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MENTORING AS A MEANS FOR SUPPORTING STUDENT AND BEGINNING TEACHERS' PRACTICE-BASED LEARNING

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Abstract. This study focuses on the issue of providing mentor support in teacher education. To this end, the main concepts of supervision and mentoring in terms of the apprenticeship and laboratory models of teacher education and that of instructional and psychological approaches to mentoring are analysed. Then an overview is given of mentoring work in three stages of student and beginning teachers' field practices – student teachers' teaching practice at school and the 'on-the-job' final qualifying phase and induction period – based on a survey of approaches used in different countries. Finally, the paper analyses the practice and issues of selection and preparation of mentors and draws some conclusions for defining the essence of mentor training programmes.

Keywords: teacher education, teacher development, mentoring, supervision, mentor training, student teacher, beginning teacher, teaching practice

1. Introduction

Becoming a professional teacher calls for extensive theoretical and practical studies going far beyond the provision of initial teacher education courses. Practice worldwide has shown that novice teachers experience enormous difficulties when starting their working careers at schools and many of them fail to survive the adaptation period. Some estimates suggest that almost 30 percent of beginning teachers do not teach beyond two years and 40–50 percent leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Darling-Hammond and Sclan 1996:83, Hughes 2003:1619). To the end of reducing the attrition and burnout rate during this period, educational authorities and teacher educators have taken measures to alleviate beginning teachers' adaptation to the profession by introducing extensive on-the-job field practice and induction programmes. The main purpose of these programmes is to provide assistance to student and beginning teachers for integrating their formal pedagogical knowledge with the practice of a specific school and for their adaptation to the specific atmosphere or *micro-politics*

(a term introduced by Kelchtermans & Ballet 2002) of this school. However, focusing only on the issues of supporting the practical studies of beginning teachers in their final phases of practice-based studies would turn out to be tardy, as many basic practical teaching skills should be mastered already in the early stages of teacher education (e.g. Berliner 2001, Moore 2003). Therefore, the issue of supporting beginning teachers' field-based studies should be seen as a continuum starting with the tasks of supervising student teachers' school practice and ending with mentoring during the induction period.

The following article, based on a theoretical review of teacher education research, analyses general concepts of supervision and mentoring of student and beginning teachers' school practice, specifies the function of supervision and mentoring in different phases of teacher education, compares some current mentoring programmes in practice, and discusses the issues of mentor selection and preparation.

2. General concepts of supervision and mentoring

2.1. Supervisors and mentors

The persons responsible for the guidance and support of the student and beginning teachers are referred to using differing terminology depending on the nature of support provided and the support providers' role in organising and supervising teaching practice. The name also depends on teacher education traditions in a specific country. For example, the person supervising prospective teachers during their final qualification phase may be called 'tutor', 'counsellor', 'coordinator', 'mentor', 'orientator' etc. (Eurydice 2002:79). Usually at least two support persons are involved in the organisation of student teachers' school practice: the supervising or mentoring teacher and the representative of the education institution as contact or liaison person between the university faculty and partner school. In order to emphasise differences in the nature of the support and guidance that student or beginning teachers need, the cooperating teacher supervising the pre-service teaching practice is called "supervisor" and teachers who work with teacher education interns are called "mentors" in this study. Thus, the name "mentor" points to a collegial and equal relationship with the protégé in which the mentor serves as a guide to practical knowledge and as a source of moral support (Awaya, et al. 2003) and better characterises the expected role of cooperating teachers working with interns.

2.2. Needs for mentoring as determined by different approaches to teacher education

From a broad analytical point of view student teaching experience can be conceptualised, as articulated by Dewey (1904), in two contrasting ways. One conception is that of apprenticeship, where university supervisors and cooperating

teachers assist students in gaining techniques and self-confidence that will help them survive more comfortably within an existing school situation, and without questioning the status quo. As stated by Cooper (1998), many teacher educators believe that the apprenticeship model predominates in teacher education.

The other conception is more akin to a laboratory experience, where the student teacher receives supervisory assistance in developing habits of personal inquiry and reflection about teaching and the context in which it occurs. Here, student teachers are taught and encouraged to consider a range of possibilities beyond the existing school situation. This conception could also mean the supervision of professional practice, which is aimed at integrating practical teaching issues that the student faces with theoretical concepts of pedagogy taught in theoretical courses.

Hence, the Deweyan dichotomy in the conceptualization of student teaching experience implies quite different requirements for the qualification of supervisors or mentor teachers. In the case of the apprenticeship model, a mentor should be, first of all, an experienced professional who is able to uncover the reasoning on which his or her decision-making is based, whereas when the laboratory approach is used, a mentor should be primarily a person encouraging the inquiry of practical educational problems.

However, understanding the real needs of mentoring become even more complicated if the recent conceptions of teacher education are taken into consideration. For example, building upon the analysis of Zeichner (1983) and Joyce (1975), Doyle outlined "… five major paradigms or themes for teacher education" (1990: 5–6): The teacher as a good employee, junior professor, fully functioning person, innovator, and reflective practitioner. Each teacher profile implies different requirements to the theory and practice of teacher education. Mentors who conceptualise teacher education as the training of good employees or junior professors (in both cases the pedagogical preparation is realised as a training of specific teaching skills) would adopt different versions of the apprenticeship model for supervision in its most simplified version. In contrast, mentors who see their mission as preparing fully functioning persons, innovators or reflective practitioners value the role of the inquiry-based learning in teacher education and would promote different versions of the laboratory approach for the supervision of field practice.

2.3. Instructional support versus psychological support in mentoring

The apprenticeship and inquiry models, though ideologically very different, are both aimed at providing prospective teachers with instructional as well as with psychological support. However, the importance given to these two aspects could be very different in mentoring or supervisory activities, justifying even a classification of support programmes according to the aspect on which the emphases are placed. For example, Gold discriminates in mentoring between

> "*(1) instructional-related support that includes assisting the novice with the knowledge, skills, and strategies necessary to be successful in the classroom and*

> *school; and (2) psychological support for which the purpose is to build the protégé's sense of self through confidence building, developing feelings of effectiveness, encouraging positive self-esteem, enhancing self-reliance, and learning to handle the stress that is a large part of the transition period"* (1996: 561).

A closer look at support provision for student and beginning teachers in both aspects could be helpful in drafting the possible content and structure of mentoring or supervision activities.

Instructional support. A more detailed analysis of research regarding instructional support in mentoring reveals that finding an answer to the question of what kind of help prospective teachers really need is a rather controversial issue. For instance, Veenman (1984), in an extensive review of the literature on beginning teachers' difficulties in the commencement of their teaching careers, identified the perceived needs where no assistance was given. To this end he analyzed descriptive interview and questionnaire studies of teachers during their first year of teaching. Summarizing these studies, he concluded that student teachers needed assistance in disciplining students, motivating them, dealing with the individual differences of their students, assessing students' work, relating to parents, organizing class work, and obtaining materials and supplies. Yet, Feinman-Nemser (1992) believed that these types of management and discipline problems frequently arose because teachers were unclear about their purposes, that they had chosen inappropriate tasks, or had not given students adequate direction. Of course, this conclusion is formally correct, but is it not too high an expectation, as the promoting of learning motivation and successful classroom management calls for strategic knowledge, which often is beyond the capabilities of the student or beginning teachers? They are simply not experienced enough to anticipate the long-term consequences of their instructional decisions. For example, a model of student motivation developed by Ames (1992) highlights that the promotion of a healthy learning orientation in students is determined mainly by the long-term impact of three factors: learning tasks given by a teacher, a teacher's assessment policy, and the autonomy of students as practiced for a longer period of time. Similarly, Weinstein and Mignano (1993) pointed out that most classroom management problems could be avoided if teachers used appropriate preventive strategies, based, of course, on their former teaching experiences. Yet, the main barrier to the implementation of these ideas by beginning teachers is their lack of context-specific and strategic knowledge. Therefore, novice and beginning teachers need appropriate advice and support for applying these principles along with acquiring the necessary specific skills, experience and sensitivity toward issues of motivation and class management. Consequently, a good mentor or supervisor of field experiences must be aware that the development of student motivation and class behavioural order are long-term pedagogical issues. She or he must be able to explain to beginning teachers the importance of strategic decision-making in these aspects of instructional design and delivery, be capable of keeping track of their protégés' long- and short term decisions, and suggest corrections if needed.

Psychological support of student and beginning teachers takes mostly individual but also a group form when supervising mentors organize regular meetings with their student teachers. Gold, relying on the conceptions of different authors, summarises that psychological support

> *"... has been described as emotional support, positive regard, accurate empathy, empathetic listening, and meeting psychological needs. In its turn, ... the psychological support includes an array of skills and strategies including confidence building, reinforcing a positive self-esteem, guidance in developing a sense of effectiveness, instilling a sense of self-reliance, learning how to handle stress, and psychological assistance"* (1996:562).

So, if instructional support is aimed primarily at informing and consulting student teachers on how to proceed, psychological support serves essentially therapeutic objectives. In certain cases timely psychological support to the student or beginning teachers during their field experiences could play an even bigger role in their professional growth than instructional support. Yet, as pointed out by Feiman-Nemser (2003:28), sometimes helping a beginning teacher in terms of how to cope with his or her class could be more effective than just comforting the novice teacher in a difficult situation. The dilemma, which of these two kinds of support has the bigger effect, is akin to searching for an answer to the question, which of the two factors – emotions or cognition – has the primary impact on human behaviour and which one is secondary. Obviously, the optimal ratio of needed instructional and psychological support depends primarily on the specific situation and individual characteristics of a student teacher. In the long run this ratio is rather determined by the adopted strategy of teacher education.

3. The need for supervision and mentoring in different phases of teacher education

Mentoring support is most effective when it is adjusted to the needs of student or beginning teachers. In order to understand what kind of support a student or beginning teacher needs in field practice, some knowledge of teacher professional development is necessary. Though several attempts have been made to describe teachers' professional development (e.g. Burden 1990, Kagan 1992; Bond, et al. 2000, etc.), Berliner has probably been the most successful thus far, with his model of developmental changes in teacher professional decision-making (Berliner 1994, Barone et al. 1996). According to this model, teachers' professional capabilities progress through five consecutive stages: from that of novice, beginning, competent, professional to expert teacher. The first three stages of this model describe the characteristic professional behaviour of student and beginning teachers.

Novice. The first steps of a novice teacher are relatively context free and inflexible. S/he is often unable to take into consideration the big picture of educational events, and needs simple, ready-to-apply rules of action. This is a

stage at which the real practice and coping with everyday problems are more important for teachers than the theory taught in pre-service teacher education.

Advanced beginner. At this level, experience starts to be melded with formal knowledge and episodic and case knowledge are built up and complement the theoretical knowledge learned in the programmes of teacher education. The strategic knowledge of when to ignore and when to follow rules is intensively developed in this stage, and the context begins to guide the decision-making.

Competent teacher. Two major characteristics distinguish competent performers from a beginner. First, competent teachers make conscious choices about what they are going to do. They have priorities, schedules of activities, and sensible means for achieving the aims they have in their minds. Second, through enacting their knowledge and skills they are able to determine what is important and what is unimportant (Berliner 1994:164–166).

Consequently, the main task of field practice supervisors and mentors, if Berliner's model is taken as the guide, is to support and promote beginning teachers' professional decision-making capabilities for progressing from their actual level of professional development to the next level.

The international practice of teacher education has proven to be flexible and diverse in finding appropriate forms for providing student and beginning teachers with field experiences. In European countries, according to the Eurydice (2002) report, at least three different phases of teacher education field practice can be identified: teaching practice as a component of undergraduate studies, as an 'on-the-job' final qualifying phase and as an induction period.

3.1. Field practice in pre-service teacher education

In this stage of professional development, prospective teachers have their first contacts with the theory and practice of education. The issue, which should be the proportion of theory and field experiences in pre-service teacher education, has always been a topic of hot debate amongst teacher educators. In some countries, for instance in England and in Wales, strong voices in support of practical preparation even led to school-based teacher education in the mid-1990s, which mostly relied on the apprenticeship principle of learning (see for example, DfE 1992, Dunn, Lock, and Soares 1996). Consequently the role of supervising or mentor teachers in the entire teacher education programme increased enormously. However, the effectiveness of extensive field experience, including student teaching within pre-service teacher education programmes, has come under scrutiny during subsequent years. The following revision of the role of practical studies in pre-service preparation was due, in part, as summarised by McIntyre, Byrd and Foxx, "…to a belief that increased practice alone does not always lead to analysis, reflection, and growth on the part of novice teachers" (1996:171), as many early field experience programmes failed to provide the necessary quality of guidance and supervision as adjusted to student teachers' developmental needs.

The issue of providing appropriate mentor support to student teachers in their practical studies is probably the main reason why the ratio of theoretical and practical pedagogical studies, including field practice in pre-service teacher education programmes, is so diverse and dependent on the specific conditions. Nonetheless, as a rule, all pre-service teacher education programmes have a smaller or bigger component of field practice, including student teaching.

The training of specific teaching skills and routines is often a typical component of these practical studies, as novice teachers need a critical mass of routines and automatic skills for their everyday teaching activities (Berliner 2001, Moore 2003). In order to make the practice-based learning effective and coherent with theoretical studies, the school practice tasks and activities should be carried out purposefully following an established programme in cooperation with a supervising teacher.

3.2. 'On-the-job' qualifying phase

The Eurydice European Unit (2002) report on the preparation of teachers for general lower secondary education in Europe defines the 'on-the-job' final qualifying phase "… as a period of transition between the initial training of teachers and their entry into professional life as fully-fledged teachers". The report specifies: "It generally constitutes the final phase of initial teacher education. This stage includes an important supportive and supervisory dimension, as well as a formal evaluation to certify the teaching skills of those concerned, without which they would be unable to enter the profession" (2002:73). According to the report, nine European countries provided for a final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase as defined above in 2000/01. In most of these countries (Germany, France, Luxembourg, Portugal, Austria and Scotland), this provision for prospective teachers already existed in the 1970s or even earlier. In the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (England and Northern Ireland), Cyprus and Slovenia, it dates from the end of the 1990s.

A more detailed analysis reveals that the demarcation line between field practice, considered as a conventional component of initial teacher education, and the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase is complicated for several reasons. However, there are four major features that seem to discriminate it from the conventional field experiences of undergraduate teacher education courses (Eurydice … 2002). *Firstly*, its duration is usually longer than that of a conventional teacher education school practice. For example, the official duration of the 'on-the-job' qualifying phase is shortest in the Netherlands (5 months of full time) and the longest in Luxemburg (24–40 months). *Secondly*, it is focused on student teaching practice rather than on the training of specific teaching skills and routines, which is often characteristic of pre-service teacher education courses. However, the structure and content of the 'on-the-job' phase is very different depending on the teacher education traditions of a country. *Thirdly*, the actual work expected from fully qualified teachers and candidate teachers in their final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase is quite similar. *Fourthly*, and probably the most characteristic feature for

the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase, is that the beginning teachers are remunerated for their work. In this phase of practical studies the student teachers are achieving the level of an advanced beginner and are becoming more independent decision-makers, as described by the Berliner (1994) model. This also means a shift in their guidance and support needs. Instead of direct guidance and supervision they now need more collegial support and advice, which is more in line with the concept of mentoring.

3.3. Induction of beginning teachers

This phase of practice-based learning is aimed at easing a gradual entry into the teaching profession. To this end, teachers in their initial post are offered formal introductory facilities in terms of professional assistance and advice so that they can adapt as effectively as possible to their professional duties. Systematic induction programmes for new teachers began to emerge about 30 years ago and have tripled in number since then in the USA (Ganser 2002:51). The induction of beginning teachers in many European countries and in the USA applies to fully qualified teachers whose responsibilities and workload are the same as that of their fully licensed colleagues (Eurydice ... 2002:110; Gold, 1996:565–572).

The Eurydice's survey revealed that only two European countries – Northern Ireland and Cyprus – practiced a final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase as well as an induction period in their teacher education programmes for lower secondary schools. However, the Eurydice report's explanation that induction for beginning teachers has been introduced only by a minority of countries because of the novelty of this approach seems too narrow. Another reason would be the overlapping nature of these two phases of field experiences and difficulties of discrimination between them in many European countries. For example, in Germany the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase and the period of provisional appointment with support and training last almost three years after initial preparation, and in Scotland the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase extended over two years after undergraduate studies. Therefore, in certain countries, for those who are already practising a final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase in their teacher education, the introduction of an induction period for beginning teachers might require a reconsideration of both phases of field experiences in order to provide better integration and congruence between them. However, it is true that there is a general trend for providing beginning teachers with a longer period of induction. For example, the extension of the induction period from one to two years for newly qualified teachers is currently under way in many states of the USA (e.g. Giebelhaus 1999, Akin: 2002). As an exception, an opposite shift took place in Scotland starting in August 2002, where the former two-year probation period with a full time teaching load was reduced to one year with a guaranteed 70% teaching load (O'Brien, Draper & Chistie, 2003).

Currently, many European countries are making preparations for introducing internships for beginning teachers. For example, in Finland, initiatives for support-

ing new teachers were under way in a few towns in the autumn of 2000 (Jokinen & Välijärvi 2003). In Estonia, a compulsory induction year for teacher education graduates was introduced in 2004 according to national Framework guidelines of teacher education (2000).

3.4. Diversity of induction programmes

The induction programmes themselves can be very different in terms of their nature, organisation and purpose. For example, in European countries mentor support is given in two different ways, which may sometimes complement each other:

- **support specially devised** to provide guidance, assistance and advice to new teachers when they take up their first post as fully qualified professionals;
- **compulsory training during the first year in service,** as for example in Greece, Spain or Italy, where teachers appointed to their first post (after reaching the required standard in the competitive examination for entry into the profession) have to undertake a series of theoretical and practical training sessions. This compulsory training corresponds to a twofold aim: it (a) provides young teachers with a special system of support and (b) serves to confirm their appointment (Eurydice… 2002:94).

First attempts have been made for characterising induction programmes on the basis of the extent of support given. For instance, Smith and Ingersoll, as reported by Strong, distinguish among "basic induction", which includes a mentor in supportive communication with beginning teachers; "basic induction plus collaboration", which adds seminars for beginning teachers and common planning time or collaboration with other teachers; and "basic induction plus collaboration plus teacher network plus extra resources", where participation in an external teacher network, reduced number of preparations, and a teacher's aide are added to the mix (2004, 8–9).

There are major differences between induction programmes in terms of their ideology and strategy of teacher education as well. For example, the State University of Michigan and the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the USA both use practice-based teacher education programmes but follow quite different strategies. The Michigan State University adopted a yearlong internship programme in 1997 (Conway & Clark 2003). The programme is based on a social constructivist vision of teacher education and it emphasises teaching as reflective practice. To foster beginning teachers' reflections, weekly two-hour guided practice seminars are held and are led by school-university liaison from teacher education faculty appointed for the supporting and supervision of interns. Reflection is also fostered through encouraging inquiry by completing an inquiry project and completing a learning to teach portfolio. A key person in supporting the reflective practice is the school-university liaison who is assigned to lead a small group of interns. This person, while adopting the conventional evaluative

function of a teaching practicum supervisor, has additional responsibilities of coaching and mentoring, as well as supporting collaborative teachers in their mentoring of the intern teachers (2003:469).

The Master of Education in Teaching (MET) Programme at the University of Hawaii at Manoa has adopted a "knowledge-*of*-practice" approach, a term adopted from Cochram-Smith and Lytle (1999) (Awaya, et al. 2003). This approach, having many features of social constructivism, like the Michigan programme, frames "... the process of student teaching and relationship of mentors and protégé as a collective inquiry into teaching practices, with the idea of generating knowledge locally, among participants, rather than having this transmitted from the university" (Awaya, et al. 2003:46). However, the most distinctive feature of this teacher education programme is taking mentoring as a developing relationship in which the student teachers are encouraged to participate in the selection of mentors. In the first year of teacher education, the student teachers spend a minimum of 12 hours per week in the partner school. In the second year they are in school full time. The student field experiences follow a precise and progressive logic in this programme. The working relationship between mentoring teachers (who also serve as school-university liaisons persons), and student teachers evolves from casual to permanent contacts over a 2-year period. The contacts with potential mentors start in semester I from observation of a variety of classes taught by mentor teachers. In semester II, students are required to teach two units which are co-planned and taught in collaboration with two different mentor teachers. The real student teaching practicum starts in semester III in cooperation with the selected mentor teacher. Semester IV is a paid internship period where MET students are placed in vacant positions in local public schools. The internship mentors are selected among mentoring teachers and their classes are taken over by interns who remain at partner schools (Awaya, et al. 2003:47–48).

In the author's native country, Estonia, all student teachers graduating from pre-service teacher education courses (60 ECTS credit points involving 10 weeks of supervised school practice) at universities have to work one year as a junior teacher under the supervision of a mentor teacher and to participate in the beginning teacher support programme in order to be certified as teachers (Induction ..., 2004). The mentor is appointed among experienced teachers at the school hiring the beginning teacher. Also, the appointees are recommended to take a mentor training course at an Induction Year Support Centre established by the two major universities preparing teachers in Estonia. The beginning teachers are affiliated with the nearest centre to their work place or with the centre they already have contacts with since their pre-service studies. A 6-credit-point support programme provided by the University of Tartu, for example, involves six days of seminars in the support centre focusing on four topics: (1) development of cooperation skills in the organisation; (2) class management and coping with inappropriate behaviour; (3) self analysis, creating a motivating learning environment; and (4) professional development (Support … 2004). The beginning teachers are recommended to have a workload not exceeding the minimum 18 lessons a week established for public

school teachers in Estonia. In addition to the compulsory classes at a support centre, the interns are required to compile a portfolio reflecting on their activities and self-analysis during the induction year.

4. Selection and preparation of mentors

4.1. Current understanding of the need for teacher educator and mentor preparation

Recently there has been a growing interest and attention to preparation and professional development of teacher educators (Luenenberg 2002:264). Along with a need to prepare teacher educators to change their role alongside the changing role of teachers in the conditions of the information and communication society, Luenenberg ascribes the other reason for the new attention to the increasing school-based education of teachers (2002:264). This means that teacher educators need better preparation for working in the field together with the extending role of practical studies in purposeful and systematic teacher education.

In spite of these emerging positive trends in teacher educator preparation, the attitudes, even toward the preparation of supervisors and mentors of field experiences, are not unanimous like some 30 years ago when the first mentoring programmes appeared. Opponents of the need for special preparation of mentors have voiced concern that "experienced teachers possess an extensive repertoire of helping strategies and that, with opportunities for collaboration, teachers can develop and shape complex mentoring roles that meet beginning teachers' needs" (Wildman et all. 1992:205). Hardcastle (1988) believed that mentors who are appreciated by their protégés for their high personal values and character traits may be the key, rather than any programmes that assign mentors to protégés. Advocates of training, however, discuss the demands of giving support and believe that preparation for teaching provided little or no preparation for giving support (Gold 1996:575). In spite of this fact, a study conducted in the USA two decades ago reported that most schools, colleges, and departments of education had fewer than 20% of their cooperating teachers trained in supervision (Johnson and Yates 1982). Another reason for the relatively slow progress in introducing programmes for mentoring teachers' preparation, in addition to the arguments already listed, is rather conceptual, as perceptions of the role and functions of mentors as support providers are too often ambiguous. The research literature has documented uncertainties of mentors', teachers', and administrators' views regarding the central purpose of mentoring, specific behaviours that mentors might engage in, and the assessment procedure they should or could use (Gold 1996: 577). As a consequence, many local educational agencies in the USA have controversial views on the necessity of training support providers.

In this sense the situation is quite similar in European countries that are providing mentoring and tutoring programmes to student and beginning teachers. As a rule, the fully qualified and experienced teachers serve as supervisors of

beginning teachers in all European countries practicing the final 'on-the-job' qualifying phase in teacher education. The overwhelming majority of these countries provide mentors with some special training for supervising beginning teachers at schools. Only tutors in Luxemburg and German mentors receive no special training in supervising beginning teachers (Eurydice …, 2002:80–81).

4.2. Increasing justification for practicing mentor preparation programmes

Despite all the arguments listed pro and contra mentor preparation programmes, there is a prevailing understanding among teacher educators that applying appropriate selection criteria alone does not completely cover the demands on the mentors' expertise, which are frequently far greater than a prospective mentor may anticipate and, therefore, a special preparation programme is needed (Gold 1996:575). For example, Williams and Prestage (2002), when analysing the role of tutoring, came to the conclusion that if induction tutors are to fulfil their functions as mentor, facilitator and manager, their training and development needs should receive as much attention as those of the student teachers. The same idea is supported by Kajs, who argues that even the most experienced teachers may lack the necessary knowledge and skills to serve as both a colleague and a supervisor of a novice teacher (2002:62). Ganser, in his analysis on the conditions of building effective new teacher mentor programmes, came to the conclusion that a need for high-quality training is understood "… when it is accepted that being a good teacher is a necessary but insufficient condition for being a good mentor". And he explains "… as the expectations for mentoring extend beyond providing emotional support, assistance with policies and procedures, and superficial instructional assistance to influencing the practice of new teachers in a significant way, the need for appropriate and thorough mentor training becomes all the more important" (2002:51). A study by Orland (2001) analyzing the nature of mentoring expresses practically the same ideas, stating that learning to become a mentor is a conscious process of induction into a different teaching context and does not 'emerge' naturally from being a good teacher for children. Thus, at an operational level, teacher education programmes should prepare teachers for this passage by encouraging the dissemination of in-service courses that allow novice mentors the opportunity to articulate the construction of their new role. The author suggests to structure such courses "… as 'learning conversations' whereby mentors are encouraged to reflect on their roles in the company of fellow mentors, mediated by an experienced mentor of mentors" (2001:75).

4.3. Defining the essence of mentor preparation programmes

Although the essence of mentor preparation programmes depends heavily on the specific role that the prospective mentor is expected to fulfil, some common features exist. Gold, in her analysis of literature on mentor skill training, found that through this training, mentors are helped to make use of their own knowledge

of curriculum, instruction, and classroom management. In addition, mentor teachers are expected, in many instances, to adopt terminology and concepts derived from classroom research and from local and state teacher evaluation guidelines. Also, a large number of these training agendas have been concerned with consultation strategies, communication skills, and classroom observation techniques (Gold 1996:575–576). Kajs (2002), obviously taking the perspective of instructional support in mentoring and by analysing different sources, found that the preparation for mentoring should be based "… on the following topics: (1) stages of teacher development; (2) adult learning principles; (3) professional development assessments; (4) interpersonal skills to assist in formative assessment and coaching; (5) and relevant knowledge and skills to assist classroom students to succeed" (2002:62).

Probably the most serious obstacle to the widespread acceptance of preparation programmes for the support of student and beginning teachers' field experiences is an absence of comprehensive studies on the selection and preparation of mentors or supervisors. In reviewing the literature, Little pointed to this problem more than a decade ago, stating, "… there are virtually no studies that trace the contribution made by post-selection training to the subsequent performance of the mentor, or to their success in relationships with teachers or administrators. No studies compare mentors who receive training with those who are left to their resources" (1990: 309). Though the number of small-scale studies on mentoring has significantly increased since the end of 1980s, there is still a shortage of large-scale research on the selection and preparation of mentors or supervisors of student or beginning teachers' field practice. In order to promote the introduction of mentor or supervisor preparation programmes for teacher education, it is an ultimate necessity to provide the field with a better research basis, including studies proving the effectiveness of these programmes.

5. Some concluding remarks

Although the role of mentoring teachers is usually realised as related to the supervision of beginning teachers in their induction year, it is obvious that this conception of mentoring is too narrow, as student teachers need support and advice beginning with their first steps of practical studies. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the role of mentoring as supporting student and beginning teachers' practical studies in all phases of their preparation. This idea is supported by an increasing attention to the quality of preparation of teacher educators and by a general trend for practice-based teacher education, providing better integration of educational theory and practice. These teacher education programmes are based on interrelated theoretical and practical studies providing a gradual transfer from student teacher status to teacher status. The support and facilitation of this transfer calls for the special preparation of teacher educators capable of supporting the learning of practical skills and helping to relate practice to theoretical generalisations.

In reality, it is difficult to give specific recommendations about how an effective mentor preparation programme should look like for at least three reasons: (1) there is no reliable research on the effectiveness of these programmes, (2) the nature of these programmes depends on the specific approach to teacher education, and (3) the prestige of mentor preparation programmes is usually low due to the lack of research-based evidence of their efficacy.

It is not difficult to see from the comparison of induction programmes introduced in the subsection 3.4 that expectations for mentors' qualifications and roles are quite different. This also means that programmes of mentor preparation, if they exist at all in a country, might be very different depending on the nature of induction provided to the beginning teachers. In the case of Michigan and Hawaii induction programmes the mentors are supposed to observe and implement specific ideologies of teacher education adapted by the coordinating universities. Instead, in Estonia, the issues of strategy and content of mentoring are only emerging and the coordination of mentoring by the adopted teacher education strategy at a specific university does not yet deserve the appropriate attention of teacher educators.

These three examples of the beginning teachers support programmes highlight the complexity of real mentoring approaches in terms of their strategy and underlying ideas. However, seeing these programmes through the prisms of conceptions on teacher education, mentoring strategies (instructional versus psychological support), beginning teachers' support needs, and concepts of mentor preparation gives a better basis for analysis of these and other mentor support programmes. Also, it is expected that a better understanding of issues of student and beginning teachers' supervision and mentoring contribute to the development of teacher education programmes themselves resulting in a better integration of theoretical and practical studies in learning to teach.

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