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# SEARCH AND RESEARCH: TEACHER EDUCATION FOR CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS



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# The reflexive diaries of mentors in an induction program

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## ABSTRACT

The induction period is a stage of becoming a teacher. The figure of the mentor has received considerable attention in research on teacher training. The mentor is a teacher with recognized experiences, expertise and specialized training as a trainer, who provides support to novice teachers' teaching (Orland-Barak, 2014; Korthagen, 2014; Kuh, 2016; Yuan & Lee, 2016). In this paper we describe the process of mentoring that has been developed throughout an induction program for novice teachers in the Dominican Republic. A total of 32 mentors participated in this research, distributed over several areas across the country. The data analyzed in this article were drawn from the reflective diaries that mentors wrote during the program. The total data made up 1,176 pages of text, grouped in 32 reflective diaries of mentors. Aligning with other research on novice teachers and induction programs, the results show the prevalence of problems are related to the methodology, discipline and motivation in all the first years of teaching. These problems are analyzed from the point of view of the mentors themselves who provide supports for novice teachers.

KEYWORDS: reflective journal, beginning teachers, induction, accompaniment.

## 1. INTRODUCTION.

Induction period is a stage of becoming a teacher. It is not a jump in the gap between initial training and continuous training, but it has a distinctive character and is decisive to achieve coherent and evolving professional development (Boerr Romero, 2011; Cox, Beca & Cerri, 2014). During the induction period, beginning teachers have to accomplish two tasks: they must teach and they must learn to teach (Jensen, Sandoval-Hernández, & González, 2012).

Induction in teaching refers to a phase of learning the craft of teaching where the doubts, the insecurities, anxiety to get into practice, accumulate and coexist without good company. It is an important time in the careers of the teachers who focus on the acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills in a short period of time and in general in the largest of the solitudes (Vaillant & Marcelo, 2015).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

The concern for the induction as a key stage of teacher professional development has become evident and urgent due to the needs of teachers faced with in some countries. For example, evidence shows that the United States, South Africa, England, Estonia, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Chile need to attract and keep teaching people who have access to it (Brindley & Parker, 2010; Eisenschmidt, 2006).

The situation in many countries does not only demonstrate the need to cater to the early years of teaching as a requirement to ensure an effective teacher professional development. There are many investigations and reviews that have been carried out in relation to the subject of our article. One of the most recent literature review work on beginning teachers from Avalos (2016) found, (1) the largest percentage of investigations relates to induction (description of programs, processes, and effects); (2) some research focuses on the processes of teaching and learning (cognitive, affective, social and practical aspects); (3) some research studies attend to professional learning (reflection, cognitive skills, leadership); he analyzed situations of abandonment/retention (factors affecting); (4) some research focuses on beliefs, attitudes, tensions, challenges and concerns of the beginning teachers; and (5) some research explores mentoring (relations, qualities and problems of mentors).

Mentoring is a process of an experienced teacher with specific training being in collaboration with one or more beginning teachers (Orland-Barak, 2006). The mentor activities launched with novice teachers include planning, observing, showing, analyzing, meditated on education (Orland-Barak, 2014).

The mentor is an experienced teacher with recognized teaching knowledge and specialized training as a trainer, offering his or her support to novice teachers (Kelly, Reushle, Chakrabarty, & Kinnane, 2014). A mentor is a professional educator that teaches, accompanies, but who also needs to learn a new role (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005). Mentors work with beginning teachers in different ways. Some mentors provide personal and emotional support of pedagogical and instrumental support. van Ginkel, Oolbekkink, Meijer and Verloop (2016) found four sets of activities which were mainly carried out by mentors: providing emotional and psychosocial supports; supporting the

construction of personal practical knowledge of the beginning teacher; creating a favorable context for beginning teacher learning and changing the behavior of the beginning teachers.

As we have shown, the research literature on the role of mentor and mentor efforts to support novice teachers within the induction program is very broad and has dealt with problems of varied interests. In this article we would like to answer the following questions:

- How do mentors perceive themselves as mentors?
- What are mentors' concerns regarding their relationship with beginning teachers?
- Do aspects of classroom teaching focus the relations among beginning teachers and mentors?
- What is the role of the mentor in beginning teacher induction at school?

### 3. METHODOLOGY.

These research questions situate in the context of an induction program for novice teachers in which authors have been involved. It's a program for the induction of novice teachers in the Dominican Republic which includes a wide variety of activities, face-to-face and online training. The mentors who participated in this study were 32 of which 29 are women and 3 are men. The total number of mentors of the induction program has been 45, and 365 beginning teachers distributed throughout the Dominican Republic.

The data analyzed in this article are diaries that mentors wrote during the program. During the training process, mentors were asked to draft a reflective diary (Slaughter-Defoe & English-Clarke, 2010). The first scenario under analysis is related to the activities carried out by mentors in schools of each beginning teacher: planning meetings, classroom observation, revisions and feedback processes to beginners. The second analyzed scenario was the so-called "learning circles". Learning circles are matches of each mentor with assigned novice teachers. Learning circles are an opportunity to jointly reflect on teaching and their potential for improvement.

The collected data consisted of 1,176 pages of text, grouped into 32 daily papers. The data analysis process began with the individual reading of diaries written by mentors in order to develop a first set of categories. With the aim of providing structure to it, we turned to the work developed some years ago (Marcelo, et al., 1991) and based on Jordell's (1985) three dimensions to analyze the problems of novice teachers: personal, didactic and organizational dimensions. Taking into account of these three general dimensions, we developed categories and subcategories based on our reading of the diaries written by mentors.

#### 4. RESULTS.

To understand the orientations adopted by mentors in their relationship with the beginning teachers, we analyzed the content of mentors' diaries. How do mentors perceive themselves as mentors? What are concerns of the mentors in their relationship with beginning teachers? Do aspects of classroom teaching focus on the relations between beginning teachers and mentors? What is the role of the mentor in the beginning teacher induction at school?

- How do they perceive themselves as mentors?

The analysis of the diaries shows us that the highlighted understanding of mentoring is that mentoring is a process of guidance, support, development, collaboration, help, etc. Mentoring is a process that mobilizes the experience and wisdom of practice to make it available to teachers. "A mentor is a person who accompanies and advises. A counselor, critical friend who is supportive and willing to collaborate as a team for the majority of the teaching assignments".

Mentors have the role and functions of support and accompaniment, as a growth tutors and professional. They do not understand their function such as supervision, control or authority. Mentors feel the responsibility as more experienced teachers to novice teachers (Orland-Barak & Yinon, 2005): available to teach, collaborate, preview, and support to people who have little experience or less knowledge of something in which the mentor is an expert or has more experience and more knowledge.

- What are the concerns of the mentors in their relationship with the beginning teachers?

Research literature shows that a part of the mentors work has to do with emotional and personal support for beginning teachers (Avalos, 2016). Novice teachers undergo true crisis in which it was not uncommon to question their own ability to teach: "She does not sleep, must take pills to sleep after giving lessons". Currently, the mentors feel useful as support for teachers' beginners, showing their experience and helping them to overcome the difficulties encountered at personal or classroom level.

In this role, mentors are thus themselves supporting not only professional but also personally and emotionally to the teachers who are just starting the teaching profession (Yuan & Lee, 2016). All are involved and are committed to the proper development of their beginners, while they sometimes show frustration or separation such as "the teacher was a little discouraged, with little energy", "the teacher who still is not doing a great job, don't know what to do," "feels disoriented", "It wants to guide and to support him". In this sense, and as Bickmore and Bickmore (2010), points out the fact that mentors and

learners establish good relations also in the personal field, helps teachers not to abandon his profession, who collaborate closely and collaboratively in the construction of joint practices. Representative narratives of this idea are: “the beginner who looks tired, exhausted and unmotivated that says this is not easy, I ask you to be quiet”, “I preferred having studied another career.”

- Do aspects of classroom teaching focus on the relations among beginning teachers and mentors?

Along with emotional support, mentors justify their activity in the accompaniment and support for the improvement of the teaching of beginning teachers' classes. Several are the topics discussed in the newspapers such as problems, difficulties and concerns, training needs, interactive teaching and planning of it.

One of the issues that inform mentors in relation to beginning teachers have to do with difficulties in managing the classroom and the use of appropriate teaching materials: “the beginner needs management and mastery of classroom support and development of the moments of class”. These problems are related to what the literature called clash with reality (Veenman, 1984). For some beginning teachers, the teaching experience implies a true personal challenge. But not all are problems. A part of the reflections that mentors expressed in their diaries are related to progresses or learning that beginning teachers have done throughout the program. These lessons have to do with his own appreciation, and make reference to the views of other professionals in the school: “the Teacher Coordinator says that the work performed by the teacher is very good and is an model to follow”, “the Coordinator considered it one of the best teachers of his Center” or “the director of the Centre said that he feels as if he is making progress with the teachers”.

Among the concern of mentors are two aspects related to the environment of classroom management: the discipline and motivation. With respect to discipline and control of students, mentors' reflections are focused on situations of disorder: “stop not very harmonious environment, the atmosphere was not good, the children came out of class, not attend to my instructions”, “the teacher can not follow the process since the students were very restless and this generated indiscipline” or control as: “There is a course very ordered, with an atmosphere of respect, all students are very well arranged sitting in rows” “there is a very good student group domain”. In relation to the motivation of students, students remain vigilant when using methodologies and interactive resources. Recreational materials, videos, crafts, workshops, etc.: “many children raise their hands to go to the Blackboard and there is an active participation”.

- What is the role of the mentor in the beginning teacher induction at school?



The work of the teacher, as described above, focuses primarily on personal and educational support to novice teachers. References to the school are scarce and much lower than other dimensions. In some phrases mentors make explicit reference to other teachers in the school, highlighting the educational collaboration, and how some beginners receive help, support and commitment to teaching fellow of the center. On most of the centers, there is a good group cohesiveness, with positive feelings of belonging to the group: “it is accompanied by another teacher who is not on the agenda”, “If I say help to another I do although it is not my job”, “if I say help to another I do although it is not my job”, “relationships interpersonal is of positive emotions”.

How directors and other teachers welcome beginner teacher influence significantly in its development and inclusion. In this regard, an aspect highlighted by the majority of mentors is the favorable reception that have had in all schools. The characteristics of the center atmosphere are: welcoming, collaborative, participatory, dynamic and empathetic. As Kuh (2016) says, if the organization is able to promote reflective processes of teaching practices, the positive effects on both students learning and their own learning process will be strengthened. Professional development in communities of reflective practice provides meaningful experiences in the learning of teachers when they share with others their experiences and interests.

Mentors highlighted how in general the educational community has been giving novice teachers a good reception on the first day when they arrived at the Center: “was well received in the Centre of great satisfaction”. Mentors included how the directors or supervisors of these centers has been interested in the induction program, creating collaborative networks, promoting good environments for cooperation and providing aid and support within its capabilities: “Coordinator is always ready to provide facilities to make possible the accompaniment”.

##### 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS.

We can conclude that the professional identity that has developed within participant mentors, leads them to perceive themselves in a profile of guidance, accompaniment and support, more than supervision or control. The role of mentors is a personal and emotional support provided to beginners. It is in collision with the reality experienced by beginners whose mentors perform functions of emotional companions, interested in the issues that created anguish and despair to beginners, thus avoiding having to leave the profession early.

But the identity is also reflected in the functions of educational accompaniment of beginning teachers. The educational problems encountered by the beginning

teachers align with the existing research literature, focusing mainly on the discipline, motivation, planning and use of technologies. The mentors that accompany teaching beginner play an important role in the socialization of novice teachers. They provide emotional and professional support in the first stage of his teaching work.

The orientation that is perceived through their narratives in the diaries is a focus of what we might call “pedagogy of care” (Nicola, Novakowskia, Ghaleba, & Beirstob, 2010). Mentors take his role from the commitment to the growth and support to beginning teachers. This commitment is reflected in the fact that many of the learning circles who have organized and attended by novice teachers assigned, all have been held in weekends, Saturdays or Sundays, many of them made at homes of the mentors. This orientation called matriarchal by Orland-Barak (2014) has permeated the written speech of mentors.

Mentoring has been a natural and informal process that has always existed in the teaching profession. In recent decades, with the formalization of induction processes, mentoring has been regulated and organized to respond to both system and beginning teacher requirements. At this point, the mentor appears as a figure on the scale between the needs of novice teachers’ staff and requirements of didactic orientation, emotional, psychological, support development of teaching skills, and administrative management (Yuan & Lee, 2016). As Orland-Barak and Yinon (2005) said, the mentor should learn a second language, support, guidance and accompaniment.

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