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In-service teachers mentoring teacher trainees: (Not always) constructive dialogue

ALEKSANDRA SZYMAŃSKA-TWOREK
AGNIESZKA TURZAŃSKA

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Abstract

The paper concerns the topic of student teaching in the context of pre-service teacher training. More specifically, the paper examines the nature of relationship between in-service teachers who undertake the role of practicum supervisor and student teachers, potential entrants into teaching. Relationships are a two-way interaction and the quality of dialogue depends on the engagement of both parties, which means that it is both supervisor (mentor) and teacher trainee (mentee) who are responsible for the development of this relationship. The aim of the present study was, however, to explore the role of mentor in directing the mentoring process, engaging student teachers in dialogue and developing a working relationship with them. The respondents were English philology students who had elected teacher training as part of their degree. The research instruments – questionnaire and interview – sought to gather data on various aspects of respondents' student teaching: primarily, the relation with their mentors, but also more general issues, such as their contacts with the school headteacher and the atmosphere at school. The results of the study show that while some mentors provide high-quality supervision and develop a genuine connection with their mentees, for about one-fifth of respondents

cooperation with their supervisor was difficult. What we see as one of the problems is that the function and role of practicum supervisor is not regulated in any formal way. Supervisors are not informed on what is expected from them and are not prepared or trained for this function. Whether teacher trainees conduct their student teaching in a supportive environment seems to solely depend on the mentor's personality traits and good will.

Keywords

student teaching, student teacher, teacher trainee, supervisor, mentor, mentee

Praktyki nauczycielskie: (Nie zawsze) konstruktywny dialog pomiędzy praktykantem a mentorem

Abstrakt

Artykuł dotyczy tematu praktyk nauczycielskich, a dokładniej relacji pomiędzy studentem odbywającym praktyki w szkole a nauczycielem (zwanym również opiekunem praktyk oraz mentorem), który podejmuje się opieki nad praktykantem. Choć za sukces każdej relacji odpowiedzialne są obie ze stron, w tym przypadku praktykant oraz opiekun praktyk, celem badania przedstawionego w tym artykule jest przyjrzenie się w jaki sposób opiekun praktyk wspiera praktykanta oraz czy wykazuje chęć i zaangażowanie w zbudowanie dialogu ze swoim podopiecznym. Wyniki badania pokazują, że podczas gdy zdarzają się relacje praktykant-mentor oparte na prawdziwej więzi i poczuciu partnerstwa, około 20 % respondentów przyznało, że ich relacja z opiekunem była trudna. W tym przypadku źródłem problemów była albo zbyt bierna postawa opiekuna praktyk (np. nauczyciel nagminnie wychodził z sali, gdy praktykant prowadził lekcje) lub niemiłe traktowanie praktykanta przez opiekuna (np. nauczyciel przerywał praktykantowi lekcję i poprawiał go na oczach uczniów).

Słowa kluczowe

praktyki nauczycielskie, praktykant, nauczyciel języka angielskiego, opiekun praktyk w szkole, dialog, relacja

1. Introduction

Student teaching[1] is arguably one of the most important components of teacher education as it helps teacher trainees[2] take a decision if they want to continue in the field. An abundant literature available attests to the critical role of student teaching in the professional development of prospective teachers (e.g. Evertson and Smithey 2000, Farrell 2008, Hobson 2002, Mihułka 2016). The relationships and experiences that occur during this period are said to highly influence the formation of teacher identity of professionals-to-be (Smagorinsky et al. 2004). It is the interaction between three parties that in particular contributes to the course and success (or lack thereof) of a practicum experience, these parties being: student teacher, supervising teacher and pupils (Mihułka 2016). Of particular interest to this paper is the relationship formed between student teacher and supervisor. More specifically, the paper explores the role that supervisors have in building this relationship and engaging students in constructive dialogue.

[1] Student teaching or practicum refers to an obligatory component of teacher training programmes in which students are required to spend time in the classroom (both observing and carrying out classes on their own) under the supervision of an in-service teacher.

[2] Students completing the student teaching portion of their education programme are referred to in this paper as teacher trainees, mentees, student teachers or students. The term 'pupils' is used to denote learners in school settings. A classroom-based teacher who has undertaken the role of practicum supervisor is referred to as mentor, supervising teacher or supervisor.

2. Mentoring: definition, mentor's role and responsibilities

School-based mentoring can be defined as "one-to-one support of a novice or less experienced practitioner (mentee) by a more experienced practitioner (mentor), designed primarily to assist the development of the mentee's expertise and to facilitate their induction into the culture of the profession […]" (Hobson et al. 2009: 207). A different definition presents mentoring as "a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and a beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both" (Healy and Weichert 1990: 17). The latter perspective points out that mentoring may act as professional development for both mentee and mentor. This theme will be revisited later on in the paper.

Since the 1980s, mentoring has come to serve a prominent role in supporting the initial preparation and induction of aspiring teachers in many parts of the world (Hobson et al. 2009). Mentoring is considered an effective, perhaps even the most effective form of assisting student teachers in their first and vulnerable months of a classroom experience (Marable and Raimondi 2007). Because the interaction between both parties during student teaching is close and unique, the beliefs and future teaching of mentees are reported to be considerably in-fluenced by their mentors (Evertson and Smithey 2000). The function of supervisor also occurs and plays an important role in the Polish educational context, although it is not formally included in law regulations and generally unnoticed and unappreciated (Walkiewicz 2006).

Although mentoring is said to play a crucial role in the development and socialization of student teachers, Feiman-Nemser (2003) points out that the presence of a mentor alone is not sufficient. Successful mentoring depends heavily on the personality traits, skills and knowledge of supervisors. Mentors need to be supportive, approachable, non-judgmental, empathetic, and trustworthy; they need to have a positive demeanour and take an active interest in mentees' problems (Rippon and Martin

2006). A further quality of a good mentor, enumerated by Feiman-Nemser (2003), is the ability to make complex tasks and practices understandable to prospective teachers. Crasborn et al. (2008) point out the need for mentors to equip mentees with reflective skills and to engage them in reflective practice. A further responsibility of supervisors is to introduce student teachers into the culture of the school, i.e. familiarizing student teachers with school documentation, rules and regulations, letting them complete the register (including online register), letting them correct tests and give grades or letting them take part in break duty and various events and staff meetings (Mihułka 2016; Walkiewicz 2006). Such experience is likely to help student teachers navigate a new school environment, reduce theory-practice dualism, contribute to the development of a working relationship between mentor and mentee and generally provide aspiring teachers with a positive entrance into the profession.

Needless to say, the presence of even the most engaged, dedicated mentor does not guarantee that practicum is going to prove successful. As has already been said, mentoring is a relationship or dialoguing between an expert and protégé and the quality of this dialogue is also dependent upon the figure of mentee. Student teachers need to be willing to be mentored (Roehrig et al. 2008) and engaged in what they are doing (Lindgren 2006). Hudson (2013a: 109) enumerates the following personal attributes and practices that mentees should have: enthusiasm, commitment to pupils, love of learning, resilience, being open to feedback, being prepared for classes, practicing reflective thinking, understanding school and university policies and building a teaching repertoire, to name but a few. To conclude, successful mentoring is dependent on the effort and contribution made by the two key stakeholders: mentor and mentee. It is the interaction between these two parties, the genuine connection based on continuous feedback and reflection, that is likely to bring benefits to both sides.

3. Mentor-mentee relationship

Hudson (2013a: 115) calls teaching "a relationship-based career" because, as he points out, teachers are in continual interaction with pupils, colleagues, parents and the public at large. He further states (Hudson 2013b: 2) that relationships and relationship building constitute a linchpin of the teaching profession. Taking student teaching as a case in point, it is argued that the effectiveness of the mentoring process is dependent on the strength of the mentor-mentee relationship (Mihułka 2016, Pitton 2006, Timoštšuk and Ugaste 2010). As has already been stated, it is both supervisor and student teacher who need to contribute to the development of this relationship. However, because of the hierarchical nature of practicum, with mentors holding the balance of power and possessing considerably more teaching experience, it can be argued that it is them who need to be particularly active in building mentoring partnership (Hudson 2013b).

The quality of the mentoring partnership is linked to the level of support provided by the mentors (Hudson 2013b). This support does not need to manifest itself in the provision of ready-made solutions; instead, supervising teachers are expected to help student teachers through the process of dialogue and reflection (Evertson and Smithey 2001, Lindgren 2006). Among the most reassuring and helpful mentor actions are: providing constructive feedback, engaging novices in mean-ingful dialogue, being available and, more generally, "taking the time to develop strong collegial relationships with their mentees" (Beutel and Spooner-Lane 2009: 358). The effectiveness of the mentoring process is facilitated by mentor's personal traits, such as friendly disposition, empathy, attentive listening and approachability. It is in fact a teachers' personality that is valued by student teachers over their professional traits (Rippon and Martin 2006: 90). Last but not least, because a visible hierarchy existing in many schools puts novices at the bottom of the 'social ladder', what student teachers seek in the mentor-mentee

relationship is being treated with due respect as future teachers, not merely as students (Rippon and Martin 2006).

Given the crucial role of the mentor in the development and sustenance of a positive mentor-mentee relationship, it seems reasonable that in-service teachers should be allowed to decide whether they want to become mentors or not. Rippon and Martin (2006: 91) report that many teachers in their study were "conscripted" by headteachers to accept university students for their practicum and had "their arms twisted". The respondents in their study admitted that the mentoring relationship suffered as a result and expressed a decisive preference to be mentored by teachers who choose to serve this function. The research literature is replete with documented cases of dysfunctional mentor-mentee relationship and attests to the negative consequences of poor mentoring. Hauge (2000) reports that 20 % of student teachers in his study experienced communication difficulties with their mentors, which made their practicum a distressing experience. The problems reported by student teachers in various studies range from mentors' laissez-faire approach to mentoring, e.g. being generally unavailable (Smith and Maclay 2007) or denying university students access to school documentation (Mihułka 2016), to what may be considered as an abuse of power. An example of the latter is Yuan (2016) who reports on a student teacher whose mentor limited her teaching time, delegating her to mark pupils' writing in the staffroom.

Perhaps the instances of poor mentoring practice would not occur, if supervising teachers had more awareness of the benefits mentoring can bring to them. While the benefits student teachers derive from mentoring are readily reiterated in the literature, mentoring is a "symbiotic relationship in which mentors also gain from the mentoring process" (Beutel and Spooner-Lane, 2009: 351). There has been an ongoing line of research that demonstrates a positive impact that mentoring has on the professional development of mentors (e.g. Hudson 2013c, Lindgren 2006, Lopez-Real and Kwan 2005, Pitton 2006, Rajuan, Beijaard and Verloop 2007, Szymańska-Tworek 2022, Walkiewicz 2006). Through their contacts with mentees, men-tors are

believed to enhance their communication skills and develop leadership roles (Hudson 2013c). Practicum supervisors have an opportunity to get knowledge about current trends in teacher education, political trends in education, recent literature and teaching methods (Lindgren 2006). As university students are often skilled in information and communication technology, mentors can make use of their digital competence. Last but not least, mentors who provide mentees with regular post-lesson feedback can treat it as a reference point for reflection on their own teaching competence and, as a consequence, a springboard for professional and personal growth. However, although literature (e.g. Crandall 2001) enumerates mentoring as one of possible tools of professional development, it seems that it is rarely perceived as one.

The following section of the paper sets forth the methodology of our own study intended to examine the relationship dynamics between mentors and mentees.

4. The study

4.1. Rationale

The rationale behind this study was twofold. First, we take the position, following Bradbury and Koballa (2008), that because a mentor has a strong influence on the beliefs and future practices of student teacher, it is important to shed light on the nature of their partnership. Second, the inspiration were findings of our previous study (Szymańska-Tworek and Turzańska 2016), which pointed to many difficulties student teachers experience during their practicum. What drew our attention was that respondents enumerated the problematic aspects of student teaching and described how they struggled with them, but never mentioned the role of supervisors in overcoming these difficulties. Generally speaking, our impression was that at least some student teachers were left to their own devices during the period of practicum and received little or no assistance. This, dovetailed with the negative aspects of mentoring discussed in

the literature review above, motivated us to ask a question about the role of supervising teachers in developing and sustaining a mentoring relationship with aspiring teachers.

4.2. The aim of the study and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore the nature of relationship between practising teachers who serve as mentors to students, potential entrants into teaching, during their practicum. More specifically, although we believe that it is both mentor and mentee who are responsible for the development of this relationship, the aim of the present study is to explore the role of mentor in directing the mentoring process, engaging student teachers in dialogue and developing a working relationship with them. The following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the nature of relationship between mentor and mentee?
2. In what ways do mentors develop and sustain a relationship with their mentees?

4.3. The sample

The participants on whom this paper focuses are students of the English philology at the University of Silesia in Katowice who had elected teacher training as part of their degree. In the sample of 67 respondents, 21 were second-year students of the BA programme, 20 were third-year students of the BA pro-gramme and 26 were second-year students of the MA programme. Gender distribution of the participants was 56 females and 11 males. All participants ranged in age from 20 to 26 years, with a mean of 22.6 years of age. Student teaching is an obligatory component of teacher education coursework and all participants had at least some part of their practicum completed at the moment of the study. As some respondents had been under the guidance of a few mentors throughout their practicum, when answering questions for this study, they were asked to

refer to the supervising teacher from the period of the second year of the BA programme, i.e. the time when student teachers carried out their first lesson, as a few statements in the questionnaire refer to this experience.

4.4. The instrument

To meet the aim of the study we decided to use two tools for measurement: questionnaire and interview. Respondents were asked to complete a web-based questionnaire (see Appendix) which sought to gather data on various aspects of their student teaching: primarily, the relation with their mentors, but also more general questions, such as the atmosphere at school and their contacts with the school headteacher. The questionnaire included 28 questions, most of which had the form of statements to which students were asked to respond on a 5-point scale, from 1 = strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree. The respondents were also encouraged to make comments on the statements, although this was not obligatory. The final part of the questionnaire included demographic questions, designed to collect background information about the respondents: their age, gender and the current year of study.

A further data collection tool was group interviews. The point of departure for these sessions was a question about how respondents assess their relation with supervisors. However, participants were also encouraged to freely contribute to any topic connected with student teaching that seemed important to them. To optimize the opportunity for honest reflections, respondents were assured of their anonymity and the interviews were not audio-recorded. The researcher (the first author of this paper) took notes of what was being said throughout the sessions and enriched her notes immediately after the discussions had finished. The interviews were conducted in Polish, respondents' mother tongue, to make it easier for students to verbalize their thoughts.

4.5. Findings and discussion

4.5.1. Questionnaire data

The questionnaire starts with a set of questions concerning the first contact student teachers had with mentors. 79 % of respondents stated they had no problems finding a teacher who would accept them as mentees for the period of student teaching. One out of ten students admitted they encountered problems at this stage: “A few teachers rejected my request, one of them specifically stated that she did not like having student teachers because they take up too much time. A different teacher agreed to accept me, but changed his mind after a few days”. It was stated by a few respondents that the decision to accept student teachers was imposed on teachers by school authorities and teachers had no possibility to refuse: “It was the headmaster's decision, I think the teacher couldn't say 'no'”; “Actually, she wasn't so happy. Because my college and primary school had an agreement, she was somehow obliged to do this”. As many as 81 % of respondents answered affirmatively to the statement that the mentor was enthusiastic about having them as student teachers in her/his classroom, whereas 10.5 % responded negatively. When asked if supervising teachers familiarised them with school documentation, 52.3 % of parti-cipants responded affirmatively, while almost a third gave a negative answer. 55 % of students stated that the supervisor did not allow them to complete school documentation (e.g. write down lesson topics in the register); while 31.3 % were given such a possibility. The following quotations reflect the respondents’ experience in this respect: “The teacher let me complete the register every time when I was conducting lessons. It was very nice because now I know how to complete some school docu-mentation”; “The supervisor also taught me how to use the so-called ‘electronic register”; “She showed me the register, but I couldn’t even check the attendance”; “I was not allowed to do that because I should not know the teacher's password”; “I had no chance to do so, because there should be only the main

teacher's signature and handwriting". 64.2 % of respondents confirmed that at the beginning of the practicum supervisor provided them with general information about the school, school life, lessons and/or pupils, while nearly one fifth of respondents (19.4 %) were not provided with this kind of introduction. 55.2 % of participants stated that supervisor encouraged them to use the staffroom; 37.3 % responded to this question negatively. 44.8 % of respondents confessed they did not feel welcome and relaxed in this place: "I was allowed to enter the staffroom but I felt more like an intruder there"; "Other teachers looked at me and they seemed rather suspicious"; "I went there a few times but I felt unwelcome so decided to spend the time between lessons in the classroom or toilet". When asked to reflect upon their contact with the headmaster, 65.7 % of respondents described the cooperation as good, while 17.9 % voiced a negative opinion; however, no additional explanation was provided. 76.1 % of respondents stated that the atmosphere in school was pleasant and supportive. 53.7 % of respondents received advice from teachers before they conducted their first lesson and 67.2 % received feedback after their first lesson had finished. The advice given before the class concerned practical issues, such as pupils' behaviour, their strong and weak points and the material that had to be covered. Post-lesson feedback focused mainly on strong and weak points of the lesson. 25.3 % of respondents did not receive any advice before their first lesson; 14.9 % did not receive any feedback after their first lesson. 73.1 % of respondents confirmed that their supervisors were present during all or most of the lessons they conducted, while 7.5 % stated that the supervisor left the classroom for the time of their teaching. Of this 7.5 %, some complained that when the teacher left the classroom, pupils became undisciplined and difficult to manage. Half of the students (50.8 %) declared that supervisors observed their lessons carefully, while 16.4 % responded to this statement negatively. The following opinions show how diverse the students' experience was in this respect: "The supervisor observed my lessons carefully almost every time but sometimes she was occupied by filling some documents and

she wasn't observing me. This happened very rarely and every time she apologized for it"; "Sometimes my supervisor was writing some documents, but when I was explaining grammatical rules to students, she was observing me carefully"; "Unfortunately, the supervisor was busy with surfing the Internet on her smartphone"; "She spent most of the time on her laptop, checking mail and even Facebook". Almost half of the students (47.8 %) stated that mentor provided them with feedback after most of the lessons; 31.3 % of respondents denied having received any feedback, while every fifth respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement, providing additional explanation: "The feedback took place usually at my request"; "The feedback was poor and only when I strongly insisted on it"; "I only heard my lessons were OK". Asked if the supervisor provided them with useful information throughout the practicum, 62.7 % responded affirmatively, whereas 17.9 % gave a negative answer. As many as 82.1 % of respondents confirmed that they were treated by their supervisor as an authority in front of pupils: "The teacher told the children they should listen to me, because I was their teacher then"; "She told the students I am their teacher now, and they should behave and treat me properly". Only a handful of respondents reported having been interrupted by the supervisor during their teaching: "Unfortunately she did [interrupt me], which was quite disheartening. I would prefer if she had corrected me/provided feedback after the lesson"; "She corrected me a few times in front of students and it made me feel terrible. I felt like a pupil myself. What is more, she was not right when correcting, but I did not want to argue". 79.1 % of respondents stated that whenever they had a problem or a doubt, they felt free to consult the supervisor. 73.1 % of informants stated that their mentor encouraged them to contact her/him through phone or e-mail, when in need. Numerous favourable comments appeared in response to this question: "My supervisor was very helpful, we had a fantastic rapport and I could ask for everything"; "If I was not sure about something, e.g. how to use the interactive whiteboard I could always ask for help and directions"; "We exchanged e-mails and text messages

very often"; That was the very first thing we did when we met – we exchanged our phone numbers, so I could contact the teacher anytime I needed". 73.1 % of respondents confirmed that the supervisor's behaviour was supportive throughout the practicum. 82.1 % acknowledged that supervising teachers treated them with respect. The same number of respondents (82.1 %) described their relation with supervisor as good. When asked if they think that supervising teachers did a lot to make their practicum a positive, growth-producing experience, 59.7 % of respondents agreed; every fourth student neither agreed nor disagreed and made a comment that their supervisor's attitude was "neutral" or "realistic". When asked if mentors learnt something from them, 71.6 % of respondents gave a negative answer, while 26.9 % acknowledged that supervising teachers got inspired by some of their ideas: "The supervisor praised some of my ideas and asked if she can use them during her lessons with other classes"; "The teacher felt like some fresh blood had come to the school".

The results of the questionnaire show that for the majority of respondents cooperation with supervisor was a positive, valuable experience, while about 20–25 % of respondents report that their relation with the supervisor was in some way problematic. In this case, the source of problems was either supervisors' laissez-faire approach to mentoring (e.g. providing teacher trainees with no feedback or leaving the classroom when student teacher was conducting classes) or their unpleasant behaviour towards student teachers (e.g. interrupting them during their lessons or correcting them in front of pupils).

4.5.2. Interview data

As a follow-up to the questionnaire, joint interview sessions with students were set up. The starting point of these group interviews was a question about how respondents assess their relation with their supervisor. In the course of the interviews respondents were also asked if supervising teachers learnt something from them or used them as a resource. Participants were

also encouraged to share any experiences, reflections and observations connected with their practicum and freely contribute on any topic important to them. The interviews produced a considerable quantity of data. Intriguingly, most recounted negative experiences. Let us start with the positive ones. Several interviewees enthusiastically pointed out that their relations with their supervisor were very good. This seemed to be the case especially when students did their practicum under the guidance of their former teachers, although a handful of respondents emphasized that they received generous support even though they had not known the teacher before the practicum. Some students remarked that supervising teachers provided them with useful tips before each lesson and constructive feedback after it, familiarized them with school documentation, let them mark pupils, write in the register and gave them enough autonomy to try out their own ideas. A few respondents admitted that they were on first name terms with their mentors, especially when mentor and mentee were of a similar age. One student stated that the supervising teacher treated her like a special guest, taking her everywhere, even to the smoking room, talking about everything and readily introducing her into school life.

However, as already stated, the interviews were largely dominated by negative comments. The following is a collection of responses gathered from interviewees, accompanied by quotations:

- the teacher did not let the student conduct classes: “My teacher did not let me conduct classes, she had no faith in my abilities to teach”;
- supervisors asked students to teach, even though they were supposed to conduct observations: “The teacher shortened the number of hours I was supposed to observe and asked me to start teaching”;
- students felt overwhelmed by harsh, nonconstructive criticism: “She interrupted me during my teaching and corrected me, she did not like my activities. One day after

such a situation she left the classroom and one of the pupils said: 'Don't worry, you're still learning'";
- the student felt overwhelmed by the number of tasks she was asked to attend to: "I was not a student teacher, I was a regular teacher because she gave me all of her duties. I had to work everything out on my own. I had no assistance whatsoever";
- students felt disrespected by the supervisor: "The teacher did not inform me that she was on a sick leave that day. I came to school and everybody was surprised what I was doing there"; "I was not allowed to write in the school register or even to look at it"; "She forbade me to use the register to protect personal details of pupils. How was I supposed to call children out? By pointing at them!?";
- supervisors did not observe lessons conducted by teacher trainees: "She observed only my first lesson, after that she was in the staffroom"; "I was writing my BA thesis on burnout syndrome and she was a perfect example. She observed two of my lessons, said that they were fantastic and then always left the classroom";
- the teacher angrily told the student he did not want to be a supervisor, but was forced to accept this function by the headmaster;
- student teacher was taught by her supervisor back in primary student and was still treated like one of her pupils;
- the supervisor's English was poor, he made numerous grammar and pronunciation mistakes, the student considered her practicum a waste of time.

During the interviews, respondents were also asked if supervising teachers learnt something from them or used them as a resource. Several interviewees were able to relate to this question and the responses are presented as follows: "The teacher said she hasn't had a student teacher for a long time and was very excited to have me. She said 'some fresh blood at last, I'm getting into a rut and I'm sure I'll learn something from you'. After the lesson she asked me about materials I use, I told her about

some Internet sites"; "She asked me to prepare a lesson about culture of the United States. Then she took notes together with the pupils"; "The primary school teacher asked me about the games I played with the pupils because she liked them so much"; "This was the teacher who treated my practicum as free time for herself, she was rarely in the class. I prepared a Power Point presentation with some new vocabulary. After the class she asked me if I attended a special IT course, she was really impressed, even though this presentation was really basic. She asked me to send it to her so that she could use it with her pupils".

When approaching the data, we were surprised by the contrast between fairly moderate questionnaire-solicited responses and a large number of negative, but also a few highly positive comments in the interview data. One of the possible interpretations of this contrast is that respondents who were most active during the interviews were those for whom cooperation with the supervisor was somehow 'extreme', i.e. either very good (hence highly superlative comments) or very bad (hence critical comments). It is especially students with a negative experience who might have wanted to give vent to their frustration in the interviews. Students whose relation with their supervisor was neutral could have felt that they do not have anything to contribute to the discussion. Another possible interpretation of the high number of 'extreme' responses in the interview data is that comments collected from interviewees went far beyond the strict set of options available in the questionnaire. For example, one of the respondents indicated in the questionnaire that her relation with the supervisor was good. In the interviews, it turned out that the supervisor was present only in the first two classes conducted by this student, said they were 'fantastic' and that her presence was not needed any more. Granted, the relation between the two parties was good – they were not in conflict and the teacher complimented the student; however, it is doubtful if the teacher developed a positive relationship with the student teacher. A further example of this type of situation: the questionnaire asked if supervisors let students complete school

documentation. One of the respondents gave an affirmative answer, which could be understood as positive evidence that the supervisor trusted the student, gave her autonomy and let her experience her practicum as a full-fledged teacher. However, in interviews the same student revealed that the supervisor delegated her to complete all school documents she had, which made the student feel overwhelmed and stressed. The interviews also revealed a number of problems which did not appear in the questionnaire because there were no questions designed to probe these particular areas. A few students admitted the supervisor shortened the number of hours they were supposed to observe classes, and asked them to start teaching, although the number of hours students are to observe and teach is regulated and agreed upon before the practicum starts. One interviewee revealed that her supervisor forbade her to conduct classes because she had no faith in her abilities.

5. Conclusion

A few inferences may be deduced from this study. Although most supervisors provide student teachers with some kind of support, while some mentors provide high-quality supervision and develop a genuine connection with their mentees, there are teachers who do not devote any time or energy to building a mentoring relationship with their teacher trainees. It might be concluded that for about 20-25 % of respondents cooperation with the supervisor was difficult. These teachers either displayed a neglectful approach to mentoring (they treated student teaching as time off from work and student teachers as a replacement) or overwhelmed students with criticism (e.g. corrected them in front of pupils). The data also revealed cases of disrespectful behaviour towards student teachers and cases of power abuse, e.g. not allowing student teacher to carry out classes on her own. What we see as one of the problems is that the function and role of practicum supervisor is not regulated in any formal way. Supervisors are not informed what is expected from them and are not prepared or trained for this function.

Whether teacher trainees conduct their student teaching in a supportive environment seems to solely depend on a supervisor's personality traits and good will.

Some other problematic areas that emerged from the data are the following:

- There are situations when teachers do not have a choice as to whether accept student teacher for practicum, the decision is made for them by school authorities.
- Only 37.3 % of students responded positively to the statement 'When I was in the staffroom, I felt welcome and relaxed', while 44.8 % disagreed. This may suggest that although student teachers generally receive support from a supervisor and headmaster, they are not introduced into the wider school community and may feel intimidated when in the company of other teachers.
- Supervisors rarely use student teachers as a resource or admit to having learnt from them; although there is evidence (e.g. Hudson 2013c, Lindgren 2006) that mentoring may act as professional development for them.

In this study, we have sought to extend previous research on the quality of dialogue between student teachers and supervisors. It is hoped that our research, limited in many ways – from focusing on a single educational context to the narrow range of sampling – manages to cast light on some of the complexities of the mentor-mentee relationship. The present study approached the topic in question from the perspective of teacher trainee. An interesting follow-up study would be to examine the dialoguing experience from the perspective of mentor. After all, relationships are a two-way interaction and the quality of dialogue depends on the engagement of both parties: mentor and mentee.

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Appendix

1. I had no problems finding a teacher who would accept me as a student teacher for my practicum.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

2. My supervisor enthusiastically agreed to have me as a student teacher in her/his classroom.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

3. At the beginning of the practicum, the supervisor familiarised me with school documentation, e.g. the register (dziennik lekcyjny).
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

4. The supervisor let me complete some school documentation (e.g. write down lesson topics in the register).
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

5. At the beginning of the practicum, the supervisor provided me with some general information about the school, school life, lessons and/or pupils.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

6. The supervisor encouraged me to use the staffroom (pokój nauczycielski), if I needed or wanted to.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

7. Before I conducted my first lesson, the supervisor provided me with some advice.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

8. Before I conducted my first lesson, the supervisor gave me some information about the pupils.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

9. After the first lesson I conducted, the supervisor provided me with feedback.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

10. The supervisor was present in the classroom during all or most of the lessons I conducted.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

11. When I conducted lessons, the supervisor observed them carefully.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

12. After most of my lessons, the supervisor provided me with feedback.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

13. The supervisor provided me with useful pieces of information throughout my practicum.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

14. When I conducted classes, the supervisor sometimes interrupted me.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

15. The supervisor treated me as an authority in front of pupils.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

16. The supervisor told me that she/he learnt something from me.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

17. Whenever I had a problem or a doubt, I felt free to consult my supervisor.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

18. My supervisor encouraged me to contact her/him through phone or e-mail, if I needed to.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

19. The supervisor's behaviour towards me was supportive throughout my practicum.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

20. The supervisor's behaviour towards me was respectful throughout my practicum.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

21. My supervisor did a lot to make my practicum a positive, growth-producing experience.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

22. Generally, I would describe my relations with the supervisor as good.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

23. When I was in the staffroom, I felt welcome and relaxed.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

24. Generally, I would describe my contact with the headmaster of the school as good.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

25. Generally, the atmosphere in the school was pleasant and supportive.
strongly disagree 1-2-3-4-5 strongly agree
Comment

26. Your age…

27. What is your gender?...

28. Which year of study are you in at the moment?
a) 1st BA
b)2nd BA
c)3rd BA
d)1st MA
e)2nd MA

Aleksandra Szymańska-Tworek
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2436-1551
University of Silesia in Katowice
Institute of Linguistics
Gen. Stefana Grota-Roweckiego 5
41-205 Sosnowiec
Poland
aleksandra.szymanska@us.edu.pl

Agnieszka Turzańska
Independent Scholar
Poland
agnieszka.nowak@interia.pl