From Expert Primary Schoolteachers to Novice Mentors

Dr. Maria da Graca Nicoletti Mizukami
Presbyterian University Mackenzie
Rua Cardoso de Almeida 978, ap.44-A
05013-001 São Paulo – SP
Brazil
gramizuka@gmail.com,

Dr. Regina Maria Simões Puccinelli Tancredi
Presbyterian University Mackenzie
CEFT-EAHC – Rua da Consolação 930
01241-001 São Paulo/SP
retancredi@gmail.com

Dr. Aline Maria de Medeiros Rodrigues Reali
SEAD – Secretaria de Educacao a Distância
Federal University of São Carlos
13.565-905 São Carlos – SP
Brazil
alinereali@gmail.com

Abstract: *This text concerns mentors' reflections about their professional development process during their participation in the construction and development of an Online Mentoring Program (OMP). Its objectives are to: identify the mentors´ reflection types and patterns along their participation in the Program; define the content of their reflections; analyze whether they have been modified and in which ways. The successful construction and implementation of the community of mentors is both facilitated and hindered by organizational dimension, the participants´ personal characteristics, interaction patterns, how roles (of mentors and researchers) are played out, the themes/topics discussed and their relationship to personal or professional aspects and the professional identity. The mentors demonstrated a multidisciplinary knowledge, and a multifocal vision about what they need to know in order to teach novice teachers how to teach considering diverse formative needs, factors and contexts of teaching practice.*

Keywords: Online Mentoring, Professional Development of Schoolteachers, Novice Mentors, Teacher Education

Introduction

The OMP – Online Mentoring Program is a professional development program for novice primary schoolteachers. It was conducted by researchers of Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar) – Brazil and experienced primary schoolteachers as mentors. It was an online program held in the Portal dos Professores (www.portaldosprofessores.ufscar.br). The Program derived from a research project that had the objective of satisfying formative needs of novice teachers with a collaboration of the experienced teachers, having as research question:

> What are the mentors' reflections about their professional development process considering their participation in the construction and development of the Online Mentoring Program?

The objectives were established based on this question:

- To identify the types and patterns of mentors´ reflection.
- To define reflections´ contents
- To analyze whether these contents had been modified throughout the OMP development and in which ways

The Online Mentoring Program

In the OMP, we conceive mentorship (or induction period) as a set of formative activities following pre-service education that aim at assisting teachers throughout their first

professional years (until five years), although mentoring programs may apply to all phases of the teaching career.

The OMP was developed in 5 years, had the collaboration of 10 experienced primary schoolteachers (the novice mentors), and catered to 41 beginning primary school teachers who were interested in investing in their own professional development. The OMP's characteristics are: is directed to K-4 teachers with up to 5 years of experience, and is run by three researchers and ten mentors; it provided help, by means of virtual and asynchronous assistance (email communication), to the beginning schoolteachers during 6 to 30 months; each mentors was in charge of three to four novice teachers (a mentor and a novice compose a dyad), but there was no communication among the novice teachers.

The novice mentors experienced different phases in their professional development process when learning to mentor (beginning, maturation and mastery). In order to be a mentor, the expert teachers were supposed to construct a specific knowledge base and a new professional identity and be capable of helping novices to learn the school philosophy and cultural values as well as of demonstrating a repertoire of professional standards expected by the school community and public policies. Their main tasks were counsel and provide general information, suggest teaching materials, supervise practices, propose solutions to problems, and share experiences.

The OMP design - objectives, themes, methodology, and duration - was developed by the researchers that were authors of the text with the collaboration of future mentors chosen by them due to their involvement with teaching and the formation of other teachers.

The OMP may be characterized as flexible and comprising activities adapted to the novices' individual needs and workplace contexts. Each novice teacher enrolled in the program is assisted by a mentor, who guides her throughout the program, which consists of two modules. The first module had a 120-hour duration approximately in one year followed by a second stage with a 60-hour module that lasted for six months.

The OMP's construction and development adopted the constructive-collaborative perspective of qualitative research and intervention. The adopted model implied the reflection of novice teacher and mentors on their own practices, bearing in mind the characteristics of adult learning and professional contexts as recounted by the novice teachers. The constructive-collaborative perspective presents the following characteristics (Cole & Knowles, 1993):

- allows the apprehension, interpretation and description of the knowledge constructed by mentors as well their mentees;
- demands dialog, communication, exchange and reciprocal professional development on the part of teachers and researchers;
- entail collaboration, mutual understanding, consensus-building, democratic decision-making and common actions (Clark et al., 1996, 1998);
- the collaborative actions between mentors and new teachers involve interpreting data and understanding the context under consideration (Wasser & Bresler, 1996) and consenting to the coexistence of multiple ideas when signifying and building solutions to identified problems.

The option for collaborative work among researchers and mentors implies adopting procedures that favor partnership and mutual learning processes (Cole & Knowles, 1993). It

entails the systematic investigation of the collaborative work to change the social relations existing in the context/community under consideration (Aldenam, 1989).

The model considers the mentors to have voice and influence in decisions by developing a culture of encouragement and support for their learning. It was considered that when studying teachers' professional development processes it is fundamental that researchers observe, participate and discuss teaching, learning and other educational aspects with the main actors, the teachers themselves. To do this it requires access to rich representations of practice, opportunities to investigate the complexity of teaching.

Justification

Mentoring programs are increasingly common in state policy in USA and Europe and it is currently an important strategy to address new teachers' isolation, frustration, and failure. It is considered to be a promising avenue for the professional development of inexperienced professionals and of those who work as mentors themselves (Sundli, 2007).

There are many models of mentoring. Countries such as England, France, Finland, Israel, Singapore and Switzerland adopt national policies regarding mentoring (OECD, 2005).

Brazil does not have public policies on the mentoring of novice teachers and it also does not cater to the specific formation needs of the teachers in other phases of their careers. Due to this context, OMP was the first Brazilian experience that focused on educating beginners and mentors. Currently, at some public universities such as UFSCar there are projects that aims to facilitate the initial teacher formative process with the help of working teachers that were trained for this purpose.

We advocate the importance of grounding professional education in practice, not necessarily by locating professional education in schools but by making the work of practitioners at the center of professional study. Therefore, the mentoring program was organized to be distance delivered with internet support.

Mentoring novice teachers is a challenging activity because of a number of factors associated with the interactive processes between mentors and mentees: conflicting ideas and attitudes; lack of confidence; partial information; incompatible schedules, and communication difficulties. Other sources of tensions and dilemmas are related to the professional culture of the novices´ schools.

We assume that the representations of practice include all the different ways in which the work of practitioners and what they think is made visible, as the stories told by practitioners about practice, to written narratives and cases of practice, cooperate with their peers in follow-up meetings on mentoring practices, taking shared responsibilities in the formation of beginners, among other things.

Theorethical Framework

At OMP, we adopted some theoretical reference: teacher learning and professional development (Shulman, 1986, 1987; Ball & Cohen, 1999; Borko, 2004); the first years of teaching characteristics (Grossman, Thompson & Valencia 2001; Zanten & Grospiron 2001; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009); mentoring processes (Weiss & Weiss, 1999; Wang & Odell

2002; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005); reflection on pedagogical action (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Rodgers, 2002; El-Dib, 2007).

In this paper specifically we will present references on the concept of collaboration, essential to the understanding of the formation, performance and reflection of the beginner mentors.

According to Slater (2010), “collaboration, whereas it is not a new idea, has provided the mechanisms that purport to change the way school problems are approached” (p.1). It is important to consider the need of culture evolution and change among the institutions and people in them as also the need for consistency and the avoidance of dissonance be controlled. This is a very complex initiative because it involves different cultural worlds as also interests on the same project (Slater, 2010). There is a proper way to "see" and "act" for the participants related to their culture of belonging and which remains in the interactions, negotiations and implementation of the collaborative process.

The collaborative mode of interaction between teachers/mentors and researchers emphasizes the importance of establishing multiple purposes and interpretations. A constructive sense in this kind of interaction is rendered by the presupposition that teaching is an ever-changing process. In this perspective, situations seen as dilemmatic or problematic ask for collective decision-making and problem-solving processes. Teachers are involved in the investigation of process lived by themselves (Cole & Knowles, 1993). It goes, therefore, beyond the idea, common in the field of educational research, that teachers are subjects, not producers of educational knowledge (Zeichner & Noffke, 2002).

In this research approach, it is fundamental to have the collaboration among participants in both formative and investigative tasks. This collaboration may be characterized as a dialog that requires the participants’ engagement in conversation, exchange and reciprocal professional development. True collaboration allows mutual understanding and consensus, democratic decision-making and common action (Clark et al., 1996; 1998). It entails the predisposition for inquiry aimed at generating new knowledge and addressing everyday school problems.

Exposing needs, reflecting and interpreting reality according to the context where they belong – characteristics of the formative/investigation processes carried out in this work – are also collaborative actions. In these actions, multiple points of view are considered to be in dynamic tension as a group of people seeks to make sense of themes, problems and meanings of a work field (Wasser & Bresler, 1996).

These actions can promote the construction of a professional learning community, understood as a community of professionals, which, through interactions, modify or learn new actions and transform their professional identities. The literature indicates that these communities play an important role in teachers’ responsiveness to public educational policies, commitment to the construction of more adequate teaching conditions for their students, and consequently in the changes experienced when teaching (Mizukami et al., 2010).

When the focus is on teachers’ individual changes, the proposals usually emphasize knowledge of subject matter, understanding the thinking of students, instructional practices and conceptions that sustain them. When the focus is on collective contexts formed by people

who are engaged in a process of collective learning, they share regularly the same goal focusing on what they do or are learning to do. These professional communities are important spaces for teachers to invest in themselves as a person and as a professional. Teachers´ professional development processes should complementarily consider individuals formative needs and the professional group in the school institution or other arrangement demands that adds teachers around a common goal (Borko, Elliot & Uchiyama, 2002), such as observed with mentors and researchers in our study.

In professional communities, teachers can rebuild their individual professional identity, build a group identity, define norms of interaction, and understand and accept individual differences over time. They develop, in a negotiated manner, understanding that teacher's learning and student's learning are processes interrelated and that there should be a collective responsibility for individual growth of different participants. As the nature of teaching is articulated within the school context, the interactions between school staff, dialogue and trust relationships are important in achieving cohesion of objectives and practices among community members.

A group can only be characterized as a community when its members are socially interdependent, participate collectively in discussion and decision-making processes, and share practices that both define and nourish the community. The members of learning or practice communities should create, expand, and share knowledge about their practices as well as develop their individual competencies (Galluci, 2003).

We consider that if teachers have the opportunity to work in groups (with shared goals), exchange ideas, negotiate responsibilities (Galluci, 2003), expose their knowledge bases as well as come into contact with connections between theory and practices (Weiss & Weiss, 1999) they can contribute to each other's professional growth and mutual enrichment.

Procedure

As research data sources we had: e-mails exchanged between the mentors and their novice teachers, between the mentors themselves and between the mentors and the researchers; reflective journals of mentors and novices; the transcriptions of weekly meetings between the mentors and researchers; autobiographical accounts and written narratives.

In order to promote the mentors' professional development and the investigation of its processes the researchers conducted weekly meetings with them that were held at the university. These meetings were recorded and transcribed.

With the purpose of defining topics for the meetings, the mentors would send a weekly report on the activities they had carried out with novice teachers under their responsibility along with a reflective journal.

To the mentors, these meetings were important due to the analysis and collaboration of the formative process of the beginner teachers. For the researchers, the weekly meetings allowed the analysis of reflective journals and reports and electronic messages exchanged by them and their novice teachers. Besides, it allowed the analysis of the interactions between mentors and novice teachers, included activities such as oral presentations about the mentoring carried out by the former, discussions about themes of collective or individual interest, analysis of theoretical articles, and seminaries.

These activities were devised to promote new professional learning as well as assist the researchers in investigating its processes.

The data were comprised of a set of narratives and it was necessary to:

- read them every week to establish their themes and focus;
- systematize them along a timeline to facilitate the definition of what each novice was "talking" about with her mentor and what was discussed at the weekly meetings;
- compile the information about the novice teachers and their interactions with their mentors into a weekly synthesis , which provided issues to be discussed at the weekly meeting between the mentors and researchers;
- compile into a weekly synthesis the information about the researches and their interactions with the mentors;
- establish the mentors professional learning trajectories, or timelines, with the intent to map the opportunities promoted by the OMP;
- analyze different kinds of narratives seeking to identify: the mentor´s conceptions, their knowledge base, knowledge demands and learning associated with the highlighted practices; characterize the difficulties faced and the ways to overcome them.

We highlight that this process enabled the delineation of the mentors' professional development trajectory and the process of construction of their professional identity as trainers.

To illustrate, the elements that were important in the process of formation of mentors are illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 1 – The OMP and related conceptual areas

Some Results

The mentors´ narratives showed that the expert teachers' lived different phases (beginning, maturation and mastery) in their professional development processes to learn to be a mentor and each one with specific concerns, fears, dilemmas and feelings.

The data were analyzed according the following dimensions: organizational, contents of reflection, participants´ personal characteristics, professional profile, interactions patterns, and roles of the researchers and of the mentors.

The *group norms* were developed spontaneously, over the course of time. Slowly the mentors and researchers built a community identity and norms of interaction. In this process, we sought solutions to conflicts and to overcome it. Each member took the responsibility for the own professional development process, the other mentors´ and those of the novice teachers. The narration of mentor Cassia illustrates this aspect.

> The personal development came through the coexistence with the other mentors and with researchers involved. With this coexistence, I could develop my ability to understand and express ideas, thoughts, and concepts. The meetings in democratic environment, harmonious, relaxed, always favored the debate and discussions of all topics. Always I had the freedom to express my opinions and make my interventions. I also have learned a lot by listening to other mentors. (Mentor Cassia) [1]

An example of *theoretical disagreement and respect for others´ ideas* was marked when the mentors and researchers discussed concepts and practices of literacy, one of the most requested topics by the novices. The group of mentors and researches had not reached an agreement on which teaching processes were "better". It was decided, in this case, that each mentor would lead the process with their beginners according to their own beliefs, experience and knowledge. An example was the manifestation of Mentor Cassia in the group meeting:

> I am having trouble working with beginning teacher A and I would like to socialize with the group. Asking for help once, we have to recognize our limitations. I fell into my own trap. I have asked for help with planning for her and now I do not know how to approach the situation because there are many problems. (...) I want to ask for help from mentors Dulce and Maria Inês who are specialists.

The *norms included the respect for the knowledge and practice of peers* whether or not they had the same teaching philosophy, and they developed sharing strategies and helped when a mentor requested. Gradually, researchers and mentors acknowledged the importance of a space designed for intentional sharing of knowledge, experience, acting aimed to build a vision negotiated about the novices and their contexts.

Partnerships between two or three mentors were born spontaneously or on behalf of interest of one of them and were favored by the relaxed atmosphere and respect existing in the group, resulting in a culture of sharing, exchange and responsibility.

> In these weeks meeting we discussed again the OMP format. Even after one year and a half we continue to construct our way. This is very interesting. We evaluate, reflect and seek for news steps. The program was modified (...) and then we asked ourselves: How long would it take? What would the mentees be capable to do at the end of the program? (....). We noticed from the beginning that the OMP is not a course that begins and end in a definite data. We know that each mentor-novice relationship is specific once each mentee shows personal formative needs. (…) Considering these circumstances and after several analysis and reflections, the ideas were clearer. This is very good because everybody (including myself) had doubt about the OMP shutdown criteria. (…) Everything now is clearer, more objective. I liked it very much. We need precise shutdown criteria in spite of the focus of OMP the teaching professional

[1] The excerpts from the narratives were kept in this paper, such as manifest by the mentors.

> development it does not have definite previous contours (each novice is a different person that lives and work in specific context). (Mentor Dulce)

In the case of *professional issues*, the clarification of doubts and dilemmas, the request and offer of aid, self-analysis and reporting of activities done and discussion of the work of other researchers and mentors encouraged the approaching between the participants of the group. This variable failed to strongly affect the group in question, because the flexibility of the curriculum and the participating total time of beginners in the OMP favored the acceptance of differences. An example of this variable can be identified in the following narrative:

> … Regina [mentor] had asked about which would be the best way to define the selection of a novice to a mentor. It followed an excitement moment when all the mentors want to have access to the novices´ files with the objective to choose one that is suitable to their profile. After a little confusion, it was decided that the best way to match a novice with a mentor would be adopting a raffle. In reality it seems that we didn't want (Is it because of fear or insecurity?) to assume an eventual didactics or pedagogical difficulties that could happen. It could be a problem, which we feel unable to help. I believe that it won't happen because the interventions will be discussed in the weekly meetings. In these occasions everyone can suggest, can exchange ideas and experiences. We would discuss the best strategies considering the profile of the novice classroom. (Mentor Maria Inês)

Other excerpts from narratives of mentors exemplify the *contents of their reflective processes* as follows:

> ... I was very apprehensive expecting the contact with the novice teachers; but I believe that everything that is "new" in our lives causes us some discomfort, great anxiety and a lot of insecurity. (...) I remember the early meetings, where the coordinators would distribute the beginner teachers to the mentors, my heart was racing and I hoped also that no mentee was given for me. The meeting started with the coordinators saying the names of mentors and their mentees and there was my name ... I was very nervous ... I imagined it would not get because I was still unsure how to communicate via online, despite having had the training I needed. (Mentor Monica, 1st year) [Fears and uncertainties related to the first experiences in mentoring]
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> My participation in this period on the OMP contributed to my professional development because I learned a lot. The debates and discussions were intense, deep, all about the difficulties of beginning teachers. As a teacher, I understood many unconscious actions on my pedagogical practices and as a principal I could better understand my school beginner teachers, their distress, their longings…. (Mentor Cassia, 3rd year) [Contributions of the OMP to the professional development]
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> Many were the lessons learned from the learning period as a mentor (…) until the moment in which I have to analyze and conduct elaborate reflections in order to systematize the process experienced by me as a mentor. In doing so, I reiterate that the most difficult time is the shutdown of the novice, although some criteria as determinants for this to occur. The construction of a bonding becomes an impediment although it is essential for the interaction between mentor-mentee be consolidated with more confidence and credibility. I think that the longer the duration of contact between mentor and the novice becomes more painful to formalize this shutdown. Likewise, the establishment of a bond can create a cognitive excessive dependence on

the mentee to his mentor at the point of being difficult to assess whether the novice teacher actually already manifest autonomy to pursue alone. To assess these situations with objectivity and transparency I need to be able to maintain a distance and not get involved in personal situations. (Mentor Dulce, 3rd year) [Difficulties and dilemmas related to the ending of the mentoring process]

I also think that the interaction of the group to share their expertise and knowledge was a prominent factor for learning new procedures - working in partnership allows those who teach also learn to have to revise their concepts and systematize their knowledge - and the development of attitudes - respect, solidarity and dialogue on the interaction with different people. [interaction with colleagues] I really think we have come quite far. We find that the act of recording should not be considered a mechanical act, mandatory and purely administrative but a procedure essential for us to rethink and evaluate the whole process of teaching and learning that occurs when we act the role of mentor. Indeed, narratives and diaries are inserted into a new learning environment when they allow you to put in evidence their analyzes and reflections for discussion and consequent change in their practice. From a problem situation, there is a need for more elaborate discussion and analysis that leads to a reflection and this, in turn, requires a decision, an action plan that will help forwarding the solution of this problem more discernment and reflection. (Mentor Maria Inês, 3rd year) [Importance of the written narratives]

It is the practice of this exercise - relate these issues from reflections - which will contribute to make me a more experienced professional. But we also have to consider that all knowledge acquired should not be isolated, the exchange is important that this knowledge can be shared in the collective. The meetings conducted every Thursday just let it happen. (Mentor Maria Teresa, 3rd year) [Importance of the knowledge constructed by the group of mentors]

The previous examples reveal that the themes/topics discussed and their relationship to personal or professional aspects - as regards professional themes, actions – such as expressing doubts and dilemmas, asking for and offering assistance, reporting and analyzing one's own activities, and discussing those carried out by the researchers and other mentors – appear to bring participants closer together.

The mentors' reflexive process, exemplified by the previous narrations, was altered throughout the mentorship and occurred in different levels and in an idiosyncratic way. Some mentors revealed broader reflections based on theory and on their practices of teaching and mentorship while others established immediate reflections, focused on solving the problems presented by their mentees.

In both cases, the following dimensions permeated (either facilitating or hindering) the successful construction and implementation of reflexive processes and the construction of the community of mentors and researchers.

In this process, the following variables were observed and classified:

– *The organizational* - related to the precise definition of participants' roles (being a mentor and being a researcher) and of interlocution loci and occasions. Absent or imprecise definition of roles (due to their fluid nature) may hamper the

establishment of fruitful interactions, especially if group environment and climate are not based on mutual respect.

- *The participants' personal characteristics* - we noticed that authoritarian personalities, inflexible and defensive, and persons that have difficulty in publicly expressing their points of view may obstruct interactions among group members (as well as mentor-novice teacher interactions).
- *The professional identity (profile)* - it was evidenced that some mentors– for several reasons – did not build or were not capable of building a teacher educator identity.
- *The interaction patterns* - established by participants. Isolation patterns cause participants to distance themselves from the group and hinder much needed interactions.
- *The way roles (of mentors and researchers) are played out* - i.e., how practices take place. In this case, actions associated with listening, analyzing, suggesting, questioning, contradicting, working a team, ignoring or changing roles, replacing, submitting, and leading seem to be very important.

Final Remarks

The successful construction and implementation of the community of mentors is both facilitated and hindered by organizational dimension, the participants´ personal characteristics, interaction patterns, how roles (of mentors and researchers) are played out, the themes/topics discussed and their relationship to personal or professional aspects and the professional identity.

Along the OMP the mentors demonstrated a multidisciplinary knowledge, and a multifocal vision about what they need to know in order to teach novice teachers how to teach considering diverse formative needs, factors and contexts of teaching practice.

The study suggests that the education activities carried out by the research group present the following characteristics: they are situated; involve social interaction processes; and are distributed, since no individual has all the knowledge and skills needed for individual teaching (Clark et al, 1996, 1998; Cole & Knowles, 1993; Borko, 2004; Galucci, 2003; Slater, 2010; Sandli, 2007).

It has been noticed that collective examination of ideas enables the distribution of knowledge so coordinated actions upon someone's existing professional knowledge can promote the construction of new knowledge for others.

This process is most likely to occur with explicit knowledge because it has been decoded by the group of mentors or because it can be effortlessly put into words. It seems clear that a collaborative culture – that accepts and invests in multiplicity of knowledge and conceptions, encourages expression of professional discourse and sharing of ideas by mapping out constructed professional knowledge and existing gaps, as happens in the research group under consideration – is of extreme importance.

The meetings between the researchers and mentors could be considered as a powerful learning source. This is not to mean that the mentors' professional learning should be limited to these instances. In the case in question, professional learning equally occurs in the virtual contexts provided by the Mentorship Program, the electronic correspondence with novice teachers, the study of pertinent literature and the analysis of teaching cases as well in their other professional contexts (e.g. schools).

We noticed that the development of dialog-based and practice-orientated educational programs for mentors provided opportunities for the abandonment of models experienced or received in other educational contexts and the collective construction of reflective practices leading to change.

It was evidenced that teaching and learning in the course of mentorship improved when mentors and researchers encouraged one another to question their routines, look into their teaching and learning conceptions, search for alternatives when dealing with demands, and actively pursue their professional development.

How professional learning communities can provide intellectual, social and material resources conducive to teacher learning and practice reconstruction may be understood when the facilitating and hindering variables involved are considered. Moreover, strong and open teacher communities may be fostered by educational programs if the aforementioned dimensions are taken into account.

Related to the construction of a professional identity (profile), the fifth cultural variable, some mentors rebuilt their identities as teachers, connecting it to the teacher educator identity, expanding their cultural identity.

> We do not know if it is possible to learn to be a mentor before being one. Therefore, the development process takes place in service. However, some personal characteristics are necessary for a teacher become a good mentor: to be worry about other people and to wish that other has success; write off from your resume envy, competitive spirit, pride and everything that can create barriers in a good relationship; accept people as they are and try to understand them in their thoughts and attitudes divergent of yours; always study and share the findings ... (Speech synthesis of mentors in one of the final meetings of the project).

From these excerpts we conclude that to change the practices of teachers and their mentors is not enough domain knowledge or to master new theories or teaching strategies. It is essential to change the concepts, theories, supporting practices, and processes of construction of practical knowledge.

To be an experienced teacher is not predictive to become a mentor. The absence or inaccuracy in defining the role of mentor and misunderstanding its complex nature may hinder the establishment of productive interactive conversations with the mentees and other mentors, especially if the environment and mood are not characterized by mutual respect. Hence, there is the importance of the organizational and professional identity dimensions.

The interaction patterns were essential aspects for the consolidation of a professional learning community of mentors and researchers. The way the dialogs are conducted and maintained can inhibit and silence their member voices or can empower them. It has been noticed that collective examination of ideas, conceptions and practices enables the distribution of knowledge so that a coordinated action upon someone’s existing professional knowledge may promote the construction of new knowledge for others and a collective knowledge base.

This process most likely occurs with respect to explicit knowledge because it has been decoded by the mentors and researchers or because it can be effortlessly put into words. It

seems clear the importance of a collaborative culture that accepts and invests in diversity of knowledge and conceptions, encourages expression of professional discourse and sharing of ideas by mapping out constructed professional knowledge and existing gaps, as happens in the group in consideration.

The diversity of ideas, conceptions and practices can lead to tensions that impact collaboration. Appreciating individual and professional diversity can facilitate the community communication and the compromises needed to negotiate mutual decisions. Being attentive to the human and professional needs of all community members showed to be another element to be considered in the mentors and researchers community grow process.

Researchers wishing to promote the building of teachers' learning communities should closely monitor this process of identity construction roles and intervene whenever necessary so that there is minimal disruption in the process.

These cases highlight the importance of respecting individual cultures, contextual variables and intervening variables in this kind of initiative. Taking into account the collective cultures is vitally important once provided a pathway to work with open plans despite goals being not well defined.

We conclude this text with a narrative of mentor Maria Ines which happened during the development of OMP and that clearly illustrates the process of teaching a beginner teacher how to teach.

> Being a mentor was a very rich learning process. Each beginning teacher with his uniqueness was crucial for the role of each mentor was being built throughout the process. (Mentor Maria Inês)

This study points to the complexity of mentoring activities and, consequently, of educating professionals to perform this function.

The results obtained in this study enabled a more detailed conception of what constitutes the knowledge of a mentor or teacher educator in Internet-mediated mentoring processes.

The data are relevant in view of the paucity of studies on teacher educators in Brazil.

Moreover, the proposed systematization may serve as foundation for the analysis of formative processes of mentors and other educators as well as for their design.

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