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The Scientific Basis of Mentoring in the System of Preschool Education in the Russian Federation

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Abstract

The strategic goal of modern state educational policy focused on improving the quality of management of a preschool educational organization in the context of compliance with the Federal State Educational Standard of Preschool Education prompted this research project. The purpose of the article is to review the concept of “mentoring” in the system of preschool education in search of methods of supporting beginning teachers. The authors formulated goals, objectives, and basic approaches to the implementation of mentorship programs in the educational environment. The essential characteristics of the scientific foundations of mentoring, which are the adaptation, training, and support of teachers of preschool organizations, are disclosed. As part of the research, the educational model “ROST” was proposed, which presents the classification of scientific mentoring and its inherent techniques. Also, the results of a survey of kindergarten teachers of the Russian Federation are presented.

The article is intended for teachers of preschool educational organizations, leaders the preschool education system, students of teacher training colleges and universities, as well as for centers of advanced training and professional retraining of educators.

Keywords: mentor, mentoring, educational environment, preschool education, coach, teachers, children's environment, pupil.

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Introduction

The 21st-century world community lives in an era of globalization concerning various spheres of human life. The world is changing and changes relate to politics, economics, culture, and education. The education sector is based on the large-scale but not always positive transformation, i.e. development of various kinds of conflicts, introduction of various sanctions that reflect the complex and contradictory processes of modern society's development. From this perspective, educational standards undergo significant changes at various levels.

New Federal educational standards were approved at the beginning of 2020; this might lead to a transition to a new type of quality education with the requirements that are formulated more specifically. With the introduction of the new Federal educational standards in higher education, the focus is expected to be on the development of "flexible" cross-curriculum and personal skills which will be reflected in the mentoring system as the priority of the preschool institutions. This will be facilitated by the use of techniques such as coaching (life and business coaching) and the facility technology which differs from previous systems as the possibility of the professional activities transformation of the educational environment becomes available.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The main goal of the research is to implement the scientific foundations of mentoring in preschool institutions. It is the mentoring method that is capable to transform the life-oriented guidelines of the menti-teacher and to answer the philosophical questions of the modern society and to improve the quality level of professionally significant competencies of the teacher.

The objective of our research is to define the concept of "mentoring" as well as to study the techniques that are integral to this concept.

Mentoring is a significant element in the development of human society. Even the ancient Greek philosophers Socrates, Aristotle and Plato reflected on the role of a mentor. They believed that mentoring equals mentorship (these two concepts have only recently been significantly differentiated) and they mean to "awaken the powerful spiritual strength and energy" of the pupil. And since the motto was "I know that I do not know anything", they interacted quite progressively with their pupils (even today) maintaining equal relations, not standing over the pupil and giving birth to the truth in the dispute.

From the history of Ancient Greece fast forward to the USSR mentoring has been an important part of the education system. It was impossible to have the desire to be a leader in the professional activity without transferring experience from senior colleagues to younger ones. In the Soviet Union, there was an institute of mentoring where whole generations of leaders were trained, and on the basis of this, it can be confidently stated that mentoring was a local “invention” and not a Western model. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the concept of “mentoring” has sunk into oblivion like many other traditions. However, this happened only during two decades; after that, mentoring methods began to transform into new forms (Garifullina, 2017; Gabdulkhakov, 2019).

One of the modern directions in the development of mentorship is the mentoring method as an alternative approach to improve essential competencies of a mentor.

Literature review

For the purposes of the research, we found the most suitable definition for the system of preschool education that states that “mentoring is a technique to transfer pedagogical experience and skills to support educators as well as an informal tool to achieve the leadership development” (Garifullina, 2019, p.107). Goleman (2007), Kegan and Lahey (2009), Salpykova, Akhmadullina, Valiakmetova, and Valiahmetova (2017) also underlined the same characteristics of mentoring.

In the Merriam Webster’s Dictionary, the word “mentor” is defined as “trusted adviser or guide – this is not a coach-mentor because as a rule the latter is not aimed at long-term follow-up; they do not seek to achieve a specific result, they do not say what exactly you should do. They only advise with different intensity while the mentor prevents mistakes” (“Mentor,” n.d.). The mentoring method is informal support, the tool in achieving collective goals (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), Salpykova et al., 2017).

Methodology

Mentoring resonated not only in pedagogy but also in research activities, regulatory instruments and even in business. Mentoring in the field of education is interpreted as the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. However, an important role is played by the transferring of experience and knowledge within the teaching staff of the educational organization.

The system is conventionally divided into three components: adaptation, training and support. The research experience in the field of preschool education demonstrates the high importance of applying a system-personalized approach in which all three components are used. The process can be repeated and cumulated;

for example if the teacher has moved to a new position, the teacher needs help in adapting to the new conditions. Also, mentoring can be individual and collective, i.e. when the mentor (in relation to the mentee) is a more experienced teacher who works with several novice teachers in a group or with individual teachers (Salpykova et al., 2017; Gabdulkhakov, 2019).

Mentoring in the system of preschool education is implemented according to the classical principles of pedagogy. The main blocks are presented in Figure 1.

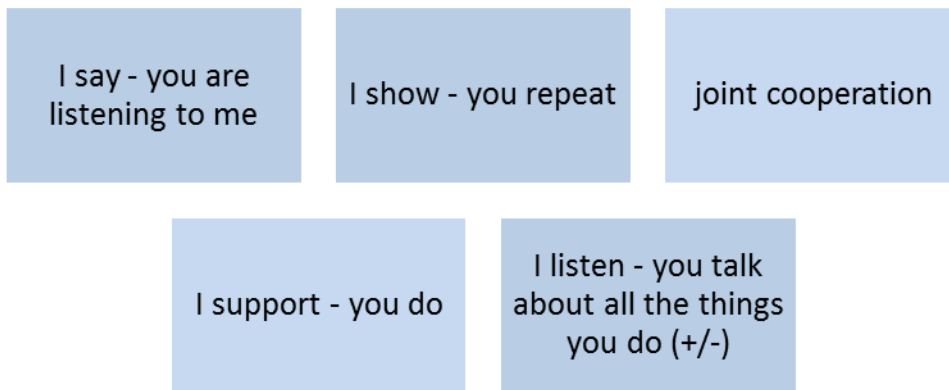


Figure 1. Stages in the Mentoring System of a Preschool Institution

Mentoring is designed to show the person's internal resources revealing new opportunities. The degree of awareness will contribute to high professional motivation and the formation of the ability to delegate the responsibility (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013; Salpykova et al., 2017; Gabdulkhakov, 2019).

In the foreign educational institutions, the concept of mentoring was strengthened in the middle of the 20th century but it entered the local system at the beginning of the 21st century. Today, mentoring has a strong position in preschool education. Foreign mentoring is distinguished by the fact that there is a long-term practice of certain approaches to achieve the goals set by the menti-teacher in relation to mentee-teachers.

Our research project was conducted at the Institute of Psychology and Education at Kazan Federal University during 2018-2019. The study involved 150 teachers of preschool educational institutions of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Samara, Nizhniy Novgorod, and the Republic of Tatarstan).

Results

We found that 87% of respondents consider that mentoring is not a common practice. Only 13% of respondents admitted that such a practice exists in their preschool educational institutions. To the question

“Are you a mentor?” 11% of respondents agreed with the statement while 89% of respondents did not. The last question “Was mentoring applied to you?” 66% (the majority) of teachers gave a negative reply and only 34% answered positively to this question. The results are presented in Figure 2.

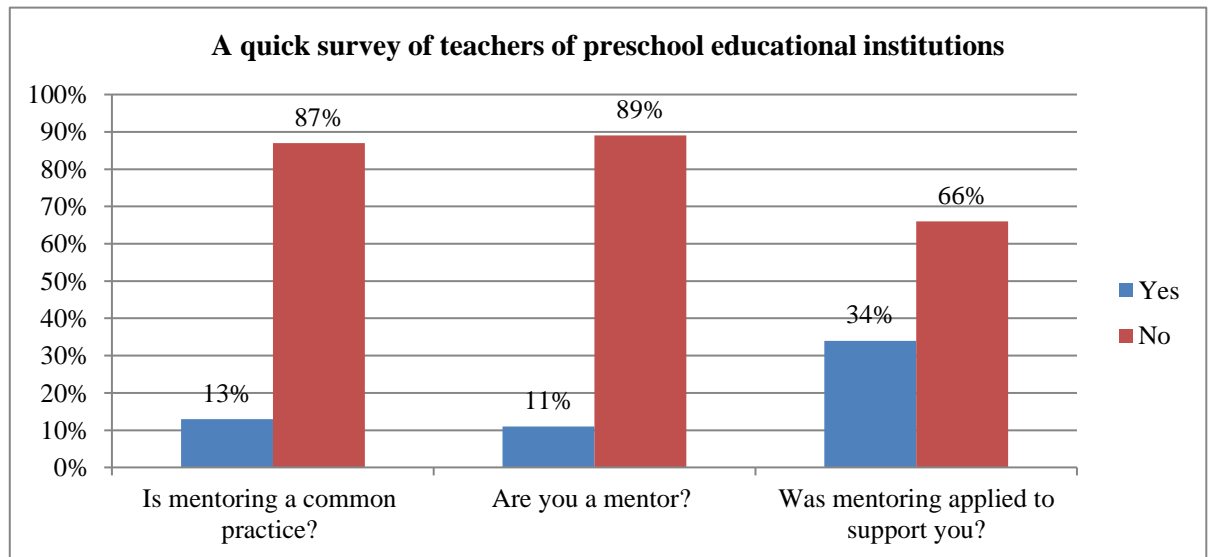


Figure 2. The pervasiveness of mentoring

The support and positive relationship between the mentor and mentee are very important at all stages. It is necessary to take into account that in any training, there is a human factor and each mentor works according to own techniques, i.e. someone is a master of explanation, someone perfectly explains cases, and someone brilliantly organizes practical work. Practitioners distinguish several models of communication between the mentor and the mentee: communication-correction, communication-support and communication-removal of psychological barriers.

Discussions

To include the mentoring technique to the preschool educational institution we should follow two rules:

- 1) to appoint a coordinator (an experienced teacher).
- 2) to choose an approach for the actions of mentors and mentee which include such sections as “Introduction to kindergarten”, “Inclusion in the pedagogical community”, “Help yourself-reflection”, “Self-realization as a teacher”.

To choose an approach we need the so-called “Briefing” approach which helps to resolve ordinary issues. The “Explication” method assumes an explanatory work with the menti-teacher depending on the task set for the mentee; this approach may be longitudinal. The “Evolution” approach involves cooperation with an experienced teacher.

Table 1 gives the examples of advantages and possible disadvantages of the process of implementation of some approaches.

Table 1. Advantages and disadvantages of some mentoring approaches

Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>“Briefing” means that the action is of absolute importance. It is used when solving everyday issues and in unusual situations when a decision is required in a short period of time</p>	<p>Uniqueness of purpose. The anticipation of preliminary results, as well as the speed of the information transfer. The ability to clarify how the menti-teacher understood the task.</p>	<p>Excessive monitoring of the menti-teacher. Low level of motivation, as the school management is not interested in the opinion of the menti-teacher. The restrictions applied to the mentor, and it is also possible that in case of failure the menti-teacher will shift the responsibility to the mentor.</p>
<p>“Explication” implies an explanation of the actions of the menti-teacher.</p>	<p>Step-by-step explanation, increasing the level of awareness in the process of the menti-teacher's activity, increasing his motivation. Delegation of responsibility between the mentor and the menti-teacher.</p>	<p>Increasing the time of interaction of the mentor and the menti-teacher. The risk that the menti teacher can “switch” from one topic to another. The menti-teacher with high self-esteem can be impatient in the process of analyzing the algorithm, as well as discuss the idea of the mentor</p>

<p>“Evolution – aerobatics” of menti-teacher. The mentor in this case only contributes to development. Menti-teacher is independent in solving problems, he has a high level of knowledge and he is sufficiently motivated to achieve the goal.</p>	<p>Menti-teacher is aware of the equality of communication and the meaning of the operations; he motivates himself with high-quality activity in the institution. He is able to find new ways to solve problems.</p>	<p>The mentor increases the time for communication with the menti-teacher, the latter has a stress due to the responsibility imposed on him, the disadvantage is also that the teacher may refuse to solve the assigned problems; it is also possible to switch to the “Briefing” level.</p>
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Having analyzed the main foreign forms and methods of mentoring, we came to the conclusion that in the educational system, there are the following aspects of mentoring:

- 1) Balance, positive focus – menti feels that the mentor's session allows to overcome the difficulties associated with his professional development. The mentor should not be too critical or too patronizing as this is a sign of incorrect mentoring.
- 2) Specificity – reflection in mentoring in the system of preschool education is not just communication between the leader and teachers. The mentor leader is always looking for ways to feedback. He does not allow generalization; only a specific fact or action can force to make one or another decision. It is important to find out what was done and in what way it was done, but not the reason. The mentor cannot speculate.
- 3) Focus on behavior, lack of evaluation – the mentor does not concentrate on the personality of the menti-teacher. The activity and the behavior are of great value for him. The goal of the mentor is not to create the conditions for the "closure" of the menti-teacher, but to "include" him in the process.
- 4) Timeliness – the mentoring involves regular reinforcement of knowledge of the menti, this factor is one of the key approaches, and the timely reflection is the best mentor can do for the menti-teacher.
- 5) Activity – the mentoring says that 70% of activity is the activity of the menti-teacher. The independence helps the menti to achieve a new level of perception of the information, when he is looking for possible solutions without waiting for the mentor.

- 6) Reflection and criticism – at best the mentor does not realize the reflection of the menti but at worst the mentor criticizes the menti. The rule of D. Carnegie has not been canceled. First, it should be praise, then the identification of weaknesses. Criticism of the mentor creates a protective membrane for the menti, he is forced to make excuses or feel guilty. Criticism does not lead to the constructive actions. The reflection as a tool will allow you to develop menti in the right way.

Table 2. Criteria for assessing a mentor’s activity in the system of preschool education (Interpretation of the results in accordance with the Russian examples)

Reflection (allows to improve the result and to understand what happened and what should be improved)	<p>“You took the topic very seriously in accordance with the requirements of the Federal State Educational Standard, you completed the project yourself. Well done!”</p> <p>“The abstract of the open classes is written according to the plan as we discussed. All three important tasks have been taken into account, but the fourth one should to be worked on. Do you agree with me?”</p> <p>“We came to the conclusion that you need to talk convincingly about the matinee with your pupils’ parents so that they help us decorate the classrooms. Tell me, please, in what way did you formulate the goal in front of the parent’s council?”</p>
Praise (it is not clear for menti what exactly he did well, what did he manage to do)	“Well done!”, “Excellent” without details of success
Criticism (the menti do not know what mistakes did he make, what exactly he should modify)	<p>“You didn’t do the right thing!”, “Who taught you to do this?”</p> <p>These “stereotyped” statements do not allow to realize the error.</p>
Lack of feedback (the student remains unaware of how and in which way he should develop himself further)	“Yeah...”, “Fine...”, “Good”, “So, I see the result!” The mentor is not involved in any of the details of the result, so he cannot reflect on it.

In the process of mentoring the mentor may form an erroneous opinion that if one technique is effective with one mentee it will be effective with another one. The mentor selects the interaction style individually for each mentee since the success of mentoring in a preschool educational situation will depend on this.

The statement of the mentoring objective directly depends on the mentor, namely, on the final result that the mentor realizes. The main idea is that he will simply and clearly formulate and present it to the mentee-teacher which will inspire the latter to achieve it. There are no unattainable goals but there are mutually exclusive criteria for their achievement which should be avoided in the process of mentoring.

In the process of reviewing of the mentoring activity for the system of preschool education at the Kazan Federal University a number of studies were carried out, as a result of which we compiled the “ROST” model. The mentoring consists of independent phases: plan, do, analyze, reflect, correct. Consider the features of the “ROST” model namely the classification of mentoring and the inherent mentoring technique. It should be noted that the model takes the form of a recommendation and can be transformed under certain conditions in a specific preschool educational institution (Goleman, 2007; Garifullina & Bashinova, 2017; Garifullina & Gabdulkhakov, 2019).

The personal qualities that a mentor should have are the high level of loyalty to the educational system; understanding of the work structure of the kindergarten; the great professional experience; the desire to be a mentor; the willingness to invest his or her time in the development of other teachers; the ability to give feedback and constructive criticism; the ability to improve the skills; the ability to find a common language with colleagues; the manifestation of leadership; the ability to be a conflict-free person (Garifullina & Bashinova, 2017; Garifullina & Gabdulkhakov, 2019; Gabdulkhakov, 2019; Garifullina, Zakirova, Bashinova, Pomortseva, & Garifullina, 2019).

Conclusion

As a result of our study, it was revealed that in the process of establishing the scientific foundations of mentoring the mentoring technique used in the preschool educational institutions are of great importance. In the West the mentoring is perceived as an honorable mission; in Russia this technique is only gaining popularity. The scientific novelty of our study was to develop a mentoring model, the introduction of which allowed us to optimize the activities of the preschool educational institution namely the process of interaction between the manager and the teaching staff. Compliance with the classification of mentoring will allow mentors to determine the style of individual management, as well as the stages will allow delegating and organizing the activities of the kindergarten to its maximum potential. In this regard the

success of mentoring will depend on the observance of the above aspects and will ensure the effective management of the preschool educational institution.

Based on the foregoing, we could conclude that the problem of mentoring in the system of preschool education is still an insufficiently studied area. This aspect will be the prospect of our further research.

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