Mentoring as an interaction system for the facilitation of the prospective teachers’ readiness to integrate into the school environment

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Abstract: The sustainable development of today’s society can be promoted by providing the educational sustainability. The education of prospective teachers should be based on ecological approach, which ensures the ecological perspective and an opportunity for students to develop their readiness to integrate into the school environment. The main aim of the author’s research is to substantiate mentoring as an interaction system for the facilitation of the prospective teachers’ readiness to integrate into the school environment. The author of this article offers the results of her theoretical research: substantiation of mentoring importance in teacher education, substantiation of mentors’ roles and functions, substantiation of ecological approach in teacher education. Ecological approach in teacher education facilitates the formation of friendly attitude towards a school as an educational environment. Mentoring provides the prospective teacher’s readiness to the professional activity and ability to successful integration in various types of school environment, considering their specificity. The author applied the following research methods: experience reflection, studying, analysing and evaluating of scientific literature.

Keywords: ecological approach, mentoring, readiness to integrate into the school environment

Introduction

The sustainable development of today’s society can be promoted by providing the educational sustainability. Nowadays the problem of the preserving and sustainable development of balanced and diverse cultural environment and educational environment has become more and more topical. The author’s opinion is that ecological approach provides a new perspective for the teachers’ education in order to find the solution of this problem. The education of prospective teachers should be based on ecological approach, which ensures the ecological perspective and an opportunity for students to develop their readiness to integrate into the school environment. On the basis of ecological approach there are new conceptions, models for the teachers’ education, and the positive experience of higher educational establishments obtained regarding the professional preparation of new teachers.

The process of integration is successful only if both parties involved (the prospective teacher and the school) are ready for it. The educational process can be successful and fruitful only if the school environment is open and inclusive and the teacher is ready to perform his/her professional duties.

The process of integration is implemented on the basis of the following principles of school activities: communication and an individual as a value; the defining of the goals of activities; different levels/stages of openness; diversity, complexity; changes; preservation and transformation; ethics and laws (Grabovska, 2006).

Nowadays the rapid changes of social and cultural values take place; the self-evaluation of a personality, the freedom of self-expression and self-realization are becoming the priorities. A teacher’s role in the education becomes more and more important within the process of the modernization of education, as well as it is possible to observe the increase of the requirements set for the teacher’s personality, social and professional position both in the school environment and outside it.

The main aim of the author’s research is to substantiate the mentoring as an interaction system for the facilitation of the prospective teachers’ readiness to integrate into the school environment.
Methodology

Modern scientists point out that the society gradually transforms from the industrial into the post-industrial one (the society of information). The priorities gradually change for the spiritual and humanistic education (Kosolapova, 2007). This, in its turn, will facilitate the identification of the aims of the prospective teachers’ professional activities. The process of educational changes influences the image of a modern teacher: a modern teacher is a researcher, educator, counsellor, assistant, advisor etc.

It is very important for the prospective teacher to develop the readiness to integrate into any school environment, which, in its turn, depends on the interaction of the orientation, competencies and self-realization (self-organization, self-control, volition) of the prospective teacher’s personality (See Fig.1). A very important precondition for the prospective teacher’s readiness to integrate into the school environment is the orientation of the teacher’s personality (these are mostly the psychological factors). The teacher’s professional orientation results from the orientation of the teacher’s personality and develops under the influence of personality’s motives. The prospective teacher’s motives are the totality of his/her aims, attitudes, needs, values and interests.

The teacher’s competencies, namely, the ecological competence, are an integral part of the teacher’s readiness to integrate into the school environment. Ecological competence provides teacher’s readiness for the professional activity and ability to successful integration into various types of school cultural environment, considering their specificity. The educator’s ecological competence is based on the holistic insight into the interchange of personality and environment, and the factors influencing it. The educator’s ecological competence is characterized by motivation, determination, the totality of psychological condition that ensures the prospective teacher’s independent activities within the context of particular environment by using its resources (Katane, 2007; Katane, Krugļija, Roga, 2009; Krugļija, 2011). Teacher’s ecological competence is an integrated totality of knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the interaction of a human being and environment, the interrelationship of the structures of ecological systems that ensures the readiness and ability to successfully integrate into and to start the professional activities in the various types of school cultural environment, taking into consideration their specificity. Teacher's ecological competence is based on a holistic understanding of personal and environmental interaction and factors influencing this interaction.

Self-organization, self-control and volition are very important factors facilitating for the teacher’s readiness to integrate. The interaction of all these factors develops the prospective teacher’s readiness not only to integrate into the school environment, but it also facilitates the professional performance of teacher’s duties.

Figure 1. Factors Influencing Teacher’s Readiness (Author’s design)
Due to the change of the values of pedagogical education, the existential projecting of the values of teacher's personality – self-cognition, reflection, creativity etc. - becomes important. Therefore not only the acquisition of knowledge is important for the teachers’ education, including during the pedagogical practice, but the transformation of the sphere of prospective teacher’s motivation, which, in its turn, facilitates the teacher’s creative self-realization in the profession (Bērīt, 1999).

The author applied the following research methods: experience reflection; studying, analysing and evaluating of scientific literature.

**Results and discussion**

During the pedagogical practice it is very important to have the successful collaboration of the school mentor, the prospective teacher and the university mentor, which, in its turn, facilitates the successful integration of the student as the prospective teacher into the school environment. When starting the pedagogical practice at a school, it is important to respect the peculiarities of student’s perception, thinking and values orientation in relation to the school as an environment, and at the same time to perform the ecological education of the student. The students must learn to think according to the new, social role to be acquired during the pedagogical practice – an educator. They must clearly understand the educator’s tasks and functions, the range of which nowadays has significantly broadened within the context of sustainable development. The ecological approach within the teachers’ education facilitates the development of friendly attitudes towards school as an educational environment (Katane, 2007). The ecological approach in the teachers’ education, including also during the professional practice, facilitates the successful integration of prospective teachers into the school environment.

If at the school there has been developed the system of mentoring for the students that undergo practical training in order to use this system to provide support and diverse collaboration, then there have been created the necessary conditions for the achievement of the formal objectives of students’ professional development (the official requirements set for the practical training) and also for the achievement of the student’s aims and objectives set by the student himself to be achieved during the practical training. In this case the school could be really named an open, supporting and overtness confirming environment. (Baltušīte, 2013; Katane, Krugļija, 2009).

Prospective teachers’ education is focused on, that student knowledges and skills quality mastering and their application during the practice gives to them opportunity quickly and successfully integrate into the varied environment of Latvian schools during pedagogical practice (study process) and after graduation (independent pedagogical activities). (Katane, Krugļija, 2009)

The prospective teacher’s education is oriented towards the qualitative acquisition and application of knowledge and skills by students during practice; the collaboration developed with the practice base schools would enable the students after the graduation of university to integrate into the diverse school environment quickly and successfully. Successfully organized practice and competent supervisors of practice are the significant preconditions in order the education of qualified teachers would be not only effective, but also that the prospective specialists would be aware the topicality of their profession. Insufficient collaboration between the higher education institutions and practice base schools could become an obstacle for ensuring students with the qualitative process of practice under the supervision of competent university lecturers and school mentors. Therefore it is important that the following basic conditions are implemented during this interaction process (Strode, 2007):

- the practice shall be implemented in close collaboration between the school and higher education institution, in order it would be supervised by correspondingly educated mentor, who can assume the roles of an observer, an organizer, an advisor and a trustee;
- the students as a prospective teacher, who undergoes practice by competent practice supervisors, shall acquire qualitative knowledge, skills and abilities, because they will increase the level of self-confidence and after the graduation of higher education institution will enable to integrate into the diverse school environment more successfully.
Mentoring, the essence of which is the development of a support system, in order the student as a prospective teacher would be ensured the qualitative process of practice, is an innovation within the framework of the organization of modern pedagogical practice process.

Mentoring in Latvia develops as a support system for ensuring the qualitative study practice. The movement of mentoring started in Latvia in 1999, but mentoring as a system started to develop in 2002, when British Council started in Latvia the project “On the Harmonized and Effective Collaboration between Pedagogical Higher Education Institutions and Schools concerning Teachers’ Education”. The aim is to prepare professional supervisors of students’ practice at schools – mentors who would help the prospective teachers to integrate into and to be welcomed in their professional environment.

In January 2005 by the support of the Ministry of Education and Science and British Council there were 13 mentors prepared for the further education of mentors in Latvia. Their task is the creation of the mentors’ educational system by involving in it the teachers of other subjects. It is believed that the mentoring system will facilitate the qualitative study practice, as well as the stability of new teachers coming to work at schools (Konstantinova, Rivža, 2007).

Mentoring is the provision of assistance to a student or a new teacher in order to ensure their development and enable them to integrate into their professional environment.

Mentoring is the process of knowledge transfer implemented by experienced mentors and the individuals who adopt mentors’ experience. The relationship of mentoring is based on the mentor’s knowledge and experience that enables the person adopting the experience to consider his/her possibilities, resources and to facilitate their application for dealing with a particular problem or achieving the goal.

Due to different application of mentoring, nowadays nobody has managed to develop a single definition of mentoring. However, having summarized different explanations of the concept of mentoring, we can identify such uniform understanding of the concept of mentoring: the relationship of mentoring develops between an experienced person (a mentor), who agrees to provide assistance and support to another person (an individual who adopts the mentor’s experience), who has less experience, with the aim to facilitate the development and success of this individual. Such mentoring relationship should develop in the environment filled with mutual trust and respect; the regular interaction of involved parties is fruitful (Bland, Taylorl, 2009).

Unlike to other types of knowledge transfer, in the mentoring the prospective teacher, first of all, is responsible for the study process. The mentor has no right to try to change the prospective teacher’s views or to transfer his/her skills directly to the prospective teacher. The mentor may suggest, supervise, assist and ask. The mentor’s main task is to establish good relationships. The mentor does not provide the solution for a problem, but by means of discussions assists in finding the right path for dealing with the problem.

Mentoring is characterized as the process of studies and development of both parties, which is an important contribution of own time and energy by both mentor and new teacher. The mentoring is the analysis, evaluation and defining of further development of both parties.

Prospective teachers’ education is focused on the aim that the students’ knowledge and skills qualitative mastering and their application, the collaboration developed with the places of practice and the potential employers, would provide the students with an opportunity quickly and successfully to integrate into the labour market.

A school nowadays needs a professionally competent, independently thinking, hardworking, and decisive teacher. However, the analysis of research carried out concerning the school performance and social pedagogical studies shows that even high level of professional readiness does not guarantee the quick and easy professional adaptation of a new teacher, his/her integration into the school environment.
The new teacher’s integration into the field of professional activities is accompanied by high level of emotional stress that requires the mobilization of the teacher’s inner resources. The introduction of a flexible mentoring system will help to solve this problem; it will help to optimize the process of the new teacher’s professional development, to facilitate the self-development, self-realization and self-education. In this system there is reflected the new teacher’s need to receive the assistance from an experienced teacher, who is ready to provide practical and theoretical assistance and it facilitate the new teacher’s professional competence (Тофлэр, 2001).

In modern pedagogy the mentoring is identified by means of terms: “tutoring” and “mentoring”. Tutoring is another experience, another educational system. A tutor – the observer of students, in English – a private teacher (a teacher who carries out homeschooling), an educator. Mentoring is a social institution that performs the process of transferring and facilitating the social experience, a form of the continuity of generations. Besides, mentoring is one the most effective forms of professional adaptation that facilitates the development of new teachers’ professional competences and their readiness to integrate into the diverse school environment (Allen, Eby, 2007; Daloz, 1986).

The mentor’s task is to help the new teacher to self-realize, to develop his/her own personality qualities, communicative and management skills. The mentor should possess professional, communicative skills of high level, as well as he/she should be respected among teachers, pupils and pupils’ parents.

Since mentoring is a bilateral process, then the basic condition for its efficiency is the mentor’s readiness to undertake the responsibility for the facilitation of the new teacher’s professional development. The mentor should facilitate the identification of the new teacher’s professional potential; the mentor should encourage the teacher to participate in the activities of pedagogical collective; the mentor should facilitate the broadening of the new teacher’s cultural and professional vision, as well as the development of his/her creative abilities and professional skills. The mentor should facilitate the new teacher’s self-education and self-development.

When starting the professional activities, a new teacher feels the necessity for the assistance. Therefore the mentor should pay the new teacher’s attention (Akopova, 2004) to: the requirements set regarding the organization of study process; the requirements set regarding the filling out the school documentation; the forms and methods used for the organization of pupils’ extracurricular classes; the development and use of educational aids.

There should be the assistance provided in the following sphere: theoretical and practical skills of pedagogical performance (preparation, conducting and analysis of classes; study forms, methods and techniques etc.); the programme of professional self-development; self-education; innovative tendencies in modern pedagogy and education (Akopova, 2004).

The mentoring is a continuous dialogue, the interpersonal communication. Therefore the mentor, when working with a new teacher, should apply effective performance forms: business and role games; group work; analysis of situations; self-actualization, which, in its turn, develops the business communication skills; the ability to make decisions; to substantiate one’s point of view.

The mentor, when educating a teacher, should apply the approach of non-formal education: I learn by doing; I do through learning; the facilitation of the development of new teachers’ social activities; the promoting of the development of objective self-analysis.

In comparison to the traditional forms of mentors’ activities (discussions, consultations, visiting classes), the new and modern methods are more efficient: psychological trainings, creative workshops, psychological-pedagogical games, discussions together with pupils and their parents, the transfer of older generation teachers’ experience to the new teachers etc. It is these methods that facilitate the integration of new teachers into the school environment. A new teacher feels more confident and finds that he/she has chosen the right profession. As a result, the new teachers’ professional skills improve (Манузина, 2011).

In order to facilitate the development of new teachers’ professional skills, the mentors together with the teachers may develop the new specialist’s portfolio. It enables to keep track of the dynamics of
new teachers’ professional development. The portfolio enables the mentor to avoid the formality, to choose the methods and forms to be applied purposefully and systematically, to evaluate the new teachers’ professional development adequately.

The mentoring is organized according to the ‘step by step’ principle that comprises the formation and development of new teacher’s functional and personality components (the projecting, organizational, constructive, and analytical one). Therefore the mentor’s activities should be carried out in 3 stages (See Table 1) (Круглова, 2009):

- stage 1 – adaptation stage.; the mentor determines the new teacher’s duties and powers, imperfections regarding the new teacher’s skills and abilities in order to develop a programme for the successful adaptation;
- stage 2 – basic stage (the projecting one); the mentor develops and implements the teacher’s adaptation programme, corrects the teacher’s professional skills (if necessary), helps to elaborate the self-development programme;
- stage 3 – evaluation stage; the mentor evaluates the level of new teacher’s professional competence, identifies the level of readiness for pedagogical activities.

Table 1

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The research performed at the New Specialists’ Mentoring Centre of Moscow Educational Institutions (Круглова, 2009) proved the purposefulness of the step by step principle. The research results show that the mentoring process reflects the new teacher’s development from the reproductive level up to the innovative level of pedagogical activities.

The mentoring should facilitate the prospective teachers’ need for self-perfection; it should promote his/her professional and individual development.
School environment should offer to the student as a prospective teacher: 1) permanent work opportunities, 2) an opportunity to take responsibility for their decisions and actions, 3) an opportunity to solve independently the problem-situations and problem-tasks, during the solution of which there is developed the prospective teachers’ ability of decision-making, accountability, critical thinking and professional skills; 4) an opportunity to analyze, evaluate and adopt best pedagogical experience; 5) an opportunity to obtain competent, considerate and correct analysis of his/her pedagogical activities, as well as advice, suggestions for the further activities, taking into account student’s opinion, without creating any obstacles for a prospective teacher’s initiative and creativity in his/her pedagogical work; 6) an opportunity to analyze and evaluate both prospective teacher’s own and school teachers’ experience. This would facilitate the professional development of prospective teachers, including formation and development of different competences. At the same time the integration of the prospective teacher into the school environment depends also on his/her readiness to: 1) become the competent subject of a school as an interaction system, 2) respect the peculiarities of the cultural environment of a school and local community, while performing teacher’s professional activities (Katane, Krugļija, 2009).

The prospective teachers’ professional activities and integration into the school environment significantly depends on (Krugļija, 2008):
- their professional adaptation and integration into the school environment; it is influenced by their views on school. Such views were formed not only as a result of knowledge obtained at the higher educational establishment, but also on the basis of pedagogical experience, gathered during their lives, including study periods;
- teachers’ motivation to work at school;
- the peculiarities of the social environment and cultural environment of school and local community;
- real living conditions and life perspectives, desire to have favorable living conditions.

Conclusions

The prospective teacher should be ready to integrate into any type of school environment, which, in its turn, depends on the interaction between the orientation of prospective teacher’s personality, his/her competences and self-realization (self-organization, self-control, volitions). The interaction of all these factors develops the prospective teacher’s readiness not only to integrate into the school environment, but it also facilitates the professional performance of his/her professional duties.

During the pedagogical practice it is very important to have the successful collaboration between the school mentor, the prospective teacher and the university mentor, that, in its turn, facilitates the successful integration of the student as a prospective teacher into the school environment.

The essence of mentoring is the development of a support system in order to ensure the qualitative process of practice for the student as a prospective teacher.

The mentoring is the provision of assistance to a student or a new teacher in order to ensure his/her development and to enable him/her to integrate into his/her professional environment.

The organization of mentoring has the ‘step by step’ nature that comprises the formation and development of the new teacher’s functional and personality components (the projective, organizing, constructive, and analytical). Therefore the mentor should carry out his activities according to 3 stages: adaptation, projection, evaluation. The results of research show that the mentoring process reflects the teacher’s development from the reproductive level up to the innovative level of pedagogical activities.

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