

The impact of pedagogical practice mentoring on the professionalization for the teaching career

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Abstract

In order to perform in the 21st century society, future teachers have to be prepared to face the challenges of today's society in constant change. In order to support a good preparation for a future teaching career, the emphasis placed on the initial training of future teachers is very important. In the training process of the future teachers, the mentor has a decisive role, through the model offered. The paper aim is to identify the opinions of the mentor teachers for the initial training on the role that the mentoring of pedagogical practice has in the professionalization for the teaching career. The methodology consisted of the rigorous analysis of the literature and the empirical research, the questionnaire survey, the main conclusions drawn from the study referring to the necessity to form a body of mentors of pedagogical practice based on national standards, for articulation of interventions in the initial training of future teachers for a success teaching carrier.

Keywords: mentoring, pedagogical practice, teaching career

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1. Introduction

In the last two decades there have been many studies and researches that have focused on the reorganization, improvement and implementation of educational policies related to the initial and continuous training of the teaching staff to promote a quality educational act. Professor John Hattie stated in his book "Visible Learning", regarding to the factors that contribute most to the learning process, that the role assumed by teachers and the quality of teaching are first and foremost (Hattie, 2014). To paraphrase, the quality of an educational system will never be higher than that of the classroom teachers. Starting from these assumptions, but also from the fact that teachers need to be in a continuous learning process to meet the challenges of the 21st century, there is a need for a certain type of teacher with a framework profile, interested and open to a permanent professional and personal development, focused on the improvement of professional and personal skills, put at the service of the development of children, students and other beneficiaries of the educational act.

2. Initial and continuous training of teaching staff - international and national guidelines

Member States of the European Union have established a set of EU Common Principles for Teacher Training and Qualification, developed by the European Commission in 2005:

- appropriate professional training;
- placing the profession in the context of lifelong education;
- professional mobility;
- partnership based profession.

2.1. International context of the teacher initial training

The initial training of the teachers is organized on two dimensions, one fundamental-theoretical, which refers to the disciplines of fundamental training and the other, practical-application that aims to complete some training disciplines in the field of the license, necessary for teaching including practice in the classroom. Currently, in the teachers training, can be found the simultaneous

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training model, according to which the theoretical component can be offered, at the same time with the practical / professional component and the consecutive model, according to which the two dimensions of the training go one after the other. In the simultaneous model, the students are involved in the specific professional training for the teachers from the beginning of the program, while, in the consecutive model, this happens later or near the end of the university program. In almost all European countries, teachers at the level of pre-primary and primary education are trained by the simultaneous model. It should be noted that France and Portugal (since 2011) are the only exceptions, where only the consecutive model is in force, and in Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland), both simultaneous and consecutive models are available.

2.2. Romanian context of the teacher`s initial training

From 2007 until now, Romania has adopted and respected the legislation that promotes the common European principles, so that, the training of the teachers is carried out through studies at the bachelor's and master's level, standards have been devised for the professionalization of the teaching career. The planning of the theoretical and practical requirements are based on the idea that teachers training is a priority of the educational system. The "Pedagogical lexicon" introduces the phrase the initial formation, seen as "theoretical and practical preparation for the didactic profession, which takes place during the pre-university and / or university studies" (Ștefan, 2006).

The initial training of teachers for primary and pre-school education is carried out within a bachelor's degree program - Pedagogy of primary and pre-school education, managed by the Department of Education Sciences within the faculties of profile. On the other hand, the didactic training of the teachers who will be assigned to the departments of the secondary, high school, post-secondary and higher education is carried out by the Departments for the Training of the Teaching Staff within the universities, by carrying out psycho-pedagogical study programs organized on 2 levels:

- level I of the Program of psycho-pedagogical studies realized simultaneously with the degree cycle;

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- level II of the Program of psycho-pedagogical studies realized simultaneously with a specialized masters.
- It should be noted that for the graduates the program of psycho-pedagogical studies can be carried out in a post-university regime, combined for a period of one year, for both Level I and Level II.

Both teacher preparation programs reflect the simultaneous theoretical and practical training model of future teachers.

In the process of training of the future teachers, a mentor has a decisive role, through the model offered by these practicing students, if we refer to the initial training or the beginners, if we refer to the continuous training. At the level of the national legislation, mentoring is introduced by the Law of National Education in 2011.

3. Mentor and mentoring

From the etymological point of view, the word mentor comes from the ancient Greek from the name of Mentor, the son of Hercules, a famous figure from Homer's *Odyssey*. Mentor was the friend of Ulysses, to whom the Greek hero had cared for his son Telemac, but also the fortune of Ithaca, during the time he had gone to war. From here, we deduce the instructive history of the term: the mentor must be wise, be a friend, be a catalyst and a good partner. In universal history we also identify a multitude of mentoring relationships, which have become famous for their efficiency, Socrates and Plato, Hyden and Beethoven, Freud and Jung. The word mentor often induces the mental image of a wise individual, who gives advice to a novice. A mentor "is simply a person who helps another person to learn something that in other conditions would not have learned slower, slower or would not have learned at all, the mentors are not authoritative figures" (Bell, 2010).

In the field of education the mentor through his activity is the one who values the aspect of the initial and continuous training of the teaching staff, "activity that highlights the establishment of a relationship between an expert and a novice / beginner / beginner. The former, the mentor, first offers himself as a training resource. He becomes a professional model, worthy to follow, which creates conditions of professional learning integrated in the appropriate

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context "(Păun & Ezechil, 2013). According to the ISCO 08 Compatible Code Nomenclature (COR), the mentor is the specialized teacher of a school or high school who has the responsibility to lead and coordinate the pedagogical practice of the students / students, through which they apply the acquired knowledge and methodological knowledge and learn to teach:

- the mentor organizes demonstration lessons and teaching hours for the practicing students, framing their pedagogical practice in the concrete system of the educational process and at the same time offering them the opportunity to learn the most varied teaching techniques, methods and procedures. It has the role of helping the practicing students to analyze objectively the process of teaching themselves or other people and must set realistic goals for the students' teaching activity, which will lead to its qualitative improvement;
- the mentor offers practicing students a fast and efficient feedback for their professional development;
- the mentor has the responsibility to draw up the evaluation sheets and to give a note for the teaching activity of the practicing students;
- the mentor attracts the students practicing also in the activities outside the classroom (holidays or school performances, pedagogical circles, meetings and consultations with parents);
- the mentor has the responsibility to collaborate with the faculty Methodist, the latter providing complementary support;
- at the same time, the mentor helps and collaborates with the other mentoring teachers in the department, in the activity that they carry out with the practicing students.

Therefore, the mentor is the person who possesses a set of professional, relational and aptitude skills, on the basis of which he builds a relationship that will ensure the achievement of the professional and personal development goals of a person who is in the initial phase of training or beginning of professional career. The relationship established between the mentor and the practicing student must be based on practical assistance and guidance, counseling and support, guidance for development and focus on solutions.

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As a concept, mentoring has its roots in the United States of America, the phenomenon initially characterizing the economic and industrial sphere of the first half of the twentieth century. With the successes achieved, the method has also been adopted in the field of business, management and education. "Mentoring is a relationship of sustaining learning between an interested individual who shares his knowledge, experience and wisdom with another individual who is ready, willing and able to benefit from this exchange to enrich their professional journey" (Faure, 2000). Mentoring is "a significant contribution from one person to another to help the transition of one of them in terms of knowledge, professional experience and thinking" (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2004).

3.1. Mentoring models and types

The mentoring activity goes beyond the transmission of the professional experience of the mentor accumulated over time, assuming the identification of common points, of the dimensions that will ensure the success of the novice in the professional career. In such a relationship, it is very important for the people involved to be aware of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the two entities involved in this process. Throughout its evolution, mentoring, according to the specialized literature but also to the research in the field, has taken many forms. A reference delimitation in the field of mentoring is that achieved by the expert Cindy Buell, concentrating all aspects of mentoring in 4 models, as shown in Fig.1.

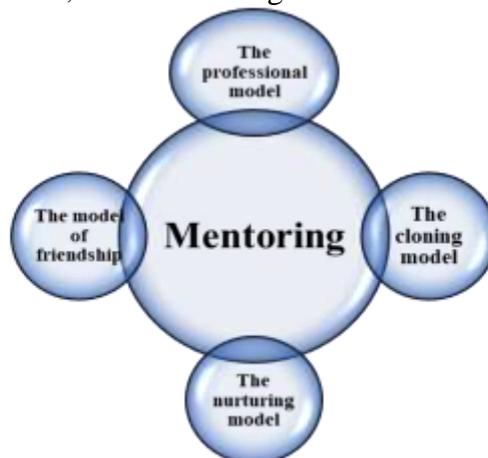


Figure 1 Models of mentoring

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Source: adapted from Buell, 2004

According to Buell's (2004) statements, there are four models of mentoring: the cloning model, in which the mentor has control and tries to create a faithful copy of it, the nurturing model, in which the mentor positions himself as a parent, ensuring a protected and open environment, where the disciple learns, but where he can also take the initiative and discover himself, the model of friendship, in which the relationship is established from peer to peer, without a hierarchy, emphasizes the creation of an interpersonal connection that promotes encouragement and the professional model, in which the personal or social component is excluded as much as possible and the focus of the relationship is on the professional component.

The legislation in the educational field in Romania regulates at the pre-university level the following types of mentoring activities:

- mentoring for the professional insertion of the beginner teachers, exercised by mentor teachers, members of the body of the mentor teachers;
- mentoring for the practical training within the didactic masters / for the pedagogical practice of the students from the pedagogical high schools that are realized by the teachers appointed at the level of the school unit for this type of mentoring;
- mentoring for continuous training carried out at the level of the educational unit;
- mentoring for professional development carried out in the Houses of the teaching staff;
- mentoring for the development of educational programs for children and young people capable of high performance.

3.2. Mentoring of pedagogical practice / for initial training

Mentor of pedagogical practice - professional category, usually designated in the normative acts used in the education system under the name of "pedagogical practice guides". This is the teacher from the application school, under the guidance of which students or students preparing for the teaching profession, do the pedagogical practice, hold model lessons, guide the practitioners in preparing the test lessons, analyze with them these lessons, initiate them into the

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practical use. of the means of education, guides them in organizing extradidactic educational actions, helps them in the psychopedagogical characterization of the students and in the elaboration of the pedagogical project, effectively introduces them in the work of teacher (Stefan, 2006).

4. Research on mentor teachers' perception on the pedagogical practice mentoring

In order to carry out the research, the analysis of the specialized literature, of the legislative documents from the international and national space was used, questionnaire survey was applied. The purpose of the research was to identify the opinions of the mentoring teachers for the initial training on the role that the mentoring of pedagogical practice has in the professionalization for the teaching career. It was based on the premise that the mentor of pedagogical practice contributes significantly to the achievement of the specific professionalization standards for the teaching career, during the initial training period.

The questionnaire survey, was applied to 11 mentoring teachers of pedagogical practice, over 10 years teaching experience and of different ages, according to the representations in Table no. 1. The respondent mentors are full-time teachers, with didactic first degree and extensive experience in the mentoring of pedagogical practice.

Table 1. Distribution of the mentors after the category age

Level of education	Age category		
	30-40 years old	40-50 years old	over 50 years old
Pre-primary			
	5	3	3
Total	11		

Source: author

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The organization in which the mentors carry out their didactic activity, kindergarten, "Raza de soare" Târgoviște, is an application unit for the students of the National College "Constantin Cantacuzino" Târgoviște since 1970 and present. Also, the pre-primary mentors guided the pedagogical practice for the students of the particular "Cristian Ersek" College and for students of the "Faculty of Orthodox Theology and Education Sciences", the Department of Education Sciences of the Valahia University in Târgoviște. The questionnaire for identifying the perceptions of the mentoring teachers on the applied educational mentoring activities was composed of objective and subjective items and structured on 8 components related to:

- clear and precise objectives for the mentoring activities;
- communication using specialized and pedagogical language during mentoring activities;
- examples / models of didactic design suitable for each type of activity, different didactic materials offered to students;
- extracurricular activities;
- evaluation process of the practicing students;
- the legal status of the mentor teacher in Romania;
- activities that would make mentoring more efficient.
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4.1. Results and discussions

The information were collected through the application of the questionnaire and to the informal discussion with mentors. The analyzed and interpreted informations provide an image of the didactic conceptions and practices related to the mentoring of pedagogical practice.

The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to specify the frequency with which the mentor of pedagogical practice projects clear and precise objectives for the mentoring activities, offering himself as a professional model for the student practitioners, so as to contribute decisively to the professionalization for the educational career of the practitioner. Most of the respondents, 81.8% believe that they design clear and precise objectives for the specific activities and 63. 6% think that they must be a great example for the practicing students.

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The next aspect of the questionnaire is connected with the correct use of the specialized and pedagogical language by mentors in the communication with the students, the verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal components, with the purpose of forming effective and assertive communication skills. 72.7% of the respondents consider that they use the specialized language and the pedagogical language in the communication of the practicing students using the verbal, nonverbal and paraverbal components.

In the next section of questionnaire is established if the mentor of pedagogical practice offers to the students examples / models of didactic design suitable for each type of activity, different didactic materials, suitable with the current activities of pedagogical practice and examples of correlating the contents of the training with the general and operational objectives. To a large extent, 73.6% are of the opinion that the mentor of pedagogical practice offers to the practicing students examples of projects that correlate the contents with the objectives of the training and various didactic materials.

The mentor of pedagogical practice requires the practicing students to participate in extracurricular activities, giving them examples of applications and activities that stimulate creativity and interactivity. The answers suggest that the mentor of pedagogical practice, involves the practicing students in non-formal activities focused on stimulating creativity to a great extent, respectively 72.7%. It should be noted that based on a protocol of collaboration with the College "Constantin Cantacuzino" Târgoviște the student practitioners participated in all the educational activities carried out by the mentors of pedagogical practice in kindergarten within the National Program "To know more, to be good!".

Connected to evaluation proces, the pedagogical practice mentor critically and constructively evaluates the curricular products of the practicing students, referring to the demands imposed by the teaching profession and offers immediate feedback to the students to help them improve their teaching performance. The analysis of the answers offered allows us to affirm that 72.7% of the mentors of pedagogical practice evaluate very critically, by reference to standards, the products of the students and 81.8% offer to the students examples of applications and activities that stimulate the creativity and the critical thinking of preschoolers.

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Opinion of the mentors of pedagogical practice questioned on the recognition of the legal status of the mentor teacher in Romania. About 54.5% of the mentors of pedagogical practice questioned think that the mentor's legal status is recognized to a very small extent.

Regarding the activities that would make mentoring more efficient the mentors options are presented in figure 2 as follows, 54.5% of the mentors of pedagogical practice prefer teambuilding meetings with other mentors but also with the teaching professors at the University, and also 54.5% consider the Good practices guide in pedagogical practice mentoring an efficient way, while 27.3 % chose the master with the specialization educational mentoring and 18.2% specific training programs to the pedagogical practice mentoring.

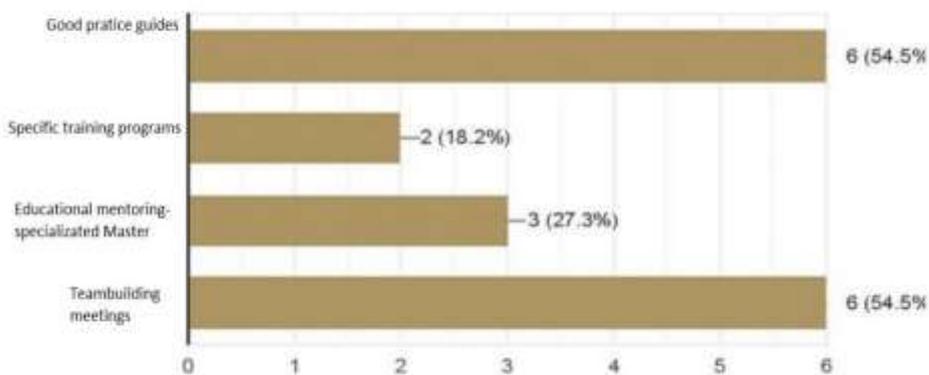


Figure 2. Mentors options on efficient mentoring activities

Sources:author

At the open item, the mentor teachers questioned had the opportunity to express proposals, opinions, dissatisfactions, which would improve the activity of the mentor of pedagogical practice in the direction of professionalization for the teaching career. A selection of them highlighted the following practical aspects, optimizing the mentoring process in pedagogical practice:

- a weak correlation between the didactic design mode taught in the university and the specific one of the didactic design in the preschool education;
- insufficient time for assistance;

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- lack of interest of the student in improving his didactic performance following the feedback offered by the mentor;
- the financial remuneration is not in line with the effort made by the mentor, hence the lack of motivation of the teachers to become mentors;
- support by the student at least once a day integrated activities according to the Methodology specific to the preschool education.

Another opportunity to collect information was facilitated by the informal discussions with the mentors of pedagogical practice were outlined and positive aspects of the mentoring relationship:

- the mentoring of pedagogical practice is an experience, the development of the appropriate personal and professional skills, a continuous improvement, a prevention of the installation of the professional routine and the avoidance of the ceiling;
- partnership with the student practitioner is seen as a challenge in the sense of professional development, because being a mentor is a valuable experience;
- the mentoring of pedagogical practice presupposes professional dynamics and permanent study, the mentor being a great resource for the practitioner, always in tune with the novelties in the didactic specialty;
- provides personal satisfaction and positive experiences when the practicing student succeeds.

Conclusions

It would be necessary to form a body of mentors of pedagogical practice based on national standards, through the course of academic programs, under the existence of standardized and generalized national evaluation systems, with explicit roles, offering coherence, continuity and consistency to the mentoring system in Romanian education. The answers given to the questionnaires, the professional dialogues confirm that the mentor of pedagogical practice represents a very important factor in achieving a high degree of professionalization in the teaching career.

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