality of the attachment bond created between students and teachers. Teacher mentors consider the need to ensure secure attachment in the classroom of students, to optimize their learning process. Many authors attest to the strong need, today, to profoundly transform the way we define and practice learning, because the whole society is based on knowledge and learning, and authentic mentors need a very good training in this direction (Robinson, 2015; Marga, 2019). John Hattie (2014) argues for the need to build schools equipped with visible learning, with solid scientific arguments, teachers being the main agents in a teaching process. The trainers in the PROF project structured the mentors' training activities based on the principles underlying *visible learning*, which allow the individual progress of each student, at their own pace, continuous evaluation and feedback being sources of motivation for both teachers and students.

The emotional education of all educational actors matters a lot, to find the necessary harmony in the middle of a community of colleagues who pursue common results, for the success of students. Mentors are concerned with their own growth process on an emotional level (Botton, 2020), to build relationships that require trust, vulnerability, generosity and especially understanding. Emotionally intelligent people give meaning to their entire professional life, with confidence and tenacity, to always find the balanced approach in their relationships with others. It takes education, availability, and healthy self-esteem for teacher mentors to learn to appreciate their true worth (Dr. Glenn, 2017).

Finally, there is a need for a practical course in building trust in others, in a deep, authentic, and insightful way, according to Walter Anderson studies (2013). Authentic mentors learn from mistakes and encourage mentored teachers to be confident and continuously improve their results. In Romania, first, there is a need for real responsibility, says author Andrei Marga, in his work "*Responsible education. A vision on Romanian education*" (Marga, 2019). No project or strategy at national level can be successful without rigorous and innovative thinking, so that the education system becomes better, more efficient. We depend on each other, and we need responsible ownership of every role for a reform that really brings beneficial change. It is the only solution, and it requires awareness, assumption, and responsible action of those responsible for the teaching profession.

3. Objectives

This paper focuses on clarifying the most obvious and different reasons underlying the need for systemic change of mentoring for teachers in Romania, in the view of the trainers directly involved in this process. We consider the large number of mentors who are trained through the four training programs within the PROF project (https://www.edu.ro/PROF), at country level, it is a very consistent one, namely 28,211 people, teachers in pre-university education. The Ministry of Education, as beneficiary, and partners from 4 universities in the country, "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, "Transilvania" University of Brasov, "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati and "George Emil Palade" University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology of Târgul Mureș, in team with 11 Teaching Staff Houses in the country, collaborated intensively to implement the project, continuously adapting the requirements and exigencies in training, to the needs of learners, teacher mentors for our schools all over the country.

4. Material and Methods

In the teams from the 4 universities activated 40 training experts, whose expertise and experience allowed them to launch unique debates at the level of numerous groups of students, about the new way we see and understand mentoring for teachers. They looked for a sensitive accordance with the real training needs in schools, whether we refer to new teachers, at their start in teaching, or to teachers throughout their career. The four training programs that were developed, were implemented gradually, during the project, with numerous requests and professional challenges, for all those involved, trainers and trainees.

In this study, the focus-group method was used, randomly attended by 10 of the interested trainers from the 4 universities involved, on a voluntary basis, to debate and clarify together what are the essential, common reasons that justify the systemic change of mentoring for teachers in Romania, in their view. The real impact of the project is directly related to how these reasons came to generate a real change in the system, post training. Several key questions were asked, to which the volunteer trainers, anonymously, answered:

- *Do you think we need innovative training in the field of professionalizing of the teaching career in Romania?*
- *What are the reasons that justify the need for a systemic change in mentoring, in your view?*
- *How do we manage to attract the most talented people who want to be teachers and how do we manage to give them those skills necessary for them to be the best teachers in the classroom?*
- *What should be brought new to mentoring?*

The collected data allowed a qualitative analysis, of interest to understand the impact of training activities, given that the trainers' vision about the new way of understanding mentoring and the reasons behind the direct action of the mentors trained in the project, who will implement what they have learned in their application schools, are directly and intimately correlated.

5. Results

The systemic non-competitive project PROF (https://www.edu.ro/PROF), which is in the last stage of implementation, aims to develop an institutional framework adequate to the current mechanisms and standards for the teaching competence, in accordance with the recommendations and guidelines from the European Commission, for the teaching career. It is envisaged the construction of the institutional mechanism of teaching career mentoring, a mechanism that will ensure coherence and conceptual, operational, methodological, and legislative unity in the teaching career development system, but also the development of a national regulatory body in the teaching career - the National Center for Mentoring.

The effort of those involved in the training was full of challenges and unique personal and professional experiences, as the diversity and experience of the students constantly brought, in all dialogues and classes, many nuances and approaches personalized or adapted to the authentic relational contexts in the schools they come from. It was felt, in each hour of training, whether the reasons underlying the improvement effort were authentic, stimulating, generating real interest, increased, to become different mentors, better adapted to schools and teachers who need mentors. The vision of each trainer and the vision about mentoring of the trainees in each group, across the country, have visibly left their mark on the entire endeavor, in the implementation of the project.

The trainers who accepted the challenge to participate in the discussions within the focus groups organized within this study, after having numerous relationship experiences with the future mentors trained in the PROF project, during the training activities, provided relevant and personal, unique answers to the questions asked, respecting the ethical norms, and maintaining anonymity.

To the first question, "*Do you think we need innovative training in the field of professionalization of the teaching career in Romania*?" All respondents answered strongly in the affirmative, as instability generated by multiple reform attempts has led to an increasingly visible vulnerability of teacher education. In the absence of a well-performing, clear, coherent, well-developed mentoring system, initial and in-service teacher education is not complete, sufficient, and credible. Most trainers come from the Teacher Training Departments in the country and have direct experience of coordinating pedagogical practice in application schools. The need for a coherent approach and the need to streamline the mentoring system at national level are more than obvious and necessary. To build a national system for mentoring that is coherent and professional, it requires an innovative, up-to-date approach, which becomes the necessary binder between teachers and students, at any stage of improvement and career evolution.

To the second question underlying this study, "*What are the reasons justifying the need for a systemic change in mentoring, in your view*?", the answers of the respondents who participated in the focus group meetings were personalized and nuanced, depending on the own vision of each trainer and the professional experiences gained in the field of teacher mentor training. The most eloquent reasons mentioned were directly related to the need to professionalize the teaching career through an efficient mentoring system, calibrated to the needs of each school. The approaches to mentor training and the concrete exercise of these professional roles have experienced significant variations from county to county, without being able to speak of a coherent vision and approach to mentor training at national level.

It was precisely this incoherence and differences in training, in different universities, which are directly involved in teacher training, through collaboration with School Inspectorates, which provided mentors on subjects in application schools, that were the basis of the concept of the PROF project (https://www.edu.ro/PROF), which brings to the forefront the need to create the National Framework for teaching career mentoring, by establishing the Mentoring Institution. The main goal was to bring to the systemic level a coherent, responsible, unitary approach to the basic requirements, to which all mentors should relate, and then to personalize each of their contribution through mentoring, according to the identified needs, within peer-learning communities. Thus, the central reasons are directly linked to the need to create a coherent framework system, at national level, in the context of the global process of digitalization of education systems. We need mentors at the beginning of their careers to act in school, to guide the steps of beginners in their classes. Likewise, we need well-trained mentors throughout the increasingly difficult and challenging teaching career. These mentors need consistent training, not only in their specialty field, but also in the psychology of human personality.

To question three, "*How do we manage to attract the most talented people who want to be teachers and how do we manage to give them those skills necessary for them to be the best teachers in the classroom*?", respondents appreciated, for the most part, not only the role of financial support for junior teachers, but also the need to build those collegiate learning environments in schools, peer-learning, friendly, open, based on trust. The role of the learning community is crucial to make this key profession for other professions much more attractive to young people with pedagogical potential and vocation.

Last question, "*What should be brought new to mentoring*?" generated a lot of debate and emphasis on the need for additional training of teacher mentors in the field of psychology and communication/relating to others. Today's teacher mentors should be, first, the ones that deeply understand how others personality's function, according to their own needs, in the view of the trainers who voluntarily participated in the study. Today, a mentor can maintain relevance in the training conversation if they deeply understand the needs of the mentored teacher. This project brings new focus to mentoring on each teacher as a complete person, not just on their job (Woolworth, 2019), so that the school learns how to have a transformative role, with a positive impact for the entire educational community. The important process of self-knowledge, essential for the training of teacher mentors, and the way in which mentors learn to communicate and intervene by personalizing the requirements of pedagogical practice, according to the personality of the mentored teachers, is indispensable.

The data collected within the focus group lead us to qualitative results of great significance, in this professional field of great sensitivity and impact for teachers growing. The values underlying mentoring are directly related to the results obtained in this important collaboration, to the personalization of training, to the consistency of activities, to the relevance of each activity, but also to credibility. People believe in the power of example and see relevance in having personal experience in any topic addressed.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

Today's mentors can make guided teachers feel important and valuable, so they will react more positively to them. The PROF project brings a systemic change in mentor training, through all the steps that led to the creation of a unitary and coherent National Institutional Framework for teaching career mentoring, of great importance at national level, focusing on the quality of relationships in peer-learning communities in schools. The dynamic, open, constructive relationship between beginning teachers or teachers throughout the teaching career, mentors, school management team, and students, is the key to success in this profession.

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THE "EDUCATIONAL EXPERT": THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF MENTORING ACTIVITIES

C. DISTEFANO[32]

Abstract: *In Italy, legislation has only recently been enacted to regulate and value the professional figure of the pedagogist as the highest expert in educational and Bildung processes. Yet, in today's complex society, his role is fundamental because he represents a point of reference in the various formal and non-formal educational contexts. Through specific actions starting from the analysis of the person's needs, the education professional becomes a promoter of tutoring and mentoring, in the perspective of Educational Care.*

Key words: *Italian Legislation; Pedagogical Science; Professional Pedagogy; Educational Care; Pedagogical Skills.*

1. Pedagogy … a complex science for the Person

"The true telos of pedagogy consists precisely in this:
pointing out the ways for human beings to form,
educate themselves and instruct themselves
by responding to the instance of freedom."
(Gennari & Sola, 2016, p. 33)

Responding to the instance of *freedom* is perhaps the most complex goal and challenge to which pedagogical science seeks to respond daily. This happens because concurring to that instance "does not mean to be free to do what one wants, but to be free to be who one wants" (Id): a *freedom*, therefore, not referring to the norms of different societies, but rather directed toward a higher level, we might say "meta", which is embodied in the uniqueness of everyone.

And pedagogical science seeks to promote this goal through the trinomial that grounds its essence and underlies all its work and research: *education*, *instruction* and *Bildung*.

Although these terms are often used synonymously, it is not easy to define these paradigms, because each has delicate shades of meaning, which makes it difficult to make a clear separation.

Let us try, here, to give a definition, in order to better understand how pedagogical science, with its complex epistemological apparatus, becomes science for the Person.

As Franco Cambi says, "education (from the Latin *educare*, intensive form of *educere*, "to bring out, to rear") is a set of processes aimed at fostering and directing the growth of the person toward

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autonomy, personal responsibility and complete socialization" (Cambi, 1999, p. 292). The meaning of education that emerges from this first definition is, therefore, that of a construct strongly anchored to a context, in which action is taken for the subject, through a set of actions aimed at his or her autonomy, at his or her acting in *freedom*, in compliance with rules and constructs inherent in the historical-social context of reference. According to this meaning, therefore, "each society curates these processes through specific institutions, which perpetuate themselves, their own traditions, their own ideologies, constantly transform, renew and restructure themselves" (Id).

On the other side, from a social level, such as education, instruction is connected to the sphere of knowledge: understood not as a mnemonic assumption of notions detached from each other, but as a process through which one constructs one's own knowledge, arranging the latter in an orderly and logical way, through critical reworking and interpretation (Gennari & Sola, 2016).

Finally, at a higher level, almost as a higher and complex form, an end point (never concluded) of the process of personal growth, we find the category of *Bildung*. "It, in the strictest sense, is the cultural and human maturation of the individual that is accomplished through an organic (and functional) synthesis of knowledge, techniques, etc., and a free (critical) assimilation of the culture of a group, a people, a society, making the individual active and responsible, therefore also self-regulated, protagonist of this process" (Cambi, 1999, p. 293).

What education promotes and seeks to delineate is, therefore, a constant and continuous dialogue with the culture of its own time; a context and a historical time, precisely, that the individual lives in, of which he becomes a protagonist and participates actively and responsibly. He is a subject of the "here and now," but he is a subject who takes shape from a past that has inevitably conditioned him (with its traditions, values, etc.), but from which and with which he seeks to build a new form of Self, open, more critical, never finished, always becoming, which considers the complex and articulated emotional and intellectual nuances of the human being, in order to condense them into a form as harmonious as possible.

Then *Bildung* encompasses education and instruction (as well as other constructs not analyzed in this context, such as enculturation, learning, etc.) and, although it represents another moment compared to the other two categories, it incorporates them, in order to put at the center the subject-individual-person for whom pedagogy is concerned.

This is the task of pedagogy, its epistemic status, considered by many to be a weak status, because it is linked to the many educational sciences that describe man from various points of view (e.g., psychology, biology, sociology) (Dewey, 2015): but this is the strength of this science that constantly rereads itself, within a critical and hermeneutic framework, to promote educational and training theories and practices that put the *freedom* of the person at the center (Mariani & Cambi & Giosi & Sarsini, 2017).

Here personalism, as a theoretical-philosophical model whose first meanings were outlined with the message of Christ, until it was clearly defined in the 20th century, takes on fundamental importance because it focuses on the Person as a value. And it becomes fundamental because, rereading it from an educational perspective, pedagogy emphasizes those traits that give importance to *freedom* and "the subject-person as a free entity, seen in its substantiality and dynamism, understood as a single, unique unrepeatable, creative in its ontological dignity" (Santelli Beccegato, 2004, p. 23).

It is an irreducible, never fully decipherable and constantly changing person that outlined by personalism: a subject-person that aims at *freedom*, promoting the perspective of responsibility and relationship that, necessarily, is realized through dialogue and encounter with the Other.

Promoting a personalistic pedagogy, therefore, means to outline an educational praxis that has as its focus a projectuality aimed at the primacy of the person, in which the various educational institutions promote his or her potential and emphasize his or her uniqueness (Id.).

Given these theoretical assumptions that make pedagogy a science for the Person, the figure of the pedagogist becomes central, not only because he or she represents the highest expert in educational processes, but also because, through his or her work, he or she seeks to promote well-being (and *freedom*) for the individual throughout his or her life.

2. The pedagogist in the Italian context: between legislation and expertise

It is only recently enacted in Italy the Law 205/2017 (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2017) that regulates the educational professions, trying to overcome the "irrelevance" to which pedagogy has too often been subjected and to clarify the training of education experts and their (central) role in society.

Despite the fact that there is still no Italian register dedicated to such professional figures - in fact, it was only in March 2023 that a draft was proposed to establish one (Chamber of Deputies, 2023) - we can consider the 2017 law as an effort to overcome that double paradox of which pedagogy (with its actors) is a victim: on the one side, as mentioned, there is the low social consideration, on the other side the "subalternity" to other sciences (Gennari & Sola, 2016).

What, instead, this legislation seeks to promote is a reversal of this conception, to give value and scientificity as much to pedagogy as a science as to its practitioners.

Within the law it is very clear not only in what field of work education professionals can enter, but also (and most importantly), the training they must undertake. In the law, in fact, it is specified how "the socio-pedagogical professional educator and the pedagogist work in the educational, training and pedagogical field, in relation to any activity carried out in a formal, non-formal and informal way, in the various phases of life, in a perspective of personal and social growth" (Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, 2017, p. 302); and again how these figures are "included in the scope of professions not organized in orders or colleges" (Id) and, finally, valuing the university path, it is specified how this training is "functional to the achievement of suitable knowledge, skills and educational competences" (Id).

But what competencies does the law refer to? What distinguishes the educational professional from other professions, entrusting him or her with importance above all for the promotion of the well-being of the person?

it is important to clarify, first of all, the workplaces, to understand what kind of necessary learning outcomes an education professional should possess. These skills are promoted by the various degree programs in the field of education.

On the one side "we are talking about professionals who will lend their work in the contexts of the social economy, where consortia or social cooperatives can be found that organize, manage and develop services to the person; on the other side we are talking about businesses, companies that employ education graduates in the areas of human resources" (Boffo, 2021, p. 172).

The centrality of the person emerges, again, from the analysis of these workplaces because, in both cases, what characterizes the educational profession is working not *for* another person, but *with* another person (Kanizsa & Tramma, 2014).

This represents an important feature of educational work, because the ultimate goal, the focus of such work is represented by a change that professionals, together with the person, seek to promote. This takes place in a mutual exchange in which at the center is an educational relationship based on attentive and active listening to the Other, in a general perspective of Educational Care (Cambi, 2010).

To achieve this change for the Person, who often experiences a situation of fragility, there are several skills that an educational professional should possess and groupable in the trinomial of *knowing, knowing how to do* and *knowing how to be*.

In order to understand "*knowledge*," it is necessary to emphasize again the strong link that pedagogy develops with the sciences of education: it is from them that pedagogy draws information about the various shades of the individual (the mind, development, culture, biology, etc.) in order to reread them in an educational and formative key. Knowledge is definable as "cognitive skills" and becomes, therefore, a key-aspect, the foundation for building projects for the change of the person: to do this requires that critical and meta-critical reading on what the various educational sciences (psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.) promote. What results, then, is an expert in educational processes who needs the most critical, open-minded thinking, capable of interpreting the various educational phenomena and emergencies, through an ability to connect with the theoretical concepts that pedagogy proposes to him. (Kanizsa & Tramma, 2014).

"*Know-how to do*," on the other hand, includes all methodological skills: that is the ability to find strategies and tools for the implementation of educational processes. It is with such tools that it is possible to carry out a parsimonious and careful analysis of the needs of the individual, which makes the educator understand and interpret their real needs: doing this means trying to build an educational project as realistic as possible (Id).

Finally, "*knowing how to be*," called "personal skills," which include "that emotional, behavioral, and ethical heritage that, while not connected to a specific knowledge, guides the individual in his or her personal and professional life" (Id, p. 156). There are, then, two skills that are central and that this profession needs to place at the center of its work: reflexivity (not only hetero-referred but also self-referred) and (attentive) communication, to which is added intentionality and "right detachment."

Starting from the latter aspects, intentionality is necessary to give the educational project the characteristic of non-randomness: thinking about change for the Person means not improvising but defining each step, in order to achieve quality experiences. But working with situations of fragility means entering into contexts of real suffering and need, in which, often, the educational professional could risk being too emotionally involved: here the "right detachment" is the way to deal with such situations with professionalism and the right balance.

From these two, basic aspects, the other two skills emerge, because entering into relationships means, necessarily, developing constant communication and reflection. Trying to communicate within contexts of fragility requires both attentive listening to the real needs of the individual and a dialogue that is a real exchange and that promotes change, sowing seeds for the person that can

guide and accompany him or her. To do this, to develop an intentional educational process, to carry out attentive listening, to respond to a real need requires, constantly, a reflection on others and on ourselves; a reflection that makes the educator think about the various emotional and behavioral nuances experienced by the Person taken in charge, to welcome them and give them importance; but a reflection that also makes the educational expert think about his or her own work, how to respond in a better way to the needs of the individuals, in a perspective of constant self-criticism.

The combination of this tripartition (*knowing*, *knowing how to do* and *knowing how to be*) makes it clear how the educational expert, at the very moment he or she seeks to promote well-being and change for the Person, simultaneously carries out mentoring and tutoring actions.

3. Pedagogist as mentoring

Although the concept of mentoring was first popularized in American business circles at the time of the industrial boom, in which experienced and knowledgeable "mentors" were identified who could perform a supportive and guiding function toward younger, inexperienced workers (D'Ugo, 2017), this category can be approached and introduced within the educational sector and, in particular, consider educational experts as mentors of the educational processes.

What we will try to argue, then, is how the role of the educational expert is well matched to the figure of the mentor, not only because he or she seeks to promote individual and social well-being, but also because he or she establishes relationships that can foster the *freedom* that necessarily comes through the development and awareness of one's own skills and abilities.

It is necessary to clarify, first of all, what is meant by "mentoring" and, in particular, to highlight how it has, over time, delineated new shades of meaning, leading to a mentoring figure that "does not merely foster the development of a part of skills and behaviors, but considers the person in his or her entirety and career" (Harvard, 2005, p. 89).

What emerges is not a figure exclusively related to the development of skills for inclusion in working environments, but a professional who, starting from the consideration of the person as a whole (and, therefore, considered as a unique being with specific potential) seeks to promote and bring out, in a pedagogical sense, his or her potential.

It is possible to state, then, how, in every field of work in which the educational professional works, this goal represents the mission of his or her work: from early childhood to adolescence, from adulthood to old age.

What educational professionals carry out within educational services is a twofold mentoring action: on the one side, more specifically for professional educators, of accompaniment for the promotion of the well-being and *freedom* of the individual recipient of the educational project; on the other, for pedagogists, an action of coordination and supervision of the educators, for the promotion of reflection, exchange and comparison for the development of activities as calibrated as possible for the various service individuals.

The expert in educational processes becomes, therefore, a mentor not only for the mentee (for whom he or she becomes a point of reference) because, through a pedagogical project calibrated to his or her needs, he or she attempts to bring out his or her skills and potential, even overcoming

situations of fragility, but also for educators and adults who work directly with the beneficiaries of personal services, at a higher level.

In the first case, the mentoring action is also well combined with that of tutoring (thus also linked to the sphere of learning): here the educational action seeks a response to a need, establishing a helping relationship for a person in a situation of fragility, for which it will be necessary to identify the causes of suffering in order to develop the most useful help (Canevaro & Chieregatti, 1999). In the second case, on the other hand, a supervisory action takes shape to guide the team toward a common goal - the person's change - promoted through the support of the whole team.

Different exemplifications could be made for this second aspect, each of them referring to the various work contexts in which a pedagogist may work (school, prison, sports, rehabilitation, etc.): think, for example, of the pedagogist in schools, to promote educational consultations to teachers and students and, therefore, to offer support in order to develop quality educational practices; think of the pedagogist in the early childhood setting, as a promoter and coordinator of healthy development from an early age; think, again, of the clinical pedagogist, who also works with people with disabilities in order to structure pathways aimed at autonomy.

In each of these areas, his or her role becomes key: if we consider the pedagogist as a "multifaceted and professional figure with skills aimed at the critical and complex analysis of individual, family, work, group and community situations; at the planning and design of educational, training, personal evolution and recovery paths and protocols; at the coordination, leadership, counseling, guidance and promotion of educational initiatives aimed at individuals, groups and interinstitutional networks" (Crispiani, 2022, p. 21), we understand how well his statute also combines the concept of mentor, because in his work, once again, the focus is on the Person, in a work of constant tension for its harmonious development.

But considering education experts as promoters of mentoring actions means underlining, once again, that ontological construct of pedagogy which constitutes it and which guides practices: Educational Care.

“Care is not an ethics, but an ethically informed practice. And it is informed by the search for what is good, that is, what helps to lead a good life. If ethics is questioning the quality of a good life, care is an action oriented by the desire to promote a good life. […] It means trying to promote the well-being of the other” (Mortari, 2022, p. 179): this is the deepest meaning of Care; this is the most effective tool for reaching *freedom*; this is the closest approach to mentoring practice.

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ACTIVITIES OF ICT TEACHING IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCES: IMPLEMENTING PERSPECTIVES FOR EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract: *The use of new technologies in e-learning through information and communication technologies (ICT) has created controversial issues related to attention, as well as the improvement of learning in Europe and in the world. The students engaged in intercultural learning without traveling by collaborating on an online project. The pedagogical approach used was Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) which powers intercultural learning using digital technology with other students around the world. This work presents a developed science program based on food safety with students in health science studies (Nutrition, Pharmacy and Food Technologies) from three Universities in Colombia, Romania, and Spain and led by the University of Valencia.*

Key words: *e-learning, nutrition, food technologies, international, food safety, COIL.*

1. Introduction

Many changes have occurred in the last decade in the University context with technological advances, as far as information is concerned. The teaching lessons are available where, when, and how you want to do them. Various sources, subjects, and contexts are accessible by one click. This is due to the innovation in information and communication technologies (ICT), which has expanded and changed the methods of gathering information, as well as the attention of educational systems. In this regard, ICTs have been considered in university settings and in professorial practice, allowing for the delivery of more dynamic and interactive lessons, and the encouragement of student´s interest. ICT benefits both educators and learners by presenting fresh approaches to teaching and learning as well as opportunities to "reflect, interact, invent, stimulate research, and learn to learn, to build new knowledge" (Albino & Souza, 2015).

By promoting European values, and identity and reinventing the quality and competitiveness of European higher education, European Universities are transnational partnerships that will lead the way for the universities of the future (EC, 2023). The initiative is providing chances to promote various cooperative models for European Universities in order to achieve this significant advancement, as the future will call for this new system of learning to be functional for all (EC, 2023).

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Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a cutting-edge pedagogical strategy that is employed globally to give teachers and students from various geographical regions the chance to engage in global engagement by learning from and about one another.

2. Objectives

The aim of this work is to present a learning based on ICT with a COIL program in science mainly focused on food safety and quality. The application of COIL improves intercultural competency and gets students ready for working in diverse environments. The planning, implementation, and evaluation of a COIL experience involving partner universities from Colombia, Romania, and Spain focused on a subject of interest to all three partners are described in this study. While Colombia was chosen as an external partner to complete the COIL viewpoint, Romania and Spain belong to the European University system. To educate in science as food safety and masters of food safety and quality around the world, faculty from all three food science departments were engaged. In order to advance the internationalization of the *syllabus (curriculum)*, we estimated that by taking part in COIL, students would improve their intercultural communication skills, gain experience working in multicultural teams, and create global education opportunities.

3. Material and Method

3.1. Setting

The Faculty of Pharmacy, Nutrition and Dietitian, Food Technology and Gastronomy from University of Valencia (Spain), served as the host and leader University. University of Cartagena (Colombia), and "Iuliu Hatieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Cluj-Napoca (Romania), served as the partners.

3.2. Participants

All students enrolled in the COIL participated in the project presented by their universities and were organized in groups of 5-6 students. The students of the University of Cartagena COIL (n=23) and students from the University of Cluj-Napoca COIL (n=33) were enrolled in the Nutrition and Dietitian, and Pharmacy program of University of Valencia in the Spring of 2023 (March to June). These 56 students collaborated with students from the University of Valencia (n=25) in the COIL activities that occurred during the first three weeks of the second semester of science in the program of Food Toxicology subject.

4. Results

4.1. Establishing a Collaboration

Finding partners can be an obstacle for faculty wanting to provide students with an international experience. This experience of networking provided an opportunity to identify other faculties with

similar learning opportunities for their students. Through an international food safety conference, faculty from Spain (Valencia), Colombia (Cartagena), and Romania (Cluj-Napoca) were able to establish an international collaboration between students with similar food-healthy programs.

Using an online meeting platform, the University of Valencia, the University of Cartagena, and "Iuliu Hatieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy from Cluj-Napoca participated in a brainstorming ideas and barriers activity for an international collaboration. Ideas included objectives, assignments, schedule, participation options, and student and faculty roles for the collaboration. Barriers included time zone differences, student workload, language, and meeting platform.

4.2. Planning the Process

Objectives for the collaboration and COIL program were established through a couple of online meetings and e-mail. The objectives established were: (a) developing collaborative relationships with university students from another country, (b) describing the recent food alert and food safety system in Spain, Colombia, and Romania, and (c) describing the applicable regulation and preventive measures for these alerts in each county. The remaining work was directed by the COIL model goals. De Castro et al. (2019) talked about the variables that affect the COIL model. Considering where the COIL project fits in the *curriculum* is one of the factors mentioned. Faculty determined that integration of the collaboration into existing courses at each university over a 3-week period would make the collaborating experience more feasible for faculty and students involved.

The course selected for students was focused on food safety and quality. It was based on the idea that by binding the collaboration to a specific course at each university and making it last for a limited period of time, obstacles related to workload and time limits for participating academics and students would be minimized.

The objectives served as a guide for creating the assignments when the courses and deadlines were decided. The goals, weekly discussion topics (section 4.3), and final tasks were appropriate to the degree-related courses in which students were enrolled. There was no grading or point system for the weekly conversations. The COIL model implies that even when the student participants are in various nations, they stay enrolled and are assessed and graded by their own faculty, as reported by de Castro et al. (2019). This makes it possible to differentiate across student groups' learning objectives.

Each professor designed a final assignment for the students, giving them the opportunity to match the tasks to the goals of the course at their university. Each university's faculty judged the final projects submitted by their own students.

In the end, it was determined that student involvement in the partnership would be entirely optional. Students set meeting times and used an online meeting platform to accommodate their schedules outside of class. Regarding the language used for the students and for communication, English was the one chosen as both the Colombian and Romanian students accorded it and resulted easy to follow.

4.3. Implementing the Collaboration

After the inscription and publishing of the acceptance of students from each country, it was published the calendar and rules of the COIL program. On the other hand, the teachers from each country established objectives and weekly working points.

Week 1

1. Create teams of work with students from each country (mixed groups).
2. Discuss the last food alert in the last year in your country (information in social media, regulation, risk assessment).
3. Discuss which subjects of your degree are involved in this type of information.
4. Describe the national implication of the alert.

Week 2

1. Discuss how to prepare the infographic slide or presentation slides (design and number of slides).
2. Discuss which regulation and legislation were applied after the alert (including levels of toxicity and permitted levels).
3. Organize the text and information to include in the final document.
4. Propose solutions to deal with or resolve a food alert and indicate skills to prevent it in the future.

Week 3

1. Organize the schedule of the oral presentation from each work group (3 days).
2. Evaluate the oral presentations according to a designed evaluation rubric (CEDEC, 2019).
3. Evaluate the graphical document presented.
4. Publish the ranking according to the punctuation received in the oral presentation and document evaluation.

Students were given the chance to take part in collaborative international learning early in their program courses. The weekly working points and collaboration goals were given to the students. Participants revealed their interest in the collaboration to the faculty. Based on the amount of willing student participants, professors divided the class into evenly distributed groups. Each member of the designated groups' contact information was given to the students.

The students received course materials that described the goals, the procedure for collaboration, the expectations of the students, and the assignments. The weekly working points were given to the pupils with freedom to complete them however they saw fit. To prepare for the discussion topics, some students worked in groups while others divided the task. Depending on the topic being discussed, information was presented in different formats. Some students engaged in discussions without the use of any additional tools while others developed electronic presentations and exchanged photographs on the screen.

In a supervisory role, professors guided students in understanding the standards for teamwork. Professors were on hand to respond to inquiries, deal with problems, and keep an eye on how students were doing with their tasks.

The students construct a presentation portfolio in English as their final project following the three-week cooperation. The portfolios covered the parallels and contrasts in the laws and ways that various social platforms treat information.

Peers in their course listened to the presentations during class.

5. Conclusions

COIL is a virtual exchange, and unquestionably one of the most effective resources available in higher education for fostering intercultural learning and, in turn, fostering the expansion of international interchange, cooperation, and mutual understanding. It helps to get an ambitious vision and excellence dimension of innovative, internationally competitive, and alluring fields of study and research in Europe, working in tandem with higher education and with the goal of encouraging change in higher education and partnering with other nations to assist them.

After completing the COIL experience in science focused in food safety and quality, students noted improvements in their intercultural competency and indicated value for joint learning with peers from other nations. It was detected that COIL-style activities gave people the chance to connect with one another across boundaries and develop their ability to relate positively to a more diverse world. We plan to use our experience to inform future COIL projects.

Professors who have been involved in COIL project are often just as enthusiastic about the model as their students. The primary benefit of COIL is that it allows students to get to know one another in a friendly, non-threatening environment.

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MILESTONES OF CHANGES IN TEACHING CAREER AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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Abstract: *At the beginning of the 3rd millennium, the teaching career went through and continues to go through a series of significant changes, influenced by technological, social, economic and educational developments. Alongside the growing globalization and infusion of technology into the educational framework, economic pragmatism and corporate management have emerged as the primary catalysts behind the continuous transformations in education, leading to the integration of schools into the market and fostering competition.*

Key words: *teaching career, milestones, education.*

1. Introduction

As the second millennium drew to a close and the third millennium began, there emerged research and studies aimed at modernizing the professional development of educators in response to evolving societal expectations and changes within the teaching profession. This transformation came in response to a deep-seated crisis in the perception of teaching as a career, a crisis that gained traction around 1980-1990 and spread across numerous European nations. The root causes of this crisis were attributed to legislative ambiguities surrounding the teaching profession and the societal standing of educators. These issues were manifest in various indicators, including salary-related concerns, a diminishing status of the profession, oversimplified interpretations of the teaching role, professional uncertainties, non-vocational criteria for teacher recruitment, and the prevailing societal belief that anyone could become a teacher without specific qualifications.

Modern education and the ever-changing role of teachers throw a new perspective on their careers. Teachers are continuously improving their training, thanks to a process of professionalization and collective creation, together with colleagues. The teaching profession is becoming increasingly dynamic, creative and exciting. All these contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the prospect of becoming and remaining a teacher.

"Education is the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world" Nelson Mandela

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2. Milestones of changes in education

The mentoring process in education is often not fully grasped, but researchers are becoming more aware of its intricate nature. It goes beyond merely assisting new teachers as they enter the education system by providing professional guidance and motivation. In the realm of education, mentoring is a multifaceted and intricate procedure that involves directing, instructing, shaping, and providing support to novice or inexperienced teachers. It is commonly acknowledged that a mentor teacher takes on the role of leading, guiding, and offering advice to a less experienced colleague within a work environment characterized by mutual trust and confidence.

An important step in mentoring a teacher for the 21st century classroom is to get to know your mentee as a person and as a professional. What are their strengths, weaknesses, goals, interests, and values? What are their learning styles, preferences, and needs? What are their challenges, concerns, and expectations? By building a relationship and trust with your mentee, you can tailor your mentoring approach to their specific situation and needs, and help them feel more comfortable and confident in sharing their thoughts and feelings with you.

Among the most important milestones of the changes in education that have taken place lately there can be mentioned:

Technology and online education: Technological advances have had a major impact on education. In this millennium, online education and digital resources have become increasingly accessible. Teachers had to adapt to the use of technology in their classrooms and acquire proficiency in utilizing digital instruments for support their teaching and connect with students online. The advent of digital technologies has transformed the way knowledge and information are obtained, disseminated, and generated. Digital competence encompasses the proficient and discerning utilization of a wide spectrum of digital technologies for tasks related to information, communication, and fundamental issue-solving across various life domains. Additionally, digital competence plays a pivotal role in enhancing other essential skills, including communication, language proficiency, and foundational abilities in mathematics and science.

Moving learning from memorization to critical thinking and problem solving: Education has evolved from a traditional approach based on memorization to one focused on developing critical thinking skills, analyze and solve problems. Teacher is more concerned with developing skills and understanding rather than focusing primarily on knowledge acquisition.

Individualization and personalization of learning: Technological advances have increased the understanding of individual student's needs which have led to the adoption of personalized teaching methods. Teachers are encouraged to adapt content and teaching methods to meet each student's needs and pace of learning.

Competency-based assessment: Traditional assessment models based on standardised tests have in some cases been replaced by competence-based assessment and practical projects. This places greater emphasis on understanding and application, instead of memorization.

Inclusion and diversity: Increased attention has been paid to the inclusion of students with special needs and cultural diversity in classrooms. Teachers are trained to develop teaching skills that take into account this diversity and create an inclusive learning environment.

Globalization of education: Education has become increasingly global. Teachers must prepare students for an interconnected world and promote intercultural understanding and global communication skills.

Interdisciplinary approach: STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and interdisciplinary approach have become increasingly popular. This involves integrating multiple disciplines into the learning process and promotes holistic thinking.

Continuous training and professional development: Teachers have understood that education is a constantly evolving field, so they invest more in continuous training and professional development to be up to date with the latest trends and practices in education.

These milestones of change in the teaching profession reflect the current trends and challenges facing education professionals in the third millennium. Adaptability, continuous learning, and the ability to respond to students' changing needs are essential for success in this evolving career.

3. Changes in teaching activity

3.1. The influence of technology and online education in teaching careers

Technology and online education have revolutionized the teaching career in several ways. These shifts have significantly influenced the methods teachers employ for instruction and how students engage in the learning process.

Access to Open Educational Resources (R.E.D): The Internet has opened up a vast array of educational materials, encompassing video guides, articles, scholarly papers, and online learning platforms.

Hybrid education and blended learning: Teachers have adopted hybrid or blended teaching methods, in which they use both traditional classroom instruction and online components. This allows personalizing learning and developing self-learning skills in students.

Online learning platforms: Schools and universities have adopted online learning platforms that allow teachers to upload course content, assign assignments and interact with students virtually. These platforms make it easy to organize classes and monitor student progress.

Online communication and collaboration: Technology allows teachers to communicate with students via email, text messages, or chat platforms. Online facilities can also encourage cooperation between students, even when remote.

Technology-assisted instruction: The use of technology in teaching can make learning more interactive and engaging. Teachers can use presentation tools, simulations, educational games and other resources to reinforce the concepts which were learned.

Educational programs conducted remotely and via online platforms: Advancements in technology have facilitated the evolution of remote education and web-based learning. Teachers can teach and interact with students without being physically in the same location. This has been particularly important in emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Self-learning and flexibility: Students have become increasingly independent in learning as they can access information and resources online. Teachers should encourage the development of self-learning and adaptability skills.

Online assessment: Technology has brought with it new assessment methods such as online tests, automated assessment tools and digital portfolios. These methods can provide a quicker and more objective assessment of students' progress.

Globalization of education: Students can cooperate with peers around the world and access international educational courses and resources. This possibility opens up new opportunities for intercultural learning and international experiences.

Nevertheless, it's worth acknowledging that technology and online education have also presented difficulties, such as the need to manage information overload, ensure data security, and ensure accessibility for all students. Teachers need to be prepared to use technology effectively and learn to navigate the evolving online environment to improve their teaching practice.

3.2. Learning from memorization to critical thinking and problem solving

Shifting learning from memorization to critical thinking and problem-solving is an important transition in education and has significant implications for the teaching career. This change promotes a deeper and more effective learning process that prepares students for success in an increasingly complex and ever-changing world. Some perspectives for the teaching career in this direction could be mentioned:

Reevaluating the role of the teacher: Teachers become guides and facilitators of learning, rather than passive transmitters of knowledge. Their role should involve leading students in the cultivation of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and comprehension of principles, rather than primarily emphasizing the dissemination of factual information.

Using technology as an educational resource: Technology can serve as a potent instrument for fostering the enhancement of critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities. Educators can leverage digital resources, simulations and online platforms to establish interactive learning settings that empower students to actively delve into and explore concepts. Digital skills are gaining increasing importance, given the ongoing digital transformation in the job market and the heightened demand for them resulting from COVID-19 lockdown measures. Various initiatives have aimed to foster and evaluate digital skills. However, despite these endeavors, numerous individuals encounter challenges in attaining a suitable proficiency level in digital skills. Consequently, digital skills remain highly relevant in the 21st century.

Fostering inquiries and dialogues: Learning is not limited to correct answers, but starts with well-formulated questions. Teachers should encourage students to ask questions, participate in discussions, and explore ideas in depth.

Practical projects and problem-solving scenarios: The problem-centered approach can involve practical projects and complex scenarios that require the application of knowledge and skills to arrive at solutions. Such activities develop critical thinking and decision-making skills.

Formative assessment and constructive feedback: Assessment should focus on understanding and applying concepts, not just memorization. Instructors can employ formative assessment techniques to track student advancement and offer valuable feedback aimed at enhancing their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Working together and exchanging information: Teachers can promote collaboration between students, where they can work together to identify and solve complex problems. Also, developing communication and argumentation skills is essential for critical thinking.

Development of metacognitive skills: Teachers should help students understand their learning processes, reflect on their thinking, and develop metacognitive skills, which help them become more independent and effective teachers.

These perspectives highlight the importance of adapting teaching methods to promote critical thinking and problem solving in education. Teachers who address this change can help students prepare for an ever-changing world where critical thinking and problem-solving skills are increasingly valuable.

3.3. Methods for Individualization and personalization of learning

Individualization and personalization of learning is an educational approach that focuses on the needs and pace of learning of each student. This change in teaching and learning brings with it a number of perspectives and challenges for teachers, such as:

Deep knowledge of students: To individualize learning, teachers must know each student deeply. This involves identifying their academic needs, interests, learning styles, their strengths and weaknesses.

Differentiated lesson planning: Teachers need to plan lessons that offer varied learning and assessment opportunities to suit students' different needs and abilities. This may involve group activities, individual projects or different tasks for students with different levels of preparation.

Using technology for personalization: Technology can play a crucial role in personalizing learning. Teachers can use online educational platforms, adaptive software and digital resources to provide materials and activities specific to individual student needs.

Developing self-guidance skills: Personalizing learning can help students develop independent learning skills. Teachers should teach them how to set goals, monitor their progress, and evaluate their own learning.

Ongoing feedback: Teachers need to provide regular, specific feedback to guide students in the right direction. This feedback can be used to adjust personalized learning plans.

Authentic assessment: Personalization of learning often involves more authentic assessments, which measure students' ability to apply knowledge in real situations or close to their daily lives.

The lifelong learning approach: Personalizing learning recognizes that learning does not stop with school graduation. Teachers can help students develop lifelong learning skills and mindsets.

Encouraging collaboration and communication: Personalizing learning does not necessarily mean isolated learning. Students can collaborate with peers to develop their social skills and learn from the experiences and perspectives of others.

Effective time management: Personalizing learning can be challenging in terms of time management, as it involves evaluating and tracking each student's progress individually. Teachers need to develop effective monitoring and reporting systems.

Embracing diversity: Personalizing learning often involves treating students as unique individuals, recognizing and valuing their diversity. This approach can contribute to creating an inclusive and

equitable educational environment.

The personalization and individualization of learning represents a significant change in the way teachers' approach teaching and learning. While it can be challenging, this approach can have a positive impact on student performance and motivation, contributing to the development of adults adapted to continuous changes in society and the labour market.

3.4. Competency-based assessment

Competency-based assessment represents a significant change in the way teachers assess and measure student performance. This type of assessment focuses on practical skills and knowledge that students acquire and apply in real contexts, rather than focusing solely on memorizing information. Here are some perspectives for teachers on competency-based assessment:

Focus on understanding and application: Competency-based assessment encourages teachers to focus more on deep understanding of topics and applying knowledge in practical situations. This is a perspective that encourages critical thinking and problem-solving.

Authentic projects and tasks: Teachers can use authentic projects, tasks and scenarios to assess students' competences. These can be activities that mimic the demands and challenges that students will face in real life or in their later career.

Constructive feedback: In competency-based assessment, feedback plays a crucial role. Teachers should provide specific and detailed feedback to help students understand what they did well and what they need to improve to develop better skills and competences.

Self-assessment and self-regulation: Students are encouraged to actively participate in the assessment process and self-evaluate. They can develop self-regulation skills and awareness of their own learning.

Time management and design of work plans: Competency-based assessment may involve time management and the development of effective work plans. Teachers can help students understand the importance of organization and planning in the process of developing competences.

Holistic assessment: Teachers can assess students holistically, considering multiple aspects of competence such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and ethics skills, not just academic knowledge.

Adaptability: Competency-based assessment may require adaptability from teachers. They should be open to the variety of ways students can demonstrate competencies and be willing to adjust the assessment approach.

Link to real life: Competency-based assessment helps students see the relevance of what they learn to their real lives and professional futures. It can increase their motivation for learning.

Development of social and emotional skills: Social and emotional competencies such as communication, empathy and conflict management skills can also be assessed within this approach. Teachers can help develop these essential skills.

Competency-based assessment represents an important change in the approach to assessment in education and can bring significant benefits for students. Teachers play a key role in implementing this approach, facilitating competence development and ensuring that assessments are fair, relevant and constructive.

3.5. Inclusion and diversity in education

Promoting inclusion and diversity in education represents a key to creating a fair and respectful learning environment that responds to students' individual needs and differences. Here are some perspectives for educators on inclusion and diversity:

Getting to know students: Teachers should try to get to know each student individually, understand their individual needs, interests and experiences. This knowledge is fundamental to provide adequate support and promote their learning.

Creating an inclusive environment: Teachers should create an open, friendly and inclusive learning environment where all students feel welcome and accepted. This may involve setting clear rules and expectations regarding mutual respect and addressing any forms of discrimination or harassment.

Adapting the teaching approach: Educators need to be ready to adjust their teaching methods to accommodate the varying learning styles and paces at which students learn This may involve the use of various teaching and assessment methods.

Diversity in curriculum content: The curriculum should reflect students' cultural, ethnic, and social diversity. Teachers can integrate materials and examples reflecting different perspectives and cultures into lessons.

Collaborating with parents and the community: Parental and community involvement can be a key to supporting inclusion and diversity in school. Teachers can work with parents to better understand students' needs and context.

Lifelong learning: Teachers should continue to develop professionally in inclusion and diversity. This may include participation in trainings, seminars and training courses.

Support for students with difficulties: Teachers should provide additional support and adaptations for students with learning difficulties or special needs. This support can range from additional lessons to individualized learning plans.

Promoting respect and empathy: Teachers can promote the learning of respect and empathy in the classroom by helping students understand and appreciate differences between themselves and others.

Fighting against prejudice and discrimination: Teachers should be role models in combating prejudice and discrimination. They can use concrete examples to show the consequences of prejudice and promote understanding and tolerance.

Promoting inclusion and diversity in education is an important responsibility for teachers. By adopting a sensitive approach to these issues, teachers can create a fair and beneficial learning environment for all students, thus contributing to their success in school and in everyday life.

4. Conclusions

The globalization of education brings unique opportunities and challenges for teachers. With an open and adaptable approach, they can help develop their students into well-prepared global citizens to face global challenges and contribute to a better future for all.

The interdisciplinary approach is an important way for teachers to promote a deeper and more complex understanding of topics and issues. This type of approach can enrich students' learning

experience and develop skills essential to their success in a complex world. Teachers play a key role in facilitating the interdisciplinary approach and creating opportunities for students to explore and understand the world in a more complex and profound way.

Lifelong learning and professional development are essential aspects of teachers' careers, having a significant impact on the quality of education and student success.

Mentoring entails collaboration, involving a nurturing, cooperative, and supportive connection aimed at enhancing the growth and skill development of the person being mentored. For those receiving mentorship, the benefits of establishing a close, ongoing, and evolving association with a mentor in their field can be concrete, such as increased pay and improved career prospects, or more abstract, such as boosting confidence by gaining insight into the language and customs of their profession. From the mentor's perspective, this process provides the opportunity to identify and promote the talents of individuals who may have had limited exposure within the organization, thereby diversifying talent and viewpoints. This, in turn, creates a fertile environment for innovative approaches that are crucial for academic or business success.

In today's context, advancements in technology and the emergence of digital social networks have given rise to the concept of "communities of practice", where professionals can seek guidance and assistance from a network of peers. The contemporary digital culture, centered around creating and sharing content with a larger group, has empowered individuals to establish their own identities as experts in their field. This can be achieved by offering advice and resources to a community of followers through educational platforms, forming networks around shared expertise, or maintaining a blog with a group of dedicated followers. Consequently, these online personalities serve as valuable resources for colleagues who seek information, guidance, or role models for their own professional development.

In the 21st century, mentoring may not necessarily involve face-to-face interactions between a mentor and a mentee, nor would mentors always be aware of their impact on a community. Instead of relying solely on in-person relationships, individuals may turn to their professional peers for guidance or establish a support network within their field. These developments underscore the need to broaden our definition of mentoring and our readiness to recognize, articulate, and explore the role of the participatory web in fostering professional communities of practice and support.

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GOOD PRACTICES IN THE MENTORING PROCESS IN ROMANIA AND EUROPEAN EDUCATION

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Abstract: *Digitization of education, online school, changes in the curriculum, competence-centered learning are some of the reasons that determined mentoring to become a topic of interest. The application of mentoring in Romania gains new perspectives thanks to the PROF-Professionalization of the teaching career project, which created the institutional framework necessary for the training of mentors. The teacher who is/will become a mentor supports the training, carries it out and then moves on to dissemination.*

Key words: *mentorship, mentor, Professionalization of teaching career - PROF, debut teacher, European Union.*

1. Introduction

Evaluating the quality of the instructional - educational process at the beginning of the millennium is not an easy activity. The changes that took place due to the pandemic and digitization, both in the Romanian space and at the level of the entire European community, produced numerous consequences related to curricular, managerial or mentoring aspects. In the educational system, various strategies have intervened and continue to appear in which several factors are involved, based on synthesis and analysis operations (Boșcodeală, Consequences of changes in the educational field at the end of the 21st century. Customizations for history teaching, 2022, p. 1).

At the national level, the desire to raise learning outcomes and support competency-based learning is closely linked to teachers and the way they work. The teaching-learning-assessment process needs to be improved to support all the changes taking place in our societies.

From the analyses carried out on the Romanian educational system (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/publications) emerge some critical points in the process of beginner teacher training. These would be: the insufficient number of hours of pedagogical training in faculties and universities, the separate study of theoretical subjects from practical ones, the lack of

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double specialization and/or interdisciplinary training for most teachers, the lack of training with students at educational risk, and so on. Although the legislative provisions on didactic mentoring existed, the support system for beginners was not functional. With the years 2020, 2021, the Ministry of Education implemented the teaching master's degree, seen as an initial training course for teachers.

The same researches show us that in the Romanian area, teachers focus their need for training on attending classes, without a clear identification of their training needs. As a rule, participation in these programs is due to the fact that teachers need the 90 mandatory credits every five years, but there are no criteria for the need to strengthen certain methodological or scientific aspects of them. The courses conducted are not sufficiently valued by the teaching staff and there is no correlation between the training providers' offers and the lacks/needs of those they address.

2. The mentoring system in Romania

2.1. Support organizations for the implementation of didactic mentoring activities and training in the teaching career - results of the Project POCU/904/6/25/146587 Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF

Until the application of the project POCU/904/6/25/146587 Professionalization of the teaching career - PROF, in Romania teaching mentoring was regulated by:

- National Education Law no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and additions, which specifies, in art. 247, the mentor quality of the teacher;
- Order of Ministry no. 5485 of 29/09/2011, for the approval of the Methodology of the mentor teacher to coordinate the internship of the beginning teacher to occupy a teaching position and annex the "Status of the mentor teacher".

Although the Corps of Mentor Teachers is mentioned in article no. 248, paragraph (2) of the previous National Education Law, no clarifications are given on how the mentoring activities should be organized.

The general objective of the PROF project was to create a national institutional framework for mentoring the teaching career until 2023.

In the Pre-University Education Law no. 198/2023 it stipulates the Mentoring and Licensing Corps in the teaching career, made up of teaching staff with at least the II Teaching Degree and with at least 5 years of experience in teaching. The teaching career Mentoring and Licensing Corps operates alongside the NCTDTC (National Center for Training and Development in the Teaching Career).

The procedures and criteria for the selection of members of the Mentoring and Licensing Corps in the teaching career are established by the methodology approved by the Minister of Education.

The activities within the pedagogical practice are coordinated by the higher education institutions, in collaboration with the Mentoring and Licensing Corps in the teaching career, based on the methodology approved by the Minister of Education.

The methodologies dealing with the operation of the Mentoring and Licensing Corps have not emerged yet.

The National Corps of Teacher Mentors and the National Corps of Trainers in the field of teaching career mentoring represent two support entities for the mentoring activity created within the PROF project, in the school year 2022-2023. To these are added the Pedagogical Practice Bases (PPB), structured on the system of school consortia, bringing together application schools where pedagogical practice internships will be held (at the level of initial training as well as at the level of continuing training), demonstration lessons, pedagogical circles, studies on the quality of teaching-learning-evaluation in the blended learning system and online.

Therefore, the teacher who is/will become a mentor acquires a basic role thanks to the PROF Project because he supports the training, approves it and then moves on to dissemination. This training process takes place in school and requires teachers to be placed in different learning contexts outside the instructional-educational process, based on the relationship between teacher and student both in face-to-face learning and in blended learning (Boșcodeală, Open educational practices in order to make the teaching-learning-evaluation process more efficient in history proposed by the PROF Project-Professionalization of the didactic career, 2022, p. 1).

Also, in the school year 2022-2023, at the level of each educational unit, a Committee for mentoring and training in the teaching career was established, according to Order no. 4183 of 4.07.2022. Among the attributions of this commission, with a permanent character, we can mention:

- evaluate the status of fulfilment of the training requirement for teaching staff and validate, after evaluation, the fulfilment of the training requirement through the accumulation of the legally required number of transferable professional credits, including the recognition and equivalence in transferable professional credits, of the results of the participation of teaching staff in programmes for continuous professional development and career development;
- planning, organizing and carrying out activities in the field of training in the didactic career;
- carrying out the diagnosis of continuous training at the level of the educational unit;
- the evaluation of the stage of fulfillment of the training condition for the teaching staff and validates, after the evaluation, the fulfillment of the training condition by accumulating the number of transferable professional credits provided by law, including by recognizing and equating into transferable professional credits, the results of the participation of the teaching staff in the programs for continuous professional development and for the evolution in the teaching career;
- organisation of activities for continuous professional development - actions specific to the educational unit, demonstration lessons, exchange of experience;
- advising teachers in the teaching-learning-evaluation process, including in the blended learning/online system;
- creating the schedule of pedagogical practice activities and monitoring the activity of mentor teachers, if the educational unit is an application school;
- organizing and carrying out specific didactic mentoring activities for beginner teachers, in order to take the national exam for finalization in pre-university education.

2.2. Types of mentoring

Analyzing the Romanian legislation, we can notice that according to the previous National Education Law, with all subsequent amendments, the field of continuous training benefits from clear provisions and regulations. For example, in the pre-university education, according to the law mentioned above, the initial theoretical training is carried out through universities, which have accredited programs available. There is also an anticipation for the didactic master's degree, which lasts two years and is carried out within the specialized departments of higher education institutions. The practical internship is also provided for a period of one school year, under the direct coordination of a mentor teacher.

The career development for the teaching staff in the pre-university education system is also provided for by law and is achieved by supporting and promoting the final exams, the second teaching degree and the first teaching degree.

Therefore, at the level of pre-university education in Romania, the following types of mentoring activities may take place:

- mentoring for the practical training within the didactic master's degree/for the pedagogical practice of students from pedagogical high schools
- mentoring for the professional insertion of beginner teachers
- mentoring for continuous training carried out at the level of the educational unit;
- mentoring for professional development carried out in The Training Teacher Institutions;
- mentoring for the development of educational programs for children and young people capable of high performance.

As for **pedagogical practice mentoring,** it has a tradition in the Romanian education system, being followed by students from high schools/vocational colleges, but also by students who opt for a teaching career. Pedagogical practice mentors (designated in the norms of the time under the name of pedagogical practice guides) are teachers who have extensive experience and who enjoy a special professional prestige within the professional community of which they are a part, contributing to the process of initial training of teachers by direct monitoring and coordination of the implementation of pedagogical practice within a school educational unit. Recently, pedagogical practice mentoring has acquired a new characteristic by promoting reflective practices. This fact requires the mentor to fulfill a variety of roles: teacher, collaborator, observer, friend, resource (Ilincuța, 2022, p.197).

When beginning their active professional activity, beginner teachers still need the specialized guidance of a mentor who facilitates their integration into the educational system and provides them with practical tools to help them carry out their teaching-learning- evaluation. Therefore, career placement mentoring is a topic of interest. The professional insertion activities of beginner teachers are timely because they ensure continuous training at the workplace focused on collaboration, monitoring, learning, evaluation, progress and performance, and the finality comes to ensure the quality of the instructional process. The mentoring process underwent transformations, acquiring the characteristics of a coaching activity.

Mentoring for continuous training, carried out at the level of the school unit, is important for the development of skills necessary to ensure a quality educational process and the career advancement of teachers. Mentoring enables the exchange of educational resources between teachers, to

stimulate them at any point in their career, even if they have accumulated years of experience. The digitization of education, the online school, the promotion of the blended-learning system, changes in the curriculum are reasons for the promotion of collaborative mentoring. Sharing thoughts, ideas, beliefs among colleagues provides each with solutions to their own problems.

2.3. Examples of good practice

In order to achieve effective mentoring activities, it is advisable to take into account the following aspects: the objectives of the mentoring activity, established by mutual agreement between the mentor and the mentored teacher; the specifics of the school and the local community; the profile of the mentored teacher (personality type, didactic and research/educational experience, his didactic style), his didactic skills; available time.

The types of activities that can be carried out during the implementation of a mentoring program are diverse: meetings between teachers and mentor-trainers (having various themes: methodology, development and development of educational projects using modern technologies, documentation and individual study, etc.); individual and group counseling; assistance in educational classes/activities; participation in didactic and extracurricular activities; carrying out demonstration activities and approaches built through collaboration; participant activity and progress analysis; curriculum development (courses, problem collections, didactic aids, etc.), planning and evaluation, etc.; support in identifying open educational resources.

Mentors-trainers represent model teachers and resource persons who can provide support in the context of the offer of teaching and educational activities and feedback. Effective communication and teamwork help the beginner to discover his talents and interests, to define his goals, to design the didactic strategy taking into account the individual learning characteristics of the students. The application of mentoring in Romania can have new perspectives by promoting peer-to-peer mentoring, which gives teachers the chance to analyze students' work together, with the aim of improving learning, but also perfecting the teaching approach (Ilincuța, 2022, p. 207). The school is the place where the professional development of a teacher takes place and which gives him the opportunity to cooperate with other teachers. Here he tries to solve all the dilemmas that arise daily in his career and most of the time solving them is done through collaboration and support with the other teaching staff in the school (Schleicher, 2011, p. 10).

3. The mentoring system in the European Union

3.1. European mentoring models

The particularity in the European space, the professionalization of the teaching career is closely related to the objectives proposed by the European institutions that aim to create a European Educational Space by 2025. European institutions emphasize the fact that a high-quality educational instructional process can only be achieved if teachers are fully involved throughout their career in a permanent professional development process.

The leaders of the European institutions and heads of state and government from each member country established the identification at the beginning of the third millennium of the challenges faced by teachers and identified the factors that support the increase in the level of professional development. The Eurydice reports (a mechanism established to support European cooperation in the field of education) drew attention to the fact that in the European space, in many states, there is a lack of staff, the causes being diverse (lack of teachers for a certain discipline or the aging of the population in certain geographic areas). It is also noted that interest in this profession is declining and that social changes in certain communities are causing teachers who teach in those areas to satisfy a wider range of needs.

According to the Eurydice Report Teacher careers in Europe: access, progress and support, published by the European Commission in 2018 mentoring of teachers entering the profession is mandatory in 28 education systems and recommended in 5 others (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Latvia and Norway).

Mentoring for teachers other than beginner teachers is not that common in Europe. In Finland, schools are recommended to offer mentoring to any teacher who needs support. In Estonia, mentoring is a mandatory element of induction programs and is also recommended for other teachers already in the system. In France and Hungary, it is only mandatory for new teachers, but inspection services may also recommend it for low-performing teachers. Although mentoring is rarely regulated for teachers other than beginner teachers, in many European countries other forms of professional and personal support are available for teachers in the system. In only eight education systems, there are no formal guidelines or regulations on mentoring.

Also, according to the aforementioned Eyrydice Report, career guidance is rare in European countries. Only three countries (France, Hungary, Austria) have made career guidance a specific legal requirement for teachers in the system.

In France, every academy – the main administrative quarter of the Ministry of Education – has a service dedicated to career counseling, with professional mobility counselors who offer face-to-face guidance through individual meetings. This service also provides information online and through brochures.

In Hungary, the Pedagogical Educational Centers (PEC), which are regional branches of the highest level educational authority, are responsible for career guidance and support. Every year, in January, they carry out a study on the support needs of teachers regarding their advancement in their teaching career. Based on this study, the PEC assigns advisors to teachers who have expressed their needs so that they can be guided and get support in completing their portfolios for promotion. Counselors are 'Master Teachers' (mester pedagogus – szaktanácsadó) specializing in teacher support, who spend part of their working time providing career guidance and support for teachers. Every year, the educational authority also organizes one-day workshops in which they provide information about the promotion possibilities of teachers.

In Austria, career guidance is provided by the counseling services administered by the local education authorities (provinces). It is also part of the mission of teacher training colleges to organize career guidance programs. The careers advice website for teachers, supported by the Ministry of Education, also provides information on additional responsibilities that teachers can receive to expand their experience.

The analysis of various didactic experiences in European education systems can represent an important landmark for the materialization of didactic mentoring in Romania.

3.2. Conclusions of the Eurydice Report on the professionalization of the teaching career

The analysis of the European mechanisms related to the instructional process and the professionalization of the teaching career highlights certain aspects that are worth reflecting on.

First of all, it was found that in the European space there are only a few education systems that make long-term forecasts and diagnoses in order to face all the challenges, while in the vast majority of states there are no such forecasts, the majority carry out this planning in advance based only on the data about the teaching staff that are already in the system. Most European countries use data that take into account teacher demographics and the likely demand for teachers in the system.

Secondly, in more than half of the educational systems graduates of pedagogical education institutions need additional conditions to be employed. As a rule, local authorities or schools are responsible for their employment.

Thirdly, the European educational systems offer, in their vast majority, conditions for employment for an indefinite period, these being associated with permanent positions.

An important issue analyzed by the Eurydice Report is teacher mobility. This analysis certifies that it is not regulated most of the time, a necessity that can show its usefulness in many situations that arise in the instructional process.

Mentoring is one of the levels of educational systems that is regulated, at least on a theoretical level. In addition, professional development and peer learning are common aspects. Also, teachers receive professional help in order to be able to deal with various difficulties.

On the other hand, teachers' participation in continuing education programs is mandatory in most educational systems. However, there are also systems in which teachers do not have any obligation in this regard. CPD/Continuous professional development is a level in which teachers benefit from support throughout Europe. There is also a multi-level career hierarchy, structured in terms of job responsibility and complexity.

Last but not least, the evaluation of teachers in the system is carried out in most educational systems, but, unfortunately, it is not always used to find out what the professional training needs are. As a rule, school managers are involved in the evaluation activity, but less than half are prepared to do an evaluation in this sense. It is usually based on direct observation after a conversation with the school manager, without using quantitative or qualitative analyses resulting from research / consultation with other educational actors, such as parents or students.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the Professionalization of the teaching career-PROF Project is a real support for rethinking the teaching career at a higher level because it modifies the entire system of professional training and produces changes in the level of initial teacher training as well as continuous training. The educational units, the newly established pedagogical practice bases, the tutoring centers, the peer-learning system offer the teacher, who is at the beginning of his journey or even at the peak of

his career, a real support for improving the educational instructional process, for increasing the quality of the act educational in the Romanian space. In this situation, the mentor teacher acquires an essential role because he analyzes the need for training, supports it and then validates it, according to the training standards in the teacher's profile.

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STEAM-EDUCATION FOR CREATIVITY AND SCIENCE

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Abstract: *STEAM education refers to a type of approach to the instructional-educational process that integrates the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics to promote holistic learning and the skills needed to solve complex problems in the real world. This approach encourages students to be creative, think critically and collaborate, often in practical or project contexts.*

Key words: *STEAM, creativity, education, science.*

1. Introduction

The acronym STEAM comes from Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Maths.

STEAM stands for the educational approach to teaching and learning STEM subjects through the arts. Basically, it intentionally integrates academic studies with art disciplines. STE(A)M education (after the addition of Arts to STEM) aims to incorporate artistic subjects, skills and ways of thinking into the teaching and learning of technical subjects.

This type of learning takes a modern approach to the sciences and related disciplines that focus on solving problems through critical thinking and analytical skills. STEAM education explores the same disciplines of study, but incorporates creative thinking and the applied arts into didactic and real-world situations.

STEAM education contributes to improving students' motivation, developing cognitive skills, solving problems and stimulating critical thinking, as well as training the skills necessary to achieve performance in any field of activity in which they will be active in the future.

2. Key aspects of STEAM education

STEAM education aims to prepare students to become well-informed citizens, able to adapt to technological change and solve complex real-world problems. It encourages the development of social and cognitive skills essential for success in the 21st century.

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Among the key aspects that contribute significantly to STEAM education are interdisciplinarity, problem solving, creativity, teamwork, practical application, critical thinking, as well as the application of technology.

STEAM education promotes connections between disciplines. It does not limit itself to learning each discipline in isolation, but seeks to highlight how they can complement each other and be used in tandem to tackle complex problems. In STEAM education, students are exposed to a wide range of subjects, including science, math, technology, and the arts. This diversity gives them the opportunity to make unexpected connections between different fields and develop their creative thinking.

Regarding the problem solving, the STEAM approach focuses on developing skills to identify, analyse and solve problems; students being encouraged by teachers to explore solutions, make mistakes and learn from them.

The Arts subjects are integrated into STEAM education to stimulate students' creativity and imagination. This component is important for innovative thinking and developing design skills. Integrating the arts into STEAM can stimulate creativity. The arts provide a way to express ideas and emotions in a unique and personal way, which can inspire creative and innovative thinking in other fields.

STEAM education promotes collaboration and communication between students, i.e. teamwork. Group projects are often used to solve complex problems. Hands-on projects and hands-on activities are an essential component of STEAM education. Students work on concrete projects that often involve solving complex problems. These projects encourage them to think creatively and look for innovative solutions. Students learn to work with others, share ideas and benefit from diversity of opinion to arrive at creative solutions.

Another key aspect of STEAM education is practical application. Students learn to apply knowledge and skills in practical contexts and identify how they apply in the real world. STEAM education encourages students to ask questions and follow their curiosity. By learning to explore, search for answers and solve challenges, students develop creative thinking skills. STEAM education addresses complex and real problems. These do not always have clear and definitive answers, which encourages students to explore various perspectives and create their own solutions.

STEAM education emphasizes promoting experimentation and learning from mistakes. By facing and solving failures, students learn to develop their creativity and find unconventional solutions.

STEAM encourages critical thinking and evaluating information. Students learn to ask questions, analyse data, and reach evidence-based conclusions. The STEAM approach prepares students to be flexible and adaptable to the changes and challenges they encounter in the real world, which is essential for creativity.

The use of technology is an important component of STEAM education because technology is an integral part of our modern world. Students learn to use digital and technological tools in their learning and projects.

At its core, STEAM education encourages students to think critically, explore, create, and be open to new ideas. These skills are fundamental to developing creativity and preparing them for future challenges.

3. STEM and STE(A)M in European policies

Modern societies, especially those in the European Union, have begun to focus on sustainability, emphasizing the challenge posed by climate change. The transition to green energy requires citizens to have green and entrepreneurial skills, to be developed in combination with basic skills and, of course, transversal skills, or "soft skills". In this scenario, digital skills are also part of the skills that European citizens should have in their daily lives. This combination of skills is supported by European policies, both through sectoral and cross-cutting policies, such as the European Green Deal, the EU Skills Agenda and A Compass for the Digital Dimension.

The 2014 EU Skills Outlook, focusing on STEM skills, highlighted a 12% increase in STEM employment from 2003 to 2013, while overall employment grew by just 4%. The total number of jobs was three times higher than in the EU-28, and in 2013 it represented 7% of all jobs. At the same time, employers reported difficulties in finding "job-ready" candidates with the necessary skills, including transversal skills. Between 2015 and 2025, all occupations are expected to grow by 3%, with STEM occupations and related occupations expected to grow by 12% and respectively 7%.

STEM and STE(A)M have started to be acknowledged as an important approach to facilitate the development of the group of competences which are included in all curricula of education in Europe. These are two related issues which aim, on the one hand, to ensure that European citizens are well prepared for modern and future jobs and, on the other hand, to facilitate women's access to vocational training, jobs and careers.

When referring to the school system, the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, entitled School development and excellent teaching for a good start in life (COM(2017)248final), refers to STEM education, stimulating the exchange of good practices and promoting the cooperation of higher education, research, businesses with schools, through the funding provided by the Erasmus+ program. In fact, the Guidelines for the Erasmus+ program, which is the European Union's program for education, training, youth and sport, included as a priority "Promoting the development of national STEM strategies, developing partnerships between schools, businesses, higher education, research institutions and society in general, the promotion of effective and innovative pedagogies and assessments, the promotion of the STE(A)M approach to education through the interdisciplinary teaching of STEM in cultural, environmental, economic, design and other contexts, with the involvement of all university disciplines".

The ***"STEM Education at School"*** initiative is a European program that promotes and supports the development of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education in schools in the European Union. This program aims at improving the quality of STEM education and stimulating interest in these subjects among students. Here are some key aspects related to the "STEM Education at School" initiative:

Main objectives: The objectives of this program include increasing the quality of STEM education in schools, promoting continuous training for teachers in STEM fields, developing appropriate educational resources and promoting the exchange of best practices between the member countries of the European Union.

Resources for teachers: The initiative provides educational resources and materials for teachers to support STEM teaching in an interactive and engaging way. These resources may include lesson plans, teaching materials, digital tools, and sample STEM projects.

Continuing education for teachers: The program facilitates continuing education for teachers in STEM fields. This can include workshops, seminars and professional development courses to help teachers improve their STEM teaching skills.

Exchange of best practices: ***"STEM Education at School"*** promotes the exchange of best practices between schools, teachers and stakeholders from different European countries. This exchange of experiences and ideas can help improve the quality of STEM education.

Promoting interest in STEM: The program encourages activities that stimulate students' interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This can include STEM competitions, school clubs, visits to research centers and other extracurricular activities.

International cooperation: The initiative promotes cooperation between EU member countries in the development and promotion of STEM education. This may include partnerships between schools and educational institutions in different European countries.

Evaluation and monitoring: The program includes mechanisms for evaluating and monitoring the impact of STEM education at the level of schools and the education system. This helps measure progress and identify strengths and weaknesses of STEM programs.

The ***"STEM Education at School"*** initiative represents an important effort to improve STEM education in the European Union, preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the modern world and contributing to the development of a skilled and innovative workforce.

STEAM education is a relatively new concept in Romania. At this moment we cannot talk about institutionalized STEAM education, programs or methodological guidelines to regulate this type of education. The most important STEAM events take place in centers where extracurricular activities such as science, robotics or math clubs are organized.

In 2021, ***"Educated Romania"*** was launched in Romania, a project that proposes concrete solutions, objectives and measures to be taken to prepare the new generation, a generation that adapts to the labor market and to the new requirements imposed by technical knowledge and advanced technologies. One of the priority areas of this project is the promotion of STEAM education.

The objectives and measures included in the ***"Educated Romania"*** project to support the STEAM field:

1. Stimulating the involvement of pupils and students in the STEAM field, both in the educational process and in choosing a career.
2. Preparing and supporting teachers for teaching, learning, evaluating and motivating pupils/students in the STEAM field.
3. Ensuring the infrastructure, technology and resources necessary for the educational process in the STEAM field.
4. The management and organizational culture of the educational units will also support the orientation towards the STEAM field.
5. Initiatives, partnerships and openness to society, focused on the STEAM component.

Starting with the 2022-2023 school year, the Ministry of Education has approved an optional STEM subject for primary education ***"Start the adventure of knowing the Universe"***. The theme was so impactful that many classes of elementary students chose to do it that school year. It is a first but extremely important step in the implementation of future STEAM activities.

The presidential program ***"Educated Romania"*** provides that the management and organizational culture of educational units will support the orientation towards the STEAM area, among the proposed measures being:

1. Innovation spaces in educational institutions, where students' works or informative materials about discoveries/researchers/innovators in the STEAM sphere can be exhibited
2. Collaboration projects between one or more educational units addressed to the STEAM component, based on common needs and interests;
3. Experience exchange programs (national and international) and learning activities, both for teaching staff and for the management of educational institutions;
4. Ensuring the infrastructure, technology and resources necessary for the educational process in the STEAM field, among the proposed measures being:

- STEAM laboratories in each educational unit, so that they offer an integrated and not subject-specific approach. Equipping them with didactic materials, auxiliary didactics, technological equipment, software and support staff;
- Ensuring robotics and informatics laboratories in each educational unit, so as to facilitate the understanding and practical application, including the notions related to artificial intelligence. Equipping them with didactic materials, auxiliary didactics, technological equipment, software and support staff;
- Provision of appropriate technological and digital equipment, internet connection, in each classroom.

Access to technology: it is relevant and well developed, according to the majority of respondents in the selected schools, even if the equipment used is very heterogeneous (internet access, tablets and even Lego Mindstorms, drones, Arduino software, 3D printers).

4. Mentoring and continuous learning in STEAM education

Mentoring and continuous learning are two essential elements in the career and skills development of STEM/STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) educators and professionals. Here's how these aspects can influence STEAM education:

Mentoring in STEAM education:

Knowledge and experience transfer: Experienced mentors can share their knowledge and experience with less experienced STEM/STEAM teachers and educators. This can accelerate learning and skill development.

Personalized Guidance: Mentors can provide advice and personalized guidance to help teachers develop their teaching skills in STEM/STEAM fields. I can suggest resources, pedagogical approaches and strategies to make lessons more effective and engaging.

Building Confidence: Mentoring can help increase teachers' and educators' confidence in their STEM/STEAM teaching skills. When they know they have a mentor they can turn to for advice and guidance, they feel more prepared to experiment and innovate in the classroom.

Networking: Through mentoring, teachers and educators can network with others in the STEM/STEAM field, including industry professionals or researchers. These connections can bring opportunities for collaboration and additional resources to the classroom.

Continuing learning in STEM/STEAM education:

Knowledge Update: Continuous learning allows teachers to stay abreast of new developments and discoveries in STEM/STEAM as these fields are rapidly evolving.

Technology Adaptability: STEM/STEAM education is closely related to technology. Through continuous learning, teachers can develop the necessary skills to use technology effectively in the teaching process.

Innovation in teaching: Continuous learning encourages teachers to explore new teaching methods, develop innovative educational projects and adapt their approaches according to the changing needs of students.

Developing social-emotional skills: Lifelong learning can also include developing social-emotional skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, and effective communication, which are essential to STEM/STEAM education.

Flexibility in teaching: Teachers who invest in continuous learning are more likely to try new approaches and adapt to the specific demands of students and the school context.

Both mentoring and continuous learning are valuable investments in the professional development of teachers and STEM/STEAM professionals. They help improve the quality of STEM/STEAM education and prepare students for the ever-changing world of technology and science.

5. Examples of STEAM teaching projects for different levels of education

Here are some examples of student-friendly STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) projects that can be adapted to different age and educational levels:

Building a Ping Pong Racket with Sensors: Students can build ping pong rackets with sensors to measure the speed and accuracy of their hits. This project involves engineering (rocket construction), technology (using sensors), mathematics (data analysis) and sports (improving ping-pong performance).

Interactive Botanical Garden: Students can create an interactive plant garden in school using soil sensors and microcontrollers. They can monitor and control soil moisture, temperature and lighting, learning about biology, technology and engineering.

The DIY Astronomy Project: Students can build their own simple telescopes and study the night sky. They can learn about astronomy, math (calculating star distances and sizes), and art (drawing constellations).

Robotics and Programming Project: Students can create sensor robots and learn to program their movements and reactions. This project involves technology, engineering, math and problem solving skills.

Art and Technology Project: Students can explore digital art and create artwork using graphics software. They can learn about design elements and combine art with technology to create innovative works.

Building a Sustainable Microfarm: This project may involve creating a micro-farm in the school to learn about agriculture, environmental science and engineering. Students can design smart irrigation systems, monitor soil and water quality, and learn about sustainability.

Sustainable Fashion Design Project: Students can create their own sustainable fashion designs using recyclable or reusable materials. This project combines art with engineering (design and construction of clothes) and focuses on the ecological aspects of fashion.

Exploring the Greenhouse Effect: Students can build small greenhouses and monitor the greenhouse effect by measuring temperature, humidity and plant growth. This project can address science, math, and engineering concepts.

Building a simple Robot: Students can build small robots using simple electronic components (such as motors, light or distance sensors) and program the robots to perform tasks such as following a line or avoiding obstacles. This project introduces them to the world of robotics and learning basic programming concepts.

Vegetable Farm in the School: Students can create a vegetable farm in school or in the school yard, learning about agriculture, environmental science and math. They can plant, tend and monitor plant growth while learning about natural processes.

Food Science: Students can explore the chemistry and physics of culinary processes by preparing simple recipes. They can understand how chemical reactions happen in the kitchen and how they affect the taste and texture of food.

Digital Art Project: Students can explore digital art using graphics software. They can create their own drawings, illustrations or animations while developing skills in art and technology.

Building Spaghetti Bridges: Students can use simple materials such as spaghetti or matchsticks to build bridges. This project involves structural engineering and is a great way to learn about the strength of materials.

Bird Watching: Students can become amateur ornithologists by watching and recording different species of birds around the school or in their area. This project involves natural science, math (recording data) and can be a great way to learn about biodiversity.

Renewable Energy Projects: Students can explore renewable energy sources such as solar panels or wind turbines. They can calculate the efficiency of these energy sources and develop models or prototypes.

Creating a Mini-Theatre or Film: Students can create their own mini-theaters or movies, developing stories, scripts, and special effects. This project involves art, technology and can develop communication and collaboration skills.

Greening of the School or Community: Students can coordinate green projects in school or in the community, collecting waste, recycling and learning about environmental issues. This project raises awareness by identifying the importance of protecting the environment.

These STEAM projects are just a few examples and can be customized to fit student and school interests and available resources. They encourage active engagement, exploration and experiential learning.

6. Online platforms and resources available to support STEAM education

There are several online platforms and resources available to support STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education in schools. These platforms provide educational materials, lessons, projects and resources to help students and teachers explore and learn in STEM and the arts. Here are some popular STEAM platforms in education:

Scratch: Scratch is a platform developed by MIT to learn programming through a visual programming environment. Students can create interactive projects, games and stories to develop programming and logical thinking skills.

https://scratch.mit.edu/

Khan Academy: Khan Academy offers free courses and lessons in math, science, programming, and more. It is a great resource for students and teachers to reinforce knowledge and explore new STEM topics.

https://www.khanacademy.org/

Tinkercad: Tinkercad is a 3D design platform that allows students to create virtual models and prototypes. It is ideal for learning about computer-aided design (CAD) and exploring engineering concepts.

https://www.tinkercad.com/

Code.org: Code.org offers a number of resources to learn programming, including interactive tutorials, lessons, and activities related to programming. Resources suitable for all age and experience levels are available.

https://code.org/

Exploratorium: The Exploratorium is an interactive science museum in San Francisco, but their website offers lots of free online resources and activities to learn about science and experiments.

https://www.exploratorium.edu/

Google Arts & Culture: This platform provides access to thousands of works of art, virtual exhibitions and interactive experiments related to art and culture. It is an excellent resource for combining artistic and scientific aspects.

https://artsandculture.google.com/

STEMpedia: STEMpedia offers a wide range of STEM resources for teachers and students, including online courses, projects, STEM kits, and programming platforms.

https://thetempedia.com/

Lego Education: Lego Education offers educational materials and LEGO kits specifically designed to develop students' STEM skills. These include kits for educational robotics and creative construction.

https://education.lego.com/en-us/

MIT OpenCourseWare: MIT offers free online courses in fields such as math, science, and engineering through the OpenCourseWare platform. These courses are intended for both students and adults interested in delving into STEM subjects.

https://ocw.mit.edu/

These platforms offer varied opportunities to explore and learn in the STEM and arts fields. They can be used in both the classroom and home learning environment to support STEAM education and develop essential 21st century skills.

7. Conclusions

STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) education has many goals and benefits for students. These goals include developing critical thinking skills and preparing them for success in an increasingly technological and complex world. Here are some of the main goals of STEAM education:

Developing STEM Skills: STEAM education aims to develop strong skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. These skills are vital in today's economy and technology-driven society.

Critical and Creative Thinking: Students learn to think critically, analyse information and solve complex problems. They are encouraged to use their imagination and creativity to find innovative solutions.

Collaboration and Communication: STEAM projects often involve teamwork, which develops collaboration and communication skills. Students learn to work together, share ideas and argue their points of view.

Practical Application of Knowledge: STEAM education promotes the application of knowledge in practical contexts. Students learn how to use theoretical concepts in real projects and solve real-world problems.

Education for the Future: Students are prepared for future job demands that increasingly rely on STEM skills. They learn to adapt to technological changes and be ready to fill jobs in emerging fields.

Promoting Diversity: STEAM education encourages the participation of all students, regardless of gender, ethnicity or other characteristics. It promotes diversity and equity in STEM fields, which have tended to be dominated by certain groups.

Sustainability and Global Problem Solving: STEAM education can address global issues such as climate change, pollution and natural resource depletion. Students learn how to develop sustainable solutions to such problems.

Promoting Digital Literacy: With technology playing an increasingly important role in our lives, STEAM education helps students become digitally literate and understand the impact of technology on society.

Promoting Art and Creative Expression: The letter "A" in STEAM, for "Arts," encourages students to explore and develop their artistic talents and creativity in the context of STEM.

These goals of STEAM education contribute to the formation of well-prepared students to become active citizens and to face the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary world.

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PERSPECTIVES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING CAREER IN A MENTORING CONTEXT

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to highlight the most important aspects of didactic mentoring on the professional development of teachers. Through a personalized teaching mentoring program, future teachers will be able to develop their teaching skills so that they correspond to the current needs of the new generations of students. Thus, the present work highlights several perspectives of the evolution of the teaching career in a mentoring context.*

Key words: *didactic mentoring, mentor, learning community.*

The development of the teaching career in a mentoring context represents an essential approach for improving the educational act and for supporting teachers in their professional career. From this perspective, mentoring is a tool for personal and professional development, because the mentee can identify his strengths, with the help of which he can improve his weaknesses, thus the teacher being able to develop personally and professionally.

The mentoring context ensures continuous learning of the mentee in a world where teachers must be constantly up-to-date with the latest educational practices and technologies. A critical component of teaching career mentoring is the guidance provided by mentors in making career decisions, who, based on counseling discussions, can establish a professional path based on career goals. These, in the end, may lead to career advancement opportunities.

Emotional support represents another dimension of mentoring, as the mentor can provide support and guidance in order to properly manage stress and pressure related to education, so that a balance between professional and personal life can be maintained. By sharing experience, members will be able to guide mentees to avoid common mistakes, thus boosting confidence and motivation so they can stay in education and achieve a successful career.

Mentoring must be the foundation for the development of a strong educational community, on which professional relationships between teachers can be strengthened, allowing for the sharing of experiences and resources that promote the development of a positive learning environment for students, this one representing another perspective of didactic mentoring.

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The concept of mentoring in education refers to the learning and guiding relationship in which an experienced teacher, called a mentor, assumes the role of supporting and guiding an early career teacher, a student or an inexperienced headmaster, with a view to personal and professional development, but also to reach the maximum professional potential. This mentor-mentee relationship can have a significant impact on individual development and both parties involved in the mentoring process can benefit from it.

Among the key aspects of mentoring in education we highlight:

- the mentor-mentee relationship, as the former provides guidance, counseling and support so that the mentored person can achieve academic and professional goals;
- personal and professional development is the goal of the mentoring process, since it includes the development of the skills of: teaching, classroom management, communication skills, stress management and everything related to the educational act;
- the transfer of professional knowledge and experience is relevant in the mentoring context, because mentors have extensive experience in the educational field, and this aspect is important in the development of the mentee;
- role modeling is a key aspect in the mentoring process because mentors serve as role models for mentees.

The impact of mentoring on the professional development of teachers is significant, because a transfer of knowledge and professional experiences that have been accumulated over the years is carried out. Within the guidance and counseling process, the development of skills and competencies is aimed at, such as increasing confidence and motivation, thus creating a professional recipe based on the connection between the mentor and the mentee. Promoting examples of good practice in working with students with disabilities or students from disadvantaged backgrounds is a good opportunity to build on previous experience and support student diversity and inclusion. Thus, mentoring is essential for the personal and professional development of teachers, providing them with guidance, support and learning opportunities that can significantly contribute to their career success. It is a valuable investment for both the mentee and the mentor.

In the mentoring context, the mentee manages to understand the roles of the teaching staff in the educational system, essential roles and responsibilities that contribute to the success of students and the development of the quality of the teaching act. Depending on the level of education and field of specialization, these roles can be different, among which we mention:

- the role of educator, teachers are responsible for transmitting knowledge and information to students, using teaching methods and techniques adapted to their level of development and understanding. They create and implement didactic planning in accordance with the current curriculum, in such a way that the learning objectives are achieved.
- The role of facilitator of learning, as teachers are not just transmitters of information, but also facilitators of the learning process. They encourage critical thinking, the development of problem-solving skills and the active participation of students in the learning process.
- The role of evaluator must be viewed with responsibility, because the teacher must objectively evaluate the progress and performance of students, using various assessment methods, such as: written assessments, evaluations, projects, portfolios, presentations, discussions, exams.

- The role of behavioral model is very important because it serves as a role model of appropriate behavior and conduct within the school and community, promoting positive social values and norms.
- The role of mentor and advisor for students, but also for colleagues, beginner teaching staff , by offering advice, suggestions and guidance so that they can face professional, academic and social problems.
- The role of class manager is another aspect that the young debutant succeeds in understanding in the mentoring context, because he will be able to properly manage the learning environment in the classroom, maintaining an appropriate disciplinary framework, organizing activities and generating didactic resources that favor active learning.
- The role of collaborator is relevant to the conditions of collaboration with their colleagues, parents of the students and other stakeholders to ensure an effective learning environment. They can participate in curriculum planning meetings, parent discussions or team projects.
- The role of professional researcher and developer as they engage in continuous learning and in the research of current educational methods and practices. Teachers constantly improve their skills and knowledge to stay abreast of developments in the field of education.

These roles of the teaching staff are interconnected and complex, and teachers must be flexible and adaptable to the needs and characteristics of students, by facilitating access to education and preparation for life.

Taking responsibility in teacher mentoring is essential for the success of the mentoring process and for the effective development of beginners or less experienced teachers.

Both mentors and mentees have certain roles and responsibilities that they must respect. Here is how these responsibilities can be defined in the context of didactic mentoring:

Mentor Responsibilities	**Responsibilities of the mentee**
• provides constant guidance and support to mentors; • sets goals and plan activities for the professional development plan and identifies the best resources to achieve the set goals; • provides objective feedback, focused on improving the activity, with suggestions for professional development; • shapes behaviour professional skills of the mentees in terms of: teaching, communication, relationship and classroom management; • encourages continuous learning by participating in continuous training activities, continuing studies and developing professional skills.	• Must be open to learning; • define their learning needs and set clear objectives for the mentoring activity; • actively participates in the process of mentoring through engagement in discussions, reflections, and planned learning activities; • assumes responsibilities for personal and professional development, following the recommendations and advice of mentors, acting accordingly to achieve the goals: • feedback and open communication in relationship with the mentor about progress and difficulties, making the mentoring process more efficient.

By respecting these responsibilities, both mentors and mentees contribute to the creation of a productive mentoring context and to the effective professional development of teachers at the beginning of their teaching career. This collaboration can bring significant benefits to both parties, generating effective meaningful learning contexts for students.

The efficiency of the didactic activity is essential to provide a quality education that stimulates the development of skills among students. The strategies aimed at making the didactic activity more efficient consist of: rigorous planning, within which objectives and resources must be optimally included, so that at the end of the didactic activity they can be achieved; the integration of modern technologies in the didactic planning by using modern programs and applications, so that the lessons are interactive, and the activity management and monitoring of the students' progress can also be done online; proper management of teaching time for all activities; individualizing learning according to the particularities of each student and adapting lessons to provide the support they need; automation of repetitive work tasks including communication with parents; continuous training in order to develop their skills in working with students; collaboration with colleagues and exchange of professional experiences; feedback and self-assessment; maintaining a healthy balance by relating to proper stress management, maintaining a balance between professional and personal life; establishing routines and clear structural elements in the classroom to have an organized learning environment and to exploit time to the maximum. By streamlining the teaching activity, we will generate meaningful learning contexts for our students so that we can enjoy the satisfaction of our work.

Promoting creativity in education can have a significant impact on student development and help prepare them for a future where innovative thinking is increasingly important. Among the examples of good practice, we can highlight personalized research projects that encourage the exploration of students' own interests and critical development, learning based on group or individual projects which involves solving concrete problems or creating products that can stimulate creativity.

Brainstorming and open discussion can create an environment where students share ideas and participate in open discussions, where students come up with creative solutions to various problems. Experiential learning through field trips, museum visits, or participation in various cultural events can stimulate creativity and provide memorable learning experiences. The use of technologies in the teaching process can provide students with opportunities to create digital content to develop multimedia projects and use online applications and tools to express ideas. Creative arts and cultures can support work with students who have various disabilities and help them see the world from different perspectives. STEAM education is about science, technology, engineering and math learning and we encourage problem solving and technology innovation. Non-formal education and creative workshops or summer camps can provide learning environments that encourage creativity and free expression. Developing the ability to solve complex problems and multiple possible solutions is another example of a method that stimulates students' creativity. Fostering creativity in education is essential to prepare students for today's complex and ever-changing world. By adopting these examples of good practice, teachers can stimulate the development of students' critical and innovative thinking.

Evaluation and monitoring of the implementation process of didactic mentoring are essential to ensure its effectiveness and to ensure that the objectives are achieved. The indicators that must be taken into account for the evaluation of the mentoring activity are:

- setting goals and expectations clearly, right from the start of the mentoring process, both mentor and mentee must set clear goals and expectations for what they want to achieve through the process. Objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART);
- regular monitoring of the mentoring process may include mentoring meetings with the mentees in which to analyze the progress made, the challenges encountered and various solutions for them;
- the collection of feed- back must be done on both sides in order to identify those dysfunctions and to find solutions to improve them;
- the evaluation of the quality of mentoring is carried out during and at the end of the process of mentoring and may include questionnaires or feedback interviews in order to highlight the satisfaction and effectiveness of the mentoring process;
- data analysis and process tuning can be done after data collection and feedback and involves an update of the mentoring plan, objectives, strategies or frequency of meetings;
- documenting progress can help track professional development of mentees, identifying any gaps that need to be covered as well as updating the objectives;
- open communication includes discussing expectations, goals and any issues or difficulty encountered.

Addressing gender and diversity in mentoring is essential to ensure that the mentoring process is inclusive, equitable and effective for all developing teachers, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age or other personal characteristics. Mentors and mentees must be sensitive to diversity and aware of the impact that teachers can have in the classroom and in the educational environment. Understanding and acknowledging diversity are important first steps in fair dealing. It is necessary to consider personalized support for each developing teacher, taking into account the individual needs and particularities of each one. The promotion of inclusion implies the acceptance and respect of the other, regardless of personal qualities, and the promotion of diversity in a mentoring context can be achieved through examples that highlight cultural and environmental diversity, by using various resources for didactic activity.

Teaching mentoring in the digital age has evolved and adapted to new technologies and changes in how we communicate and learn. The use of technology has brought both opportunities and challenges to mentoring. In the digital age, online communication is facilitated by technology, and mentor-mentee interaction can occur even if they are at a distance. Emails, instant messages, video calls and web conferencing platforms allow efficient and regular interaction. Another benefit of online technology is access to online educational resources, including learning materials, online courses, expert articles, and other information sources that can support professional development. Due to the need to adapt didactic strategies to the needs of current generations, the development of technological skills, including ICT skills, is required by online mentoring. As part of the process of monitoring and recording progress, mentoring management platforms can be used to help track goals and highlight achievements. Online mentoring groups can be formed for collective professional development through forums and professional social networking platforms where teachers can share experiences, ideas and resources. Technology can ensure continuity of mentoring despite geographic obstacles or other physical limitations, so that mentees do not have to travel great distances. At the

same time, we must consider the limitations that technology imposes, as there is the risk of isolation or difficulty in establishing genuine human connections in the online environment. The security and confidentiality of information is another limitation of the digital environment.

Given the evolution of studies in the educational field, the component of teaching mentoring, but also its post-pandemic evolution, it is useful to recall Sinclair's study, published in 2003, on the blended-learning component, which led to the conclusion that "although technology does not replace face-to-face interactions, it can expand the experience of learners", stressing that "the results of qualitative work indicated that more teachers had some resistance or fear of using the platforms". Sinclair also highlights two mentoring roles, frequently assumed by mentors, aimed at "providing feedback to students (19.4% of comments made) and challenging them, generally by asking questions (17.7% of comments)".

Teaching mentoring can bring significant benefits, but also obstacles and challenges that can affect its effectiveness. Among the main challenges and obstacles in teaching mentoring, we highlight:

- limited time due to overcrowded schedule, which makes it difficult to find the time required for regular mentoring and professional development meetings;
- lack of resources, such as training materials or access to professional development programs that may be limited or unavailable;
- differences in age and experience, when a mentor is much younger or less experienced than the mentee, or vice versa;
- poor communication that can lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and loss of direction within the mentorship;
- resistance to change due to the fact that some teachers may be reluctant in receiving feedback or guidance from a mentor;
- the lack of confidentiality may affect his confidence in the process and in the relationship with the mentor;
- insufficient preparation for mentoring, which can affect the quality of mentoring and of the feed back provided;
- assessing evaluation, as difficulties may arise regarding the objective evaluation of the teacher's performance and in establishing clear evaluation criteria;
- overloading mentors with various didactic or administrative responsibilities which can affect the quality of the mentoring process.

To overcome these challenges and obstacles it is important to pay attention to adequate planning for mentor training, open communication and provision of all necessary resources. At the same time, understanding and sensitively approaching the different situations and contexts of those being mentored can contribute to improving the didactic mentoring process.

The outlook for the future of teacher mentoring is full of opportunities and challenges in the context of continuous changes in the field of education and professional development. Technology and online mentoring is an important key to the future of teacher mentoring, which will be more and more common with the help of video conferencing platforms, applications and communication tools, making mentoring more accessible and flexible. The competency-based approach in future mentoring will be based on key teacher competencies tailored to the specific needs of students and

schools. A growing trend is that of "reverse mentoring," where younger or less experienced teachers can bring new perspectives and innovative approaches to the mentoring process, thus providing valuable input to their mentors as well.

Virtual communities and online teacher groups play an increasingly important role in supporting the mentoring process through community-based learning in a collaborative environment. Career mentoring addresses aspects of teachers' long-term professional development, such as career planning and strategies for career advancement, with inclusion and diversity in mind, that will persist in mainstream education.

Evaluating the performance and impact of the teaching career mentoring process on teacher performance will lead to the identification of new assessment tools and methods to appropriately measure mentoring success. There is a growing need for ongoing training of mentors to keep abreast of the latest trends in education and develop their mentoring skills.

In the future, didactic mentoring will adapt to the new requirements of the education system and technological changes, through a flexible and adaptable approach, mentoring will continue to be a valuable tool for the professional development of teachers and for improving the quality of education.

In conclusion, the prospects of teacher mentoring are full of promise regarding the professional development of teachers and the improvement of the quality of education. As technology evolves and education continues to change, mentoring will play a crucial role in supporting teachers in developing and promoting excellence in education.

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THE LEARNING-CENTERED APPROACH TO MENTORING. APPLICATIONS IN TEACHER INDUCTION AND TEACHER MENTORING

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Abstract: *Mentoring is a practice with a long history and with well-documented positive results for personal and professional development in various domains. Teacher mentoring has a significant positive impact on the professionalization of the teaching career, teacher commitment, school climate, and on the quality of school learning. The learning-centered approach reflects a constructivist point of view on the mentoring process, and it is based on the principles of adult learning. In this approach, the development of the mentoring relationship, a collaborative one, with the mentee actively involved in learning and the mentor acting as a facilitator, has been described as a four-phase process: preparing, negotiating, implementing, and closing. Reflection on learning, readiness to learn, opportunities for learning and support are all critical aspects with a significant influence on the quality of the mentoring process. In our opinion, Zachary's learning-centered approach is a useful tool in teacher induction and mentoring.*

Key words: *learning-centered approach, teacher induction, teacher mentoring*

1. Introduction

Beyond the multitude of definitions in the literature, mentoring is described as a more or less formally established supportive relation and a multifaceted transactional process between a person with advanced expertise in a particular field and a less experienced one. The main purpose of mentoring in education is to support teachers and future teachers to acquire knowledge, skills, abilities, values, or attitudes that enhance their professional competence and, consequently, the quality of learning while increasing their confidence and job satisfaction as well. The mentor role is a complex one, involving observation, in-depth analysis, reflection, knowledge sharing, effective communication, guidance, role modelling, and collaborative action. To some extent, the mentor is a tutor and a partner in learning, a model and a partner of reflection, an expert in profession, a supervisor, and a counsellor or coach. In education, the teacher induction and the mentoring programs offer the opportunity for the more experienced teachers to share their professional expertise, to develop their evaluation and counselling skills while significantly improving the beginning teachers' professional competencies, motivation, confidence, and sense of self-efficacy, resulting in reduced teacher attrition and improvement in the quality of learning, all with a significant impact on school

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culture, which becomes more reflective, collaborative, and supportive (Baron, 2006; Hayes & Pridham, 2019).

2. The Learning-Centered Approach to Mentoring

From the different theoretical approaches/models that describe the mentoring process available in literature, we focused in this paper on the learning-centered approach proposed by Lois Zachary (2011). Stating that "learning is the purpose, process and product of mentoring" (from the Center for Mentoring Excellence web page, https://www.centerformentoring.com/about-us/dr-lois-j-zachary), Zachary guides the mentors' activities from a learning-centered approach, a theoretical perspective that has the principles of andragogy as a starting point and that, according to its author, is congruent with the best practices of adult learning. The learning-centered approach reflects the constructivist view on learning and mentoring and it marks a shift away from the "traditional" mentor-centered perspective (Zachary, 2011).

In the mentor-centered approach, the mentor leads the mentoring process in a directive manner, she/he assumes the responsibility for the results, and the expertise that she/he possesses in the field is the best argument for her/his investment with authority. In the learning-centered paradigm, the mentee is deeply involved in learning and the mentor's main responsibility is to facilitate the process. The mentor-mentee relation is a collaborative one and the responsibility for the accomplishment of the learner's objectives is shared between the learning partners. Over the course of the relationship, the mentee's motivation and autonomy are carefully monitored by the mentor, nurtured, and stimulated through appropriate strategies. The mentor's expertise and the mentee's experience are valuable resources for learning.

The learning-centered approach shifts the focus from the product/results of the knowledge transfer to "a process-oriented relationship involving knowledge acquisition, application and critical reflection" (Zachary, 2011, p. 186). The key elements of the learning-centered mentoring paradigm are presented in Table 1, in relation to the principles of adult learning, as they were formulated by "the father of andragogy", M. Knowles (2000).

Elements in the Learning-Centered Mentoring Paradigm (source: Zachary, 2011, p. 203) …..Table 1

Mentoring Element	Changing Paradigm	Adult Learning Principle
Mentee role	From: Passive Receiver To: Active Partner	Adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning.
Mentor role	From: Authority To: Facilitator	The role of the facilitator is to create
Learning process	From: Mentor-directed and the mentor is responsible for the mentee's learning To: Self-directed and the mentee is responsible for their own learning	Adult learners have a need to be self-directing.

Mentoring Element	Changing Paradigm	Adult Learning Principle
Length of relationship	From: Calendar focus To: Goal determined	Readiness of learning increases when there is a specific need to know.
Mentoring relationship	From: One life = one mentor; one mentor = one mentee To: Multiple mentors over a lifetime and multiple models for mentoring: individual, group, peer models	Life's reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others add enrichment to the learning process.
Setting	From: Face-to-face To: Multiple and varied venues and opportunities	Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application.
Focus	From: Product oriented: knowledge transfer and acquisition To: Process oriented: critical reflection and application	Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn

According to Zachary (2000; 2011), there are four phases in any mentoring relationship: preparing, negotiating, enabling, and closure (Fig. 1). In order to develop a functional mentoring relation, both the mentor and the mentee should be aware of its phases that all build one from another, with varied length and potential partial overlap. Reflection is a key condition for facilitating learning in any phase of the mentoring relationship, with a significant impact on the results of the whole process. In her writings, Zachary often metaphorically describes mentoring as a personal learning journey and these four phases of the relationship development are compared with the four seasons of the growth of a plant: preparing is as tiling the soil before planting, negotiating is planting the seed, enabling is nurturing growth, and closing is bringing in the harvest (Zachary, 2000).

Preparing. Both the mentee and the mentor need to prepare themselves, individually and collaboratively, in order to start a successful mentoring relationship. For the mentee, it is important to be aware of her/his motivation, strengths and weaknesses, learning needs, objectives, and expectations. For the mentor, it is important to explore her/his motivation, to be aware of her/his readiness and skills, to understand her/his role, to identify the strengths, the available resources, and also the areas that need further learning or improving. The mentor should reflect on her/his experiences in order to be able to use them as learning resources, avoiding projecting them onto the mentee. An initial conversation between the mentor and the mentee offers both parties the opportunity to clarify motivation and expectations, to evaluate the compatibility between them and to estimate the viability of the relation, to make plans for the future.

Negotiating. In this phase, the mentor and the mentee work side-by-side to develop a mutual understanding of their assumptions, expectations and needs, to clarify and negotiate objectives and learning goals, to agree on strategies, methods, and on the course of the mentoring/ learning process. The explicit norms, rules, boundaries and limits of the relationship, practical details such as where to meet and how often, responsibilities, accountability, and criteria for success are also established during this phase. The relevant information is written in a contract signed by both parties.

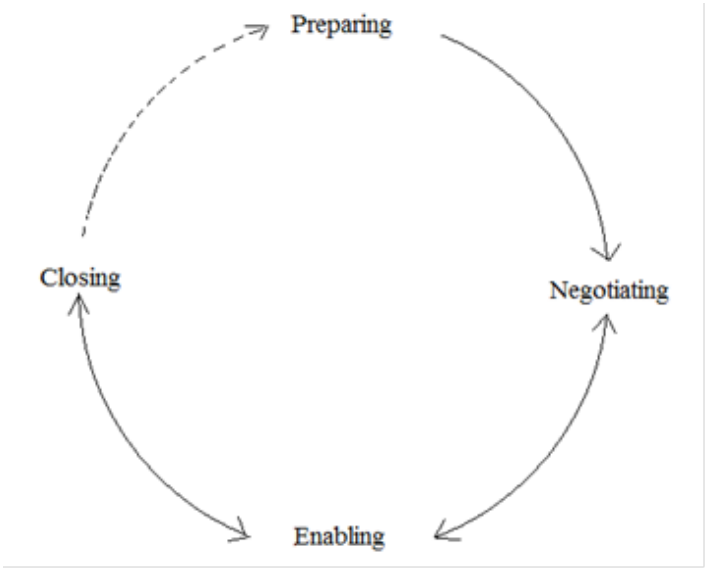

Figure 1. *The Phase Cycle in the Learning-Centered Mentoring Paradigm (source: Zachary, 2011, p. 621)*

Enabling is the longest and the most complex phase, during which the learning/ mentoring relationship is effectively implemented. A large domain of activities, personal experiences, events, and social interactions are exploited as learning opportunities and/or as learning resources. Reflection on learning, trust and effective bidirectional communication, constructive feedback, an open, collaborative, and supporting learning climate are all conditions for success. In this phase, the learning process is nurtured and facilitated, and both the mentee and the mentor are monitoring the process to ensure that the initially proposed objectives are met (Zachary, 2011).

Closing is a carefully conducted process that begins in the preparation phase with setting a closure protocol as a part of the mentoring agreement. It involves anticipating and overcoming the obstacles in the course of the developing mentoring relationship and it ends when the learning goals are accomplished and both the mentor and the mentee are aware of the personal and professional relevance of the learning outcomes. Closing the mentorship process also implies acknowledging and celebrating the achievements and the positive experience of learning. The mentoring process has been successful if the learning achievements can be applied in other situations and contexts.

Individual and collaborative *reflection*. Reflection is a critical part of mentoring, and it is practiced by the mentee and the mentor alike during the whole process, from preparation to closing. Using reflection, the mentee becomes more adept at deriving meanings from experience and the mentor becomes more competent in assisting her/him during the process. According to Zachary (2011) "reflection is an introspective dialogue carried out in written form that stimulates the raising of questions, provokes the assessment of learning, and enables the integration of new learning" (p. 650). Among the multiple advantages of reflection, we note: the clarification of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, inspiring questioning and stimulating critical thinking, leading to solutions, the clarification/ revision of the learning goals, and consolidating learning.

The Gibbs' reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988; Fig. 2) is a useful tool for teacher mentoring. In a six-stage approach, Gibbs offers a framework to reflect on experience. The 6 stages are: 1. Description of the situation/experience. 2. Feelings and thoughts about it. 3. Evaluation of the experience/situation. 4. Analysis to extract meanings. 5. Conclusion. Identifying the positive aspects that are worth remembering and those that should be approached differently. 6. The action plan includes good practices useful in the future in similar situations, but the aspects that should be changed are also mentioned.

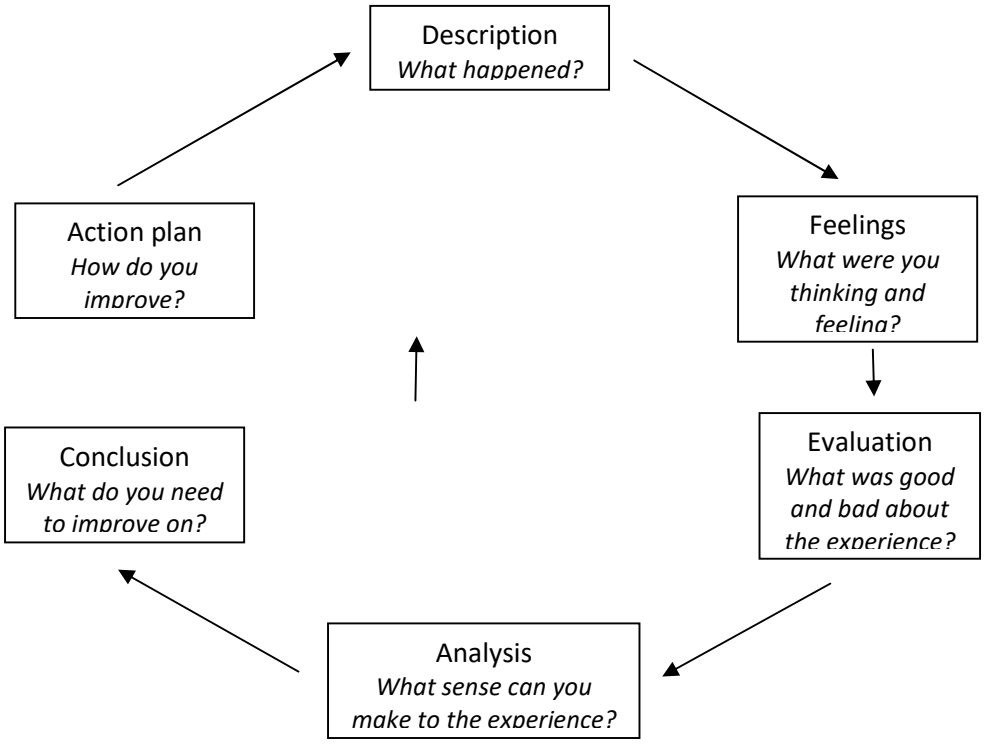

Figure 2. *The Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (source:* Cambridge International Education Teaching and Learning Team)

Application of the Gibbs reflective cycle in teacher mentoring. For example, if a pre-service teacher analyses/reflects on the lesson she/he just taught, in the description phase she/he presents the course of the lesson relying on solely factual information. In the feelings phase, she/he refers to the feelings she/he had in various moments of the lesson. In the evaluation phase, the mentee evaluates the activity that she/he carried out, reflecting on the positive aspects, on the things that did not work according to the plan, and on the aspects that should be improved. The assessment covers both the pre-service teacher's activity and the students' learning results. In the analysis phase, the whole teaching experience begins to make sense for the mentee, who identifies variables that facilitate

learning as well as obstacles. In the conclusion phase, the learner puts ideas together, paying attention to ways in which they could improve her/his work. The action plan describes, step by step, the actions that will be taken by the mentee in her/his future teaching activities.

3. Conclusion

Zachary (2000; 2011) describes mentoring using the journey metaphor. In most cases, this journey remains an adventure, because there are many variables difficult to predict. A well-documented and pragmatic approach to the process could serve as a useful tool in teacher mentoring. A wide range of research data and descriptive models from experiential learning theory, constructivism, cognitive theory, and adult education are valuable resources in the training of teacher mentors.

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THE ROLE OF MENTORING AND PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT IN SUSTAINING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *This paper presents a part of the RESPOND European Erasmus+-project on the mutually sustaining relationship between teacher professional development and overall school development. The focus is on one of four product results from the project, "The RESPOND Teacher Professional Development Support Guidelines" developed as a tool for understanding the roles of and interactions between different actors in school, with particular reference to the role of mentors for formal institutional support and peer-to-peer support for informal support between colleagues. The paper concludes with a reflection on the aims and the intended impact of the guidelines.*

1. The RESPOND project

RESPOND (Sustaining the Professional Development within Schools as Professional Learning Environments) is an Erasmus+ KA220-SCH - Cooperation partnerships in school education project. The RESPOND partner organizations are the University of Florence, Italy (coordinating partner), the University Lucian Blaga of Sibiu, Romania, the University of Granada, Spain, the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway, the Regional Educational Authority of Piemonte (USR – Rete Sostenibilità), Italy, and the Comprehensive School 21, Sibiu, Romania.

The point of departure for the RESPOND project is that there is a need to investigate and analyse the complex relationship between teacher professional development and overall school development and identify ways in which they can be mutually sustaining. The sustainability of a teacher professional profile is considered from the dual perspective of its ability to both demonstrate characteristics of durability, resilience, and transformability in the way these components develop throughout the teacher's career and also correspond to global and local realities and learner needs in an increasingly complex, volatile, uncertain, interdependent, and interconnected world. RESPOND considers sustainable professional development at the level of individual teachers, the schools they teach in, and the educational systems in which they build their careers and proposes ways in each of these levels can be mutually sustaining.

RESPOND envisages four intersecting products:

1. The RESPOND Teacher Professional Profile/Electronic Portfolio (TPP/E-PT).
This tool defines a common teacher professional profile related to global competence – articulated in specific areas and types, levels, and indicators of competence – that is elaborated and experimented internationally and can serve to promote self-evaluation processes concerning the development of teachers' competences and thereby enhance the sustainability of teacher professional and school development.

2. The RESPOND Teacher Professional Development Support Guidelines (TPD-SG).
This tool focuses on the roles of and interactions between different actors in school, with particular reference to mentors, newly qualified teachers, experienced teachers, and school leaders, and defines Mentor Support Guidelines (M-SG) for formal institutional support and Peer-to-Peer Support Guidelines (PP-SG) for informal support between colleagues.

3. The RESPOND Impact Evaluation Support Guidelines (IE-SG).
This tool focuses on the ability of schools to understand and promote the complex processes involved in ongoing teacher professional development and its relationship with school development. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying indicators of institutional impact and learning lessons for future development.

4. The RESPOND Promoting and Monitoring Sustainability Indexes (PMSI).
This tool proposes an overall sustainability development framework with particular emphasis on identifying factors that facilitate and impede the sustainability of professional and school development and how facilitating factors can be increased and impeding factors reduced. The sustainability development framework proposes both a common core related to the concept of sustainability in terms of ongoing professional development (Teacher Professional Development Sustainability Index – TPDSI) and school development (School Development Sustainability Index – SDSI) and how the framework and the indexes are relevant to diverse and specific situations.

One member of the partnership has overall responsibility for the various phases of elaboration and definition of each one of the projects, while other members are actively involved in generating ideas, discussing contents and field-based experimentation.
Each product is declined in terms of four dimensions, each of which is based on a guiding question which directs its development, values and attitudes concerning consciousness and awareness of the nature and importance of that dimension, and for which key action areas that should be the focus both of teacher professional and overall school development are identified.
This article focuses on the second product involving the definition of mentor support guidelines for formal institutional support and peer-to-peer support guidelines for informal support between colleagues. The leading organization with overall responsibility for this product was the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway.

2. The RESPOND methodology

Each one of the members of the partnership is actively involved in the areas addressed by the project.

The target groups and relevant stakeholders involved at all levels of the activities implemented cover a wide range of professional profiles. These include teachers at ISCED levels1 and 2, staff in faculties of education involved in initial and continuous teacher education programs, as well as those involved in the provision of continuing professional development, advisory groups, or individuals with this role in regional or national contexts, teacher professional associations, the inspectorate, senior management in schools and staff from all curricular areas.

On the basis of a common methodology established for each of the products at the outset of the RESPOND project, the mentor support and peer-to-peer support guidelines have been developed on the basis of a number of intersecting steps.

1. Transnational development of an initial framework for data collection on facilitating and impeding factors in defining and promoting the work of mentors and experienced peers in teacher professional development and school development and the building of of work packages with relevant activities and outcomes proposed for each of the members of the partnership.

2. Individual country initial data collection based on literature research and previous professional learning experiences of the participants in order to identify factors that facilitate and impede development in particular situations that involve given action areas and specific actions for mentors and experienced peers and developing competences within the dimensions focussed on.

3. Transnational development of support guidelines based on identifying and implementing ways of increasing facilitating factors and decreasing impeding factors in each dimension.

4. Individual country main study data collection based on current ongoing professional learning experiences together with implementation and testing of support guidelines.

In this way, as with each of the products of the project, the development of the mentor and peer-to-peer support guidelines means that the networks of schools in each partner country actively participate in terms of being consulted in order to identify their needs and obtain their point of view while planning, informed of all decisions taken and the ongoing data collection and monitoring processes that take place, and involved as protagonists in all the activities conducted. Every effort is made to ensure a multilateral flow of exchanges from and to each partner country and its network of schools so that all the participating schools, teachers, classes, and learners can be a part of and gain benefit from the products of the project. Each of the activities ensures opportunities for all participants to provide feedback and feedforward at each one of these participation levels.

3. The four dimensions of the mentor support and peer-to-peer support guidelines

The four dimensions identified for the mentor support and peer-to-peer support guidelines and the corresponding guiding questions are:

1. Leadership for mentorship and peer-to-peer programmes.
How can the school develop good leadership, qualifications and structures for effective mentor support and peer-to-peer support guidelines?

2. Support for the transition from teacher education to the teaching profession.
How can mentor support and peer-to-peer support programmes support newly qualified teachers' transition to the professional practice of teachers?

3. Sustained support for teacher professional development.
How can peer-to-peer collaboration and continuing professional development strengthen teachers' competences and the practical application of their knowledge and skills?

4. Developing the school culture for professional development.
How can systems be established to promote sustain ed professional development and strengthen the development of a school culture and learning community?

Each of the of the guidelines' four dimensions are then declined in terms of action areas to be addressed as mentor and peer-to-peer support are implemented within the school as a professional learning environment.

1. **Leadership for mentorship and peer-to-peer programs**
   - Identify the purpose and vision for mentorship and peer-to-peer programs.
   - Integrate evidence-based management practice in systems and structures (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2023; Kvernbekk, 2016).
   - Enhance teachers' professional competence by developing a school culture for action, reflection, and sharing of competence (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).
   - Provide clear opportunities and strategies for career development and advancement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).
   - Establish systems for training and qualification of professional mentors and peer-to-peer guides.
2. **Support for transitions from teacher education to the teaching profession**
   - Implement sustainable mentorship programs.
   - Design personalized mentoring plans for the mentees.
   - Enhance social and academic membership and engagement in the learning community and strengthen cooperation between school and teacher education.

- Establish and distribute in-depth knowledge about school culture, the teaching profession, and transitions from teacher education to professional practice (Tiplic, Brandmo & Elstad, 2014).
- Cultivate professional flexibility and resilience.

3. **Sustained support for teacher professional development**
   - Develop sustainable mechanisms for peer-to-peer support and ongoing learning opportunities for teachers (Darling-Hammond, et al, 2017).
   - Stimulate active and engaged participation in school leadership.
   - Create genuine practices for teacher collaboration and unity (Donohoo, 2018; Darling-Hammond, 2021; Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).
   - Encourage critical reflection and create systems for teacher feedback and appraisal.
   - Develop awareness and understanding of current research and evidence on effective teaching practice (Dunn & Hattie, 2021; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kvernbekk, 2016).
   - Expect and encourage teachers to continuously build bridges between theory and practice throughout their careers.
4. **Developing the school culture for professional development**
   - Promote collective ownership of the school's mission, values, and goals.
   - Enhance a culture of continuous improvements.
   - Create a structure and process for sustained professional learning and development at an organizational level.
   - Integrate intuitive knowledge processes into management procedures.
   - Implement mentorship and peer-to-peer programmes in school development plans and strategies.
   - The values, attitudes and competences that should underpin action within these areas are articulated as follows.

The guidelines encompass a shared set of values, attitudes, and competences that permeate all facets of the outlined action areas and the associated work with these:

Values

- Authentic leadership and coaching.
- Trust building and empowerment.
- A culture of continuous improvements.
- Communication and cooperation.
- Recognition of teachers' role and impact.

Attitudes

- Responsibility.
- Awareness and empathy.
- Self-reflection and critical thinking.
- Adaptive and flexible practice.
- Openness to others' points of view.

Competences (as identified in the RESPOND Teacher Professional Profile/Electronic Portfolio)

- Global and Local Issues and Multiple Perspectives.
- Intercultural Communication and Interaction.
- Individual and Collective Wellbeing.
- Acting for Sustainability.

4. Declining action areas in terms of specific actions

Each of the action areas identified within the four dimensions of the guidelines are then declined in terms of specific actions.

Dimension 1: Leadership for mentorship and peer-to-peer programs

Action area 1: Identify the purpose and vision for mentorship and peer-to-peer programs.

- Clarify the reasons for building a mentorship and/or peer-to-peer program(s).
- Involve participants in the process of creating a strong vision.
- Communicate the vision for the program to all involved.
- Set measurable short-term targets and long-term goals for the mentorship program.
- Create a roadmap for the program's vision, including a plan for achieving the goals.
- Identify and support varying individual mentoring needs across specific learning goals, preferences, and professional needs.

Action area 2: Integrate evidence-based management practice in systems and structures.

- Ensure to keep updated on relevant research literature and policy documents.
- Stimulate cooperation with other institutions and establish opportunities for sharing experiences across schools and regions.
- Share experiences and practices within and between schools (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).
- Motivate continuous professional development and lifelong learning.
- Conduct observational- and evidence-based reflection on outcomes and impacts.

Action area 3: Enhance teachers' professional competence by developing a school culture for action, reflection and sharing of competence (Dunn & Hattie, 2021; Marzano & Heflebower, 2016).

- Facilitate arenas for sharing and critical discussions of personal practice and experience, by promoting:
  - Knowledge acquisition – creation of new insights, skills, and relationships.
  - Knowledge sharing – dissemination of such learning within and among members of the organization.
  - Knowledge utilization - integration of learning to make it broadly availability, its generalization to new situations, and its practical application.
- Provide space for dialogue and reflection regarding teaching practice.
- Develop strategies for dealing with difficult situations supported by a professional repertoire of practice.

Action area 4: Enhance teachers' professional competence by developing a school culture for action, reflection, and sharing of competence (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Marzano & Heflebower, 2016).

- Establish model pathways/guidelines for teachers' career advancement and link to opportunities for professional development.
- Encourage teachers to take on new responsibilities and leadership roles linked to their career advancement pathway.
- Supervise individual teachers to develop their own pathways for career advancement and facilitate its achievement through regular review and provision of necessary opportunities.

Action area 5: Provide clear opportunities and strategies for career development and advancement.

- Establish model pathways/guidelines for teachers' career advancement and link to opportunities for professional development.
- Encourage teachers to take on new responsibilities and leadership roles linked to their career advancement pathway (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017).
- Supervise individual teachers to develop their own pathways for career advancement and facilitate its achievement through regular review and provision of necessary opportunities.

Action area 6: Establish systems for training and qualification of professional mentors and peer-to-peer guides.

- Identify if training of mentors will be through an individual school-based program or a common mentor education program (e.g., led by a Teacher Education Institution or professional training organization).
- Establish accredited training programs for mentors and peer-to-peer guides.
- Support experience-based reflection and learning for continued enhancement of mentors and guides.

<u>Dimension 2: Support for the transition from teacher education to the teaching profession.</u>

Action Area 1: Implement sustainable mentorship programs.

- Implement an induction phase where mentoring is prioritized in a systematic way during the first years of teaching, based on:
    - A co-designed plan between the mentor and the newly qualified teacher.
    - The encouragement of building personal skills and competence.
    - The promotion of new skills and competence.
    - A trustful relationship between the mentor and the mentee.

Action Area 2: Design personalized mentoring plans for the mentees.

- Assess the mentees' current competences. This can be done with reference to the self-assessment tool provided by the RESPOND Teacher Professional Profile/Electronic Portfolio.
- Identify the mentees' needs for professional development.
- Set development targets for mentees according to the schools' eco-systems.
- Facilitate a continuous meta-reflection on the process and outcome.

Action Area 3: Enhance social and academic membership and engagement in the learning community and strengthen cooperation between school and teacher education.

- Include and recognize the newly qualified teachers as important resources and contributors in the professional community.
- Establish forums for reflexive dialogue where newly qualified teachers can share their knowledge on issues such as new teaching methodologies, the use of technology in education, interdisciplinary perspectives, and action-based research-initiatives to strengthen the quality of teachers' own teaching.

Action Area 4: Establish and distribute in-depth knowledge about school culture, the teaching profession, and transitions from teacher education to professional practice.

- Create spaces for reflecting on connections between qualification in teacher education and further professional development in professional practice.
- Facilitate opportunities for collaboration and joint planning between newly qualified teachers and more experienced colleagues.

Action Area 5: Cultivate professional flexibility and resilience.

- Motivate newly qualified teachers to further develop and stay in the profession (Tiplic, Brandmo & Elstad, 2015).
- Provide and initiate programs where newly qualified teachers can further develop their competence.
- Reduce the experience of isolation by newly qualified teachers and increase their self-confidence and self-esteem.

<u>Dimension 3: Sustained support for teacher professional development.</u>

Action Area 1: Develop sustainable mechanisms for peer-to-peer support and ongoing learning opportunities for teachers.

- Equip the teachers with tools and methods for different forms of peer-to-peer-support, including:
  - Observation of others, being observed, and mentoring each other – structure the school day to give teachers time for activities.
  - Joint problem solving: a problem for one teacher, is a problem for the whole school.
- Facilitate opportunities for the staff to meet and work with common issues regularly and encourage interdisciplinary collaboration (Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).
- Reduce the teacher`s isolation through peer-coaching.
- Stimulate teacher collaboration to internalize new practices.

Action Area 2: Stimulate active and engaged participation in school leadership (Dunn & Hattie, 2021).

- Communicate clear expectations for individual and collective professional development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).
- Prepare individual development plans for all teachers which follow the overarching school goals and have clear expectations for further advancement.

- Show interest and motivate teachers to focus on development, by:
    - Having an overview of all development projects and follow-up on the progress and results.
    - Creating a shared vision of the school goals and operationalize these visions to create ownership among the staff.
    - Being open to pilot and experience new learning innovations.
- Lead by example, by (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012):
    - Providing personal follow-up, showing concern and being responsive.
    - Encouraging openness to feedback and willingness to learn from mistakes.
    - Investing in personal growth, new knowledge, and self-development.

Action Area 3: Create genuine practices for teacher collaboration and unity (Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).

- Develop a school culture where the staff trust each other, discuss challenges and successes, share experiences, observe, and reflect over each other`s practices, including (Donohoo, 2016; Donohoo, 2018; Dunn & Hattie, 2021).
    - Planning and problem-solving as a collaborative activity.
    - Regular meetings to discuss student work, plan lessons and discuss research.
    - Teachers take advantage of each other's knowledge and skills to create a coherent culture where the collective capabilities of the whole teaching staff are greater than the individuals (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).
- Appreciate and value all staff for their unique experience, competence, and opinions by allowing all voices to be heard and supporting the work of each individual.
- Use reflective dialogues to develop and enhance teachers' meta-view on their own and collective practices.
- Support teachers in establishing good routines and structures for their own work, set limits for their roles and responsibilities, and develop teachers' resilience and adaptability to stay in the profession over time (Tiplic, Brandmo & Elstad, 2015).

Action Area 4: Encourage critical reflection and create systems for teacher feedback and appraisal (Dunn & Hattie, 2021).

- Dare to be critical of one's own and peers' practices – be able to reflect and understand this as an opportunity for continuing development.
- Understand teaching as a learning profession – all teachers should develop their skills and knowledge throughout their whole career.
- Share reflections regarding students' results from mapping surveys, standardized tests, and classroom observations as a basis for further planning and teaching and assess if current practices are achieving the desired outcomes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).
- View feedback as a tool for teachers' improvement, not as an assessment to locate the weakest.
- Recognize professional learning as a part of the day-to-day practice.

Action Area 5: Develop awareness and understanding of current research and evidence on effective teaching practice (Dunn & Hattie, 2021; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2023; Kvernbekk, 2016)..

- Organize time and space for teachers to explore research literature by:
    - Making current research available (and makes it mandatory reading) as a foundation for staff meetings.
    - Reducing hours earmarked to teaching and giving more time to professional development (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017; Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).
- Ensure access to research literature through:
    - Demonstrating how to search for relevant research literature.
    - Making printed copies of research available.
- Create a culture of talking about research findings.
- Provide time and space for critical reflections by teachers to identify their schools` challenges and assess how current research could support their specific situations, including (Dunn & Hattie, 2021):
    - Creating an understanding that effective teaching requires regular development and improvement, that experience alone is only part of that development, and that opportunities for professional development should be valued.
    - Providing opportunities for critical discussions about relevant research and what can be an inspiration for the teachers' further development and their practices.

Action Area 6: Expect and encourage teachers to continuously build bridges between theory and practice throughout their careers (Dunn & Hattie, 2021; Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).

- Support teachers to conduct practice-based research about student and teacher learning, testing new work methods and measuring the effect of innovative practices, by supporting (Darling-Hammond et al, 2017):
    - Lesson study (Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).
    - Action research.
    - Publication of practice-based research work for other teachers and researchers to use.
    - Provision of necessary resources for teachers to conduct practice-based and design-based research.
- Apply current research and experience as a basis for constantly developing teaching practice and promote an openness towards testing new solutions, which can be strengthened by:
    - Instructional experimentation.
    - Trust and help seeking.
- Share and celebrate teachers' experiences with the rest of the teaching staff – both positive and negative.

Dimension 4: Developing the school culture for professional development.

Action Area 1: Promote collective ownership of the school's mission, values, and goals (Dunn & Hattie, 2021).

- Conduct a shared assessment and evaluation on the current status of the school -- which responds to the key questions: Where are we now? & Where do we want to go?
- Provide opportunities for cooperative dialogue and deliberation on the schools' mission, values, and goals.
- Encourage active participation in identifying forward looking improvements and/or targets for the school's development and in developing strategies to achieve them.
- Promote the responsibility of teachers (both individually and collectively) for the achievement of these targets and goals.
- Build strong collaboration with parents and guardians around the development of a holistic learning community.
- Strengthen and embed the school's role in wider society by establishing a strong network with external stakeholders and local actors.
- Establish processes for regular review and renewal of the school's vision and/or mission.

Action Area 2: Enhance a culture of continuous improvements.

- Pilot and test new approaches and alternative practices on a regular basis and evaluate outcomes in relation to professional contexts.
- Incentivize and reward innovative teaching practice.
- Promote creative approaches and recognize that valuable learning comes from both what worked well and what did not work.
- Provide opportunities for critical reflection and discussion on current teaching practices, habits and presumptions.
- Utilize research-based evidence to inform and enhance continuous improvements.

Action Area 3: Create a structure and process for sustained professional learning and development at an organizational level (Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).

- Support processes for knowledge acquisition, sharing and utilization.
- Coordinate and routinely arrange opportunities for exchange, sharing and collaboration among staff and students.
- Provide defined and differentiated roles and_responsibilities for school staff to implement and achieve collective initiatives.
- Ensure time is given to staff to work collectively as a professional learning community.
- Facilitate opportunities for school-based professional development.
- Promote competence development between colleagues through conversations and observation of professional practice.

Action Area 4: Integrate intuitive knowledge processes into management procedures.

- Establish structures for supportive leadership that facilitate organizational learning and development (Marzano & Hefleblower, 2016).

- Enhance opportunities for decentralized leadership and stronger engagement.
- Embed organizational learning within daily processes in order to acquire, share and utilize knowledge within and across the school.
- Integrate a systematic structure for review, reporting and feedback that supports collective knowledge generation.

Action Area 5: Implement mentorship and peer-to-peer programmes in school development plans and strategies.

- This implementation follows the guidelines provided for Dimension 2 and Dimension 3 respectively.

5. Conclusions

As with all the RESPOND project products, the principal aim of the mentor support and peer-to-peer support guidelines is to build a framework for developing action areas and specific actions to promote contexts and conditions that facilitate the interdependence between professional development and school development and the sustainability of both. The tool provided by the guidelines aims to create a homogeneous scaffolding for teacher professional and school development and the avoidance of sectoral approaches which risk fragmentary and unsustainable outcomes. The four dimensions focussed on are key features of any teacher's professional profile and resonate with international priorities for teacher professional and school development.

The intended impact of the mentor support and peer-to-peer support guidelines is at the level of ongoing professional learning for all teachers, curriculum renewal and delivery to promote global learning and competence, and that of planning for overall school improvement. The levels of participation and dissemination foreseen mean that this product is a key part of the overall RESPOND project and can enable it to impact in terms of intersecting local, regional, national, and international levels by fostering a collegial professional culture throughout all the organisations that play a role in educational systems.

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"LEARN PROJECT: MOTHER TONGUE AND THE OTHER LANGUAGES". MENTORING AND PEER TUTORING EXPERIENCES TO BUILD INTERCULTURAL AND INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Rossella CERTINI[58]

Abstract: *Plurilingualism represents one of the main categories for interpreting post-modern society: due to the growing presence of multiple languages in family and school contexts; moreover, behind the linguistic aspect there are cultures to discover, interpret and better understand. The pedagogical, in the intercultural sense, becomes central to enhancing the diversity of the human, and to making a dialogue alive, which overcomes prejudices and false beliefs. The LEARN pilot project – Mother tongue and other languages – is trying to promote an opportunity for knowledge and comparison between cultures, safeguarding and promoting personal uniqueness, towards a planetary citizenship perspective. The University of Florence was responsible for training Arabic language teachers who worked in schools promoting the alphabet, writing, and spoken language. UNIFI's scientific role was to monitor and supervise all activities, making real tutoring path.*

Key words: *LEARN project; Interculture; Educational Care; Tutoring, Arabic language and culture*

1. Postmodernity as a "planetary" place

For scholars and researchers addressing the topic of multilingualism opens an important window on the integral education of the Person, on multilingual identity and on the beneficial effects that this brings to the psychological, social, and emotional life of the subject (Anolli, 2006). This is a complex path (and complexity is one of the contemporary paradigms that characterizes our postmodern time) and this needs to be studied and well understood, in order to develop the right accompanying strategies and the most appropriate methodologies. The well-being of the person also passes through the recognition and practice of the "mother tongue" and the integration of other languages, which produces a new self-image within an evolving personal history (Augé, 2017).

Knowing and practicing multiple languages is an exercise and a widespread practice today, even if history teaches us (and not just linguistic history) that everyone has more than one linguistic code that they use regularly, for example local and national dialects.

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There are also other implications related to plurilingualism, which do not strictly concern the sphere of glottolinguistics and spoken language: these are linked to the multicultural and educational dimension of our society (Aime,2020).

Within our local communities, family, and peer groups, in schools of all levels, our many diversities intertwine daily. A widespread plurality that characterizes the actions and experiences that each of us carries out every day (Ainscow & César, 2006), Every day we develop new needs for knowledge about the life contexts of others and regards the conception of different values. This could help us in the ability to perceive our own centrality only as a personal perspective (the deconstruction of ethnocentrism).

The identification of the 8 European key competences by the European Union moves in this direction: construction of a richer, more critical, and open identity that promotes the principles of global and planetary citizenship. It is a long journey, which began in 2006 and was profoundly innovated in 2018. A complex process which saw Parliament and the European Commission working in synergy. European key competences represent knowledge, skills, and attitudes appropriate to the context and plurilingualism as well as cultural plurality are the most advanced frontier of our contemporary society.

In every disciplinary field: political, social, technological, economic, educational, and so on. Bateson and Morin had already spoken of the need for a closer dialogue between knowledge and disciplines because knowledge is the result of interaction between the many sciences. We also find this in the social dimension of life and openness and knowledge of languages and cultures other than one's own is certainly an enrichment and a necessity. The LEARN project has developed in this direction and has involved various national and international institutions. The University of Florence, the department of Science of Education – FORLILPSI – was responsible for training Arabic language teachers who worked in schools promoting the alphabet, writing, and spoken language (Cuciniello & Pasta, 2020), UNIFI's scientific role was to monitor and supervise all activities, making real tutoring path.

2. Recognizing cultural uniqueness: the structure of the LEARN project

Intercultural education is a complex issue. It is confronted with a difficult and contradictory reality such as that of immigration. There are still many prejudices in our society on this topic and the policies inspired by hospitality are not enough to build a truly intercultural community; it is necessary to practice and build inclusive actions (Habermas & Taylor, 2008).

The LEARN project – The mother tongue and other languages – was born from the desire to accompany students to experience multiculturalism, with an intercultural perspective in a truly and consciously welcoming and inclusive school. This perspective safeguards the uniqueness of each person and makes the school experience of each student significant, also considering their cultural background of which the mother tongue is part. It is also an opportunity for all students in the class to learn about and compare different cultures, regardless of their cultural background.

The objectives of the project are:

- To become aware of one's own and other people's identities (personal and cultural) and recognize ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity;

- Open new horizons and arouse interest in other cultures, particularly the Arab one, and support understanding and respect for diversity;
- Offer students the opportunity to approach and learn about the Arabic language and culture and experience linguistic plurality;
- Aiming at the value of inclusion and solidarity through moments of sharing and exchanging experiences and raising awareness of the values of peaceful coexistence;
- The deconstruction of one's own ethnocentrism as a prevention of radical positions;
- Move away from monocentric view towards pluricentrism;
- Global educational approach (Global Education).

The project is carried out for primary school students, specifically the fourth and fifth grades, regardless of the presence of students of Arab origin. For some students it represents an opportunity to learn and consolidate their mother tongue and for others it represents an opportunity for openness and exchange and to get closer to one of the most widespread languages in the world. This multicultural education path should not only concern schools because our entire society is involved in this game of linguistic and cultural exchanges. Therefore, many places of social life should take action to create inclusive actions and policies that involve all citizens, from childhood to adulthood.

However, it is worrying to observe that, more than twenty years after the start of the new strong migratory flow towards the European coasts, intercultural pedagogical research, based on mutual knowledge, exchange, meeting and dialogue is practiced almost exclusively at school. It is true that every life is lived as a story, personal and private, but to acquire value and substance it needs the other who listens and, in turn, builds other stories and tales. The relationship between men passes through the verbal and written exchange of information and this gives life to an environment rich in many "diversities" which are at the origin of inclusive education (Augé, 2017). LEARN is trying to chart a lively path in this direction and classroom teaching has been designed to have a real impact outside of school too. This is to create an important connection between all aspects of man's social life. To return to the structure of the project, this involves weekly laboratory meetings to be held regularly throughout the school year. The time will be agreed with the classes based on their lesson timetable. The meetings can be activated in individual classes and one of the truly important aspects of LEARN is the official recognition of it by the schools involved, who have included it in their POF (Piano dell'Offerta Formativa - Educational Plan). The most useful methodology for building the project was laboratory-based, to encourage young students to work actively during the proposed experiences, to independently build an inclusive and peaceful context, respecting each other's cultures.

The great intellectuals of contemporary pedagogy, starting with John Dewey, underlined the importance of experience as a fundamental tool for building all our knowledge. In the essay Experience and Education, from 1938, (Dewey, 1938) the American philosopher argued that everything relating to education comes through experience. This means that anyone involved in educating, training, and teaching should assume the concept of EXPERIENCE as the central element of every action to be carried out. Consequently, the project's scientific team was guided by this pedagogical imperative: to offer young students' quality and valuable educational experiences, to better understand cultural plurality and to experience the complexity of our time with greater competence (Kohut & Certini, 2022).

3. Actors of LEARN project

LEARN was organized by the University of Florence, FORLILPSI department, together with the Good World Citizen association of Florence. The project was supported by the USR Toscana of Florence (Regional School Office, detachment of the Ministry of Education) and by the QFI association based in New York and Washington. The project involved three comprehensive schools of the Metropolitan City of Florence: ITC “Le Cure”, ITC “Puccini”, plexus “Villani”, ITC 3 di Sesto Fiorentino, plexus Balducci. There were 7 classes involved, with students aged 9 and 10. The classes involved are all multilingual because multiculturalism is a natural condition of every society, and it is the knowledge of this phenomenon that can help us improve living environments and build processes of inclusion and peace.

Below is the cultural richness of two classes of the ITC "Le Cure" involved in the project:

a. 42 students: 21 in each class;

b. Ethnic groups present:

- Bangladesh;
- Romania;
- Kosovo;
- Peru;
- Philippines;
- Morocco;
- Albania;
- Sri Lanka;
- Children with bilingual families: Italian-Moroccan e Italian-Irish;
- Italian-Bulgarian.

c. There are also students with special needs and with special supporting law (L. 104).

All teaching activities were carried out by 6 native Arabic speaking teachers and their pedagogical and didactic training was carried out by teachers from the University of Florence. For one hour a week the young students learned the Arabic alphabet, writing, the different spatial arrangement of work tools, pronunciation and reading of sentences, and, finally, many aspects typical of the culture of Arabic-speaking countries (for example Egypt or Morocco). The results were better than our expectations but what we are interested in highlighting is the process that truly put the principles of intercultural pedagogy into practice. The project focused on some key principles of the 2030 agenda to help children understand the Sustainable Development Goals and the impact they have on their lives and the daily actions that can be taken to achieve “quality education” and “reduce inequality”. The Sustainable Development Goals are important, world-changing goals that require cooperation among governments, international organizations, world leaders. The Sustainable Development Goals are major, world-changing goals that require cooperation between governments, international organizations, and world leaders. Above all, these need a strong educational system capable of building increasingly inclusive and culturally multifaceted spaces. For these reasons, the training course for Arabic-speaking teachers had three epistemological focuses: 1) relationships and communication in the classroom, 2) intercultural pedagogy, 3) teaching methodologies. The action of

the UNIFI teachers was above all a tutoring action because the mother tongue teachers obviously had strong disciplinary preparation, and the acquisition of pedagogical/didactic information enriched their teaching skills. After an initial brainstorming, the activities shared for their preparation were mainly the following: 1) Lesson; 2) Demonstration; 3) Tutorial approach; 4) Discussion; 5) Case study; 6) Group learning; 7) Problem solving; 8) Simulation; 9) Role playing; 10) Design. As researchers we refer to the classics of contemporary pedagogy and thinking once again about the American philosopher John Dewey, what makes the difference for the learning and education processes is the "quality of the experience" (Dewey, 1938). The central problem of experiential education is to choose the type of current experiences that young people and adults live fruitfully and creatively, and to renew them in the experiences that will come. Continuity and creativity are needed, and above all they must be "useful" experiences both for the contents and for the emotional and cognitive dimension of the subject. "But community life is not organized lastingly in a merely spontaneous way. It requires thought and precise planning. The educator must, on his responsibility, know both the individuals and the subject of study, knowledge that allows him to derive the activities that lend themselves to social organization, to an organization to which everyone can bring his contribution and in which activities, in which everyone participates, are the main means of control." (Dewey, 1938, p. 44).

Dewey's words represent well the work we have done with the Arabic language teachers: we have tried to develop quality and valuable experiences together that we can then offer to the younger ones. We have activated real tutoring paths and not "traditional lessons" because it is the support and accompaniment towards knowledge that can give life to an operational, useful, and inclusive model within society. To define a valuable experience, Dewey indicates three principles:

A. Continuity: one quality experience promotes subsequent ones;
B. Growth: transformation;
C. Interaction: it promotes relational situations between people.

The teacher's responsibility at school is therefore to create learning situations that respect the principles of continuity and growth, connecting past, present and future. LEARN has tried to develop these characteristics, obtaining very good results. The young students learned the use of inverse spatiality, the alphabet, writing and oral language, managing to master the basic elements.

Most importantly, the Arab-mother tongue teachers together with the Italian Team have built a space of true plurilingual sharing, where everyone was able to experience their own linguistic and cultural identity. The role of “tutoring” has been central to developing good inclusive practices: because it is a non-coercive activity; because it has no opposing aims with respect to the objectives to be achieved; because it is a practice of “educational care” that can be activated at any moment of our professional and non-professional experience.

4. Mentoring and Tutoring: observe educational change

Mentoring and tutoring are two complex terms and refer to a wide range of activities and tools that can be used to support students, but also adults, in learning specific skills.

Mentoring is an action that lasts over time and its objective is the holistic development of the person. It is a deeply shared relationship, and it is usually the student, the young person, who

chooses his or her mentor (Dennison, 2000) Tutoring, on the other hand, has short-term objectives and often concern the learning of techniques and knowledge (Dennison, 2000). For LEARN project, the tutoring action involved above all the university staff and the Arabic language teachers. It is an intentional, systematic, and interactive activity that was carried out by the whole group with one Unifi teacher at a time Tutoring methods and techniques are designed according to the principle of interactivity that adequately supports the Arab teaching team and makes best use of resources. The interactive relationship between teachers has developed mainly along three lines: guidance and consultancy; monitoring during the year of the phases of classroom teaching and the results obtained along the way; observation of the dynamics between the class group and the Arab teachers. All these activities were carried out in presence and the technological aids were used in class (interactive multimedia whiteboard – in Italian LIM) to help the young students understand literacy and language. The monitoring activities of the work carried out by the Arab teachers by the tutors have the aim of periodically verifying the overall progress of the learning stages, the acquisition of intercultural skills and linguistic knowledge. This is to allow any adjustments to be activated during the development of the project. The university tutors had teaching simulations carried out during the year, so that the teachers could carry out more competent and more interesting work for the students at school (Certini, 2022).

All members of the educational team perceived the importance of tutoring, and we can highlight some points on the qualitative dimension, in particular:

1) Tutoring as "responsibility": the Arabic language teachers felt a strong "responsibility" for what their work in the classroom would be. The pedagogical accompaniment (tutoring) evolved during the project because the pedagogical team responded to the questions and problematic issues proposed by the teachers. They felt the importance of their presence in the classroom and the tutoring was fundamental to implement their skills (especially relational and communicative).
2) Peer Tutoring activities. Peer tutoring can be considered an educational strategy aimed at activating an "informal" transfer of knowledge, experiences, and emotions from some members of a group to other members of equal status. The relationship between professors and teachers was on an equal footing, with greater attention on the part of the university tutors to the educational and pedagogical principles to be shared.
3) Tutoring as "cooperation": teachers observed that through collaborative activities, sharing, and working in small groups, students were more active and gained greater confidence. The tutoring activities, therefore, were of a dual nature: between teachers and university tutors, and between students at school (Peer Tutoring).

There would be many reflections on tutoring activities and in this context, we would like to underline that the success of the project is certainly due to the methodologies used in the classroom (Cooperative Learning, Peer Education, Problem Solving, Laboratory Teaching, Spaced Learning) and to the values and objectives we wanted to achieve. First, the construction of an inclusive environment, where one can freely practice multilingualism and one's own culture of identity.

Cultural complexity is a natural condition today and only by practicing this complexity can we create educational processes built on dialogue and diversity. Ernesto Balducci's planetarium man can perceive his own space as a space for everyone, and the world should not be a place of divisions but

of shared experiences. Morin reminds us that "planetization now means community of destiny for all humanity. Nations consolidated the consciousness of their communities of destiny with the incessant threat of the external enemy. Now, the enemy of humanity is not external. It is hidden in the consciousness of the community of destiny needs not only common dangers, but also a common identity which cannot be the only abstract human identity, already recognized by all, ineffective in uniting us; it is the identity that comes from a paternal and maternal entity, concretized by the term homeland, and which brings millions of citizens who are not at all related by blood into brotherhood. This is what is missing, in some way, for a human community to be achieved: the awareness that we are children and citizens of the Earth-Homeland. We are still unable to recognize it as the common home of humanity." (Morin, 1993, p. 53). With the LEARN project we began to put into practice the concrete principles of an intercultural pedagogy aimed at building places of understanding and peace.

5. Conclusion

This project was born with the interest of wanting to offer a different possibility of learning a new non-traditional language, trying to go beyond the cultural prejudices that are now part of common sense. What has been written so far allows us to understand how behind learning a language there is something deeper, first of all "living inside" another culture. It would be reductive to think that the experiences completed by the students are sufficient to fully understand the complexity of a language and its culture and it would not be correct to think that the hours dedicated to the project were sufficient to understand the entire structure of the learning process. Although these aspects are of great importance for understanding the work carried out in the 7 months of school (from December 2022 to June 2023), we have seen how important it was to integrate the educational objectives of the project with the teaching and tutoring methodologies. In fact, tutoring actions represent a particular way of "being in the situation" and of understanding the phenomenology of the experience. This allows us to intercept the many changes in the situation and activities to be carried out, which are also linked to the age of the students. The original element is the importance of tutoring as a tool for accompanying and interpreting problems in a formal learning context: school. Today's school actions are often considered ineffective, not well oriented, disaggregated and qualitatively weak. If we tried to replace traditional teaching with tutoring or experimenting with new activities that are closer to children's interests (for example games), perhaps the school could partly obtain important new results. In other words, it is about recognizing the importance of creativity for the construction of educational strategies that aid learning processes. All this also has value for the teachers, who have taken advantage of this methodology to better structure their knowledge and skills.

This exercise of "shared work" and "peer tutoring" allowed us to enhance their interests, passions, curiosities, their perspective on social complexity and their naturalness in practicing a culture truly different from their own, a topic that it still causes a lot of discussion today. The students were eager to take ownership of this new language and say, "I know how to speak Arabic", a difficult but fascinating language, which allowed them to interact outside of school. This was the real educational success: having built together an intentional and useful communication tool; a model of behavior

that has given positive results not only inside school, but also outside. A transferable behavioral model.

The complexity that characterizes our postmodern society allows us to reflect on the importance of education. The educational challenge is to educate young people who are aware, responsible, equipped with critical thinking that allows them to read and interpret this complexity. All aspects that need to be developed and cultivated through educational support (tutoring) that can guide children towards the search for meaning in their existence. Accompanying young students on their path of growth and knowledge is not simple because it requires the ability to get involved, to show availability and to change perspective. This means paying close attention to their needs, knowing how to listen and dialogue with them. For educators and teachers, offering quality and valuable experiences means first of all being on the side of the children, knowing the situation in which we live well and proposing the most suitable activities for the circumstances. It is through educational action and methodologies such as tutoring that we can animate the "search for meaning" of our existence – in a theoretical and pedagogical sense – by offering new training experiences, capable of broadening the interest of young students towards the reality that surrounds them. LEARN was a project that opened up many of these new perspectives.

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