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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an element of a long term research project on the development of a conceptual framework for the training of mentors of beginning teachers. Three aspects are being investigated: (1) mentors' perceptions about mentoring; (2) the relation between mentors' perceptions and their actions in practice; and (3) the effect of mentoring as perceived by beginning teachers and other interested parties. This paper reports on a case study of the first aspect, with a focus on qualities mentors perceive as important for adequate mentoring and how mentors perceive their own mentoring style. An inventory was completed by 36 participants in two 1995-96 mentor training courses. It was found that the collaborative nondirective approach dominated, that mentors expected a development plan from their protegees, and that mentors supported protegees only on request. The result was too little direction and guidance for beginning teachers. It is concluded that, especially in the beginning of the induction process, mentors need to take up their role of instructor more explicitly and work out strategies that will guide the beginning teachers in the process of planning and monitoring their own learning. The appendix contains the inventory instrument. (Contains 26 references.) (JLS)

Conceptualizing the mentoring of beginning teachers

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Summary

This paper reports about an element of a long term research project which aims at the development of a conceptual framework for the training of mentors of beginning teachers. In the project three aspects will be investigated in succession: mentors' perceptions about mentoring; the relation between mentors' perceptions and their actions in practice; the effect of mentoring as perceived by beginning teachers and the various groups of interestees, such as, heads of school, heads of departments and the like.

The paper reports about a case study of the first aspect. The central question is:

a. What qualities do mentors perceive as important for adequate mentoring?

b. How do mentors perceive their own style of mentoring?

The outcome of the project will be used to improve the mentor training programme which the author has developed over the last six years.

The content of this paper concerns (i) the concept of mentoring basic to that programme, (ii) mentors' perceptions of mentor qualities, (iii) preferred styles of mentoring, and finally (iv) some conclusions.

1. Introduction

In spite of the rhetoric of improving the quality and the status of the teaching profession by governments in nearly all European countries, the systematic induction of teachers into the profession has since long been a neglected area in education and teacher training, despite of the massive numbers of beginning teachers that leave the profession within their first three years of service (Ooms, 1991).

It is widely known that the large majority of beginning teachers (BT) experience their first year of service as problematic and stressful. They do not feel sufficiently prepared for their job as teachers, and their transition from initial training to the profession often resembles an ongoing confrontation with problems they did not expect and cannot solve due to a lack of adequate training.[1] During induction most beginners (with some exceptions) experience that they are left to fend for themselves. They rarely receive appropriate support or help from colleagues (mentors) or the school management, and if they do, it is mostly inadequate and of little help. However, systematic guidance by a mentor during the first year of service can help beginning teachers to tackle the problems they meet effectively and so to establish a basis for further professional development (Letvin, 1992).

This paper is one of a series I have written about teacher induction and mentoring.[2] They are based on the outcomes of my study of 'The professional development of beginning teachers in secondary education' (Vonk, 1996). The study in question consists of a coherent set of small-scale, close-to-practice investigations - case studies (Merriam, 1988, Yin, 1994) - about beginning teachers and their mentors which have been carried out since 1981. It aims for a better understanding of the processes of teacher induction and of the role mentors can play in it.

In the course of 1994 my research attention shifted from beginning teachers to the training of mentors. In particular to the development of a conceptual framework for the training of mentors of beginning teachers. In this long term research project, three aspects will be investigated in succession: mentors' perceptions about mentoring; the relation between mentors' perceptions and their actions in practice; the effect of mentoring as perceived by beginning teachers and the various groups of interestees, such as, heads of school, heads of departments and the like. The outcome of the project will be used to improve the mentor training programme which I have developed over the last six years.[3]

This paper reports about a case study of the first aspect. The central question is:

a. What qualities do mentors perceive as important for adequate mentoring?
b. How do mentors perceive their own style of mentoring?

The case study concerned was executed in the context of a mentor training programme in the autumn of 1995 and will be repeated in the second half of 1996.

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1 See for a review of recent literature: Kagan (1992), pp. 150-164.
2 Vonk, 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996.
3 An outline of the programme can be found in Vonk, 1993.

The content of this paper concerns (i) the concept of mentoring basic to that programme, (ii) mentors' perceptions of mentor qualities, (iii) preferred styles of mentoring, and finally (iv) some conclusions.

2. The concept of mentoring

As a result of growing governmental pressure to develop more school-based initial teacher education programmes (e.g. the UK and the Netherlands) and a growing interest in teacher induction, a number of books on mentoring have appeared in recent years (e.g. Wilkin, 1992; DeBolt, 1992; Vonk, 1992; McIntyre *et al*, 1993; Caldwell & Carter, 1993; Tomlinson, 1995; and Kerry & Shelton Mayes, 1995). Altogether, these books present a variety of concepts about mentoring. Most of these concepts consider the basic problem of beginning teachers to be a 'transfer' problem[4] and, as a consequence, emphasize mentoring as a method for transferring theoretical and/or practical knowledge to teacher trainees and/or beginning teachers (learning to teach: applying the skills one has learned in a new situation). I, however, perceive beginning teacherhood basically as a developmental process (Fessler & Christensen, p.28) and therefore I consider the basic problem of beginners to be a transition[5] problem rather than a transfer problem.[6] Beginners strongly experience teacher induction as a transformation[7] process: they have to develop a new image of self, of their knowledge and skills, and of their work environment (their classes, the school). The idea of transformation is a better means to explain the emotions, the feelings of insecurity and stress that a beginner experiences during induction, than simply putting it down to their inability to transfer what they have learnt about teaching during their training to the actual practice. It is the transformation process that confuses them. Therefore, I consider two aspects to be vital in a mentor-protegee relation: first, the help a mentor offers to assist a beginner to bring about the transformation from novice to professional teacher, and, second, the support to realize the transfer with respect to teaching skills and the expansion of their repertoire of actions. Related to that, I define mentoring as *a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protegee) aimed at promoting the professional development of both* (Healy & Welchert, 1990). Beginning teachers' interest in the relation is the help they receive from an expert in developing a professional identity - the image of *I-as-a-teacher* - and in their development from novice to self-developing professional. Mentors' interest in this relationship is that, in order to be able to help beginning

4 *Transfer* refers to moving something to a different place of position, without changing fundamentally the object of the transfer.
5 *Transition* refers to the process in which something completely changes from one state to another.
6 This idea is supported by the works of Glassberg (1979), Burke (1987), Burden (1990) and Huberman (1993).
7 *Transformation* refers to a complete change in appearance or function.

teachers effectively, they have to reflect continuously on their self-image as teacher and on their own repertoire of actions. The latter nearly always results in improvement of that repertoire. Apart from that, in particular for older teachers, the mentoring relationship means practicing 'generativety'.[8] Essential in this definition, however, is the reciprocity. The mentoring relationship contributes to the professional development of both participants, i.e. it contributes to the improvement of the quality of their professional practices.

Apart from being a qualified teacher with excellent classroom management skills, an expert in the subject (s)he teaches and in the subject methodology concerned, a good mentor has to have the following personal qualities: open- mindedness, reflectiveness, flexibility, listening skills, empathy, creativity and a helping attitude. Those responsible for mentoring beginning teachers must meet a number of prerequisites (Vonk, 1994, p.89-98). The first is a *knowledge base*. Mentors need to understand the nature of the process of professional development of beginning teachers, the nature of the problems beginners experience and what the causes of those problems are, and finally, they have to have insight into the essentials of the teacher's professional learning process. The second is an *interpersonal skills base*. Mentors must master a wide range of interpersonal behaviours and know how these behaviours affect their protegees, and what type of behaviour is appropriate in a particular situation. Third, mentors must master a wide range of *technical skills*, such as, counselling, observing, providing feedback, providing instruction, evaluating.

It will be clear that mentors have to be carefully selected: not all teachers meet the prerequisites mentioned above or have the abilities to develop them. After selection they will still need substantial training to be able to act effectively as a mentor.

2.1 Mentor perceptions about mentor qualities

In the previous section, I described a number of mentor qualities as they come from the literature (e.g. Elliot & Calderhead, 1993) and from my own experience as trainer and supervisor. However, the question is what qualities mentors themselves perceive as important. To investigate this question I decided to develop a questionnaire. During January 1995 I interviewed a number of practicing mentors, and based on the outcomes of those interviews I designed the inventory 'Mentor perceptions about mentor qualities' (see appendix 1). The aim of this inventory is to develop an instrument which can help to gain insight into the perceptions of mentors about the necessary qualities for good mentoring. It will be used in the training. The general instruction was:

> *Indicate for every mentor quality of what importance you think it is for adequate mentoring.*

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8 Levine (1989) quotes Erikson: *Generativety is primarily the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation or whatever in a given case may become the absorbing object of a parental kind of responsibility,* p. 62

The 40 mentors or so who I train annually act as respondents in this research project. The inventory consists of three sections each containing a coherent set of questions (Cronbachs' $\alpha \geq .75$).

Section I, contains questions about a mentor's *technical qualities*;
Section II, contains questions about a mentor's *professional knowledge*;
Section III, contains questions about a mentor's *interpersonal qualities*.

The inventory was distributed among the 36 participants of the two 1995-1996 mentor training courses: group 1 in October and group 2 in November. Except for question 7 (Knowledge about and insight into the learning process of beginning teachers), the Levene test for homogeneity of variance between the groups of mentors 1 and 2 proved that no significant differences in variance existed, i.e. both groups scored in the same way on all the questions.

With respect to question 7 83.3% scored a '4' in group 1 and 11.1% a '5', while in group 2 only 55.5% scored a '4' and 33.3% a '5'. In the case of the quality addressed in question 7 the composition of the group made a significant difference. The participants represented a broad range of mentoring experience: from 0 to 7 years of experience (many mentors come back bi-annually for retraining or to collect new ideas). In group 2 the novice mentors were over-represented. At the start of the session concerned, everybody was asked to complete the inventory. The percentages of the scores are presented in the tables 1 to 3, followed by the outcomes of the small group discussions which were held afterwards.

Table I
A mentor's technical qualities
(scores in percentages)

	1	2	3	4	5*
Question 1	-.-	-.-	22.2	58.3	19.4
Question 3	-.-	-.-	2.8	50.0	47.2
Question 5	-.-	-.-	8.3	66.7	25.0
Question 11	-.-	-.-	22.2	58.3	19.4
Question 13	-.-	2.8	33.3	52.8	11.1
Question 15	-.-	-.-	22.2	52.8	25.0

* 1 = Completely irrelevant; 2 = Unimportant; 3 = Sometimes important/sometimes not; 4 = Important; 5 = Of vital importance.

Table I shows that all mentors scored high on the technical skills: at least 66% of all respondents scored on all skills either 'Important' or 'of vital importance'. Particularly questions 3 (The ability to provide adequate feedback) and 5 (The ability to analyze teacher behaviour) scored very high. Only the scores on question 13 (Having a broad range of didactical skills) deviate from this pattern: not all mentors were convinced of the need to have an extended repertoire of didactical skills as a condition for good mentoring.

Table II

A mentor's professional knowledge
(scores in percentages)

	1	2	3	4	5*
Question 6	-.-	-.-	5.6	63.9	30.6
Question 7	-.-	-.-	8.3	69.4	22.2
Question 9	-.-	2.8	44.4	44.4	8.3
Question 10	13.9	41.7	41.7	-.-	2.8
Question 12	5.6	16.7	52.8	25.0	-.-

* 1 = Completely irrelevant; 2 = Unimportant; 3 = Sometimes important/sometimes not; 4 = Important; 5 = Of vital importance.

Table II shows the scores on the 'professional knowledge' part of the inventory. It is surprising is that the respondents made a clear distinction between knowledge of the beginning teacher's problems (question 6) and learning process (question 7) on the one hand, and the quality of their own pedagogical content knowledge (questions 10, 12) on the other. Obviously, the respondents do not consider it necessary that a mentor and his/her protegee teach the same school subject. In the schools I know it is the practice: mentors generally have protegees from a variety of school-subjects.

Table III

A mentor's interpersonal qualities
(scores in percentages)

	1	2	3	4	5*
Question 2	2.8	2.8	16.7	55.6	22.2
Question 4	-.-	-.-	5.6	38.9	55.6
Question 8	-.-	-.-	22.2	50.0	27.8
Question 14	-.-	-.-	5.6	44.4	50.0

* 1 = Completely irrelevant; 2 = Unimportant; 3 = Sometimes important/sometimes not; 4 = Important; 5 = Of vital importance.

Table III shows the scores on the 'interpersonal qualities' part of the inventory. Questions 4 (The ability to listen to others without prejudice) and 14 (Enthusiasm for the teaching profession) were the two highest scoring qualities (mean and st. dev. resp. 4.50; .61 and 4.44; .61). Although the Levene test of variance did not prove a significant difference between group 1 and group 2 with respect to the quality addressed in question 2 (The ability to establish a good relationship with his/her protegee), the table of frequencies of the scores in both groups shows that in group 2 33.4% scored a '5', while in group 1 only 11.1% scored in that way. In group 1 more participants had followed the course in the previous years, which might explain the difference in the scoring pattern.

After everybody had completed the inventory, I divided each group of 18 participants into four subgroups to discuss the outcomes. The task for the small-group discussions was:

> *Discuss the individual scores and identify as a group the four most important qualities and rank-order these from 1 to 4.*

From the plenary discussions with the mentors that followed the small-group discussions, I learned that mentors tend to emphasize their personal dispositions over their technical skills. The qualities which received high priorities are the qualities as represented by the questions 2 (mean 3.92;st. dev. .87), 3 (mean 4.44; st. dev. .56), 6 (mean 4.25; st. dev. .55) and 14 (mean 4.44; st. dev. .61). With the exception of question 2, the scores on these questions had the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation in the inventory. What is surprising is that the ability to establish a good relationship with one's protegee (question 2) was identified as one of the most important qualities in the small group discussions, while Table III shows a more scattered picture.

3. Mentoring in practice

Essential in mentoring BTs are the *conferences*, i.e. structured discussions about teacher related experiences, such as lessons, dealing with individual pupils, contacts with colleagues, subject related problems, and the like. These conferences are aimed at facilitating and supporting BTs' professional learning processes. They can have different formats: the *mentor-protegee conference*, such as a post-observation conference or a progress-review conference; or the *peer group conference*: a group of beginning teachers, assisted by a mentor, discuss their problems and examine together how these problems can be solved.

The effectiveness of those conferences is for the greater part determined by the quality of the protegee-mentor relationship and, in that context, by the nature and the effectiveness of the mentor interventions, i.e. the interventions have to meet the protegee's needs for assistance. From this we can deduce that the mentor-protegee relationship is a very sensitive one: How should one act as mentor during those interventions? In general, a mentor's approach to a particular protegee is - apart from his own personal disposition - mainly defined by his perception of the protegee's personal qualities, skills and the expected need for help. The nature of the mentor-protegee interactions depends on the extent of responsibility both players have with respect to planning, monitoring and directing the protegee's professional development. In Table IV the various types of mentor-protegee interactions - ranging from non-directive to highly directive - as they relate to the outcomes of mentor interventions have been classified.

Table IV

Relation mentor approach intended outcome
(Glickman, 1990, p. 109)*

Approach	Outcome
Non-directive (-,P)	BTs' self-plan, BT is primarily responsible
Collaborative (m,P)	Mutual plan, shared responsibility
Directive advisory (M,p)	Mentor suggested/imposed plan, mentor is primarily responsible

*Glickman distinguishes a fourth approach the *directive control* (M,-) in which the mentor prescribes the protegee's development plan. However, I have not come across such an approach in any Dutch school and have therefore omitted it.

Non-directive-mentoring is based on the assumption that the protegee concerned knows best what changes he has to make and that he has the ability to think and act on his own. The mentor acts as an active prober and a mirror. *Collaborative-mentoring* is based on the principle that mentor and protegee are equal partners in the mentoring process. The mentor wishes to resolve the protegee's problems by sharing them. Apart from probing and mirroring, a mentor also actively participates in the problem solving process by proposing possible actions and/or solutions, and subsequently negotiating a solution that satisfies both the mentor and the protegee. With *directive-advisory-mentoring* the mentor acts as resource person: the mentor analyzes the protegee's actions and identifies the problems, for which he subsequently provides a number of solutions. The protegee commits himself to using the solutions provided.

The nature of the mentor's interventions largely depends on the protegee's autonomy and self-concept. The more self-confident and knowledgeable a protegee is, the less effective directive mentoring will be. On the other hand, a protegee who lacks self-confidence may profit from more directive mentor actions. A well trained mentor masters the whole scala of behaviours and is able to adapt his performance to his protegee's needs. Whatever relationship may exist between mentors and protegees, conferencing - both peer conferences and mentor-protegee conferences - plays an important part in mentoring beginning teachers and, therefore, mentors need to have an elaborate repertoire of interpersonal skills. We perceive a mentor as a skilled helper (Egan, 1986). These skills coincide largely with more general discussion and communication skills, such as, listening, clarifying, encouraging, reflecting, summarizing, probing, negotiating, and directing (Glickman, 1990, p. 105).

3.1 Preferred styles of mentoring

In relation to the different styles of mentoring as described in the previous section, a second questionnaire was used to trace mentors' ideas about good mentoring. It

dealt with a mentor's preferred style of mentoring. The questionnaire concerned, is an adaptation of 'The supervisory beliefs inventory' of Glickman (1990, pp. 88-91). This inventory maps out three styles of mentoring, i.e. directive, collaborative, non-directive.

Directive mentoring is defined as an approach in which the mentor is the prime responsible person for regulating and monitoring his/her protegees learning process, in collaborative mentoring the mentor and his/her protegee share that responsibility, whereas in the non-directive style of mentoring the protegee is primarily responsible for his/her own learning process.

The inventory indicates the balance (in percentages) in the three mentor approaches as perceived by the mentors themselves. Both groups of mentors were asked to complete the questionnaire. The Levene test for homogeneity of variances did not indicate a significant difference in variances between group 1 and group 2.
The balance in the average scores of all mentors on the three types of mentor behaviours was 16.9% directive, 44.9% collaborative and 39.0% non-directive. The interpretation of this outcome leads to the conclusion that in the group of respondents the collaborative approach dominates, be it with a strong tendency to a more non-directive approach. Only a few respondents perceived systematic interventions from their side (directive mentoring) as a desirable approach.

This conclusion is confirmed by the outcomes of a number of interviews I had with mentors on the nature of mentoring in the course of 1995. These outcomes lead to the conclusion that most mentors:

a. strongly support the idea that beginning teachers are primarily responsible for their own professional development: BTs have to develop their own individual teaching style;
b. do not perceive teacher induction as a process of change in the planning of which they have a major role to play, but rather see their role as supporting a beginner who has to draw up his/her own development plan;
c. prefer beginning teachers to take the initiative to ask for support and advice.

However, there is a difference of opinion about these conclusions between mentors who also have a managerial role (deputy heads, heads of department and the like) and those who have not (schools where the mentor role is strictly separated from any managerial role). In the latter schools a mentor's prime function is to support beginners and to treat all information about the BT he/she receives as confidential. Those who are also involved in school management tend to be more directive, because in their view school interests prevail over individual interests, and their perception of quality in teaching directs their actions as mentor, whereas the independent mentors have the individual development of their protegees as their prime focus.

4. Conclusion

In my view teacher induction (but also pre-service) can only contribute to the professional development of beginning teachers if the protegee him/herself is actively involved in planning his/her learning experiences. From my research and training activities I have learned that protegees have great difficulties in planning and monitoring their learning and therefore too often learn by chance and/or by trial and error. This particularly happens during the first months of a beginning teacher's career. In general, however, it is vital for a beginning teacher's learning process to structure the overwhelming amount of experiences. In this his/her mentor has an important role to play, i.e. helping to structure this chaos of experiences and to make a selection where to start. This, however, requires a more directive approach to mentoring.

From this small study on mentor perceptions I conclude is that in the two groups involved the collaborative/non-directive approach dominated, which often means that mentors expect a development plan from their protegee and that they tend to support their protegee only on request. This most often results in giving 'too little' direction to beginning teachers' professional learning. In particular at the beginning of the induction process many protegees need an approach with an accent on 'giving direction', i.e. apart from their role as provider of feedback mentors need to take up their role as instructor more explicitly. My experience as a mentor is that in many cases such an approach speeds up the learning process of beginning teachers. In the training programme I developed more attention has to be paid to strategies to guide/direct BTs in a subtle manner to plan and monitor their own learning process.

The next steps in the process of furthering the development of a conceptual framework consists of two investigations.

a. Collecting more data on mentors' perceptions of mentoring by using the two inventories presented in this paper.
b. Collecting data on what mentors think they do and what they actually do as a mentor. In this context I have developed a checklist (based on my inventory of problems of beginning teachers) which will be submitted for completion to both mentors and their protegees. The mentors will be asked to which issues they paid most attention in supporting their protegee. The protegees will be asked to name the issues for which they needed support and whether they actually received this support from their mentors. Comparison of these data might deepen our insight into discrepancy between the way we perceive mentoring and the actual reality of mentoring.

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Appendix 1

Mentor perceptions about mentor qualities

Instruction: Indicate for every mentor quality in the list below of what importance you think it is for adequate mentoring.

Key:

1 = Completely irrelevant
2 = Unimportant
3 = Sometimes important/sometimes unimportant
4 = Important
5 = Of vital importance

1	The ability to structure information	1	2	3	4	5
2	The ability to establish a good relationship with his/her protegee	1	2	3	4	5
3	The ability to provide adequate feedback	1	2	3	4	5
4	The ability to listen to others without prejudice	1	2	3	4	5
5	The ability to analyze teacher behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
6	Knowledge about and insight into the problems of beginning teachers	1	2	3	4	5
7	Knowledge about and insight into the learning process of beginners during their first year	1	2	3	4	5
8	Empathy for the position of his/her protegee	1	2	3	4	5
9	The ability to asses the personal development of his/her protegee in the light of the professional development process of teachers	1	2	3	4	5
10	Having extensive knowledge about his subject as it is taught at school	1	2	3	4	5
11	The ability to asses his/her own didactic actions critically	1	2	3	4	5
12	Having up to date knowledge of recent developments in the field of teaching methodology	1	2	3	4	5
13	Having a broad range of didactical skills	1	2	3	4	5
14	Enthusiasm for the teaching profession	1	2	3	4	5
15	The willingness to discuss his/her own didactic actions with his/her protegee	1	2	3	4	5

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