

On Becoming an Effective Mentor in Adult Education—Investigating the Perceptions of Greek Adult Educators

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Abstract

Interest in mentoring, which is an innovative method in adult education (CEDEFOP, 2013), has been growing rapidly in Europe, especially since the Lisbon European Council in 2000. In Greece, this interest has found expression either through the development of educational material in the context of adult educator training programmes, or the investigation of the mentoring needs of adult learners (Koutsoukos, 2021). In spite of the obvious fact that the mentor plays a key role in ensuring that the mentoring process is constructive and successful, there has been little research to date on the attributes of an effective mentor in adult education. The present study, using multimethod research, examined the perceptions of 337 Greek adult educators as to what characteristics constitute an effective mentor, as well as the role and the selection criteria of a successful mentor. The findings indicated that the key qualities of an effective mentor were: having sufficient training in adult education and mentoring, teaching, communication and relational skills, as well as having a positive attitude to lifelong learning and a willingness to innovate. In addition, the role of an effective mentor was perceived by the study participants as being a trainer, a model teacher, as well as an equal partner.

Keywords: effective mentor, qualities, knowledge, skills, attitudes, role

1. Introduction

1.1 *The Concept of Mentorship and Mentor's Role*

In the ideal conception of mentoring, described by Homer in the *Odyssey*, the archetype of the mentor is depicted as both a wise and patient counsellor who serves to provide guidance to younger colleagues, and as a paternal figure (Miller, 2002; Green-Powell, 2012).

The characteristics and skills which have been defined in various terms in the international literature, have contributed to forming the profile(s) of a mentor. Some of these include: teacher, counsellor, and sponsor (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Klopff & Harrison, 1981), guide on the journey (Daloz, 1986), coach (Fragoulis, Papadakis, & Velisarios, 2016), trusted friend (Lopez-Real & Kwan, 2005), critical friend (Gardiner, 2010; Jones, 2001), and significant other (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999). Yet other attributes of an effective mentor are those of catalyst, ally, and defender (Kaye & Jacobson, 1995). Mentors, themselves, seem to hold a variety of perceptions on their role, some considering it to be that of a guide or leader, others a good listener, a friend, or an organizer of experiences for the mentee teacher (Elliott & Calderhead, 1994). Obviously, the particular terms used to describe the role of the mentor differ depending, on the one hand, on the context in which mentoring is applied, and on the other, the personal perceptions of the people who use them (Cherian, 2007; Scalon, 2008).

Clutterbuck (2005) coined the acronym M.E.N.T.O.R, in an effort to create a synthesis of the different approaches. In effect, a mentor: Manages the relationship, Encourages, Nurtures, Teaches, Offers mutual respect and Responds to the mentees' needs.

The words used in the international literature to describe the various roles of the mentor seem to mainly refer to either emotional and/or professional support for mentees, which in general terms, the former involves encouraging them to become reflective educators, while the latter includes enriching teaching strategies, methods, and techniques (Matthews, 2015). These functions outline the basic theoretical models of mentoring which lie between behaviourism and constructivism with differences in both the role and the relationship formed during the mentoring process

1.2 The Ideal Mentor

The characteristics that enable a mentor to be effective, regardless of the theoretical foundation of mentoring, fall into three key categories: knowledge, skills, and attitudes (McDonald & Flint, 2011).

1.2.1 Knowledge

A sound scientific background to adult education is imperative when one is mentoring adult teachers. The specific aspects of the knowledge that the mentor needs to possess include: the principles of adult education, the barriers to adult learning, the ways of investigating educational needs, and the appropriate teaching methodology (Rice, 2007; Jones, Brown, Chapman, Morgan, Nettleton, & Smith, 2005; Glover & Mardle, 1995). It is likewise necessary for a mentor to have a good knowledge base of both the culture and the particular characteristics of the educational system (Hanover Research, 2014), as well as having an understanding of sociology and psychology (McDonald & Flint, 2011; Straus, Chatur, & Taylor, 2009). In addition, many researchers stress the importance of mentors being aware of the limits of their role (Jackson, Paleru, Szalacha, Caswell, Carr, & Inui, 2003; Ramani, Gruppen, & Kachur, 2006), which helps them to keep at bay unhealthy or inappropriate dependency relationships that are sometimes sought by mentees, and which absorb more energy than the mentor can afford to invest (Ramani et al., 2006, p. 406).

Finally, a prerequisite for the mentor's own professional development, not to mention for successful mentorship, is to possess self-knowledge. A mentor needs to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, their values, their assumptions, and their limitations (Larson, 2009; Odiorne, 1985).

1.2.2 Skills

One of the most important components of effective mentoring is communication skills (Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000; Lawson, 1989; Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003), with particular emphasis on the mentor's active listening skills (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Holbeche, 1996; McLean, 2004; Randels, Carse, & Lease, 1992; Schmidt, Marks, & Derrico, 2004). Various studies also make reference to the following: counselling and guidance skills (McLean, 2004; Pitney & Ehlers, 2004; Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000), the ability to exercise honest and constructive criticism (Lawson, 1989; Rose, 2005), educational and interpretative skills (Pitney & Ehlers, 2004), as well as the ability to express oneself in a clear, concise and accurate manner (Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991; Schmidt et al., 2004).

Another aspect of communication, highlighted by several studies, was the element of humour, where, for example, those with a good sense of humor were described as being as ideal mentors (Johnson, 2002; Pitney & Ehlers, 2004; Apter & Carter, 2002). Also related to communication skills is the ability to form relationships with the people and the educational organization in which the mentor works. The importance of the context in which mentoring is applied has been extensively researched (Hobson, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Lee & Feng, 2007; Bullough, 2005; Yusko & Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Simson et al., 2007) and found to be a factor that influences its effectiveness.

One of the top essential qualities that effective mentors need to have when viewed as "teachers of teachers" (Matthews, 2015, p. 25), is teaching skills. As an adult educator, the mentor is a facilitator of and mediator between knowledge and the learner (Kokkos, 2005). In this context, their basic professional skill is to develop and implement open and participatory methods of teaching and guidance, whose main objective on the completion of the mentoring process is the autonomy and self-directed learning of the mentee. Needless to say, many scholars support the view that self-directed learning is an important learning strategy in adult education (Cranton, 2006; Kokkos, 2017). It is associated with individual autonomy, and on this basis, encouraging mentees to take control of their learning is a key component of the mentor role (Slusarski, 1994). Knowles' (1975) approach lists the following as useful skills of self-directed learning: the organization of a warm learning climate, the diagnosis of learning needs, the formulation of learning objectives, the implementation of appropriate learning strategies, and the evaluation of learning outcomes.

Reflective skills are, likewise, considered essential to mentoring (Bell, 2001). Reflection helps the mentor to re-evaluate their own assumptions and practices, review their perceptions, and reassess the training needs and capabilities of the mentees. It is a response to experience (Bud, Keogh & Walker, 2002: 18) which involves events occurring during action (reflection-in-action), the review of experiences after action (reflection-on-action), and thoughts about planned actions (reflection-for-action) (Schon, 1987; Zhu, 2011; Ghaye, 2011).

Counselling skills are required for the effective implementation of mentoring as a supportive process. The mentor must have the skill to accurately perceive the mentee's emotional messages, to experience and understand their feelings (empathy), as well as use empathic techniques, such as active listening, feedback, encouragement,

reflection and recognition of emotions etc. (Rogers, 1980; Branch, 2016). These techniques are of particular importance both in building a relationship of trust and in understanding and resolving any issues that a mentee might have. Through the use of counselling skills, the mentor addresses these concerns by applying the mentee's frame of reference rather than what they themselves consider being important.

As an adult educator, the mentor is in the role of "learning manager" (Rogers, 1996) and as such needs to have organizational skills in the design, observation, and facilitation of discussions with mentees. They not only fix the mentoring goals and establish the work that needs to be done in order to achieve them, but must also determine time management, as well as establish the frequency of contacts with the mentees, which will decrease over time as the mentee gains independence. They set the conditions that facilitate the mentoring processes, devise carefully designed tasks, supervise and appropriately handle learning situations, while adapting the approaches to the mentees' needs.

Furthermore, the mentor's emotional intelligence is a key factor of effective mentorship (Cherniss, 2007; Rowley, 1999). The concepts of emotion and learning coexist in the cognitive experience, and during the learning process, there is often a "battle" between the emotions and the mind. The learning potential is determined by the emotional load of an experience, which at times functions positively as a motivation to learning and sometimes negatively as an obstacle to learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The mentor's emotional intelligence is associated to their ability to understand and manage the mentee's emotions in a way that facilitates cognitive functions and their adaptation to the learning environment. The mentor recognizes and analyses the difficulties faced by teachers in planning and carrying out their work, while guiding their solution. At the same time, the mentor controls their own impulses and regulates their moods in order to build constructive interpersonal relationships (Illeris, 2007).

1.2.3 Attitudes

A key prerequisite for undertaking the role of mentor, is the willingness to become one (Larson, 2009). This means that a person, who is willing to be a mentor is open to new perspectives on personal and professional development. A desirable attribute, which one often comes across in the literature, is that of enthusiasm (Lahey, Trant, Verderber, & Verderber, 2005; Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003; Ehrich et al., 2004), and is considered to be associated to a high level of mentor energy, even when circumstances might not be favourable (Terrion & Leonard, 2007).

The supportive relationship on which mentoring is based presupposes the positive attitude of the mentor towards the mentee as an individual. Each mentee is unique and the mentor must recognize that different mentees react differently to feedback (Branch, 2016). It is necessary to accept the mentees as they are and to respect their right to determine the issues that concern them (unconditional positive regard) (Rogers, 2001).

In addition, as an adult educator, the mentor is in an equal relationship with the mentee whom they recognize as a source of knowledge (Brookfield, 2006). The mentor needs to have genuineness, be free of prejudices and stereotyped notions, as well as express sincere interest in the mentee, encouraging their full participation in the mentoring process.

The mentor's positive attitude towards participatory learning is also of the utmost importance (Randels et al., 1992). Mentoring, which is a dimension of adult education, has been described as an activity in which all participants take turns in the roles of learner and trainer (Thompson, 1980). Based on this, many mentors feel that they are co-learners (Kram, 1996). Having such a perception greatly assists in adopting a lifelong learning attitude, which helps in the personal and professional development of not only the mentee but also the mentor (Young, Bullough, Draper, Smith, & Erickson, 2005). Thus, Brookfield's (1995) statement that to become an excellent teacher is a never-ending process strongly supports positivity towards lifelong learning for both.

Moreover, many scholars have shown the similarities between the attributes of the mentor and mentee, whether these be demographic features or attitudes and personal values, which contribute to effective mentorship, (Miller, 2002; Lee & Feng, 2007; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Allen & Potet, 1999; Barrera, Braley, & Slate, 2010; Phillips & Fragoulis, 2010; Hobson et al., 2009; Bouquillon, Sosik, & Lee, 2005; Pitney & Ehlers, 2004; Rose, 2005).

Other characteristics mentioned in the literature as important to effective mentoring are: the mentor's willingness to devote time (Terrion & Leonard, 2007), their experience (Johnson, 2002; Straus et al., 2009), their desire for self-improvement (Allen, 2003), their enthusiasm (Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003), politeness (Miller, 2002), their honesty and trustworthiness (Tickle, 2001), their optimism (Branch, 2016), and their selflessness and generosity (Larson, 2009).

Finally, it should be pointed out that some studies have found that there are characteristics of an effective mentor, which, however, are not the same as those of an effective educator. A "good teacher" does not automatically imply

a “good mentor” (Matthews, 2015), and it has been indicated that “no mentor is better than a bad mentor” (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000).

1.3 Research

1.3.1 Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of the research was to outline the profile of an effective mentor through the perceptions of adult educators. The research questions were the following:

- 1) What are the characteristics of an effective mentor?
- 2) What are the criteria for selecting a mentor?
- 3) How do adult educators perceive the role of mentor?

1.4 Method

The research was carried out on adult educators of the Vocational Training Institutes (IEK), Second Chance Schools (SDE) and Life Long Learning Centres (KDMB) of Central Macedonia, Greece, who formed the study’s sampling frame. The sample size was obtained using the mathematical formula proposed by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) and was determined at 300 adult educators. The study was conducted between February and May 2021. The data was gathered through the use of methodological triangulation with a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies for data collection. The use of mixed method research, which integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, is a methodological strategy that aims to maximize the understanding and interpretation of the issue under examination, while at the same time minimizing the weaknesses of using a single research paradigm, since the advantages of one method of data collection outweigh the disadvantages of the other (Creswell, 2018). It also strengthens research by ensuring validity, as it helps to clarify issues which, using a single method, might yield plausible but inadequate results (Cohen et al., 2000; Wheeldon, 2010; Mertler, 2012). The research instruments used were a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire for the quantitative data collection, allowing for a larger number of respondents to be reached, which represent a larger population, and the semi-structured interview for the qualitative data collection, enabling the researcher to explore participants’ views and opinions on the issue under examination, while delving deeper into their personal thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

More specifically, regarding the quantitative research, the questionnaire was developed after studying the relevant literature and conducting preliminary interviews with four (4) adult educators. Besides the data-statements regarding the demographic and individual characteristics of the respondents, the questionnaire consisted of twenty-seven (27) closed answer questions in order to measure latent constructs. On a 5-point Likert scale, participants rated the level of importance to specific attributes and statements (Robson, 2011). Having pilot tested with preliminary respondents (50 adult educators), and checking the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the final version, after the relevant adjustments, was built through the Google Drive platform, whose distribution was approved by the Greek General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning of the Ministry of Education. The web-based self-administered questionnaire was then sent to the following institutions: 18 IEK, 12 SDE and 10 KDBM throughout Central Macedonia, Greece, with the request to be forwarded to their teachers. There were 337 questionnaires completed, a satisfactory Response Rate (82.6%), according to relevant literature (Groves, 2006). Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.25).

Regarding the qualitative research, fourteen (14) semi-structured interviews were conducted with adult educators from the above adult education organizations, each lasting 30 to 40 minutes. An interview guide was formed by conducting two preliminary semi-structured interviews with two adult educators. To ensure the reliability of the interviews, the interview guide had the same structure and sequence of questions for all participants. In addition, three pilot interviews were conducted to verify the completeness and clarity of the questions. The interviews were structured on four thematic axes, investigating: a) personal information, b) views concerning characteristics of the ideal mentor, c) views concerning mentor selection criteria, and d) perceptions on the role of the mentor in adult education. The interview data was processed through content analysis which has been established as one of the best research tools in the social sciences (Cohen et al., 2007). Participants’ responses were studied intensively and then interpreted by categorizing them into coded concepts (Cohen et al., 2007).

1.5 Results and Discussion of the Quantitative Analysis

Tables 1 to 4 below present the study results of the quantitative data analysis. Firstly, Table 1 shows the characteristics of the study participants. It can be clearly seen that they not only have different scientific backgrounds, but also different knowledge and experience in adult education. The largest group consisting of

accredited adult educators (73.6%), have a relatively high mean age (45.1% are in the 46-55 age group, followed by 43.6% in the 36-45 age group), but relatively little experience as adult educators (53.7% 1-10 years, followed by 37.1% 11-20 years).

Table 1. The demographic profile of adult educators participating in the study

Gender	Males: 128 (38%)	Females: 209 (62%)	Total: 337 (100%)
Age Groups	25-35	36-45	46-55
	38 (11.3%)	147 (43.6%)	152 (45.1%)
Postgraduate Studies	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Total
	Yes: 192 (57%)	Yes: 18 (5.3%)	337 (100%)
	No: 145 (43%)	No: 319 (94.7%)	
Years of service in Adult Education	1-10	11-20	21-30
	181 (53.7%)	125 (37.1%)	28 (8.3%)
			>30
			3 (0.9%)
EOPPEP Accreditation	Yes: 248 (73.6%)	No: 89 (26.4%)	Total: 337 (100%)

2. Views on the Attributes of an Effective Mentor

Adult educators' views regarding the profile of a mentor were explored. Research participants were initially asked to rate (on a 5-point Likert scale) the characteristics of an effective mentor, as highlighted in the literature (Clutterbuck, 2005; Matthews, 2015; Larson, 2009; Terrion & Leonard, 2007; Bell, 2001; Branch, 2016; Cherniss, 2007; Ehrich et al., 2004).

Table 2 shows these data. More specifically, the aggregate percentage of the scales "Extremely Important" and "Very Important" (5 and 4 respectively) are given below, in descending order to present the attributes which the participants rated significant for an effective mentor. It appears that the highest was that of a positive attitude to Lifelong Learning with an aggregate score of 96.5% (74.8% and 21.7%, respectively). Communication and counselling skills, each at an aggregate of 95.3% (76.6% and 18.7% respectively for the former and 73.3% and 22.0%, respectively for the latter) were the next highest attributes. The attribute of absence of stereotypes, with an aggregate of 93.1% (69.4% and 23.7%, respectively), was followed by teaching skills at 92.9% (67.1% and 25.8%, respectively). The attributes adult education training and willingness to innovate, each with an aggregate of 92.6% (60.8% and 31.8%, respectively, and 68% and 24.6%, respectively) came closely after as characteristics of an effective mentor. Reflection skills at 90.8% (58.8% and 32% respectively) and organisational skills at 90.2% (65.9% and 24.3%, respectively) were also high aggregates. Finally, it appears that relevant mentoring studies was considered at a significantly lower aggregate of 73.0% (38.3% and 34.7%, respectively; with another 18.1% stating it was "Moderately Important") as an attribute of an effective mentor; a finding which seems to contradict the literature where it has been indicated that mentors need to have the necessary cognitive background (Jones et al., 2005; Glover & Mardle, 1995; Straus et al., 2009; McDonald & Flint, 2011; Lejonberg, Elstad, & Christophersen, 2015).

Thus, it would appear that the adult educators participating in this study identified the attributes of knowledge, skills and attitudes as key qualifications for a mentor to be effective (McDonald & Flint, 2011).

Table 2. Attributes of an effective mentor

	Number of participants/Percentage									
	Not Important at all		Slightly Important		Moderately Important		Very Important		Extremely Important	
Relevant mentoring studies	7	2.1%	23	6.8%	61	18.1%	117	34.7	129	38.3%
Adult education training	1	0.3%	6	1.8%	18	5.3%	107	31.8%	205	60.8%
Teaching skills	2	0.6%	5	1.5%	17	5.0%	87	25.8%	226	67.1%
Communication skills	0	0	3	0.9%	13	3.9%	63	18.7%	258	76.6%
Organisational skills	1	0.3%	6	1.8%	26	7.7%	82	24.3%	222	65.9%
Reflection skills	2	0.6%	6	1.8%	23	6.8%	108	32.0%	198	58.8%
Counseling skills	3	0.9%	2	0.6%	11	3.3%	74	22.0%	247	73.3%
Absence of stereotypes	2	0.6%	5	1.5%	16	4.7%	80	23.7%	234	69.4%
Positive attitude towards lifelong learning	1	0.3%	3	0.9%	8	2.4%	73	21.7%	252	74.8%
Willingness to innovate	0	0	3	0.9%	22	6.5%	83	24.6%	229	68.0%

2.1 Views on Mentor Selection Criteria

Participants were then asked to rate 10 criteria by which they would choose their mentor (Johnson, 2002; Straus et al., 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2012; Mee-Lee & Bush, 2003; Branch, 2016; Rose, 2005; Hobson et al., 2009; Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Barrera et al., 2010). More specifically, the aggregate percentage of the scales “Extremely Important” and “Very Important” (5 and 4 respectively) are given below, in descending order. As can be seen in Table 3, the criteria which were given the highest percentages were the following. Firstly, by far the highest was experience in adult education at an aggregate of 91.4% (63.2% and 28.2%, respectively) followed by experience in mentoring at 87% (55.2% and 31.8%, respectively) and scientific background in teaching at 84% (45.1% and 38.9%, respectively). Finally, special training in mentoring was rated at an aggregate score of 77.5% (48.1% and 29.4%, respectively). From the above results, it can clearly be seen that the participants’ responses focus on the two scientific fields of adult education and mentoring, in terms of experience and the scientific training of mentors in both areas. The osmosis of the two fields as a criterion for selecting a mentor in the respondents’ choices confirms the view that theoretical knowledge for adult learning and experience in adult education can be used in mentoring practices (Cox, 2006). It appears that same gender is by far the least important criterion for selecting a mentor for adult educators at an aggregate of 5.1% (2.4% and 2.7%, respectively), followed by the mentor being older in age at 19.6% (7.7% and 11.9%, respectively; with another 26.4% rating it as “Moderately Important”). The criteria of having a common interest at 30.3% (13.1% and 17.2%, respectively) and same subject matter at 36.5% (14.5% and 22.0%, respectively; with another 33.8% stating it was “Moderately Important”) were also relatively low. These findings do not seem to agree with some of the literature which argues that the existence of common knowledge can be a favourable factor for the effectiveness of mentoring (Phillips & Fragoulis, 2010; Hobson et al., 2009), or that gender similarity increases the satisfaction of the mentor (Johnson & Huwe, 2003). On the contrary, these results seem to support the view that the pursuit for a mentality based on similarity, limits the benefits for all involved (Enhrich & Hanson, 1999). Finally, absence of hierarchy 41.8% (17.8% and 24.0%, respectively) and working in the same educational organisation at 45.1% (17.2% and 27.9%, respectively; with another substantial 24.3% stating it was “Moderately Important”) also received low aggregate scores as criteria for the selection of a mentor. This last finding is in contrast to the results of other studies, specifically in primary education, where respondents expressed a preference for the mentor to be an in-school person (Hallan, Chou, & Hite, 2012). As regards, absence of hierarchy, the interpretation of this finding can be related to the more conventional training practices of adult educators, where there is a clear distinction between the hierarchical roles of mentor and mentee. Nevertheless, only 35.9% of study participants rated this criterion as “Moderately important”, which can optimistically be considered as a first indication that adult educators are starting to move away from the traditional concept of learning that is based on hierarchical roles. It seems that equality in the mentor-mentee roles is making some progress.

Table 3. Mentor selection criteria

	Number of participants/Percentage									
	Not Important at all		Slightly Important		Moderately Important		Very Important		Extremely Important	
Scientific background in teaching	3	0.9%	8	2.4%	43	12.8%	131	38.9%	152	45.1%
Special training in mentoring	5	1.5%	14	4.2%	57	16.9%	99	29.4%	162	48.1%
Absence of hierarchy	29	8.6%	46	13.6%	121	35.9%	81	24.0%	60	17.8%
Work in the same educational organisation	42	12.5%	61	18.1%	82	24.3%	94	27.9%	58	17.2%
Experience in mentoring	2	0.6%	7	2.1%	35	10.4%	107	31.8%	186	55.2%
Experience in Adult Education	0	0	4	1.2%	25	7.4%	95	28.2%	213	63.2%
Older in age	118	35.0%	64	19.0%	89	26.4%	40	11.9%	26	7.7%
Same gender	210	62.3%	56	16.6%	54	16.0%	9	2.7%	8	2.4%
Same subject matter	82	24.3%	37	11.0%	95	28.2%	74	22.0%	49	14.5%
Common interests	57	16.9%	64	19.0%	114	33.8%	58	17.2%	44	13.1%

2.2 Views on the Role of the Mentor

In order to explore the views of adult educators regarding the role of the mentor, the participants were asked to respond to what extent they believed the mentor functions as a: friend, model teacher, equal partner, assessor, counsellor, instructor, and trainer. More specifically, the aggregate percentage of the scales “Extremely Important” and “Very Important” (5 and 4 respectively) are given below, in descending order. As can be seen in Table 4, the role of equal partner at an aggregate score of 93.5% (62.9% and 30.6%, respectively) was substantially the highest. This was followed by the role of instructor at 86.0% (59.9% and 26.1%, respectively; with another 11.3% considering the instructor role as “Moderately Important”). The role of model teacher at an aggregate of 81.3% (41.8% and 39.5%, respectively; with another 13.4% considering this role to be “Moderately Important”) came next. The role of trainer was stated as an important role at an aggregate of 79.8% (43.9% and 35.9%; with another 14.2% considering it “Moderately important”). At an aggregate score of 67.6% each, were the roles of Counsellor (40.4% and 27.3%, respectively; with another substantial 25.8% stating it was “Moderately Important”) and assessor (33.5% and 34.1%, respectively; with another 20.2% stating it was “Moderately Important”). Finally, friend was stated by participants to be the least important role of a mentor at an aggregate score of only 30.3% (9.8% and 20.5%, respectively; with 28.8% considering it as “Moderately Important”). The relatively small range of difference in the percentages of the above roles could be attributed to the theory of self-directed learning. According to this approach, depending on the level of self-direction that adults have acquired from their biography, their perception of the role of mentor changes. More specifically, they prefer the role of mentor as trainer if they have a low level of self-direction, instructor if they have a moderate level, or an equal partner if they have a high level of self-direction. These findings, on the one hand, confirm a basic characteristic of adult educators regarding the different, structured ways of learning (support) (Rogers, 1996). On the other hand, the role of the mentor as an equal partner is in agreement with the view put forward by the reflective mentoring models, which adopt the constructivist conception of learning as a product of active, inclusive training in collaborative interactive environments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). In reflective collaborative frameworks, roles are equal and all the stake holders construct their own professional knowledge, without adopting tried and tested practices (Schon, 1987; Tang & Choi, 2007). In addition, participants’ perceptions which reflect the ideas of behavioral mentoring theories, namely, that the mentor is a model whom the mentee tries to emulate and knowledge is instrumental, also have their significance (Jones, 2009).

Table 4. Participants' views of the role of the mentor

	Number of participants/Percentage									
	Not important at all		Slightly Important		Moderately Important		Very Important		Extremely Important	
Friend	54	16.0%	84	24.9%	97	28.8%	69	20.5%	33	9.8%
Model teacher	4	1.2%	14	4.2%	45	13.4%	133	39.5%	141	41.8%
Equal partner	1	0.3%	1	0.3%	20	5.9%	103	30.6%	212	62.9%
Assessor	18	5.3%	23	6.8%	68	20.2%	115	34.1	113	33.5%
Instructor	2	0.6%	7	2.1%	38	11.3%	88	26.1%	202	59.9%
Trainer	4	1.2%	16	4.7%	48	14.2%	121	35.9%	148	43.9%
Counsellor	8	2.4%	14	4.2%	87	25.8%	92	27.3%	136	40.4%

3. Results and Discussion of the Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data were taken from fourteen participants, who were selected based on the following criteria: an equal number of males and females; some being more and some being less experienced; their different scientific background in adult education; a variety of teaching subjects; and the different structure of employment.

3.1 Views on the Characteristics of an Effective Mentor

All 14 participants stated that knowledge and experience were important characteristics of an effective mentor, and stressed that it was not enough for the mentor to possess these attributes but more importantly to have the “disposition, willingness, and ability to share them.” They also made particular reference to the mentor’s “experience in innovative mentoring” thus, acknowledging the need for changes to be introduced that comprise new, creative, and original actions and ideas in mentoring. The attributes which the study participants believed should be most prevalent were associated to the mentor’s personality and communication skills. Following, the number of interviewees (out of 14) and the most representative words and phrases that they used to portray an effective mentor are given in descending order. The participants claimed that a mentor needs to “be open to cooperation” (no. 14), be “empathic” (no. 13), “show enthusiasm for a collaborative relationship” (no. 12), be “adaptable” (no. 11) and “have love for their fellow human beings” (no. 11), be “calm” (no. 10), be “a good listener” (no. 8), “cheerful” (no. 7), “good-natured” (no. 9), and finally, “willing to listen” (no. 6).

3.2 Views on Mentor Selection Criteria

When asked to state with which criteria they would select a mentor, all 14 interviewees stated that it would “depend on the extent that [the mentor] has been successful in shedding the image of authority” and that “[they] had a keen interest in what they do and were eager to do it.” Participants expressed this view using phrases such as: “[the mentor] should not dominate” but rather they should be “a buttress on which [the mentee] can rely on to express or unleash their potential... without [the mentor] wanting to impose their point of view or dictate which decisions to take.”

3.3 Views on the Role of the Mentor

Regarding the role that the mentor should have, the study participants stated that the mentor: needs to “believe in the mentee’s potential”; is “willing to give time as well as space [to the mentee] for self-motivation”; “involves [the mentee] in having new experiences”; “encourages [the mentee] to discover and develop their goals as well as their skills”, and “guides [the mentee] in order for them to broaden their horizons”; giving them “the freedom to decide for themselves... without questioning [the mentee’s] commitment”; and finally, the participants claimed that “[the mentor] does not judge [the mentee’s] attitude nor abilities”. From the responses of the interviewees, it is apparent that they strongly believe that the mentor’s main concern should be “[the mentee’s] development and empowerment”, thus, once again reinforcing the developmental nature of mentoring.

4. Conclusions

The responses of the adult educators who participated in the present study, for both the quantitative and qualitative data, produced a profile of an effective mentor with characteristics similar to themselves (Kokkos, 2005). The participants considered that the most important qualifications for a mentor are to have good training in adult education and mentoring, as well as teaching skills (Clarke, Killeavy, & Moloney, 2013; Matthews, 2015; Bullough, 2012; Ponte & Twomey, 2014; Stanulis & Floden, 2009). In addition to the mentor’s cognitive profile and experience in adult education and mentoring, the participants believed that equally important attributes for effective mentoring are communication and relational skills (Rogers, 1980; Branch, 2016). This particular finding

is consistent with the results of 54 related studies reviewed by Terrion and Leonard (2007), in which one of the key characteristics of an ideal mentor was good communication. Another interesting finding is that adult educators had an affirmative view of mentors who have a positive attitude towards lifelong learning and are willing to innovate, thus, recognizing the benefits these attributes contribute to the mentoring process. It seems that these two factors coexist in the perceptions of adult educators, reinforcing the claim that a teacher who is willing to change is also inclined to lifelong learning (Eesmaa, 2010; Mezirow, 2000). However, their views on the qualifications of an effective mentor depend on their perceptions of the concept of mentoring which in turn are linked to the level of self-direction they have acquired as individuals. More specifically, those who want a mentor to be a model teacher focus on the mentor's teaching skills, whereas those who want the mentor to be a guide and counsellor put the weight on the mentor's communication and counseling skills. Of particular interest are the perceptions of adult educators who see the mentor as an equal partner, indicating support for the principles of a constructivist approach to learning, where from a facilitator of learning (Rogers, 1980) the mentor becomes an equal partner in learning (Mezirow, 2000). From this point of view, the mentor and mentee roles are not only broadened but also alternate in a two-way process where knowledge is analyzed and on-going. In this way, a framework is formed which allows the continuous and parallel development of all parties involved. It goes without saying that between the mentor who is an "authority" and a mentor who has "authenticity", adult educators prefer the latter.

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