

## APPROACHES TO THE MENTORING ACTIVITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EDUCATIONAL ETHICS

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**Abstract:** *Knowledge of professional responsibilities from a moral-pedagogical perspective is a goal of educational ethics codes. As a professional educator, a mentor teacher must have the ability to carry out reflections, critical-constructive analyses and representations of fundamental pedagogical concepts and, at the same time, to offer moral perspectives in various professional and life situations. Establishing educational objectives at different levels, selecting and configuring educational content, establishing evaluation forms, methods, and criteria, managing and regulating relationships with learners, colleagues, decision-makers, and parents are all professional responsibilities that require pedagogical but also ethical competencies for educational professionals. The inclusion in codes of professional ethics in education of issues related to the deontology of educational purposes, the deontology of educational content, the deontology of evaluation, the deontology of pedagogical relations can stimulate the reflection and action of teachers who carry out mentoring activities but, at the same time, also that of the mentored persons. The purpose of the investigation was to highlight the importance of including in the codes of educational ethics some principles that regulate the exercise of mentor roles, especially from the perspective of the deontology of evaluation and the deontology of pedagogical relations between teacher and student but also between teachers. Starting from the premise that ethical and deontological regulations in any professional field have the role of protecting the quality of professional services offered by specialists in that field, the need to consider ethical principles of behaviour of the mentor teacher is imperative in*

*the educational field and that of initial professional training due to the mechanism that underpins the mentoring process: the mentor's professional service includes behaviours and attitudes, and it has a formative, directing, and guiding role more than in other fields.*

**Keywords:** *mentoring; educational ethics; mentor teachers; mentoring relationship; code of professional ethics.*

### **Approaches to educational ethics from the perspective of the roles of mentor teachers**

In essence, mentoring designates a relationship aimed at supporting learning and education established between a person willing to share their experience and knowledge (mentor) and another person with less experience who is usually at the beginning of their professional path, capable and willing to receive this support in order to develop their professional experience and to develop personally (mentored person/mentee). Mentoring is a relationship based on trust between mentor and disciple, in which a transfer of practical information, knowledge, and models takes place, which favours the transformation of the disciple's professional identity (Stan, 2020).

A mentor is a professional, a person with high expertise in a field, who helps someone, an individual or a group, to develop through learning. A mentor in the educational field is a professional who advises a less experienced person or one who is at the beginning of their teaching career, offers informed opinions about the profession, shares their experiences and knowledge, facilitating the professional integration of beginners or those in the training process and the achievement of their potential in their professional and personal lives (Ezechil, 2009).

The efficiency of the mentoring activity and relationship is influenced by personality characteristics of the mentor (ease in establishing interpersonal relationships, empathy, open, positive attitude, moral integrity, resilience), but also by his/her professional skills. From the perspective of the mentee, the efficiency of mentoring is conditioned by qualities such as: desire for (self)improvement, confidence in one's own potential, openness to new things, willingness to learn continuously (Lazăr, Leahu, 2020). To successfully fulfill the role of mentor, the teacher must possess specific qualities and attributes: objectivity and honesty; integrity, concordance between his/her actions and guidance; ability to make the most appropriate decisions; perseverance, proven through actions and transmitted to the mentees;

ability to motivate and transmit trust to the mentees. Rowley (1999) identifies the following essential qualities of a good mentor (cited in Craşovan, 2016, pp. 73–74):

A good mentor is committed to helping new teachers achieve success and fulfillment in their new work.

A good mentor is accepting of new teachers.

A good mentor provides instructional support.

A good mentor is effective in a variety of interpersonal contexts.

A good mentor is a role model for lifelong learning.

A good mentor transmits hope and optimism.

The mentor must be a model of professionalism, a supporter of the ideals and aspirations of those at the beginning of their career, possess a high level of professional expertise, but also personality traits that favour the exercise of the mentor role: altruism, empathy, concern for the needs of others, patience, being a good role model for the disciple's activity (Ezechil, 2008).

The fundamental roles that a mentor teacher fulfills:

- identifies together with the mentee the professional needs, objectives, and action strategy;
- observes the didactic and extra-didactic activity of the mentee;
- provides pedagogical assistance for the design of the professional activity;
- provides feedback for all dimensions of the mentee's professional activity;
- provides advice on the management of the class;
- contributes to facilitating the integration of the mentee into the organizational culture of the institution;
- provides support to the mentee in learning about the profession;
- highlights the mentee's professional qualities and achievements;
- evaluates the mentee's progress, contributing to the improvement of non-achievements.

The exercise of these roles, in the most diverse professional situations, requires the existence of a deontological framework that regulates the behaviours, attitudes, targeted competencies, as well as the context in which the mentoring process is carried out.

Knowledge of professional responsibilities from a moral-pedagogical perspective is a goal of educational ethics codes. As a professional educator, a mentor teacher must have the ability to carry out reflections, critical-constructive analyses and representations of fundamental pedagogical concepts and, at the same time, to offer moral perspectives in various professional and life situations. Establishing educational objectives at different levels, selecting and configuring

educational content, establishing evaluation forms, methods, and criteria, managing and regulating relationships with learners, colleagues, decision-makers, and parents are all professional responsibilities that require pedagogical but also ethical competencies for educational professionals (Crişan-Tăuşan, 2023).

The inclusion in codes of professional ethics in education of issues related to the deontology of educational purposes, the deontology of educational content, the deontology of evaluation, the deontology of pedagogical relations can stimulate the reflection and action of teachers who carry out mentoring activities but, at the same time, also that of the mentored persons. From this perspective, Ghiaţău (2011) presents an inventory of issues that can be included in codes of professional ethics for teachers, suggesting themes of the code generated by pedagogical variables (objectives, content, evaluation) but also by psychosocial ones (relationships between teachers and students, colleagues, parents), which outline the area of action of the teacher at the classroom and school institution level.

### **Methodology**

In line with the aforementioned ideas regarding the ethical component of the teaching and mentoring activities of mentor teachers, we investigated the opinion of teachers in pre-university education regarding the importance of knowing professional responsibilities from a moral-pedagogical perspective as well.

Following a semi-structured interview applied to groups of teachers who carry out teaching activities within two pre-university education institutions in Cluj-Napoca, we formulated the items of a questionnaire through which we aimed to identify their perception regarding the importance of including in the codes of educational ethics some principles that would regulate the conduct and attitudes of mentor teachers, the targeted competencies, as well as the context of the mentoring process.

The items in the questionnaire through which we investigated these aspects are:

- I believe that the inclusion of ethical principles of behaviour of mentor teachers in the educational ethics code has an important role in regulating the conduct and attitudes of mentors.
- I believe that it is important to include regulations regarding the deontology of evaluation in the educational ethics code.
- I believe that the inclusion of regulations regarding the deontology of pedagogical relationships in the code of ethics promotes the reflection and action of mentor teachers.

The purpose of the investigation was to highlight the importance of including in the codes of educational ethics some principles that regulate the exercise of mentor roles, especially from the perspective of the deontology of evaluation and the deontology of pedagogical relations between teacher and student but also between teachers.

Research objectives:

- Highlighting the need to include in the code of educational ethics some ethical principles of behaviour, which regulate the conduct and attitudes of mentor teachers;
- Highlighting the importance of regulating in the code of educational ethics the deontology of evaluation;
- Highlighting the importance of including in the code of educational ethics some regulations regarding the issue of the deontology of pedagogical relations between mentor teachers and other teachers, mentor teachers and students.

Research hypothesis: we assume that knowledge and awareness of professional responsibilities from a moral-pedagogical and ethical perspective has a positive impact on the quality of mentoring activity and on promoting the reflection and subsequent actions of mentor teachers.

Target group: the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 30 teachers with a minimum of 5 years of professional experience, who carry out teaching activities within two pre-university educational institutions in Cluj-Napoca.

Results and discussions

Following the application of the items from the questionnaire assessing the teachers' perception regarding the importance of including principles that regulate the conduct and attitudes of mentor teachers in the codes of educational ethics, we recorded the following results:

Table no. 1: I believe that the inclusion of ethical principles of behaviour of mentor teachers in the code of educational ethics has an important role in regulating the conduct and attitudes of mentors

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Agree	21	70.0
Partially agree	7	23.3
Disagree	0	0.0
I don't know/No answer	2	6.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table no. 2: I believe it is important to include regulations regarding the deontology of evaluation in the code of educational ethics

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Agree	19	63.3
Partially agree	10	33.3
Disagree	0	0.0
I don't know/No answer	1	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table no. 3: I believe that the inclusion in the code of ethics of regulations regarding the deontology of pedagogical relations promotes the reflection and action of mentor teachers

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Agree	23	76.6
Partially agree	6	20.0
Disagree	0	0.0
I don't know/No answer	1	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The responses of the teachers highlight their perception of the importance of including in the codes of educational ethics principles that regulate the conduct and attitudes of mentor teachers, principles that regulate the exercise of mentor roles, especially from the perspective of the deontology of evaluation and the deontology of pedagogical relations. We note that the majority of the teachers surveyed highlight the importance of ethical competencies, not only pedagogical, as well as the need to understand professional responsibilities from a moral-pedagogical perspective. The opinion of the majority of the teachers surveyed regarding the need for regulations concerning the deontology of evaluation and the deontology of pedagogical relations in the activity of mentor teachers highlights the awareness of the need for a deontological framework specific to the mentoring activity, beyond the code of educational ethics.

Evaluation in mentoring activities can be approached from two perspectives: evaluation of the mentor and evaluation of the mentee. The evaluation of the mentee takes into account training needs, teaching behaviour, attitudes (toward students, profession, colleagues, school institution, own career), teaching skills (especially

communication skills), motivation. In addition to the mentor, the evaluation can also be carried out by school managers, school inspectors, as well as the evaluated person themselves (the approach being self-evaluation). The mentor, in turn, can be evaluated by school managers, school inspectors, by the mentee, or can self-evaluate. Most often, the following are subject to evaluation: the quality of the mentoring activity, the efficiency of the strategies used, the attitude towards the mentee, the results obtained - both professionally and personally.

Providing measurement, assessment and decision guiding functions, evaluation includes issuing value judgments based on the analysis and processing of measured data, estimating the degree of achievement of objectives, and assessing the quality of the results obtained. Through measurement, data is collected in the most objective ways possible; through assessment, a qualitative, value-based estimate of the measured results is established, but some aspects that cannot be quantified are also assessed here; and through decision, grades or qualifiers are assigned.

Thus, ethical discussions are particularly necessary through the component aimed at evaluation. From the mentor's perspective, they note, analyze and evaluate the results obtained by the novice in relation to the proposed objectives; they identify the positive aspects, successes, but also the failures, gaps, as well as the causes that determine them, proposing amelioration measures. The regulation of the teaching process, but also that of the mentoring process, the improvement of one's own activity as a teacher and mentor highlights the fundamental role of evaluation at the level of teaching processes and mentoring processes. From the perspective of the mentee, a correctly conducted evaluation allows them to develop their capacity for self-knowledge and self-evaluation, further stimulating their motivation and professional interests, forming the basis for the regulation and self-regulation of future teaching activity. Taking into account the impact of the evaluation process on the personality of the mentees but also on the improvement of the activity carried out, it is necessary to apply strategies to ensure objectivity and limit subjectivity in evaluation.

The qualities of a good examiner specified by Ghiațău (2011, p. 131) are essential for both the teacher and the mentor:

- the empathic capacity to identify the desire for knowledge and the interests of the person being evaluated/mentored;
- emotional stability and maintaining the evaluation process within the limits of a psychological and moral balance;

knowledge of the fundamental notions of evaluation theory.

The deontological perspective on the teacher-student relationship supports the inclusion of the following benchmarks in the attitudes and professional conduct of teachers:

avoiding treating students with contempt or arrogance;

avoiding exaggerations regarding students' mistakes;

limiting relationships to topics related to the subjects studied, to the processes of information, training and education of students;

teacher-student communication will not include confidences between them;

the presence of permanent control regarding the teacher's actions and the messages transmitted;

adapting attitudes to the psychosocial particularities of the age of the educated;

maintaining objectivity in the assessment of the educated.

Numerous ethical questions develop around the concept of teacher authority, including both epistemic authority, generated by the teacher's ascendancy over the learner in terms of scientific content, and deontic authority, resulting from the teacher's ability to influence behaviour based on arguments or constraints. Ethical codes regarding the teaching profession establish legitimate frameworks for the manifestation of authority and professional conduct.

Regarding the regulation of relations between teaching staff and students, the Framework Code of Ethics for Teaching Staff in Pre-university Education specifies in Article 5 the obligation of teaching staff to know, respect and apply a series of rules of conduct.

Regarding collegial relations between members of the teaching staff, the Framework Code of Ethics for Teaching Staff in Pre-university Education stipulates, in Article 7, that these are based on respect, honesty, solidarity, cooperation, fairness, tolerance, mutual support, confidentiality, fair competition. Basing interpersonal relationships and interactions between teachers on collaboration, cooperation, collegiality, assuming professional responsibility, collegial professional support, exchanges of good professional practices, collegial support for managing problem situations, supporting the professional development of the institution, openness to the real learning needs of students, all constitute premises for creating a professional context favourable to freedom of expression, positive, desirable manifestations, and continuous personal and professional development.

Furthermore, in their professional activity, teaching staff should avoid practicing any form of discrimination and denigration in their



relationships with other colleagues and act to combat intellectual fraud, including plagiarism.

The professional culture of teaching staff based on values such as collaboration, support, honesty, respect, tolerance, encourages the growth of professional performance at the institutional level, and is even more necessary within mentoring relationships that are based on cooperation, shared responsibility, and reciprocity.

Analyzing the ethics of pedagogical relationships between educators, Ghiațau (2011) emphasizes the importance of the values of cooperation, collegiality and collaboration, which underpin a professional culture with positive relationships as its core. We believe that these define mentoring relationships, evidenced in the attitudes, conduct and actions of both the mentor and the mentee.

Through cooperation, the mentor and the mentee mobilize their efforts to solve a problem, respecting the principle of the best interests of the children, freely express their ideas, fairly allocate their rights and responsibilities, and contribute to the joint development of solutions.

Collegiality, “as a professional virtue that implies a mutually positive attitude, a disposition for support and cooperation between professionals in the field” (Ghiațau, 2011, p. 138) constitutes an indispensable premise for building the mentoring relationship. We identify four types of interaction that can be called collegial (Ghiațau, 2011, p. 138):

- “(a) frequent, concrete and precise discussions about teaching practice;
- (b) frequent observations on the activities carried out;
- (c) joint planning, design and evaluation of teaching materials;
- (d) organization of lessons taught in teams.”

These interactions are specific to a collegial attitude between teachers, but they are defining for the mentoring relationship, revealing some of the most significant actions and objectives pursued in this process.

The third concept that describes the supportive relationships between teachers – collaboration throughout the mentoring process – involves the establishment of an intra-institutional relationship between mentor and novice, based on adherence to common norms and values, specific to the school institution and the activities carried out, but also based on the assumption of common goals established for the mentoring process.

## Conclusions

Starting from the premise that ethical and deontological regulations in any professional field have the role of protecting the quality of professional services offered by specialists in that field, the need to

consider ethical principles of behaviour of the mentor teacher is imperative in the educational field and that of initial professional training due to the mechanism that underpins the mentoring process: the mentor's professional service includes behaviours and attitudes, and it has a formative, directing, and guiding role more than in other fields. The teaching profession involves ethical requirements, compliance with "values, principles and norms of conduct intended to contribute to institutional cohesion and the cohesion of groups of people involved in educational activity, by creating and maintaining a climate based on cooperation and competition according to fair rules." (Article 2 of the Framework Code of Ethics for Teaching Staff in Pre-university Education). Regarding mentor teachers, in addition to the principles and norms of conduct included in the Framework Code of Ethics for Teaching Staff in Pre-university Education, which aim at the commitments of all teachers towards students and towards the profession, they should adopt principles and norms that derive from the specifics of the mentoring process.

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