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MENTORING-METHOD OF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION FOR THE FUTURE TEACHERS

-abstract for the doctorate thesis-

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CONTENTS

Introduction

SECTION I

V. 8. 1. 2. Analyses of the progress files 2. Comparative analyses on the data gathered from progress file 1 and 2

V.8.2. Analyses of the structured journals

V.8.3. Analyses of the observation files

V.8.4. Analyses of the students' portfolios

V.9. Results of the post-test

V.9.1. Data regarding the optimization of the results achieved by the students during the pedagogical practice activities

V.9.2. Data regarding teachers' opinion on the mentors' activity and on the practical activities as a whole

V.9.3. Data regarding the opinion of the mentor teachers on the mentoring programme and on the performance and evolution of the students

V.10. Results of the testing stage at distance/ re-testing

V. 11. Appreciations of the debutant teachers, of the school headmasters and teachers with a experience on the mentoring, professional debut, continuing professional development and professional integration

CONCLUSIONS

BIBLIOGRAFY

ANNEX

PAPER ABSTRACT

KEY WORDS: mentor, mentee, initial teacher training, continuing professional development, teaching profession, partnership, professional debut, induction.

ARGUMENT

Words like change, dynamic, challenges are specific for nowadays society. As a subsystem of the social system, the educational system is very much affected by this dynamic. The school is also in the middle of a reform and innovation process, not only on what the curriculum is concerned but also on the evaluations methods, teaching strategies and human resources implied. From our point of view, the teaching staff is the most important variable on which depends the success of the educational reforms.

The teaching profession is one of the most complex professions, and the requirements towards the school and the teachers are variable and challenging. The economical, social, political and cultural changes have a direct impact on the school and teachers. The teachers are obliged to take upon roles more a more complex and diverse, to work with children with different cultural levels and different learning potentials.

The small number of qualified teachers, the decline of the prestige of this profession among the young people, the critics towards the teacher training institutions, the high temptation of other activity fields, the lack of selection for the teaching profession, the lack of support at the profession debut, the abandonment of the profession only after a few years of activity are aspects that force us to reconsider the training systems for the teachers.

Hereby, the educational systems are looking for solutions for the effectiveness and modernization of the school and education, and one of the elements that must be considered is the quality of the human resources, respective the teachers.

More than ever, the teaching profession must be characterized by flexibility, dynamics, moderate perceptiveness to new things and critical reflection. The nowadays teacher is no longer a knowing – all person in his domain, but a person aware of his own continuing development, keeping up and integrating the new information and communication technology, a person capable of continuing reflection on his demarches and actions and promoting a qualitative education.

Through the present paper we try to analyze the specific of the teaching profession and then move on to two of the most important stages of the teaching career and namely the initial training and professional debut, trying to identify, through mentoring, a possible strategy for better results of the teacher training and professional integration. Through our research, we try to offer concrete solutions for the optimization of the initial training and professional integration for the future teachers through a mentoring programme.

CONSIDERATIONS ON PAPER'S CHAPTERS

The thesis is structured on five chapters, three of them treating theoretical aspects, and the last two presenting our experiment. On the first chapter, we tried to outline the specifics of the teaching profession, analyzing the actual issues and reviewing the main research studies and their interpretations, on the state of art at European and national level. Therewith we tried to emphasize the complexity of the teaching profession, the new roles and competences the teachers must assume and develop now and to emphasize the statute of the teaching profession and the importance of the standards in this profession. Being a dynamic activity with the aim of improving the pupils' results through an effective learning activity, we approached the issue of the continuing professional development and its way during the development stages of the teaching careers.

In order to get a better understanding of the teaching profession and the people working in the educational systems, we tried to point out a few characteristics, obviously not all of them:

- This is a profession that presumes multiple and diverse interhuman relationships, and maybe this why it has such a big subjectivity
- It implies a huge responsibility, the school is a major step in a child's future, and it is an important factor which contributes to the value of a society because of the human resources that it ''produces''
- It is the only profession that allows you to return in the same place where you have left from, but in a different role: as a teacher and not as a pupil. This is why certain studies have pointed out the idea that the childhood experiences have a great significance in our life, and our behavior as teachers is tightly related to our ''pupil's life'', because we tend to reproduce certain behaviors and attitudes of our teachers

- In every educational system there is a high number of teachers, aspect that implies expenses and a complex monitoring and leading system.
- This is a relatively stable profession, with clear rules and quite inflexible. The teachers leave the system at a certain age (about 35-40 years), and it is very hard from persons from other domains to enter the system. On the other hand this is a profession where the jobs are quite stable, excepting the economical crisis situations.
- This is a high requiring profession from an emotional point of view. The daily interaction with different types of educational systems, the diversity and their innovation, the interaction with tens or hundreds of pupils and parents, the conflict situations that demand and a right – away solution, attract a big emotional involvement from the teacher at a cognitive and affective level.
- This is an activity where the teacher has the freedom of decision, freedom in his classroom. Even though the curriculum is quite clear stated in the formal documents, the freedom of the teacher becomes obvious in his manner of selecting the contents, of processing them and in the way he chooses his teaching strategies.
- Even though a profession that implies high exposure, the teacher is quite a solitary person. He works in a closed environment, a classroom, sheltered from the colleagues' and headmasters' eyes.
- This is a profession that can be easily affected by routine, and feelings of self – complacency, of induced self – satisfaction (I am a good teacher, the pupils are bad, they do not learn)

Due to its nature and complexity, the teaching profession is one of the most beautiful professions, very demanding, but one that can bring you huge professional satisfactions, a profession that implies commitment and responsibility.

Chapter II – *Initial teacher training – major step of the continuing professional development,* takes a deeper look into the initial teacher training, beginning with the following benchmarks: duration of the studies, teacher training institutions, curricula, selection criteria and the closing up of the studies within this programmes. We have also reviewed the main paradigms of training the teachers (the traditional paradigm of the profession, the behaviorist paradigm, the personalized paradigm and the research oriented paradigm), because they can offer suggestions for

the elaboration of the main mentoring programmes. The analyses of the teacher training system is completed by the analyses of the teacher training system within the Romanian universities, followed by the analyses of the practical preparation, but also of the specialization and psycho pedagogical preparation. We have chosen to approach the issue of the professional debut because the issue of mentoring, analyzed in the following subchapter and in the research part, is related to this period.

The initial teacher training is the first step of the continuing professional development no matter the domain of the activity. In the educational system, the preparation of the teachers is sort of different from one country to another, from an educational system to another or even in the same country, regarding: the duration of the studies, the preparation level, the curricula, the teaching strategies, the access criteria and finishing the studies etc.

Learning how to teach, training yourself for becoming a teacher, it is a *complex* process, due to the variety of information, competences and skills that must be acquired and developed, *personally*, relying only on the previous learning experiences of the pupils, on their conceptions, prejudice and beliefs about the teaching and learning and *contextual-specific* (Hauge, 2000).

The documents clearly stating the legal frame for the teaching profession in Romania are the Education Law and Teachers' Statute Law. These two laws, as organic laws, govern the organization and activities of the national education system. These documents state: the structure of the primary education system, categories of the teaching and auxiliary staff, the curricula of the primary education system, evaluation of the teaching results, the initial and continuing training, the teaching career, lifelong learning and the structure of higher education system, the requirements of the continuing professional development, the selection and recruitment of the personnel, the continuing training and the authorized institutions which can run courses for the continuing training activities etc.

 The initial teacher training in Romania is developed exclusively within the Universities, from 2005-2006, the Romanian Universities being the main teacher training institution for the primary education system.

According to the new Education Law (*1/2011),* **the initial training for becoming a teacher** in the primary education system involves:

a)   Initial theoretical, specialized training run through universities, within the programmes established by the law;

b)   Didactic master programme with a two years duration;

c)   Internship with one year duration in an education unit, coordinated by a mentor teacher.

The new system for the initial teacher training is completely different from the model used before the new Education Law. Until now a competitive model was being used, which promoted the alternation of the methodical and psycho pedagogical method with the specialized practice, from 2014-2015, the graduates of any university will have to choose between a didactical master programme and a year of internship, if they want a job in the education system. The necessary time training for becoming a teacher will be 6 years, a period of time quite long and a possible impediment for those who want to apply for this job. From our point of view, a combination between the old models of training and the new education law, by keeping the competitive model, followed by a year or two of practice with the coordination of mentor, would have been more desirable.

A particular aspect, highly debated, was the one concerning the balance between the different activities within the initial teacher training elements based on university and the ones based on the school, respectively the balance between the theoretical aspects and the practical ones. This task can be assigned to none of the education institutions mentioned above, but must be accomplished through an authentic partnership, with well known responsibilities, negotiated and assumed by all the parties involved. School plays a major role in the initial teacher training, and the university is the one coordinating these activities that complete the specialized training, achieved through the university curricula.

The pedagogical practice fulfils the assignments that none of the disciplines owes more specific:

- it introduces the students to the scholar environment, to the rules, discipline and schedule of the school system, teaching them the elements that can not be met outside the school
- It allows the students to be involved in real didactic-educational situations, giving them the chance to apply the theory, to give away their knowledge and to learn the organization habits of the scholar activity.

Chapter III is an introduction to the complex and not enough explored domain of the mentoring. We have tried to catalogue the most important aspects of this field, combining the theoretical aspects with suggestion and concrete examples. We have tried to define the concept, underlining its main characteristics, analyzing its functions, its types the stages of such a

relationship and we tried to synthesize the mentoring principles in programmes and activities for the initial teacher training period and also for the induction way.

In education, the mentoring subject is highly debated and closely analyzed, which reflects in the vast specialized foreign literature. As we mentioned before, the term was used at first in the economic field and then imported in the education field in the 80's, aiming to improve the quality of the educational act, like an innovation solution for the teaching profession and the training of the future teachers. Because of the high abandonment rate in the first years of activity and a low preparation level, the American experts introduced the mentoring within the induction programmes, for the first years of activity, facilitating the pass from the initial teacher training to continuing professional development, afterwards being used within the initial training, especially in the practical practice in schools under the coordination of experienced teachers.

In the Romanian educational system there were no formal mentoring programmes before the new Education Law (*1/2011),* not in the initial training period, nor in the professional debut period. Sporadical efforts have been made for achieving this guidance, but they were neither systematical, nor organized and the mentors have not benefited training in this way.

Fortunately, according to the new **Education Law** (*1/2011),* in 2014-2015 we will be able to talk about mentoring in its initial form, institutionalized, within the practical stage of the didactical master, but also within the one year internship in a school under the coordination of mentor teacher.

The second part of the paper, the experimental part, is built upon the ideas and directions described in the first part, the theoretical one. We tried to maintain certain accordance between the theoretical part and the experimental one. We propose an action research, concreted in a structured, inquiring and long term study.

The ascertaining research is presented in **Chapter IV** and it is, in fact formed from two complementary subchapters. The first research tries to explore new ways of improving and optimizing the pedagogical practice of the students which are willing to become teachers. We proposed a research that tries to make certain practice activities more effective by introducing new action models.

The second micro-research is focused on the initial teacher training and professional debut period, trying to find out how the three years experienced teachers' opinion about the quality of their initial training, how useful it was in their first years of activity and which were the main difficulties they came against in their first years.

The aim of the ascertaining experiment was to outline the state of the art in the pedagogical practice activities, at the practical training level for the future teachers, through the internalization of the opinion of the main actors involved, mentor teachers and students. In order to achieve the research objectives, we conceived two questionnaires, one for the mentors and one for the mentees, focused on aspects such as pedagogical practice, the application school and the collaboration with the universities on one hand, trying to obtain, as a final result and evaluation practical training environment.

The sample was formed from 122 teachers from the application schools in Timisoara, who guided the students' pedagogical practice and 369 students, attending the courses of the Department of Teacher Training within the West University of Timisoara, in their third year of university.

Within the ascertaining stage of the experiment, the sample was formed based on a combined methodology, using random sampling, but also a rational selection of the subjects through the stratification of the population, in order to enhance the representation level of the sample.

The teachers' sample that coordinated the students' pedagogical practice was formed from 122 teachers, from different departments. From this sample, 14, 75% were males and 85, 24% were females. 16, 39% have the second didactical degree, and 83, 60% have the first didactical degree and 3, 27% have a phd. The average age was 46, 45 years, the youngest interviewed teacher was 30 and the oldest was 63 years old. On what experienced is concerned, the average was 25, 45 years experience, with the lowest level at 8 years and the highest at 38.

The students sample was formed from 369 students, in the third study year, from different faculties and departments from the West University of Timisoara. The average age of the students was 21, 96 years, the youngest student was 21 and the oldest student participating at the research was 37 years old. From a total of 369 subjects, 15, 44% are males and 84, 55% are females.

Through our ascertaining research, we tried to intercept the following aspects:

- An evaluation of the effectiveness of the practical dimension of the training of the future teachers, by analyzing the pedagogical practice activities and identifying ways of optimizing these, from the perspective of the students and mentors involved in the training process.

- Identifying the training needs and characteristics of an effective mentor, which guides the practical training in the application schools

10

- An evaluation of the intervention styles (and by default, of the training strategies) used by the mentors and the ways of optimization, from the perspective of the students and mentors involved in the training process

From the perspective of the two main actors in the field, the elements providing efficiency to the pedagogical practice activities are:

- For the mentors: a good theoretical and practical background of the students (first degree), an efficient organization of the pedagogical practice schedule (second degree), the quality of the mentors' educational background (third degree) and the analyses of the carried out activities (fourth degree);
- For the mentees: an optimal collaboration mentor-mentee, unconditional support of the mentor (first degree), interest in his own training (second degree), a well established pedagogical practice schedule (third degree) and specialized, methodological and psycho pedagogical training of mentor (fourth degree).

The most important elements of the application school are:

- The mentor (4,46), the pupils (3,10), the school's technical resources (2,86), the administration staff (2,45) and the teachers (2,10) – from the students' point of view
- The mentor (4,45), the pupils (2,80), the teachers (2,73), the school's technical resources (2,63), the administration staff (2,63) – from the mentors' point of view;

From the mentors' and mentees' perspective, the elements defining and efficient mentor are:

- A qualitative background from a scientific, methodological and psycho pedagogical point of view (27%), professional experience (21%), organizing abilities (13%), good communication abilities in their relationship with the adults (9%), empathy (9%), creativity (7%) – from mentors' perspective
- A qualitative educational background, good communication abilities, clear assignments, offering help are vital qualities for the mentors from the mentees' perspective

The unwanted elements for a mentor are: the mentors do not appreciate the lack of involvement (36%), the inflexibility (29%), shallowness (15%), self-approbation (8%), subjective evaluation (7%) and the lack of pedagogical tact (5%); the mentees would not like their mentor to be: a bad communicator, to have high expectations from his mentees, or to impose certain methods of teaching, or to be too emphatic.

11

The aspects to be improved in the activity of the university's practice coordinator are as follows:

- Optimizing the discussions, analyses and feedback time (21%), students' evaluation (15%), familiarization with the specifics of the teaching profession (15%) and stating his expectations (9%) – from the mentor's perspective
- The availability for offering support, active involvement in the activities, moral support for the mentees, communication with his mentees and a clear identification of the expectations are the mentees' points of view.

Regarding the positive and negative aspects of the pedagogical practice activities, the mentors identified the following:

- School's technical resources (21%), experiences mentors (18%), good communication with the mentees (16%), a favorable environment for collaboration (13%) and mentees' willingness for involvement (12%);
- The adequate theoretical and methodological educational background of the mentees (36%), the insufficient collaboration between the application school and the university (27%), the small number hours assigned to pedagogical practice (12%) the lack of time for discussions, analyses, feedback (7%),

and the students identified the following:

- Good interaction with the pupils, accommodation with the teacher role, practicing teaching and the guiding of the mentors;
- The short time for accomplishing all the categories of activity, overlapping of the practice hours with university ones, mentees' level of training, the lack of organization at the school level and the weak communication between the school the university's representatives.

In order to identify the specific elements of the intervention styles and training strategies used by the teachers coordinating the pedagogical practice in the application schools, we used the Daloz (1998) model, which starts with premise that, when the students come to the university they are in a new environment. The mentors can provide support, can give them confidence, can challenge them to an optimal accommodation and they can provide the vision the students need in order for them to see where they left from and where they are headed.

There are perception differences quite big differences about the type of guidance the mentors provide from the mentors' perspective and the mentees'. The mentors have often evaluated

themselves as being very supportive, dimensions as vision and challenges being ignored, with an average difference between them of 0,02. The other evaluation, of the mentees, does not overcome an average of 3,41, approximately in the middle of the evaluation scale, confirming the mentors' support, but on smaller proportions with an average of 3,41. The vision dimension was placed second, with 3, 13 and last, on a 0.15 difference was placed the challenge dimension.

Within the second research, focused on the three years experience teachers, we tried to find the answers for a few questions: how do teachers evaluate the initial training period, which were disciplines studied in this period that helped them in the teaching activity, what type of support do students and debutants benefit from, what kind of support do they need, do the ask for help, are the schools prepared, do they have plans for a better professional and personal integration of the debutants, which is the university's role in the training process and in providing support for the new teachers?

This research was structured as an investigation based on a questionnaire which involved 142 teachers from the counties Timi , Arad, Cara -Severin and Mehedin i from all the educational departments.

On what regards the definition of the strong and weak points in the initial teacher training system, the subjects answered the following:

Strong points of the initial teacher training:

- The quality of the educational background of the teachers in higher education, their emphatic and open attitude (26,76%);
- Various opportunities of working as a volunteer in different schools and organizations, the opportunity to be involved in diverse activities, workshops, projects, extracurricular activities (7,74%)
- The pedagogical practice was extremely helpful (5, 63%);
- Qualitative training, but not enough to cover all the requirements of a workplace (9, 42%);
- Good quality of the training, but a much higher level than requested at the workplace (2, 81%).

Weak points of the initial training:

- The training was mostly theoretic, heavy and irrelevant for the actual profession (21, 83%):
    - A lot of theory, with a low level of applicability, not enough practice;

13

- Heavy curricula;
- More practice, more emphasis on the connection between the theoretical and practical aspects;
- General theoretical training;

- Lack of interest from the teachers, their shallow knowledge, even weak sometimes (8, 45%);
- Too much importance is assigned to the specialty disciplines and not to the preparation for the teaching profession. (7, 04%).
- Reproaches regarding the pedagogical practice (7,04%): the practice activity was carried out at the same time as the courses, the theoretical disciplines were not relevant in report to the educational reality, there was no support nor information necessary in the practice activities, the pedagogical practice did not cover all the needs of the school activity;
- Low quality of the Romanian educational system, the depreciation of the diploma, anyone can be a teacher in Romania (4, 22%)
- The precarious facilities of the schools and the old methods used during the initial training (3, 52%).

From the data regarding the disciplines studied during the pedagogical module, taking into account their utility in the firs year of teaching, the pedagogical practice was placed first, with an average of 3,42% (a maximum of 4,00), quite far from other disciplines like specialties' didactic, evaluation theory, the theory and methodology of training. In support to the above mentioned aspects are the teachers' statements:

- *"I learned more from the practice activities than at any other course or seminar";*
- *"The quality depends a lot on the school where you practiced and on the teacher who coordinated you";*
- *"I liked the practice activities, but we kept doing the same things, I had to teach in a certain manner and I did not have much liberty";*
- *"We had to teach more than observe";*
- *"Practice provided me the opportunity to see if I can be a teacher";*
- *"My practice coordinator never assisted me. He told us which school to go and we only saw him at the exam".*

14

The professional debut period was analyzed through the problems of the debutants, their sources of help, the characteristics in choosing a teaching career, aiming to build up some facilitation strategies for the professional and personal integration at the new workplace for the debutant teacher.

The main issues for the debutant teachers are: pupils' behavior problems, aspects regarding evaluation, completing the documents, using teaching strategies, carrying on projects, low self-confidence, issues related to class management and motivating pupils to learn.

The persons where debutants turn for help are: colleagues with experience in the school (average 3, 00 from 4, 00), the school headmaster (2, 66), the head of department (2, 59), other debutant teachers (2, 37) or friends outside of school (2,30).

It is clear that the debutants feel the need of the support of experienced teachers, although they are vulnerable and do not want to be acknowledged the fact that they have difficulties.

The debutant teachers consider useful the following types of help and resources during their debut period:

Possible types of resources	Average
Mentoring (counseling, guidance and help) from a mentor (experienced teacher that can help me).	3.1549
Observing other experienced teachers in the school	3.1056
Attending conferences, symposium, workshops, debates	3.0563
More opportunities for discussion/ meetings with other teachers, even from other schools	3.0352
Training within the school on different subjects that present interest for the debutants	2.8944
Being assisted in class by other experienced teachers	2.8732
Teaching in team with other experienced colleagues	2.8732
Discussions/ working groups with other debutants teachers	2.8310
Practical courses organized by the university	2.8169
Clear stated expectations from the school administration and from the headmaster	2.8028
Access to foreign literature in the field	2.7817
Parents' support	2.7817
Emotion support	2.6972
Teaching in team with another debutant	2.6408
Assistance from the school headmaster	2.5915
Observing ether debutants	2.5845

The general conclusions on the training experiment highlighted the necessity of a redimension of the ways of achieving the practical dimension for the future teachers, through the reconfiguration of the roles of each of the partner institutions, by specializing teachers in the mentoring field and by using alternative methods, which can assure the optimization of the future teachers' training and a better insertion on the labor market. The involvement of the partner institutions in the training process of the future teachers, in the specialization and training of the mentors, are ways of assuring the desired quality of the practical dimension of the initial teacher training.

The final chapter is a follow up of the ascertaining experiment, offering a structure of the theoretical premises regarding mentoring, a model of training for the teachers who are willing to become mentors during the initial teacher training and a working guide that can be used by the students during the pedagogical practice activities.

During the experiment there were involved 234 students, in their third year of study and attending the DPPD courses and those who chose to prepare this way in order to become teachers. They are from different faculties and departments: Informatics, Geography, Romanian language and literature, Mathematics, Plastic arts, Physics, Biology, History, Chemistry and English.

In order to ensure the validity of the research, we have chosen control groups that that proved their equivalence with the experimental groups, based on the results of the pre-test carried during this research.

During the experiment we involved 234 subjects, in five experimental groups (N=118) and five control groups (N=116), in the following experimental dyad (table 1.I):

Study year	Specialization	Experimental groups	Control groups	Specialization	Total number of subjects
III	Informatics	E1=32	C1=29	Physics	61
III	Geography	E2=31	C2=27	Biology	58
III	Romanian language and literature	E3=20	C3=24	History	44
III	Mathematics	E4=12	C4=10	Chemistry	22
III	Plastic arts	E5=23	C5=26	English	49

16

TOTAL		118	116		234

Table 1.I.   The sample

On what the experimental groups composition is concerned, 38, 13% are males and 61, 86% are females and two experimental groups are formed from students of the real departments. From the total number of subjects, 37, 28% are students from the real departments (informatics and mathematics), and 62, 71% are from human departments (Geography, Romanian language and literature, Mathematics, Arts).

A big percent of the students are included in the specific age interval (about 23 years old), respectively 91, 79% and only a percent of 8, 21% are included in the age interval 24-52 years. The subjects of this category have chosen higher education in order o keep their actual job or in order to get a better paying one.

What determined us to develop a mentoring programme is the state of art of initial teacher training in many educational systems and, as a consequence, within the Romanian educational system, meaning the traditional model, very restrictive, based on the delimitation between theory, provided by the higher education institutions and practice, provided by schools.

Ken Zeichner (2009) talks about the first space perspective, belonging to the practical knowledge and about the second space perspective belonging to the theoretical knowledge. This delimitation can also be found in the real initial teacher training: the theory is learned at the university, and he students go to schools in order to apply what they have learned at the university; the practical knowledge are often considered as meaningless, are marginalized together with the low capitalization within the higher education, of the researches and micro-researches developed in the schools.

In order to overcome and unit this spaces, the author proposes the creation of a third space in the teachers' education and educational research, bringing into discussion the compatibilization and complementarities of these two institutions responsible for the training and their philosophy regarding the supremacy of one or another. This third space proposes the integration into a new, unitary approach of everything that might appear as competitive. In the educational system, he proposes the integration of the academical and practical knowledge in new ways that may determine the development of the educational systems, the development of the skills of teaching and practice, the development of the educational researches developed by the practitioners and their capitalization in the university curricula.

17

We believe that in order to make the practice activities of the students that want to become teachers) more efficient are aiming the learning results, the psycho-social aspects, the relationship aspect with benefits for all the parties involved: the practice coordinators (university), mentors (applications school) and students.

The programme we propose is based on the idea and the principles of an authentic partnership between the two responsible institutions for the training of future teachers and on the emphasis of the mentor role of the teachers guiding and facilitating the learning of the teaching profession, with a continue collaboration the practice coordinator from the university, the mentor in the application school and the student.

The proposed mentoring programme is structured on specific steps of educational intervention at the mentor's activity level but also of the preparation environment of the student. The pedagogical practice is projected in three main stages: a stage for preparing and projecting the activities, a stage for the training of future teachers through the mentoring programme and an evaluation stage. The proposed programme is based on adult education principles and on the characteristics of the adult student.

The mentoring programme has two main elements: a socializing element, aiming to ensure the student's integration in the school activity and one for professional and personal development of the future teachers.

The element of *professional and personal development* has a few essential aspects: the observation activity, the reflection, the feedback and partnership training.

In order to create the necessary framework for the verification of the hypothesis and in order to ensure the structural and functional relevance of the mentoring programme in the pedagogical practice, we structured the educational intervention in the following sub stages:

- Training the mentors through a training session; we have conceived and carried out the training; we tried to bring at the training practice coordinators; theses are working in application schools, reason for what the course was run in weekends; the course ended with an evaluation impact session and of the opportunity of such a programme in training future teachers; their feedback was included within the mentoring programme;
- The mentoring programme was completed with the mentors and students in the specific departments, during this sessions, the trained mentors had to apply what they had learned at course and develop a portfolio;

18

- The end of the programme and feedback.

At the end of our experiment, we tried to get a constructive feedback from our direct beneficiaries, students and mentors, but also an indirect feedback from our indirect beneficiaries, the pupils.

The experimental research was based on a methodological system formed of: the didactical experiment, the investigation based on a questionnaire, the observation, the study of the activities' products, the portfolios and the focus group. The research tools capitalized within the experimental training were: evaluation questionnaire for the practical learning environment, observation file, structured journal, questionnaire for mentors and students for the evaluation of efficiency of the mentoring programme, our own activity and the partners' activity in the programme.

The data analyses pointed out quantitative aspects, by underlining the progress from one step to another, but also qualitative aspects, concerning the level of awareness in the personal development and optimized for the future.

Next, we will present a few data obtained from the application of the research tools described above:

- The analyses of the observation files proves that the introduction of the learning situations that capitalize the reflection, the partnership teaching, the observation and analyses of the activities, have benefic effects on the involved persons and on the learning environment, making more effective the activities and interactions on the following dimensions, respectively:
  - the relationship dimension (the support provided by the mentor, colleagues, other teachers, pupils);
  - maintain-keep the system dimension;
  - the personal development dimension (autonomy, task orientation, pressure at the workplace).

The main personal characteristics obtained by the students were: ways of interacting with the mentor, colleagues and pupils (32,5%), developing the seek and find answers abilities (27,8%), assimilating knowledge specific for teaching profession (22,6%) and self-confidence (15,9%). On what the main improvements of the mentoring programme are concerned, the highest percentages were obtained by the understanding of the school and of the teaching profession from a teacher's

perspective (34,6%) and understanding the theoretical knowledge obtained during the courses and seminars (28,2%). The ways of interacting with the mentor are diverse, from discussion o different topics to discussions after classes or informal talks. So, the interaction ways are significant.

Structured journal analyses allow us to point the following aspects:

- the improvement of the students teaching activities is owed to the experiences with debates, analyses with the mentor and colleagues on specific aspects of the teaching profession;
- knowing the pupils and establishing some optimal ways of interaction with these, facilitates the adaptation at class level and modifying some elements of the projects, which proves flexibility from the students and awareness of the class needs;
- experimenting and analyzing the diverse situations that they live during the pedagogical practice activities, students can overcome their emotions and try to act like real teachers;
- The mentor's and colleagues' feedback is an important way for the students to correct their activity, they can analyze it and identify within the partnership alternative solutions for the challenging situations that occur in everyday life.

The observation files analyses allowed us to intercept the following aspects:

a. the involvement of the students in the pedagogical practice activities evolve, according to the mentors from the tendency to sit alone and do only what is required from him, the student now wants to be involved and help his mentor (average of 8,27 to 8,52);

b. Te interaction ways student-mentor, student-student, student-pupil arise at first certain difficulties resulted from the habit of being passive, unfortunately very often promoted during the courses and the seminars at the university. Slowly, they begin to collaborate, after each activity they ask for feedback, are willing to listen to their mentor's and colleagues' opinion (from an average of 8, 18 to 8, 38);

c. The difficulties and the ways of overcoming them are based on project development, on the understanding and following of the specific terminology for the teaching projection, on choosing diverse contents and communication with the pupils. The solution appears as a result of the discussions and analyses of the activities with the colleagues, through objective and adequate observations (from an average of 8, 29 to 8,66).

20

The general hypothesis and the two specific one established at the beginning of the investigation are confirmed, as it follows:

- the evolution/ progress of the students from one stage to another of the training experiment, where were capitalized observation, reflection techniques, there have been created opportunities for feedback in a critical and constructive manner and ways of partnership teaching (comparison of the obtained scores and the answers to all the tools used);

- The analyses and conclusions of the evaluation and self-evaluation of the students and mentors on the mentoring activity, prove the utility of applying such a programme. In this way, we gathered information regarding three important categories:

a. organizing the pedagogical practice activities and the relationship university-application school:

The statements of this category, referring to the organization degree of the activities, the communication with the university's representatives and the general organization of the pedagogical practice obtained an average of 9,20, which proves the satisfaction degree of the mentors and the fact that the suggested activities during the mentoring programme were successfully applied.

b. the involvement of he students:

The involvement of the students during the programme was good to very good, these category obtaining an average of 8, 59 (statements 3, 5, 6, 10, 11). This is the lowest average, which can be explained through the low consistency of the students in the activities, their uneven involvement, the lack of motivation and interest for some of them.

c. Capitalizing the elements of the mentoring programme:

These category was evaluated through the statements referring to the achievement of the specific objectives of the pedagogical practice activities (an average of 9, 36), analyses of the lessons learned (9, 63), the analyses and discussion of students' activities (9,81) and offering feedback in a critical and constructive manner (9,36). The average at this category is 9, 54, the highest average from all the three categories we established.

The general conclusion of the training experiment was that the application of a mentoring programme through a coherent training demarche, using systematic observation activities o the defining elements of the learning process (objectives, contents, teaching strategies, evaluation methods, lessons types), of individual reflection (using observation files, journals, portfolios), feedback and partnership teaching (with a teacher and a colleague) has a significant contribution to the improvement of the practical learning environment and to achieving better theoretical-practical abilities, specific for the teaching profession.

The mentoring programme proposed achieved its objectives and its purpose, but of course there are ways of improving the programme, the mentors' and students' activity for better results.

As **research** *boundaries*, we were able to identify: the students' tendency to treat the pedagogical practice in shallow manner, the inconsistent participation of some of the students to the experiment (some of them are working), some o the students perceived the activity as much too difficult and time consuming, compared to other colleagues' effort, the investment of time and effort as too big, both for the mentors and students.

The idea we have promoted through this paper is that of the necessity of urgent implementation of the mentoring programmes, for the initial teacher training, but also for the professional debut period and of the projection of some intial and continuing training programmes for mentors. The advantages of the mentoring are above discussions for everyone involved:

- *For the students*: they benefit from the experience of the special trained teachers; they meet situations for discussions, observations, debates, analyses in a critical and reflexive manner; they analyze their own beliefs regarding the teacher activity in general and the teachers' role; they are integrated in a learning community; they learn team work; they get a taste of the life in real school, with real pupils.

- *For the debutant teachers:* the facilitation of the integration at the workplace; adaptation to school specific, to school's requirements and expectations, and those of the parents' and pupils' regarding his performance; opportunities for creating relationships and channels with different resource-persons; the development of debutant teachers' learning communities; they benefit from the experience of a teacher who wants to help them, and open them to new perspectives; the debutant is no longer alone in the classroom and in the teachers' room;

22

- *For the mentor teachers:* it is a good opportunity for avoiding the routine; the mentor has the appropriate professional prestige; it is a good way for stimulating the continuing professional development; he belongs to a professional community; they contribute to the personal and professional development of the future teachers; they are a resource person for the debutant teachers;
- *For pupils*: they benefit from the experience of well trained teachers, that pay attention to their needs, they interact with younger teachers, who stop leaning their job through the try-error process; can be a motivating factor in choosing their future profession;
- *For the school headmaster*: the human resources in the school are recognized for their competence; the school benefits from stable partnerships with the university, other schools, or other educational institutions; he represents a school not only promoting learning, but also which continuing learns;
- *For the school as a whole*: recognition within the school community; attracting teachers willing to learn; development of partnerships; well trained staff; the teachers overcome more easy the debut period and adapt more easily; the school becomes a really community an it opens to community.

General conclusions

Based on the study of specialized literature and of the different theoretical perspectives presented in our paper, together with the quantitative and qualitative we have developed within our experiment, we dare to draw up the following conclusions and recommendations:

- *For decisions factors (Ministry and school inspectorates)*
  - Adequate financing of the educational system, raising the payment level for the teachers and more investments in the continuing professional development system, beginning with the initial training until the end of the career.
  - Promoting a better public image of the teachers through the modern communication levels
  - Improving the working conditions for the teachers: smaller number of pupils, resources for the classroom, reorganizing the amount of assignments by reducing the administrative and bureaucratic tasks.

23

- Promoting the collaboration between the educational institutions, between the teachers from the same institution and from different institutions; eliminating the competitive factors and an unloyal and subjective competition between the teachers (see the actual criteria from the observation files)
- Validating the teachers' experience obtained within formal and non formal contexts (amounting with continuing professional development credit system);
- Reorganizing the evaluation system of the teachers through objective criteria, possible to achieve and which capitalize the competences and less the ''diplomas', giving more importance to the teachers' evaluation system, to the activities in class and pupils' progress, starting from an initial evaluation.
- Introducing some standards for the teaching profession depending on experience and building up a specialized evaluation system based on these standards.
- Introducing a substantial reward system for the mentor teachers.

- ***For the headmasters of the educational institutions/ decision factors within universities:***
    - Promoting and developing authentic partnerships between schools and universities: developing mutual projects, capitalizing the practical experience of the teachers, involvement in mutual activities, accomplishing partnership studies.
    - Creating learning communities at schools and universities levels, for the advantage of initial and continuing teacher training;
    - Organizing formal mentoring programmes, for the initial training period, but also for the professional debut period; conceiving training courses for mentors, which will support the professional development of the students and debutant teachers;
    - Creating mentor networks, true professional communities, with a certain statute;
    - Encouraging and involving teachers in research projects and different studies;
    - Reorganizing the university curricula according to the new competences required to a teachers in the actual society; a redimension of the practice-theory report;
    - Reorganizing the courses and seminars, by capitalizing the research in the field, through a better application of the theory, emphasizing the development of practical abilities, the analyses of the beliefs system, the development of the reflection capacity and of asking questions;

24

- A redimension of the number of hours assigned to pedagogical practice in the university curricula; introducing some practice periods, in order to get the chance to see a diverse number of activities;
- Raising the statute given to psycho pedagogical practice by raising the students' awareness on the importance of this training;

- *For students and debutant teachers::*
  - Involvement in the mentoring programme;
  - Accepting help from the mentors and accepting the opportunities of professional and personal development within the mentoring programme;
  - Treating with more responsibility and maturity the training period for becoming a teacher;
  - Assuming the roles and active involvement in the pedagogical practice activities, in the initial training period through the didactical master, but also through the one year internship

- *For teachers*
  - Capitalizing the experience and expertise of the teachers by involving them in training activities for becoming a trainer;
  - Motivating and involving the experienced teachers in mentoring programme and raising awareness on the opportunities of professional and personal development they offer
  - Continuing professional development for teachers in higher education and training for the future teachers, on themes concerning interactive methods, student oriented principles and methods for working with adults, alternative and evaluation methods, good practice presentations etc.

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