

EARLI 2021 Symposium: Clara Kuhn & Gerda Hagenauer

Learning in the School Practicum Mentoring as professional development for student & mentor teachers

Abstract

During their professional education, student teachers go through various school practicums that usually involve mentorship by established teachers. These practicums are not only an important learning opportunity for student teachers but also for their mentors. Various individual and contextual factors contribute to the effectiveness of these opportunities for both parties. The first presentation within this symposium examines the importance of the quality of mentoring for these learning opportunities. Using a mixed-methods approach, it investigates the factors that can predict mentoring quality, as defined by student teachers—a key perspective, given that mentoring quality is a predictor for student teachers' competence development during their internships. The second presentation, through a triangulation of qualitative methods, looks at the learning opportunities for mentor teachers within long-term practice-based teacher education. This presentation highlights how mentoring can be an important aspect of mentor teachers' professional development, and how their motivations and attitudes towards teaching students are decisive for their own learning in such settings. Relatively, it is to be expected that teachers' initial motivations for becoming mentors can have an impact on the learning opportunities available to both mentor and student teachers. The third presentation, drawing on the expectancy-value theory, explores established teachers' motives for becoming mentors through qualitative analysis of interview data. The overall goal of this symposium, and the focus of its final segment, will be discussing how to design teacher practicums in a way that provides the highest quality mentoring possible.

Discussant:

Kari Smith
kari.smith@ntnu.no

Mentoring quality of internship in teacher education – individual and mentoring related predictors

Isabelle Grassmé, Antje Biermann & Michaela Gläser-Zikuda

Twenty-five years ago, the development of highly qualified and committed teachers for „the invention of 21st century schools...” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 9-10) was already an important issue in many education systems. Nowadays, there seems to be agreement on some core competencies that all teachers need (European Commission, 2013), such as a deep knowledge of adequate subject teaching, effective support of children’s learning, classroom management, interpersonal and reflective skills, positive attitudes to professional development, collaboration, diversity, and inclusion.

Aims and demands of teacher professionalization cannot be met by just doing practice (Hascher, Cocard, & Moser, 2004). Teacher education needs both a theoretical and scientific framework and practice. Regarding the „holy grail of teacher education“ (Darling-Hammond, 2014), integrating practice in teacher education is highly relevant. During internship, preservice teachers have the opportunity to observe instruction of experienced teachers, to plan instruction and experience themselves as teachers, and to discuss and reflect about these experiences with expert practitioners who support them as mentors (Korthagen et al., 2006). Good mentors are competent in providing instructional support, and the positive relationship between mentor and mentee is seen as the heart of a supportive process of professionalization (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). The emotional and academic support as well as communication and feedback have been identified as key elements of positive mentoring (Izadinia 2016).

The quality of mentoring is an indicator for preservice teachers’ competence development during internship (Grassmé, Biermann & Gläser-Zikuda, 2018). But how preservice teachers experience the internship and how they take opportunities to develop their professional competencies strongly depends on their individual characteristics (Biermann et al., 2019). Based on the so called “offer-and-use model of practical training in teacher education“ (Hascher & Kittinger, 2014), the present study focuses on the prediction of mentoring quality in internship. Student and mentor related predictors were tested and described applying quantitative and qualitative methods.

A total of $N = 884$ (77.4% female; $M_{\text{age}} = 22.85$ years, $SD = 3.94$) preservice teachers at two German universities participated in an online survey. The students were enrolled in two different teacher education programs (primary and secondary school education) and were on average in their 6th university semester ($SD = 3.71$ years of study). All of them had participated in at least one school internship supervised by a mentoring teacher. In the survey, which took place during a lecture, they were asked to think of their experiences during the last internship. Standardized scales were applied to measure different dimensions of mentoring quality (quality of supervision, of personal and professional relation, quality of preliminary discussion and of debriefing). Included predictors were preservice teachers’ activation during internship by the mentor, taking learning opportunities during internship, pre-experiences in education, vocational choice motivation, and students’ personality. All scales showed satisfying to very good reliability coefficients (alpha .75 to .96).

Multiple regression analyses showed predictive power for the variables activation by the mentor (Beta .20 to .31 for the four dimensions of mentoring quality), followed by taking learning opportunities by the students (Beta .16 to .27) and students’ conscientiousness (Beta .10 to .13) with 7 to 16% explained variance. In the qualitative part of the study, semi-structured interviews with participants of an internship were carried out. $N = 5$ female preservice teachers, selected regarding their participation in different internships ($M_{\text{age}} = 23.2$ years, $SD = .84$), were asked to characterize the quality of mentoring. The interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Most of the coded statements can be assigned to the category “strengthening individual development” (37.1% - e.g. individual support), followed by “cooperation between student and mentor” (28.6% - e.g. communication), “professional support” (17.1% - such as learning new instructional methods), and the “teacher personality” of the mentoring teacher (17.1% - such as mentors as positive role models). Cooperation between mentor and mentee was also mentioned as an important condition for the mentoring quality experienced (mainly with respect to mutual feedback, close agreements, and a positive relationship).

The theoretical background and the main results of the qualitative and quantitative part of the study will be presented. Implications to ensure quality of mentoring in internship in teacher education will be discussed.

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Learning opportunities for mentor teachers in practice-based teacher education

Tina Hascher, Anja Winkler, Daniela Freisler-Mühlemann & Christiane Ammann

Abstract of 100-250 words

Practice-based teacher education is becoming increasingly important in teacher education. Although little is known about the use and effects of long-term practice-based teacher education, it is regarded as an ideal setting to develop professional competencies (Ingersoll, 2012). Due to duration, intensity and continuity, long-term practice-based teacher education is considered to be particularly conducive to learning for students. In these settings, student teachers collaborate intensively with their mentor teachers, which in turn provides learning opportunities not only for student teachers but also for mentor teachers (Hollweck, 2019). Using two different methodological approaches, this study examines the learning opportunities for mentor teachers through mentoring a long-term practice-based phase P3 at the Institute of Lower Secondary Education of the XX University of Teacher Education. Rating conferences (focus groups based on short questionnaires) with 30 mentor teachers as well as semi-structured interviews with 17 mentor teachers in different functions within teacher education reveal a variety of learning opportunities for mentor teachers primarily based on active reflections on instructional quality. Also, it was found that the motivation and the attitude towards mentoring student teachers are decisive for the learning processes of mentor teachers.

Extended summary of 600-1000 words

According to the Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD, 2014), professional development of teachers refers to activities aimed at improving teachers' skills and knowledge. In line with this, "professional development in schools can be provided through coaching or mentoring, collaborative planning and teaching, and sharing good practices" (OECD, 2014, p. 86). The survey defines induction programs for teachers as "a range of structured activities in a school to support teachers' introduction into the school" (OECD, 2014, p. 88). Accordingly, mentoring teacher induction or student teaching can be defined as a professional learning task.

During the last years, increasing attention is given to long-term practice-based teacher education (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Due to its duration, intensity and continuity, long-term practice-based teacher education is considered to be particularly conducive to student learning (Arnold, Gröschner & Hascher, 2014). In long-term practice-based teacher education, students collaborate intensively with mentor teachers, which in turn offers learning opportunities both for student teachers and mentor teachers (Hollweck, 2019).

Recently, approaches to promoting informal forms of learning among teachers through reflection, joint problem-solving, professional learning communities, networking and the exchange of expertise and experience have gained increased appreciation (OECD, 2018, p. 1). Accordingly, mentoring is recognized as a means of supporting professional development (e.g., Aspfors & Bondas, 2012; Ingersoll, 2012). Mentor teachers provide student teachers with "a support structure in schools where more experienced teachers support less experienced teachers" (OECD, 2014, p. 89). The most important role of a mentor teacher is to be an open-minded partner who can listen, but also contribute with knowledge and experience (Smith, 2015). Starting from a situated perspective of learning, our paper argues for collective reflection processes in which new knowledge is developed. Bianchini, Southerland and Windschitl (2010) argue that mentoring encourages to break old patterns and support professional learning for both newly trained and experienced teachers. In collaborative learning settings, mentors and mentees can work together to keep abreast of the latest research on teaching practices and reflect on their experiences (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Heikkinen et al., 2018). Involving students as knowledge-oriented learners can help develop a more responsive pedagogy of teacher education (Percy, et al., 2020).

As little is known about the extent to which this collaboration contributes to the professional development of mentor teachers, our study investigates how mentor teachers evaluate their mentoring practice with regard to professional learning. The study is related to the long-term practice-based phase

P3 at the Institute of Lower Secondary Education of the XX University of Teacher Education that is characterized by the following tasks for student teachers: getting to know the class, mentored teaching, independent teaching and phases of reflection (XX, 2018). Against the background of these interactive, primarily collaborative activities, we assume the learning opportunities in P3 not only relevant for student teachers' but also mentor teachers' professional development. Accordingly, our contribution addresses the question of how mentor teachers learn through mentoring student teachers and what characterizes such learning situations.

In a first study, 30 mentor teachers were asked about their learning experiences by means of so-called rating conferences (focus groups based on ratings from a short questionnaire). Since learning processes can depend on the expertise of teacher educators and their functions for teacher education, 17 mentor teachers were interviewed individually regarding roles and learning opportunities and benefits and challenges of mentoring in a second study. Five mentor teachers were employed at a so-called partner school of the XX University of Teacher Education, five mentor teachers had no additional employment at a partner school, and seven mentor teachers were employed at a school that occasionally cooperates with XX University of Teacher Education. Analyses of transcriptions of focus groups and semi-structured interviews were based on qualitative content analysis according to Kuckartz (2014).

Findings indicate that mentor teachers understand mentoring as one step of professional development, as long as they reflect purposefully about instructional quality. According to different functions, group-specific differences can be found: mentor teachers with an additional position at the XX University of Teacher Education perceive the long-term practice-based phase P3 as a link between school and university and as a co-working space, while mentor teachers without an additional position identify less with teacher education goals. The results stress a new aspect of teacher development and, thus, can contribute to the theory on professional development. They also highlight that mentor teachers perceive their roles differently which, in turn, could affect the quality of mentoring and teacher education.

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Why did you become a mentor teacher?

A qualitative study on the motives to become a mentor teacher

Clara Kuhn, Gerda Hagenauer & Alexander Gröschner

Abstract of 100-250 words

Student teachers consider their mentor teachers and the experiences gained during their practicum to be among the most important aspects of their teacher preparation programme. Mentor teachers play an important role in their mentees' professionalization and are considered as role models for student teachers. Evidence shows that a teacher's decision to voluntarily become a mentor teacher has an impact on the quality of mentoring. Yet, little is known about what motivates teachers to become mentors. This study examines these motives, drawing on the theoretical framework of Eccles and colleagues' expectancy-value theory (EVT) and the Factors Influencing Teachers Choice (FIT-Choice) Model rooted in EVT (Watt et al., 2012). This qualitative study involves guided interviews with N=23 secondary mentor teachers in Austria. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed in MAXQDA following Mayring's (2015) structuring qualitative content analysis. Findings show that teachers commonly choose to become mentors for several reasons: competence beliefs (e.g., they feel they have enough experience to pass on knowledge or open their classroom to student teachers), intrinsic values (e.g., they enjoy passing on knowledge), social utility values (e.g., they want to help student teachers gain practical experience), intrinsic and extrinsic personal utility values (e.g., they value learning from students or getting paid to mentor), and social influence (e.g., they were asked by their school principal to become a mentor). These findings are discussed in light of EVT and FIT-Choice and function as starting point for a conceptual model addressing the initial motivation of becoming a mentor teacher.

Extended Summary of 600-1000 words

Becoming a mentor teacher involves taking responsibility, a variety of tasks, and a new role with regard to teacher education (Clarke et al., 2014; Hoffman et al., 2015). The mentoring these teachers provide is valued by many student teachers as evident by their beliefs that the school practicum is the most important part of their training and, relatedly, that their mentors are some of the most important contributors to their education (Clarke et al., 2014). In a quantitative study by Gröschner and Häusler (2014) who asked how teachers became mentor teachers for a newly introduced practicum in Germany, only eight of the 129 teachers said they participated out of their own initiative; the others were either asked to do so by their principal (60.6%), by student teachers (11.8%), or for some other reasons. The question is: Why are so few professional teachers interested in becoming mentor teachers? And are there differences in the quality of mentoring provided by those who choose to become mentors versus those who are asked to do so? Both Gröschner and Häusler (2014) and van Ginkel et al. (2016) have found that the voluntariness of the decision to become a mentor teacher affects the perceived quality of the mentoring provided to the student teachers.

In this context, it is important to look at what factors can motivate teachers to become and continue to serve as mentors. A theory that has not yet been considered within the mentoring context is the expectancy-value theory (EVT). EVT, as set out in Eccles and Wigfield (2002), focuses on 'achievement-related choices', making it a promising framework for exploring the factors that initially motivate teachers to become mentors. Two main dimensions are at the centre of EVT: *the expectation of success* and *subjective task value*. Together, they directly influence *achievement-related choices*. The first dimension looks at competence beliefs and the perceived likelihood of succeeding in a certain task. How a person answers the question *Can I do the task?* will influence their decision of whether to undertake it. The second dimension addresses the questions *Do I want the task?* and *What benefit(s) do I gain?*—considerations that can similarly shape whether someone embarks on a task. While there is an internationally recognised model that has its root in EVT, namely Factors Influencing Teachers Choice

(FIT-Choice) Model (Watt et al., 2012) to look at students motives to become a teacher, there is no comparable model within the mentoring context yet.

The present study investigates both of these dimensions with the aim of identifying the factors that influence teachers' decision to become a mentor similarly to the FIT-Choice model Watt et al. (2012). To explore this question, the study employs a qualitative approach. A sample of $N=23$ mentor teachers in Austria was selected according to the following criteria: they must (1) currently teach at either a (high-track) secondary school (AHS) or higher vocational school (BHS), (2) have undergone a mentor teacher qualification program, and (3) currently be mentoring student teachers in a curriculum-based school practicum.

Semi-structured interviews based on an interview guideline were used in data collection. The framework of the guided interviews was based on the theoretical foundations of EVT (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Rosenzweig et al., 2019). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were analysed in MAXQDA following Mayring's (2015) structuring qualitative content analysis. The categories of the coding scheme were developed deductively (EVT and FIT-Choice, from Watt et al., 2012) as well as inductively.

Based on EVT and FIT-Choice (Watt et al., 2012), the results show that teachers choose to become mentors for several reasons: The motives range from *competence (expectancy) beliefs* (e.g., belief in one's ability to mentor student teachers) to *intrinsic values* (e.g., enjoying working with student teachers), *social utility values* (e.g., finding it rewarding to provide student teachers with practical experience), and *intrinsic/extrinsic personal utility values* (e.g., getting new ideas from student teachers/receiving payment for mentoring). In addition, cost-related factors, such as required effort, were mentioned by the mentor teachers, as well as factors related to (external) social influence (e.g., requests from the school principal to act as a mentor). These findings are discussed in light of EVT and FIT-Choice and function as starting point for a conceptual model addressing the initial motivation of becoming a mentor teacher

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