

## **MENTORING IN LIFELONG LEARNING FOR TEACHERS- EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE**

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**Abstract:** *This article highlight theoretical and applicative aspects of mentoring activity. There are presented models of good practices of the teachers involved in the activities carried out through the project Proaction for a multi-professional educational community - ProActiv, a project co-financed from the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020. This approach is an example of a continuous training activity that places mentorship at the center of its objectives. The activities are projected for use in mentorship relation between teacher and teacher and also for teacher and student. The examples for good practices was focused on character education, communication skills and adaptativ social relations.*

**Keywords:** *mentoring; lifelong learning; teacher; student; best practices; non-formal education; character traits.*

In a world where the number of people suffering from low levels of self-esteem, anxiety or various phobias has increased, we must learn to be brave, motivated and involved. What does it mean? First of all, we need to know our weaknesses and strengths, to mobilize our soul to fulfil his dream, in working our coins received with all the strength and passion that we are capable of, not to despair if things don't always go the way we want, the search for models of courage, to be role models of courage, in doing everything that depends on us and nothing more.

The young people of these times carry an extraordinary force in them, which must be discovered and channelled in the right direction, so it is our duty of adults, either we are parents or we are teachers, to teach them to follow their way, to overcome their fear, to take their responsibility, to believe in them self, to understand that the feelings, thoughts, words, actions are important, contributing to the construction of a world, a world we want quiet and beautiful for all of us. But at the same time, they face dysfunctional states given the variability of the social environment in which they live, face with challenges of the virtual environment and may have blockages in self-expressing(Dughi, Rad, Demeter, 2019; Rad at all.,

2019). Their guidance in building a constructive value system and in obtaining satisfaction regarding their life and world is mostly the teacher's duty.

For reaching these goals, young people need guidance from their teachers. A responsible guidance, with respect for students' particularities and needs, based on cooperative attitude requires teacher training appropriate to these requirements.

The teacher is no longer a simple information provider but becomes a catalyst for student transformation, a guide for them. (Herlo et al., 2014). In this way, the mentoring dimension of the teaching profession is becoming clearer and more imperative. This is why teachers also feel the need to develop these skills through their continuous training and collaboration in activities aimed at developing mentoring skills.

Mentoring is an activity with roots deep seated in Greek antiquity, specific to those who supported young people and wisely counselled them.

We find that most valuable people, each in his field, have been valuable mentors to others or they also had mentors: Aristotle was the mentor of Alexander the Great, Socrates – Plato, Archimedes - Galileo Galilei etc. (Ungureanu, D., 2001). The concept of mentoring is relatively new in Romania, in education this term is carefully debated. Initially used in the economic field, the term was taken up in the early 1980s and in the field of education by American specialists. At that time, they faced an increasing number of dropouts after the first years of education. The solution they found was the introduction of mentoring in professional adaptation programs facilitating the transition from initial training to continuing vocational training. There is no universally accepted definition of mentor and mentoring. Mentor means: "in a broad sense, a person who helps someone develop through learning; in a restricted sense, a professional working with a person, a group or an organization for personal or organizational development" (Craşovan, M., 2004).

An example of continuous training activity that places mentoring at the centre of its objectives is the project Pro Action for a multi-professional educational community – ProActiv, project co-financed from the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020. The project is implemented by Teachers Training Centre „Alexandru Gavra” Arad in partnership with Arad county School District and have the general goal applying and multiplying a complex program of professional development in order to prevent the risk of early school leaving at the county level (Ardelean, D., 2019).

The program is implemented in five schools from Arad County, having a complex structure. A first stage is that of training the teachers of the five schools for the following modules:

#### **1. Program A - Personalization of learning in the context of diversity in the educational environment**

This program involves identifying good practice examples in non-formal education, adapting and applying them in the educational process. It also aims to form the students' behavioural skills that make it possible to integrate them into

mainstream education. It also pursues Communication in education with a focus on the relationship with parents, education for change and development, non-formal education methods and tools used to facilitate learning, working strategies for children with behavioural problems and hyperactivity, and not least school inclusion.

## 2. **Program B–Education for character and leadership**

This program aims to raise awareness among students of the importance of being brave, cross-curricular education of the essential features in daily activities, through the activities proposed in the project, the application, in the educational process, of the cross-curricular elements and the hidden curriculum. The program also aims identification of character traits in everyday situations, identification of the consequences of courage or lack of courage, student accountability in borderline situations, the accumulation of experiences that lead to the development of courage; increased self-esteem, to familiarize students with the personalities with / without disabilities who have shown courage, personalities that, most of the times, have become leaders.

## 3. **Program C-Management of an inclusive school**

The purpose of this program is the creation of partnerships with different foundations, NGOs, other schools and institutions, carrying out attractive, useful, integrated, interactive extracurricular activities in order to reduce the absenteeism / school dropout.

## 4. **Program D - Behavioural analysis techniques applied in autism spectrum disorders.**

During this program will be highlighted the communication and language in autism - alternative communication systems and verbal behavior.

The second major stage of the project, after the completion of the teacher training, is that of implementation among the students, of all that was transmitted and accumulated during the training sessions. Where? When? How? These are just a few questions we will try to answer below:

**Where?** –in the school of each teacher involved in the project.

**When?** – throughout the school year.

**How?**–the teachers establish their target group with which they will collaborate for the implementation of the project, elaborate a project idea to be realized during the school year, during the teaching activity. To accomplish this teaching approach, the teachers will have the support of a mentor. The mentoring program involves both direct and online interaction with teachers. Principles underlying the implementation of the program:

*Relevance:*

- relevant problems, identified following the needs analysis;
- approaching the problem - central concepts, facilitating opportunities for the construction of learning activities focused on the needs of the target group.

*Social innovation:*

- education for change and development which will lead to the management of situations that can cause risk of school dropout, favouring the development of school inclusion

*Proactivity:*

- The personnel participating in the training will be "equipped" to deal with challenges in the schools
- practices that directly support professional development, career and successful outcomes.

*Non-discrimination*

- each participant will have equal opportunities

In the following, we will bring to your knowledge some examples of good practices of our colleagues, involved in the project.

***Education is my chance.*** School dropout is an important negative aspect of our society. The most important and sad aspect of school dropout is the fact that these children, are not schooled, will not have a job/qualification, will not integrate into society, are prone to delinquent acts. In order to try to prevent this, our colleague proposes to make attractive didactic activities in order to maintain the students' interest in the school, proposing as objectives the students' responsibility by educating character traits such as wisdom, integrity, responsibility, hard work; reducing absenteeism and preventing school dropout; supporting students in achieving their goals, the school being the community of those who learn and do not drop out; preparing students for good integration into society and the labor market. Expected results are: increasing the quality of teaching activities; active participation of students in the didactic activity; improving student learning outcomes; reducing the number of absences; dropout prevention in students at risk.

Examples of activities:

A1. Motivating students to study- older students/colleagues who have completed high school and attend higher education or have a job are invited to share, explain, argue the importance of education, respectively the completion of the study cycle. Students will ask questions and will be discussions about the motivation importance for the study: Why do we learn? Who do we learn from? How much time do we spend studying? Why don't we learn? Each student will write on a sheet of paper 2 reasons why it is worth learning.

A2. The ideal school - who is responsible? - give students time to think about their ideal school. On a sheet of paper, each student notes the characteristics of the ideal school: words, phrases, drawings. There is a debate on those responsible for the ideal school (e.g. students, teachers, political leaders, etc.) and what they can do to make the school a pleasant place.

***Courage is the fear of prayer.*** The purpose and objectives of this project were to complete the three training modules proposed by the project (Management of an inclusive school, Education for character and leadership, Personalization of

learning in the context of the diversity of the educational environment). So, the colleague, who proposed this theme was determined to try to integrate the acquired knowledge, puzzle pieces, so as to create an integrated activity, which would give students a resilient base on which to build their life. The school means much more than an information provider, a means of developing character traits, of forming "people of humanity" and leaders, necessary for both the community of which they are part and the society.

Examples of activities:

A1. My symbol for courage - according to the teacher's model, each student will think of a person or a being who impressed him with courage. He will briefly tell you about it, then write down the name of the person or what the being is about. The most creative students could sketch/draw this symbol.

A2. Overcoming the fear ... Disabled personalities like Leslie Lemke, Stevie Wonder, Ray Charles, Andrea Bocelli, blind musicians; Marlee Matlin – the deaf actress; Ion Creangă, Moliere, Flaubert, Hemingway, Dostoevsky, writers, suffered from epilepsy; Alexandrucl Mare, Iulius Caesar, heads of state who suffered from epilepsy; Helen Keller, VasileAdamescu, models of courage for all of us, who faced life; Beethoven, the deaf composer; Geronimo Cardano, Charles de l'Epee - inventors of signs for the deaf; Louis Braille - the inventor of writing in the Braille system.

Students will present an aspect that at one point frightened them very much and how they overcame that obstacle (e.g., fear of darkness).

The teacher will give each student an envelope in which there will be a leaflet with information about VasileAdamescu - a personality with disabilities, who has overcome his fear, becoming a role model for everyone else.

***Today educated students, tomorrow people of character.***

The argument for the implementation of this project is related to the education of children. There is a lot of talk about the knowledge and skills that students accumulate within the education system and which are so needed for their future. There is too much emphasis on the amount of information accumulated by the student and too little is discussed about the character that the child develops in all these years. Indeed, the character is given by hereditary inheritance but can be modelled through education and social environment. Clearly, the moral decline among young people affects the whole society.

From our colleague's point of view, it does not matter how much knowledge you have about the world or about a certain field, or how many skills you have, if you have an unworthy character you will use that information that you have in a selfish and harmful way to society. Instead, a man of good faith, with a good character, will do good to those around him. The purpose in the aforementioned context, character education is a necessity and a responsibility that rests with all teachers. Thus, implementing this educational project, our colleague intends to invest real time to understand each student individually, to observe their personality traits and to succeed through the proposed programs to help them and

to motivate them to develop harmoniously and balanced. In order to make real progress, he has integrated elements of character education into the programs proposed in the weekly activities of the class.

Examples of activities:

A1. Formation and education of wisdom as a character trait - Dramatization - Role play.

By the method of dramatization, students will be put in different situations inspired by real life. The education of the concept of wisdom will be done using the individual and group activities, for imaginative purposes, with the emphasis on language acts: description, characterization, expression of feelings, opinion, summary, change of point of view. Using their judgment, they will show wisdom by making the right choices. After interpreting the scenes, the students will freely express their opinion, they will highlight the good facts that denote certain traits but also the mistakes or lack of certain character traits. Through dramatization and discussions that happen in the role play, children understand notions with positive content such as wisdom, perspective, discretion, etc., but also those with negative content that attract certain consequences.

**Reflection:** I have something to say! "*Wisdom means anticipating the consequences of your actions.*" Norman Cousins

A2. Forming and educating wisdom as a character trait - "Stories full of meaning- tell me what you give to tell you what you will receive."

A brainstorming session is organized and three short stories are told through alternate reading. Students have the task of formulating as many ideas as possible, they will retain the ideas relevant to the proposed topic and they will be used to solve group tasks, focusing on the concept of wise/unwise choices. Each group of students will write on the sheet, vertically, the word "WISDOM". At the same time, the students will write a sentence beginning with each letter about how the characters in the fairy tales have shown wisdom.

These educational project ideas can be a point of reference for a larger project. I would love very much, in the future, to be able to develop more joint activities with parents because the students come to school with the "baggage" of the family. All our efforts are in vain when the example from home is at odds with what we are promoting. Parents are the first attachment figure, and as teachers we have to find ways to get "under the skin" of the children in order to smooth out these character traits that are waiting to come to the surface. For these reasons, additional efforts should be made to "educate" parents and their children.

By structure and content, these projects require a flexible and application-oriented approach, which will contribute to self-knowledge and the formation of their own value system. Weekly activities with students include concrete means and methods that contribute to character development, increased self-esteem, reduced school dropout, and school inclusion. The emphasis is mainly on these because they largely determine the success of children with special educational requirements and not only, success in school activities but also in life: self-control, perseverance, optimism, gratitude, enthusiasm, curiosity and social intelligence.

The project recommends that learning be carried out within attractive activities, which will stimulate the participation of students in the lesson. All these activities carried out together with a mentor have as a continuous purpose the formation and development of communication and an attitude adapted to the relationship with others.

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