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**ENRICHING THE MENTOR-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP FOR A
SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP IN TEACHING**

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Abstract

The lack of qualified teachers, the decline in the status of this profession among young people, the criticism of teacher training institutions, the increased attractiveness of other fields of activity, the lack of selection in the teaching profession, the lack of support and support for the onset of the profession, leaving the system only after a few years of activity, are imperative to the need of think over about teacher training systems and also to enrich an efficient relationship between a mentor and his debutant/future teacher. Thus, our educational system are looking for solutions to streamline and modernize school and education, and one of the components to be considered is the component of the quality of human resources, namely future teachers. In our country, the practical training system for future teachers is organized simultaneously with the acquisition of the theoretical component. An important role in the efficient realization of the pedagogical practice, besides the practical and theoretical notions in the field, also plays the collaboration between all the 'actors' involved in its organization and development, namely: educators, teachers, mentors, tutors and practice coordinators, and in the last but not least, teachers of pedagogy, psychologists. The aim of this article is to underlined the importance of the efficient relation between a mentor and his mentee. The main quality of a mentor consists in giving it to a student/future teacher his/her experience, giving him/her a model of conduct, professionalism and support in everything that involves design, teaching and evaluation.

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Keywords: Mentor, school, practice, pedagogical mentoring, student.



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1. Introduction

The paper aims to provide a perspective of what an efficient relationship mentor/mentee means and has to be in order to have a successful partnership in teaching. Information was collected from different sources presenting the general framework of mentoring issues, worldwide and European. The University system of the world has shown a constant preoccupation for a practical orientation of its programs. Some universities have incorporated experimental parts in their practical strategies, many of the students being able to face the labour market. One can notice that, in opposition to the national system, in the European Community there is a fast track towards practical university studies.

One might meet, often now than in the past years, new concepts not very familiar to more, but evidently, used in an international educational language: “training, mentoring, tutorial, coaching”. These words are used mainly by large firms which seek, by all means, ways to realize the practical training of young employees, due to their specific, immediate needs, but in a short period of time. Bearing the above in mind, universities have the following options: to keep the “old in training system”, where there is a theoretical curriculum focus; to adopt new ways of in training, pursued by the large firms or to adopt some innovative methods and techniques from the firms, keeping also the traditional orientation for a good theoretical background.

Facing these options, some universities prove more radical and more receptive in finding a new pragmatic orientation for its study curriculum. But there are also some inert universities which tend to keep the theoretical orientation of its curriculum, but its staff is thinking to change / to alter the problem. The majority, though, consider the fact NOT a big issue, so they are facing every day critics, both from its students, both from its personnel who complain about the old habits and foreign prejudices, that a real, dynamic labour market is demanding.

The main findings of the paper underlined a number of issues concerning the efficient relationship between mentor and mentee/ debutant, conceptual developments for future of this segment of Romanian pedagogical education.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Why pedagogical mentoring is seen as an important issue in our educational system?

The pedagogical mentoring is a subject largely debated in the past 15 years. Being a designated person one has to be an experienced professor, having a well-known prestige among the Community and being able to initially train teachers through direct mentoring, assisting the pedagogical preparation in the appointed school.

Nowadays, an important aspect is the fact that it is done in the very field the future trainees are about to enter. The purpose of pedagogical training is to form students ‘ abilities to work with information taken from specialty field or Educational Science; to orientate students in using curriculum, school programme and textbooks; to develop students’ abilities to use didactic materials; to initiate students in lab or cabinet activity; to earn professional abilities.

To form psycho-pedagogical competences, to master didactic technology and methodology, to adjust an educative behaviour for high performances of pupils, it means to possess initial psycho-pedagogical training, to develop, by means of pedagogical training, specialty and psycho-pedagogical

knowledge. Considering that the didactic activity is closely related to the pupil's individual and individual peculiarities, it is necessary to know the student's personality. By doing part with the trainee, the mentor has the task of initiating the student and the future teacher to know the pupil's individuality, to be able to do the learning tasks, to organize different activities according to their individual peculiarities.

2.2. Theoretical aspects. Concepts

In general terms Ezechil (2009) **mentoring** is the activity which emphasizes the relationship between an expert / mentor, and a mentee. The first becomes a valuable source of in training. He/she becomes a role model, worth to follow, preparing the appropriate learning context. In the university system mentoring takes several shapes, even if one cannot link human models to activities. Thus, there are three types of mentoring:

- ✓ **Academic** – one is taken by another person and familiarized with the scientific and research field.
- ✓ **Professional** – being initialized to practice a job, like becoming a chemist, biologist, an engineer, a. s. o
- ✓ **Didactic** – to learn how to teach – educate – assess, becoming yourself a model.

The last mentioned must not be mistaken by becoming a future teacher, but it means that ANY teacher might become a role model in a didactic situation. Therefore, there may be good teachers who are not directly involved in creating future / to be teachers, but who are worthy role models.

Atchison, Pollock, Reeders, and Rizzetti, (1999), Boud, Solomon and Symes (2001) focus on the idea that students must understand the importance of being integrated in real – life, up – to – date work situations where they are to set operational correlations between academic teaching and effective professional activities, an integrated learning work, or as Kolb (1984) stated “experiential learning”. In the above mentioned scholars’ opinion by being part in the real life situations students earn opportunities to test in practice the learning theories; they are facing the school organizing medium and culture; they are involved in relevant teaching situations.

On the other hand, mentoring as a professional, scientific, pragmatic and acknowledged activity is set in a larger social scale, in between a professional community.

I believe it is important to take responsibilities over our own mentoring, but in the same time, to look for role models. A mentor can guide your career, or can have some abilities you lack but you admire or wish to possess.

A mentor can:

- Share his / her “professional secrets” or values
- Build and maintain a positive relationship with the student / mentee
- Help the mentee to be integrated in school working atmosphere
- Communicate with the student / mentee
- Stimulate his / her activity
- Offer support, guidance, good practice models
- Set challenging activities to practice the abilities of the mentee
- Provide direct and useful feedback

People need help in day to day activity, even in their own personal and professional development. Not even school, be it one of the best, can offer lifelong training, or to prepare oneself to be the best at work.

Mentoring is between people of specialty, one being a mentee, and the other, a wise, experienced professor. The mentor organizes demo and teaching lessons for his/her students, making the pedagogical training an effective educative system, and in the same time he/she offers them the possibility to “steal” techniques, didactical methods and ways of teaching (Chiş, 2005).

The ideal connection between the two of them should respect some points:

- The mentor gives a quick and efficient feedback. He/she is responsible for assessment files and for grading the didactic training. The mentor shows students how to deal with extracurricular activities (school celebrations or shows, pedagogical meetings, parents ‘meetings or parents’school).
- He/she takes responsibility for co-coordinating with the Faculty mentor, the last one helping the first, but in the same time working together with his/her co-workers, supervising the activity of the trainee students.
- The mentor professor presents his/her schedule, his/her classes to teach, the timetable, some other complex activities like: free tuition, semestrial meetings, special classes for pupils able of performance, Olympics or school contests, lessons for School Selected Curriculum, Excellency Center meetings.

It’s important for us, as teachers who teaches future teachers, to understand that the purpose of pedagogical training is to form students ‘abilities to work with information taken from specialty field or Educational Science in a class; to orientate students in using curriculum, school programme and textbooks; to develop students’ abilities to use didactic materials; to initiate students in lab or cabinet activity; to earn professional abilities. By all means the students ‘pedagogical training must not be just preparing, delivering and analyzing a lesson. It has to be an occasion to apply all the theoretic knowledge earned at the time.

The **communication** has to be seen as an inter-human relationship, like a specific interaction. Any kind of activity means information exchange, communication operations and relationships. A definitely characteristic of the didactic communication is to identify, possess good communication ability and to decipher correct relationships between partners. To be a good communicator is a quality. The art of efficient communication results in being able to express ideas, opinions of your own but to be understood by the other persons.

A good communication *mentor - mentee* is based on stimulating the implicative communication. That is to earn high quality if in – training, of pedagogical training.

The role of the mentor is to establish communication through:

- ✓ Adapting ways of communication via efficient, individual situations
- ✓ Gradually introducing specialty terminology and in – training information
- ✓ Focusing on the objectives of the lesson
- ✓ Clear and short talking
- ✓ Verifying correct receiving of the message sent
- ✓ Building the capacity to communicate with and between students
- ✓ Receiving the mentee’s opinion

In training mentee for a didactic career is subject to the following values:

- ✓ Offering data on objectives, contents, structures of pedagogical training
 - ✓ Thinking about projecting, sustaining and assessing the pedagogical training
- To form communication abilities at the trainee is done through:
- ✓ Permanent documentation of the in – training activity
 - ✓ Stimulating communication abilities via specific methods
 - ✓ Projecting and stimulating usage of training theme, specialty methodological works, thematic bibliography, means of teaching, curriculum, textbooks, didactic projects

To earn communication and relating abilities one has to

- ✓ Project, deliver and assess a lesson
- ✓ Fill in a psycho – pedagogic sheet after knowing and working with pupils
- ✓ Team working (for team – teaching lessons)
- ✓ Cooperating with the mentor, parent, tutor, teaching staff

Specific competences to be earned are:

- ✓ Best usage of communicating concepts and modern theories (horizontal , vertical, complex, multiple, diverse, specific communication)
- ✓ To master the emphatic behavior
- ✓ To access various informational sources
- ✓ To project, conduct, realize the teaching act via communication (Ezechil, 2008)

Not one single activity may be done without communication. This means that it is the fundamental element of human being. Through it, people socialize, have different services, bond friendships, write in social group, even at work place. Statistics say that 75 % within a work day we talk and listen. By communication we analyze ourselves and the other, we interact, identify, establish and maintain social contacts.

Communication is the key to personal and professional efficiency. It is seen everywhere, in every social domain, in education as well, where is shown as a particular, personal form.

Communication provides teaching the values of a complex education intervening, based on a didactic language which proves the structure of the educated person, adding some changes of cognitive, affective, attitudinal and acting nature. Relationships among working groups are different to those within the familiar or friendly ones. They are of cooperation and hierarchy. The last affects inter – human relationships and the way we communicate. Although they might seem not equal, the mentor trainee relationship is based on collaboration and close communication.

Peter and Pop (2012) considers that an efficient communication is the interactive communication, and its coordination is:

- ✓ Adequate and permanent talking mentor – others, (school mentor, trainees, school board)
- ✓ Correct and on time information flux
- ✓ Usage of short, polite language
- ✓ Capacity to offer logic argumentation for your own ideas
- ✓ Capacity to correct reaction to unknown situations
- ✓ Correct usage of terminology
- ✓ Constant feedback

Communication must adapt to any situation, to other characters or to group characteristics. Because any activity has specific character, either complementary or similar or totally different, objective or subjective for persons that communicate, keeping an efficient talking relationship has to identify the similarities, knowing and interpreting correctly the resemblances or differences of the situation, because it is the only way a person learns to communicate, think or act. (Ortan, 2005)

The art of communication is not a natural process or an ability one gets when born. We, people, learn to communicate. The style, itself, deals with several problems which impose methodological prudence: the necessity to operate within the concept; to view the whole perspective and its complexity; to adapt the style to its context; to find not a “better style” but an “optimal one”; to make the relationship efficiently.

It is needed to see closely to us and the others, to identify what we need to communicate, to engage in various type of communicating activity, to get help to improve one’s capacity to communicate.

Thus, one can try to do the above by practicing the following:

- ✓ Ability to talk - to listen and speak-
- ✓ Cooperate and create a reliable medium
- ✓ The self-respect, the mutual respect, tolerance for the others’ different opinion, a democratic decision making
- ✓ Accepting your own and others responsibility
- ✓ Dealing with emotions
- ✓ Interpersonal problems

3. Research Questions

3.1. What mentoring should represent in the school activity in order to improve the educational process?

Mentoring represents a method to develop human resource, its purpose being to get better human performance. A mentor is a person having more experience, that shares his/her experience and knowledge to a beginner. As time goes by, the mentor was that person who helped the beginners to form a career and to give advice. Mentoring is about advice, suggestions, teaching in a formal or informal way. In the academic stage, the word mentor is used as a synonym for “counselor” or “tutor”. Being a mentor means to share from your wisdom, to be a role model, to offer support to the beginner in projecting, teaching and assessing. Therefore, the didactic activity is closely related to age and personal peculiarities of the pupils, who requires a better understanding. Teaming up with the mentee, a mentor has the task to initiate the to be teacher in knowing the pupil characteristics, to create differential teaching tasks, to organize differential activities based on the pupil individuality. For a better understanding the mentor helps the mentee with methods, procedures or modalities to learn the personality of the pupils. So, this is done by studying the psychological profile, the stage of psycho – physical development of the child (Chiş, 2005).

A teacher is greatly responsible for educating a pupil, for guiding youngsters in a changing society which asks / demands for competence, equilibrium and permanent adaptation to new. Having a large pedagogical experience, a mentor offers the tools and methods to know the pupil, a mentor supports in every way the mentee in finding new and efficient techniques to “catch” the pupil’s personality. Being a

synthesized product, made out of important data on child evolution, the file is important when the pupil passes on a next level, the new class teacher knowing how to interact with his / her pupils.

A good “adviser” projects the activity to know the pupils by finding suitable ways or instruments, offering the mentee physical evidence on the pupil conduct. The mentor may initiate the mentee in a case study, its steps to follow. As in any profession, training is a big challenge for the new ones. They overpass a period of training and applying of knowledge, skills and abilities earned during the education studies.

It is a period of transition, the to be teacher facing a huge challenge, of finding a mentor to guide activity, to make him/her confident in what he/she theoretically learned. Therefore it is the period of guidance and support to develop competence and trust. Regarding educational mentoring, it is said to integrate academic demands to new means of developing in training teachers, to develop abilities to learn from and off the training, to develop research and to use them in academic curriculum.

4. Purpose of the Study

Developing mentoring activities by having efficient training activities for future teachers, bearing in mind both the results and the psycho – social elements, it implies good results for every party: university mentor, a school mentor and a mentee. Mentoring activity consists of two elements that are: a socializing component, being meant to integrate the student in the life and activity of the school and another one, regarding future teachers’ professional and personal development.

Teaching a job means to observe, to reflect, to offer feedback and to team teach. “Mentoring” should implies support for the other, sharing knowledge and experience, skills specific to the job. The mentor, based on a vast and mutual trust, advices and supervises the beginner. The first is offering himself/ herself as a role model, becoming a “sculptor” and an “adviser” for the young beginner. Mentoring consists of a relationship trying to protect the beginner teacher, trying to find new opportunities to learn, to experiment and to practice, all wishing to increase the self-confidence, individual development, autonomy and awareness (Bocoş, 2007).

Mentoring is based on trust, respect, opening and honesty, it allows the beginner teacher to grow in a secure and protected area. For a successful result, both the mentor and the mentee have to feel comfortable within the relationship. At the beginning of mentoring relationship, the beginner teacher is kind of depending of his/her mentor professor, but in time, the first is learning how to become independent, reliable, strong on his/her own feet, ideas or knowledge.

The mentor will guide the mentee, will set him/her free to act independently, will press the mentee to reflect, to self-analyse. The mentor is not a walking stick, asking the mentee to depend on, but the first one has to develop the second autonomy and independence, so that, in the end, the mentee overpasses his/her mentor.

A true mentor is that person that takes part in every actions his/her mentee takes, is that one that challenges to action, trying and finding solutions beforehand and being pleased of the mentee performance.

Ezechil (2008) sustains that mentoring is a very complex, interacting guiding process, between two or more persons, its purpose being to develop knowledge and skills in a certain field. The mentor offers day-to-day support, trust and help. Mentoring is necessary to every person, no matter the activity. A

mentor is chosen taking into account his/her vast experience, being open to sharing 'career secrets', being friendly and blank.

Mentoring might be spontaneous, not planned, informal when the situation requires, (an older teacher wishes to freely share from his/her wisdom). Mentoring makes a young person aware of and, in the same time, responsible for getting abilities, skills and competences in the domain the mentee wishes to become an expert, having a role model to guide on the path.

5. Research Methods

Analyzing the classroom activities, the way mentee/ future teacher understand the contents, talking to the students, we can notice that they are superficial in how they manage a class in their practice teaching hours. Maybe because there are too few hours of pedagogical practice and the relation between mentor and student/future teacher doesn't have time to develop in a good way and, on the other hand, they don't have time to know the class/pupils as much as they need in order to have good results.

Also, the involvement of the mentor is as insignificant as possible, in most cases justified by the lack of time and the too busy schedule. From the perspective of an experienced mentor, with those entering into the education system for the first time requires hard work, given that at the level of the school institution, the mentor is not regarded with good eyes, the mentality has not changed yet.

6. Findings

As in any profession, training is a big challenge for the new ones. They overpass a period of training and applying of knowledge, skills and abilities earned during the education studies.

It is a period of transition, the to be teacher facing a huge challenge, of finding a mentor to guide activity, to make him/her confident in what he/she theoretically learned. Therefore it is the period of guidance and support to develop competence and trust.

Regarding educational mentoring, it is said to integrate academic demands to new means of developing in training teachers, to develop abilities to learn from and off the training, to develop research and to use them in academic curriculum.

Being a mentor means to encourage the mentee to educational and formative dialogue, to develop higher competence, to be self-monitoring and self-aware, so that to become an etalon of his/her training, a proper mentor. This metacognitive ability is needed for passing all the misfortunes of teaching career (Bradea, 2010).

Hence, mentoring represents a dimension not no miss in teaching, something without which didactic activity does not exist. It is necessary a clear status of the mentor professor and a national development of mentoring studies. Foreign countries experience (France, Turkey, Portugal) being known, one might adapt good practice situations to Romanian school, its transversal objective being of a quality didactic activity.

For mentee/student, the mentoring activity creates the projecting competence, the doing and the assessment of a didactic activity. In doing the above, one has to bear in mind the following specific objectives (Bocoş, 2007):

- Knowing human resources, school materials, aids, knowing how a school is organized and how it works
- Training the studying and better knowledge of pupils ‘ personality, their capacities and their learning ways
- Training the analyses of Programmes, of school Curriculum; of doing and filling in school documents / papers; writing about and projecting didactic activities
- Identifying the types of lessons and the main parts of a lesson
- Forming abilities and applying methods and didactic strategies for learning
- Forming skills to project and coordinate a didactic activity
- Forming abilities to communicate and collaborate with parents
- Forming abilities to notice and evaluate school and social behavior
- Forming abilities to assess and self – assess didactic activity
- Forming abilities to identify education crises and trying to adopt best negotiation strategies.

7. Conclusion

The activity of mentoring must be understood as a specific in–training activity for teaching a class. Largely, the word mentoring is used to describe the support offered by a person (usually wiser/ experimented) in helping and training another one. The mentor is that person who encourages, guides and helps you in your career. In the same time, a mentor practically assists you in reaching your professional, personal growth.

As regarding the socio–human perspective, a mentor is, as Pukelis, and Fokiene, (2008) underlined, that person who encourages, guides and helps you, practically assisting you in reaching your personal, professional growth.

Thus, a mentor possesses professional skills and the necessary abilities. Mentoring is about several things: wisdom, encouragement, having time, listening for, specific skills. Although a good teacher makes a good mentor, it does not mean that a good teacher becomes a good mentor. Professionally speaking, a mentor is very important to explain and guide, as well as to give quick access to knowledge.

These are acquired after a process of filtering and gathering, it is taking a lot of time and it needs lots of experience. Mentoring is not only sharing, it is also finding common points for a successful ending. Educational mentoring has, as its principal purpose, promoting and constant growing of in–training of students from Pedagogic Department, as well as of beginner teachers who try to find a suitable place to work and even more for didactic training. A mentor must give a mentee exercises, experiments and experience, carefully planned and concise. The information must be also clear and reasonable, and the examples relevant. The mentor focuses on main features, on themes or on problems, a mentor encourages and quickly corrects, foresees the difficulties and overpasses them.

Mentoring means being aware of strong and weak points, making a psychological profile for the two parts involved in the act, but not hurting each other’s personality. Mentoring is a natural process of knowing, which creates value and positive energy. The mentee must be mentored, having a correct attitude towards mentee, that is not hurting the mentee trust, not to show off, to morally act, not to step on mentee’s life principles and to trust each other.

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