



Aleksandra Szymańska-Tworek

University of Silesia in Katowice

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2436-1551>

Mentoring as Professional Development for Mentors

Abstract

The present paper concerns the topic of mentoring in the context of pre-service teacher education. Mentoring refers here to assistance or guidance provided by a school-based teacher who agrees to mentor a student teacher during her or his practicum. More specifically, the paper examines if mentoring can be recognized as a form of professional development for mentor teachers. While a great deal of literature has looked at the benefits student teachers gain from mentoring, an ongoing line of research has acknowledged that teachers in their roles as mentors also can benefit professionally from the experience of mentoring. However, the bulk of this research comes from the Anglo-Saxon context and it cannot be assumed that the experiences of British, American or Australian teachers are shared by teachers in Poland. The aim of the present study then was to identify the ways in which Polish teachers of English who have undertaken the role of a mentor develop professionally through mentoring. The instrument used was a web-based questionnaire. The main findings show that mentor teachers gain professionally primarily through the process of mentoring—being a mentor enhances their capacity for self-reflection and positively impacts their leadership skills, confidence as a teacher, willingness to self-develop, as well as their enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. On the other hand, mentors do not feel they learn directly from student teachers, although, in general, they recognize cooperation with student teachers as an inspirational and positive experience.

Keywords: teachers of English, mentoring, professional development for mentors, student teaching

Introduction: Terms Explained

Mentoring is “one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee’s expertise and to facilitate their

induction into the culture of the profession [...]” (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009, p. 207). A different definition presents mentoring as “an intentional pairing of an inexperienced person with an experienced partner to guide and nurture his or her development” (Pitton, 2006, p. 1, cited in Beutel & Spooner-Lane, 2009, p. 351). In the context of pre-service teacher education, mentoring refers to assistance provided to a student completing the student teaching portion of their education program by a more experienced teacher in her or his classroom. Teachers in their roles as mentors have been labelled a number of terms across the research literature. Le Cornu (2015, p. 3, cited in McDonough, 2018, p. 99) identified the following: supervising teachers, mentor teachers, associate teachers, co-operating teachers and school-based teacher educators, with the first two being most commonly used in recent research. Although the distinction between mentor and supervisor is not always acknowledged and some studies use these terms interchangeably, the current literature offers a more nuanced definition of both concepts. While supervision bases mostly on technical procedures, such as explaining, providing feedback, and generally modelling one’s protégés according to certain standards, mentoring is a much deeper process that involves interpersonal and psychosocial development of the mentee and is intended to foster the formation of her or his identity as a professional teacher (Walkington, 2005, p. 63). Although both mentoring and supervision can be hierarchical in nature, mentoring implies greater collegiality between the classroom teacher and student teacher, which means their relationship is more likely to be based on dialogue and reciprocity (Ambrosetti, 2014, p. 31, Carruthers, 1993, cited in Walkington, 2005, p. 56). As the current research literature has consistently presented the intended role of a school-based teacher as a guide (mentor) rather than a technician (supervisor) and the terms mentoring and mentor have become more pervasive, for the purpose of the present paper this terminology is adopted.¹

¹ Mentor, mentor teacher, and mentoring teacher are used throughout this paper to denote a classroom-based teacher who has undertaken the role of a mentor. University student completing the student teaching portion of her or his education program is referred to as mentee and student teacher. Student teaching is also termed practicum. The term pupils is used to denote learners in school settings.

Literature Review

Mentoring as Professional Development for Mentees and Mentors

The benefits that student teachers derive from effective mentoring are varied and many, and have been exhaustively described in a spate of publications. It has been reported that mentoring and mentors: provide student teachers with emotional and psychological support (Hobson et al., 2009), exert an important effect on mentees' beliefs and their future practices (Evertson & Smithey, 2000), promote student teachers' teaching competence (Yuan, 2016), play a key role in the socialization of early-career teachers (Hobson et al., 2009; Yuan, 2016) and generally support the initial preparation, induction and early professional development of beginning teachers (Hobson et al., 2009; Lindgren, 2006; Marable & Raimondi, 2007).

While a great deal of literature has looked at the benefits student teachers derive from mentoring, an ongoing line of research has acknowledged that undertaking the role of a mentor brings numerous benefits for the mentor herself or himself. That student teachers can be used as a resource is presented, for example, in a study by Jaspers, Meijer, Prins, and Wubbels (2014, p. 112), where mentor teachers refer to mentees as a colleague, an additional value, and describe their presence as "having two more hands, eyes and ears in the class." The study reports that having student teacher in the classroom allows for the possibility of working with pupils in smaller groups and give teachers freedom to undertake other work in the school. Other possible benefits of working with mentees include: removing the isolation many teachers feel and creating a more collaborative environment (Gilles & Wilson, 2004, p. 91) and preventing teachers from feeling bored (Jaspers et al., 2014, p. 110).

However, the process of mentoring is said to have a much deeper impact on mentors—it has been demonstrated that mentoring is a powerful and cost-effective learning opportunity that promotes growth in both mentees and mentors. As reflected in the following citation by Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005, p. 16):

[...] there is no doubt that the major focus of mentoring is on the mentee. After all, the verb is a transitive one and implies that one is mentoring somebody [...] that somebody is the student teacher and the whole emphasis of mentoring is on helping the student teacher become a competent professional. Nevertheless, there is some evidence in the literature that suggests the mentors themselves can also gain professionally from the process of mentoring.

This sentiment is echoed by Walkington (2005, p. 54) and worded as follows:

[...] each mentoring relationship with a pre-service teacher is unique and has learning opportunities for both parties. It is not a one-way transfer of skills and knowledge from expert to novice, but an opportunity for challenging those things that create personal philosophies and modes of operation.

The experience of mentoring provides teachers with benefits, rewards, and opportunities that help them develop their own teaching potential (Gilles & Wilson, 2004, p. 91). The following sections of the paper discuss different ways in which mentoring can enhance professional development of mentoring teachers. The paper is organized as follows: first, it is described how teachers in their roles as mentors benefit from the very process of mentoring, then it is presented what mentors can learn directly from mentees.

Learning from the Mentoring Process

It is recognized in the literature that mentoring is an opportunity for mentors to enhance their capacity for critical reflection and self-reflection (Ambrosetti, 2014; Jaspers et al., 2014; Gilles & Wilson, 2004; Smith & Nadelson, 2016; Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005). The development of reflective abilities comes about via two avenues, as discussed by Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005, pp. 22–23). First, because mentors see themselves to be in the position of a role model, they decide to verify their teaching practices, attitudes or beliefs in order to set a good example for student teachers, which is likely to involve them in meaningful reflection. As put by one of the respondents in a study by Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005, p. 19):

It makes you reflect on your own teaching when you know someone is trying to learn from what you are doing. So you put a lot of effort into the structure and what you are doing because you want it to be good. You don't want to give someone a bad example of how to teach.

Second, mentors who observe student teachers' lessons and provide them with post-lesson feedback tend to analyze the differences between their own and student teachers' performance, which, again, is likely to trigger reflection. As reported by Lopez-Real and Kwan (2005), mentors who get involved in reflective thinking during the practicum, are likely to continue practicing reflection after the mentee had finished their student teaching.

Apart from the development of reflective skills, other documented benefits that mentors derive from mentoring are a renewed enthusiasm for teaching

(Ambrosetti 2014; Hobson et al., 2009), increased confidence in their own teaching (Hobson et al., 2009) and the development of communication skills and leadership roles (Hudson, 2013a; Hudson, 2013b). As discussed in Jaspers et al. (2014, p. 110), mentors reported that mentoring “kept them fresh and sharp and prevented them from teaching too automatically and routinely and from getting bored.” Gilles and Wilson (2004, p. 91) point out that through contacts with student teachers mentors often get reenergized in their profession. Mentoring teachers in a study by Jaspers et al. (2014, p. 110) have also reported that mentoring made them more confident in their own teaching because they realized they could help student teachers more than they had expected.

Learning from Student Teachers

That mentors can actually learn from mentees may seem somewhat ironic. After all, student teachers are explicitly in a learning situation and teachers in their roles as mentors epitomize wisdom and experience (Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005, p. 20). Nonetheless, the studies adduced in this section give evidence that interaction with student teachers can be instructive and inspirational even for teachers with many years of experience.

Mentoring may be an opportunity for teachers to get inspired by student teachers’ innovative ideas and points of view (Hobson et al., 2009; Jaspers et al., 2014; Rajuan, Beijaard & Verloop, 2007; Ulvik & Langørgen, 2012; Gilles & Wilson, 2004; Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005; Hudson, 2013b). Student teachers may offer a fresh perspective because they view the classroom from an outsider’s perspective that allows them to challenge what is considered ‘the truth’ in the classroom culture (Ulvik & Langørgen, 2012, p. 48). They are not tied to old habits, they view matters from a different angle and may offer new perspectives, for example, alternative practices, creative lesson ideas, new methods, teaching styles and strategies. Even expert veteran teachers are likely to gain new insights and benefit from innovative ideas that student teachers may have to offer. This practice is illustrated in the following comment by a mentor in a study by Hudson (2013b, p. 778): “The preservice teacher brings back all those great ideas, brings a little bit more creativity back into my teaching, and that made me think about maybe I need to do a bit more of that in my teaching.”

A further contribution student teachers can make follows from their status as university students. Due to their current engagement with tertiary education, students are more updated as to current trends in teacher education, political trends in education, recent literature and recently recommended teaching methods (Lindgren, 2006; Hudson, 2013a; Gilles & Wilson, 2004). Teachers undertaking the role of a mentor can embrace this opportunity to get knowledge

about the latest educational theories, or to re-inform their teaching routine with theoretical, “bookish” knowledge that students are likely to have.

Ulvik and Langørgen (2012, p. 52) point out that because of their young age, student teachers are likely to be highly skilled in information and communication technology and know more about youth culture than older teachers. Student teachers’ digital competence could be a valuable resource especially for teachers who are less IT-skilled and an opportunity to liven up traditional class instruction with some creative ICT usage. A further contribution student teachers can make, because of their familiarity with youth culture, is facilitating communication between the teacher and pupils and perhaps even acting as a mediator between the two parties. In this way, mentoring could serve as an opportunity for mentors to try to understand her or his pupils better.

Summing up, the research overview presented in this part of the paper discusses different benefits that teachers can derive from being a mentor. It has been pointed out that mentors can develop professionally by (1) benefiting from the process of mentoring and by (2) learning directly from student teachers. The former includes the development of reflective skills, as well as a boost in enthusiasm, confidence, communication and leadership skills. The latter involves getting inspired by new ideas, learning about current trends in education, improving one’s digital competence and getting to know one’s pupils better. Apart from this, mentors can make mentoring work to their advantage by treating student teachers as a resource. For instance, having student teacher in the classroom gives teachers a possibility to work with individual pupils or to undertake other work outside of the classroom.

The Study

The Aim of the Study and Research Question

The aim of the study presented in this paper is to identify the ways in which teachers of English who have undertaken the role of a mentor develop professionally through mentoring. The secondary aim is to examine if teachers make mentoring work to their advantage by using student teachers’ help and treating them as a resource. In this study, we are interested in the Polish context because although the literature on mentoring among Polish teachers of foreign languages is vast (for English, e.g., Siek-Piskozub & Jankowska, 2015; for French, e.g., Grabowska, 2019; for German, e.g., Miłułka, 2016; for

Russian, e.g., Karolczuk, 2013), there are no studies (at least to the best of my knowledge) that deal specifically with this aspect of mentoring experience. The research cited in the theoretical part of this paper comes primarily from the Anglo-Saxon context, where mentoring has a long tradition, and where some teachers are given a possibility to attend mentor training programs (a course or a series of workshops designed to prepare teachers for the role as mentors). It cannot be assumed then that the experiences of British, American or Australian teachers are shared by teachers in Poland. The present study aims to answer the following research question: in what ways (if any) mentors develop professionally through mentoring?

Participants

Respondents selected for the study are teachers of English. As argued by Werbińska (2005), teachers of English tend to work more than teachers of other foreign languages because they have more opportunities for additional earnings. This is the result of the role of English as a lingua franca and its privileged position on the job market. It is teachers of English then that were selected for the present study because it is interesting to examine if this group of respondents is able to use mentoring as a learning opportunity, despite all the other responsibilities and roles they need to embrace as teachers, learners, and users of English.

The questionnaire was filled out by 36 teachers of English who have mentored at least one student teacher in the course of the last six years. Thirty-five respondents were female and one was male. Of these, 21 currently work in a primary school, 13 in a secondary school (*liceum*) and eight in a technical secondary school (*technikum*) – the sum exceeds the number of respondents because some of them work in more than one place. As far as work experience is concerned, two thirds of the respondents have between ten to 19 years of teaching experience, while the most numerous group of respondents (41.7%) have the teaching experience between 15 to 19 years. The detailed breakdown of the responses is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Respondents' Teaching Experience

| Years of experience | 0–4 | 5–9 | 10–14 | 15–19 | 20–24 | 25–29 | 30–34 | 35–39 | >40 |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Number of respondents | 0 | 2 | 9 | 15 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

The respondents were asked about the number of student teachers they mentored in the last six years. More specifically, this question was divided into three parts:

How many student teachers did you have in your classroom in the last six years?

- who were only observing?
- who were only teaching?
- who were both observing and teaching?

The responses are summarized in the following Tables 2–4.

Table 2

The Number of Respondents Who Mentored Student Teachers Who Were Both Observing and Teaching

| Number of student teachers | 0 | 1–2 | 3–4 | 5–6 | 7–8 | 9–10 | > 10 |
|----------------------------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| Number of respondents | 0 | 28 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |

Table 3

The Number of Respondents Who Mentored Student Teachers Who Were Only Observing

| Number of student teachers | 0 | 1–2 | 3–4 | 5–6 | 7–8 | 9–10 | > 10 |
|----------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| Number of respondents | 12 | 13 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 |

Table 4

The Number of Respondents Who Mentored Student Teachers Who Were Only Teaching

| Number of student teachers | 0 | 1–2 | 3–4 | 5–6 | 7–8 | 9–10 | > 10 |
|----------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| Number of respondents | 28 | 7 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

As can be seen from Table 2, all the respondents mentored at least one student teacher whose practicum included both elements: student teacher observed the lessons and carried out lessons on her or his own. Apart from this, as presented in Tables 3 and 4, most teachers also have experience mentoring student teachers whose practicum included only observation or only teaching component.

Asked if they feel successful in their role of mentor, 20 respondents (55.6%) gave a positive answer, while 15 teachers (41.7%) had no opinion. Only one respondent (2.8%) indicated that she felt unsuccessful in her role as a mentor.

The Instrument

The instrument used for collecting data was a web-based questionnaire consisting of three parts followed by demographics questions (see Appendix). The three parts of the questionnaire include statements to which participants

were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert scale (1—I strongly disagree, 2—I somewhat disagree, 3—I have no opinion, 4—I somewhat agree, 5—I strongly agree).

The first part of the questionnaire, entitled “Learning from the mentoring process,” includes ten statements that ask respondents if being a mentor increased their reflective skills, enthusiasm for teaching, confidence as a teacher, commitment to teaching, motivation to improve their English, willingness to self-develop, communication skills and leadership skills. The second part of the questionnaire, entitled “Learning from student teachers,” encompasses seven statements that ask teachers if mentees inspired them with new ideas or teaching methods and, more generally, if cooperation with student teacher was instructive and inspirational for them. The statements also inquire whether respondents managed to learn something from student teachers and whether the presence of student teacher contributed to better relations between the teacher and pupils.

The third part of the questionnaire, entitled “Student teacher as a resource,” includes five statements that ask respondents if mentees shared teaching materials with them and if the presence of student teacher allowed for the possibility to work with individual pupils or to undertake other tasks in the school. The last two statements are of a more general nature and inquire if respondents feel that cooperation with student teacher was a positive experience and if it constituted a welcome diversion from the classroom routine. The statements in this part of the questionnaire were intended to examine whether respondents used student teachers as a resource—as described in the theoretical part of this paper, student teachers are perceived by some teachers as “an additional value” (Jaspers et al., 2014, p. 112) that relieves teachers from some duties and prevents them from feeling isolated and bored. The three parts of the questionnaire are followed by demographics questions that inquire about respondents’ sex, teaching experience, the number of student teachers they mentored in the course of the last six years, the type(s) of school they currently work in and about whether they feel successful as mentor teachers. Additionally, as all of the questions in the main part of the questionnaire are close-ended, three open-ended, non-obligatory questions were added. These questions ask teachers if there are any other mentoring-related experiences they want to share and encourage them to leave any comment related to mentoring or the questionnaire they feel like. The language of the questionnaire is English, with the exception of the last question that inquires about the type of school respondents work in. As Polish, British, and American educational systems differ considerably and there is no clear one-to-one correspondence of the names of different school types, this question was worded in Polish for the sake of simplicity.

Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed through a social networking service, namely Facebook, by being placed on the pages of three groups created for and run by in-service teachers of English. These groups serve as a forum for teachers to share ideas, ask and answer questions and, generally, talk about all teaching-related topics. They were chosen for the purpose of this study because they provide access to many teachers of English of different backgrounds from across Poland, some of whom may have experience as mentors. The questionnaire was accompanied by a short note which spelled out the criteria that teachers taking part in the study need to meet. These included:

1. being a teacher of English;
2. having at least one student teacher for practicum in the course of the last six years;
3. the practicum included both elements: student teacher observed the lessons and conducted solo teaching.

As far as criterion (2) is concerned, it was decided not to collect responses from those teachers who served as mentors more than six years ago because it can be argued that the memories after such a long period of time are less likely to be accurate. Teachers who had experience mentoring more than one student teacher were asked to think about the most recent one when answering the questions. The respondents were briefly informed about the aim of the study and assured of their anonymity.

Results and Discussion

The results are discussed separately for the three parts of the questionnaire. The statistics for each of these groups of questions are presented in Tables 5–7. The original 5-point Likert scale, with “I strongly disagree” and “I strongly agree” at the extremes, has been collated into three categories and presented as percentages. Cronbach’s alpha calculated for the whole questionnaire (the three groups of questions) amounts to 0.92, which renders the questionnaire internally consistent. Although the questionnaire included some open-ended questions, these were not obligatory and no relevant responses were recorded.

Learning from the Mentoring Process

The first part of the questionnaire, presented in Table 5, was designed to inquire whether mentoring teachers develop professionally through the process of mentoring.

Table 5

Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviation for Statements Concerning Development from Mentoring

| Learning from the mentoring process | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. I feel that being a mentor has increased my reflective skills. | 2.8% | 0.0% | 8.3% | 44.4% | 44.4% | 4.28 | 0.84 | |
| 2. Having a student teacher observe my classes has made me reflect on whether what I do in the classroom is right. | 8.3% | 5.6% | 8.3% | 33.3% | 44.4% | 4.00 | 1.22 | |
| 3. Observing the lessons run by a student teacher has made me reflect on my own teaching. | 5.6% | 5.6% | 11.1% | 30.6% | 47.2% | 4.08 | 1.14 | |
| 4. I feel that being a mentor has increased my enthusiasm for teaching. | 8.3% | 5.6% | 22.2% | 38.9% | 25.0% | 3.67 | 1.15 | |
| 5. I feel that being a mentor has increased my confidence as a teacher. | 11.1% | 5.6% | 13.9% | 27.8% | 41.7% | 3.83 | 1.32 | |
| 6. I feel that being a mentor has increased my commitment to teaching. | 11.1% | 5.6% | 19.4% | 33.3% | 30.6% | 3.67 | 1.27 | |
| 7. I feel that being a mentor has increased my motivation to improve my English. | 27.8% | 22.2% | 33.3% | 8.3% | 8.3% | 2.47 | 1.21 | |
| 8. I feel that being a mentor has increased my willingness to self-develop. | 8.3% | 5.6% | 19.4% | 38.9% | 27.8% | 3.72 | 1.17 | |
| 9. I feel that being a mentor has improved my communication skills. | 11.1% | 11.1% | 36.1% | 27.8% | 13.9% | 3.22 | 1.16 | |
| 10. I feel that being a mentor has improved my leadership skills. | 8.3% | 2.8% | 13.9% | 36.1% | 38.9% | 3.94 | 1.18 | |
| | | | | | | Total | 3.69 | 1.17 |

As many as 88.8% of the teachers stated that being a mentor increased their reflective skills, while 2.8% expressed the opposite view ($M = 4.28$). 77.7% of the respondents declared that being observed by the student teacher made them reflect on whether what they do in the classroom is right and 13.9% did not agree ($M = 4.00$). 77.8% of the respondents stated that observing the lessons run by a student teacher made them reflect on their own teaching; 11.2% provided

a negative answer ($M = 4.08$). These results show that the teachers feel very strongly that being a mentor enhanced their reflective abilities. Interestingly, it is both, observing and being observed while teaching that seem to involve mentors in reflective thought.

63.9% of the respondents claimed that being a mentor increased their enthusiasm for teaching, while 13.9% did not agree ($M = 3.67$). 69.5% of the informants felt that being a mentor increased their confidence as a teacher; 16.7% articulated the opposite view ($M = 3.83$). 63.9% of the informants felt that being a mentor increased their commitment to teaching; 16.7% provided a negative answer ($M = 3.67$). 66.7% of the respondents stated that being a mentor increased their willingness to self-develop, with 13.9% taking the opposite point of view ($M = 3.72$). 75% of the respondents declared that being a mentor improved their leadership skills; 11.1% did not agree ($M = 3.94$). A statement that obtained a relatively moderate response inquired if being a mentor helped the respondents improve their communication skills—41.7% of the respondents answered affirmatively, 22.2% did not agree, while 36.1% had no opinion ($M = 3.22$). The responses to the above statements indicate that most respondents feel that being a mentor helped them gain professionally by improving their leadership skills, as well as increasing their confidence, willingness to self-develop, enthusiasm for teaching and commitment to teaching.

The statement that was assigned a relatively low mean rating asked if respondents feel that being a mentor increased their motivation to improve their English, to which only 16.6% answered affirmatively, 50% responded negatively and 33.3% had no opinion ($M = 2.47$). Respondents do not feel that being a mentor had any impact on their motivation to improve their English language skills.

Summing up the results of this part of the questionnaire, mentor teachers do seem to develop through the process of mentoring. The statements that inquire about reflection were assigned mean ratings that equal to or are higher than 4.00. It can be stated then that the development of reflective skills is one of the most considerable benefits that teachers derive from their roles as mentors. The experience of mentoring also seems to contribute to the enhancement of teachers' leadership skills, confidence, willingness to self-develop, enthusiasm for teaching, commitment to teaching and communication skills (the last one to a lesser extent though). What seems to be unaffected by the presence of student teacher is teachers' motivation to improve their English.

Learning from Student Teachers

The second part of the questionnaire, presented in Table 6, was intended to examine if mentor teachers develop by learning directly from mentees.

Table 6

Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviation for Statements Concerning Learning from Student Teachers

| Learning from student teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Student teacher inspired me with some new lesson ideas or interesting teaching methods. | 8.3% | 13.9% | 22.2% | 33.3% | 22.2% | 3.47 | 1.21 |
| 2. I learnt from the student teacher about current trends in education, recent literature or recently recommended teaching methods. | 36.1% | 30.6% | 13.9% | 16.7% | 2.8% | 2.19 | 1.17 |
| 3. I learnt some English from the student teacher (words, phrases, pronunciation of some words, grammar point, etc). | 47.2% | 22.2% | 22.2% | 8.3% | 0.0% | 1.92 | 1.01 |
| 4. I learnt something from student teacher's IT skills. | 19.4% | 16.7% | 11.1% | 25.0% | 27.8% | 3.25 | 1.50 |
| 5. Having a student teacher was instructive and/or inspirational for me. | 11.1% | 11.1% | 19.4% | 33.3% | 25.0% | 3.50 | 1.28 |
| 6. Having a student teacher has made me get to know/understand my pupils better. | 36.1% | 27.8% | 19.4% | 13.9% | 2.8% | 2.19 | 1.15 |
| 7. Having a student teacher has helped me have better rapport with my pupils. | 41.7% | 19.4% | 33.3% | 5.6% | 0.0% | 2.03 | 0.99 |
| | | | | | | Total | |
| | | | | | | 2.65 | 1.19 |

Only three statements were assigned a mean rating higher than 3.00 and these are as follows. 58.3% of the respondents stated that having a student teacher in the classroom was instructive and/or inspirational for them, while 22.2% did not agree ($M = 3.50$). 55.5% of the informants declared that the student teacher inspired them with some new lesson ideas or teaching methods, with 22.2% taking the opposite point of view ($M = 3.47$). 52.8% of the teachers declared that they learnt something from the student teacher's IT skills and 36.1% articulated the opposite view ($M = 3.25$). These results show that most of the respondents appreciate student teachers' digital literacy and recognize cooperation with student teacher as inspirational.

The remaining questions were assigned relatively low mean ratings. 19.5% of the respondents stated that they learnt from the student teacher about cur-

rent trends in education, recent literature or recently recommended teaching methods, while 66.7% provided a negative answer ($M = 2.19$). 16.7% of the informants felt that cooperation with the student teacher let them understand/get to know their pupils better, while 63.9% were of the opposite opinion ($M = 2.19$). 5.6% of the respondents declared that the presence of the student teacher helped them have better rapport with their pupils and 61.1% did not agree ($M = 2.03$). Most of the respondents do not feel they made use of the student teachers' knowledge of current trends in education. It also seems that the presence of the mentee is of little consequence to the rapport between the teacher and pupils.

The statement that was assigned the lowest mean rating asked respondents whether they learnt some English (words, phrases, pronunciation of some words, grammar points, etc.) from student teacher—8.3% of the respondents answered this question affirmatively and as many as 69.4% responded negatively ($M = 1.92$). The teachers decisively reject the idea that their English improved thanks to student teachers. This corresponds to one of the statements in the previous group of questions that asked whether being a mentor increased the teachers' motivation to improve their English—the respondents declared it did not.

Summing up the results of this part of the questionnaire, the respondents do not feel they learn directly from the student teachers. Mentoring teachers do not relate to questions that asked whether cooperation with the student teachers improved their English language skills or increased their knowledge of trends in education. An important exception is digital competence—most respondents state that their computer skills improved thanks to student teachers' advanced digital literacy. Having a student teacher in the classroom seems to hold no significance for the relations between the teacher and pupils. However, most of the respondents acknowledge that interaction with student teacher was inspirational and/or instructive for them.

Student Teacher as a Resource

The third part of the questionnaire, presented in Table 7, was designed to examine if teachers make the most of mentoring by treating student teachers as a “helping hand.”

Table 7

Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviation for Statements Concerning Using Student Teachers as a Resource

| Student teacher as a resource | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Mean | SD | |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Student teacher shared with me some teaching materials or Internet websites. | 16.7% | 30.6% | 25.0% | 16.7% | 11.1% | 2.75 | 1.23 | |
| 2. The presence of a student teacher made it possible to work with small groups of pupils or individual pupils. | 11.1% | 25.0% | 44.4% | 13.9% | 5.6% | 2.78 | 1.00 | |
| 3. Having a student teacher made it possible for me to undertake other tasks in the school. | 30.6% | 33.3% | 16.7% | 13.9% | 5.6% | 2.31 | 1.20 | |
| 4. For me, having a student teacher was a positive experience. | 8.3% | 0.0% | 8.3% | 36.1% | 47.2% | 4.14 | 1.13 | |
| 5. For me, having a student teacher was a nice diversion from the classroom routine. | 5.6% | 2.8% | 2.8% | 44.4% | 44.4% | 4.19 | 1.02 | |
| | | | | | | Total | 3.23 | 1.12 |

27.8% of the respondents admitted that the student teachers shared with them some teaching materials or Internet websites, while 47.3% responded to this statement negatively ($M = 2.75$). 19.5% of the mentoring teachers stated that the presence of the student teacher allowed for the possibility to work with individual pupils or small groups, 36.1% answered this question negatively, while 44.4% had no opinion ($M = 2.78$). 19.5% of the mentoring teachers declared that the presence of the student teacher made it possible for them to undertake other tasks in the school, while as many as 63.9% expressed the opposite view ($M = 2.31$).

The last two questions were of a more general nature and inquired whether teachers feel that cooperation with a student teacher was a positive experience for them and if it constituted a welcome diversion from the classroom routine. As many as 83.3% of the respondents stated that for them cooperation with student teacher was a positive experience; only 8.3% responded negatively ($M = 4.14$). The last question of the questionnaire received an even more positive response—88.8% of the participants declared that the presence of the student teacher was a nice diversion from the classroom routine, while only 8.4% articulated the opposite view ($M = 4.19$).

Summing up the results of this part of the questionnaire, the respondents do not perceive the presence of the student teacher as “having two more hands, eyes and ears in the class” (Jaspers et al., 2014, p. 112), or, in other words, they do not feel that student teachers relieve them from classroom duties. Optimistic results were, however, obtained in response to the last two

statements—cooperation with a student teacher is recognized as a positive experience and a break from the class routine. This may suggest that although teachers do not treat student teachers as a resource, they appreciate their presence as a source of company and diversion.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the study should be noted. First, data were gathered from a small number of participants ($N = 36$), which partly resulted from the fact that the criteria the respondents had to meet to fill out the questionnaire were quite stringent (see section Procedures). Second, due to the self-selecting nature of the sample, caution needs to be taken in interpreting the data. Inviting people to participate in the study may be open to bias as a given topic may draw attention of a particular group of respondents. Third, the perceptual and attitudinal nature of this study means that the data only reflect self-reported perceptions of mentoring teachers rather than hard facts. Further, the study provides only quantitative data. Integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods based on interviews, narratives, and classroom observations could greatly enhance the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings. Taking all of the above into account, it can be stated that the study may lack universal validity and should therefore be considered as suggestive rather than conclusive. That said, it is also believed the results are still interesting in the sense that certain patterns emerged regardless of the limitations. It is hoped that the findings may serve as pointers for future research.

Conclusion

The aim of the study presented in this paper was to identify the ways in which mentors develop professionally through mentoring. The results show that they gain professionally primarily through the process of mentoring—being a mentor enhances their capacity for self-reflection and positively impacts their leadership skills, confidence as a teacher, willingness to self-develop, enthusiasm for teaching and commitment to teaching. Mentor teachers do not seem to benefit professionally through direct interaction with student teachers, with the exception of digital competence—most of the respondents state that their computer-related skills improved thanks to the student teachers' advanced

digital literacy. Not insignificantly though, teachers recognize the presence of the mentee as inspirational and instructive. The secondary aim of the study was to examine whether teachers make mentoring work to their advantage by using student teachers as a resource. It seems that the respondents do not perceive student teachers as a “helping hand” and do not feel that student teachers relieve them from classroom duties. However, having a student teacher in the classroom is recognized as a positive experience and a break from the class routine.

Looking forward, future research could revisit these findings and probe further into teachers’ minds. For example, it would be interesting to examine if mentor teachers actually recognize mentoring as a form of professional development and whether they entertain the possibility that student teachers may be in a position to teach them something. As observed by Ulvik and Langørgen (2012, p. 53), experienced teachers often “do not believe they have anything to learn from teachers who lack experience and knowledge of the context,” although there is evidence (as discussed in the theoretical part of this paper) that student teachers may have a lot to offer. Also, it would be interesting to examine the attitudes towards mentoring held by teachers who have taken part in a mentor training program (a type of formal training for in-service teachers designed to prepare them for the role of a mentor). Programs of this kind are offered to teachers in some countries (e.g., the UK, the USA, Australia, the Netherlands) and as many as 80% of the teacher respondents in a study by Siek-Piskozub and Jankowska (2015, p. 217) declared to be interested in such training. It can be speculated that raising teachers’ awareness of how they might use mentoring as a learning opportunity could help them approach their role as mentors more consciously.

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Appendix

Questionnaire**Learning from the mentoring process**

1. I feel that being a mentor has increased my reflective skills.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
2. Having a student teacher observe my classes has made me reflect on whether what I do in the classroom is right.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
3. Observing the lessons run by a student teacher has made me reflect on my own teaching.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
4. I feel that being a mentor has increased my enthusiasm for teaching.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
5. I feel that being a mentor has increased my confidence as a teacher.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
6. I feel that being a mentor has increased my commitment to teaching.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
7. I feel that being a mentor has increased my motivation to improve my English.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
8. I feel that being a mentor has increased my willingness to self-develop.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
9. I feel that being a mentor has improved my communication skills.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
10. I feel that being a mentor has improved my leadership skills.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

Learning from student teachers

1. Student teacher inspired me with some new lesson ideas or interesting teaching methods.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
2. I learnt from the student teacher about current trends in education, recent literature or recently recommended teaching methods.
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree
3. I learnt some English from the student teacher (words, phrases, pronunciation of some words, grammar point, etc.).
I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

4. I learnt something from student teacher's IT skills.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

5. Having a student teacher was instructive and/or inspirational for me.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

6. Having a student teacher has made me get to know/understand my pupils better.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

7. Having a student teacher has helped me have better rapport with my pupils.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

Student teacher as a resource

1. Student teacher shared with me some teaching materials or Internet websites.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

2. The presence of a student teacher made it possible to work with small groups of pupils or individual pupils.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

3. Having a student teacher made it possible for me to undertake other tasks in the school.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

4. For me, having a student teacher was a positive experience.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

5. For me, having a student teacher was a nice diversion from the classroom routine.

I strongly disagree 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5 I strongly agree

If there are any other things that you learnt in the course of mentoring, please, name them here.

If there are any other things student teacher helped you with, please, name them here.

Do you feel successful in your role of a mentor?

a) Yes

b) No

c) I don't know/It's difficult to say

If you have any comments, please, leave them here.

What is your sex?

a) female

b) male

What is your teaching experience?

– less than 5 years

– 5–9 years

- 10–14 years
- 15–19 years
- 20–24 years
- 25–29 years
- 30–34 years
- 35–39 years
- 40 or more

How many student teachers did you have in your classroom in the last 6 years?

Who were only observing:

- 0
- 1–2
- 3–4
- 5–6
- 7–8
- 9–10
- more than 10

Who were only teaching:

- 0
- 1–2
- 3–4
- 5–6
- 7–8
- 9–10
- more than 10

Who were both observing and teaching:

- 0
- 1–2
- 3–4
- 5–6
- 7–8
- 9–10
- more than 10

W jakiej szkole Pani/Pan pracuje? (można wybrać więcej niż jedną odpowiedź)

- a) szkoła podstawowa
- b) liceum ogólnokształcące
- c) technikum
- d) szkoła branżowa
- e) inne _____

Aleksandra Szymańska-Tworek

Berufliche Entwicklung des Lehrpraktikumsbetreuers

Zusammenfassung

Der vorliegende Beitrag befasst sich mit dem Lehrpraktikum in der Schule und im Einzelnen mit der Betreuung eines Praktikanten durch den Lehrer (auch Lehrpraktikumsbetreuer bzw. Mentor genannt). Es wurde eine Reihe von Studien veröffentlicht, die sich der Entwicklung des Praktikanten widmen, der sich während des Lehrpraktikums ein strukturiertes Wissen über die schulische Realität, neue Fähigkeiten und eine neue Perspektive auf den Lehrprozess aneignet. Die in dem vorliegenden Beitrag aufgeführten Untersuchungen zeigen jedoch, dass die Praktikumserfahrung nicht nur die Entwicklung des Praktikanten, sondern auch die seines Betreuers-Mentors beeinflusst. Der Artikel befasst sich hauptsächlich mit der Frage, ob und inwiefern die Mentorenfunktion dem Praktikumsbetreuer zu seiner eigenen beruflichen Entwicklung verhelfen kann. Die meisten Untersuchungen zu diesem Thema wurden in angelsächsischen Ländern durchgeführt. Es mangelt allerdings an entsprechenden Untersuchungen unter den polnischen Lehrern. Die im Beitrag besprochene Untersuchung stellt einen Versuch dar, diese Lücke zu schließen. Die Probanden sind polnische Englischlehrer, die in den letzten sechs Jahren als Praktikumsbetreuer für mindestens einen Praktikanten fungiert haben. Es wurden zwei Aspekte behandelt: (1) ob sich die Praktikumsbetreuer durch die Mentorenfunktion weiterentwickeln, sowie (2) ob die Praktikumsbetreuer von den Praktikanten lernen können. Als Untersuchungsinstrument wurde ein Fragebogen gewählt. Die Ergebnisse der Umfrage zeigten, dass sich die Praktikumsbetreuer vor allem durch die Mentorenfunktion weiterentwickeln – die Betreuung eines Praktikanten erhöht ihre Fähigkeit zur (Selbst-)Reflexion und wirkt sich positiv auf ihre Führungsqualitäten, Selbstvertrauen, Motivation zur Weiterentwicklung, Enthusiasmus für das Unterrichten und Berufsidentität aus. Die Befragten erklären jedoch, dass sie nicht direkt von den Praktikanten lernen, obwohl sie die Möglichkeit der Zusammenarbeit mit einem Praktikanten als eine positive und inspirierende Erfahrung betrachten.

Schlüsselwörter: Englischlehrer, Lehrpraktikumsbetreuer, Mentor, berufliche Entwicklung des Mentors