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TRAINING INDUCTION MENTORS: -alternative policy scenarios of Romanian educational system-

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Abstract

Even though mentoring beginning teachers is considered as being an important component of induction, how mentors should be prepared for their role is rarely addressed in the literature. In this paper we will try to overview the level of regulations in induction mentor education and to identify a couple of policy scenarios for induction mentor training in Romania. As conclusion, we will propose a couple of dilemmas that arise in our analysis and that constitute the ground for further research.

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1. Mentoring beginning teachers: European level of reglementation

The European Commission Communication '*Improving the Quality of Teacher Education*' (2007) noted that, where they exist, support measures for new teachers are still relatively unsystematic and emerging rather than well embedded.

In the policy paper, *Teacher Education in Europe* (2009), ETUCE advocates that an induction phase of at least one year's duration should be both a right and an obligation for newly qualified teachers and must include: support from mentors and other colleagues; a reduced teaching timetable without a decrease in remuneration; access to appropriate support resources attending a mandatory guidance program, opportunities to relate theory to practice in a systematic way.

Taking this in consideration, in '*Developing coherent and system-wide induction program for beginning teachers – a handbook for policymakers*', developed by the European Commission in 2010, is stated that in order

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to create a coherent induction program, four interlocking systems must be taken into consideration: systems for mentoring, expert inputs, peer support and self-reflection.

As mentioned before, mentors are an important (perhaps the most important) component of an induction program (Wong, 2004) and has subsequently become a key strategy in supporting new teachers (Jones, 2010).

2. Mentor education: an overview

The benefits of mentoring are mainly for the new teacher himself/herself (support at various levels), but also for the mentor (enhancing skills and knowledge) and for the school, since mentoring provides opportunities for developing the culture of a learning community within the school (European Commission, 2010). Even though, how mentors should be prepared for their role and what kind of role it is are rarely addressed in the literature.

Within the European context there has been a strong focus on induction of newly qualified teachers (mentees), not on mentors and their needs. There has also been a focus on why mentoring is needed, how can mentoring schemes can be developed and not on how the mentor role is carried out or on whom should perform it. While mentors are more likely to employ effective mentoring when they have been prepared for the role, mentor preparation is rather sparse and underdeveloped (Ulvik & Sunde, 2013). The criteria on which mentors are appointed are regarded mainly to experience. As Bullough (2005) states it is not immediately obvious that a good teacher will automatically become a good mentor or whether experience is enough to support new teachers in an adequate way during the first year of teaching.

Taking this in consideration, mentoring should be established as a professional role (Ingleby & Hunt, 2008) and in the process of professionalizing the mentor role, Gravey and Alred (2000, cit. in Fan Tang, 2012) state that mentor preparation must take in consideration two substantive aspects: mentoring as a subject in its own right (knowledge base of mentoring) and the preparation and development of mentors to perform mentoring in various contexts (mentoring practice).

3. Alternative policy scenarios for induction mentor training in Romania

In Romania, the concept of induction and induction mentor is relatively new and has gained recognition since 2011 when the new National Law of Education (1/2011) has been approved. Taking this in consideration, there are a lot of gray areas regarding the implementation of induction at national level.

According to the National Law of Education 1/2011 every teacher, after taking a Masters' Degree in Teaching, has to undergo one year of induction under supervision from an induction mentor. Until now, specific mentor preparation has not been regulated. The teachers that want to become induction mentors need to have the didactic degree I (which can be achieved only after approximately eight years of teaching) and must have participated in at least one training course in the last five years, approved by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports.†

In the current section we will try to draw out two scenarios for mentor preparation in the Romanian context and to identify for each one the advantages and disadvantages. Before stating the principles that underline each scenario, it is necessary to establish both a set of premises from which to draw on and a set of criteria that will guide us in our analysis.

The first prerequisite is the existence of a professional standard for induction mentors, different from the current one which refers to mentor for student teachers. It is very important from this stage to have a clear delimitation between the two adjacent professions, in order to fully of the roles and responsibilities of the two types of mentors. Secondly, we have to take in consideration the principle of flexible routes in continuing

† The methodology regarding the establishment of induction mentors body, Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, art. 248, alin (1) from the National Law of Education 1/2011

development of teachers through the capitalization of the validation process of competencies gained both in formal and non-formal contexts. Another premise from which to draw on is the principle of partnership between stakeholders, in our case between the various training providers and the workplace of the induction mentor (school).

In order to discuss the development of a training system for induction mentors as part of the process of continuing professional development of teachers, we need to set of criteria that will guide us in our analysis. The criteria on which we will draw the two scenarios are: level of regulations, training providers and types of program.

Concerning the level of regulation, in general, the choice of programs of continuing professional development of teachers may depend on educational priorities of central authorities, may be developed at local level or as part of school development plans. In the absence of a plan, the decision to follow development programs may also be entirely up to the individual teacher (Eurydice, 2008).

- **The first scenario** we propose is *a centralized and highly regulated system for training induction mentors*. It implies a central institution with multiples roles - Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports through its National Authority for Qualifications – that generates a singular route at national level. The roles that the institution stated before must undertake range from establishing the objectives and accreditation process to coordination, evaluation and finance of the training programs for induction mentors. In this case, the professional route is limited in what both providers and types of programs are concerned. The training programs are standardized and take the form of long term academic programs (Master in Education, Professional Doctorate) and the only providers are universities.
- Given their duration, this kind of programs will not be able to respond to schools' immediate needs of induction mentors, as there will be a gap of minimum two years until the first induction mentors are certified. This centralized system may facilitate consistency between training needs identified at national level, beneficiaries (teachers that want to become induction mentors), schools and training providers (universities), but may overlook specific training needs in different communities. Taking this in consideration both overlaps in training courses and unsystematic allocation of resources can be avoided. This type of scenario with a high level of professionalization offers the possibility of developing resources for induction mentors (e.g. guidelines, working materials).
- **The second scenario** we propose is *a flexible and moderate regulated system for training induction mentors*. It implies a regulation of policies and design of the framework for training programs at County School Inspectorates level and decentralization at school level regarding training strategy. Accordingly, schools are the ones that regulate the offer for training induction mentors based on the needs of the employees (teachers that wants to become induction mentor) and of the workplace (schools). This approach is specific to in-service training systems. Unlike the first scenario, both the providers (e.g. universities, NGOs, private organizations, professional associations) and types of programs (e.g. short academic programs, lifelong learning programs, mobility programs) may vary.
- Explicit focus on training needs of beneficiaries and immediate needs of schools to train induction mentors may constitute an advantage of this system. Concurrently, being known and assume dimples a greater accountability both for future induction mentors and schools as work places. This moderate regulated system enables the development of sustainable partnerships between training providers and the workplace of the induction mentor (school). Thus, arises the possibility of creating communities of practice through intensification of formal (at institutional level) and informal (at individual level – transfer of good practices) information exchange.

We need here a few lines with honest and balanced conclusion on how consist the advantages and the restrictions / limitations of the two scenarios taking into account the policy component of our proposal. Given the premises from which we started, the implementation of this system may face an obstacle: the possible lack of flexibility of the central institution in what alternative routes are concerned. Likewise, the elaboration of the

professional standard for induction mentors and the validation of competencies gained in other formal or non-formal contexts may be difficult in terms of different categories of stakeholders (ministry, universities, other training providers, teachers, school principles) consultation process (referring to the first scenario). In terms of quality assurance and access to high quality training services, the second scenario approach may encounter overlaps and gaps in the provision of training programs which may lead to a possible limitation in recognition of competence and study certificates.

4. Instead of conclusions

Analyzing the two scenarios proposed, a couple of dilemmas arise. First, taking in consideration the paradigm change in Romanian initial teacher training from the concurrent model to the consecutive one, we wonder how opportune is doubling the need to undergo two types of masters (Masters in Teaching and Masters in Education – the first one as European professional master and the second one as European scientific master program). This type of discussion could be launched and supported in the European context of the PhD processes developments: European Doctorate in Teacher Education.

Secondly, which is the best approach in induction mentor training: part of continuing professional development of teachers or in-service training? Taking this in consideration, further research involving education policy makers ought to be conducted in order to validate one of these scenarios or identify other types of scenarios. The next step would be also to design flexible routes for mentor education and training by exploring the valences of professional credits transfer and accumulation system.

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