

COACHING MODELS APPLIED IN STUDENTS' TEACHING PRACTICE PLACEMENTS

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Abstract: *This paper presents the theoretical and methodological framework for the application of the most popular models of coaching in education, specifically in the practical training of future teachers, within the teaching practice placements, which could be much improved if the principles and strategies of coaching for performance were capitalised. For an optimizing approach to education based on coaching, one does not need just conceptual clarification, but also new practice models to support the personal and professional training of students in their academic career. The purpose of the research was to experiment with established models of coaching which, applied in teaching practice placements, generated analyses, reflections, resizing of the process of initial training for future teachers and ultimately led to best practices and positive changes at the behavioural, attitudinal and value level. The methodology is of the qualitative type. The conclusions of the work emphasize the value of coaching models, the specific nature of the process based on the evidence of the research into the practical training of future teachers.*

Key words: *coaching models, teaching practice, initial teachers' training.*

1. Introduction

The current interrogations and reflections on the recalibration of initial teachers' training system from the Romanian pre-tertiary education in accordance with the National Education Law No.1/2011, updated, but also with the European strategies and practices in the field, bring forward new principles of reconstruction and resizing of future teachers' initial training based on a modern reference frame that enables diversified routes for teachers' training.[2]

Since practical training represents the most important component of initial formation for the teaching career, teaching practice is the key element that requires resizing actions in terms of extending the number of hours allocated,

of consistence and of diversification of the contexts of professional behaviours practice. Professor E. Păun (2013) points out that “*reflective practice must become an essential training component for the teaching career.*” [8] At the teaching practice level, the major role that mentors and practice coordinators play has often been stressed as “*their model, their teaching styles, attitudes and values they convey, manifested teaching skills are sources of inspiration for future teachers*”. (Tudor L.S., 2015). The issue of these teachers’ continuous training as specialists in coaching is of high topicality. Schon D. argues that true professionals, regardless of their field of activity, are reflective practitioners and all their efficient performances are reflective practices because they think while acting and act on what they think. [9] Later extended by J.P. Killion and G.R. Todnem, Schon’s model brings under the spotlight both reflection in action, reflection on action and reflection for action. [6]

2. Coaching versus mentoring in teaching practice

Coaching has proved its efficiency over time as a process and strategy of motivation, performance improvement, change and personal and/or organizational development in areas such as sports, business, psychology, adult education, leadership, industry. According to Whitmore J. (2014, p.33), “*coaching is even a way to lead, to treat people, a mind-set, a way of being*”. [12]

Used for the first time in the UK (1830), the term *coaching* (the verb “*to coach*”) has, by definition, according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the primary significance of “*to meditate*” and then to “*train, make suggestions about, to work with facts.*” [12] In teaching practice, from the perspective of the student practitioner, meditation in the sense of introspection, self-analysis is essential in gaining active and deep knowledge about our own actions, moods, emotions, inner experiences, motivations, as compared to the practical exercise at the teacher’s desk and future profession in general. It’s about personal reflection on one’s own professional behaviour in training. Through coaching, one can develop strategies in teaching practice that lead to reflective introspection and to questioning on some unique teaching moments experienced by the students, which help them develop a critical and self-critical spirit, as well as a cognitive and educational autonomy. The student who enters a coaching process will be aware, first of all, of the level of his/her own preparation for the teaching profession, will conceive this moment as being the starting point in his/her professional development. This necessarily involves awareness and responsibility, ownership and commitment. The student will set clear and realistic objectives in his/her effort of professional growth, knowing precisely what is his/her starting point and what are the necessary steps that

will have to be undertaken in order to gain even more self-confidence, more excitement and more teaching experience. (S)He will learn how to be proactive, open and flexible, constructive and organized. Being accompanied throughout the process by a mentor specialist in coaching, the student will follow his/her own program of training and development, will gain self-confidence, will gain knowledge and new skills and will practise his/her less developed capabilities and skills. According to Whitmore J. (2014, p.32), *“the fundamental and ubiquitous purpose of any coaching-type interaction is to build the self-confidence of others, regardless of the nature of the task or issue in question”*. Among the multiple benefits of coaching, Whitmore J. (2014, p.233-236) mentions the following: *“improved performance and productivity, personal development, improved learning, improved relationships, improved life quality, creativity, better use of resources, greater flexibility and adaptability to change, culture change, existential skills et alia”*. All these facts will motivate the student in his/her professional development. Unlike mentoring, which involves a support relationship offered by a long-term experienced mentor to his disciples, coaching *“does not depend on an older and more experienced mentor who transmits his knowledge to someone”*, but on the coach’s skills that help students learn *“...on their own rather than be taught by others. [12]. Both processes (mentoring and coaching) are valuable because they facilitate the exploration of needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes and assist students in making a real and lasting change in their way of professional assertion. The literature of specialty emphasizes both the differences between the two processes and the similarities between them. While mentoring involves long-term support and guidance in order to prepare students for their future professional roles, coaching is a short-duration process covering several areas of development/specific aspects (Jarvis J., 2004).*

An optimizing approach to the practical preparation of future teachers needs not only conceptual clarification, but rather new practice models to personally and professionally support students in their training for a teaching career. In order to explore the applicability potential of coaching models in teaching practice, models that are popular in the literature of specialty [1], [4] due to their practically-proved effectiveness in various fields, a focus group was conducted in May 2016 with 6 people directly involved in the teaching practice placements of students from the following specialisations: Letters, Economics and Law (three teaching practice mentors from 3 application schools in Pitesti and three tutors/practice coordinators from the university). The objectives of the focus group aimed at, among others, designing the procedural framework necessary to the experiencing of certain coaching models in teaching practice placements and advancing proposals for the operationalization of new pedagogical tools for teaching practice

placements. The focus group was organized and moderated by the researcher, who collected the data based on the interview guide. The pre-session of the discussion focused involved the familiarization of the participants with each other, but also with the meeting space, and there was an introduction on the meaning of a coaching model, i.e. a set of guidelines that offer coaches practical ongoing support in students' practical training. Moreover, the moderator explained that, in teaching practice, a coaching model could be a logistical plan for working with teacher-to-be students who brings together a set of specific strategies for the designing, understanding of and reflection on the act of teaching and for increasing the students' teaching performance. The moderator pointed out that in specialised literature there are several coaching models and invited the focus group participants to analyse 3 of them: the GROW Model, the GROWTH Model and the FUEL Model. The selection of these models was based on the following main criteria: assessments of several specialists in the field [7] in what concerns their popularity, applicability and effectiveness demonstrated in various professional fields, the roles set out for the coach and the coachee, the coaching strategies that lead to professional success, reflective analysis, individual and together with the coach, on experiential learning situations and on "inside knowledge" of the profession by practising it.

The GROW Model (J.Whitmore, 2003) involves going through 4 stages, just like planning a trip desired:

- Goal/setting the goal - *Where do you want to go? What's your goal?*
- Reality/examining current reality - *What's the reality? Where are you right now?*
- Options/exploring options - *What are your options to bridge the gap between your goal and reality?*
- Will/setting the way/the path to be taken- *What will you do to plan your next steps?*

Coaching in teaching practice is a model of student support based on the following key elements: "*building awareness of the facts, of their own potential, of responsibility and of self-confidence*". (J.Whitmore,2014).An expanded version of the previous model is the GROWTH Model (Gollwitzer, 1999), which involves 8 training steps:

- Goals—*What do you need to achieve?*
- Reality—*What is happening now?*
- Options—*What could you do?*
- Will—*What will you do?*
- Tactics—*How and when will you do it?*
- Habits—*How will you sustain success?*

The FUEL Model (Zenger, Stinnett, 2010) involves the existence of 4 stages:

1. The frame/context of the conversation is agreed by both coach and coachee, the purpose and the desired outcomes are set;
2. Understanding the current state by the coachee, through his/her awareness of the current reality;
3. Exploring the desired state through multiple alternative paths before prioritizing methods of achieving success;
4. Laying out a success plan involves identifying the specific action steps to be taken in order to achieve the desired results in time and determine the follow-up of the process.

In teaching practice, coaching is focused on the mentor/tutor-student professional dialogue, oriented towards helping students in the process of initial training in terms of awareness and responsibility in exercising increasingly better teaching roles and behaviours by appealing to their own potential and to the internal resources waiting to be brought to light. The issues addressed in coaching meetings are selected by the student himself/herself and the coaching process provides opportunities for individual reflection, but also for reflection with the coach on understanding the specific issues of the teaching profession.

3. Steps in implementing coaching models in teaching practice

The initial stage is based on J. Whitmore's belief about coaching, which, to be practised successfully, "*requires expertise in coaching*"[12]. This step aims to prepare teaching practice mentors and tutors as specialists in coaching through a training program specially designed in accordance with the existing occupational standard (COR code 242412) to ensure their possession of the skill set necessary to the capitalization of coaching strategies in teaching practice placements. The training program in coaching can be designed in modules (table 1), totalling a number of 360 hours, distributed as recommended in the standard.

Table 1. Designing the modular training program for specialists in coaching

Crt. no.	Modular training program for specialists in coaching		No of hours allotted/module
	Module I	Fundamentals of the coaching process	78 hours
	Module II	Coaching techniques	156 hours
	Module III	Organization of coaching	66 hours
4.	Module IV	Practical coaching sessions	60 hours
	Total No of hours		360 hours

In order to diversify the experiential learning situations in which students will be involved in teaching practice placements and to broaden their practical training, decisions can be made at the level of management of teaching practice activities and at the level of the continuous training provider in view of establishing a network of specialists in educational coaching, which will bring together *resource persons* trained as specialists in coaching and working in alternative education units (Step by Step, Montessori, Freinet, etc.) or in non-formal education, student clubs and palaces, in NGOs with learning/recreational/cultural purpose etc.

In the proper stage of individual/group coaching sessions, students start their self-reflective analyses and the coach puts a functionality imprint on a coaching model, mainly by following the main stages:

- Identification of the current situation, as perceived by the student (*Where am I?*);

- Selection and specification of the condition desired/outcome to be reached by the student (*Where do I want to get?*);

- Finding/building a strategy to achieve the desired condition (*How do I get there?*);

- Choice of techniques meant to activate the inner resources needed to achieve the desired condition (*What are the best techniques for activating the resources to achieve the desired state?*);

- Training and continuous support to the student all the way from the current condition to the desired condition by specific coaching methods (*How am I supported on my way to teaching performance?*).

The duration of a coaching session can vary from 30 minutes to 1-3 hours. One can opt for practical coaching sessions organised in groups. Coaching works at the level of thinking and attitude, strategy and behaviour, skills and management of emotions. During the coaching session, the coach can fulfil several roles. In the case of the teaching practice, training is twofold: on the one hand, the role of the mentor from the application schools as a specialist in coaching and, on the other hand, the role of the practice coordinator/tutor from the university as a specialist in coaching. Both coaches support students on their way to professional success by acting as facilitators and trusted partners that provide security and support. The coaching models adopted differ, as well as the context in which the coaching process takes place. The specific nature of these support actions in the coaching process consists of:

- setting the goals related to performance and setting the final goals;
- using specific questions, well placed in order to generate new insights into understanding or addressing a practical situation;

- using different coaching strategies that will allow students to access their inner resources, to better understand themselves, to motivate themselves, to make decisions responsibly, to develop new strategies for action, to refine their behaviours, attitudes or personal working strategies;
- selecting the best solution after examining several options for solving a situation/practical problem in accordance with the student's own will;
- interest in perceptions, values, belief system of the student, in his/her way of thinking, emotional structure, potential and limitations;
- constructive and generative feedback for new understandings of the matter addressed.

4. Discussion and perspectives

The analysis of the 3 coaching models has allowed the focus group participants to highlight several useful things from the viewpoint of their applicability in teaching practice placements. The Grow model allows the identification by the student of the behaviour whose change is desired, the goal of the coaching process being represented by the structuring of this change with the coach's help. Students will be taught how to distinguish between the final goals and the performance goals that are under the control of each of them and which provide an adequate way of measuring individual progress. There follows the examination phase of current reality, when the student is helped by the coach to accurately and honestly describe the original state or the starting point of his professional development through open questions (*what, when, where, who and how much*). An exploration of the options will enable the student to weigh each action from a wide range of alternatives in terms of advantages and limitations so that, at a later moment, the students will make the right decision or adopt that behaviour which could lead to the right solution based on their own will. The GROWTH model brings as added value the introduction of the *tactics stage* and of the *habits stage* that will lead the student to reinforcing and adopting an efficient work strategy in a determined time, but also to reflecting over concrete ways to assist their professional success. The FUEL Model converges with the previous models when setting up a plan for success, articulating specific action steps to achieve the desired results in time. The coach sets time limits for specific actions and for feedback. (S)He also offers creative ways to support the coachee.

The optimization of teaching practice placements by capitalizing coaching strategies points to several interrelated actions which contribute to the increased quality of the future teachers' practical training:

- creation of innovative tools for carrying out the coaching process and practice sessions;

- widening the range/scope of the teaching practice, creating the context for capitalization of the complex learning situation (Soare E., 2015) by diversifying the situations of students' skills exercising, it happening in other educational settings than the application schools (e.g. students practice in spaces of non-formal education);
- formalization of internships under the supervision of practice mentors and tutors and setting up a mechanism for recruiting teacher-to-be students ever since college years;
- setting up a system of coordination of volunteer students who engage in voluntary work at the level of certain school units, public or private institutions with educational and/or cultural/community purposes and its correlation with teaching practice;
- facilitating the exchange of best practices among teacher-to-be students, among mentors and tutors from other universities/other countries in projects, summer camps, round tables, conferences, workshops etc.

5. Conclusions

Coaching in teaching practice is a dynamic process focused on a professional dialogue designed and implemented in the student's benefit in order to help him/her out in the process of formation/development of his/her professional and transversal competences. The coaching relationship is built on trust, open communication and confidentiality, it having a well-established duration and entailing the existence of informal or scheduled meetings focused on achievement of the specific and immediate goals. Coaching is a process that aims to improve student performance immediately. The art of coaching lies in creating an environment that is favourable to learning/exercising professional behaviours and of discovery by the student of his/her internal resources, most often elicited by a coach's ability and used effectively in the practical exercise at the teacher's desk. The coaching process will guide the student in surveying the personal development potential and will activate those latent qualities, skills and resources he/she needs in order to become increasingly better in the successful practising of the teaching profession. The coaching models help us understand the coaching intervention from a systemic perspective on improving the practitioner students' teaching performance. Out of the variety of coaching models, coaching specialists can opt for those models that best facilitate the conversation underpinning the coaching relationship with a view to change, development and achievement of the desired performance. As coaches in teaching practice, mentors and tutors will use open questions to help students reflect on their own didactic actions, reactions and behaviours, decisions, revise certain unconformities under way

and acquire that procedural knowledge and those practical skills necessary to a successful performance of the teaching profession.

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