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SUPPORTING NEW TEACHERS. THE FINNISH AND ISRAELI MENTORING MODELS

ABSTRACT. Nowakowska-Siuta Renata, *Supporting New Teachers. The Finnish and Israeli Mentoring Models* [Wspieranie nowych nauczycieli. Fiński i izraelski model mentoringu]. Studia Edukacyjne no. 70, 2023, Poznań 2023, pp. 7-17 Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 1233-6688. Submitted: 20.10.2023. Accepted: 18.12.2023. DOI: 10.14746/se.2023.70.1

In this article, we will have a closer look at two models of teacher mentoring, which for many years have been successfully operating in two culturally different countries: Finland and Israel. Following the methodology of comparative research according to Raymond Boudon, I will identify and briefly characterise the main social mechanisms, which lie behind the particular approach to mentoring in the two analysed models: Self-Determination Theory and Work Motivation (Israel) and Peer Group Mentoring (Finland), including the axiological-rational prerequisites for their application.

Key words: mentoring for novice teachers in Israel, mentoring for novice teachers in Finland, novice teachers' mentors' conceptions, teachers' motivational strategies in comparative perspective, mentoring models

Introduction

The problem of preparing teachers for their work as educators and pedagogues is exceptionally important and pressing. It concerns not only the more or less successful Polish attempts at reforming the education system, but can be observed in most countries in the world. On the macro scale, the conflicts, wars taking place here or there, as well as lack of understanding have their impact on education, revealing its shortcomings in terms of historical thinking, analysis of the geopolitical situation, intra – and intercultural communication. Online support groups are becoming the new powerhouse, while parenting is driven more by 'influencers', idols of Youtube channels, TV talent-shows, paradocumentaries and soap operas rather than scientific authorities. In their

search for answers to professional problems they encounter, including psychological and educational concerns, teachers often look for non-scientific formulas. The reason behind it is that the latter are quicker to obtain and less demanding, expressed in a simple manner. The disorganisation of the traditional society and its influences results in fundamental changes in the basis of young people's socialisation. The progressive failure of objective institutions of socialisation, such as family, school, workplace (demise of traditional authorities: father, mother, teacher, master), reinforces the role of subjective socialisation – experiencing society and culture independently, without the support and guidance of adults. One of the most important educational tasks in the modern world has therefore become such teaching that leads to personal and social maturity and the matter of identity as a problem of achieving balance between the needs of individual development and the demands and obligations towards other people and social groups.

On adults, this imposes an obligation to educate in multiculturalism without assessing these cultures as better or worse, teaching children and young people to actively distance themselves from the world created by the media and other means of communication. The responsibility for this process lies in the hands of the teacher. We dream of an open school, i.e. one in which a democratic debate and negotiation regarding the rules and norms of community life could take place amidst a multiplicity of cultural patterns. However, in the process of preparing teachers for their professional roles in a manner that is relevant to the present reality, are we able to go beyond used formulas and recognise that we need paradigms other than those already out of touch with regard to a fluid, dynamic, permanently uncertain future? Can we ensure that motivation for the teaching profession is based not only on expecting a decent salary for good work (an extremely important issue, nonetheless), but also on responsible and well-designed support, especially for young teachers who are new to the profession, to not deter, but to motivate, support and show appropriate solutions to professional problems that may arise?

No single individual left alone to make his or her own decisions is able to practise a profession with the same passion and commitment for a long time, especially when it is a particularly exhausting one, requiring continuous self-education, involving the need to face other people's problems, empathise and fight against one's own mental limitations. Hence, there is the growing awareness of the need for wise support and supervision in the teaching profession.

In this article, we will have a closer look at two models of teacher mentoring, which for many years have been successfully operating in two culturally different countries: Finland and Israel. Following the methodology of comparative research according to Raymond Boudon, I will identify and briefly

characterise the main social mechanisms, which lie behind the particular approach to mentoring in the two analysed models, including the axiological-rational prerequisites for their application.

Mentoring models: SDT-Based Mentoring and Peer Group Mentoring

In the pursuit of what is modern, in the affirmation of artificial intelligence and the possibilities it provides, such as the ease and speed of communication and the finding of information, which is not always used in accordance with its proper purpose, many educators have unfortunately lost the curiosity about another human being, which is essential for education. Technology has become a kind of prosthesis for upbringing, for it is easier to refer another person to electronic resources than to talk to them, it is simpler to show a finished electronic product than to inspire imagination. Personal relations, encounters with other people, the broadly understood culture of expression, have become scarce commodities which many international studies have noted and addressed (Venezky, Street, 1999; Wagner, 1990). Unfortunately, a fair share of this process is attributed to the teachers (academics included), who explain their own inability or shortcomings in communication with students by lack of time or being overloaded with responsibilities. We are witnessing, and often also participating in processes that were already written about at the end of the 1960s in relation to Western European countries, and which our country is also currently experiencing. Erich Fromm described societies as insane because they replace the aspiration to 'be', which is natural to humans, with the struggle to 'have'. Herbert Marcuse saw the effect of alienation – the emergence of a 'one-dimensional human being', whose life is limited to work and consumption. Ferdinand Tönnies wrote of the replacement of the natural will by the rational will, where all contacts with others are subordinated to self-interested, instrumental calculation. As a result of the manipulation and the instrumentalism that it entails, natural interpersonal communities and mutual trust disappear, and people dissolve into an inert and anonymous 'mass' that easily succumbs to demagogic slogans, the temptation of autocratic rule of 'law and order', eagerly joining various social movements in the search for substitute relationships to compensate for loneliness and frustration. Mentoring is becoming not only the need of our times but one of the essential 'anchors' for the development of professionalism. The school, being kind of a lens in which social change is focused, is also the right place to develop mentoring as a way to support and build the right framework for relationships between teachers.

There are several established models of mentoring, however, for the analysis of the two international cases of systemic mentoring approaches addressed in this article, two of them will be of interest. The first concerns the *Model of Peer Group Mentoring*, based on the theory of learning and professional development established within social constructivism. This model reflects the Finnish education system, in which a high level of teachers' autonomy is crucial. Therefore, group mentoring is primarily based on the exchange of experiences and expertise which takes place at regular meetings. The educational narratives that emerge then become the basis for the creation of teachers' professional identities.

The second model is based on the self-determination theory of Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan and is called the *Self Determination Model* (SDT Model). At its core, there lies the emphasis on the optimal development of both partners within the mentoring process. According to the SDT concept, the expected development of the mentor and the mentee occurs when the mentoring relationship supports their natural psychological needs for the development of relationship, competence and autonomy. Self-determination theory is of particular relevance to educators as a source of information regarding the mechanism of how the fomenting of both individual and group motivation for learning in the workplace can occur, based on individual preferences in this respect. The proposal by Deci and Ryan presupposes that an individual can, and should, be active in his or her environment, given the opportunities to do so. The genesis of these opportunities should be sought both within the individual and in the environment in which he or she operates. Motivation itself is defined by the authors as 'the driving force or forces responsible for the initiation, persistence, direction and strength of a purpose-oriented behaviour' (Colman, 2015, p. 412). The central idea referred to in this concept is that of needs. These are defined as universal and necessary. Among them are the need for autonomy, competence and relationships with others. By satisfying the aforementioned needs, it is possible to act effectively, with the focus on embracing an active role and maintaining it despite the emerging difficulties (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, Ryan, 1991, p. 2).

In the context of school as a workplace, teachers may feel more competent when they have the opportunity to engage in tasks of increasing difficulty, which allow them to use and develop their unique set of skills. Baard suggests the following management behaviours as a support of the need for competence: adequate training and support for subordinates, discussion and agreeing upon achievable goals with the subordinates, delegation of interesting tasks which develop new skills, regular feedback and removal of barriers that interfere with effective work (Baard, Deci, Ryan, 2004, p. 1). According to Ryan and Deci (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, Ryan 1991, p. 4), instilling a sense

of competence will in turn lead to a growing sense of autonomy, reduced feelings of interdependence and a strong internal grounding in decision-making and agency. Of no less importance is the need for relationships, signifying a sense of connection with others, interdependence, and responsibility for others (Taylor, Ntoumanis, Standage, 2008, p. 75). Leader (mentor) behaviours which promote relationships and fellowship are those which foster teamwork, mutual respect, trust in other team members and demonstrate group objectives.

What is also worth mentioning, is the *Lesson Study* model of mentoring, which is a tool to support teacher collaboration in addressing key issues of educational practice and developing innovative and creative education. In effect, *Lesson Study* involves a group of teachers (usually a group of three) undertaking collaborative lesson planning and engaging in a cycle of teaching, review and verification. For this article, the first two models of teacher mentoring will be relevant.

Finland. Peer Group Mentoring

As a result of the new challenges faced by the school in Finland, both in the 1970s and then in the 1990s, what was expected of the teacher has also changed, with the latter now obliged to prepare students to respond to the challenges of the modern world, to skilfully combine general and vocational knowledge in the education programmes, to constantly raise the level of requirement standards from students, especially in regard to examination ones, to assist students in the process of self-education, to create conditions for increasingly better cooperation between teachers and parents. Similarly, in many European countries (Scandinavia, the Netherlands, England and Wales), teachers have become obliged to eventually move away from the encyclopaedic nature of school curricula and move towards the understanding of the world in its unity and complexity. The active and task-oriented student approach to knowledge and the real world was emphasised. In order to achieve the above, it was necessary to recognise and provide for the necessity to use active teaching methods and to refer to various life situations in private and public life. Educators are expected to focus on teaching instead of on filling out documentation, so its preparation by teachers is kept to a minimum. Weekly subject plans, daily registers in which the teacher must meticulously record what he or she had been teaching during each hour, compulsory lesson plans, the filling out of mark sheets, attendance reports, notification lists of proposed grades – all these traditional solutions were

abandoned in the 1990s and effectively discarded from the Finnish education system. Instead, the emphasis was placed on supporting the teacher in his or her journey in the preparation for the profession and throughout his or her work as a teacher. In Finland, it is believed that any rivalry is detrimental to the schools, as well as to the students and the teachers themselves. Schools should cooperate with each other, and each should strive to provide students with the highest quality education. Teachers are also supposed to cooperate with each other. The teaching profession in Finland is one characterised by prestige and trust. Teaching faculties experience the state of real siege every year, with seven to ten applicants competing for one place. The admission process itself is stringent and only the best have a chance of being accepted. Prospective teachers have to achieve the highest results at the final high school examinations (certificate competition) and pass the written exam organised by the university. Candidates also take part in staged activities (micro teaching) during which their interpersonal skills are tested, they are invited to an interview and asked why they want to become a teacher. This multi-stage selection process identifies those who have the psychological aptitude for the profession and genuinely want to work with children. Students of pedagogy can choose either early childhood education (incl. global, combined, typical for grades I to VI) or subject-based teaching. In the latter case, students must first acquire a specific specialisation and then, within a year, master the methods used to teach the subject. During the course of study, particular emphasis is placed on combining theory and practice. Students prepare classes and teach during numerous apprenticeships in schools, through which they learn the ins and outs of the teaching process and develop their own range of teaching skills. They are also encouraged to pursue research studies – for example, the master's thesis must include the results of their own research in the area of education.

The ethos of teacher work has been successfully created by the Finns over a period of 40 years. High requirements set for university applicants and the excellent content and methodological preparation of students for their work in education – these two factors mean that the 'best of the best' actually enter the profession. Therefore, it is not surprising that the status of an educator is much higher in Finland than in many other countries, and teachers enjoy great prestige and public trust. It is worth mentioning that a Finnish teacher works four hours a day (thus the weekly teaching load amounts to 20 hours – to compare, the teaching load of Polish teachers employed in primary, middle and secondary schools is 18 hours per week). In addition, every Finnish teacher is obliged to devote 2 hours a week to professional development, e.g. by participating in various courses and training. What is more, all forms of professional development for teachers are 100% funded by the state.

Group mentoring is a natural consequence of caring for the wellbeing of a teacher who enters the profession. The group provides support, listens, helps. Someone from the group can substitute for a colleague who's feeling exhausted. No teacher in a Finnish school is left alone. The dialogic nature of Finnish mentoring entails a flexible and receptive cooperation (responsiveness) oriented towards response and reciprocity (symmetrical give-and-take relationship). The experienced mentor engages in a dialogue, which could be described as anticipatory: he or she looks ahead towards the future, focused on support, finding solutions, undertaking actions appropriate to emerging problems.

Israel.

Self-Determination Theory and Work Motivation

Higher education is provided by universities, academic-style colleges and teacher training colleges. The minimum requirement for admission to first degree programmes in Israel is a secondary school diploma (Teudat Bagrut). Applicants must also pass the Psychometric Entrance Test (PET) and have an additional interview. First degree programmes in Israel last from three to six years, depending on the field of study, and end with the award of a Bachelor's degree, e.g. Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Laws, Bachelor of Nursing, Bachelor of Education. In some fields of study, a prerequisite for the award of a Bachelor's degree is to write a thesis under the guidance of a supervisor.

Recipients of Bachelor's degrees in Israel enjoy the right to enter second degree programmes. However, some universities additionally require good grades during the first degree studies, an interview or an entrance test (the so-called Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT)). The course of study lasts 1-2 years. The prerequisite for graduation is usually to write a thesis, complete an apprenticeship or carry out a project. Graduates are awarded Master's degrees in various fields, e.g. Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Nursing, Master of Education. As a rule, to be eligible for admission to doctoral studies in Israel, one must have a Master's degree, obtained after completing a study programme which includes writing and defending a thesis (Master with thesis). An important prerequisite is a high average grade obtained during the studies – at least 80/100 and a Master's thesis grade of at least 85/100. An obligation to which all young Israeli citizens are subject, both men and women, is two years' military service, which must be completed after secondary school examinations, with the exception of ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, which are not subject to this rigour.

In the education policy of Israel, mentoring has been an essential part of the holistic approach to supporting especially new teachers, the so-called Novice Teachers, for several years. In Israel, these newcomers are mentored – supported and evaluated – already in their first year of teacher training college as a requirement to receive their licence. Only teachers who have taught for at least five years themselves can become mentors to new teachers. Mentoring in Israel is compulsory for beginning teachers and focuses on subject-specific, didactic and cultural aspects, which is relevant in the setting of multicultural schools, mainly those where the language of instruction is both Arabic and Hebrew. The problems concerning the situation of new teachers in Israeli schools are perfectly highlighted, among other things, in the article by the research team of Orna Schatz-Oppenheimer (Schatz-Oppenheimer, 2017), revealing gaps in the knowledge of new teachers, which need to be supplemented by training courses for current and future mentors.

Research on the existing mentoring model in Israel shows that the responsibility of mentors for new (novice) teachers plays a central role in it. Mentors are expected to create an atmosphere of trust and professional security which would enable the novice teacher to grow, to accept the professional authority of the mentor and to learn the dialogue. The mentoring model developed in Israel is based on self-determination theory (SDT) and perceives human beings as capable of self-regulation. The role of the system (and by the system I refer to the school's organisational culture, both formal and informal one) is to support and motivate to act. For the individual is capable of making independent autonomous and deliberate choices about the aspects of life that are important to him or her, including his or her own development. In order for the teacher to perform optimally, it is necessary to adapt both the expectations and the requirements of the environment in which he or she functions, which means that real opportunities arise when a person is able to respond adequately to stimuli coming from the environment, including those related with one's development. In this aspect, the concept of self-determination applied in teacher mentoring is strongly connected with the notion of the school's organisational culture, clearly indicating that it is culture that determines which aspects of action, which determinants of effective learning in the workplace –creation of the environment, including motivation, will be noticed, interpreted and selected as significant.

From my experience as a visitor to teacher training colleges in Israel, my contacts with academics and the Mofet Institute for teacher formation, I can confidently express the view that for the progressive and democratic section of Israeli academics, to educate future generations of teachers is a task of high priority. Even before the outbreak of the war with Hamas in 2023, the need to

undertake a broad spectrum of reforms in teacher education was widely discussed. The expanding international cooperation in this field was perceived with optimism, and the Israeli model of motivation for self-education, self-development, and the building of a broad perspective, also scientifically among teachers, was spoken of with pride. In this respect, the numerous scientific mentoring projects for teachers who wanted to integrate school work with academic work, proposed by the Mofet Institute in Tel Aviv, were innovative. The mentoring model developed in Israeli schools despite the ongoing war is worth appreciating and noting. It provides an example of the great importance given to education, which is treated as a continuous process of growing in knowledge and competence. Mentoring based on self-determination is a natural consequence of this mental attachment to learning.

Conclusion

After this analysis of the interesting models of Finnish and Israeli education, including the process of supporting the teacher in professional development, we wonder whether it would be possible to transfer them, at least partially, into the reality of the Polish school. Before we start to copy the solutions from any country in the hope that transferred to our homeland they will bring similar results, is worth to quote a Finnish researcher, Pasi Sahlberg, as a word of caution: 'Education systems are complex, cultural organic entities, like plants or trees that grow vigorously only in their native soil and climate' (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 76). Does it come across as a pessimistic final note? Absolutely not, as every education system should first and foremost pay attention to what is most relevant in the history, tradition and culture of the society in which it operates, what challenges a given society will have to face in a few decades. It should plan reforms or subtle, evolutionary changes, according to its own ideas, not those of others. Indeed, education systems are not about the unreflective reproduction of other people's ideas, but rather about one's autonomous project that is in line with the specific social needs of a given country. Foreign models rarely work well in education. We are obliged to find our own way of mentoring teachers entering the world of education. Comparative education has a special role in this respect to showcase positive models and good practices, but also to emphasise the importance of choosing models wisely to help them find one's own way of approaching the systemic change in education.

Author contributions

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work.

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