
“I WISH I HAD MORE TIME” – MENTOR TEACHER NARRATIVES OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE: A CASE FOR ONLINE MENTORING

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Theoretical framework

Processes of mentoring for teaching in primary and secondary schools has been transforming simultaneously with the structural changes in teacher education in Hungary (Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education). Educational policy provisions are being introduced to make the mentor teacher certification mandatory for mentors working with pre-service teachers in schools during their practicum. Europe 2020: A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth and its communication document Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes (EC, 2012) as well as the national acts and provisions of education in Europe, including Hungary (Kotschy, Sallai, & Szőke-Milinte, 2015), encourage creating new ways for understanding the importance of teachers' reflective attitude, and these exclusively focus on mentors and mentees in teacher training. Supplements and explanatory documents related to the legislation of education largely deal with the expectations from and duties of a reflective mentor, however, these focal documents still barely engage in conceptual know-how or in-depth components of mentors' reflective practice.

It is broadly accepted that mentoring relationships aim to support novice teachers, basically, in three aspects: help novices to survive the induction part of their career, to develop teaching competences, and to define and identify their teaching lives (Fairbanks, Friedman, & Kahn, 2000; Marble & Raimondi, 2007). As the result of successful mentoring relationship, novices tend to develop a more positive outlook on teaching and stay longer in the profession (Long, Hall Conway, & Murphy, 2012). The two-semester formal mentor training in Hungary focuses on raising pedagogical awareness for mentoring strategies, administrative and statutory duties, conflict management, expectations, roles and functions in mentoring, but importantly, it aims to prepare for reflective practice in order to support continuous professional development (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Korthagen, 2004; Schön, 1983). Reflection, as Korthagen (2001) claims, is “the instrument by which experiences are translated into dynamic knowledge” (p.53) and it facilitates growth competence (p.47), that is, the ability to develop professionally in an ongoing manner guided by internally directed learning.

Mentoring in teacher education is “one of the most important strategies to support novices learning to teach” (Wang, 2001; p.52) and helps to improve confidence, self-esteem, and the

ability to problem-solve (Mathur, Gehrke, & Kim, 2013). Further, guided reflective teaching practice is crucial for trainees to become teachers or even good teachers (Taggart & Wilson, 1998; Korthagen, 2004). The mentor thus has specific responsibilities at the various stages of the learning cycle, which includes, for example, the cyclical routine of exchanging ideas and reflections on the teaching experience, observation and analysis, conceptualization, and experimentation. However, ideally, reflection on one's actions is integrated in each cycle with the aim to support trainees in their deep learning.

Integrated reflection as well as the whole mentoring process put huge workload on mentors and mentees and require expended extra time from both. Observing, following, reflecting on, planning and cooperating with novices reportedly impact mentors' work-life balance and have an influence on the quality and extent of collaboration (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009). Effective mentoring and useful reflections are realized where mentors and novices are provided with extra time for releasing and timetabling of contact sessions (Bullough, 2005).

In general, researchers focusing on mentor teachers' mentoring strategies, identity and learning through mentoring frequently outline the conflict of time and workload. Efficacy and professionalism are often measured in time that a mentor can and would dedicate to his or her mentee; availability for formal and informal discussion is one of the most desired characteristics of an ideal mentor according to mentees (Johnson et al., 2005; Cain, 2009; van Ginkel et al., 2016; Lejonberg et al., 2015). Informal discussions, released or non-contact time are recognized as equally essential factors for mentors and beginners in order to result in higher effectiveness, and among other articulated recommendations, researchers almost always include giving appropriate time frame for implementation, completion and management of mentoring process (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000). Online mentoring, that is, "the use of email or computer conferencing systems to support a mentoring relationship when a face-to-face relationship would be impractical" (O'Neill, Wagner, & Gomez, 1996; p.39) can provide further opportunities for a well-managed mentoring process, as the interaction between mentor and mentees can be maintained at any place and time that is convenient to them. In addition to extending limitations of time and space, asynchronous communication channels allow for more thoughtful interactions between mentor and mentee (Wade, Niederhauser, Cannon, & Long, 2001); and e-mentoring provides greater anonymity and privacy (Hew & Knapczyk, 2007).

Methods

Mentoring for reflective practice may take different forms and can rely on various strategies; these are however embedded into certain conceptualizations of *mentoring for teaching*. This study thus is an initial exploration of how mentors think about and interpret the mentoring process. In particular, we focus on how mentors conceive of the issue of time commitment for their mentoring activities. In doing so, we problematize whether and how online mentoring could be integrated into these activities, in the Hungarian context.

This study is the exploratory first stage of a large-scale survey study that is scheduled for 2017-18 and investigates mentoring practices embedded in Hungarian institutional practices. To kick start the survey design process, we conducted semi-structured interviews ($n = 10$, 7 women, 3 men) with highly qualified, senior mentor teachers from various Hungarian institutions (primary and secondary schools). The duration of the interviews was at least 2 hours each, which adds up to 20 hours of interview material. On the interview data we performed an exploratory analysis in the phenomenographic tradition (Marton & Booth, 1997): research was carried out on the basis of inquiring about mentors' individual interpretations of their mentoring experience. The interviews were designed with predetermined questions and developed according to the mentors' conversation and answers. In all cases, the interviewer encouraged the mentors to further explain and dwell on topics they wanted to elaborate, in some instances, the interviewer asked for further explanation. The interviewer never evaluated or exerted pressure on the mentors, she was open and focused exclusively on the world of the mentor, on the feelings, beliefs, values, experience of the mentors' reflective practice in order to allow the interviewee think aloud. Results of this analysis, that is, the outcome space (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) will guide us in understanding how mentors describe the mentoring practices, with a special attention to the issue of 'time' and how they conceive of time commitment in mentoring processes (short-term engagement with a need for immediate outcomes vs. mid-term or long-term investment with a slow or delayed outcome). Through this inquiry we will further explore the potential of integrating online mentoring practices in Hungarian mentors' practices and use this qualitative data for designing the survey tool.

Findings and conclusion

We found agreement among mentors about the importance and meaningfulness of mentoring and the responsibility it encompasses. However, the narratives of different mentoring aspects clearly highlighted the conceptual diversity regarding time and relatively flexible perceptions of its necessity and sufficiency. The conception and interpretation of time in mentoring diffuse according to the mentoring experience, major and even according to gender. At one end, more experienced mentors ($5 \leq$) and especially those, who work with novices regularly (at least once in a semester) seemed more aware of time constraints of the mentoring process. They try to stay focused on timetabling, but for the pressure of the system, they often feel guilty of resolving mentoring duties of routine and not dedicating enough time to reflect on unique or problematic situations. At the other end, "novice" mentors are rather frustrated of finding insufficient time for pre- and post-lesson reflection sessions, and have a constant feeling of incompleteness. However, neither experienced nor less experienced mentors find enough time for frequent self-assessment. In this small sample, taught subject is another variety in the collective meaning of time in mentoring: elementary teacher ($n = 1$), secondary literature and linguistics ($n = 3$) as well as language teachers ($n = 4$), P.E. teacher ($n = 1$) and science teacher ($n = 1$) dedicate time to different areas of professional development in novice teachers' career, and these variants are identified and categorized during the analysis as disciplinary and pedagogical developmental motivations. We found similar diffusion in case

of male and female mentors in the current small sample. Females tend to be less purpose-centric with regard to time and use discussion sessions for gradual development. They rather apply time management techniques learnt from the mentor trainings, while men are more regardless of time, interested rather in the realization of the purpose appointed in a holistic approach. This second-order time perspective in which the mentoring process is described by the mentors is largely understood as a core contradiction in reflective practice of mentors hence, in each case, interviewees admitted they find available time insufficient for the global development of novices' professional identity (Korthagen, 2004). Time constraints and the potential frustrations caused may hinder processes of mentoring and can impact the mentor-mentee relationship in negative ways. How could then strategies of online mentoring help to resolve these internal and, eventually, interpersonal conflicts? What could be useful ways of integrating online mentoring strategies into Hungarian mentors' practices?

Previous empirical studies of online mentoring in teacher training suggest that there are possible benefits of using digital or electronic tools for mentoring. These studies also reinforce the different implications for the mentors' strategies (Heaton Shrestha et al., 2009). Therefore, we asked mentors about how digital tools are or could be embedded in their pre- and post-lesson discussions, administrative duties and formal and informal communication with mentees, teacher educators, or the university. Previously, the policy review and the literature review informed us that the Hungarian pre-service teacher training is not supported by any digital frameworks. There is no official digital platform for mentors, mentees and teacher educators, or the university for managing the process. Communication, consultations and discussions are designed to be carried out in person and official documents are requested in printed form to be submitted (Kotschy, Sallai, & Szőke-Milinte, 2015). Consequently, with the aim to widen the horizon of recommended and demanded mentoring activities we asked the mentors to go into details about their experience and conception of consultations supported by information technologies or telecommunication. Regardless of age, gender or major, mentors use some kind of digital tool for communication, and three of the most experienced mentors (10 ≤) frequently give extensive reflection online as a kick-off for further discussions. E-mails are used by each mentor as a time saving tool for reviewing lesson plans and consulting technical details (e. g.: location, time, necessary equipment), and three frequent Facebook users apply messenger for communication, one of the language teachers use Viber mainly for fixing appointments. Age, experience or gender do not show any significance in the frequency of e-mailing, but it is rather determined by the individual practice of using information technologies and the mentee's needs. Nevertheless, mentors who are frequent users of the Internet (using social media, mobile apps, teacher resources regularly) seemed to be open, and expressed interest toward comprehensive and integrative digital applications for supporting mentoring, three of them suggested using some kind of digital mentoring framework to integrate and simplify mentoring, which would contribute to a better service offered to the mentees. Two mentors, teaching literature and linguistics, use e-mails for consultation, but are in doubt about finding more time for "out-of-school time" mentoring.

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On the whole, private emails, phone calls, and messages are used in mentoring but mentors feel abandoned in this issue as well as concerning their time-management.

These initial findings serve as key reference points and will be taken on board in the survey design process. In fact, we plan to investigate more thoroughly the frequency, the length, and the content of these mentoring sessions – with and without information technologies. As for the content, we are particularly interested in the structure of these mentoring discussions, the (reflection) questions or the protocols mentors use, and how these contents are channelled back to mentees' classroom practice. Additionally, mentors' use of social media sites and online communication tools will be further explored and these channels of communication will be evaluated based on mentors' and mentees' professional needs.

We acknowledge the limitations of this small-scale study and underline that it is an entry point into a large-scale endeavour. We will, nevertheless, share a detailed description of mentors' reflections on their practice, particularly, on their conceptualizations of 'time' as a crucial dimension of it. We will elaborate on how face-to-face and online mentoring could be aligned to each other to serve the purpose of meaningful induction of pre-service teachers. Additionally, we will also reflect on those findings that orient our thinking in designing the survey tool for the large-scale study.

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