Mentoring for School-based Teacher Education

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Abstract

Due to the shortage of teachers at schools, the Ministry of Education and Science in Latvia has devoted special attention to fast track of teachers to teaching starting new teacher education project to attract capable and motivated professionals from various fields to the work of a teacher. This also raised the necessity for the development of programme and training competent teachers to act as mentors in school-based teacher education programme. The study aimed to explore and evaluate mentor education in the context of work-based (school-based) initial teacher education. The research sample consisted of 55 participants of mentor professional development programme and 2 mentor trainers. The data analysis of participants' questionnaires, reflections, mentor trainers' self-evaluations and feedback on participants' assignments led to the guidelines for building partnership between schools and universities to promote a common understanding of school-based teacher education.

Keywords: mentor education; school-based teacher education; student teacher; university-school partnership

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1. Introduction

Traditionally initial teacher education in Latvia has been organized in two ways representing two models of the entry point into the subject teacher's profession: novice teachers who obtain the teacher's qualification via a concurrent model and novice teachers who obtain the teacher's qualification via consecutive model. Since 2009 also alternative pathway – programme "Mission Possible" started its work in attracting new specialists into the teaching profession in Latvia.

In the concurrent model, students can enrol the programme after secondary school. They study the chosen academic subjects, education, psychology, information technology, research, etc. in the value of 230 ECts including school practice. Graduates obtain the qualification of two subject teachers in four years, and there is a regular connection with schools (Mikelsone, Odina 2017). In the consecutive model, students first get the degree in specific discipline – academic subject and then they enrol the programme for pedagogical training. Students obtain the qualification of one subject teacher in five years, where the last two years are connected to school teaching. The alternative pathway – programme "Mission Possible" recruited university graduates with other backgrounds and professionals with no knowledge in teacher education for a two-year teaching position in a school (Mikelsone, Odina 2017). The programme offered a six-week summer course and mainly provided teaching practice at school. Alternative pathways give "low priority to educational theory and research and to scientific knowledge. They rely on the candidates' previous education to provide adequate grounding in subject matter. The curriculum itself emphasizes learning by doing" (Musset 2010: 22).

According to Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2020) the number of teachers in Latvia has declined by approximately 10 000 for the last 20 years, falling from 29 262 (2000/2001 school year) to 21 789 (2019/2020 school year) with the situation getting more critical – at the beginning of 2020/2021 there was a lack of 470 teachers (Dēvica 2020). Already in 2018 it was reported that in Latvia there are not enough teachers in STEM subjects, which poses a challenge for schools, as the importance of STEM subjects is increasing in the technology-driven working world. Moreover, teacher education programmes do not have enough students that move on to work in the profession, which is connected to the prestige of teaching, renumeration, and psychological factors (European Commission 2018). Teacher aging poses a problem for schools in many countries in Europe and Latvia is not an exception – in 2018, only 7.8% of teachers were under the age of 30 years in secondary education in Latvia, while 50% were over 50 years of age (OECD 2021). However, the latest TALIS report states that young teachers (under 30) and entry-level teachers are more likely to believe that the profession is appreciated in society, contrasting with the older teacher generation and those working for more than three years (OECD 2020). Due to the shortage of teachers at schools, the Ministry of Education and Science in Latvia has devoted special attention to fast track of teachers to teaching.

2. Literature review

Initiative of School-Based Teacher Education

Since 2020 the work of alternative pathway – programme "Mission Possible" has been merged with consecutive model of teacher education programme provided by the University of Latvia, Liepaja University and Daugavpils University to license new 2nd level professional higher education programme "Teacher". The aim was to attract capable and motivated professionals from various fields to the work of a teacher, providing the necessary education and practical training. This initiative is state funded by the Ministry of Education and Science in Latvia giving an opportunity for 100 selected candidates a year to obtain the qualification of a teacher during one study year and to continue their professional development during the second year to become a teacher in one of the schools in Latvia ((Andreasen, Bjørndal & Kovač, 2019).

The uniqueness of the second level professional higher education study programme "Teacher" in Latvia is justified by the form of its implementation – school-based studies. For applicants with a bachelor's and a master's degree, it is an opportunity to acquire pedagogical competence in school-based studies under the guidance of highly qualified teachers during the year. The study programme offers reasonable solutions to the new challenges for the education system, for example, the shortage of teachers in Latvian educational institutions, the change of the role of teachers in the context of the competence approach. The study programme is an opportunity for young specialists to retrain and become teachers, using their acquired competence in the relevant field of science. The content of the study programme consists of study courses of 60 ECTs, dividing them into theoretical courses (9 ECT), qualification paper / teacher's portfolio (15 ECT) and teaching practice (30 ECT) and integrated teaching methodology courses (6 ECT) in 7 module areas: Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Language, Technology and Design, Cultural Awareness and Self-Expression in the Arts, Social Sciences and History, and Health and Physical Activity.

The programme starts with a two-week summer course at the end of July and the beginning of August, with students from all three universities enrolled in the 2nd level professional higher education study programme "Teacher". Under the guidance of professionals and experienced teachers, students acquire the necessary knowledge in pedagogy, subject methodology, educational psychology, and other basic skills to successfully start working at school in September where students are employed to work at school – four days a week and one day study at the university.

The principle of school-based studies is observed when the student's pedagogical competence is developed both in the academic study environment and while working at school as a subject teacher. School-based studies allow to effectively combine theory and practice, as well as work and study at the same time, which is especially important for family people and it is possible to attract more people to teaching.

The concept of the study programme envisages school-based studies, therefore teaching practice is a very important component of studies. This is also confirmed by the amount of credit points planned for teaching practice – 30 ECTs (from 60 ECTs) in the study programme.

As it has been stated before, after a two-week summer course, students start work at school where a mentor is assigned to them to support students in the integration phase into the new work environment, as well as to provide professional support during teaching practice. The teaching practice ensures the development of the students' knowledge, skills, and competences in accordance with the goals of the study programme and the real needs of the work environment (Andreasen, Bjørndal & Kovač, 2019).

During teaching practice, the student is supported by practice organizer, university mentor from the University of Latvia, tutor from programme "Mission Possible" as well as an experienced teacher-mentor appointed by the head of school with the competence appropriate for teaching practice management, preferably a mentor's qualification. The teaching practice of the 2nd level professional higher education study programme "Teacher" consists of two parts (Pedagogical Practice I (15 ECT) and Pedagogical Practice II (15 ECT)). The study courses of the 1st semester "Teacher's Professional Activity", "Educational Psychology" and "Integrated Methodology of the Study Field" also include study assignments based on the analysis of school practice and pedagogical self-experience, so that student teachers get information about school, and analyse the learning process, as well as get to know the upbringing work at school and class teacher's responsibilities. The content of study courses is planned so that within the framework of school-based studies the student receives support for what is most relevant in the specific stage of teaching practice (content planning, effective lesson planning, subject

methodology and use of teaching methods, support in classroom management, assessment in the learning process analysis, differentiation of the learning process, etc.).

Such approach also created the need to develop a modified mentor professional development programme meant for improving the professional competence of mentors of various subjects for the provision of pedagogical support for school-based studies. Mentors play an essential role in implementing effective school-based teacher education, i.e., introducing new teachers to the teaching profession and facilitating teacher retention. It is vital to train competent teachers to act as mentors in school-based teacher education programme.

Mentoring and Mentor Education

The first three years of teaching is the time when up to a quarter of all novice teachers choose to leave the profession (Clark 2012). Therefore, support from school heads and co-workers is essential throughout a teacher's career, but especially so in the first years, as it can help the novice teacher deal with the challenges of teaching and not lose the motivation to teach. A teacher induction programme or mentorship is one of the ways how new teachers are supported in their first years. Most countries in the EU have a formal induction programme for new teachers, lasting between three months and two years, whereas in a few countries, including Latvia, there is no official induction programme. There have been several initiatives by the British Council in Latvia since 1999 and the University of Latvia, Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art since 2003 to improve the quality of initial teacher education in Latvia towards building a coherent and effective partnership between universities and schools. By 2017 there have been educated and qualified 1473 mentors and 27 mentor trainers in Latvia to provide support to student teachers, novice teachers and practising teachers' professional development. There have been also developed and accredited university courses for master's programmes "Mentoring in Education" at the University of Latvia and "Mentor Education" module with mentor's qualification at Liepaja University. Despite that, mentoring is a popular form of novice teacher support in Latvia, there is no state policy, schools organize mentoring and other forms of support internally. Although a popular solution, mentoring might not be effective as a tool for motivating and retaining novice teachers, unless it is carefully planned and organized, and state supported.

Mentor education refers to the process through which an individual can learn being exposed to some level of freedom in their experimentation. This relationship is built on the belief that both the mentor and the mentee understand their need for personal growth and are willing to allow each other the opportunity to express this incentive towards demonstrating growth. For this relationship to work, the mentor must have more experience than the mentee, which means that they will use it to attempt to mould the mentee into their best versions. Mentor education is crucial in teacher education because it takes more than the ability to understand coursework to become a great teacher (Ellis, Alonzo, Nguyen 2020). Both good and great teachers must find it easy to teach. This is because despite understanding what the syllabus requires of the teacher and the content within this syllabus, the individual needs to understand the best way to pass this information to students. For this reason, through mentor professional development programme, student teachers are provided with an opportunity to experience teaching as it is in the field. Student teachers are supervised by their mentors to ensure that where they may go astray, they are corrected, ultimately helping them develop the most effective teaching techniques that work for them.

Reasons for Mentor Education

There are various reasons why student teachers need to be mentored into teaching. One of the primary reasons is the case that certain teaching aspects are acquired through experience. This means that the more a student teacher teaches a certain subject or class, the more likely they are to figure out which teaching technique works best for the students in question. For example, while one class might respond positively to group discussions, another might respond to drill-teaching. The differences between these groups can only be established through experience. Therefore, the purpose of a mentor is to ensure that all student teachers do not have to undergo the process of trial and error to find the approaches that best work for them and their students (Mosley, Taylor, Vlach 2017). The role of the mentor, in this case, is to provide direction on approaches the student teacher might take to improve on one's teaching practice. However, in most cases, mentors only hold a suggestive position, meaning that the ultimate decision on which approach to apply in teaching lies with the specific student teacher. Furthermore, mentoring serves as a creation of a role model for these student teachers to follow.

Most mentors are not only individuals in the profession for a long time but also people who have successfully performed in the profession. This implies that these are individuals from whom the new teachers would be willing to learn since doing so will increase their possibility of becoming successful in the future as well. For example, suppose a teacher has produced more elite students in school than any other teacher despite being balanced in terms of past academic performance. In that case, such an individual could be considered a success in the field (Manning & Hobson 2017). Therefore, learning from this individual is considered learning from the best, and the ultimate objective, often, is to become as good or even better than these mentors. Therefore, if an overachiever mentor one, they are likely to become achievers or even overachievers. However, if an underachiever mentor the same individual, they will learn to do the bare minimum, which will result in underachievement.

Moreover, teacher mentoring is important because it facilitates the exhibition of enthusiasm in both teaching and learning. When a student teacher is only measured by their ability to correctly answer questions on the issues discussed in exams, it is impossible to determine how committed they are to the profession. For most new generation teachers, teaching is considered only a source of income, and if these individuals find any better source of income with less work, they are likely to switch fields (Izadinia 2018). As a result of this situation, most young teachers are only willing to do the bare minimum in teaching, not to lose their jobs. As a result, when teachers do the bare minimum, students tend to fail and miss out on an opportunity to achieve their optimal potential. Mentor professional development programmes can ensure that this is avoided by establishing the difference between individual teachers looking for a source of income from those who are enthusiastic about both teaching and learning. With this information, measures can then be implemented to ensure that only the most passionate individuals about teaching get the first opportunity to exercise this enthusiasm. Creating such policies will ensure that teachers will be willing to sacrifice for the sake of their students and be willing to learn from students and colleagues, which ultimately helps them achieve optimal productivity. Finally, resulting from the enthusiasm discussed above, teacher mentoring helps teachers participate in ongoing learning and growth in teaching. As mentioned above, enthusiasm in teaching often means that the individual is likely to put more effort than the rest to improve their situation and make better the situation of others. Since these programmes often involve a mentor that provides directions to mentees based on their life experiences teaching, they will be expected to learn from their mentor's experiences. On the other hand, mentors are also expected to learn from their mentees, making them better teachers and teacher mentors overall (Andreasen, Bjorndal, Kovač 2019). Due to the effectiveness of these programmes, both student teachers and students enjoy various benefits.

One of the main benefits of mentor education is that student teachers acquire practical advice from their mentors, which is then used to improve content delivery making life easier for students. Unlike a lecture setting, whereby student teachers are likely to take advice provided by lecturers, from mentors they get to practise their advice. As a result, when advice turns out to be efficient, these student teachers are likely to hold it with more regard than a situation where they do not get to try out the advice (Grimmett et al. 2018). Additionally, mentor education programmes create an opportunity for the empowerment of decision-making. When their mentor requires a teacher mentee to make certain decisions regarding their lesson plans and implementation, they develop confidence in decision making. This results in teachers being more confident in their decisions, and when students experience the same confidence, the chances are that these students' performance will also improve.

Mentor Professional Development Programme

Nevertheless, there are qualified mentors and mentor trainers in Latvia, they need constant professional development as the types of mentoring also differ, for instance, the new work-based (school-based) mentoring which would mean something blended between student-teacher, novice teacher and peer mentoring. The aim of mentors' professional development programme is to improve mentors' competence to supervise quality teaching practice for student teachers, to introduce student teachers to school life and to provide support to colleagues. It is expected that during 32 hours the school assigned mentors plan mentor's work to provide school-based studies, compile the strategies to promote positive interaction and analyse them in groups, reflect on one's mentoring experience in groups, provide feedback to fellow mentors and evaluate the management of student teachers' professional development for school-based studies and present it other course participants. In 2020 the content was planned for 4 days, where on Day 1, mentors reflected on their role in mentoring, learnt about the characteristics school-based studies, critically analysed the stages of a teacher's professional development, selected, and used strategies for relationship building and support (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2020).

After Day 2 mentors were supposed to be able to select the most appropriate online learning methods for distance learning, evaluate online learning according to the type of synchronous and/ or asynchronous communication, provide advice to student teacher on planning, organizing, and conducting online learning. During Day 3, they updated mentoring skills, practised perception, active listening, counselling and support skills, improved observation, and feedback skills. Day 4 was devoted to the cooperation of teachers in the implementation of the competence approach in education, the needs and challenges of student teachers' cooperation were recognized and evaluated, offered solutions to facilitate teacher collaboration in their workplace. However, due to the pandemic situation in the country the implementation of the mentor professional development programme started only in November – much later than it had been planned at the end of August.

Purpose of study

The article deals with the experience of the implementation of mentor professional development programme for the introduction of school-based studies in initial teacher education in Latvia. Research question was put forward: how should be organized mentor education to support student teachers in school-based teacher education programme? The study aimed to explore and evaluate mentor education in the context of work-based (school-based) initial teacher education.

3. Methods and Materials
Participants

The research sample consisted of 55 school mentors and 2 mentor trainers. The data were collected by the participants of mentor professional development programme questionnaires and reflections and mentor trainers' self-evaluations and feedback on participants' assignments.

Concerning the teaching experience of the participants of mentor professional development programme, two participants belonged to the group of novice teachers themselves (2 – 5 years), in the group of 6 – 10 years – four participants, 10 participants represented the group from 11 – 20 years, more than 21 year in teaching – 18 participants, other participants (21) have not revealed their teaching experience. As to experience in mentoring for 22 participants this was their first mentoring experience, seven teachers have performed mentor's work from 2 to 5 years, three teachers have marked the experience of mentoring from 6 to 10 years and two have stated to have mentoring expertise from 11 to 20 years and unknown information about 21 participants. Nine participants have been among those 1473 mentors who have completed mentor education courses before – five to seven years ago and one of participants has got supervisor's qualification.

The mentor trainers' analysed assignments were mentee's needs analysis profile (concerning their previous teaching experience; expectations from this teaching practice; how they saw a teacher's job, role; professional aspirations they wanted to achieve and readiness for the work of a teacher), cooperation code (dedicated time to cooperation; introductions; lesson observation; lesson planning; feedback sessions; documentation; reflection; cooperation with other mentors; improvement of their skills) and presentation of mentoring practice and experience evaluation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data analysis of participants' questionnaires, reflections, mentor trainers' self-evaluations and feedback on participants' assignments allowed to answer the research question put forward: how should be organized mentor education to support student teachers in school-based teacher education programme. It also led to the guidelines for building partnership between schools and universities to promote a common understanding of school-based teacher education.

4. Findings and Discussion

As it was stated before mentors were supposed to submit two assignments: mentee's needs analysis profile, cooperation code and present mentoring practice and experience evaluation. On the whole 46 of 55 teachers who provided mentor's support to student teachers submitted their mentee's needs analysis profiles and 33 (31 of them relevant to the aim of the assignment) submitted assignments of cooperation code.

Nine mentors did not submit this assignment at all – could be explained by low ICT skills to upload the assignment on MOODLE platform and very formal attitude to professional development – being present from time to time in zoom sessions. Seven mentors demonstrated very formal analysis, basically answering the questions by one or two-word responses. It could be explained by the workload and the attitude to mentor's job. It also turned out that the choice of the mentors had not been well-considered by school administration. "*I was called in headmaster's office and he said I should do this* [be mentor for student teacher]".

Five mentors have asked mentees themselves to fill in the profile and submitted them stating "*I have no time for this work, I have almost two teaching loads*" which is not the best decision to be a mentor

for someone. Clark (2012) reports that for mentoring to be effective, student teachers and their mentors should have enough time to work together and collaborate with other teachers in the school.

From the submitted cooperation codes, it was also evident that even if the mentor was very eager to help student teacher, the school timetable was not well considered for mentoring and made mentor to do twice as much work, besides in a way work behind the student teacher's back to investigate how the situation has changed: "*As I said, it is difficult because we teach at the same time. Many lessons are taught remotely. I will definitely go back to the class I was already observing to see if there is a change in leadership style, growth*".

Ideally, the mentor should be someone who teaches the same grade level or subject to be able to provide the novice teacher with practical advice on how to improve their teaching. "*I invited student teacher to observe my lessons, the student teacher came. But for her, my lessons were not interesting from the point of view that we teach the students of different age. I teach mathematics to Forms 9 – 12, and she teaches computing to Forms 4 – 6. We agreed that when I plan the "interesting" lesson, I will invite her again*".

Collaboration with a group of teachers is beneficial not only for the purposes of sharing materials or brainstorming to solve problem; it is a way for the beginner teacher to integrate as part of the group and create a support network at work. "*I suggested to the student teacher the colleagues and lessons that would be worth observing, she was ready to ask permission herself to observe. Probably neither I nor she was ready to expect a negative attitude from colleagues, unwillingness to show lessons. If I had known, I would have talked myself, I think I would be able to explain why they should allow to observe their lessons*".

Eight mentors in their assignments have mentioned mentee's name in the profile, which demonstrates a respectful attitude towards these relationships. Three mentors have filled in the profile together with mentee – another good point to demonstrate mentor's and mentee's cooperation.

On the whole mentors have described their mentees as creative, inspiring, friendly, enthusiastic, interested, however, there have been 12 cases where mentors did not feel optimistic about their mentees and about the success of their "match".

"*As the student teacher is a known person in society and is a specialist in his field, it is difficult for him to perceive recommendations for teacher's work, therefore the self-analysis of his performance is weak*".

Some mentors also express concerns about mentee's longevity at school "*X wants to get a master's degree in the coming years. He would love to return to school afterwards. As a practitioner, a professional to teach a few hours a week*" and in subject teacher's position "*In time, I would love to become a director or a politician*", "*I see that I can make some greater contribution, such as working as a school principal*".

Warning signs are present in the quoted mentee's response: "*Difficult, exhausting job – I have never felt so tired when working in another workplace as I feel now working at school. Illusions about the teacher's work have disappeared. The teacher has an important role in the educational process, but this role cannot be fully realized due to various limitations. I am not sure whether there will be a desire to continue working at school as a teacher*".

Irrelevant of very tough competition and serious admission process to get the study place in this programme some mentees also express uncertainty: "*First, I need to understand if the teacher's job is what I would like to do in the future…*".

"*Hard. I didn't think it was such a time-consuming job and there were so many unwritten responsibilities. Admittedly, I would not have applied for this programme a second time if I had known the real workload in advance*".

"*As part of this project, they want us to learn a profession and work in it. The teacher's work is perceived as a long-term job opportunity. Currently, my aim is to survive this year by satisfactorily fulfilling the requirements of three parties (School, University of Latvia, Mission Possible), hoping that the result will allow to continue working, develop, learn more deeply, and efficiently use of my time*".

Mentors also mentioned the points to improve in student teachers' performance, like subject knowledge *"being the bachelor and master's degree owners in the subject related science does not at all mean they have enough knowledge for teaching the subject at school"*, lesson planning, school documentation, filling in register, classroom management and psychological persistence. This information should also shape the content of mentor professional development courses.

The submitted assignments of cooperation code (dedicated time for cooperation, introduction to school and colleagues, lesson observation, lesson planning, feedback sessions, documentation, reflection, cooperation with other mentors, improvement of mentoring skills) revealed the lack of time for performing mentor's duties "*Twice a month I observe the lessons of the student teacher*", "*I have observed 6 lessons of my colleague, including online*" which for December is insufficient.

Two thirds of the submitted cooperation codes are vague, just responding to the statements: "*yes we meet*", "*yes, I observe*", "*Yes, I give feedback after every observed lesson*", but there are no concrete numbers and reference points of specific evidence: "*I regularly contact my mentee*" which could lead to either no contact at all or too much intervention as there are no borders set for cooperation. Like such case "*I leave the work I have started and pay attention to the student teacher if there are any urgent questions*" is unnecessary and will not give this cooperation any good – the student teacher can become helpless, and the mentor can burn out.

The time for cooperation should be clearly defined, the mentor and the student teacher should agree already at the beginning of teaching practice: when this time will be, how long, where, and what questions will be discussed. Good samples: "*We meet on Thursdays at 1 p.m.*", "*There is scheduled 1-hour meeting every Tuesday during the 4th lesson (11:00) at library*".

Based on the analysis of mentor professional development course questionnaire and reflections and mentor trainers' self-evaluations, it could be concluded that this programme should be delivered as a teamwork. It was highly appreciated by all participants "*competence of course lecturers and excellent course management in tandem*", "*very motivating, positive attitude and involvement of all participants. A good tandem of teachers, they complement and support each other. Thus, any problems (usually related to technical solutions) were immediately solved, constructive decisions were made to change the way of presentation, task, etc. Excellent collaboration skills*". What is more essential that mentor trainers are also involved in student teachers' education process and perform university mentor's role, know partnership process from inside "*they are working on a daily basis with these student teachers, I liked they shared their experience*".

The second highly appreciated aspect was the possibility to share and exchange experience. From the comment of mentor trainer "*mentors are really eager to learn about each other's experience. It looks

like they need more moderated discussion among themselves, they can come to conclusions themselves". Half of the participants mentioned this in their responses: "*The most important thing for me from these courses was that I had the opportunity to hear the experience of other colleagues (mentors), thus understanding what to do differently or what I am already doing well and correctly. Since I am also a supervisor by profession, I knew many things, but revision is good*".

"*I work as a mentor for the first year, so it was valuable to hear both the results of the research and examples from practical experience in building cooperation between the student teacher and the mentor*".

The third important point was the information and materials about mentor's duties and responsibilities. It cannot be expected that mentors that started once as teachers themselves will recall their experience and remember how it was and what were the needs of the mentee. Besides the situation has changed, students have changed, and mentors should not try to cope somehow, but they are expected to scaffold mentees efficiently in teacher's work

"*… we have been working since September, but only now we have learned exactly what is expected of us, what to pay attention to, what are our responsibilities, what methods can we use*".

The priorities of mentor professional development programme have also changed a lot, new topics that should be covered are the characteristics school-based studies, strategies for relationship building and support in hybrid teaching mode, online learning methods and evaluation according to the type of synchronous and/ or asynchronous communication, planning, organizing and conducting online learning, the implementation of the competence approach in education, solutions to teacher collaboration in their workplace. "*The programme is more useful for new mentors. Of course, experienced mentors also have useful insights and materials. For example, the evaluation of Bravo online links, the experience of other colleagues. The number of classes in the programme is definitely too small*". Therefore, also the mentors that once have completed mentor education courses could lack some things and seem to appreciate even longer programme. "*Many practical things will be useful not only for me as a mentor, but also as a subject teacher*". "*Useful materials available in the e-studies, such as a questionnaire designed to follow an online lesson*".

From the mentor trainers' perspective essential is the process of the appointing mentors "*since I was thrown into this "in September" (I don't regret it :)), it would have been good if I had more information beforehand, because then maybe I would have done something different. But this is a good challenge*". Schools that have applied for the student teacher should consider more carefully who will support this person as a mentor and adapt the timetable so the lessons of mentor and mentee do not overlap otherwise a lot of mentor duties, like mutual lesson observation, planning, evaluation will be impossible to perform.

School mentors also expressed need to have clearer picture about the organization and content of school-based study process, some of them did not know that student teachers had university mentors and alternative pathway "Mission Possible" appointed tutors that visited schools as well and observed student teachers' work. "*To me as a mentor without experience, it was not clear at the beginning of the school year (also now) who I should contact, what is the cooperation with educational institutions, university and project mentors. It would be good if there was a networking event at the beginning of the school year for the mentors to meet with the teaching practice organizers to work together to develop a collaboration plan*".

Concerning the timing issue, as it has already been stated – due to pandemic situation the mentor professional development programme started only in November when mentoring process had lasted

for almost three months, so majority of responses expressed this regret "*Clear mentor action plan and information on what is expected of the mentor (already in August)*". The frequency of meeting times especially online should be scheduled "*in the longer term, it could be once a week on the zoom platform, but the lecture time could be shorter*". The participants expressed wish to have a common platform and regular online meetings to be informed about student teachers' study requirements in higher education institutions. Mentors up to some point expressed uncertainty about post lesson feedback sessions: "*I think it would be valuable for school, university and project mentors to watch one lesson together and then discuss it with each other*".

According to the self-evaluation of mentor trainers, they have noticed a marked difference in the work experience of school appointed mentors and the contribution of involvement in the provision of school-based studies, the readiness of schools to accept student teachers on equal basis instead of the substitutes of missing teachers. Nevertheless, there is a lack of teachers in schools, the working conditions should be paid attention to as well. Student teachers have experienced several hardships that would make life hard for experienced teachers not speaking about novice teachers that are still struggling to find their way in teaching the subject knowledge. They are discouraged by mixed level classes, i.e., three Form 1 students, two Form 2 students and three Form 3 students in the English language lesson; forms of students with special needs; carrying around one's laptop and projector, not speaking about internet connection in remote areas. This is not the best way to make student teacher stay in teaching for long. Besides, probably the student teachers should be appointed to teach in the forms appropriate to their level, if they are master students in philology or science and they must work with only beginners, is a loss of resources (Andreasen, Bjørndal & Kovač, 2019).

More attention should be paid to pairing of mentors and student teachers and allocated time for mentoring, as working at the same time mentors and mentees have no time for mutual observation. Gradual transition to student-led lessons, devoting time to observation, planning together, then starting teaching would be something to look forward (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 2020). The best preferred model would be two teachers: student teacher and mentor at the same time for one class during the first semester – four months, starting from the second semester student teachers could work on their own. The first month could be devoted to observation of mentor and other teachers' work, the second month – to planning and teaching a part of lesson, third – to team teaching and teaching alone, the fourth month – to teaching alone and school and university mentor's observation.

Mentor trainers also supported the launching of cooperative online platform for all mentors involved in student teacher's teaching practice where "*some new papers, questionnaires, methods were uploaded, you would be informed about them immediately, instead of attending separate courses*".

The mentor needs to acquire new, special knowledge to support the novice teachers at the beginning of work and so that they would like to work in the educational institution for a long time.

5. Conclusions

Ultimately, mentoring improves the lives of student teachers and ensures that students involved acquire optimal teaching content and services. The better students are taught, the better they are likely to perform. Furthermore, since these student teachers get to experience teaching while still engaged in their studies, they have sufficient time both to learn from the victories and mistakes of their mentors so that by the time they are done with studies, they are either ready to become better teachers or have changed their career paths accordingly. However, the ultimate result is that students will have access to the best quality of education since their teachers will have had sufficient time to polish their skills and learn from the mistakes of their predecessors.

The content of mentor professional development programme for school-based studies differs in several aspects from the one of the concurrent teacher education models where student teacher's practice is scheduled for several and shorter periods. The teaching practice of the 2nd level professional higher education study programme "Teacher" means that students are employed to work at school as subject teachers and they need more intensive mentor's support. Thus, it is vital to train competent teachers to act as mentors and improve the professional competence of mentors of various subjects for the provision of pedagogical support for school-based studies.

Mentor professional development programme should be delivered in a teamwork of mentor trainers working with student teachers. There should be planned time for experience exchange among the participants which was a bit complicated due to the number of people – 55 and online course organization mode – zoom. Even if people were divided in breakout rooms, it took time for them to start exchange of information and share the chairing of the discussion. So first it would be preferable to introduce the participants with the group discussion strategies online and then only organize experience exchange that has been so highly valued by programme participants.

Due to constant changes in education provision and teacher education models, mentor professional development programme should also undergo constant amendments to answer the needs of specific situation. New topics should be covered concerning school-based studies, relationship building in hybrid teaching mode, synchronous and/ or asynchronous communication, planning, organizing, and conducting online learning, teacher collaboration in the implementation of the competence approach in education.

As to the process of the appointing mentors, schools should consider more carefully who can be a mentor due to experience, willingness, time availability, and teaching load. They also should be ready adapt the timetable so the lessons mentor and mentee do not overlap otherwise a lot of mentor duties will be impossible to perform.

Partnerships between schools and universities should be developed to promote a common understanding of school-based teacher education. As part of the partnership, universities should offer constant follow-up professional development programmes for mentors and host online platform for information update and cooperation.

For experienced mentors, professional learning programmes can provide career growth or competence development, which can increase teacher retention rates, as it reduces the feeling of stagnation teachers might experience after having worked for several years.

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