

CURRENT PERSPECTIVES ON TEACHER MENTORING

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Abstract: *From the perspective of the ideas promoted by modern educational paradigms, the role and activity of the mentor teacher must converge with them, both in terms of carrying out the practical educational activity by the mentor teacher and in terms of advising beginning teachers or the students/pupils carrying out their pedagogical practice. How they carry out the mentoring activity and how they coordinate and direct the didactic activities of the beginning teachers or students are essential factors in their initial training with an impact on their future didactic activity. A current, modern perspective of the mentor regarding the elements of the educational process, regarding its procedural teaching-learning-evaluation, will support the shaping of an appropriate, up-to-date vision for the mentored individuals, which will be reflected in their own teaching activities. The quality of the teacher mentoring activity is conditioned not only by the characteristics that define the profile of a competent mentor (pedagogical expertise, interpersonal skills, communication, the ability to provide constructive feedback, to ensure proper management of lessons, etc.) but also by the implementation in the educational practice and the mentoring activity of the trends of modern educational paradigms. In correlation with the abovementioned ideas regarding the development of the teaching mentoring activity following the characteristics of modern educational paradigms, we investigated the opinion of a group of teachers in pre-university education regarding the importance of carrying out the teacher mentoring activity and the didactic activity in general in agreement with the trends in the evolution of didactics and current paradigms.*

Keywords: *teacher mentoring; modern educational paradigms; initial training of teachers; the mentor's role; instructive-educational process.*

Teacher mentoring. Legislative markers

Teacher mentoring is a supportive relationship for learning, training, and personal development between a teacher with a wealth of professional expertise and a trainee, usually a beginning teacher, in which the teacher intentionally shares their knowledge and experience with the trainee, helping the latter to develop their professional knowledge. (C. Stan, 2020)

Mentors in the educational field are professionals who advise a person with less experience or at the beginning of their teaching career; they offer informed opinions about the profession and share their experiences and knowledge, thus facilitating the induction of the beginning teachers or those in the process of training and the fulfillment of their potential (E. Lazăr, G. Leahu, 2020).

Depending on the stage of training in which the mentored person is, two forms of mentoring can be identified:

- Pedagogical practice mentoring was introduced in the legislative provisions long before the professional induction mentoring was added and is aimed at training students from vocational high schools with a pedagogical profile or students opting for the psycho-pedagogical training program in order to certify their skills for the teaching profession.
- Professional induction mentoring was stipulated and regulated in the Romanian education system by the new National Education Law (2011).

National legislation provides for the introduction of mentoring through the National Education Law No. 1/2011, through the Government Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 49/2014 regarding the establishment of measures in the field of education, and through the Order of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport no. 5485/2011 which regulates the establishment of the body of mentor teachers for the coordination of the practical internship in order to occupy a teaching position.

The training of teaching staff in Romania is carried out according to the provisions of the National Education Law No. 1/2011 as well as other normative acts and related secondary documents. The National Education Law No. 1/2011 implements a series of changes regarding educational policies and practices concerning the initial and continuous professional development of teachers.

In the National Education Law No. 1/2011, the practical internship is stipulated as part of the initial training: each beginning teacher must carry out a practical internship lasting one school year, in an educational institution, under the coordination of a mentor teacher. Art. 61 of GEO no. 49/2014 specifies that the performance of the practical internship is conditional upon obtaining a bachelor's degree and either the teaching master's degree or the certificate of completion of level I or II of the psycho-pedagogical training programs. We note that the National Education Law No. 1/2011 provides for the position of a mentor teacher in educational institutions to ensure the initial training and professional induction of teaching staff.

By establishing the need for beginning teachers to complete a practical internship to practice the teaching profession under the assistance and coordination of a mentor (National Education Law No. 1/2011, Art. 248, paragraph 1), a solution is offered to improve and facilitate the professional induction of beginning teaching staff.

The mentor is the person who exercises roles regarding the facilitation of the professional induction of beginners. The concept of professional induction defines the process of integrating a beginner into an organizational, professional environment (L. Ezechil, 2008, 2009).

By employing the Order of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport no. 5485 of 29.09.2011 for the approval of the methodology regarding the constitution of the body of mentor teachers for the coordination of the practical internship required in order to carry out a teaching role, in Romania the process of selection and training of professional induction mentors was started. Obtaining the didactic function of a mentor teacher for the professional induction of beginning teachers is achieved through a competition consisting of fulfilling minimum conditions regarding the experience and accumulations within the continuous learning process and participating in an examination. Teaching staff who have the role of mentor teachers and are part of the body of mentor teachers benefit from a reduction of two hours per week of their teaching norm or remuneration for mentoring activities carried out outside the base norm.

The end of the initial teacher education stage is represented by the national permanent teacher certification exam.

The legislation and the fundamental normative acts that regulate mentoring activities and in which the status, functions, and roles of the professional induction mentor are specified are as follows: the Occupational Standard -

Mentor, Bucharest, 1999; the National Education Law No. 1/2011; the Occupational Standard - School Inspector for Mentoring, 10/10/2011; the Order of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth, and Sport No. 5485 / 29.09.2011 for the approval of the methodology regarding the constitution of the body of mentor teachers.

The role of the mentor from the perspective of current educational paradigms

The education projects for the third millennium aim to transform traditional educational practices based on the new principles specific to contemporary education and pedagogy: global education, lifelong learning, inclusive education, education for all, equal opportunities, and partnership in education. In-depth learning, based on the action and responsibility of the learner, competency-based learning, integration of knowledge in application structures, interactive teaching, and inter- and transdisciplinary curriculum are just a few concepts and ideas on which contemporary pedagogy is based, being generated by the shift of European societies towards globalization and the knowledge-based society, the need for synchronization between the development of society and the development of education, the new results of some evaluations and applications in education systems, the need for the integration and globalization of education.

The postmodern paradigm in the field of education, objectified by the new perspectives and solutions in educational theory and practice, developed along the lines of continuity and restructuring of the paradigm of modernity, but also of new directions and educational projects, took shape in response to the need to adapt the school to the changes and problems of the contemporary world.

In a study devoted to the analysis of the evolution of pedagogical theory from the perspective of the postmodern paradigm, E. Păun (2002) highlights the following characteristics of postmodernity in education:

- Education centered on the student, as a person with individual, differentiating characteristics that must be valued and maximized in the educational act (idea located at the center of the existential-humanist paradigm, subsumed by the postmodern perspective).
- Reasserting the value of the subjective-affective dimension in the educational relationship, of the actions and behaviors of the subjects that have a unique, situational, and contextualized character.
- Regarding the educational relationship as an interaction in which the teacher and the student are engaged in a process of cognitive and

- affective investment, and in which the teacher works together with the pupils towards their development and building their status as learners.
- Achieving a balance in the school between the promotion of competition and cooperation.
 - Overcoming the prescriptive, normative, and formalized vision of the curriculum theory and pursuing its integration in the class of students as a cultural space in order to analyze the cultural contexts in which the curriculum is structured and enable its continuous re-elaboration and development.

All these directions of restructuring the educational reality, which appeared and developed as responses to the challenges of the contemporary world, are reflected in the principles of the new educational paradigm (Table 1), synthesized by Bruno Wurtz and presented compared to the principles of the classical educational paradigm (as cited in C. Cucoş, 1999, pp. 32-33):

Table 1: The principles of the new educational paradigm

The principles of the classical educational paradigm	The principles of the modern educational paradigm
- Emphasis is placed on the content and the accuracy of the acquired knowledge.	- Emphasis is placed on access to information, lifelong learning, establishing connections between pieces of information, and openness to new concepts.
- Learning is regarded as a result or an outcome.	- Learning is seen as a process.
- The presence of a hierarchical, authoritarian structure that encourages and rewards conformity.	- Promoting anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian principles that encourage individualized, different thinking. Teachers and learners regard each other as people, not as roles.
- The structure of the teaching-learning process is rigid, with compulsory analytical programs.	- The structure of the teaching-learning process is flexible, with optional subjects and alternative didactic strategies.
- Establishing a mandatory rhythm for knowledge assimilation for all students.	- Respecting the individual progression rate of the students through the subject matter.
- Emphasizing efficiency, performance, and success.	- Valuing the individual and emphasizing the development of their personality.
- Emphasizing the outside world.	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasizing the importance of the inner experience by promoting the activation and the development of imagination.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on developing analytical thinking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emphasis on the valorization of the entire intellectual potential by combining rational strategies with those based on intuition.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluating the students and their performance with the help of labels – a practice which leads to stigmatization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Labeling is reduced to an auxiliary role, purely descriptive.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern towards norms and standards exterior to the students. - Emphasis on theoretical, abstract knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concern towards the performance of the students as related to their personal potential. - Combining theoretical, abstract knowledge with experiments within and outside of the classroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Designing the classrooms based on criteria related to their purpose and functionality. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taking into account ergonomic aspects (lighting, chromatics, physical comfort, and the possibility of student-student interaction).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resistance towards proposals from the collective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The proposals from the collective are considered and supported.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education is considered a method for achieving the minimum level of skills required in the present. - The flow of knowledge is unilateral, from the teacher to the student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education is targeted toward the future, takes place throughout the entire life, and is lifelong. - The flow of knowledge works both ways, promoting the reciprocity of learning.

From the perspective of the ideas promoted by modern educational paradigms, the role and activity of the mentor teacher must converge with them, both in terms of carrying out the practical educational activity by the mentor teacher and in terms of advising beginning teachers or the students/pupils carrying out their pedagogical practice. How they carry out the mentoring activity and how they coordinate and direct the didactic activities of the beginning teachers or

students are essential factors in their initial training with an impact on their future didactic activity. A current, modern perspective of the mentor regarding the elements of the educational process, regarding its procedural teaching-learning-evaluation, will support the shaping of an appropriate, up-to-date vision for the mentored individuals, which will be reflected in their own teaching activities. In addition to the theoretical elements that describe the role and aspects of current educational paradigms, the examples from teaching practice provided specifically by the mentor teacher are of significant importance in establishing the bases of skills and competencies used in educational practice by beginning teachers or students/future teachers.

Methodology

In correlation with the abovementioned ideas regarding the development of the teaching mentoring activity following the characteristics of modern educational paradigms, we investigated the opinion of a group of teachers in pre-university education regarding the importance of carrying out the teacher mentoring activity and the didactic activity in general in agreement with the trends in the evolution of didactics and current paradigms.

Following a semi-structured interview applied to groups of teachers who carry out teaching activities in two pre-university educational institutions in Cluj-Napoca, we formulated the items of a questionnaire through which we sought to identify their perception regarding the role of teacher mentoring as a stage in the initial teacher education and regarding the importance of employing the ideas and trends of current educational paradigms, especially by the mentor teachers.

The questionnaire items through which we investigated these aspects are:

I consider teacher mentoring an essential and necessary stage in the initial training of teachers.

I believe that the ideas of the current educational paradigms must be reflected in the mentoring activity.

I believe that the educational practice of mentor teachers must be carried out in accordance with the ideas of modern educational paradigms.

The aim of the investigation was to highlight the importance of the teacher mentoring activity as a stage in the initial training of teachers and the role that the mentor teacher fulfills by carrying out the educational practice following the trends in the evolution of didactics and modern educational paradigms.

Research objectives:

- Identifying the importance and necessity of teacher mentoring as a stage in the initial training of teaching staff.
- Highlighting the importance of implementing the trends of modern educational paradigms in the mentoring activity.
- Highlighting the importance of carrying out the didactic activity following the trends of modern didactics.

Research hypothesis: we assume that bringing awareness to the role and importance of the teacher mentoring activity in the initial training of teachers has a positive impact on the quality of the mentoring activity by ensuring that it is carried out in convergence with the trends of modern educational paradigms.

Target group: the questionnaire was applied to a sample of thirty teachers, both beginning teachers and experienced teachers, who carry out teaching activities in two pre-university educational institutions in Cluj-Napoca.

Results and discussions

Following the application of the items from the questionnaire aimed at evaluating the perceived importance of the teacher mentoring activity and its implementation in agreement with the trends of modern educational paradigms, we recorded the following results.

Table 2: *I consider teacher mentoring an essential and necessary stage in the initial training of teachers.*

	Frequency	%
I agree	25	83.3
I partially agree	3	10
I do not agree	0	0
I do not know/No answer	2	6.6
Total	30	100,0

Table 3: *I believe that the ideas of the current educational paradigms must be reflected in the mentoring activity.*

	Frequency	%
I agree	23	76.6
I partially agree	6	20
I do not agree	0	0

I do not know/No answer	1	3.3
Total	30	100,0

Table 4: *I believe that the educational practice of teacher mentors must be carried out in accordance with the ideas of modern educational paradigms.*

	Frequency	%
I agree	28	93.3
I partially agree	2	6.6
I do not agree	0	0
I do not know/No answer	0	0
Total	30	100,0

The answers of the teaching staff highlight their perception regarding the role and importance of the teaching mentoring activity in the initial training of teaching staff and its development in convergence with the trends of modern educational paradigms. We note that the majority of teachers surveyed highlight the importance and necessity of teacher mentoring as a stage in the initial training of teachers. Furthermore, the opinion of most of the teachers questioned concerning the need to implement the trends of modern educational paradigms, both in everyday practice and in the teacher mentoring activity, highlights their awareness of the role of the mentor teacher for beginning teachers or students carrying out teaching practice.

From the initial meaning of mentoring, which involved the preservation and transmission of knowledge from one person to another, the concept has undergone paradigm and direction changes that highlight features of the constructivist paradigm, following the principles of adult learning (M. Craşovan, 2016, p.65):

- The role of the mentee: transforms from a passive receiver to an active partner (adults learn best when they are involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning).
- The mentor's role: changes from authoritarian to facilitator (to maintain a supportive climate that promotes the conditions necessary for learning).
- The learning process: from a mentor-mentee direction and the mentor taking responsibility, it becomes self-directed learning with the mentee taking responsibility for their own learning.

- The duration of the relationship: it evolves from a focus on the calendar to a relationship determined in time by its purpose.
- Mentoring focus: from focusing on the product, the result, embodied in assimilated knowledge and its transfer, it evolves towards focusing on the process through critical reflection and application.

The mentioned perspective shift regarding mentoring and the mentor-mentee relationship is consistent with the principles of the constructivist paradigm of instruction and learning. Adherence to the constructivist principles of training and learning is increasingly present in the educational process in Romania after the education reform, and it involves the knowledge and transference into the educational practice of some base aspects of constructivist learning, which highlight the central role of the student and the structuring of the teaching-learning-evaluation processes starting from the student's needs, abilities, and experiences (E. Joita, 2006):

- It favors the organization of information in structures and systems based on individual experience and particularities.
- It aims to build new knowledge through direct mental and actional involvement and not its acquisition through hearing and receiving.
- It is a process of internalizing the method of knowing, and understanding is experiential, subjective, and interactive.
- It is active learning based on research, processing, prediction, critical analysis, interpretation, personal reasoning, and then collaboration.
- The resulting constructs are based on the students' experience, encounters, and their own interpretations.
- The objectives and ways of supporting learning are adjusted through differentiated treatment according to individual particularities in learning.
- The practice of constructivist theory focuses on the student's learning and not the teacher's teaching.
- Students learn to organize and carry out their own learning and knowledge in a personalized way, achieving the objective 'to learn to learn, to know, to understand.'
- Experiences must facilitate the approach of problems from several points of view and perspectives, allowing the valorization and affirmation of the variability of the particularities and learning styles of the students.
- It is accompanied by affectivity, motivation, and attitude that support active participation, experiencing successes, and overcoming difficulties.
- The interests, wishes, and needs of the students are respected.

Conclusions

The characteristics and trends of education in the future, of the paradigm of postmodernity in the field of education, should constitute the fundamental characteristics of the current education systems, exemplified in aspects such as: focus on the learning process, on learning competencies and abilities; learning through problem-solving, critical thinking; monitoring through high performance, success; design and management in a school-community partnership; student/adult-centered education; varied learning paces and styles; customized, individualized teaching-learning activities; adapting the school to the characteristics of the student; the preponderance of interactive experiences that generate deep learning such as co-operative teaching-learning, lessons based on life experience.

The quality of the teacher mentoring activity is conditioned not only by the characteristics that define the profile of a competent mentor (pedagogical expertise, interpersonal skills, communication, the ability to provide constructive feedback, to ensure proper management of lessons, etc.) but also by the implementation in the educational practice and the mentoring activity of the trends of modern educational paradigms.

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