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Mentor teachers' perceptions of teacher training competences

Thesis of doctoral (Ph.D) dissertation

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TOPICALITY OF THE SUBJECT, OBJECTIVES

The last decade has seen significant changes in thinking about teacher education, including mentoring, both internationally and domestically. The prevailing view in Europe is that a teacher's career is a career path characterised by continuous professional development. The three main stages of the career path are teacher training, the induction support stage (induction stage) and the stage of continuous professional development (*Stéger,* 2010; *Council of the European Union,* 2008, 2009). The mentor teacher is an active participant in all three stages of the teacher's professional career. The mentor teacher becomes a mentor teacher in the third stage of his or her professional career, the most active and experienced stage, and the teacher educator in the first and second stages of the mentored teacher's professional career.

In international and national educational science, the process of developing a unified competence framework for teacher educators started in the late 1990s (*Buchberger et al. (eds.),* 2000; *Kocsis et al.,* 2012; *Supporting Teacher Educators,* 2013), and by 2015 the competence framework for national teacher educators had been developed (*Falus and Estefánné,* 2015). There has been an emphasis on the clear relevance of mentor teachers among teacher educators (*Boudreau,* 1999; *Lesznyák,* 2005; *Di Blasio et al.,* 2013). In Hungary, the standardised professional training of mentor teachers in practice began in the early 2010s (*Proposals,* 2009). Since 2013, regulations have governed the responsibilities of mentors (*Government Decree No. 326/2013; EMMI Decree No. 8/2013*). The first experiences of traineeships including mentor teacher training have been summarised (*Sallai,* 2015a).

Mentors play an important role in teacher educators by acting as a bridge between theoretical and practical teacher education (*Nyaumwe et al.,* 2005; *Falus and Estefánné,* 2015; *Abad and Pineda,* 2018; *Phang et al.,* 2020), but they are a heterogeneous group in terms of education and professional experience, and their definition and professional identity are currently the subject of national and international research (*Péchy,* 2004 cited in *Révész,* 2010; *Izadinia,* 2016; *Andreasen et al.,* 2019).

The focus of my thesis is provided by a volume of studies on the results of the pilot projects "Internship Qualifying Examinations" and "Preparation of Teacher Candidates", which started in September 2013. The experiences in the volume entitled "Development and Evaluation of the Teacher Traineeship System (*Education Office,* 2015)" shed light on the achievements and difficulties of the work of Hungarian mentor teachers and provide a critique of the preparation of mentor teachers.

When analysing the self-assessments, it is striking how few positive aspects mentor teachers mention in terms of their own competences. The differences between trained and untrained mentors can also be clearly distinguished in the self-evaluation. Mentors mostly report problems with knowledge of the structure of the competency framework, but also a lack of knowledge of the relationship between diagnostic assessment and the development plan, and serious problems with reflectivity. Mentors' perceptions of the development of their own mentoring competences vary widely (*Sallai,* 2015a). There is a big difference between trained and untrained mentors in developing trainees' reflective thinking (*Ritter and Sallai,* 2015). Some of the mentors had serious problems writing reflections, many were not aware of the exact concept of reflection (*Sallai,* 2015a), little emphasis was placed on developing trainee's reflectivity (*Sallai,* 2015a; *Ritter and Sallai,* 2015; *Sallai,* 2015b).

There are significant differences between trained and untrained mentors in their ability to accurately assess the competences of trainee teachers (*Falus, Fóris and Hütter*, 2015; *Sallai,* 2015). Similarly, mentors feel uncertain

about providing professional support. At the top of the list of gaps, mentors mentioned competencies in conveying the beauty of the profession, but lead teachers also feel insecure in handling conflicts with trainees (*Sallai,* 2015a). More often, a lack of relationship skills also makes working together difficult (*Falus, Fóris and Hütter,* 2015; *Sallai,* 2015b). Initial experiences show that efforts to increase the role of mentor teachers have not yet fully achieved their goals in practice.

In my thesis, I reflected on the teacher educator competences of the interviewed mentor teachers. My research focuses on mentor teachers' perceptions of the perceived importance of teacher education competences and their self-assessment of their feasibility, and my hypotheses explore these issues. The relevance of my research is demonstrated by the fact that the exploration of the teacher educator competency framework on the one hand, and of mentor teachers' perceptions of teacher educator competencies on the other, still has a number of potentials in international and domestic educational research.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Statements predicting the future of education in the 2000s are about challenges, goals and expectations that are relevant to my research topic. Schools will have to perform several socialisation and integration tasks at the same time. Education is becoming an increasingly complex task. Competences will play a more prominent role and the development of competence-based self-awareness and self-esteem will become central. For teacher education and teacher training, this means that, in addition to methodological and pedagogical competences, trends focusing on the personal development and individual interests of learners will become increasingly important. There will be a greater need for cooperation and mutual support between the different actors in education in the fields of curriculum development, teacher education and in-service training (*Posch,* 2018, *Wenzler-Cremer*, 2020).

Increasingly complex teacher work requires specialised knowledge, a high level of professionalism, diverse forms of teamwork, and the development of partnerships between mentor teachers and teacher education institutions (*Prenzel,* 2018; *Grimmett et al.,* 2018). Teachers acquire new knowledge from their own practice, from research findings, and through knowledge sharing within professional communities (*Guerriero,* 2017). Teacher educators who work at a professional level can only be trained by teacher educators who are professionally prepared and think in terms of a coherent set o f principles.

It is important to recognise the importance of the work of teacher educators, including mentor teachers, and to develop the leadership skills of mentor teachers (*Kuswandono,* 2017; *Hestness et al.,* 2018; *Chu,* 2019).

Research on the links between mentoring and the mentoring profession has been increasingly included in education research in recent decades (*Huling and Resta*, 2001; *Ewing and Smith*, 2003; *Bray and Nettleton*, 2007; *Anhorn,* 2008; *Cothran et al,* 2008; *Darling-Hammond et al,* 2009; *Rots et al,* 2010; *Tarman,* 2012; *Maphalala,* 2013; *Buchanan et al,* 2013; *Hudson,* 2013; *Kidd et al,* 2015; *Constantinescu,* 2015; *Chu,*2019). Research findings have highlighted the importance of teacher education and professional development for teachers. Indeed, teacher excellence clearly contributes to student achievement (*Darling-Hammond,* 2000; *Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin,* 1998; *Munoz, Prather and Stronge,* 2011; *Wright, Horn and Sanders*, 1997 cited in *Guerriero,* 2017). The literature mentions mentoring as a central strategy in teacher education (*Maphalala,* 2013). Some authors attribute a vital role,

a key role, to mentoring in the induction training of teachers (*Bray and Nettleton,* 2007; *Darling-Hammond et al*., 2009).

However, the lack of mentoring support negatively affects the career plans of early career teachers and has an impact on teacher attrition (*Darling-Hammond,* 2003 cited in *Anhorn, 2008;* K*idd et al.,* 2015). Without the help of a mentor teacher, some beginning teachers reported a lack of necessary competencies in some key areas of their work (*Ewing and Smith,* 2003). In contrast, novice teachers who received intensive mentoring were much less likely to leave the profession, with dropout rates falling by nearly two-thirds (*Darling-Hammond,* 2003, cited in *Anhorn,* 2008; *Hobson et al.,* 2009, *Smith and Ingersoll,* 2004, *Wang and Odell,* 2002 *cited in Rots et al.,* 2010), and even the classroom performance of novice teachers improved as a result of mentoring (*Darling-Hammond et al.,* 2009). Rotz et al. (2010) found positive associations between mentoring and novice teachers' perceptions of school practice.

However, beginning teachers' views of their teaching careers are influenced by a number of factors other than mentoring, such as the status of the profession (*UNESCO/ILO, 2008: 21* cited in *Guerriero,* 2017). The status of a profession is closely related to whether or not it can be considered a profession (*Hoyle,* 2001, *Howsam et al*,1985, *Krejsler,* 2005, *Ingersoll and Merrill*, 2011, cited in *Guerriero,* 2017).

The definition of when a profession can be called a profession is linked to the concept of professionalism. Particularly noteworthy in this context is Freidson's (2001) definition of professionalism as, among other things, a commitment to quality work (*Freidson,* 2011 cited in *Guerriero,* 2017). Thus, the concept of professionalism is also associated with specific attitudes and psychological characteristics that are represented in society as ideals and values (*Guerriero,* 2017). The terms "vocation" and "career" also refer to this (*Bárdos,* 2014-15). The existence of professional autonomy and professional development is of paramount importance when interpreting mentoring as a profession (*Kovács and Orgoványi-Gajdos*, 2020). In my thesis, I use the concepts of mentor teacher profession and mentor teacher profession as working concepts supported by references in the literature (*Fónai et al.,* 2012; *Guerriero*, 2017; *Kovács and Orgoványi-Gajdos*, 2020*; Szivák et al.,* 2020).

The role of the mentor teacher is to model the teaching profession for novice teachers (*Maphalala,* 2013; *Breaux and Wong,* 2003 cited in *Anhorn,* 2008). As with many professions, the teaching profession is characterised by novice teachers feeling that they can develop their skills through learning from colleagues (*Buchanan et al.,* 2013). The mentor teacher supports his/her decisions with arguments, thus helping the novice teacher to understand the decisions and to synthesise theoretical and practical knowledge. Meanwhile, the mentor familiarises the mentee with the logic of his/her thinking (*Bray and Nettleton*, 2007). The role of the mentor is to help develop the effectiveness of novice teachers (*Zachary,* 2000 cited in *Cothran et al.,* 2008; *Darling-Hammond et al.,* 2009). The literature highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal support for effectiveness (*Fives et al.,* 2007; *Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy,* 2007 cited in *Rots et al.,* 2010). The responsibility for the mentored is often a challenging task for the mentor teacher (*Buchanan et al.,* 2013) and the mentoring profession requires professionalism. These processes are a heightened emotional and intellectual challenge for mentor teachers, and the demands of mentor teacher professionalism are a great pressure on them. They have to mobilise new energies, face increasing workloads and may experience a deterioration in well-being (*Hargreaves,* 2000; *Gillett-Swan and Grant-Smith,* 2020).

The characteristics of the profession suggest that, in addition to the cognitive components, the professionalisation of a profession requires a strong emphasis on certain attitudinal traits, including commitment, dedication, motivation, responsibility, and an increasing emphasis on cooperation and openness to professional

collaboration.

Mentoring is a mutually beneficial two-way learning process (*Schön,* 1990, *Le Cornu and Ewing,* 2008 cited in *Bray and Nettleton,* 2007). The results of peer discussions go beyond the mentor-mentee relationship (*Bray and Nettleton*, 2007), and the joint work also changes the mentor's thinking (*Le Cornu and Ewing*, 2008 cited in B*ray and Nettleton,* 2007). During mentoring, the mentor is in a state of continuous professional learning, and working with the mentee encourages constant collaboration and reflection (*Carter and Francis,* 2001 cited in *Buchanan et al.,* 2013). Continuous professional development keeps the mentor focused and aware and helps him/her to identify with the leadership role. Mentoring therefore has a great impact on the mentor (*Hawk,* 1986-87 cited in *Huling and Resta,* 2001). Mentors develop their professional competences, cognitive skills and new ideas about teaching (*Ganser,* 1997 cited in *Huling and Resta,* 2001). Reflective practice in mentoring provides opportunities for professional renewal, regeneration, mobilisation of new energies, all of which strengthen mentors' commitment to teaching (*Ford and Parsons,* 2000, *Steffey et al.,* 2000 cited in *Huling and Resta,* 2001; *Lesznyák,* 2005). Mentoring also has a number of psychological benefits for the mentor. Mentors can increase their self-esteem (*Wollman-Bonilla,* 1997 cited in *Huling and Resta,* 2001), become more satisfied, their self-confidence improves (*Scott,* 1999 cited in *Huling and Resta*, 2001), and their commitment to the teaching profession and the mentoring profession is strengthened (*Boreen et al.,* 2000 cited in *Huling and Resta,* 2001).

The professionalism of mentor teachers and mentoring are mutually conditional, interacting concepts. Mentor teachers play a key role in the commitment to the profession and in the development of teachers' sense of vocation, and the mentoring process reinforces the professional development, professionalism and commitment of the mentor teacher.

The definition of mentoring is based on a professional consensus, with expectations of the mentor defining the concept and a tradition of its use going back thousands of years (*Di Blasio et al.,* 2011). In my thesis, I have used the 21st century interpretation of the concepts of mentoring and mentor teacher (*Government Decree 326/2013 (VIII. 30.)*; *EMMI Decree 8/2013 (I. 30.); Eurydice*, 2021).

Mentor teachers have a specific role to play by providing a link between theoretical and practical teacher education (*Falus and Estefánné,* 2015). In terms of their qualifications, a smaller number of mentors have accredited mentor qualifications and a higher number have no qualifications but have experience (*Sallai,* 2015a).

In the first decade of the 2000s, only half of the EU Member States had the required level of induction training for beginning teachers, and there were no uniform expectations (*Falus,* 2010). In November 2009, at the initiative of the Council of the European Union, the Commission of the European Union summarised ideas for a coherent and systemic induction programme for beginning teachers - an education policy handbook. This is based on the introduction of a mentor scheme in Hungary (*Stéger,* 2010). At the end of 2009, a curriculum for mentor training was developed within the Comenius programme and translated into Hungarian (www.tissnte.eu) (*Falus,* 2010).

Mentoring can vary in time and content depending on the current role of the mentor, and the concept is open to many interpretations (*Berk et al.,* 2005 cited in *Di Blasio et al.,* 2011; *Taskó,* 2018). Mentoring is a distinct profession, a profession that requires specific training to practice. The mentor may deal with problems that directly affect the mentee, problems of motivation, skills or abilities, or perhaps socialisation problems, or interpersonal conflict situations. The mentor can help an individual, but also his/her immediate or wider environment. They may work in a formal or informal setting, relying on intuition or in a professional setting. In addition to traditional forms of mentoring, we can also talk about group mentoring, peer mentoring or online forms of mentoring (*Taskó,* 2018).

Mentors are also able to plan and organise support for disadvantaged learners and learners with special educational needs (*Di Blasio et al.,* 2011; *Taskó,* 2018).

The mentor works in practice schools, partner schools and external practice sites run by higher education institutions. Their work is based on a pair-working model, with information shared between mentor and mentee in a time-bound framework, in partnership (*Di Blasio et al.,* 2011). The mentor is primarily a role model and expert partner for the mentee, with less frequent need to act as an advisor. (*Lesznyák,* 2005).

In my thesis, I examine the perceptions of trained mentor teachers with a statutory mandate and mentors in mentor teacher training (*Government Decree 326/2013 (VIII. 30.); EMMI Decree 8/2013 (*I. 30.) integration in the public education institution during the traineeship period and within the limits set by the legislation. Regularly attends the trainee's classes, consults the trainee, evaluates the trainee's development of teaching skills in writing every six months, and provides the head of the institution and the trainee with a summary evaluation of the trainee's activities at the end of the traineeship (*Eurydice*, 2021).

Until the first decade of the 2000s, teacher trainers were not defined in half of the European countries, and the definition was limited mainly to teachers and trainers in the fields of pedagogy and psychology. Thus, criteria for their employment and training were also lacking (*Falus,* 2014-2015).

Early on, domestic research and development interest focused on the issue of defining teacher trainers and formulating the uniform competences of teacher trainers, including mentor teachers (*Falus*, 2010; *Kotschy,* 2012; *Kocsis et al.,* 2012). In our country, the Association of Teacher Trainers has always believed that mentor teachers working in practising schools and partner schools belong to the category of teacher trainers (*Falus,* 2015b).

The Commission of the European Union organised several exchange conferences in the early 2010s, the main aim of which was to establish a common basis for the part of education policy at Member State level concerning teacher trainers and to clarify the concept of the teacher training profession. The European Union's Expert Group on Teacher Education has been working for several years to strengthen the professional coherence of teacher education, and the Hungarian working group has been represented at the expert meetings from the very beginning, contributing significantly to the synthesis of expert opinions (*Falus,* 2015b; *Stéger,* 2018).

Since the 2000s, the identity-forming elements that bind teacher educators together, as well as the dynamism of their individual professional development and the process of their identity formation, have become increasingly important issues (*Bullough Jr.,* 2005; *Olsen,* 2008; *Olsen and Buchanan,* 2017). Identity as the recognition and embracing of values (*Taylor,* 1989 cited in *Bullough Jr.,* 2005) is the result of a constantly challenging developmental process associated with the development of self-awareness (*Palmer,* 1998 cited in *Bullough Jr.,* 2005; *Izadinia,* 2014 cited in *Olsen and Buchanan*, 2017). As a result of the dynamic nature of identity formation, the teacher educator's sense of identity is constantly changing and this has an impact on the environment, alternative interpretations of identity may emerge at different stages of development, and identity is the result of continuous construction (*Bullough Jr.,* 2005; *Olsen and Buchanan*, 2017). Strong emotions may also be associated with identity recognition (Zembylas, 2003 cited in *Bullough Jr.)*. Olsen (2008) understands teacher education as a holistic, dynamic process. Both national and international educational researchers agree that teacher educators work in three areas: initial teacher education for student teachers, induction training for trainees, and in-service training for practising teachers. According to the European Union expert group's summary (*Supporting Teacher Educators,* 2013 cited in *Falus,* 2015b), all those involved in the formal training of teacher candidates and teacher educators - teachers, lead teachers, mentors, teacher trainers - can be considered teacher educators. In addition to the so-called primary competences that

are linked to the initial qualifications of teacher educators, there is a kind of secondary knowledge, shared competences, skills and attitudes that all teacher educators should possess, a prerequisite for professional collaboration (*Falus,* 2015b; *Murray and Male*, 2005 cited in *Olsen and Buchanan*, 2017; *Sandvik et al.,* 2020). However, teacher educators working in different fields have different levels of depth of competences. All teacher educator competencies are needed, but there are differences between groups in which competency areas are more pronounced in their profession.

Teacher trainers differ in terms of their jobs, their posts, their subject, their level of education and their teaching experience. The recognition of lead teachers and mentors in public education as teacher educators is not always obvious (*Falus,* 2014-2015). Teacher educators have multiple identities, mostly considering their primary profession as authoritative, and many do not even consider themselves teacher educators (*Swennen*, 2010 cited in *Falus*, 2014-2015). By primary knowledge of teacher educators we mean knowledge to teach the subject effectively, and by secondary knowledge we mean knowledge to help them become teachers. This requires knowledge of the pedagogy of adult learning (*Murray,* 2002 cited in *Falus,* 2014-2015).

The description of a single competence framework for teacher educators will strengthen the unity of the teacher education profession, contribute to the professional development of teacher educators, provide a framework of objectives and targets for teacher educators, and provide opportunities for self-reflection. The competence framework also contributes to the work of teacher educators by defining the objectives, content and methodology of teacher education. The existence and knowledge of a coherent competence framework contributes to quality assurance and professional development, can provide guidance for the selection of candidates for teacher education and can also help other professionals working in higher education (*Falus,* 2015a).

The following is an overview of the competences of teacher trainers in Hungary, based on the volume edited by Iván Falus and Magdolna Estefánné Varga (*Falus and Estefánné,* 2015). The teacher educator competences are examined in a broader horizon, always focusing on teacher education. The description of a single set of teacher educator competences both strengthens the unity of the teacher education profession and contributes to the professional development of teacher educators, provides a set of goals and frameworks for teacher educators, and creates opportunities for self-reflection (*Falus,* 2015a). The competences of teacher educators include (*Falus and Estefánné,* 2015):

1. Models professional teaching practice (has the teaching competences).

2. supports the process of becoming a teacher and the professional development of the candidates, to assist their career socialisation and continuous professional development.

3. cooperates with persons, institutions and organisations involved in teacher education.

4. regularly analyses and reflects on its own practice and demonstrates its commitment to lifelong professional development and teacher education

5. conducts research related to learning, teaching or teacher education.

6. contributes to the development of teacher education activities within the institution.

7. is responsible for ensuring and improving the quality of teacher education and public education.

8. In its approach and practice, it is integrated into the international current of teacher education and public education, at least in a European context.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

In my PhD thesis, I followed the combined paradigm based on Creswell's sequential model (*Creswell,* 2012). The use of the combined paradigm provides the educational researcher with the opportunity to see the research problem from different perspectives. Since, from my research perspective, the quantitative and qualitative paradigms are fully compatible, I opted to use the combined paradigm when exploring the possibility of uncovering the latent content that is challenging for educational research. The combined methodology transcends the position of exclusivity of qualitative and quantitative methods, pragmatically seeking the methodologically optimal research methods based on the research question. I chose Creswell's interpretative sequential design model, where the sub-method, quantitative data collection and analysis, preceded the main method, qualitative data collection and analysis. The sub-method thus helps the main method to explore deeper relationships. Among the types of sequential design, I chose the interpretative sequential design model. The quantitative study (questionnaire data collection and analysis), chosen as a sub-method, was followed by the main method, qualitative data collection and analysis, and then data interpretation *(Sántha,* 2015). The direction of the analysis was based on Mayring's content analysis communication model. In Mayring's model, the basic criterion is to resolve the qualitative-quantitative contrast. In the model, rule-driven analysis steps follow each other in a systematic way. The content analysis is a category-driven text analysis based on theoretical considerations, where feedback and intersubjective verifiability are introduced. Mayring calls his method "qualitative-oriented content analysis", in which qualitative and quantitative techniques are represented in phase models, providing the researcher with a logical content analysis procedure with a solid methodological basis (*Mayring*, 2015).

In the qualitative content analysis, I used the deductive categorical approach, structuration, as a basic form of interpretation. With structuring, my aim was to represent the structure of the text according to fixed criteria. Within structuring, I followed content structuring, whereby I started from the category system established from theory, looked for text units for each content node and tried to summarise the mentor teacher educators' reflections on teacher educators' competences by analysing them (*Mayring,* 2000, 2012). I used MAXQDA software for qualitative data analysis. Of particular importance, I used Mayring's qualitative content analysis, which is less well known in domestic qualitative research, in the qualitative part of my research.

The Mayring content analysis methodology was presented at the XVII National Conference on Educational Research (*Katonáné and Subrt,* 2017).

Hypotheses

H1. Both trained mentor teachers and teachers applying for mentor teacher training consider modelling professional practice as the most important teacher training competence.

H2. Qualified mentor teachers and teacher candidates for mentor teacher training consider it important to support teacher development and professional development.

H3. There is no significant difference between trained mentor teachers and teacher trainees in their reflection on practice.

H4. trained mentor teachers and teacher trainees reflect similarly on the development of teacher training activities within the institution.

H5. Trainee mentor teachers and teacher candidates for mentor teacher training have significantly different views on the importance of teacher training competencies that are characteristic of teacher professionalism.

H6. There are significant differences in the self-evaluation of trained mentor teachers and teacher candidates for mentor teacher training on the importance of implementing teacher education competencies that are characteristic of teacher professionalism.

Sampling

The quantitative questionnaire survey was conducted on a sample of N=113 items. I worked with two subsamples:

- Teachers enrolled in mentor teacher training (N=75)

- Teachers who have been mentor teachers for several years (N=38).

Among the non-random sampling techniques, I used expert sampling (*Csíkos,* 2009). For the purpose of this research area, I selected trained practicing mentor teachers from the population as well as teachers who are applying for or have already attended a practicing mentor teacher training.

Based on the mixed-model design, I selected the qualitative study participants from the large sample of the quantitative study. I selected the three participants using a typical-intensive sampling strategy (*Sántha,* 2006). My aim was illustrative, my qualitative study cannot be considered representative.

In my thesis, I aimed to explore deeper layers of mentor teachers' professional culture, autonomy, existing or lacking teacher education competences and their thinking about teacher education as a profession. For this purpose, I used a quantitative method, the questionnaire I developed, and I explored the reasons for the correlations revealed by the quantitative study by means of the in-depth interview with Seidmann (*Seidman,* 2002) and the qualitative content analysis procedure developed by Mayring for its analysis.

RESULTS

Results of the quantitative data analysis

In the ranking of competences, becoming a teacher and supporting professional development ranked first. Within this, mentor teachers rated the competency highest at the attitudinal level. A helpful, supportive attitude, helping to develop a sense of vocation, commitment and dedication to continuous professional development are the most important elements of mentor teachers' thinking.

Although reflection did not score particularly highly, it was one of the most important competences. Mentor teachers' thinking now includes the need for conscious analysis, evaluation and participation in professional debates. Very few significant differences were found between trained mentors and mentor teachers in training in relation to the practical activities of mentor teachers. The only exception to this is the development of pedagogical activity

within the institution. This competency includes the use of differentiated development programmes and diagnostic assessment, areas that trained mentor teachers consider much more important and incorporate more often into their mentoring practice than untrained mentor teachers.

In general, there is no significant difference between the group averages for the competencies specific to the teaching profession, although trained mentors are perceived as more important for the variables. Significant differences are found in the areas that rank last in the ranking of competences: scientific soundness, opinion formation and, most importantly, collaboration. Trained mentors rate almost all forms of collaboration as significantly more important than untrained mentors. Workplace teamwork, grant and project opportunities are not included, and trained mentors do not consider it very important to take advantage of these opportunities.

There is even less significant difference between the means of the two groups in terms of implementation. Being academically sound and being involved in the international mainstream of teacher training and public education are in last place in mentor teachers' thinking. Mentoring practitioners in the teacher education profession have made significant strides over the last ten years to bring the profession into the ranks of the professions, but further changes within the profession need to take place to ensure that mentoring is characterised by professionalism in the future.

H1. In my study, I found that both trained mentor teachers and teachers applying for mentor teacher training consider the modelling of professional practice as important and feasible. There was no significant difference between them, but trained mentors perceived the findings as more important than mentors in training and believed they were more able to implement them. In the ranking of competences, modelling professional practice was ranked 3rd. Based on the results, **I have to reject my first hypothesis.** For the mentor teachers in the sample, modelling professional practice (having the teacher competences) is not the most important teacher education competences.

H2. I found that support for becoming a teacher and professional development was rated very highly by both groups of mentor teachers. Both trained mentor teachers and teacher trainees found the indicators of competence important and feasible. No significant differences were found between the means of the subsamples. The role of a helpful and supportive mentor is the most important competence for both groups, ranking first in the list of competences. **The data confirm my second hypothesis.** The mentor teachers in the sample consider the most important teacher training competency to be supporting teacher development and professional development.

H3. Reflection on practice is included in competence 4 of teacher educators. In the title of the competence, the sentence "Regularly analyses and reflects on his/her own practice" is included. In my questionnaire, six items refer to this area of competence. After performing a two-sample t-test, I examined the significance levels for the six items. I found that there was no significant difference between the group means for any of the items. **The data confirm my third hypothesis.** There is no significant difference in the reflection of the mentor teachers in the two subsamples on their practice activities.

H4. Competency 6 deals with the development of teacher training activities within the institution. In my questionnaire, I asked how important it is for mentors to set up a differentiated development programme for their mentees and to assess them in a diagnostic way. The competency is important and achievable for both groups of mentors, but there is a significant difference between the group means for all items for both importance and achievement. Based on the data, I found that mentor teachers and teacher trainees have significantly different

perceptions of the development of teacher education within the institution, and thus **I cannot support my fourth hypothesis.** There is a significant difference in the way mentor teachers in the two subsamples think about the development of teacher education within the institution.

H5. On the twenty-seven variables examined for the perception of the importance of teacher professionalism, fourteen significant differences between the group means were found, 51% of the time. Significant differences were found in four areas: academic soundness (3 variables), commitment to continuous professional development (2 variables), responsibility for the profession (1 variable), and the need for broad collaboration (8 variables). After analysing the data, it can be concluded that **my fifth hypothesis was only partially confirmed.** The opinions of the mentor teachers in the two subsamples differ significantly on half of the variables analysed, mainly on the importance of cooperation.

H6. In relation to the implementation of teacher education competencies that characterize teacher professionalism, I found significant differences between group means on only nine of the twenty-seven variables examined. This represents 33% of the cases. Significant differences were found in the areas of scientific grounding (2 variables), commitment to continuous professional development (1 variable), taking responsibility for the profession (1 variable) and the need for broad collaboration (5 variables). Based on the data, I found that there were no significant differences between the self-assessment of trained mentor teachers and teachers enrolled in mentor teacher trainingon the implementation of teacher education competences that characterise teacher professionalism, **I must therefore reject my sixth hypothesis.**The self-assessment of the mentor teachers in the two subsamples does not show significant differences in their self-assessment of the implementation of teacher education competencies characteristic of professionalism.

Results of the qualitative data analysis

In the qualitative study, I looked for the following causal relationships:

- Trained mentor teachers score higher on average in both areas of the study (importance, implementation) than their colleagues who are enrolled or participating in mentor training. Is this difference due to a more in-depth and systematic theoretical background?

- Mentor teachers almost always gave higher scores for each variable in terms of importance than in terms of implementation. What could be barriers to practical implementation?

- The mentor teachers ranked professional collaboration in the middle of the competency ranking. What could be the reason for this?

- What is the reason for the fact that scientific grounding and involvement in the international mainstream of teacher training and public education are ranked last in the mentor teachers' thinking?

Barriers to modelling professional practice may include negative experiences of mentoring that mentor teachers have had as trainee and novice teachers. To the extent that the lack of professional collaboration and communication at the beginning of their teaching careers made it difficult for them to socialise in their careers, the effects of this were deeply embedded in their thinking about the role of mentor teachers. The extent to which a novice teacher perceives the supportive attitudes of his or her mentor teacher has a serious impact on early teaching experiences. In

their absence, teachers who later take on mentor teacher roles without prior positive experiences face greater difficulties in modelling professional practice. Negative experiences as a trainee teacher and novice teacher can lead to negative emotions in teachers. Anxiety, feelings of fear, failure, the need to over-achieve and a sense of insecurity can accompany teachers throughout their careers, and as a mentor teacher they may experience these negative emotions again. The views they have developed during their career socialisation have a long-term impact on their perception of their role as a teacher and of their role as a mentor teacher. In the long term, they may develop critical attitudes towards the role of mentor teacher and the effectiveness of mentoring. The lack of mentoring support may be associated with the development of a high degree of professional autonomy of the teacher, which may have a positive impact on professionalisation.

The mentor teachers interviewed have strong views on the role of a successful mentor. They stressed the importance of the mentor's personality, mostly emphasising the impact of personality over up-to-date theoretical knowledge. As an example, they also mentioned that knowledge and application of the competency framework is not seen as crucial for successful mentoring. However, they stressed the mentee's accepting attitude as a key to successful mentoring. They stressed the barriers arising from the mentor's personality, attitudinal differences and lack of competences.

The mentors mentioned mainly negative or positive attitudes and emotions in their mentoring experiences. A completely different type of feeling may contribute to the initial lack of self-confidence, the difficulties arising from conflict management, the difficulties in managing the collegial relationship with the mentored, the anxiety felt in the presence of teacher candidates or novice colleagues. The leadership role brings with it a sudden increase in prestige, which can be mentally difficult for the mentor teacher to manage. This can be compounded by a misunderstanding of the role. Excessive expectations can be demotivating for the mentor teacher and the increased workload can lead to mental health problems. Among the barriers to modelling professional practice, mentors mentioned external factors associated with mentoring: lack of calm conditions for mentoring, lack of time. They also mentioned the shortcomings of teacher training institutions, the lack of professional communication between the teacher training institution and the mentor teacher working in the field placement.

Supporting the modelling of professional practice in mentor training is a key focus in the thinking of mentor teachers. It was highlighted that the mentor teacher is seen as a model by the mentees. The influence of the mentor can develop commitment and dedication to the career. Previous negative experiences may lead teachers who apply for mentor training to be critical of the training. However, the interviewees were unanimous in stressing that they had positive experiences and found a supportive environment in the mentor teacher training. They mainly looked to teachers with a high level of knowledge and experience as models. The training helped them to acquire a professional professional model, both in theory and in practice.

The concept of teacher competences is usually associated with negative emotions. Participants reported that they were not aware of using the competence framework and that it was not yet embedded in their practice. They mentioned the need for a conceptual shift in teachers' perceptions of the competence framework. A suggestion was made that the competences should be acquired through in-service training.

In terms of support for becoming a teacher, commitment and dedication to the teaching profession, the role of mentor teachers was present in their lives from an early age. Positive attitudes were associated with the helping role. They saw their teachers as teacher models who contributed to the early development of their views on the role of teacher. These views were very firmly held throughout their careers, rigidly adhering to their early views.

During their career socialisation, at the beginning of their careers, teachers generally developed positive attitudes and experiences of success. They report experiences of effective professional communication and perceived the role of teacher as a prestigious one at the beginning of their careers. During the mentor training they encountered positive teacher models and positive attitudes. They saw mentor teachers as an opportunity for continuous professional development in the areas of self-awareness, personal development and reflectivity. They felt a sense of vocation for the career of mentor teacher. However, during the mentoring process, the initial positive attitudes were accompanied by additional positive and negative attitudes. Participants reported feelings of anxiety, patience and trust. Among the causes of burnout, low social and financial esteem in the teaching profession was mentioned as a possible reason for early career drop-out. Mentors are increasingly finding that their mentees are planning to leave their careers, which is can make them unmotivated.

Support for becoming a teacher, dedication and commitment to the teaching profession were identified by participants as the most important factors for the success of mentoring. In their opinion, this is primarily the responsibility of the mentor. Mentoring can be successful if the right attitudes, professionalism and the necessary teacher training competences are in place. Participants highlighted the role of mentor's views. However, they also mentioned a supportive institutional climate as a prerequisite for successful mentoring. External circumstances were cited as a factor behind the decline in mentors' commitment.

The possibility of changing the mentor's views and preparing for a possible conceptual change was seen by participants as something that could start during the external placement, but which is more likely to happen during the traineeship. In their opinion, professional communication by mentors can help the process, although it is difficult to change views.

The participants felt that **the application and project opportunities and good practices** require a lot of extra work and often lack professional cooperation in their implementation. Good practices are often prepared under pressure from external expectations, often presented in an uninteresting, untrustworthy and rarely interesting way.

Among **the conditions for commitment to lifelong professional development,** participants mention a supportive institutional environment, an innovative approach by the mentor, the possibility of attending further training, possible study trips abroad, the need for professional cooperation within and outside the institution, and the existence of teacher training competences. They mentioned the need for advanced professional communication, reflexivity, knowledge of theories, knowledge of literature and methodology. According to participants, trained mentor teachers are more committed to continuous professional development.

In relation to reflection, mentor teachers mentioned that it is not part of their daily practice as it takes a long time to master. They added that trained mentors may have more developed reflexivity, but may also have negative attitudes due to possible negative experiences in the qualification.

The potential of the research was perceived by participants as not embedded. They are not known by mentor teachers, nor are they considered relevant, only results that can be used in practice. They stress the importance of mentors' positive attitude towards research results.

Regarding the development of teacher training within the institution, it was reported that differentiated development is considered time-consuming and not very frequent in mentoring. It requires professional collaboration between mentor and mentored and the concept of differentiated development to be present in the mentor's view. Diagnostic assessment is important in the joint working process, but it is not a frequent and time-consuming process. It is important that diagnostic assessment is part of the mentored person's view, but this form of assessment can be

demotivating for the mentored person.

A high degree of professional autonomy, an established network of contacts and positive attitudes, such as openness and flexibility, are necessary for professional contact outside the institution. This is hindered if there is a lack of professional contact with the trainers of the training institution. There may be a feeling of anxiety towards more highly qualified professionals.

In relation to their sense of responsibility for the quality of teacher training and public education, mentors stressed that although they consider professional forums as a platform for interest unification, inadequate professional communication and the tone of online forums discourage this form of professional communication.

Involvement in international teacher training and public education is not part of mentoring practice, lack of funding, lack of opportunities to apply for grants, lack of language skills for teachers and lack of information on the opportunities available.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS

In my research, the two methodological cultures acted as complementary to each other. The studies complemented each other, facilitated the exploration of causal links, and provided a more nuanced picture of my research topic. In particular, I would like to highlight my outline of Mayring's content analysis used in the qualitative study. The content analysis was highly elaborate, with logical, easy to follow steps that guided me through the entire qualitative study. The content analysis combined qualitative and quantitative elements using MAXQDA software, which increased the objectivity and validity of the study. The systematic perspective triangulation provided me with a solid support throughout the qualitative study, I felt the research process was logical and well structured throughout. I will continue to use the Mixed Methods combined methodology, Mayring's content analysis procedure and the MAXQDA software in my research career and I recommend it to my fellow researchers in the field of education.

In my doctoral thesis, I wanted to explore the depth to which mentoring as a profession appears in the thinking of mentor teachers. My research suggests that the competency framework is rather one-sided in mentor teachers' thinking, significantly more so at the attitudinal level than in terms of skills and knowledge. Some features of professionalism are still missing or incompletely present in mentor teachers' thinking. Their theoretical background knowledge of mentoring and the need to acquire it is not yet present in the majority of mentor teachers. Most lack the knowledge, both theoretical and practical, that is essential for the mentoring profession. Differentiated approaches to mentoring, diagnostic assessment and reflection are not embedded in their thinking. Their views on the field and mentoring are fixed and difficult to change.

From my research, I found that mentor teacher training is of paramount importance in shaping the views of mentors. They see their trainers as models, and the need for professional renewal is strongly present in their thinking. For the professionals involved in mentor teacher training, this result can be very promising. In addition to shaping the views of prospective mentor teachers, it would be worth paying close attention in training to areas which, in the light of teacher competences, might have seemed obvious until now: differentiated development, diagnostic assessment, reflection. It would be important to deepen these concepts at a theoretical level and to integrate their application into mentor training.

I also propose that the system of in-service teacher training for mentor teachers should include specific in-service training modules for qualified mentor teachers, which would deepen the competences of teacher trainers, both theoretically and practically.

Professional cooperation, which is also of great importance for the teacher training profession, is a key to the professionalisation of the mentor teacher profession. My research has clearly shown that the need for professional cooperation is not yet characteristic of the mentor teachers interviewed, and that this area of competence is not even present in their attitudes. Mentors are even more reluctant to participate in academic forums. Commitment to research-based professional practice is less characteristic of mentors. External circumstances are often a factor in mentors' failure to take full advantage of the training opportunities available to them. The lack of status, financial recognition and the conditions necessary to carry out their tasks in a professional manner also hinder their professional development. In an ever-changing education environment, the burden on this group of teacher trainers is increasing and they need comprehensive support. In the future, it would be worthwhile to strengthen the content and frequency of professional cooperation between mentor teachers and teacher training professionals, and to develop closer links between teacher trainees/apprentices, mentor teachers and teacher trainers in higher education institutions. The benefits of this would go far beyond professional cooperation and would also have a positive impact on the well-being of the parties involved.

My suggestions for further research options point in several directions. It is worth exploring the forms, opportunities and possible barriers to professional professional cooperation between different groups of teacher educators, including teacher candidates and early career teachers. From the point of view of the professionalisation of the mentor teacher profession, it would be useful to explore the possibilities of mentor training and mentor teacher training integrating research findings. Research into teacher education as a profession also offers a number of exciting areas for research. I am convinced that this research will further enrich and nuance the results of educational science in the future.

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