

PhD Snezana Jovanova-Mitkovska<sup>1</sup>

PhD Biljana Popeska<sup>2</sup>

## **MENTOR TEACHER - COMPETENCES, ROLE, CHALLENGE**

### **Abstract**

Setting of the practical teaching, her representation, manner of organization and implementation are one of the key aspects incorporated and innovated at the curricula at Faculty of teacher education. When we speak about practical teaching, her implementation at the educational institutions (preschool institutions, schools), inevitably set up the question of choice, competence and the role of a mentor teacher as a part of triad teacher –tutor (teacher from high educational institution) – student – mentor teacher (teacher from preschool institution, school), from whose cooperation, interaction is largely dependent on the successful implementation of the same.

Key competences, criteria for selection of mentor teacher, their roles, and the challenges are subject to the elaboration of this paper.

**Key words:** teaching faculties, practical teaching, mentor teacher, tutor

### **Introduce**

Upbringing and education are the key factors in the shaping of European society in a dynamic society, a society in which people learn factors of social progress and social cohesion (Buchberger et al., 2001).

This thought directs us to the importance of education and upbringing for the individual and social development, but at the same time indicates the responsibility of every one of us for drafting and implementation of quality in the educational process.

Educational process is carried out through a variety of institutional and non-institutional forms. Its realization is most often connected with the activity of his key actors: teachers, professor, pupil, and student.

The last thirty years, as a result of rapid social, scientific-technical and technological development which is reflected in the educational sphere, we are witnessing for numerous innovative actions that occur in education at all levels, innovation that are reflected in the change of roles and responsibilities which have a teacher (teacher, professor, tutor).

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<sup>1</sup> University “Goce Delchev”, Stip, Faculty of educational sciences, snezejov@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> University “Goce Delchev”, Stip, Faculty of educational sciences, biljana.popeska@ugd.edu.mk

"In the foreground are the major changes in the role of the teacher in all areas of his work. These changes are caused by new understanding of the knowledge roles, the tasks of teaching and the ratio of direct factors of teaching; the impact of a new scientific knowledge about the nature of a process of learning, the impact of psychological knowledge about the nature of the child; the role of educational technology, didactic tools and equipment, the use of various media in the teaching, development of extracurricular activities in school and change the cultural role of the school in the society." (Janković, P., 1994)

All this had influence on the changes in the concept of the new curricula for initial teacher education, in the direction that future teacher must acquire competences, the abilities - to know, to do, to be able to present it at the end like a conclusion of the educational process, to acquire the values which will lead him further in his profession, which will enable him to the successful start of the job, but also to be incentive for his further career and professional development.

When creating new curricula of faculties that educate teaching staff, especially for the first and the part of the second cycle of the nine-year primary education, are taken into account contemporary knowledge about the design of the curricula for the education of teaching staff, defined eight key competences (communication native tongue, communication in foreign languages, mathematical competence and core competencies in life sciences, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression) at EU level, the European framework teacher qualifications, Blooms taxonomy, and numerous international documents, the declaration Bologna, ECT- system since 2003, and a legal solution in the country with whom is regulating teacher profession.

Also, we have in mind knowledge about various models of teacher education, like: the behavioral model, the model of training, the model that focuses on knowledge - academic orientation and cognitive-constructivist model.

In drafting the concept of the programs special attention is paid to the possibility for gaining more practical experience, i.e. on creating the conditions for intensive professional - pedagogical practice (practical training) through which students can practice their theoretical knowledge and to acquire professional teachers competencies in the course of their studies, to achieve a balance in the combination of academic research knowledge and practical experience, to acquire professional competencies of teachers in the course of their studies.

Professional- pedagogical practice in the innovative teaching programs is their integral part and refers is specifically to the practical training of future teachers. "Educational training for students for their future vocation as a teacher, is inseparable whole with the work of the teacher in elementary school. ... In elementary school teachers carry out numerous curricular activities with their students. The teacher has the greatest responsibility for educational achievements, which has life-long implications of the generations who are educated and cared. It is necessary to point out that the professional profile of the teacher is dynamic and needs to monitor and anticipated changes in upbringing and education ...

Therefore the teacher education is also conceived to ensure success of the teacher education and student education in the dynamic conditions, today, maybe tomorrow, and can predict changes in schools and education in the future". (Bezić et al., 2002: 110)

Her essence and significance is reflected in her determination as "rationally organized human activity aimed at changing the objective reality and finding optimal solutions. According to marxist philosophy the practice is a specific way of human existence according to which man is different from other people. She is a free creative activity by which man fashioned himself and his world, historical action which are guided with the call of the future (Pedagoška enciklopedija, 1989: 233).

The aim of the practical teaching on faculties of education of teaching staff is to enable to future teachers independent teaching practice, in all forms of educational work. The same is carried out in different ways: by observation, working on practicums, independent practical jobs and internships that can be realized during the studies, but also after graduation.

The practical students work is the subject of numerous studies, concerning to her structure, organization, quality, duration, determining the principles that need to be adhered to in the same realization, research related to determining of the quality standards in the practical pedagogical training of students and sl. In this respect, is interesting the research by Gajić, O. and Budić, S. (2006) who examined the principles of organization of pedagogical practice in Finland. According to these researched with practice students begin at the start, at the first semester and continued with her in second semester when they combined theoretical knowledge and practical activities, and day by day becoming more complex. In the first year, practice has an orientation character, in second year of study students carried out intensive two-week monitoring of the educational process. During the third year of study, students acquire competencies for teaching, and in the fourth year practice lasts four weeks and involves gaining experience for educational work.

Similar is the situation with the structure and implementation of practical teaching on the Faculties who educated teaching staff and in R. Macedonia. Namely, with the practical teaching, in accordance with legal regulations, students begin in the first year of study and in the coming years, increase the duration of practical teaching. In a different study programs has different names, as: practical teaching, pedagogical practice, methodical practice, pedagogical experience, in the frame of which, enables the student think about the choice of their profession, to acquire various vocational skills, to be familiar with the operation of the school as organization, to introduce with different styles of leadership at the school, etc.

The practical work of the students at faculties for educated teaching staff are held in schools, children institutions which represent pedagogical, practical laboratories ... The same are realized under mentoring, tutoring from professor-mentor from the faculty and under the guidance of a teacher - mentor of child institution, school.

The question of mentoring, mentors, the selection of mentors-teachers, in recent years attracted the attention of experts, people of the scientific public.

## **What is meant by mentoring?**

The term mentor is related with Greek mythology. Mentor was the man in who brave Odysseus has confidence; he was his loyal friend, a counselor, and supporter.

This term is accepted in the United States, Europe. In the United States, England, mentor is the person who has a key role in the other people development, person who is responsible for their development, while in Europe, the mentor helps in the development of the individual and of his professional development. The individual takes responsibility for their own development.

In pedagogical literature this terms means: a person who gives assistance; advisor who helps in the detections of an obstacles towards achieving the objectives; expert who advises in the area of organizational and behavioral changes; facilitator-person facilitates decision-making; person who possesses sufficient knowledge and skills; person committed to the professional development; person who has a positive approach, which will encourages an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. The term mentoring is defined differently in different areas.

In the economy is defined as "mutual, collaborative relationship between the client and the mentor, in which the mentor uses a range of methods and techniques to help the client in the definition, defining common goals; i.e. a complex, interactive process that spanning between transfer of knowledge and experience of professionals and experienced people (mentors) to less experienced people (mentored, mentis). The goal of mentoring is to enable continuous improvement of skills and knowledge, to allow career development". (Avramovic, M. et al., 2012:7)

"Mentoring allows learning, improvement and progress not only for the student in practice, but also the progress of the mentor, i.e more, bear in mind that through the mentoring process develops and progresses also the professionally, the teacher mentor."

Similar identification also has in the pedagogical science as: mutual interactive relationship, a relationship of equals partners in which none of the parties does not represent himself in the position of power over the other, between skillful person, experienced teacher and less experienced, student in the teaching process. "Mentoring means travel, as a continuous process that takes at least two years. The mentor is a guide on the road and in him we can have confidence, because he knows the route which he has traveled many times, but not always run the same route, but along with the student may choose new destinations. "(Avramovic, M., et al., 2012:7)

The teacher mentor, teacher from the educational institution in coordination with professor of higher education institution have key role in the practical students training, his future colleagues. Namely, he is the person with whom the student enter into mutual relationship, in which the teacher gradually lead them, teach them, support them, encourage them and he motivate them in the process of acquiring knowledge, gaining practical experience, skills for the teaching profession. Mentor teacher lead the student in the implementation of the theoretical knowledge in practice, guide him into the concrete educational situations and helps him in communicating and working with children. In this process, the

teacher is guided from the previously prepared plan, the result of the interaction, and cooperation with persons of higher education institution, professor mentor, and tutor.

The student, less experienced, is the person to whom is need a support, he is the person who wants to learn something new, the person who requesting, searching for answers to questions, motivated person, a person who has a wish to improve his own development, own career. The student is s person that needs knowledge, practical experience and advice of a mentor teacher. Hence, mentor teacher and the student are partners in the process of practice and training of future teachers. Their mutual relationship is the link between theoretical knowledge and its effective implementation in teaching or effective practice.

"The modern view of mentoring, mentor and student has treated as an equal partners and their relationship as a part of the development process." (Awaya et al., 2003; Eby et al., 2006).

What are the roles which has mentor teacher in the educational institution (school, preschool institution)?

There have been numerous attempts to determine the role that the mentor teacher has at the school, child institution. However, as most acceptable for us, is determination made by Awaya and others (2003), in which the mentor has the following roles:

- Role of an equal partner, it means that in the mentoring process cannot exist dominations of the mentor or student, but equal, reciprocal relationship, based on the greater wisdom and experience of the experienced teacher; A guide to the practical knowledge - the journey is not only a journey by one route, but implies that teacher leads the student to new practical knowledge, to search for new ways, new roads for that;
- The role of instigator, to instigate student to take concrete actions; to provide space and opportunity to the students to show their worth – they must to try to prove their abilities with the help, support, guidance of mentor and to take responsibility for their own action;
- A person who is always ready to provide feedback on the success, failure, to provide guidance for improving presented practical activity;
- A person who is always positive example;
- Supporter, a man who constantly gives, offers emotional and professional support based on clearly stated expectations;
- Critical friend, always ready to offer constructive criticism about his teaching,
- Manager - gradually introduces the student with the procedures that are used in the school.

#### **What are the tasks of the mentor teacher?**

Analogous to the roles which has the mentor teacher, may be determined his specific tasks:

- To prepare a plan and program for the practical training in collaboration with professor-mentor of higher educational institutions;
- Introduction with the structure, organization, method of management, code of conduct, cooperation with other stakeholders of the work of the educational institution;

- To brief the student with the forms of security in the school /preschool institution;
- Gradually introduces the student to the various stages of formal, professional and personal education;
- To present good examples of teaching practice, mentoring hours;
- To establish a climate of mutual trust, cooperation, interactive communication with the student;
- To introduce the student into various models of teaching and new approaches and strategies used in the teaching process;
- To introduce students with new trends in education, new models of teaching, education of children with special needs in the regular education system;
- To ensure optimal instruction, suggestions, explanations, instructions, advice for student in the planning process, advices of preparation and implementation of the teaching / educational process;
- To acquaint the student with the climate in the classroom, the possibilities, the interests of the pupils, their knowledge;
- To acquaint the student with the material technical and technological equipment of the educational institution;
- To carry out the monitoring of the teaching hour/ educational activity and to provide continuous feedback to the student;
- To make an assessment, to give constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement of the practical teaching / educational activities by the student;
- Constantly encourages and stimulates student to search for new approaches and ways that lead to improvement of the teaching / educational process;
- To make evaluation for student practical work, to prepare the final report;
- To give proposal and suggestions for improvement of practical work, in collaboration with students and representatives of the higher education institution

### **Who can be a mentor-teacher from the educational institution?**

Each teacher after completion of initial education, after his employment at the educational institution, should have a series of general, professional, personal, interpersonal competencies that will enable for him successful organization and implementation of educational activities, which will enable his advancement.

Among them include: fundamental knowledge of scientific disciplines necessary for the efficient performance of educational work, people with knowledge of their own area, develop capacity for critical and self-critical thinking, the ability for analysis and prediction, solving problems, communication skills, the ability for interaction and collaboration with members of the closer and wider social community, the ability for application of innovative methods, procedures and processes of research in teaching, ability for self-evaluation, management ability, ability for teamwork, empathy communication, to have a sense of the needs of the other, to possess tolerance, democracy and respect

and recognize diversity, to be flexible, to has professional ethics, to recognize and have a respect for ethical values, people with a positive attitude towards the individual student...

The foregoing indicates that every teacher from the educational institution who possesses enough knowledge, experience, desire, motivation for his own development, interest for his professional advancement, a person who loves his profession, can be a mentor teacher for the students from faculties that educate teaching staff.

Considering the fact that in last few years the number of students at faculties that educated teaching staff is reduced, it raises the issue of selection of mentor- teacher of students, i.e the question for the determination of criteria for the selection of the same.

The choice of a mentor teacher look like on a job advertisements in which are seeking educated, experienced, intelligent, communicative person with who can be establish relationship of trust and cooperation, person of trust and credibility, person who is able to design new tasks to looking and offers new creative solution.

This indicates that is necessary to establish criteria for the selection of mentor teachers.

Like possible criteria we highlight:

- Teacher who wants to work with students and who is willing to share acquired experience and to respect the requirements of job in highly - educated institution;
- Teacher with working experience as a teacher, at least five years;
- Teacher who has in his portfolio, has a professional documentation, upon which it can be concluded his progress in teaching profession (part of training, seminars);
- Teacher for whom will make a recommendation at least two professor-mentors, as a result of long-term cooperation with the educational institution;
- Teacher for whom will gave recommendation professional co-workers and the school principal;

The selection of mentor teacher will be carried out with respect to these criteria, and before the implementation of the mentoring process is necessary to establish closer cooperation between mentor-teacher, professor- tutor of the higher education institution and student, for contracting about obligations, responsibilities, benefit of all stakeholders, in order to have successful, long-term cooperation and improvement of the educational activities.

### **Conclusion**

"Theory without practice is dead, practice without theory is blind" will highlight Rubinstein. Namely, their integration is one of the basic criteria for pedagogical and professional advancement of each teacher. Theoretical knowledge which is acquired in higher education becomes an integral part of the life of every individual just with checking of his objectivity in practice. Therefore, the main tendency of modern teacher education is to put emphasis on their practical training during their initial education. At the practical students training tremendous is role of the teacher mentor who will lead the student, who will "travel" with him on the way of his training for quality and efficient organization, implementation, evaluation, innovation, improvement of the educational process. The practical

training of future teachers during initial education is only the beginning of their professional advancement, improvement and innovation, their professional growth in teacher's researchers, enthusiasts, fluent and creative individuals.

„The main task of mentors remain to “help students to learn how to teach” by way of helping them to learn from their own experiences through planning, implementing and analysing the instruction (Marentič Požarnik, B., 2006).

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