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THE TRAINING OF MENTOR TEACHERS FOR NEWLY HIRED TEACHERS IN ITALY

AN ECOSYSTEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Massimiliano Fiorucci
Giovanni Moretti
(Eds)

Roma TrE-Press
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Università degli Studi Roma Tre
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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI ROMA TRE
DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE DELLA FORMAZIONE

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Dedicated to *Giuditta Alessandrini* and *Valeria Biasci*, who have shared this research and training experience since its inception.

Regolamento della Collana

Psychology & Education

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The *Psychology & Education* series aims to: promote and develop research in psychological and educational field; promote scientific reflection on psycho-socio-educational research methodologies, with particular reference to empirical-experimental research; disseminate and discuss the results of quantitative and qualitative studies in the field as well as offer scientifically high profile material to those young researchers or teachers who have to base their work on solid up-to-date knowledge.

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Qualified empirical and theorethical contributions are accepted.

The accepted contributions focus on the following theme areas:

– Basic research on affective and cognitive processes, and on personological lines
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– Learning difficulties and disabilities
– Sociology of education and Methodology of social sciences.

Tutti i volumi pubblicati sono sottoposti a referaggio in 'doppio cieco'.
Il Comitato Scientifico può svolgere anche le funzioni di Comitato dei Referee.

Contents

Introduction

This volume examines the role and functions of the mentor of newly hired teachers in Italy from an ecosystemic perspective. The contributions delve into the chosen topic starting from the reflection on the outcomes of a multi-year path of training and diachronic cognitive investigations carried out since the school year 2017-2018 by the Department of Education Sciences of Roma Tre University, in agreement with the University of Cassino, the Regional School Office for Lazio and local School Networks.

The Research-Training project, in its six iterations held so far, as a whole, has involved more than 9,000 tutors of teachers in the training and probationary year, hired at state educational institutions in the Lazio region. The continuity that has characterized this initiative has allowed the training and research group to refine the training offerings and to consolidate and develop special detection and intervention tools in the school context. The possibility of observing the use of such tools on a diachronic level has undoubtedly favored the possibility of detecting and comparing data and information on the topics covered by the training and research.

The training activities, in the first three iterations, were carried out mainly in-person, complemented by a short in-depth online course (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019, 2022a). Following the health emergency due to the pandemic, the initiative was discontinued during the 2020-2021 school year. Once the emergency situation was resolved, the activities were re-proposed and redesigned in *blended* mode, taking into account some organizational constraints reported in the competitive public call for proposals prepared by the relevant Lead School. In these subsequent iterations – school years 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024 – the *design of* the online pathway was definitely enriched, which included the active involvement of the tutor teachers within their work context. The *design of* the new training pathway was initiated following an online synchronous intervention with experts from the Research-Training group and was developed in five integrated stages: 1) access to the platform; 2) in-depth study with scientific material; 3) identification by the tutor teachers of at least one tool or device which characteristics should be explored in depth and used in the performance of tutor functions; 4) drafting of a summary report of the activities carried out, in which to note considerations on the use of the chosen tool or device and formulate some overall reflections; 5) conclusion of the training course with the completion of a final questionnaire.

The main objective of the new training pathway was to help and support mentors to exercise their role and the responsibilities associated with it by adopting an ecosystemic posture, understood as a perspective that is attentive

to people and relationships, and sensitive to both the organizational and local contexts in which the school operates.

The attention in regard to the active adoption of an ecosystemic posture was developed by the Research-Training group during the course of the project, as it was deemed necessary to prevent attitudes and behaviors tending to interpret the role of tutor as an individual exercise limited to the tutor-new-hire pair, rather than interpreting it as an expression of a broader systemic, collective and reflective work capable of involving the entire professional community of teachers. Moreover, even in the aftermath of the pandemic emergency, the adoption of an ecosystemic posture has been deemed indispensable for dealing with emergencies and other uncertain situations that will characterize educational contexts in Italy and around the world in the future. Indeed, the mentors of newly hired teachers, with their ability to assume an ecosystemic posture and to exercise democratic educational leadership among peers, represent a strategic resource for fostering the professional learning that is at the heart of the training initiatives (Massimiliano Fiorucci & Giovanni Moretti).

The contribution of Paola Perucchini, Salvatore Ioverno and Giulia Graziano takes into account the large amount of evidences that have emerged as a result of the health emergency, and those that are hypothesized to still emerge in relation especially to the fragility and vulnerability of students. In this sense, the training of tutors must take into account aspects that are considered strategic, related to how to foster probationary teachers in an era when students express sometimes profound discomfort and need dedication and listening, that is something unusual yet still urgent.

The reflection of the Roma Tre research group has taken into account international experiences, and in particular has maintained a close and continuous dialogue with the research group engaged in the POCU project, "*Professionalization Of The Teaching Career – Prof*" (Project code: POCU/904/6/25/146587), which took place between April 01, 2021 and December 31, 2023. Roma Tre University collaborated in the international project promoted by the University of Sibiu, Romania, in particular by participating in the international conferences "*Mentoring in Teacher Education and Training*" in 2021, with a paper entitled "The tutor for newly hired teachers in Italy: a resource for professional development" (Fiorucci & Moretti 2022b) and "*Mentoring in Teacher Education and Training*" in November 2023, with a paper entitled "In-service training of the tutor for newly hired teachers in Italy: an ecosystemic perspective" (Fiorucci, Moretti & Margottini, 2023). For these reasons, we felt it was important to enrich this publication with Daniel Mara's paper entitled "The national system of mentors in the educational field – the PROF project," which takes up some of the reflections developed as part of the project (Petrache, Mara & Velea, 2022; Petrache, Mara & Bocoș, 2023).

The following contributions explore a number of issues considered relevant in the Research-Training pathway. Massimo Margottini and Federica De Carlo

reflect on the development of self-assessment skills and the strategic competencies considered indispensable to qualify and orient professional action in an ecosystemic perspective. Conny De Vincenzo, Nazarena Patrizi and Valeria Biasi examine the preparation of the mentor teacher in Counselling for the professional supervision of the newly hired teacher. Fabio Bocci, Aurora Bulgarelli and Umberto Zona focus on the use of Microteaching and Video-annotation to understand the educational dynamics in the ecology of the training processes that characterize educational institutions. Some contributions reflect on specific aspects such as: ways of using and enhancing evaluative feed-back, through a trifocal gaze, even in digital environments (Concetta La Rocca and Edoardo Casale); classroom observation activities from a research and teacher professional development perspective (Anna Maria Ciraci and Monica Bianchi). Arianna Morini and Giovanni Moretti examine the qualification of tutorship activities through the introduction in the school context of checklists for observation in the form of self- and hetero-assessment. Finally, the volume presents an overall profile of tutor teachers of newly hired probationary year teachers emerging from the analysis of the data collected (Arianna Morini and Edoardo Casale).

The outcomes of the annual surveys conducted and the multi-year survey conducted subsequently on the available set of data, some of which are still in progress, confirm the importance of adopting and promoting an ecosystemic perspective among all actors involved in decision-making processes or processes activated by the decisions made. The outcomes also suggest that the training and professional development initiative for mentors of newly hired teachers should be promoted continuously. In this sense, it is appropriate to envisage several modes of development, not conflicting with each other, but complementary, paying the utmost attention to the development of Research-Training modes, in agreement with the Regional School Office for Lazio, School Networks and Universities, in particular making use of the *Teaching and Learning Centers* that in Italy represent the local hubs of a new and indispensable system infrastructure. Roma Tre University, in its role as leader of the network of Universities participating in the definition of the tasks of the TLC envisaged by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for the macro area of Central Italy, will be able to make the most of all the knowledge and evidence gathered so far to contribute to qualifying the role and functions of the tutor of newly hired teachers.

Rome, June 6, 2024
Massimiliano Fiorucci and *Giovanni Moretti*

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CHAPTER 1

Ecosystemic perspective and training of mentor teachers of newly hired teachers: a multiyear journey.

Massimiliano Fiorucci, Giovanni Moretti[1]

1. Mentor teachers' ecosystemic posture development

During the Covid-19 health emergency years, some structures of the Italian education and training systems revealed themselves to be weak due to excessive bureaucracy, widespread formalism and a tendency to deresponsibilization at various system levels. However, several schools have clearly shown resilience capacities and positive agentiveness towards the surrounding communities. Several schools coped with intense uncertainty affecting people wealth, social relationships, and the working world. Schools have enhanced their local rooting in responding to the pandemic challenges. All the local actors in the ecosystem recognized the schools as close garrisons of reference dealing with educational purposes, but also coping with the situation of uncertainty. The adaptive capacity and vitality of school reactions on the one hand confirmed the potential of schools' autonomies. On the other hand, they highlighted certain governance dynamics, both at school and at Educational System levels.

The research carried out in Italy showed the Distance Learning (DaD) and the Integrated Digital Didactics (DDI) drawbacks, confirming the same issues previously identified. Neverthless, the survey outcomes have also largely recorded positive and systemic actions of those who assumed roles and performed educational leadership roles within schools and educational services (Lucisano, 2020a).

During the health emergency peaks, Headmasters (Ds) and teachers, especially those engaged in instrumental roles and positions, turned the typical traditional top-down decision-making of the education system into a bottom-up. In fact, many Headmasters and teachers urging for instructions and guidelines from policy makers, have anyways actively "re-organized" their schools, without passively waiting. Through such choices, schools fully applied their organizational and educational autonomies, and quickly made schools strong and operational again. Flexible solutions were implemented according to the specific conditions, and to the students' families availability to cooperate.

[1] The contribution is the result of joint work by the two authors; in particular, M. Fiorucci wrote paragraphs 1 and 2 and G. Moretti wrote paragraphs 3, 4, 5. Paragraph 6 was written jointly by the authors.

As a result, after the pandemic, the education vocabulary has been enriched with new words denoting the direction to be taken to retrain and make the Education System even more resilient. For instance, more specific expressions have been added to concept of "collaboration", such as "school-family alliance" and "school-family co-responsibility" (Moretti, Briceag & Morini, 2021; Moretti & Morini, 2021b). Such labels reveal that the "educating community" dimension has been found out again.

What happened during the health emergency proved that no man is an island: communities are crucial for humans. Moreover, the pandemic highlighted how learning can be interrupted and fail due to unforeseen events causing uncertain conditions. Therefore, the decision to "re-doing school" entails more than ever core crucial abilities such as cooperation, goal sharing, flexible and participatory planning, firsthand responsibility and risk assumption.

What positive happened during and after the pandemic should be considered (Batini et al., 2020; Nirchi; 2020; Moretti & Morini, 2021a; 2021b), in order to draw helpful suggestions from the lived experience, reorganize school and redesign educational and teaching activities.

This paper focuses on the need to enhance the distributed education leadership (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2014, Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012) as democratic and focused (Moretti, 2022). The ecosystemic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ellerani, 2022), helps redefine the current several positions at school, especially those of mentor teachers of newly hired teachers, because their roles are increasingly strategic. Mentor teachers developing ecosystemic posture (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2022a; Fiorucci, Moretti & Margottini, 2023), on the one hand promote self-reflection on several-year working experience (Schön, 1983). On the other hand, capitalize teachers' knowledge accumulated over time putting it at peers' service, in a collective – both, mesosystem and microsystem – perspective.

Mentor teachers' ecosystemic posture is defined by the capacity to combine specific responses to challenges concerning education needs, methodologies and didactic, organization, communication, regulation and adaptation to school environment experienced by newly hired teachers, with the ability to act consciously at systemic level, as mentor teachers represent schools as multilevel (macro, meso and micro) and multiple actor contexts. This posture enables mentor teachers to contribute to integrate organizational players' actions and vision, with relevant social and local stakeholders behaviours and missions (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977).

The multiple level system is part of the more general trend to delineate multilevel and multiple actor representations of training and education systems (Scheerens, 2018). These representations aim to clearly describe complex systems and subsystems, and highlight positive/negative interrelations among the several elements to be examined (Moretti, 2022).

This paper promotes the distributed educational leadership by taking the CIPP model as a reference (Stufflebeam, 1971; 1981; 2001). CIPP stands for Context, Input, Process, Product. Each of them focuses on different categories devided by context (Context) related to social demands, regulations, constraints, expectations, etc.; by resource (Inputs) related to human, instrumental/technological, economic resources, etc.; by process (Process), concerning with processes at school or class level; by product (Product) related to results achieved by schools, classes or single students on short, medium and long terms. CIPP model allows to frame a complex multilevel system (articulated into macro, meso, microsystem). The model can explain organizational specific dynamics for each school unit (Domenici & Moretti, 2011). Furthermore, it allows newly hired mentor teachers to:

1. observe which are the specific dynamics (What), and how they occur in the specific educational and training contexts seen as complex and open systems;
2. understand which can be the organizational, teaching, working and educational responses to be enhanced in each work context, where also newly hired teachers work. In these contecxts, processes of change and innovations should be participatory, sustainable and achievable within the established deadlines;
3. evaluate and understand the effectiveness of the processes activated at school, class or group level, in relation to other direct/indirect players. Here the reference is especially to those who assume specific responsibilities or who perform leadership functions in the mesosystem and in the microsystem (such as Headmaters, Assistants, teachers holding Instrumental Roles, Heads of Departments and working group Coordinators).

Particularly interesting is also Scheerens' multilevel educational model (Scheerens 2018), which identifies four levels: the system, the school, the classroom or groups of students, and the unique student. This model is characterized by a dynamic tension between pushes for control from the top, and pushes for autonomy from the bottom. The model is multilevel and hierarchical in the sense that each higher level influences and controls the lower levels, but at the same time the lower levels remain partially autonomous and have the power to influence the ones above; moreover, processes at the lower levels may have considerable freedom, as in the case of teachers' activities in their classrooms.

The mentor teacher who adopts an ecosystemic posture is more aware about relations among actors, so she can: perform mentoring and support her peers more effectively; ensure environmental and social sustainability of education work (United Nations, 2015; Barzanò et al. 2019); promote appropriate cooperative and democratic contexts; provide effective responses to her job environment, the related community, and the newly hired teachers. Ultimately, the mentor teachers ecosystemic posture entail abilities to distributed educational leadership for making it democratic, focused, inclusive.

2. PNRR and the launch of *Teaching and Learning Centers* in Italy

The Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), mission 4, component C1, establishes "the enhancement of educational services supply: from Kindergartens to University". Among the goals to attain, there are "Skill improvement and infrastructure development". This is intended to frame teaching and learning processes and to upgrade and innovate learning environments. The PNRR allocates resources to establish three national *Digital Education Hubs* (DHEs) and three national *Teaching and Learning Centers* (TLCs). Notably, the TLCs will be activated as *university networks* or networks, distributed in the country's three regional macro-areas: North, Center, South and Islands, so as to respond to local specific needs.

The Italian Society of Educational Research enageged in the public debate on tasks and functions to be assigned to TLCs. It has drafted a document widely committed to train all the educational system staff, including mentor and newly hired teachers, experts, all school stage teachers, and university professors (SIRD, 2022, pp. 8-9).

Depending on the specific functions assigned, the TLCs will be able to design specific action plans to be submitted to the MUR for prior evaluation.

As project leader of the *university networks*, and responsible for the *Teaching and Learning* in the Center, Roma Tre University considers its four editions experience with mentor teachers research and training in Lazio region as an advantage. Roma Tre University will be able to design and implement innovative training programs for mentor teachers of newly hired teachers, promoting an ecosystemic approach. In fact, the effectiveness of this approach has been confirmed and enhanced especially after the pandemic, in 2022 and 2023 reasearch editions.

Mentor teachers', and broadly speaking, any teacher's, ecosystemic posture is closely related to awareness about multilevel and multiple actor system complexity, where negotiation, decision-making and inclusion processes develop. That includes the recognition of educational relationship value, the in-depth knowledge of operative contexts, the ability to appropriately fit professional actions in the right contexts (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2022a; Fiorucci, Moretti & Margottini, 2023).

The development of tutor-newly hired teachers relationship trhough an ecosystemic approach is a goal to be taken into serious consideration, notably, as a result of the repeated reorganization and redesigned interventions required during the emergency and after the emergency period, in order to provide local communities with targeted and focused responses to their educational and training needs, and more widely to the related needs (Domenici, 2020a, 2020b; Lucisano, 2020a, 2020b; Moretti & Morini, 2021a). Regarding the initial and life-long training of Secondary school teachers, the Decree Law 36/2022, Art. 44 highlights the goal of developing "the ability to design flexible educational program through group planning and peer tutoring based on stu-

dents' capacities and abilities. These programs implemented at school should be developed in synergy with local stakeholders and with the educating communities, in order to promote critical and conscious learning, orientation, transversal skills, taking into account the specific educational needs of each student involved".

The mentioned-above Law suggests taking into consideration the needs of students and fostering distributed educational leadership. It should be focused on people, contexts and related local communities (Moretti, 2022). The objective is to design customized educational interventions to systematically and regularly return education *feedback* to students (Shute, 2008). Feedback should support self-regulation processes, personal skills development, sense of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000; Pellerey, 2006). Furthermore, the purpose is to create working learning communities where students play leadership roles between peers, mutually exchanging educational *feedback* based on reliable observations, and findings (Earley, 2013; Bubb & Earley, 2010, 2013).

3. The training of mentor teachers of newly hired teachers

Since the 2017-2018 school year, Roma Tre Department of Education Science, the University of Cassino and the Regional School Office have launched a training project for mentor teachers supporting newly hired teachers in their probationary year in the Lazio region state schools. This paper considers all the five edition plan involving 7530 mentor teachers overall (Tab. 1).

In the first edition, about 1000 teachers engaged in the training initiative, including on-site activities followed by online insights. In 2018-2019 school year second edition, 669 teachers voluntarily participated (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019), and in the 2019-2020 school year third edition, 679 teachers joined. The activities have been canceled during the 2020-2021 school year due to the pandemic emergency. After the emergency, the in-service training have been reproposed and redesigned taking into account some organizational constraints reported in the public tender announced by the Leading School in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years[2].

[2] Istituto Comprensivo "Via Giacomo Matteotti, 11", of Cave (RM), the Leading School chosen by USR Lazio where to carry out the training.

Edition	Academic year	Implementation method	Mentor teachers participating
First edition	2017/2018	Mostly on-site activities followed by online insights	1001
Second edition	2018/2019	Mostly on-site activities followed by online insights	669
Third edition	2019/2020	Mostly on-site activities followed by online insights	679
–	2020/2021	Activity disruption due to the pandemic health emergency	–
Fourth Edition	2021/2022	Blended mode training	2500
Fifth edition	2022/2023	Blended mode training	2681
Total			7530

Table 1 – The editions, implementation methods, number of participants of the professional development training targeting mentor teachers in Lazio region, in Italy

Each training plan aimed at strengthening and developing mentor teachers' professional knowledge and skills. Since the 2021-2022 school year, a blended mode training has intended to promote mentor teachers' abilities of tutoring, counselling and professional supervision, taking into account specific purposes, the educational and the related schoos. A total of 5181 mentor teachers have been involved in the two training editions in blended mode. They were from any school stage, coming from sixteen districts of Rome, two of Rieti and two of Viterbo.

The training encouraged the comparison among mentor teachers working together through heterogeneous groups, regardless the subject and the school stage of belonging.

The Department of Education Sciences at Roma Tre University scheduled three hours of synchronous activities on Microsoft Teams, and seven hours of asynchronous activities with online resources for studying and analysing available on the related platform (https://crisfad.uniroma3.it/docentitutor/)

The topics from the synchronous activities focused on mentor teacher role and tasks supporting newly hired mentor teachers; on observation and peer observation at school; on peer-to-peer training; on reflection on the working practices; on operational tools knowledge; on professional supervision methodologies (such as observation techniques in classroom, peer review, teaching materials, professional counselling, etc.); knowledge of teaching strategies and techniques promoting dialogue and cooperation.

The participants were able to access the asynchronous activities and the research and study materials relating the synchronous activities through their personal accounts on the Moodle e-learning platform.

For each thematic area research and study materials, and data and information collection tools were available. The mentor teachers involved had the opportunity to choose the tool they considered the most appropriate for carrying out their fieldwork.

The tools proposed were the following:

1. hetero-observation and self-assessment checklists for observation in classroom, used by both mentor teachers and newly hired teachers;
2. peer observation supporting learning and professional development through microteaching or video analysis;
3. counselling and additional self-assessment tasks to reflect on the professional action done;
4. self-competences and Convictions' Perception Questionnaire (QPCC) promoting self-reflection focused on personal competences and convictions affecting working actions;
5. tri-focal observation, conducted in "classroom context" involving the mentor teacher, the mentee teacher (newly hired), and the students.

Each tool and technique option was provided with some research materials for a theoretical framework, and an online demo on how to use the tool, describing features, purposes, functions and data interpretation methodology.

Figure 2 briefly explains the five training stages closely integrated: platform access; follow-up study on scientific articles; mentor teachers identification and knowledge of at least one tool or technique to use for the mentoring; report writing summarizing what has been done, including final overall reflections and considerations about the tool or technique choosen; training conclusion and final questionnaire.

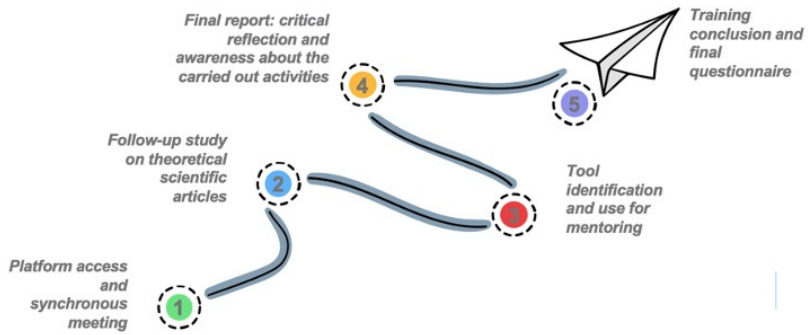

Figure 2 – Stages of the asynchronous training activities

In 2023 fifth edition, 2681 mentor teachers had applied to enroll the online study environment: 86.5% of them were women; most of them (60.5%) performed as mentor teachers for the first time; and almost all (87.1%) supervised a unique newly hired teacher; 41.4% performed other positions within the schools *middle management* (such as Deputy Head Primary, Instrumental Roles). For the first time in five editions, most of the mentor teachers were from Upper Secondary education schools (34.2%), followed by Primary education (30.7%), Lower Secondary education (23.8%) and Kindergarten (11.3%). The data analysis shows that the mentor teachers involved believe that the training plan is a suitable support for framing several aspects of their professional actions (all recorded values are above 3, out of a maximum value of 4 points). Notably, the mentor teachers believe that the training helped them to "appreciate the benefits of the dialogic exchange" (value 3.5) and "to more often reflect on teaching -educational activities carried out" and to "improve their teamworking disposition" (values 3.2). A slightly lower value (3.1) was attributed to the item "Designing teaching-educational activities more creatively" (Chart 1).

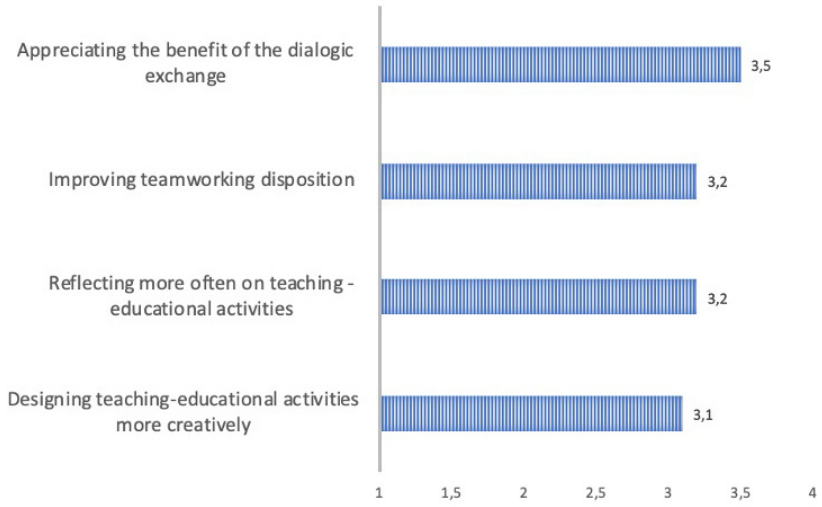

Chart 1 – What training attendance impacted most in mentor teachers' perceptions in term of effectiveness (2023)

A substantial number of teachers, more precisely 2090 participants, concluded the asynchronous online training, and submitted the required reports. The mentor teachers had the opportunity to reflect on some relevant aspects of the training experience, including the application of one or more tools in their own working contexts.

The Roma Tre University working group left free access to the online envi-

ronments and resources beyond the scheduled deadline, because of the large amount of request for keeping the online environments open beyond the project's formal closing date, scheduled on April 2023. So, the participants have been able with no haste to conclude or examine.

4. The relational and emotional dimensions of educational leadership: a comparison before and after the pandemic emergency

Covid-19 emergency affect education, nowadays especially focused on communication and relationships, as a result of physical, social and emotional distancing for a long period. In this way, the emergency challenged several school organization structures. Notably, the large-scale adoption of Distance Education (DaD) or Digital Integrated Learning (DDI) pushed local managememnt players to rethink in depth both educational relationship and leadership with particular attention to the emotional dimension.

The answers to question "which are the most interesting training areas to fulfil the role of mentor teacher" highlight the multiple effects of the unforeseen emergency situation. Chart n. 2 compares data collected before and after the emergency. It shows the "relation and communication" training area increasing from 37.6% to 46.4% and then to 49.8%. The "teaching method" area, while maintaining a large consensus, has decreased from 49.2% before the pandemic to 36.7% in 2023. "Psycho-pedagogical" and "juridical-administrative" areas remain substantially stable. The percentage concerning the item "Other" has slightly increased from 0.5% to 1.4% in 2023.

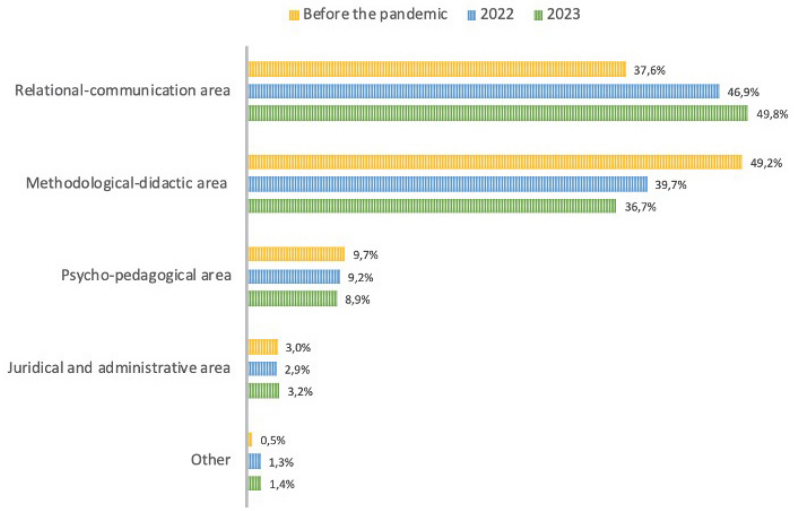

Chart 2 – Training areas mentor teachers find more suitable for mentoring newly hired teachers: a comparison before and after the pandemic (2019-2023)

Therefore, mentor teachers' ecosystemic posture requires knowledge and capacity to analyse the working contexts they belong to. Furthermore, as educational leaders, they must have the capacity to enhance the emotional dimension, by cultivating some aspects in the peer educational relationship. These human aspects have been well explicated by Goleman: sensitivity, empathy, creativity, flexibility, the capacity to motivate and engage people (Goleman, et al., 2013). Ecosystemic posture shows both in tutor-newly hired teacher relationship and at systemic level. At this level mentor teachers' capacity to face problems and issues reflects their professional awareness about schools as complex systems and their multilevel and multiple actor relationships.

In this sense, mentor teachers' distributed educational leadership is clearly focused on a given context. Mentor teachers should act as democtratic leaders aware of the relational and emotional climate of tutor-newly hired teacher confrontation (eachone with their own motivations, experience, emotions, exigences, know-how). Democratic leadership establishes peer and respectful relationships, engages in both working and educational relationship humanely, embraces potential doubts, fears, changes of mind and enthusiasms, leaves room for positive emotion sharing.

Furthermore, mentor teachers' multi-level and multiple actor ecosystemic vision promotes newly hired teachers constant call for cooperation and collaboration in the educating community, in order to face situations of uncertainty and challenges arising from present or future emergencies (Batini et al., 2020; Capperucci, 2020; Domenici, 2020b; Lucisano, 2020a; Nirchi, 2020; Moretti & Morini, 2021a).

Hence, confrontation and quality of the relationship between mentor teachers and Headmasters, and between mentor teachers working in the same school, are crucial. These relationships should to be constantly encouraged and supported with specific actions and feedback aimed at building people-oriented positive emotional climate (Urbani, 2021). Understanding and showing "emotions in context" help: to give meanings to the surround world; to enrich educational relationships; and to make decisions that are environmentally, socially and even economically sustainable (doing more and better, using fewer resources). In that time dominated by increasingly pervasive digital technologies, it should consider that emotions ideas and other factors have always shaped people relationships contexts and the entire world as much as technologies nowadays. However, unlike machines or Artificial Intelligence, it is people who recognize emotions in other people by observing and contextualizing both their body language and facial expressions. (Firth-Godbehere, 2021).

5. Mentor teachers' ecosystemic posture and inclusion processes

The emergency situation highlighted the need for more resilient schools, in Italy. Schools should increasingly be understood as strategic local presidia part of crucial national infrastructure. This ambitious goal can be pursued ef-

fectively through aware education-oriented models and projects matching the local needs, and using the available human, infrastructural, environmental and cultural resources.

It is recognised that after emergency phases, is important to pay utmost attention to relationship with local stakeholders and to students' specific life contexts, in order to innovate educational action though a bottom-up approach. That means to focus on inclusive processes both at classrooms and at education institution levels.

According to the ecosystemic perspective explained, the several-year training plan targeting mentor teachers of newly hired teachers offered by Roma Tre University allows to identify teachers' availability to engage in the role. The focus on availability is new. Schools should not underestimate mentor teachers' availability, as specific resource, widely available in all Italian schools, and that can be positively considered at system level. In order to implement the role, the too many organizational steps might be reduced, and the vision limitating the role to individual student-support teacher relationship should be overcome as part of wider inclusive processes. Inclusive processes require school players adopt both ecosystemic posture and distributed leadership to enhance shared decision-making processes, and inclusion extended to social, cultural and work levels, according to any involved individual life project. This perspective entails to act in several education areas.

First of all, it is appropriate to progressively and continuously develop expanded forms of positive sociality in high intensity relationship environments. The online interactions need to be enhanced by consciously using digital technologies (Ferri, 2021, Rivoltella, 2021).

Furthermore, it is strategic to leave more space and time to allow any student to intensify peer learning and peer assessment experiences (Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2020; Grion & Restiglian, 2021), without any distinction as, instead, traditional categories or classifications do (such as types of disabilities, types of Special Educational Needs or BES). In Italy a wide range of legislation allow families and schools to ask for additional support teachers to facilitate the inclusion of students with various types of certified disabilities or with Special Educational Needs (BES). Teachers who want to perform as support teachers are requested to attend one-year specialization training in addition to their Bachelor's degree. After that, they are required to submit their availabilities, but the selection is done through a public competition. That means in Italy, schools have larger endowment of teachers on common teaching (posto commune) and an additional smaller endowment of support teachers, each of whom can engage on one or more students, in one or more classrooms, during all the school year.

The support teacher selection management process has been widely criticized, even recently, often with good reasons. Indeed, support role access is often considered as an easy and faster path towards teaching role. Many apply as soon as possible to move towards common teaching ("posto

commune"), that allows them to be in charge for specific subject teaching.

A further criticism is based on the fact that parents of disabled students often push schools and teachers to support the individual at the expense of the class as a whole. This constant pressure for control and verification is often advocated by Associations, Agencies or Nonprofit Cooperative, who hinder rather than encouraging support teachers'ecosystemic postures. Limiting the supportive action to individuals sometimes fosters the risk of labelling them, with the consequent personal discomfort perceived by students in being classified and considered as "disabled or BES". This discomfort can worsen during the fragile phase of adolescence (Zappella, 2021).

In light of the above, support teachers' availability to take on the role of newly hired mentor teachers is very interesting. The voluntary commitment in this role is a strong and significant signal regarding the willingness of many support teachers to deal with ecosystemic perspectives as education leaders in the micro and mesosystem.

By the results of the initial questionnaire, answered by 2271 mentor teachers participating in 2023 training, 57.2% appear to be engaged, or to have been previously engaged, in support positions (Chart 3).

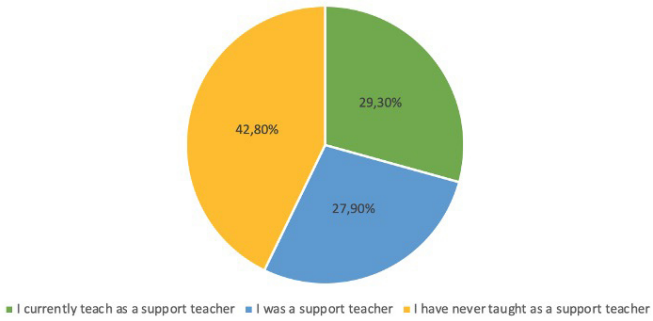

Chart 3 – Teaching from support teachers (2271 answers).

The data collected show that a large amount of support teachers spontaneously propose to perform middle management roles, including mentor teachers. This evidence is valuable in itself, but it is even more interesting under further disaggregated data reading by role type (*comune* or support) and by classroom (whether the individual is a mentor teacher in the same classroom where he works or not). This aspect contribute to better define newly hired profiles shadowed in their induction.

Chart 4 considers 1406 answers submitted by mentor teachers' on the initial questionnaires. 55.4% of support teachers who perform as mentor teachers have as points of reference teachers working on *posti comuni* in other classrooms (29.4%) or in the same classrooms (12%).

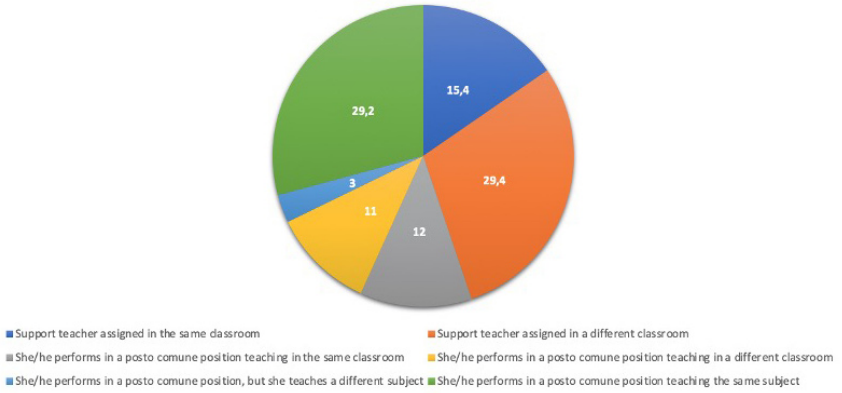

Chart 4 – Position and classroom type assigned to the newly hired teachers (1406 answers).

The important finding comes from the analysis of the initial questionnaire question "*Do you hold any other middle management position at school (such as Deputy Head, or other instrumental roles, etc…)?*", to which 2312 mentor teachers have answered (Chart 5). 58.6% of them report not to hold other middle management positions in addition to mentoring newly hired teachers, while 41.4% claim to hold other school middle management positions along with mentoring. 14% of the latter, and also the largest group, are support teachers. In Italy they are responsible for: coordinating support teachers' activities, managing the relations with families of disabled children or children with special educational needs; supervising the relations between schools and local educational, social and health services involved in projects of social inclusion of students who officially need for help at school.

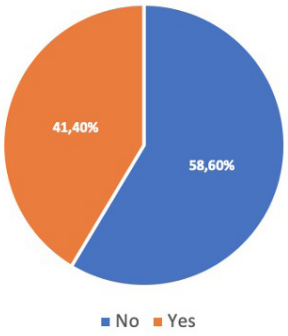

Chart 5 – Mentor teachers holding other middle management positions in the schools where they work (2312 answers).

Inclusion is the final innovative ambitious crucial objective to attain. This is possible thanks to a large amount of teachers who want engage in inclusive processes at schools, going beyond the narrow dual vision involving teacher and unique student only. Hence, it is important to encourage any action helping support teachers, including those holding common teaching positions (posto commune), to engage as tutors, or mentor teachers.

At the end of the fifth edition training in 2023, a final questionnaire was submitted to the mentor teachers. Here the results from question *"How much do you apply the following activities to promote learning and inclusion in your classrooms?"*. 1442 participants have been requested to evaluate the following items between 1 (not at all) and 4 (a lot): "I use simulation/observation/experiments to identify problems, collect data, formulate hypotheses"; "I use ICT as a learning support"; "I use self-assessment"; "I assess prior knowledge and skills before the learning plan, or better, I define the starting knowledge and skills of my students"; "I highlight each student's strengths to focus on and to improve the performance"; "I promote peer learning and cooperation in my classroom." Chart 6 shows an overall spread use of activities promoting learning and inclusion processes.

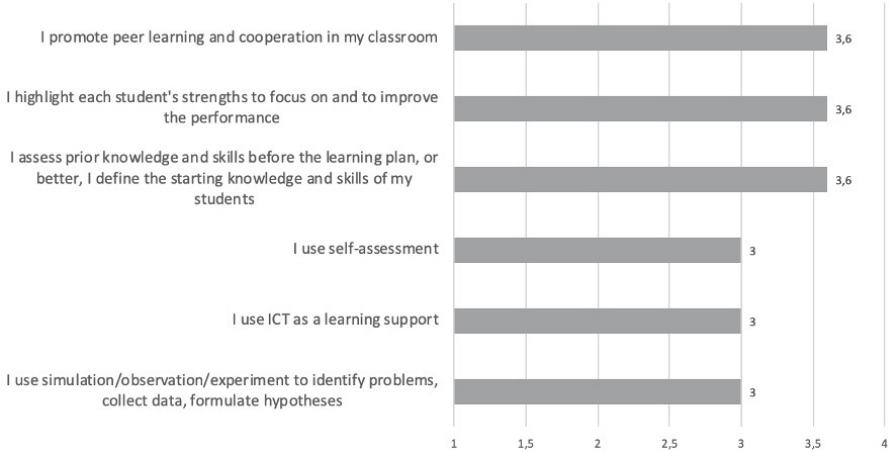

Chart 6 – "How much do you apply the following activities to promote learning and inclusion?" (1442 answers).

The outputs are never below 3 (enough), some reach 3.6 points.

From the results examination, three dimensions should be monitored, in order to confirm the inclusion processes, namely: the adoption of a scientific method along with teaching methods based on specific problems to be addressed; the use of ICT; the proper use of self-assessment, which should include both peer evaluation and self-evaluation.

6. Reflections and developments

The multi-year training plan carried out in Lazio region, in Italy, currently provides a solid, evidence-based framework that allow to think mentor teachers roles and positions critically and knowledgeably. The approach was systemic and holistic, in order to reflect on mentor teachers' expertise ecosystemic outcome.

The data collected inspire the future training plans, mainly regarding: the training program as a whole; the research on the *induction* step; the roles and positions of mentor teachers. Notably, the fifth edition training (2023) provide evidence on the effectiveness of the *blended* mode *and* on the mentor teachers' *willingness* to enhance communication and relational skills (49.8%).

Considering the evidence recorded in the previous training editions the following goals are confirmed:

1. developing abilities to cope with uncertain situations and emergency challenges, in particular, to review and redesign educational activities;
2. developing basic skills deemed essential to continuously perform the roles of mentor teachers or teacher coordinators;
3. promoting teachers' conscious use of valid and reliable data collection tools;
4. promoting teachers as researchers reflecting in-action (Schön, 1983), and aware of their notions, and able to make evidence-based decisions;
5. involving mentor teachers, especially young, or those who have few years of experience, and schools with Head Teachers who value tutor training, in the Research Training plans (Asquini, 2018).

Professors and Researchers in the Department of Education Science at Roma Tre University, engage in systematic and multi-year efforts aimed at:

1. detecting strategic information and data on mentor teacher positions;
2. validating some tools experimented during the training activities, and considered as effectively supporting tutor-newly hired relationship by the mentor teachers;
3. disseminating the research outcomes both at national, and international levels as contributes to the debate started within the National University Conference of Education Sciences (Cunsf, 2019), and as collaborations to the project promoted by the Romanian *University of Sibiu* (Fiorucci & Moretti 2022b; Fiorucci, Moretti & Margottini, 2023; Petrache, Mara & Velea, 2022; Petrache, Mara & Bocoș, 2023; Bocoș, Mara, Roman, Rad, Crișan, Balaș & Purcar, 2023).

The outcomes from both the annual surveys and from the multi-year research carried on the available data, some of which still under elaboration, confirm the importance of promoting ecosystemic approaches among all players involved in decision-making and in decision implementation.

The same results also encourage to continue with the professional development training targeting mentor teachers of newly hired teachers, under mul-

tiple complementary modes, mainly focused on Research-Training, and involving the Lazio Regional School Office, the schools and universities networks, the *Teaching and Learning Centers* that represent the local hubs for a new and crucial infrastructure system, in Italy. Roma Tre University will bring the knowledge and evidence gathered so far, as a University network leader responsible for defining the tasks of the TLCs as per the PNRR in Central Italy, in order to frame roles and positions of mentor teachers of newly hired teachers.

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CHAPTER 2

Supporting teachers during their probationary year in a time of heightened student vulnerability

Giulia Graziano, Salvatore Ioverno, Paola Perucchini

In light of the unprecedented change in the education systems prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to provide robust support for teachers, particularly during their probationary period, to adapt to this new educational landscape. An essential role is played by mentors of beginning teachers, who guide, provide support, and mentor new colleagues. So many negative things have been said about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student education. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the valuable lessons learned from this experience. The pandemic has not only magnified pre-existing education vulnerabilities but also shed light on systemic weaknesses within the education sector. Importantly, it has provided an opportunity to discern the risk and protective factors influencing the mental health and the learning outcomes of students across various grade levels.

Delving deeper into how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected education can equip probationary teachers with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they may face with students who experienced schooling during the pandemic, as well as the opportunities for growth within the education system. Drawing from insights on the pandemic's impact on student education, this chapter offers several information and recommendations for teachers, especially mentors of beginning teachers.

1. Recognizing the Impact of the Pandemic on Student Mental Health

Despite the end of the pandemic, recognizing the ongoing mental health challenges faced by students is important for teachers, especially those in their probationary years. Numerous studies have delved into this issue, allowing us to learn about the effects of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of children and adolescents.

A recent systematic review (Panchal et al., 2023) highlighted significant increases in anxiety symptoms during lockdown among children and adolescents, ranging from 1.8% to 49.5%, with depression as the second most prevalent outcome, ranging from 2.2% to 63.8%. Longitudinal studies underscore a rise in depressive and anxiety symptoms in children compared to the pre-pandemic

era. Additionally, research indicates an increased prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity (ADHD) disorder symptoms, sleep disorders, and reactivation of eating disorders (Panchal et al., 2023).

During lockdowns, increased anxiety and depression rates among children and adolescents were linked to disruptions in routine, excessive exposure to COVID-19 information, having family members in frontline roles during the COVID-19 emergency, and residing in areas with a high number of cases of COVID-19. Older adolescents, due to their increased developmental need for social connections, were particularly vulnerable to depression as a result of reduced social interaction (Panchal et al., 2023). In addition, increased internet and social media use during lockdowns led to elevated anxiety, boredom, and loneliness (Panchal et al., 2023), with risks including compulsive internet use, exposure to bullying, and access to inappropriate content (Singh et al., 2020). Furthermore, the isolation imposed by lockdowns often intensified the plight of children living in abusive households, as avenues for seeking help and support became more limited (Singh et al., 2020).

The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns presented particularly acute challenges for children with special needs, including those with conditions like autism, ADHD, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, developmental delays, and other behavioral and emotional difficulties (Singh et al., 2020). The disruption of routine, closures of specialized services, and reduced social support negatively affected their development and well-being. Specifically, research suggests that these children experienced increased emotional symptoms, conduct issues, and ADHD-related symptoms compared to peers without special needs (Panchal et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, many children and adolescents demonstrated remarkable resilience in navigating these circumstances. Key protective factors emerged as crucial in mitigating the negative impact of the pandemic on anxiety, depression symptoms, and overall mental well-being. Among these factors were nurturing parent-child relationships, constructive parent-child communication, adherence to established routines, participation in enriching play and recreational activities, and the maintenance of physical activity levels (Panchal et al., 2023).

1.1 Adapting Teachers' Strategies

Teachers can use this knowledge to be prepared to create supportive classroom environments that address any persistent mental health challenges their students may face since COVID-19 (Minkos & Gelbar, 2021). First, they should be able to recognize signs of psychological distress and disorder, in particular of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal or compulsive internet use. To reach this goal, it is necessary for teachers to improve their observational skills and sensitivity, as well as to pay attention to students' behaviors. Tutor teachers may help beginning teachers through mentoring and peer tutoring (Moretti,

2019). Then, teachers can create opportunities for deep listening and discussion, and implement more targeted interventions, such as adding more specific assessments or even integrating mindfulness or relaxation exercises into daily routines. Moreover, teachers must prioritize the necessities of students with special needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring they receive personalized support and accommodations tailored to their circumstances, given their potentially heightened vulnerability during the pandemic. By emphasizing open communication, healthy routines, and activities that promote resilience, teachers can help students continue to thrive emotionally and academically in the post-pandemic world.

2. Recognizing the Impact of the Pandemic on Students' Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic forced governments to take drastic preventive actions, determining an unexpected and unplanned disruption in the education system. Quarantine and school closures, which in most cases were followed by a switch to online learning or a hybrid system, affected about 95% of the student population (Betthäuser et al., 2023). This shift significantly impacted students' learning progress and the development of their knowledge and skills (Di Pietro, 2023).

By the end of 2022, there was an unprecedented decline in academic performance worldwide, mostly attributable to the effects of the pandemic (OECD, 2023). A recent systematic review and meta-analysis by Betthäuser and colleagues (2023) found that the learning progress of school-age children slowed significantly during the pandemic, with students losing about 35% of a school year's learning. Learning deficits during the pandemic were more pronounced in mathematics than in reading, and these issues did not differ across grade levels (Betthäuser et al., 2023). The shift to online learning may have had a particularly negative impact on students whose curricula included experiential learning tasks (e.g., developing art or science projects, using materials to learn writing or math, etc.) that could not be effectively replicated in a virtual environment (Di Pietro, 2023).

While it might be expected that children would recover lost learning after adjusting to normal learning conditions, research shows that by 2021, students had not recovered from the learning deficits caused by COVID-19 in 2020 (Di Pietro, 2023). Indeed, previous research on teacher strikes and education disruptions during World War II suggests that learning deficits – delays in expected progress and the loss of already acquired skills and knowledge – are difficult to compensate for and tend to accumulate.

An Italian survey reveals that during the pandemic, parents expressed negative views on distance learning due to disorganization, lack of evaluation, and difficulty in contacting teachers (Scarpellini et al., 2021). Moreover, a minority of children (1.5%) could not participate in class due to tech access issues.

Mothers struggled to motivate children and manage behavioral challenges like reduced attention span, increased need for breaks, restlessness, and anxiety. As a result, primary students' academic performance declined. However, middle school grades remained stable. This can likely be attributed to the refinement of test planning strategies and the introduction of oral exams at the middle school level (Scarpellini et al., 2021).

The academic challenges during the pandemic appear to be linked to the overload of children's cognitive capacities due to the multiple stimuli involved in remote learning (Korzycka et al., 2021). The lack of proper cognitive stimulation and social interaction during COVID-19 lockdowns likely harmed young children's learning performance (Cortés-Albornoz et al., 2023). Additionally, factors such as time constraints, inadequate digital skills, or a lack of clear educational guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic limited parents' ability to offer emotional support and reduced teacher enthusiasm. These challenges prevented them from providing the necessary support, potentially impacting students' learning experiences and attitudes (OECD, 2020).

2.1 Adapting Teachers' Strategies

Teachers at various educational levels should acknowledge that post-pandemic students may significantly differ from pre-pandemic students in terms of learning styles and abilities. It is critical to improve teachers' skills and abilities in responding to diverse student needs. Effective assessment tools can help teachers identify areas of difficulty, adapt curriculum, and adopt innovative practices (UNESCO, 2022; Tang, 2023). Considering that learning deficits were detected among students even two and a half years after the onset of the pandemic, Betthäuser and colleagues (2023) suggest different strategies to mitigate these deficits: summer schools, extended school days and weeks, scale-up tutoring programs, free learning apps, online platforms, or educational television programs.

Assessment of student progress should align with the principles of student-centered learning, ensuring that the unique needs and abilities of each student are taken into account. By consistently using formative assessments, observation, and feedback, teachers can monitor student growth and adjust instruction accordingly. This approach fosters a supportive and engaging learning environment, addressing the diverse needs of all students in the post-pandemic era (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). Consequently, mentors play a crucial role in guiding beginning teachers to effectively use these assessment strategies.

By understanding individual students' learning gaps and providing personalized learning experiences, teachers can better support students' educational journey, promoting student success and achievement (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). Thus, teachers should perceive the curriculum as dynamic, continuously adapting it to cultivate competencies pertinent to the modern age (Tang, 2023). It is essential to engage students in co-developing aspects of the cur-

riculum, granting them the opportunity to personalize their learning pathways (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). Listening to student preferences and integrating them into lesson design can create a more engaging learning experience, boost student satisfaction, and encourage students to exercise self-determination and active participation in the school community (Zhao & Watterston, 2021).

Creating supportive environments through community-building initiatives and stress management resources can help mitigate the negative impacts of student anxiety and isolation experienced during the pandemic. Specifically, incorporating psychosocial support into schools could be one way to meet the needs of educators and students. The 2020 agreement between the Italian Ministry of Education (MI) and the National Council of the Order of Psychologists (CNOP) funded the presence of school psychologists to prevent psychological distress and promote wellbeing (Protocollo d'Intesa, 2020). In 70% of the schools that applied for funding, psychological support was activated or implemented. However, this funding was available only for the 2020-2021 school year (Italian Ministry of Education, 2021). Teachers can play a proactive role in identifying and monitoring students at risk for psychosocial problems before referring them to professionals (Tang, 2023). In addition, techniques such as meditation, mindfulness, and relaxation offer avenues for identifying and transforming negative thought patterns, thereby reducing stress, enhancing attention, bolstering mental well-being, and fostering self-awareness. These practices can be seamlessly integrated into daily routines, either individually or in group settings, providing valuable support for students (Córdova et al., 2023).

3. Cultivating resilience

The pandemic has placed significant strain on teachers, who have had to adapt to new teaching methods, incorporate technology into their lessons, and navigate the challenges of hybrid learning while also preventing the spread of the virus. Many Italian teachers faced challenges in implementing distance learning due to organizational issues like planning sessions, lacking teaching materials, and assessing student understanding (Doz et al., 2023; Van der Spoel et al., 2020). The shift to new teaching technologies often caused dissatisfaction and issues related to maintaining student motivation and engagement (Oxfam Edu, 2023).

This strain led to heightened psychological distress among teachers of different countries and educational sectors, with studies reporting alarming rates of anxiety (17%), depression (29%), and stress (39%) (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Many teachers experienced burnout, resulting in diminished teacher-student relationships, which, in turn, was associated with poorer academic performance and increased behavioral issues among students (Geraci et al., 2023), and decreased job satisfaction among teachers (Doz et al., 2023.).

Which resilience factors supported teachers in managing the challenges of the pandemic and might prove essential for teachers during their probationary year? Studies revealed that teachers with elevated levels of emotional intelligence, strong metacognitive skills, high self-efficacy, adequate work-life balance, and positive social interactions were particularly capable of coping with the demands of the pandemic.

3.1 Emotional Intelligence and Metacognition

According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to: (a) perceive, value, and express emotions accurately; (b) access and generate feelings that facilitate thinking; (c) understand emotions and have emotional awareness; and (d) regulate emotions and promote emotional and intellectual growth.

A study by Geraci and colleagues (2023) revealed that Italian teachers with strong emotional intelligence experienced lower burnout levels while maintaining high self-efficacy and work engagement. Emotional intelligence serves as a valuable resource enabling teachers to adapt to various life contexts and manage anger and frustration effectively (Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2019). Conversely, low levels of emotional intelligence during the pandemic were a risk factor for anxiety, burnout, and strained teacher-student relationships (Geraci et al., 2023).

Metacognitive competence emerges as another significant protective factor in teachers' professional lives. Defined as a multidimensional set of skills that involve "thinking about thinking", metacognition includes two main components: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation. The first entails the ability to understand oneself as a learner, factors affecting performance, knowing strategies for learning and problem-solving, and knowing when and why to use specific strategies. The second includes planning activities, monitoring comprehension and task performance, and evaluating the effectiveness of strategies and processes (Lai, 2011).

By honing metacognitive skills, teachers can gain valuable insights into their teaching methods, ultimately leading to more effective teaching practices and better student outcomes. Iacolino and colleagues (2023) found that emotional intelligence and metacognition are crucial for teachers in handling stress related to remote work. These factors helped teachers to reduce burnout and stress and respond more effectively in demanding situations.

Given the potentially detrimental impact of stress on health and teaching effectiveness – especially heightened during pandemic and post-pandemic periods and in the first year of teaching – teacher mentors play a crucial role. They help beginning teachers reflect on and improve their social-emotional and metacognitive skills through mentoring and peer coaching. This support not only fosters the development of teachers' cognitive, emotional, and social skills but also promotes positive classroom environments and enhances students' emotional well-being.

3.2 Self-efficacy

Teacher's self-efficacy refers to beliefs in personal and instructional ability to successfully cope with instructional tasks, obligations, and challenges, as well as to teachers' beliefs in their ability to motivate students' engagement and learning (Geraci et al., 2023; Caprara et al., 2006). While research on the impact of COVID-19 on novice teachers remains limited, there is some evidence that first-year teachers who experienced disruptions in their student teaching placements reported significantly diminished levels of overall teacher self-efficacy (VanLone et al., 2022). Most teachers expressed feeling inadequately prepared for their first year of teaching, especially regarding instructional strategies, classroom management, parental engagement, support for special education students, and adaptation to diverse teaching modalities due to disruptions during their student teaching experiences. During school closures, Doz and colleagues (2023) found that older teachers exhibited more resilience compared to younger counterparts, while younger teachers felt more helpless. This difference might be attributed to lower self-efficacy and experience among younger teachers, negatively impacting their adaptation to online teaching. Conversely, older teachers, often possessing stronger self-efficacy beliefs, likely adjusted more effectively, fostering positive feelings. Fostering a robust sense of teacher self-efficacy holds promise in fortifying novice teachers against burnout and premature departure from the profession, thus enhancing student outcomes.

Teacher mentors generally have high levels of self-efficacy, making them well equipped to help beginning teachers improve their sense of efficacy. Therefore, targeted training provided by these mentors or other specialists to further increase their self-efficacy can be very helpful. This training should address issues such as digital literacy and inclusive education. It is critical to recognize that digital literacy training should not be viewed as a temporary response to the pandemic, but rather as a permanent component for teachers to confidently use modern digital educational resources and methodologies. This proactive approach enables teachers to navigate the coming educational landscapes with confidence and competence (van der Spoel et al., 2020).

3.3 Positive social interactions

Many teachers reported dissatisfaction with their interactions with other adults during the pandemic, including colleagues, headmasters, and parents. This dissatisfaction often led to hostile emotions and became a significant source of stress in their teaching (Iacolino et al., 2023). Since professional collaboration is linked to higher job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and the adoption of innovative practices, it is essential to support teachers' cooperation with their colleagues. This collaboration can take various forms, including exchanging teaching materials, observing each other's classes, and providing feedback.

For novice teachers, mentoring and guidance from teacher mentors and veteran teachers can be particularly beneficial, helping them navigate challenges and develop their skills (VanLone et al., 2022).

4. Conclusions

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant psychological distress across various sectors, particularly in education. As previously mentioned, the pandemic has profoundly impacted students' mental health and learning experiences, while also intensifying challenges for teachers, especially those in the early stages of their careers. Novice teachers, already struggling with the inherent difficulties of their probationary year, had to swiftly adapt their teaching strategies and develop new digital skills. In addition, due to the long-term effects of COVID-19 on students, teachers continue to observe numerous ongoing difficulties among their students.

The probationary year is a critical period for newly hired teachers as they refine their knowledge and their skills and learn to apply them effectively within the school environment. After the pandemic, the school context has become even more demanding, exacerbating the challenges faced by novice teachers. Research on the pandemic's effects on both students and teachers has yielded valuable insights into strategies for addressing these challenges, which remain relevant and useful today.

Teacher mentors play a crucial role in supporting new teachers through mentoring and peer coaching, fostering the reflection process that is considered a core competency for teachers (cf. Schon, 1983). Mentoring can have a profound impact on the career path of beginning teachers, assisting them in orientation to the new school environment and supporting their skill development (Morettini et al., 2020). A mentoring model that develops the functional aspects of teaching, adaptability, innovation, creativity, resourcefulness, open-mindedness, collegial respect, and self-confidence is essential (Larsen et al., 2023).

To address students' psychological difficulties, teachers must be able to recognize signs of distress, create opportunities for deep listening and open dialogue, and use techniques to manage anxiety, such as relaxation exercises and mindfulness. More severe cases should be referred to specialized psychological services. In addition, teachers need to recognize that student learning has been disrupted by school closures and distance learning. Consequently, more emphasis should be placed on using effective teaching strategies that prioritize the needs of individual students, personalize instruction, and integrate supplementary programs and multimedia content.

Beginning teachers can rely on their resilience, while teacher mentors play a central role in guiding them to harness emotional intelligence, metacognition and self-efficacy. By activating reflective processes, mentors can help beginning

teachers develop their metacognitive skills, thereby enhancing their sense of self-efficacy. Establishing a trusting, supportive and collaborative relationship between mentors and beginning teachers is crucial, as the absence of such a relationship can have a negative impact on both teaching practices and student learning. According to Mosley and colleagues (2022), both new and experienced teachers find mentoring beneficial to their practice. This suggests that mentoring can be advantageous for not only novice teachers but also experienced teachers.

Given the significant changes in teachers' roles during the pandemic and post-pandemic, there is an urgent need to improve their ability to facilitate communication, promote discussions, and effectively motivate students. The adaptability shown by teachers in adjusting to new educational needs underscores the importance of flexibility in content delivery and organization. Ultimately, the pandemic has highlighted the potential for transformation in education. However, for these changes to be fully realized, teachers, particularly during their probationary period, must receive adequate support to enable them to perform their roles effectively and achieve positive educational outcomes even under the most challenging circumstances.

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CHAPTER 3

The national system of mentors in the educational field. The PROF project, Romania.

Daniel Mara

1. Introduction

In this chapter we propose to present the main components of the project POCU "*PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE TEACHING CAREER – PROF*", Project code: POCU/904/6/25/146587, which took place between 01 April 2021 – 31 December 2023 and aimed at creating the national network of mentors in the educational field, by strengthening the professional status of the pedagogical practice mentor, already existing within the initial teacher training programs and by setting up and imposing the professional status of the teaching career mentor, a professional figure created and implemented for the first time at the level of the Romanian education system.

The general objective of the PROF project aimed at ensuring professional mentoring throughout the entire teaching career, in the pre-university education system, by creating a coherent and reliable national system of professional training and the development of didactic and psycho-pedagogical skills, necessary to occupy and exercise a didactic function such as and obtaining pedagogical performance in pre-university education in Romania, in the teaching/training activity and in the educational management activity, in the context of the global process of digitization of education systems.

The diagnosis of the pre-university educational system revealed the need to quickly restructure the current system regarding the beginning and evolution of the teaching career, in order to make it more efficient and adapt it to the specifics of contemporary education.

The central theme of the PROF project is that of mentoring, a complex key concept, determined both by the evolution of theoretical approaches and by the various ways of its application in educational practice in different education systems. Through the PROF project, the Romanian Ministry of Education has carried out the redesign of the professional training system for the teaching career, intervening, both at the level of initial training, through practical internships, and at the level of continuing training, by creating learning communities and flexible access routes and career development.

Both the practical part of the initial training and the continuous training of teaching staff, as professional development, is carried out in the format

of the learning community, through the pedagogical practice bases (BPP). These are school consortia that bring together, under the coordination of an application school, various types of educational units, offering future teachers and those developing in this field opportunities for training and professional development through the multitude of educational contexts they hold. The role of the mentor teacher, within a learning community, built, to begin with, in the structure of the pedagogical practice base, is very important. It identifies the need for training, supports, mediates, validates and disseminates the training, based on the training standards associated with the teacher's training profile.

The quality of the continuous training process is due to the fact that it is carried out in the school, similar to the system of pedagogical practice, not outside it, through the participation of teachers in courses and/or by placing them in learning contexts external to the educational process, and involves the teacher- student, on a peer-learning model, in a blended-learning system.

2. The learning community in the school – the basis of pedagogical practice

By Ministerial Order no. 3564/2021 the pedagogical practice bases (BPP) are established, organized and operated, which are school consortia that bring together, under the coordination of an application school, various types of educational units, offering future teachers and those developing in this field training and professional development opportunities through the multitude of educational contexts they hold. BPP is formed around a high school pre-university education unit with the status of an application school, called a coordinating application school, which concludes partnership agreements with other educational units, in order to organize and carry out pedagogical practice and didactic mentoring activities, constituting a school consortium.

BPP have a pedagogical profile or have a profile other than the pedagogical profile and prove: the existence of teaching staff with the status of mentor teachers and/or teachers with teaching experience and methodical activity; the existence of a suitable material basis for the organization and conduct of practical pedagogical internships within the initial and continuous training programs; accessibility and versatility of tools, resources and educational means; participation in international educational programs/projects for student and teacher mobility, such as Erasmus, eTwinning, other projects and programs organized by international bodies with an educational, scientific or cultural profile.

The pedagogical practice bases are not only these application schools, but several schools coordinated by this unit. The order stipulates that the number of pre-university education units established in a pedagogical practice base is at least 4 and no more than 6.

School consortia of the Pedagogical Practice Base type are thus introduced.

The consortium must include the following types of pre-university education units: the coordinating application school – the high school education unit that will identify itself and be called BPP; an educational unit that educates students from vulnerable social/medical (hospital school)/racial/ethnic/economic/geographic backgrounds; an educational unit that provides education for the primary and secondary levels; vocational education unit. Bases comprising more than 4 units can be formed by joining the application school coordinators and with educational units from the rural environment and/or with units that have structures for early education and/or with other educational units of the same type (theoretical, vocational, technological high school education units), located in the same county/municipality Bucharest or neighboring counties. The director or deputy director of the coordinating educational unit is the coordinator of the Pedagogical Practice Base.

The coordinating mentor teacher within the BPP is a teacher employed at the coordinating application school, who teaches pedagogical subjects or who has methodical experience

relevant/for didactic mentoring in the specialty of one of the disciplines in which practical pedagogical internships/pedagogical activities are organized and carried out. Within the BPP, an adequate number of mentor teachers will be selected to ensure the organization and conduct of didactic mentoring activities.

The learning community created and developed in the school through mentoring includes the teachers in a school, the students who learn in that institution, as well as the other educational agents. All of these members are driven by common learning goals. In a learning community, interactions are both practical and emotional, and members share knowledge, skills, resources, and support, emphasizing open and coherent communication. Teachers understand the school as a learning community and as a community in which learning is practiced. Members of a learning community are aware that the collaborative relationship improves academic performance but also contributes to the development of self-knowledge and self-esteem of all members of that community.

Learning communities create and maintain an environment that fosters collaboration, honest discussion, and commitment to the growth and development of individual members and the group as a whole. They start from the premise that teachers are intellectuals who do knowledge work and not just technicians who implement other people's ideas. This means that members of learning communities privilege both theory and practice. Also, within learning communities members are encouraged to examine their practice, try new ideas and reflect together on the educational process, they are given opportunities for collective construction and sharing of new knowledge. Equally important to the learning community concept is the link it establishes between professional and student learning. As teachers identify and solve problems of educational practice together, they develop their collective capacity and will to

advance school equity and improve learning and achievement for all students. If successful, communities can change school culture for students, teachers, and administrators, but it requires members to maintain a commitment to creating shared values, maintaining a collective focus on student learning, working collaboratively within coordinated efforts to improve and retain collective control over decisions about teaching and learning.

3. Teaching Career Mentorship training program

The Teaching Career Mentorship training program was designed to meet the needs of teacher mentor trainers who will carry out training activities in the field of teaching career mentoring.

The training program was oriented by the objectives regarding the formation of the capacities for rapid adaptation to changes of a social nature, the valorization of the methods and techniques of knowledge and activation of students and disciples, the responsible assumption of the social role of the teaching mentor, involvement in the development and development, in schools, of national and international cooperation projects, identifying dynamics and trends on the labor market and correlating them with the instructional-educational process, etc.

The development of the professional skills targeted by the continuous training program was achieved through:

- awareness of the importance of the axiological component in professional performance, a sine qua non condition of professional development, but also of the integration of the Romanian school in the European space, from the perspective of the Community Aquis in the field of education;
- understanding the importance of transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary openings;
- the formation of a professional culture focused on the mastery of modern communication techniques;
- privileging the quality of educational actions in order to make Romanian education compatible with internationally performing systems in the spirit of the Bologna declaration;
- understanding the importance of approaches focused on the development of critical and creative thinking;
- resizing the scientific research of the education staff, promoting research as an essential criterion of professionalism;
- developing the capacity to rethink the contents and model the teaching and evaluation techniques according to the requirements of the reform, the requirements of the local community, the specifics of the class, the particularities of the age of the students;
- developing the ability to adapt to the plurality of instructional contexts by writing alternative textbooks, structuring programs and course materials for CDŞ, creating new didactic methods;

– developing the capacities to value differences positively;
– developing the capacity to build interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches based on openness, flexibility and effective communication;
– continuous professional and personal development with a view to career advancement, both for the individual and for those being mentored.

Within the *Teaching Career Mentoring module* – from concept to action, the proposed activities aimed to sensitize the participants to the current issue of educational mentoring, as well as familiarize them with the specific concepts: mentor, mentoring, types of mentoring, personality, roles, skills of the mentor in the educational field, by posing and solving problems specific to the analyzed field. The strategic and methodological vision has been adapted to adult pedagogy and integrates the facilities offered by modern means of instruction and communication.

The chapter *New European and national policies in the professionalization of the teaching career* contained content through which the trainees were familiarized with the new national and European educational policies, in the context of the publication of the Educated Romania Report (July 2021) and the existence of analyzes and reports related to the professionalization of the teaching career, in different states of Europe. The chapter highlights the main problems faced by the current didactic activity, presents the long-term objectives, as well as the measures that are required at the national/European level, for the didactic mentoring support of teachers throughout their entire teaching career.

The chapter *Concepts and professionalization processes regarding didactic mentoring, national and international legislative aspects* includes theoretical and practical aspects of didactic mentoring, which contribute to awareness of the main particularities of didactic mentoring activity, through the lens of existing legislation at international level and last but not least , nationally. Detailing the status of the didactic mentor in different European countries, as well as the legal framework for carrying out the mentoring activity in European states and in Romania, creates the prerequisites for the professionalization of didactic mentoring.

The chapter *Cultural and gender differences in the mentoring process* includes content through which cultural and gender differences are defined and exemplified, the dimensions of the didactic mentoring relationship are analyzed, the types and stereotypes involved in the didactic mentoring activity, the methods and strategies recommended in to overcome cultural and gender differences.

Within the module *Elements of adult education and teaching career mentoring – values, principles, characteristics*, in the chapter *Principles and models of adult learning*, aspects are presented that aim at the specifics of learning and motivation for learning in adulthood, a series of principles being identified useful in the didactic activity. A separate space is dedicated to forms of learning whose effectiveness has been demonstrated in numerous studies: self-directed learning, experiential learning, respectively cooperative learning,

highlighting both ways of developing/implementing them in adult training and application models.

Chapter *Designing and organizing the adult/trainer training process; Principles and models of adult learning* includes the presentation of the important stages of the design and implementation of adult/mentor training programs, principles, characteristics of learning in adulthood, as benchmarks for the awareness and elaboration of training projects for teaching career mentors. A training, learning, development program starts with a thorough planning and design, which includes all the conditions, factors, variables that can influence it. If planning is deficient, in terms of defining the purpose and how the results will be measured, problems will arise in the implementation of the training program.

The chapter *Management of difficult situations and personalities in the context of training* addresses the challenges and difficulties trainers face in the context of training activities, especially the issue of difficult personalities and the situations they generate in the said context.

The *Designing the mentoring activity module includes the chapter Identifying the needs for training and professional development in the teaching career – strategies and tools*, through which the participants in the training program are offered the appropriate support and context for the realization of a set of useful strategies and tools for making a diagnosis . The chapter *Factors that contribute to the efficiency of the mentoring process in education* includes the theoretical and practical support for the analysis of the educational situations specific to Romanian education in order to identify the elements that can be improved to increase the efficiency of the mentoring activity.

The chapter *Strategies in the mentoring activity* proposes a reconsideration of the didactic methodology (classical and modern) from the perspective of teaching-learning good didactic practices, respectively the evaluation of beginning teachers. The strategies proposed for the mentoring activity will include modern learning tools and applications based on digital technologies. Classic didactic methods (demonstration, observation, role play, debate, case study, modeling, problem solving, etc.) are integrated into the mentoring strategies in complementarity with adapted active and cooperative learning techniques: team teaching, lesson incubator, flipped classroom, fishbowl format mentoring. The mentor trainers also familiarize themselves with the tools from the mentor's portfolio needed both in the activities of observation, teaching, lesson analysis and in the (self) evaluation of the performance of beginning teachers. Mentors and teachers in training will learn a common professional language, specific to adults but also to the elite professional condition, language in which to communicate effectively about the teaching profession, the development of teaching skills and to reflect in depth on the various aspects of "teaching". Adequate verbalization of knowledge about teaching, transfer of experience in a constructive way, emotional and moral support contribute to the access of young teachers to the "art of teaching".

The *Ethics of Mentoring Relationships* chapter includes contents that problematize the ethical aspects characteristic of teaching in pre-university education (including mentoring), present the most important normative acts and regulations regarding ethics in pre-university education and illustrate their application by discussing one of the most complicated problems in current Romanian education (the problem of similarity).

The *Management of the didactic mentoring proc*ess module includes the chapter *Assertive Communication*, which aims to familiarize both with the complex and sensitive field of interpersonal communication, as well as the development of assertive communication skills, indispensable in mentoring activities. They are also aimed at practicing self-knowledge and problem-solving skills specific to educational communication. A fundamental theoretical framework and a significant applied part are developed to enable the training of practical skills of mentors to actively contribute to the transformation of schools into organizations that learn and develop continuously, where authentic and effective communication becomes a priority throughout teaching careers. The aim is the initial and continuous training for the optimization of educational communication and the configuration of assertive communication expertise in the professional development of teaching staff. The contents proposed to the participants allow explaining and exemplifying the variables specific to communication, as well as specifying the importance of knowing the factors on which communication depends in order to build an assertive and effective message. The participants will analyze the quality conditions of an effective assertive communication: the evaluation and self-evaluation of a speech, the development of the ability to argue, dialogue and cooperation, the practice and improvement of personal expression, the efficiency of the skill of active listening.

The topics addressed in the *Working techniques chapter for managing and strengthening the team and trust* address the specific field of teamwork management, with elements of theoretical and practical utility for the teaching profession. The aim is to develop specific skills for training, developing and strengthening effective work teams, by using work techniques that cultivate intercollegiate trust, indispensable for a successful educational activity. Team work and the training necessary to achieve performance in diverse teams, with all educational actors (students, parents, colleagues, teaching career mentors, school managers), is one of the most acute and sensitive needs in the professional development of teaching staff in our country, as a considerable effort is needed to rebuild professional mentalities and train mentors as team leaders, so that the teams in the school space become functional and efficient. It is very important that relationships in a team are built on genuine values of trust, respect and transparency in order to achieve the common goal.

In the chapter *Self-knowledge and performance – exploring the personal profile (cognitive, emotional, social, value, attitudinal styles*) self-knowledge is addressed from the perspective of recent theories on the development of human potential, with an emphasis on identifying the elements of the personal profile in

accordance with the self-leadership model. Also, the theme incorporates effective strategies for developing the skills and competencies contained in the model, with the aim of facilitating self-knowledge and effective positioning in educational roles, but also the development of a solid professional identity, in accordance with individual values.

Within the *Counseling for training and professional development in teaching career mentoring* module, in the chapter *Techniques of coaching, counseling and psycho-pedagogical guidance*, the main models of coaching, counseling and guidance are presented, with an emphasis on the methods applicable in the context of the mentoring process. The importance of knowing and implementing counseling and coaching strategies in the teaching career is given by the need to identify individual didactic development solutions, tailored to the needs of each person and the fit between them and the organizational culture of the school. The National Curriculum represents the regulatory document of the didactic and educational activity and is the teacher's working tool. Transposing the curricular provisions into practice involves the design of the didactic approach. This precedes and anticipates the teaching activity in the classroom and involves the following steps by the teacher: reading the school curriculum; the delimitation of the learning units that are the basis of the realization of the calendar planning; development of calendar planning; designing learning units; designing lessons – necessary-mandatory in the case of beginning teachers and optional afterwards, taking flexible and counter-forms depending on the level of professional development, the stage of the teacher's career – ultimately being a coordinate of professional self-requirement. The complete reading of the school curriculum and the application of its internal logic are mandatory conditions for the effective design of the didactic activity. In the sequence aimed at the relationship in the mentoring process in this module, the favorable framework for building an adequate, efficient and functional relationship between the mentor and the mentee is presented as a result of going through some stages and using some relationship skills in the interaction process between the two people . In this module, personal and professional development in the teaching career is addressed under the umbrella of professionalization, in the context of which the training of professional skills and the development/optimization of personal skills are the key factors of career progress and personal well-being among teaching staff.

Within the module *Evaluation and validation of professional didactic skills*, the chapter *Development of adult assessment methods and instruments* includes the presentation of adult assessment methods and instruments, types of items and aspects related to the self-assessment process. The evaluation represents the totality of the activities through which the data obtained from the application of some measuring instruments are collected, organized and interpreted in order to issue a value judgment on which a certain educational decision is based. The proposed activities aim to sensitize students to the issue of evaluation in the educational mentoring process. Evaluation and self-evaluation in

mentoring activities can be approached both from the perspective of the mentor and the mentee. The topic and the proposed activities aim to train the mentors' capacity to develop and use strategies and tools appropriate to the activities carried out, as well as the objective self-evaluation capacity of mentors and mentees. The strategic and methodological vision is adapted to adult pedagogy and integrates the facilities offered by modern means of instruction and communication.

The chapter *Professional teaching standards and qualification levels* includes the presentation of the general framework for teacher training in Europe and Romania.

4. Pedagogical practice mentorship training program

The purpose of the program was to develop the competences of pre-university teaching staff in the field of pedagogical practice mentoring, both from the perspective of the initial training of teaching staff, and from the perspective of facilitating the integration and adaptation of beginning teachers to the specifics of the organization and functioning of the educational system.

The objectives of the program aimed at: the training of specific skills for the innovative and effective exercise of the role of pedagogical practice mentor; optimizing the design, implementation and evaluation of pedagogical practice to increase the quality of school activities and the personalized approach to teaching roles for a quality inclusive education and the successful integration of students at educational risk; empowering teaching staff with the role of pedagogical practice mentor in the design and use in practical activities of materials, techniques and tools specific to the teaching career, in accordance with legislation, professional standards, ethics and professional deontology; the identification and application of mentoring models, best practices, methods, techniques and tools to make the process more efficient and increase the quality of the training process for aspirants to the teaching profession; capitalizing on the new strategies and techniques of e-learning and ICT in the implementation of pedagogical practice; the open, innovative approach to the field of teaching staff training and the identification of solutions for the successful integration of young graduates into the field of education; stimulating an inclusive and responsible attitude towards practitioners, students, parents, the community.

In the module *Mentoring of pedagogical practice – premise of the quality of education*, the role of mentoring in the current educational context is emphasized. This is stated in various educational policy documents, such as the OECD Report, which points out that students in schools with teacher mentoring perform better in reading than students enrolled in schools without mentoring (OECD, 2020, PISA 2018, volume V: Effective Policies, Successful Schools, p. 180).

The data provided by the OECD correlates with those processed by Pro-

fessor John Hattie, who showed that the greatest impact on the quality of learning is the ability of teachers to collaborate in the school team, to plan the didactic activity together, to share the belief in education and to continually evaluate their actions. Or exactly these aspects could be ensured through mentoring – genuine, honest, peer-to-peer communication and collaboration, uniting efforts towards a common goal. This common goal is the estimated progress of each student, believing that each student deserves the chance to progress (Hattie, 2014.)

In the mentoring activity, a central place is occupied by the axiological dimension (universal values, individual values). An important particularity of the pedagogical practice mentoring within the initial training program for future teachers is that it is carried out by experienced teachers from pre-university education (mentor teachers), right in the professional field in which future graduates are to integrate, i.e. in school . From this point of view, a number of authors highlight how relevant it is for students to understand the importance of their integration in concrete work situations from the first years of college, where they can establish bridges between academic learning and actual professional practices through integrated learning in work.

In the module *Professionalizing the teaching career through pedagogical practice mentoring – policies and directions for action*, the conclusions of the EU Council (May 2020) regarding European teachers and trainers are presented, which highlight the fact that "special attention should be paid to beginning teachers, offering them guidance and additional mentoring, to facilitate their career start and to help them cope with the specific needs they face". It is also found that there is a consensus among researchers and educational policy makers that teacher training is very important for quality teaching and student learning outcomes.

The professionalization of the teaching career is a complex, multidimensional process, which requires active and responsible involvement, through awareness of the role and status corresponding to the teaching profession, but also of the social attributes that derive from it. Pedagogical practice mentoring has a long tradition, including at the level of educational institutions in Romania, with a role in the practical training, in a school context, of future teachers.

In the module *Mentoring the design of didactic activities*, paradigm changes are presented, by designing didactic activities according to interactive strategies and methods. The activity aims to address several aspects, among which: the role of the mentor in the interactive design of didactic activities (formative, critical and constructive, analytical) in the training/professional development of the beginner; strategies used to design the didactic activity in mentoring; psychopedagogical and didactic criteria of the strategies used in the mentoring activity; the design of activities and their rationalization in the mentoring activity, a sine qua non condition of optimization in the preparation of the beginning teacher; the connection of structural elements (objectives, content,

strategy, evaluation, etc.) in the design of the didactic activity proposed by the mentor; the stages of didactic design at the mentorship level.

In the Pedagogical *Practice Activities Management* module, a series of specific actions are presented through which the practicing students will become familiar, on the one hand, with the various types of activities carried out in the educational unit, and on the other, with the multiple roles and professional responsibilities that the teaching staff can assume at the level of the school institution. An important stage in the management of pedagogical practice is the students' general knowledge of the application school institution and its way of organization and operation, both from an administrative and educational point of view, at the level of both managerial tools and regulatory documents (school and curricular) as well as actual practices. The management of the school organization, but also the management of the educational curriculum as an important aspect of the management of the class of students, constitute elements that define the organization and operation of the educational institution.

The actual didactic activity carried out with the class of students/group of preschoolers constitutes the most complex object of the management of pedagogical practice activities. By combining the two forms of pedagogical practice, that of systematic observation and that of active, operational, actual exercise in the classroom, and by using relevant evaluation and self-evaluation criteria and indicators and various analysis tools, the practicing student will acquire a clear picture of the component elements of the didactic activity, of the type of lessons that can be conducted, as well as of the range of behaviors of the teaching staff necessary to carry out a successful and effective didactic activity.

In the context of the didactic activity, more attention must be paid to the management of the students' knowledge activity, since a good knowledge of the students' individuality contributes to increasing the scientific character of the pedagogical act. Psychopedagogical knowledge is a process with specific functions, continuous, organized according to efficiency criteria, in which, through an action of generalization and synthesis of a set of information accumulated through methods and in varied contexts, the educator highlights the parameters of the individual psychic organization of those on who educates them.

The use of information and communication technologies in pedagogical practice constitutes a relevant and current dimension of the management of pedagogical practice activities. In this context, it becomes mandatory for students to become familiar with online and blended-learning teaching, respectively with the ways of integrating new technologies and computer applications and virtual environments into the on-site teaching, and familiarizing them with the ways of capitalizing in the didactic process open educational resources.

In the pedagogic practice internships, a necessary training for the students is the relationship exercises with the parents in the context of various types of

activities, as well as the knowledge of ways to capitalize on the educational activity of the formative potential of the community, of the socio-cultural environment from which the students come. Opening up to the resources of the community and of the students' families as important educational agents and widening the framework for carrying out didactic activities, for the integration of these resources, represents a fundamental principle of the organization and functioning of the school institution.

In the *Pedagogical Practice Portfolio* module, the tools and methods by which the competences of the practice mentor teacher are highlighted are presented. The personality and training of the pedagogical mentor teacher directly affect the quality of practice in the educational environment. The mentor teacher will constantly train the students/practitioners regarding the whole didactic activities and will monitor through direct observation and through the analysis/evaluation of the products/results, the progress made by them in the acquisition of knowledge, the formation of specific capacities and attitudes that will contribute to the formation didactic skills.

In an informational society, where knowledge and creativity are key factors, investment in human capital must become a priority assumed at the level of educational policy. The increase in quality in the field of education and implicitly in all areas of social life, requires the reconsideration of policies, models and strategies of training and development of human resources, which contribute to the stimulation of competitiveness and cooperation, to the promotion of innovation, change, flexible training, as well as to the valorization of new information and communication technologies.

In this social and professional context, the pedagogical practice mentor teacher becomes an agent of change in education, his work being supported by a series of didactic mentoring tools that can constitute components of the portfolio. We illustrate some of the most relevant such materials, handouts, tools possible to use, inviting readers and trainers to develop and create other educational resources.

In the module *Evaluation and self-evaluation of pedagogical practice activities*, aspects related to the evaluation of students in pedagogical practice activities are presented. Thus, the evaluation of the professional skills of the practicing student involves establishing and assessing the extent to which he performs a number of professional tasks using an organized set of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes. This evaluation involves confronting the evaluated person with a variety of professional situations, in various contexts, which will give him the opportunity to highlight the level of his professional skills as best as possible.

The activity of pedagogical practice aims at the development of general professional skills, such as psycho-pedagogical skills, expressed in the design, management, evaluation of the training process, in knowledge, counseling and assisting the development of the student's personality; social skills, expressed in social interactions with students and school groups; managerial skills, ob-

jectified in the organization and management of the class of students. By participating in the pedagogic practice activities, the practicing student will develop a series of specific professional skills regarding: the interpretation of the school as a social organization, the specifics of educational units according to level, school documents, organizational and functioning structures; operating with information from specialized disciplines and integrating them into the analysis and interpretation of educational situations specific to various levels of education; design, management and evaluation of didactic activities carried out with students; critical-constructive analysis and self-evaluation of the quality of didactic projects and lessons; the application of appropriate methods, techniques and tools for getting to know students and groups of students in order to treat them differently and advise them; participation in the institutional development activities and in the methodical-scientific activities carried out in the school; collaboration with members of the school community and with the children's families. These competencies, which describe the psychopedagogical competence, are in accordance with both the Professional Standards for the teaching profession and the key competencies required for the awarding of teaching degrees.

The evaluation of pedagogical practice activities has a series of specific purposes, takes various forms and methods (initial, continuous, final), refers to a series of clear criteria and indicators and uses diversified evaluation strategies and methods (oral, written, practical evaluation, systematic observation of behavior, evaluation based on portfolio, project, self-evaluation, etc.). The most relevant criteria for evaluating the pedagogical practice activity are: knowledge of the curricular and school documents on which the organization and management of the didactic process is based; capitalizing on specific knowledge regarding the education process; capitalizing on specific knowledge regarding didactic design; organization of teaching-learning-evaluation activities; formation/development of students' knowledge capacity; the ability to self-assess and integrate feedback into the personal projection of professional development; involvement in carrying out activities complementary to the lessons.

The self-evaluation of pedagogical practice activities is essential in the initial and continuous training of teaching staff because it can provide valuable and operational benchmarks relevant to a multitude of personal and professional contexts. Self-evaluation supports and directs a complex process of reflexivity, as a basic component of teachers' self-evaluation, which consists of a multitude of analysis and comparison operations, between the way in which the respective practitioner carries out his teaching activity and the school documents, between the project of lesson and the lessons based on it, between how he understands the lesson and the students' perceptions, including the differences in the students' perceptions (as he can identify them), differences in conception, interpretation and methodology between him and the mentor, himself and peers, And so on The specialized literature proposes numerous methods and techniques of self-evaluation, classified according to several variables and

levels of analysis, in order to optimize the activities of self-evaluation of pedagogical practice. Starting from these, an integrated model is proposed, which provides a general framework for analysis and interpretation as well as operational benchmarks, in the context of didactic mentoring. The integrated model of self-evaluation of didactic activities (MIAD) considers two dimensions: a) the frame of reference (internal or external) and b) the stages of the self-evaluation process, at procedural level: identification, analysis and optimization.

5. Conclusions – the results obtained through the implementation of the PROF project

The results of the PROF project are included in the area of systemic educational policies aimed at the elaboration and development of an institutional framework adequate to the current mechanisms and standards for the training and development of teaching competence, in accordance with the recommendations and guidelines developed by the European Commission, in the field of teaching career/teacher training:

– the institutional mechanism of mentoring the teaching career, a mechanism that will ensure coherence and conceptual, operational, methodological and legislative unity in the teaching career development system;

– national regulatory body in the teaching career – the National Mentoring Center for the Teaching Career – CNMCD;

– 100 Bases of Pedagogical Practice (BPP), structured on the system of school consortia, bringing together application schools (529) in which practical pedagogical internships are organized – both at the level of initial training and at the level of continuing training – demonstration lessons, practical evaluations of didactic competence (various types of school inspection), pedagogical circles, studies on the quality of teaching/learning/evaluation, in blended learning and online systems, etc.;

– 11 Didactic Tutoring Centers (CTD), necessary for the training and development of didactic competence during the entire teaching career, in the current structure of the CCD, as learning/training facilitation centers;

– 4 Teaching Career Training Centers (CFCD) – higher education institutions with continuous training attributions, in the current structure of the Teaching Staff Training Departments (DPPD) within the universities, as entities providing training at an academic/professional level;

– National body of experts in the field of teaching career mentoring;

– Corps of trainers in the field of teaching career mentoring, established at the level of each county/at the level of the municipality of Bucharest. Didactic mentoring is approached as a guidance and support activity, carried out by a teacher with experience and expertise, for the professional development of those at the beginning of their teaching career or who are already in the process of continuous training. The implementation of a new curriculum, the design

and realization of the didactic approach and the management of the class of students in the online school, the use of blended learning in the didactic activity, the integration of children with special educational needs, the organization of didactic and extracurricular activities with an impact on education and sustainable development, etc. generates, in many situations, mentoring needs for teachers with different degrees of experience. Therefore, mentoring in the educational field takes new forms, in accordance with the increasingly complex and diverse needs that interfere with the evolution in the teaching career. The PROF project responded to the need to expand support from mentoring activities intended for those at the beginning of their teaching career, to mentoring activities carried out throughout the career evolution.

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CHAPTER 4

The perception of one's beliefs and skills in the professional actions of the teacher tutor

Massimo Margottini, Federica De Carlo

1. The foundation of professional action

The professionalism of the teacher is characterized by a complex interaction between cultural, educational, social skills, and specifically teaching skills, the result of an equally complex orchestration of knowledge, know-how, beliefs, and internal dispositions. Often, mediation is also discussed as a peculiar characteristic of the teacher's professional action. Competent action is always the result of a reinterpretation and reprocessing of behavioral protocols that involve cognitive, affective, motivational, volitional, and social dimensions and that are an expression of one's personal and professional identity. Professional identity can be considered as comprising a set of skills, abilities, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that relate to a work environment and is the result of a construction process by the individual, certainly within educational and professional contexts, but in a framework of awareness and personal responsibility. Building a professional identity, by the teacher, would also imply the possibility of developing spaces and practices of narration and reflexivity around one's professional actions, that is, what can typically be promoted through activities conducted in a workshop format and with internships of professional practice mediated by supervision.

One must wonder whether neglecting these aspects in the initial and ongoing training of the teacher could have implications in their professional life.

For about the last twenty years, the issue of discomfort in the teaching profession has been the subject of increasing attention from the research world as well as the media.

In the early years of the millennium, a Lombard doctor, Vittorio Lodolo D'Oria *et al*. (2003), with the Getsemani research conducted on 3049 clinical cases of requests for work disability in the Italian public administration, highlighted that the incidence of *burnout* syndrome among teachers is 2-3 times higher than that of other categories of public employees (doctors, nurses, public officials) and is constantly and significantly increasing (from 45% in the biennium 92/93 to 57.5% in the biennium 2001/2). In the same research, it

is hypothesized that "psychic discomfort"[1] is fueled under conditions of prolonged work stress, which often leads to the development of actual burnout (Bonetto, 2011).

Among the main stress factors, there would be a "pressure from above" that urges teachers towards continuous processes of change, evolution, but also rethinking of their role and professional practices. This not only implies new skills to meet the changed professional needs but also affects their understanding and representation of the school and teaching, thus continuously challenging their professional identity. It is also interesting to note that research shows that the main trigger for negative emotional states, suffering, discomfort, and thus burnout can be traced back to the conflict and distance in the representation of one's professionalism, of one's professional self, torn between ideal and reality. On the contrary, harmony and balance between personal, professional, and social identity promote well-being and emotional stability.

It is therefore appropriate to remember that professional identity develops and consolidates as a fundamental dimension of the same general personal identity, as it constitutes a fundamental component in order to give meaning and perspective to one's existence as a whole. Moreover, it refers especially to the awareness developed about one's aspirations, goals, fundamental motivations and values, the work skills actually achieved as a result of a progressive construction initially under the influence of educational environments, and then, increasingly, on the basis of lived experiences and the emotional and cognitive reactions that have marked them. Such construction is all the more lively, penetrating, and influential, the more it is the result of a life project consciously and responsibly elaborated and realized. In the current work context, professional identity constitutes the fundamental resource to call upon in order to face stressful situations, even painful transitions, periods of uncertainty, and the search for new job perspectives, being a motivational and dynamic source for setting up and realizing one's career.

In the specific case of the professional identity of a teacher or a trainer, it is appropriate to thoroughly explore the constructive process that, especially today, constitutes its structure. Studies on the subject fluctuate between an identity determined, in its fundamental configuration, by the demands coming from the current system of education and training and by the functions that define the role of a public administration employee, who must comply with the requirements of the current legislation. The professional identity of the teacher also suffers from continuous tension, as the school and vocational training context is characterized by profound and ongoing changes at both the organizational level and in terms of teaching content, as well as in response to the educational and training demand coming from society, families, and the labor market. This tends to further complicate the demand for teacher training, not only and not so much at the beginning but continuously, since such pro-

[1] From this point forward, the translations from Italian are the author's own.

gressive tensions influence the design, implementation, and evaluation of teaching activities themselves. Thus, the demand for competencies becomes more complex and extends especially on a plane of transversality.

It has been rightly written that "The primary architect of the design of one's own professionalism is the teacher themselves, a reflective professional according to Schön (1993), aware of their own role, capable of promoting and self-regulating their own learning process, both at an individual level and through communities of practice and practice networks" (Bandini et al., 2015). The competency area related to the ability of planning (self-determination) and conducting (self-regulation) one's professional development implies the awareness of what personally constitutes its meaning and the perspective that guides the fundamental choices to be made, the deep aspirations that animate one's self, the goals to be achieved, the competencies already acquired and those to be acquired, the motivations already present and those to be conquered (Pellerey, 2019). However, it is appropriate to add, to avoid deterministic interpretations, that human subjects certainly have the necessary potential for the development of such higher cognitive functions, but for such an increase, they need favorable socio-cultural environments. And in this direction, the contributions of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (2012) with the *capability approach* are decisive.

2. Self-assessment in the development of strategic competencies

Particularly significant, in this respect, is the ability to develop critical reflection on one's own learning and work experiences. To activate and make this reflective process fruitful, it is necessary that the educational context stimulates, guides, and supports it for a sufficient period of time until the individual becomes able to initiate and conduct it effectively on their own. In this case, too, it is evident that a central mode of developing one's self-regulation capacity consists of forms of internal dialogue that are activated in response to the different situations encountered.

Currently, many self-assessment tools are available based on self-perception questionnaires, starting from theoretical developments that refer to emerging needs in the workplace.

In our research work, a freely accessible digital platform www.competenzestrategiche.it has been progressively implemented (Pellerey *et al.*, 2013; Margottini, 2017), which includes a set of self-assessment questionnaires of one's strategic competencies, among which is the QPCC – Questionnaire of Perception of one's Competencies and Beliefs, Pellerey, 2001). The Questionnaire is aimed at adult subjects, engaged in relational work contexts, as is typically the professional context of a teacher, in order to stimulate reflective processes on the image they have of themselves and on the quality of the personal competencies and beliefs that determine their professional action.

Regarding the concept of competence referred to in the QPCC, it is necessary to emphasize that it is understood as the ability to orchestrate and mobilize various personal resources (cognitive, affective, volitional, motivational, beliefs, and convictions) to face various life and professional situations. Conviction is seen as a set of cultural aspects, metabolized experiences, critical and constructive reflection, and emotional resonance that provides a series of interpretative frameworks guiding the individual in making decisions and facing new challenges (Pellerey, 2001). In this sense, the QPCC allows the evaluation of four fundamental dimensions of professional action: the cognitive dimension, the affective-emotional dimension, the motivational dimension, and the volitional dimension. It is composed of 63 items that belong to 10 scales of cognitive, affective-emotional, volitional, and motivational nature.

The construct of professional action has been explored in depth, in recent decades, by various scholars and in different disciplinary fields: sociological, psychological, pedagogical, economic.

A contribution of great importance to the realization of the questionnaire comes from research in the psychological field.

As Michele Pellerey (2001) emphasizes, the German psychologist H. Heckhausen (1992) was among the first to study the process of self-direction in terms of motivational drives, because it is strongly linked to the phase of determining the goals one wants to achieve through pathways of choice and intentionality of action.

Psychologists E. L. Deci and R. M. Ryan (1985) outlined two main types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. These correspond to psychological needs that meet the primary need to provide a sense to actions, in order to satisfy one's psychological well-being. As these scholars maintain, intrinsic motivation corresponds to innate needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Extrinsic motivation involves the pursuit of pleasure derived from external reinforcements (rewards, advantages, etc.). Through the process of internalization, the integration of the two types of motivation can occur. An example is the motivation for wealth linked to the need for autonomy and competence.

Subsequently, J. Kuhl (2000), a student of Heckhausen, reconsidered the decision-making process by dividing it into two phases: the pre-decisional motivational phase and the post-decisional volitional phase. Focusing on the post-decisional phase, Kuhl developed the theory of volitional control of action, with which he introduced the concept of "action orientation." With this, he identified a system of self-regulation according to which, over the years, the individual develops a series of metacognitive strategies aimed at self-control of actions. Among these we recall: strategies for selective attention to information; strategies for memorization and encoding of information; strategies for controlling emotions and protecting motivations; strategies for managing and organizing the study and work environment; strategies for overcoming situations that risk hindering the achievement of the goal.

Another scholar, B. J. Zimmerman (1989), considering self-regulation as

the learning process that involves the individual on the metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral levels, has grouped the variables that determine this process into three categories:

– metacognitive aspects: the ability to use cognitive strategies (memory, processing, organization) for the processing of information and the control of mental processes directed towards the achievement of goals;
– affective aspects: the ability to control emotions and motivational drives (self-efficacy, orientation towards learning, satisfaction, etc.);
– volitional aspects: the ability to plan and control time and actions to be performed (avoiding distractions, maintaining concentration and focus on the goal);
– relational aspects: responsibility, active participation, exchange, and communication with others.

Within this theoretical framework, Michele Pellerey has developed a series of self-assessment questionnaires that investigate various cognitive, affective, motivational, volitional, and relational dynamics and their roles in learning processes and at work.

Regarding the set of questionnaires available on the competenzestrategiche.it platform and their use in educational and guidance contexts within schools, particularly secondary schools, an account has already been given in the volume related to previous editions of this same training course (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019).

In the training course held in the academic year 2021/22, the educational proposal, curated by the author, focused on the knowledge and application of the QPCC.

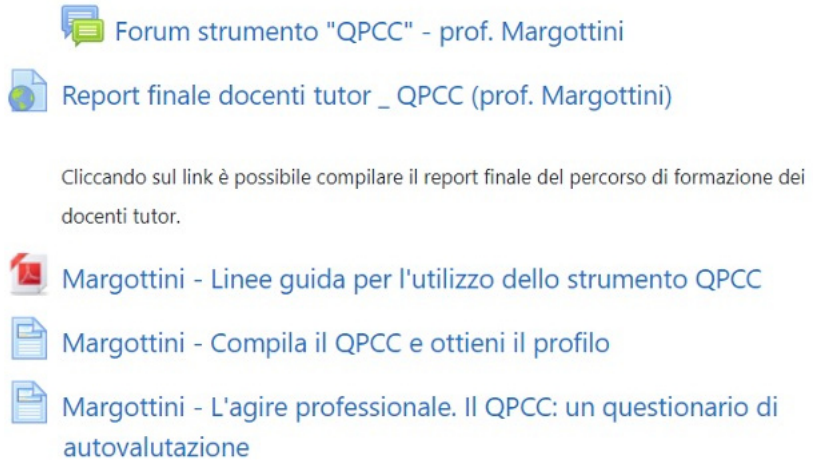
This tool aims to investigate certain competencies and beliefs that can be considered foundational to professional action in relational contexts. The items are phrased in the form of descriptions of actions or behaviors common in a professional performance and are answered using a four-level scale: never or almost never, sometimes, often, almost always or always. The questionnaire is administered digitally, via the competenzestrategiche.it platform, and upon completion, a graphical profile with textual comments is provided, allowing reflection on the competency's dimensions explored. If applied within educational contexts, the proposal is to initiate reflective processes that can naturally develop into narrative practices, converging in the drafting of professional diaries or, as also suggested by regulations concerning newly hired teachers, in the creation of an e-portfolio. These practices can significantly contribute to the processes of constructing one's professional identity (Margottini, 2019; La Rocca, Margottini, 2017).

3. The educational proposal for tutor teachers

Within the framework of training activities aimed at tutor teachers of newly hired staff, which are detailed in this volume, conducted through several in-

person meetings and modular deep-dives via an e-learning platform, teachers are given the opportunity to choose which topics to delve into and to report on them with a final presentation.

The deep-dive into the knowledge and application of the QPCC was structured, as shown in the image that follows from the e-learning platform of the training course: in a discussion forum to develop the contents presented through a study unit titled "Professional Action. The QPCC: a Self-Assessment Questionnaire"; the QPCC to be filled out directly online; and an operational guide for the application of all tools developed on the competenzestrategiche.it platform.



33 teachers have delved into the educational proposal related to the QPCC, distributed by age group and school order as follows:

Age Range	Number of Teachers
25-30 years	1
31-40 years	27
41-50 years	94
51-60 years	96
+60	15
Total	233

Educational Level and School Grade	Number of Teachers
Kindergarten	15
Primary School	84
Lower Secondary School	77
Upper Secondary School	57
Total	233

This distribution is substantially homogeneous to that of the total participants in the training course.

Completing the QPCC allows for immediate feedback, right after finishing the questionnaire, which consists of a profile in graphical form supplemented by a textual comment.

The following is an example of a profile.

Fattore	Descrizione	Valutazione
A1	Ansia di parlare in pubblico	5
A2	Senso di insicurezza	9
A3	Senso di inadeguatezza	7
V1	Autoregolazione e perseveranza sul lavoro	3
V2	Far fronte alle sfide personali (Coping)	4
C1	Competenze elaborative	8
C2	Competenza comunicativa	7
M1	Percezione di competenza	4
M2	Orientamento all'io	5
M3	Attribuzioni causali (locus of control interno)	5

LEGENDA: = nella media; = sotto/sopra la media (punto di forza); = sotto/sopra la media (punto di debolezza)

Fattore	Descrizione
A1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per l'**ansietà** che sperimenti ogniqualvolta ti esprimi di fronte a un pubblico uditore/interlocutore.
A2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **alto** per il **senso di insicurezza e incertezza** che provi quando devi far fronte a richieste improvvise, e/o assumere la responsabilità di effettuare, in tempi brevi e senza preavviso, una scelta che senti come importante, oppure ancora, affrontare compiti particolarmente impegnativi. *Un elevato senso di insicurezza potrebbe condurti a rimandare la soluzione dei problemi e a non sentirti mai pronto a sufficienza per affrontare l'azione richiesta. Cerca di contrastare i pensieri negativi che accompagnano l'emozione che provi e che sono all'origine dell'emozione.*
A3	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **alto** per il **senso di inadeguatezza** nel portare a termine in maniera valida ed efficace compiti e attività in contesti relazionali, anche se non necessariamente connotati come molto impegnativi, come convincere gli altri della validità di un'idea o condurre a termine una discussione. *Una elevata percezione di inadeguatezza potrebbe incidere sulla motivazione ad utilizzare energie e risorse per portare a termine in maniera valida ed efficace i propri compiti anche se non particolarmente impegnativi. Si suggerisce di lavorare per accrescere la percezione di saper compiere progressi e acquisire nuove competenze socialmente riconosciute.*
V1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **basso** per la **capacità di assumere e portare a termine gli impegni**, cioè di mettere in atto strategie che proteggono e sostengono l'esecuzione delle decisioni prese anche in presenza di fatica e/o disinteresse rispetto all'impegno preso. *Rifletti su come rafforzare la costanza nel tempo rispetto al conseguimento degli obiettivi fissati: cerca strategie di controllo cognitivo per sostenere efficacemente la realizzazione delle azioni preventivate (ad esempio: organizzazione del tempo, monitoraggio dei risultati conseguiti): individua e controlla le possibili interferenze derivanti dall'ambiente e dai propri stati d'animo.*
V2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per la capacità di **saper affrontare in modo positivo situazioni difficili**, emotivamente coinvolgenti, in qualche modo minacciose dal punto di vista dell'apprezzamento sociale.
C1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **alto** per la capacità mettere in atto **processi e strategie elaborative** che facilitano il ricordo e l'integrazione di quanto acquisisci di nuovo con il patrimonio di conoscenze che già possiedi, al fine di poterlo riutilizzare per la risoluzione di problemi, anche in contesti diversi.
C2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **alto** per la **capacità di** organizzare in modo efficiente ed efficace sia l'aspetto attivo della **comunicazione** (come il pronunciare discorsi e fornire spiegazioni ad altri) sia l'aspetto passivo ad esso correlato (come ascoltare e leggere).
M1	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per la **percezione** di avere conseguito, nella tua attività professionale, livelli di competenza tali da garantire il conseguimento di risultati positivi nell'assolvimento dei vari impegni, e per la capacità di appropriarti in maniera valida e significativa di tutto ciò che è utile per migliorare la tua professionalità.
M2	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per l'**orientamento motivazionale** che ti spinge a perseguire risultati positivi con energia e impegno proporzionali al loro grado di riconoscibilità e gradimento sociali. La ricerca di visibilità, apprezzamento, ed esaltazione di sé di fronte agli altri, entro certi limiti tende ad avere conseguenze positive anche in contesti collaborativi, in cui cercherai una posizione da leader e potrai fungere da stimolo per l'impegno del gruppo verso gli obiettivi condivisi.
M3	Ti attribuisci un punteggio **medio** per l'**attribuzione causale** che si riferisce al tipo di spiegazione che fornisci rispetto a successi e fallimenti, e le loro rispettive cause. A seconda del tipo di causa che attribuisci al successo/fallimento, vedi condizionate le tue previsioni di successo e fallimento per il futuro. Legare un fallimento a fattori che puoi controllare ti induce ad assumerti la responsabilità per l'errore commesso, e a convincerti che attraverso un maggiore sforzo o la scelta di diverse strategie, nella prossima occasione potrai raggiungere l'obiettivo prefissato.

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Fig.1

The profile is easy to interpret, presented in graphical form, according to a standardized scale with nine intervals, called stanines, allowing for immediate

evaluation of one's positioning. Moreover, critical aspects are highlighted in yellow, enabling quick identification of the dimensions that require particular attention. Finally, the textual comment provides explicit guidance, albeit expressed in generic terms, considering it's an automated interpretation.

4. Description of the QPCC scales and presentation of the outcomes

Below are the scales of the questionnaire with their respective items, and the results of the QPCC questionnaire completion by the 233 tutor teachers and some of the teachers they supervised during the trial year, totaling 432 teachers. 77% of the 233 tutor teachers, who delved into the QPCC theme, indeed stated that they shared the proposed QPCC-related activities with their newly hired colleagues. The outcomes are reported in the form of a percentage distribution of the scores on a *stanine* scale, grouped into three classes: below average for scores equal to the values 1, 2, and 3; average for scores equal to 4, 5, and 6; above average for scores equal to 7, 8, and 9. As extensively mentioned in the previous paragraphs, it is a self-assessment questionnaire useful for promoting reflective processes, therefore, the data will not be commented on according to diagnostic-type analysis.

4.1 Scales related to the affective-emotional

• Scale A1: Anxiety about speaking in public

This scale refers to the embarrassment and discomfort felt when having to make a speech and present one's arguments in public. This type of anxiety appears normal within certain limits, especially in front of a large audience or interlocutors who disagree with one's ideas. Nevertheless, in these situations, an excessive state of tension can arise that, regardless of one's state of preparation, risks interfering with the expected results. When a high level is found on this scale, it is advisable to design a training course aimed at modifying anxiety-provoking thoughts and lowering the level of nervous tension.

Scale items

When I speak in public, I feel embarrassed.
10. I feel very uncomfortable during a public intervention, even when I am well prepared.
29. When I speak in public, I tend to sweat and tremble, even if the environment is comfortable.
52. Before starting a speech in public, I feel very tense.
20. I feel nervous when speaking in front of people I don't know.

39. I try to avoid situations where I have to speak in public.

Score	A1 – Anxiety about speaking in public
Below average	43%
Average	45%
Above average	12%

• Scale A2: Sense of insecurity

This scale expresses the sense of uncertainty that can arise from the condition of having to make decisions, face sudden requests, and take on significant responsibilities. A high level of insecurity is associated with negative thoughts and further forms of anxiety that risk disturbing one's professional activity. Naturally, there are ways to counteract these states, but the most significant problem is that these are individual characteristics that the subject struggles to control.

Scale items

2. When I have to respond to a sudden request, I freeze and can no longer react.
21. Faced with a difficult choice, I feel overly responsible, and for this reason, I remain stuck in my decision.
53. I feel disoriented if there are many and conflicting opinions expressed on a problem.
40. While performing a demanding task, the persistent thought that I might not make it keeps coming to me.
30. If I have to face a particularly difficult decision, I feel overly responsible, and for this reason, I become nervous and unapproachable.
11. During the execution of an important task, doubts and uncertainties about my ability to succeed well pass through my head.

Score	A2 – Sense of insecurity
Below average	33%
Average	54%
Above average	13%

• Scale A3: Sense of inadequacy

This scale refers to the perception of inadequacy in performing certain professional tasks and, in a way, accompanies the state of insecurity addressed in the

previous scale. A high level of inadequacy negatively influences the motivational state and the willingness to engage in work. In this case, cognitive (self-judgments), affective (negative emotions), and motivational (perception of competence) elements come into play, negatively influencing professional action.

Training interventions aimed at decreasing this sense of inadequacy are tasked with increasing the perception of being capable of completing various professional tasks, the perception of making progress, and acquiring socially recognizable skills.

Scale items

12. I find it difficult to convince others of the validity or the timeliness of a course of action.

31. When I fail at a task, I think something too difficult and complex was asked of me.

54. I find myself unable to complete a discussion in an orderly manner.

41. When I find it difficult to tackle a particular topic, I think there's nothing I can do because it's too challenging.

Score	A3 – Sense of inadequacy
Below average	10%
Average	57%
Above average	32%

4.2 Scales related to the volitional dimension

• Scale V1: Self-regulation and perseverance in work

The scale considers personal beliefs about the ability to consistently fulfill professional commitments. Specifically, it evaluates the capacity to implement strategies that support the execution of one's decisions (action control), especially when feeling disinterested or tired during the performance of a task. An individual capable of self-regulation and perseverance in work can organize time and respect commitments in order to complete a specific task.

A low level on this scale can be overcome through systematic control programs for the interferences coming from the surrounding environment and one's own mood states.

Scale items

3. Even if a task is boring, I continue to do it until it's finished.

13. When I've decided to do something, I complete it even if it's hard.
22. Once a decision has been made, I don't think twice before moving on to its implementation.
32. I organize my work based on the time I have available,
42. I complete the commitments I've made in a timely manner.
48 At the beginning of a task or activity, I check what things I need to do.
55. I commit seriously, even when the task or assignment doesn't interest me much.

Score	V1 – Self-regulation and perseverance in work
Below average	10%
Average	31%
Above average	59%

• Scale V2: Coping with personal challenges

This scale is about the ability to implement cognitive and control strategies that allow facing new challenging situations and counteracting various forms of anxiety and inhibition.

A high score on this scale shows an individual who, in difficult conditions, is capable of exercising metacognitive control. On the contrary, low scores indicate the need to improve the tendency to reflect on the reasons for difficulties encountered in certain situations and thus improve their approach to problems.

Scale items

4. When I feel unjustly judged, I reflect on the situation trying to understand why.
14. When I communicate with others, I use short and clear sentences.
23. If I am criticized in public, I calmly examine the reasons for such behavior.
33. When I speak in public, I reflect on what I want to achieve.
43. When something goes wrong for me, I try to understand the reasons and overcome the difficulty.
56. If others avoid me, I try to understand the reasons and clarify them.

Score	V2 – Coping with personal challenges
Below average	9%
Average	45%
Above average	46%

4.3 Scales related to the cognitive dimension

• Scale C1: Elaborative skills

Elaborative skills involve the ability to create connections between new knowledge and experiences already lived. Thus, the importance of stimulating attention and motivation towards the use of these strategies to understand and remember what has been learned, going beyond the simple memorization and repetition of mental schemes and actions, is emphasized.

Scale items

5. I try to find relationships between what I learn and what I already know.
15. I try to establish connections between the different ideas that are presented to me or that I come across in reading.
24. When I learn something new, I try to find an example to which it can be applied.
34. When I come across new ideas or proposals, I try to imagine some situation and/or professional context to which they can be applied.
44. I try to understand how what I learn can be applied to my everyday life.
49. While reading or listening, I reconstruct with my imagination situations, characters, or events, comparing them with those of my professional reality.
57. During work or the analysis of texts and documents, I think of connections with other concepts already familiar to me.
62. When I learn something new, I wonder if there are cases or situations to which it cannot be applied.

Score	C1 – Elaborative skills
Below average	3%
Average	29%
Above average	68%

• Scale C2: Communicative competence

Communicative competence involves the development and presentation of speeches and explanations to others, in addition to skills related to reading and listening. As with elaborative skills, the purpose of the QPCC is to stimulate reflection and improvement of such aspects.

Scale items

6. I ask questions to stimulate the attention and reflection of my listeners.
16. When I introduce new or difficult terms, I carefully explain their meaning.
25. I check if I have understood what is being told or explained to me.
35. I verify if others have clearly understood what I tell them.
45. When reading a challenging text, I carefully note the most important things.
50. I involve the interlocutors by stimulating their participation.
58. I prepare the outline of my speech in three blocks: opening, development, conclusions.
63. When I have to present a document, I come with my speech prepared in a way to adequately support my position.

Score	C2 – Communicative competence
Below average	4%
Average	26%
Above average	70%

4.4. Scales related to the motivational dimension.

• Scale M1: Perception of competence

The scale considers self-efficacy judgments and the perception of having reached levels of professional competence such that the successful fulfillment of commitments is ensured. A low level on this scale is generally associated with a high score in factor A3 (sense of inadequacy) and indicates issues in the motivational sphere related to one's professional action. In this case, it is important for the individual to regain confidence in their abilities and skills.

Scale items

7. When I succeed in my activities, I think it's because I am truly capable.
17. If I want to delve into topics and/or issues, even very complex ones, I am confident of succeeding.
26 I feel confident in achieving good results in my work.
36. I feel capable of learning everything I need in my job, quickly, well, and without too much effort.
59. If I have prepared well, I am confident of succeeding effectively even in complex and challenging tasks and activities.

Score	M1 – Perception of competence
Below average	7%
Average	41%
Above average	52%

• Scale M2: Self-orientation

This scale refers to the presence of an orientation towards achieving success in a task and social recognition of one's qualities. If contained, this type of orientation can stimulate motivation and commitment. However, when this turns into a form of self-exaltation and the desire to excel over others, relational problems that risk hindering work can arise, especially in collaborative types of work.

Scale items

8. I would like to be the best at something.
18. I finish my tasks quicker when I try to outperform others.
27. I do better when I try to surpass others.
37. I find it very useful to work in a group, provided that I am the one leading.
60. I like to perform better than others.

Score	M2 – Self-orientation
Below average	23%
Average	51%
Above average	26%

• Scale M3: Causal attributions (internal locus of control)

In this case, causal attributions refer to the internal locus of control, that is, the tendency to attribute the reasons for one's successes or failures to personal efforts and controllable causes, that depend on oneself, rather than to external and thus uncontrollable reasons, such as chance or luck. A high score on this scale expresses the belief that positive outcomes can be achieved through personal commitment.

Scale items

9. A person's ability depends on the consistency and effort they put into their work.

19. When I achieve good results in learning new things, I think it's because I've put a lot of effort into it.
28. The ability to succeed depends on the commitment each one puts into doing their job with punctuality and precision.
38. When I do a rather boring job, I think about its less negative aspects and the satisfaction I will feel when I have finished it.
47. When a job goes well for me, I think I did really well to dedicate so much effort to it.
51. When it comes to learning new things, I can really commit myself.
61. I can be really focused when I try to achieve an important result.

Score	M3 – Causal attributions (internal locus of control)
Below average	8%
Average	50%
Above average	42%

5. Teacher satisfaction expressed

In the final report, compiled at the conclusion of the training course, participants are asked to express their opinions on the enjoyment of the activities carried out. Of the 233 teachers who delved into the topic related to the QPCC, 61.4% found it *very* useful, 35.1% *fairly* useful, and 3.4% *not very* useful.

They were also asked to provide a summary judgment of the activity carried out. What follows is a representation of the frequency of words contained in their judgments through the *word cloud* methodology, that is, an image composed of words whose size varies based on the frequency with which they recur, words contained in all the judgments expressed by the 233 teachers.

What follows is a selection, among the expressed judgments, of those that seemed most representative.

This training course was truly constructive. I wanted to delve into the topic related to professional communication. I really consider it a very important aspect of my job to have the ability to communicate with others, managing different discussions consciously and calmly. The QPCC questionnaire is a tool that led me to functionally review some personal aspects related to public engagement. Having the awareness that self-control and the content to be shared can be decisive for the outcome of effective and not frustrating communication. Reflection offers all professionals the opportunity to grow their self-esteem and self-efficacy and at the same time manage communication in a professional way. Strengthening the consistency over time with respect to the achievement of set goals; seeking cognitive control strategies to effectively support the realization of planned actions (for example, time organization, monitoring of achieved results); identifying and controlling possible interferences arising from the environment and one's mood states.

After administering the QPCC questionnaire, I found the experience very useful, as it allowed me to improve my knowledge, my profile as a reflective teacher/researcher, as well as to acquire further information and new knowledge that will be useful in preparing the report to be presented to the Evaluation Committee.

I approached the QPCC with much curiosity and found the report extremely interesting, especially since I sensed some discomforts in the affective-relational dimension, but the evidence helped me gain greater awareness. I reflected on some of my attitudes that can influence expected outcomes; I realized that I need to learn to manage them by working on myself and possibly implementing specific training interventions.

Reading the QPCC profile was useful for self-reflection and brought to light elements that had not been considered before (for example, managing anxiety in public speaking – see faculty meetings, gatherings, and parent-teacher conferences)

I consider the experience to be very interesting and full of insights for reflection on my role as a teacher and, specifically, as a tutor teacher, on my skills and beliefs at this point in my work experience, in an important relational and educational context, such as the school environment.

I found the tool to be very effective for its ease of completion and for the clarity with which it provides the profile. I believe it can be an excellent tool for self-awareness and can also be effectively used in the skills assessment phase with newly hired colleagues.

The in-depth study of operational tools and methodologies for professional supervision aimed at the "operational knowledge" of the QPCC has allowed the teacher to firsthand see the legitimacy of the proposed law on not only cognitive competencies, confirming the need for continuous steps of self-reflection and critical self-assessment. Professional competencies must be capable of translating knowledge and project planning into operational terms, certainly

operating in the Cognitive dimension but also in the Affective-Emotional, Volitional, and Motivational dimensions. This is about *Lifelong Learning*: and the course followed thanks to the University of Rome Three has confirmed my personal professional choice.

Completing the QPCC tool was a very interesting and enjoyable experience at the same time. Once I obtained the profile, I had the impression of receiving guidance counseling that puts one in the position to reflect on one's professionalism and to be able to plan the consolidation or an *empowerment* of one's skills. This tool, when used appropriately, is certainly useful both in organizational contexts (corporate, educational, socio-health) and at the individual level.

Reflecting on one's actions, both human and professional, along with the willingness to grow, educate, and improve are the main aspects to invest in to know, to be able to do, and to be in any context of life, but especially in the school context.

It was a very formative experience because the comparison between me and the Teacher in the trial year mutually enriched us. In fact, we discussed the same answers and the different ones, trying to understand the reasons why different responses were given. The human interaction that was created between us brought us closer as Teachers, but above all as human beings.

I think I will continue to share the QPCC and the other questionnaires I have discovered, since reflecting on the results with my family members has been very fruitful and interesting, and it has helped my daughters to review some behaviors and optimize their study strategies.

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CHAPTER 5

Tutor Teacher training for counselling for professional supervision: the importance of simulation of context

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1. The necessity of the training of the Tutor Teacher to the professional Counselling in educational-formative field

Based on the definition of the characteristics and main functions of professional counseling practice in the educational-training context, as specified by the guidelines disseminated by the Ufficio Scolastico Regionale of the Regione Lazio (academic year 2017-2018), it is emphasized that: "Counseling, within the probation year of the newly appointed teacher, is an encounter between two teachers – the counselor (tutor) and the newly appointed teacher – who, through oriented dialogue, establish a quality relationship in an atmosphere of listening, fostering the ability to identify, recognize, and define any difficulties. Through the reflective process, the newly appointed teacher will discover the resources necessary to overcome these difficulties. In this relationship, where the newly appointed teacher is the protagonist of the process and is guided to examine the issue from different perspectives, new interpretations and various potential solutions can be discerned" (p. 17).

Furthermore, it is highlighted in Article 12, paragraph 3 of DM 850/2015, that the evaluation process of the newly appointed teacher is entrusted particularly to a teacher-tutor who, to fulfill this task, must possess adequate cultural competencies, proven teaching experiences, and a marked inclination to perform tutoring, counseling, and professional supervision functions.

At this point, it is evident the crucial role that the development of counseling skills should increasingly play in both initial and ongoing teacher training.

These skills, according to the model proposed by Gerich and Smith (2016), should include some fundamental abilities for counseling contexts such as:

a) Communication skills, containing general counseling practices like "active listening", "paraphrasing", and the ability to "structure" discourse;
b) Diagnostic abilities, for "problem definition" and "search for possible causes";
c) Problem-solving skills, for the development and initiation of appropriate and personalized solutions for any identified learning difficulties;
d) Coping skills, including strategies to "critically address" difficult situations that may arise during counseling sessions.

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[1] The contribution is the result of joint work by the tree authors; in particular, C. De Vincenzo wrote paragraph 2, N. Patrizi wrote paragraphs 1 and V. Biasi wrote paragraph 3 Paragraph 4 was written jointly by the authors.

In addition to these four dimensions, the authors identify various specific variables on which the so-called "counseling competence" is articulated, such as: the level of knowledge of counseling and learning strategies, the concept of professional self, the ability for professional self-assessment, and experience in the field of counseling practice.

However, it must be acknowledged that – to date – there are few specific training programs aimed at promoting this highly complex essential competence for teachers, especially in the context of their initial training.

Gerich, Trittel, and Schmitz (2017) have recently empirically demonstrated how the counseling competence of future teachers can be successfully promoted through training and individual process-oriented feedback. They conducted an almost experimental study comparing three treatment groups (training group, training + feedback group, control group), measuring pre and post-test levels and scheduling appropriate follow-ups with time-series data. The results obtained highlighted how through simulated counseling interviews – conducted during the initial or in-service training of teachers – an improvement in their counseling competence can be achieved.

This aligns with Parsons & Stephenson's earlier observation in 2005, emphasizing that contextual simulations act as a catalyst for improving skills within teachers' training processes. The opportunity for teachers to engage in simulations with real subjects, possibly aided by video recordings, indeed reinforces their listening abilities and allows them to apply theoretical knowledge to evaluate its actual effectiveness in contexts, albeit simulated, very close to real-life situations.

Stones in 2003 also highlighted the complex role of supervising a teacher, as it emphasizes the comparison between educational practice and theoretical preparation. He further emphasized that the objective of the supervision process is not simply to reinforce the teacher's observation skills but, in a broader and more comprehensive sense, to outline the most effective formative methods to ultimately facilitate student learning.

Gall and Acheson's studies (2010) align with this perspective, considering supervision implemented through counseling as a formative evaluation method for working with teachers aimed at improving education. It constitutes a formative model centered precisely on the teacher and based on collaborative comparison.

Further recent empirical investigations (Vumilia and Semali, 2016) report on supervising teachers engaged in multiple guidance, counseling, monitoring, and support activities for teachers in training. The latter are then invited to complete an evaluation form regarding their experience with the mentor teacher and the effectiveness of the received tutoring program concerning the improvement in classroom learning. The analysis of these evaluations reveals how teachers in training have benefited from the supervision activities carried out by mentors regarding both teaching aspects and those related to collaborative teaching and support received.

From the examination of these pertinent studies, it is summarized that active learning methods – such as contextual simulation experiences – precisely contribute to the application of acquired content in an evolving professional practice. This type of approach could, therefore, serve as a model for designing specific counseling skills training programs for professional supervision of teachers.

2. Instruments and procedure

Interested teachers responded to an online questionnaire designed to investigate some aspects of their professional experience, including difficulties encountered in conducting educational-training activities, professional well-being, and perceived self-efficacy. Additionally, the study explored teachers' beliefs regarding the potential roles of counselling services within educational institutions.

The survey comprised two main parts. The first part contained questions related to the presence of counselling services within teachers' educational institution and the potential functions of these services in addressing common issues found in educational settings. The second part consisted of the following questionnaires:

- The *Toronto Empathy Questionnaire* (TEQ) is a self-report questionnaire designed by Spreng and collaborators (2009), translated and adapted into Italian by Chiorri (2016). It can be considered a brief measure of the affective component of empathy, defined as the ability to empathize with and recognize the moods of others.

The questionnaire comprises 16 items that evaluates how often individuals encounter common situations, using a 5-point response scale ranging from "Never" to "Always". This instrument is composed of two distinct subscales:

1. *Empathy*, which evaluates the tendency to think and feel the same way as someone else and the ability to share others' feelings and moods (e.g., item: "It upsets me to see someone being treated disrespectfully"). Higher scores on this subscale therefore reflect a higher degree of empathy;
2. *Insensitivity*, which assess cynicism and indifference towards others (e.g., item: "Other people's misfortunes do not disturb me a great deal"). In this case, higher scores are indicative of greater insensitivity towards others.

In addition to the two subscale scores, it is possible to calculate an overall total score that takes into account the subject's general ability to feel empathy and empathize with the moods of others (reversing the insensitivity subscale scores).

The questionnaire's reliability was adequate in the study (α=0.76 for the empathy subscale and α=0.74 for the insensitivity subscale).

- The *Interpersonal Reactivity Index* (IRI) is a questionnaire developed by Davis (1980) and validated in Italian by Albiero and collaborators (2006). It is designed to assess the different components of empathy.

The IRI consists of 28 items, and respondents indicate how accurately each statement describes themselves on a 5-point scale (from "It doesn't describe me at all" to "It describes me completely").

The instrument consists of four subscales:

1. *Fantasy*, which evaluates the tendency to identify with fictional characters from movies or books (e.g., item: "I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel");
2. *Perspective taking*, which measures the inclination to identify with others and adopt others' point of view (e.g., item: "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective");
3. *Empathic concern*, which evaluates the extent to which the respondent experiences compassion and concern when interacting with people in distress (e.g., item: "When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them");
4. *Personal distress*, which assesses the tendency to experience anxiety when faced with unpleasant situations (e.g., item: "Being in a tense emotional situation scares me").

In this study the subscales reliability was adequate, with alpha coefficients ranging from a minimum of 0.65 for the empathic consideration subscale to a maximum of 0.76 for the personal distress subscale.

- The *Teacher well-being* is a questionnaire derived from the Teacher Well-Being Scale (Collie et al., 2015) and was translated into Italian specifically for this study. Its purpose is to assess different aspects of teachers' well-being.

The instrument consists of 16 items in which teachers rate how different aspects impact their well-being as educators on a scale from 1 (Negatively) to 5 (Positively).

Three dimensions of well-being are measured:

1. *Workload well-being*, which evaluates issues related to workload and the resulting pressure (e.g., item: "Fitting everything into the allotted time");
2. *Organizational well-being*, that investigates teachers' perception of the school as an organization, including their views on school leadership (e.g., item: "Support offered by school leadership");
3. *Student interaction well-being*, which assesses the quality of interaction between teachers and students (e.g., item: "Student behavior").

Higher scores indicate a greater perceived senso of well-being. The reliability of the subscales was satisfactory, with α=0.72 for workload well-being, α=0.78 for the organizational well-being subscale, and α=0.75 for the student interaction well-being subscale.

- The *Outcome Questionnaire 45* (OQ-45.2; Lambert et al., 1996; Lambert et al., 2004; Italian validations: Chiappelli et al., 2008; Lo Coco et al., 2008) is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 45 item and used to obtain information on the subject's general functioning across three main dimensions:

1. *Symptom distress*, which investigates the presence of common symptoms, such as anxiety and depression;
2. *Interpersonal relationships*, exploring difficulties in interpersonal relationships;
3. *Social role*, which evaluates problems within the work context.

Respondents rate each item on a 5-point scale, ranging from "Never" to "Almost always".

The instrument allows for the calculation of an overall score and scores for each of the three subscales. Higher scores indicate more problematic general functioning (greater distress, relational difficulties, and social role problems).

- The *Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale* (SAED) is a questionnaire derived from Tschannen-Moran & Hoy's Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (2001), adapted and translated into Italian by Biasi and collaborators (2014).

The questionnaire allows the assessment of teachers' self-efficacy, defined as their belief about their ability to successfully plan and carry out teaching tasks.

It consists of 24 items through which teachers evaluate the extent to which they feel able to act with respect to certain situations that occur in their teaching activities on a 9-point scale (from 1 "Not at all" to 9 "Very much").

The questionnaire consists of three subscales, each made up of 8 items:

1. *Self-efficacy for student engagement*, evaluating teachers' confidence in their ability to inspire and motivate students (e.g., item: "How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?");
2. *Self-efficacy for instructional strategies*, assessing teachers' confidence in their ability to employ various teaching strategies to motivate students who exhibit low interest (e.g., items: "How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?");
3. *Self-efficacy for classroom management*, investigating perceived self-efficacy in managing and interacting especially with challenging students (e.g,. item: "How much can you do to control disruptive behaviour in the classroom?").

A higher total score obtained by summing the subscales' scores indicates a greater perception of self-efficacy.

Participants

540 teachers responded to the online questionnaire (88.9 percent of the sample were women), with a mean age of 50.9 (SD = 8.15) (see Table 1).

	N (%)	M (SD)
Age		50,9 (8,15)
Gender		
Female	480 (88,9%)	
Male	60 (11,1%)	
School grade		
Kindergarten	57 (10,6%)	
Primary school	160 (29,6%)	
Lower secondary school	127 (23,5%)	
Upper secondary school	196 (36,3%)	

Table 1 – Partecipants characteristics

Results

Regarding the questions aimed at investigating teachers' opinions with respect to some functions of counselling in the school context, it can be observed that the majority of teachers consider counselling important for fostering students' social and emotional development. They perceive it as a valuable tool for supporting students in need and as a valuable resource for teachers themselves, as indicated in Table 2.

Concerning counseling's role in promoting students' academic development, 56.9% of teachers consider it useful, whereas 43.2% did not find it useful or did not express a definite position.

	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't know
promote students' social development	*466* (86.3%)	3 (0.6%)	52 (9.6%)	19 (3.5%)
promote students' emotional development	*493* (91.3%)	1 (0.2%)	34 (6.3%)	12 (2.2%)
promote students' academic development	*307* (56.9%)	25 (4.6%)	*165* (30.6%)	43 (8.0%)
enable support for students in need	*507* (93.9%)	3 (0.6%)	26 (4.8%)	4 (0.7%)

be helpful in managing students' behavioral problems	*497* (92.0%)	4 (0.7%)	36 (6.7%)	3 (0.6%)
promote the successful integration of students at school	*485* (89.8%)	1 (0.2%)	46 (8.5%)	8 (1.5%)
be helpful in managing some students' psychological distress issues	*464* (85.9%)	14 (2.6%)	54 (10.0%)	8 (1.5%)
be a valuable aid for teachers who are faced with uncomfortable situations in the classroom	*495* (91.7%)	2 (0.4%)	39 (7.2%)	4 (0.7%)

Table 2 – Counselling in the school context

Notably, the majority of teachers indicated a high level of comfort when it comes to collaborating with school counselling services to enhance the well-being of both themselves and their students and colleagues. However, it's also worth noting that a significant number of teachers did not provide a definitive stance on this matter, as indicated in Table 3.

	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't know
Teachers, parents, and students are adequately informed about available counselling services	179 (33.1%)	87 (16.1%)	125 (23.1%)	149 (27.6%)
I believe that students feel comfortable approaching counselling services	189 (35.0%)	43 (8.0%)	145 (26.9%)	163 (30.2%)
As a teacher, I feel comfortable collaborating with school counselling services to promote student well-being	*382* (70.7%)	8 (1.5)	*54* (10.0%)	*96* (17.8%)
As a teacher, I feel comfortable collaborating with school counselling services to promote the well-being of myself and my colleagues	*341* (63.3%)	18 (3.3%)	*74* (13.7%)	*106* (19.6%)
I believe counselling is an important service in the school context	*467* (86.5%)	2 (0.4%)	20 (3.7%)	51 (9.4%)

Table 3 – Opinion regarding counselling services

To explore the relationships between empathy scores, teachers' perceived well-being, general functioning, and self-efficacy, Pearson's correlations between scales were calculated (Table 4). The results are heterogeneous and alongside the expected relationships between the two instruments that evaluate empathy (IRI and TEQ) and their subscales, some interesting associations were found.

Regarding the dimensions of teacher well-being, student interaction well-being presented significant and positive relationships with the IRI subscales fantasy ($r = 0.13$; $p < 0.01$), empathic concern ($r = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$) and perspective taking ($r = 0.16$; $p < 0.01$), with the TEQ empathy subscale ($r = 0.30$; $p < 0.01$), with the TEQ total score ($r = 0.29$; $p < 0.01$), and with all the self-efficacy subscales, namely self-efficacy for student engagement ($r = 0.19$; $p < 0.01$), self-efficacy for instructional strategies ($r = 0.10$; $p < 0.05$), and self-efficacy for classroom management ($r = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$). On the other hand, negative correlations were observed between student interaction well-being and the IRI subscale personal distress ($r = -0.18$; $p < 0.01$), the TEQ insensitivity subscale ($r = -0.19$; $p < 0.01$), and the three dimensions of distress in general functioning, namely the OQ subscales symptom distress ($r = -0.22$; $p < 0.01$), role difficulties ($r = -0.32$; $p < 0.01$), and relationship difficulties ($r = -0.22$; $p < 0.01$), as well as the OQ total score ($r = -0.26$; $p < 0.01$).

In other words, better student interaction well-being is associated with higher empathy scores, particularly in the aspects of empathizing with others' moods and feeling concern when others are in distress. It is also related to a stronger sense of self-efficacy in student engagement, classroom management, and adaptation of different teaching strategies. Furthermore, enhanced student interaction well-being is linked to lower scores of symptoms of anxiety and depression, lower difficulties in the work role, and lower difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

Thus, empathy, general functioning, and self-efficacy seem to play a pivotal role in the perceived student interaction well-being.

The relationships between general functioning and empathy dimensions are interesting too. In particular, positive correlations were observed between the OQ total score and the IRI personal distress dimension ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$) and the TEQ insensitivity dimension ($r = 0\ .36$; $p < 0.01$), whereas negative correlations were found with the IRI perspective taking dimension ($r = -0.22$; $p < 0.01$), the empathy TEQ dimension ($r = -0.15$; $p < 0.01$), the TEQ total score ($r = -0.31$; $p < 0.01$), and with the dimensions of teacher well-being, namely workload well-being ($r = -0.25$; $p < 0,\ 01$), organizational well-being ($r = -0.26$; $p < 0.01$), and student interaction well-being ($r = -0.26$; $p < 0.01$). Negative correlations were also found between the OQ and the SAED total score ($r = -0.11$; $p < 0.01$) and the SAED dimensions self-efficacy for student engagement ($r = -0.12$; $p < 0.01$) and self-efficacy for classroom management ($r = -0.12$; $p < 0.01$).

Hence, a higher general functioning score (which is indicative of maladjustment and distress, of difficulties in the work roles and in

interpersonal relationships) is associated with a greater perceived discomfort and a greater tendency to experience anxiety when faced with unpleasant situations, as well as greater cynicism and indifference towards others. At the same time, more problematic general functioning is linked to a lower identification with emotional states experienced by others, lower empathy, lower perceived well-being, and a lower sense of self-efficacy.

A similar pattern of correlations was observed for the three specific dimensions of the OQ.

In general, it appears that greater problems in overall adjustment – and thus greater symptoms of distress and problems related to the work context and interpersonal relationships – may hinder perceived well-being, empathy and perceived self-efficacy in the teaching role.

Finally, a positive relationship between self-efficacy and empathy was also observed. In fact, a greater sense of general self-efficacy was found to be associated with greater empathic concern ($r = 0.14$; $p < 0.01$), greater perspective taking ($r = 0.15$; $p < 0.01$), greater empathy ($r = 0.22$; $p < 0.01$), and greater teacher well-being in all dimensions.

Overall these results support the relationship between teachers' general functioning and distress, empathy, and self-efficacy, highlighting the importance of these dimensions in the evaluation of teachers' well-being.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.
1. IRI-Fant	1																	
2.IRI-Emp.Conc	,41**	1																
3.IRI-Persp.Taking	,25**	,41**	1															
4.IRI-Pers.distress	,16**	-,11**	-,24**	1														
5.TEQ-Emp.	,33**	,54**	,45**	-,18**	1													
6.TEQ-Ins.	-0,20**	-,49**	-,34**	,20**	-,42**	1												
7.TEQ-Tot.	,31**	,61**	,46**	-,23**	,82**	-,87**	1											
8.Workload.wb	0,01	0,05	0,04	-,18**	,01*	-0,06	,09*	1										
9. Org.wb	0,02	,11*	,10*	-,18**	,19**	-,16**	,20**	,62**	1									
10.Stud.wb	,13**	,17**	,16**	-,18**	,30**	-,19**	,29**	,46**	,49**	1								
11. OQ-tot	,09*	-,09*	-,22**	,41**	-,15**	,36**	-,31**	-,25**	-,26**	-,26**	1							
12.OQ-sympt.distress	,11**	-0,04	-,19**	,44**	-,13**	,32**	-,28**	-,22**	-,21**	-,22**	,97**	1						
13.OQ-social.role	0	-,11*	-,18**	,35**	-,14**	,30**	-,27**	-,32**	-,31**	-,32**	,85**	,78**	1					
14.OQ-Int.rel	0,07	-,15**	-,25**	,24**	-,16**	,35**	-,31**	-,17**	-,23**	-,22**	,84**	,70**	,60**	1				
15.SAED-eng.	,10*	,17**	,18**	-,15**	,24**	-,15**	,23**	,13**	,16**	,19**	-,12**	-,10*	-,12**	-,12**	1			
16.SAED-Strat.	0,06	,09*	,11*	-,01*	,16**	-,10*	,15**	,11*	,09*	,10*	-0,07	-0,06	-0,05	-0,07	,88**	1		
17.SAED-Manag.	0,08	,14**	,14**	-,16**	,22**	-,13**	,20**	,15**	,15**	,17**	-,12**	-,11*	-,13**	-,10*	,89**	,85**	1	
18.SAED-tot	0,08	,14**	,15**	-,14**	,22**	-,13**	,20**	,13**	,14**	,16**	-,11*	-,09*	-,10*	-,10*	,96**	,96**	,95**	1

**. La correlazione è significativa a livello 0,01 (a due code).
*. La correlazione è significativa a livello 0,05 (a due code).

Table 4 – Correlazions among variables

Legenda: *IRI Fant*: Fantasy; *IRI Emp.Conc*: Empathic Concern; *IRI Persp.taking*: Pespective taking; *IRI Pers.distress*: Personal distress; *TEQ Emp*: Empathy; *TEQ Ins*: Insensitivity; *TEQ Tot*: Total score; *Workload.wb*: workload well-being; *Org.wb*: Organizational well-being; *Stud.wb*: Student interaction well-being; *OQ tot*: Total score; *OQ Sympt.distress*: Symptom distress; *OQ Int.rel*: Interpersonal relationships; *SAED eng*: self-efficacy for student engagement; *SAED Strat*: self-efficacy for instructional strategies; *SAED Manag*: self-efficacy for classroom management; *SAED Tot*: total score.

3. Developing Listening Skills for Counseling in Professional Supervision

Considering the outcomes of the sector research previously presented, it is deemed possible to promote the development of communicative and relational competencies and reinforce empathetic and listening skills through counseling activities for professional supervision, primarily realized through psychological assessment.

During the psychological assessment procedure carried out thanks to the counselling procedure, together with conversation, multiple emotional, motivational dynamics, significant cognitive processes are activated, involving both the subject and the conversation conductor (or counselor) (cf. also Biasi, 2019). From the counselor's standpoint – in this case, the teacher-tutor – there is a continuous collection of verbal and non-verbal information, paying attention to both the so-called "here and now" and any historical reconstruction, involving mental representation of past events linked to educational-training contexts traversed. This process of past reconstruction appears closely connected to grafts, completions, adjustments highlighting the presence of a "plausible" construction of experienced reality, juxtaposing the concept of explaining what happened with the construct of narrative.

The counseling procedure also involves continuous recourse to explaining encountered professional problems, verifying the evolving hypotheses that are progressively defined and restructured in a creative and shared manner with the newly appointed teacher. This verification process also includes feedback forms based on explicit and implicit information from both verbal and non-verbal communication, often apparent through facial expressions, posture, general attitude, etc.

During these instances, the teacher-tutor must demonstrate flexibility, openness to an unbiased interpretation, willingness to embrace the new, and to recognize any elements that might be significant, even if sometimes challenging to explain within the utilized theoretical framework. In the course of supervision activities, it's crucial to be ready to reorganize theoretical structures to provide a genuinely fitting explanation for the situation at hand: it is always useful to question if the problem being addressed could be explained differently and, if necessary, be open to suspending judgment in favor of a more accurate data collection.

An essential component in counseling sessions is undoubtedly the quality of interpretation, i.e. the structure of the explanation provided, co-constructed, and shared during supervision meetings.

Cognitive reprocessing is one of the main effects of interpretation or attribution of meanings (causal and non-causal) and can also encompass potential changes in reality levels through which reprocessed conflicting materials are perceived.

Another significant effect of the advanced interpretation is emotional restructuring, coupled with potential phenomena of so-called "restitution", in-

volving the transmission of reprocessed contents, including aspects of recognition, progressive independence, and subsequent detachment.

For the effective implementation of the counseling procedure, it is important to consider both the verbal and non-verbal components of the encounter. The nature of language used (lexical and syntactic choices), non-verbal components such as posture, facial expressions, gestures, intonation, pauses, silences, and the expressive qualities of the environment where the communication exchange occurs (the so-called setting) or the perception of time flow, adds meanings that can intervene in the interpretative processes of encountered problems and/or conflicts.

The care for these factors is central to facilitating effective communication between the teacher-tutor and the novice teacher. Good communication entails enhanced empathic sensitivity and greater listening skills: fundamental competencies in building satisfying and productive professional relationships.

4. Paths of Professional Tutor Training in Counseling: The Significance of Simulating Contexts

Acknowledging the necessity, as shown by the examined data, for adequate training of the teacher-tutor in utilizing professional counseling, we propose integrated training programs that include, among various diversified tools, simulated counseling sessions on real problems, namely simulation of contextual encounters. These encounters, being asynchronous concerning classroom work, favor moments of reflection and functional detachment suitable for introspective analysis. They involve a structured timing and should be systematically organized during the period of accompanying the new teacher.

The simulation of contexts naturally allows the execution of complex procedures in a somewhat protected environment, making it possible to test hypotheses, challenge oneself, compare theories and educational practices: it can therefore represent a significant innovation if included in teacher training and support programs.

Faced with the multiple issues affecting the school institution, it becomes increasingly important and central, in our opinion, not to nullify the entire supervision process but to intervene using the tool of counseling to provide the teacher in training with adequate strategies for facing and/or resolving difficulties encountered, particularly in the initial phases of professional integration. Mastering this tool will expand the possibilities of addressing professional challenges beyond merely adopting occasional teaching strategies or resorting to generic collaboration modes and impromptu discussions with other teachers, following a model of continuity between one's personal teaching experience and the new supervisory function. Instead, it will be necessary to develop a process of redefining and raising awareness of the encountered problem or conflict to identify more mature intervention methods characterized by greater

detachment from the passive reproduction of individual past teaching experiences and more responsiveness to the specific experienced professional context.

In the realm of recognized necessary and specific training for using such a delicate tool for analyzing professional problems in the educational-training context, there is a hope for systematic programming of simulated counseling meetings for professional supervision, focused precisely on the development of communication and listening skills. This is aimed at identifying strategies for addressing or confronting conflictual or problematic issues that might be encountered in the school setting. This approach intends to promote systemic action for training teacher-tutors as systemic figures in the ecology of educational processes, following an ecosystemic perspective directed at reinforcing, considering, and caring for the various personal and socio-environmental factors involved in educational processes to qualify and optimize the activity of instruction and education.

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CHAPTER 6

Microteaching and video annotation: mentor teachers' considerations on applied video analysis

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1. Introduction

Training for mentor teachers responsible for the new hired teachers is increasing in our country. It encourages activities implemented by Regional School Offices and Universities charged of design, organize and develop them.

Newly hired teachers *training and probationary* periods are currently regulated by Decree-Law of the Minister of Education No. 226, August 16, 2022, which supplemented and amended the previous Decree-Law No. 850, October 27, 2015.

By the law, mentor teacher jobs are clearly crucial. Through the training action, they are responsible to introduce the newly hired colleagues into the professional community. They should support, counsel, work with and listen to foster newly hires full and active participation within the school community life promoting professional development and learning perspectives.

Mentor teachers and newly hires are called upon to elaborate, experiment and validate teaching resources by systematic mutual observation. Peer observation is the method par excellence, not surprisingly recalled by both Decree-Laws previously mentioned. Peer observation indeed refers to the shared recursive reflection on what is done during the live teaching experience, and that has also educational purposes. Regardless the nature of newly hired teachers, mentor teachers hold *mentoring* functions.

Although the probationary year could be the first experience for newly hired teachers, the term *newly hired,* is sometimes difficult to apply in our country, since it is quite typical for those performing the *novitiate* to have, instead, already several years of precarious teaching experience, with annual or temporary teaching contracts.

Mentoring should be performed regardless newly hired teacher levels of prior

[1] This paper results from the collaboration between the authors. Therefore, the following assignment is merely formal. The *Introduction* and paragraph *The qualifying features of mentor teacher actions, and of newly hired teachers training* have been written by Fabio Bocci. Paragraphs *Developing reflectivity, agentivity and train-to-action research (form-azione) through video-analysis and Microteaching*, including *Microteaching*, and the *Description of the training and research experience at Roma Tre* are by Umberto Zona. Finally, Aurora Bulgarelli dealt with the *Data Analysis.* The *Conclusions* and the *References* are in common.

experience, in order to shape the action by relation. Mentoring remains an opportunity for peer education. It should increasingly become part of teacher working routines, to encourage the entire teacher groups towards professional training and development as part of school communities.

As shown by some recent findings (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019; 2022; Bandini & al, 2021; Bandini, Biagioli & Ranieri, 2022; Del Gobbo & Frison, 2022; Del Gobbo & al., 2023), and also from on-field considerations and propositions (Dondero & Finauro, 2017; Referza, 2017), the pedagogical scientific community is paying attention to mentor teacher role and to its related training practices, in order to enhance the ministerial acts.

Here, a short explanation on the basic features qualifying mentor teacher (and of newly-hired teacher) profile, and some essential considerations on video-analysis, notably focused on *Microteaching and video annotation*. After that, a report and description of the outcomes from the training-research experience carried out by the University of Roma Tre in agreement with the Lazio Regional School Office in 2023 and also considering the previous works on the topic (Bocci, 2019; 2022), and earlier (Bocci, 2017; 2018).

2. The qualifying features of mentor teacher actions and of newly hired teachers training

In addition to the mentioned-above Decree-Laws regulating the *training and probationary* programs of newly hired teachers, it should be quoted also the *Sviluppo professionale e qualità della formazione in servizio* (*Professional development and quality of working training)* published in 2018 by the (previously joint) Ministry of Education, of University and Research (MIUR)[2]. It highlights the need for enhancing "the mentor teacher role (such as with models of *peer review* and learning supervision), nurturing the development of newly hired teachers personal reflective capacities, and promoting both "real" and "virtual" professional communities online. The individual dimension will necessarily dialogue with the collaborative dimension" (p. 4).

Considering the statement as background, the attention focuses on at least three features, related to mutual observation, qualifying the mentor teacher position: *recursive reflective capacity*; *agentivity*; and *research-training* action. These aspects promote teachers learning and professional development, briefly outlined as follow.

Agentivity, notably *Teacher Agency,* refers to educational studies, research and application having increasingly attention also regarding the inclusive pro-

[2] Currently there are two different Ministers: the Minister of Education and Merit (MIM) and the Minister of University and Research (MUR). The mentioned updated document has been signed by the MIM https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/-/sviluppo-professionale-e-qualita-della-formazione-in-servizio-documenti-di-lavoro [last accessed 07/02/24]

cesses, at both national and international levels. (Biesta & Tedder, 2006; 2007; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2013; 2015a; 2015b; Calvert, 2016a; 2016b; Aiello, Corona & Sibilio, 2014; Aiello, Sharma & al., 2016; Urbani, 2016; Ferrari & Taddei, 2017; Sibilio & Aiello, 2018; Lascioli, 2018; Andreoli & al., 2023).

Among the best known definitions of *Teacher Agency* there is certainly the one formulated by Laurie Calvert, who states that it concerns: "the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues" (Calvert, 2016a, p. 4). This means teachers are truly the protagonists of their own professional learning-development journey, directing it, self-determining it. Indeed, this process does not develop separately from working, social and cultural contexts of reference. The process is the result of relational networks that allow individuals and groups (in this case of teachers) to give life to professional communities (Guerra, 2018).

From this consideration, at least three crucial aspects.

First, *agency* starts a circular process (potentially virtuous if the person in the situation perceives what she is experiencing as meaningful) between thought and action patterns pertaining to past experience (her history, her experiences) and what is in place at that moment. Consequently, professional identity is never static or defined once and for ever (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Secondly, agentivity is not a *natural* quality (there are those who possess it and those who lack it) but is learned as people (in this case, teachers) act to learn.

The third aspect concerns *agency* as impacted by past experience that mutually influence the motivation to engage in life-long professional learning process. Furthermore, *agency* is connected to teacher social representations (like literary, cinematographic, media). They operate across and influence the previous two aspects (Bocci, 2017; 2018; Bocci & al., 2017).

Under this light, agentivity can play as a mediator connecting training and research, thanks to the fact that, as mentioned above, it is activated by ongoing processes supported and nurtured by recursive reflexivity.

Education Researchers particularly focus on recursive reflexivity training practices – whether initial, or in-service – as domain of study, research, and on-field application, promoting teacher professional learning and development (Schön, 1993; 2006; Striano, 2001; Moretti, 2003; Mortari, 2003; Mezirow, 2003; Montalbetti, 2005; Fabbri, 2007; Fabbri, Striano & Melacarne, 2008; Damiano, 2008, Nuzzaci, 2009, 2011; Lyons, 2010; Calvani, Bonaiuti & Andreocci, 2011; Cunti, 2018; Falcinelli, 2018).

However, some clarifications about reflexivity are required to highlight the complexity of reflexive action and practice. For instance, Calvani, Bonaiuti and Andreocci (2011) inspired by scholars such as David A. Kolb, distinguish between *process-based* and *hierarchical-shaped* reflexivity. The first one describes

a process based on experience (based on recursive critical analyses of problems) and involves the following steps: personal past experience recall, past experience cruces identification and analysis, suspension of judgment and consequent situation settling, possible actions seeking.

The second is *hierarchical-shaped,* and refers cognitive levels involved in the reflective practice: one first level involves descriptions (such as comments) that help to identify the experience. One second level requires the use of interpretation (as per reference literature), complex arguments and real theoretical elaborations aimed at investigating in a critical way (and in a lay way) roles, positions and professional identities of teachers engaged in such practices.

After a careful screening of the scholarly literature, also Antonella Nuzzaci (2011) contributes to clarify what "reflectivity" means. She calls for a distinction between *reflectivity*, *reflective attitude* or *reflective posture* and *reflective practice*.

Reflectivity refers to an intentional cognitive process aimed at interpreting the experience, in order to bring out and understand the reasons behind the choices that lead to act in a certain way. This way shapes the meaning of the undertaken actions. At the same time, it stimulates new experience connected with a new awareness acquired about the why and the how of past, present and future actions. Nuzzaci quotes Mezirow (2003), to highlight the *transformative perspective* thanks to reflectivity. This transformative perspective promotes both individual and community professional profiles, which are both challenged to overcome entrenchments, dogmatisms, merely routine practices, etc…

Reflective attitude or posture refers to random actions. They start and finish in a short time, and, therefore, they are not systematic, but fragmented and irregular. Such practice is not led by awareness and does not define any clear or intentional change in the action related to experience.

Finally, *reflective practice* refers to mental and action attitude adoption strongly interconnected with the individual teacher professional identity. *Reflective practice* is placed at the opposite of the *reflective attitude*. It is intentional and systematic and is based on the teacher's capacity to consciously use her prior experience. Furthermore, as already noticed by Graziella Ballanti in her 1975 *Il Comportamento Insegnante*, the teacher is able to detach from her past experience, and to frame it according to the scholar theories, in order to convert into action knowledge (in this sense Antonella Nuzzaci quotes Schön, 1993, Perrenoud, 1994 and Pescheux, 2007).

Therefore, *reflective practice*, is an operational expression of the "multiple manners, strategies, and procedures concretely enacted in reflection" (Nuzzaci, 2011, p. 11).

It is important teachers are aware about the different reflectivity conceptualizations, since their degree of awareness impacts the opportunities to use the reflectivity, whether in their daily tasks, or in their initial training (such as internships in the degree course for teachers in Primary Education, in the Specialization Courses for Support Teachers, in the qualifying courses known as

"60 CFUs", as well as for the probationary year at school). This awareness also affects the quality and the reliability (by the purposes of the type of reflexivity applied) of the tools used: portfolios, reports, autobiographies, diaries, reflective journals, forums, blogs, chats, video analysis, and so on. That is what Antonio Calvani (2014) calls teacher *epistemological attitude.* This may focus on a static conception of knowledge, especially by value assigned to the *knowledge of experience*, or, on the opposite side, oriented toward a flexible, non-dogmatic, fluctuating view. This kind of teachers are inquisitive, they observe and analyze the reality by formulating hypotheses and verifying their actions. Furthermore, they spur their colleagues and students to reflect on the actions to be undertaken and on the decisions to be made in a process always in progress. As a result, fruitful spaces for confrontation are created. In there, collaborative groups and communities of practice engage in daily bottom-up, intentional systematic training and self-education.

Therefore, reflective action can be seen as an essential component of teachers' work, focused on teachers as researchers (Moretti, 2003) and schools as independent educational and research hubs generating high quality educational practices. Hence the importance of research as a systemic train-to-action practice (form-azione) to make school environments increasingly specifically learners-oriented (beyond the temporary trends, and beyond external vision on school). As already reported (Bocci, 2021; 2024), it needs a kind of training able to create renewed synergies between school and university, and able to overcome subalternity positions (generated by separating *those who know and those who do not know*), delegations (*you are who knows, tell me what to do*) and distrusts (the suspicion that those who work *in the gilded academic world* do not know much about those who *work in the trenches*).

Thus, research need to be in training (Asquini, 2018; Pomponi, 2021) and participatory, resulting from a careful screening of the needs of a given context, in a certain school (or, better, of networks of schools), of leaders, teachers and students, hopefully emerging from practices of self-analyses (thus of recursive reflexivity) promoted by themselves (and not imposed by others) in order to undertake a self-improvement path. This way, the core training needs, are converted into object-oriented research inquiries and working hypotheses, playing as frameworks for procedures and modes of implementation and verification. This research-mediated training approach (or training- mediated research) is necessarily based on action-oriented and participatory research developing from the bottom. As Jean-Pierre Pourtois (1986) states action-oriented research is closely related to social problems. And the individuals engaged in the action-oriented research actively become aware of the desired changes (emancipating from the routine standstill even in their imagination) by keeping re-design the ongoing transitions.

Jean-Pierre Pourtois is echoed by René Barbier (2007), who directly connect the action-oriented research with the *implication of* those engaged in such practice, as per the Institutional Analysis and Pedagogy.

Barbier describes even the concept of *collective researcher* (considering teacher training as a community of practice) engaged (as a collective subject) in *spiral processes* moving and unwinding around an *ongoing reflection* promoting improvement in specific practices (Bocci, 2021). Therefore, if on one side educational practices are necessarily verified by scientific theories and findings, on the other side the role played by the knowledge of practices is equally fundamental (precisely for the purposes of these inescapable verifications). As Fabio Dovigo states "Although it is sometimes less generalizable, knowledge based on practices highlight how in education there is no such thing as something that "works" regardless of the meaning of learning and the individuals involved. In other words, it is important to inquire what *should* work, and especially *for whom* and *with whom*. Therefore, while *evidence-based practices* at school are crucial, at the same time it should be highlight schools themselves are inexhaustible source of *practice-based evidences* waiting to be discovered and appropriately considered [...]. Practices-focused research allow to highlight how educational challenges cannot be traced back to the adoption of neutral or "technical" choices that scientific research would be in charge of providing. Quite the opposite, indeed, training involves permanent and critical confrontation among all the stakeholders, starting from an open debate about the qualities to develop for school we want" (Dovigo, 2017, pp. 103-104).

What has been described so far is strengthen by the opportunity of learning by digital technologies and video-analyses, such as Microteaching, that can and are being reborn (Calvani, Bonaiuti & Andreocci, 2011).

3. Developing reflectivity, agentivity and train-to-action research (form-azione) through video-analysis and Microteaching

Currently, there is a broad consensus between scholars about video-analysis-supported training practices as valid and qualifying for teacher professionalism. The consensus is conveyed by a very solid literature developed over at least fifty years (Allen, 1967; Cooper & Allen, 1970; Allen & Ryan, 1974; Dressel, 1974; Ballanti, 1975; Menzinger, 1976; Johnson, 1976; Cerri & Gennari, 1984; Mottet, 1997; Galliani, 1988; Tomassucci Fontana, 1999; Llama, Kurz & Savenye, 2003; Bocci & Cellamare, 2003; Nardi, 2003; Santagata, 2003; 2012; Sherin, 2004; Sherin & Han, 2004; Lin, 2005; Star & Strickland, 2008; Hosack, 2010; Bonaiuti, 2010; 2013; Calvani, 2011; Calvani, Bonaiuti & Andreocci, 2011; Santagata & Guarino, 2011; Masats & Dooly, 2011; Felisatti & Tonegato, 2012; Bonaiuti, Calvani & Picci, 2012; Tacconi & Gomez, 2012; Seidel, Blomberg & Renkl, 2013; Galliani & De Rossi, 2014; Pedone & Ferrara, 2014; Calvani & al., 2014; Santagata & Stürmer, 2014; Seidel & Stürmer, 2014; Cescato, Bove & Braga, 2015; Blomberg & al., 2014; Vivanet, 2015; Calandra & Rich, 2015; Gaudin & Chaliès, 2015; Rossi & Fedeli,

2016; Bonaiuti, Santagata & Vivanet, 2017; McCullagh & Doherty, 2018; Vegliante, Miranda & Marzano, 2018; Marzano, Vegliante & Miranda, 2018; Bocci, 2017; 2018; 2019; 2022).

The use of video for teaching, especially in its digital version – *video annotation*, *video analysis*, *video research, video documentation*, *video collaboratories* (Marzano, Vegliante & Miranda, 2018)[3] – represents a dynamic and engaging way to develop teacher training. Indeed, videos allow to re-view contents and verbal as well as nonverbal attitudes (communicative, relational, behavioral). Therefore, videos provide evidences because they *reflect* the actions done, in the strict sense of returning images, consequently providing the opportunity to think about, and, thus, to act reflectively. The actions done can be assembled in order to focus on specific passages, or dissembled to plan them again, and to re-orient them by the feedback received (Bocci, 2022). It is an immersive approach actively involving stakeholders (for this reason, it can be used as action-research practice) in a *training setting* full of implications (about the educational relationship in general and, specifically in the teaching-learning process). In addition, the skilled considerations from the teachers involved (in this work, mainly mentor teachers, newly hired teachers, and, hopefully, other colleagues) connect knowledge from experience with knowledge from scientific findings, as mentioned above by Dovigo.

As mentioned above, digital technologies allow wider use of video tools in teachers training, especially concerning video- annotation (Preston et al., 2005). Teachers can add comments synchronized with the videos. Several *web-based* applications are available for the purpose. Among these, *VideoAnt*, developed by the University of Minnesota (Hosack, 2010). This App enables to create communities by the following steps: 1) video watching; 2) personal comments annotation on specific video passages labelled. The system tracks comments and labels by displaying them on the side and, thanks to the timeline option, those who will watch the same video can view the comments history, and can in turn contribute with other labels and comments (Calvani, Bonaiuti & Andreocci, 2012; Bocci, 2017; 2019). Videos can be taken from the web or from other sources (even a movie can be an interesting source). They can be made for the purpose or can be the result of Microteaching experience. Following a series of Microteaching VideoAnt experiences, McCullagh & Doherty (2018) have detected how the interactive features of this App promote a more detailed view of teaching practices and perceptions, thus reaffirming the potential of video to implement teachers' reflexivity.

[3] Concerning the last three, Marzano, Vegliante and Miranda clarify the features: in *video research,* videos are used to analyze and interpret educational, didactic and training activities. The goal is to frame and understand the observed phenomena, and to identify possible solutions to emerging problems; in *video documentation*, different narrative techniques are used to annotate the observed episodes, focusing attention on emerging strengths and critical issues; *video collaboratories* involves coding and network sharing of the different information sources looked up.

3.1 Microteaching

Microteaching, which was conceived in 1963 at Stanford University as an operational proposal for simulation games (Tomassucci Fontana, 2012), in response to the need to increasingly qualify teacher training (Allen, 1967). Microteaching has been created both, as a tool to support training programs of teachers, and to encourage them to carry out research on their own actions.

As Allen and Ryan point out "the tool aims at training teaching, and at experimenting new teaching materials and educational techniques" (Allen & Ryan, 1974, p. 29). Graziella Ballanti quotes the mentioned authors stating "all teachers should be allowed to experiment and experience teacher behavior models, from the current to those that can be proposed and implementable" (Ballanti, 1975, p. 84).

Given these assumptions, the procedural model of Microteaching is composed of the following steps, conceived as circular:

1. *Plan*: organizing short educational intervention;
2. *Teach*: intervention implementation through video recording;
3. *Feedback*: observing and analyzing the lesson recorded;
4. *Re-Plan*: re-organizing the intervention based on the feedback received;
5. *Re-Teach*: repeating the lesson reviewed;
6. *Re-Feedback*: observing and analyzing the lesson reviewed.

It is evident that there are several areas of application, during the probationary year, as well as during the teaching career (laboratory, internship, mentoring, etc...). Notably, Allen and Ryan (1974) explained that teaching skills are generally classified into 14 skills that can be analyzed, namely: (1) stimulus variation, (2) set induction, (3) closure, (4) silence and nonverbal cues, (5) reinforcement of student participation, (6) fluency in asking question, (7) probing question, (8) higher-order question, (9) guest divergence, (10) recognizing attending behavior, (11) illustrating and use of example, (12) lecturing, (13) planned repetition, and (14) completeness of communication.

These are operational suggestions developed close to the conception of Microteaching, which can and should be improved, like the *teaching events of* Robert M. Gagné (1990), further reformulated over time (Bocci, 2019)[4].

It is also possible to start from the *effective lesson* steps as theorized by Antonio Calvani (2014), as follow: 1. *preparation* (defining objectives, methods variation, considering critical points); 2. *starting* (context set-up, entering the situation, focusing attention, activating pre-knowledge...); 3. *unfolding* (*communicative aspect*: use of multiple codes, facilitators, avoiding cognitive over-

[4] The nine teaching stages identified by Gagné are: 1. A*ttention gaining* (grabbing); 2. *Goals presentation* (communication); 3. *Prior knowledge stimulation* (pre-requirements); 4. *Presenting the stimulating features* (of the task); 5. *Learning leading*; 6. *Fostering* (urging) *response* (performance); 7) F*eedback provision*; 8. *Performance verification*; 9. *Ensuring memorization* (retention) *and transfer provision* (generalization).

load; *cognitive and strategic aspects*: predicting changes in learner mental patterns, making the learning process open and challenging; *management and interaction*: concerning relationship rules and control ; *participation*: feedback and activities management; 4. *conclusion* (summarizing, consolidating, opening). Therefore, it is interesting to focus on the role of *Supervisor of* newly hired teachers. Either experienced teachers (as precisely in the case of the probationary year), or external teachers (university researcher as a *critical friend*), or even a group of colleagues can perform the role. According to Allen and Ryan, the creators of Microteaching, the Supervisor fulfills the dual function of acquiring the skills to practically apply instructional techniques (*executive stage: how to do it*) and providing guidance on the circumstances in which it is preferable to use them (*decision making stage: where and when to do it*).

Taking into consideration what has been outlined so far, both in the underlying theoretical assumptions and by referring to the use of videos (including the digital version) and Microteaching in teacher training, below an account of the training and research experience carried out as part of the 2023 Mentor Teachers of Newly Hires training course offered by the Department of Education Sciences at Roma Tre University, in agreement with the Regional School Office for Lazio. The project has involved 2470 mentor teachers (of whom 2090 have completed the training process). As far as concern directly this paper, in line with the previous editions and publications (Bocci, 2019; 2022), peer observation based on video-analysis, notably through Microteaching and video annotation have been proposed.

4. Description of the training and research experience at Roma Tre

The training was addressed to mentor teachers. They attended an introductory meeting (in this edition, in synchronous distance mode) to explore some propositions, later explored in depth on the Moodle platform properly set up to complete the training courses. This paper report the proposal entitled *Peer Observation Practices to Facilitate Learning and Professional Development*, concerned the opportunity to use video-analysis as Microteaching and/or video annotation. In the Microteaching activity, mentor teachers have been suggested to involve other colleagues, including the new hires, and their students in the lesson to be video-analyzed, in order to attain education outcomes as well as findings for the tests. The tests have been based on the mentioned above Gagné's *teaching stages* or Calvani's *effective teaching* instructions.

Instead, video annotation has been implemented through the mentioned web-based software VideoAnt. The mentor teachers have been asked to upload their videos, and to analyze them in pairs (with the in probationary year colleague) or, preferably, in groups involving colleagues and students where possible.

During the instructions delivering, it was explained sharing comments

(video annotations) provide significant opportunities of recursive reflection within a community of practice (Wenger, 2006).

As in the previous editions a Form containing the following sections was provided to report the activities:

– mentor teacher essential credentials (surname and first name);
– educational working stage (Kindergarten; Primary School; Lower Secondary; Upper Secondary);
– description of the activity performed (Microteaching or video annotation);
– comments on the activity carried out by the mentor teacher;
– comments on the activity carried out by the newly hired teacher;
– section devoted to any further comments on the activity carried out by other colleagues involved;
– section devoted to any further comments on the activity carried out by the students involved.

The completed Forms have been uploaded on a dedicated section by the mentor teachers on the training course Moodle platform.

5. Data analysis

As for the previous latest editions, at the end of the training course, a survey has been submitted. The purpose was to better understand the different levels involved in the tutor-newly hired teacher relationship, notably in the working activities. A total of 162 mentor teachers applied the video analysis test, with a prevalence of teachers who declared to belong to female gender (129 = 79.62%) and 33 to male gender (20.38%), distributed by educational stages as follows: 21 (13%) Kindergarten; 40 (25%) Primary School; 39 (24%) Lower Secondary School; 62 (38%) Upper Secondary School.

Among 162 teachers who took part in our training proposal, 59% had performed the role only for one year or were at their first experience.

Accordingly with the participant considerations, activities have been valued as positively helpful (Please, *indicate below how much helpful it was to learn more about the following topics: Topic 2. Peer observation and observation at school*). *Very helpful* = 86 (53.1%); *Fairly helpful* = 72 (44.44%); *Slightly helpful* = 4 (2.46%).

Almost each mentor teacher had the opportunity to share the tool with the newly hired teacher (96.2%), often involving colleagues and students in the various stages of the activity as well. Notably, 108 (66.6%) mentor teachers applied the Microteaching, 23 (14.19%) the video annotation and 31 (19.13%) both Microteaching and video annotation.

More deeply, to the question *How much helpful do you think the peer observation activities have been* for... – seven options to express the scale agreement: a) *Improving the observation quality in class*; b) *Detecting data that otherwise*

would not have been taken into account; c) *Stimulating shared reflection on teaching*; d) *Giving feedback on teaching activities*; e) *Fostering constructive relationship development*; f) *Contributing to improve educational practices*; and g) *Identifying teaching action strengths and weaknesses of newly hired teachers* – participants' feedback significantly ranked extremely positive (Tab. 1).

Scale agreement	Strongly agree	Agree	Slightly agree	Disagree
a) Improving the observation quality in class	54,93% (89)	41,97% (68)	1,85% (3)	1,23% (2)
b) Detecting data that otherwise would not have been taken into account	51,23% (83)	40,74% (66)	6,79% (11)	1,23% (2)
c) Stimulating shared reflection on teaching	59,25% (96)	36,41% (59)	3,08% (5)	1,23% (2)
d) Giving feedback on teaching activities	59,87% (97)	34,56% (56)	4,32% (7)	1,23% (2)
e) Fostering constructive relationship development	62,34% (101)	33,33% (54)	3,08% (5)	1,23% (2)
f) Contributing to improve educational practices	54,93% (89)	39,50% (64)	3,70% (6)	1,85% (3)
g) Identifying teaching action strengths and weaknesses of newly hired teachers	54,93% (89)	40,12% (65)	3,08% (5)	1,85% (3)

Table 1 – Considerations on how much helpful is peer observation mediated by Microteaching and video annotation

Comparing these data with those of the previous test survey (Bocci, 2022), the positive appreciation is confirmed from most of the participants on all levels involved. "Strongly Agree" (SA) and "Agree" (A) in all dimensions investigated (Table 2).

	Scale of agreement %							
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
Dimension	SA	SA	A	A	SyA	SyA	D	D
a	53,45	54,93	44,23	41,97	1,38	1,85	0,92	1,23
b	44,23	51,23	50,69	40,74	3,68	6,79	1,38	1,23

c	57,60	59,25	38,70	36,41	2,76	3,08	0,92	1,23
d	54,83	59,87	41,01	34,56	2,76	4,32	1,38	1,23
e	55,29	62,34	41,01	33,33	2,76	3,08	0,92	1,23
f	52,99	54,93	42,85	39,50	3,22	3,70	0,92	1,85
g	56,22	54,93	41,01	40,12	1,38	3,08	1,38	1,85

Table 2 – Comparison between 2022 and 2023 survey

Furthermore, interesting feedback have been received from the open-ended questions aimed at detect strengths and any eventual critical issues about the video-analysis experience applied at school as part of the training course.

Here some opinions. By M. (56 years old, Primary School), "watching the video and receiving comments from the mentor teacher allow the teacher to observe her own teaching "under the microscope". Consequently, the teacher can implement different teaching strategies and receive feedback on the technique tested. Moreover, simulation promotes teaching strategies and practices mastery, and also helps to improve teaching sequences observation and analysis skills. I believe it was a valuable peer-to-peer observation technique."

Lesson recording, therefore, allows self-assessment on teaching methods. So, it is possible to critically (reflectively) analyze the practices adopted, sharing feedback between colleagues (through a feedback network). This entails greater decentralization, because "the observation is twofold: from one side, it is a mutual tutor-tutee observation. On the other side, it allows self-evaluation on teaching strategies and methodologies" (A., 55 years old, Primary School).

Several voices highlight how collaboration is a strength for the recursive reflectivity, because it breaks out of isolation: "One of the strengths was working together collaboratively. We dwelt on our job features from a mutual observation perspective. We engaged in this peer-to-peer experience stimulating human as well as working relations." (M. 58 years old, Primary School).

Summarizing the many comments, it is possible to say that Microteaching and video annotation as video-analysis practices have:

– facilitated discussion among teachers;
– created positive environments based on shared knowledge and teaching practices;
– fostered sharing and dialogue among teachers united by the goal of improving teaching practices through shared reflection;
– positively influenced the meta reflection regarding teaching methods and classroom management.

In line with the previous year experiences, some of the obstacles concerned the privacy policy limiting the use of videos in class. Furthermore, it is not always easy to obtain the related authorizations, especially for minors. However, some creative solutions have been set up. Some teachers have taken pictures

only of the crucial steps during the lessons. Others have pointed the cameras only on the newly hired teachers.

Other issues were connected to time. Participants struggled to find moments for mutual observation due to the daily school organization, especially in the Secondary schools, both lower and upper. Here, mentor teachers and newly hires not always are in the same section: "The greatest problem was to be available on the same schedules in the same classrooms. It needed to schedule special lessons for the purpose" (L. 53 years old, Lower Secondary School).

Another problem has been related to colleagues complaining about "slowdowns in the didactic programs implementation" (R., 62 years old, Upper Secondary School), especially in the case where students were involved.

Finally, a further critical factor reported concerned the difficulty to combine different teaching methods between mentor teachers and newly hires, especially when the newly hired teachers have already had years of experience, but as a precarious teacher. However, it must also be said that in their open-ended responses, mentor teachers highlighted how these different visions were opportunities for comparison and mutual enrichment, since these visions became the subject of shared analyses and reflections.

6. Conclusions

According to the theoretical reflections and the training-research experience carried out, it is more interesting to focus on the critical aspects highlighted by the participants, rather than on the strengths.

The privacy issues should certainly be taken into consideration. They concern complex bureaucratic matters discouraging the use of videos as tools for teaching and learning training (such as video curriculums and project presentations in orientation programs). As per privacy bureaucracy, rules must be obeyed, but it is important to plan and systematize the use of videos in daily teaching practices, in order not to make the technique a further burden for teachers.

The privacy issues combine with other two problems: the lack of time for the peer observation; and the alleged slowdowns in the implementation of the didactic programs due to tasks felt as unrelated to the daily school routine. According to Graziella Ballanti *no-school* moments should be considered as observation, experimentation and self-evaluation opportunities. Since mid-70s, she considered: "All teachers should be allowed to experiment, and to test current types of teaching models, as well as the proposed and potentials" (Ballanti, 1975, p. 84). Moreover, she argues the need for *no-school programs* at school. These programs "should be opportunities for overcoming and detachment in order to attain authentic professional changes, instead of pure mimetic, passive, not rationalized transfer" (Ballanti, 1975, pp. 85-86). This attitude, typical of the entire educational institution, would also allow to reconfigure different

teaching methods and visions as real opportunities for both, individual and collective growth. An education system like this is based on agentivity, recursive reflectivity and research practices as training practices (and vice versa). These are the three qualifying teaching aspects crucial for this research, as claimed at the beginning.

According to the many scholars quoted, investment in mentor teacher training should continue. Furthermore, mentor teacher training should be implemented and combined with other research-training practices promoting teacher agency and reflectivity. Video analysis, including Microteaching and video annotation, become engaged opportunities of reflection for several actors. They can experience (and test) diverse teaching practices by *immersion* (at the same moment they carry out their activities), and by *abstraction* (when cooperating with their colleagues).

Finally, video-mediated training and research fit with the idea of professional learning development. According to our findings, and the feedback received, these practices are definitely applicable in mentoring process involving experienced teachers and newly hires engaged in their probationary years.

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CHAPTER 7

Building a learning-oriented educational environment. Tutor teachers, newly hired teachers and students discuss assessment practices.

Concetta La Rocca, Edoardo Casale[1]

1. Introduction

The herewith contribution represents a continuation of one of the activities proposed in the past editions of the training intervention, targeting tutors of newly hired teachers[2]. Notably, the authors introduce an operational evolution about the previously addressed topic: building an educational collaborative classroom environment, where teachers involve students considering the assessment practices applied (La Rocca, 2019). Since the previous editions, participants have been proposed to assume the classroom as a laboratory where newly hired teachers, supported and supervised by the mentor teachers, involve students in the observation and evaluation of the assessment methods applied to performance. According to a shared reflection between the teaching learning process actors on the crucial aspects of the assessment practices, the goal is to improve teaching practices, as explicitly stated by the legislator: "Observation focus on how activities and lessons are led, on supporting the learners' motivation, on building a positive and motivating environment, on educational methods to assess performance." (D.M. n.850 del 27/10/2015). Observation has been chosen to focus on the assessment practices because, based on the studies from many authors (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Carless, 2006, 2012; Hattie, 2008 – 2011; Lucisano, 2017; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2005) "Verification and evaluation are indeed core activities of teaching/learning, since they allow to verify, or falsify, the hypothesis that a certain teaching project has, or has not, been successful". On one hand this occurrence clearly refers exclusively to the "grades" teachers assign to students' performances on the assignments, on the register, or on the report cards. On the other hand, the same occurrence represents an opportunity for teachers of monitoring the effectiveness of their lessons, and for students, the opportunity to understand whether they are studying in the

[1] The work comes from a shared reflection between the authors. Notably sections 1,2,3, 3.1, 4 by Concetta La Rocca; section 3.2 by Edoardo Casale.

[2] For the activities carried out in the previous years, see Fiorucci M., Moretti G. (eds) (2019) *Il tutor dei docenti neoassunti.* Roma: RomaTre Press; Fiorucci M., Moretti G. (eds) (2022) *La formazione del tutor dei docenti neoassunti. Una prospettiva sistemica*. Roma: Roma Tre Press.

right ways or whether they should change the approaches. Therefore, evaluative data can offer far more information than what is traditionally attributed to them. However, this broadening of the assessment practices application can be possible only if teachers, students, and, in this case, tutors activities are committed to a common goal: collaborating to improve the quality of the teaching/learning processes and of the related outcomes (La Rocca, 2019, p.78).

2. Building learning-oriented environments: the role of the assessment practices

Based on research carried out (Alkharusi 2011; Brookhart, 1997; Stiggins, 2007; Dorman and others, 2006), Hussain Alkharusi (2015) notices that effective communication between teachers and students, concerning the classroom assessment practices, leads to the construction of a positive school environment that positively affects students learning. Notably, Alkharusi (2011) highlights that teachers can address their students' perceptions about school environments as learning- or performance-oriented, through the management of the applied assessment practices.

The author specifies in a perceived performance-oriented environment, teachers are believed to places "grades" (measure of student's final results) in the foreground, not taking into account the students efforts, and creating competitive contexts, comparing performance and outputs. Moreover, in this type of contexts, teachers do not clearly express their assessment methods, they hardly assign high "grades" and use tests compliant with standards rather than with the specific related knowledge and learning status. Conversely, students perceive teaching activities as learning-oriented, when teachers help them identify the places where they need more effort to improve their performance, when teachers use a variety of ways to assess students' mastery of the learned subject materials, including stimulating tests related to daily life. Moreover, when teachers help students to find out their strengths, and to get responsible for their education, and when they give them a chance to correct their mistakes in the assigned homework and tests, sharing the study goals, the assessment criteria, and the related expected results. And when they provide continuous feedback on learning outcomes and processes. Therefore, students perceive their school contexts as positively oriented when they feel involved in the learning process, as the protagonists of their own growth paths. This, as a result of teachers' choices to be available to build relationships, sharing the teaching practices, especially about the assessment methods.

Alkharusi (2011; 2015) believes his studies confirm theoretical instances by Ames (1992), Natriello and Dornbusch (1984), Ryan and others (1985). Ames argues that teaching and cognitive structures built at school, in classrooms, influence students perceptions and their motivations to study. Natriello and Dornbusch (1984) argue that assigning roles to students in the develop-

ment of assessment criteria, and in the performance levels to attain strengthen students, control perceptions over their own learning paths, improving both, their motivations to study, and their achievements. Furthermore, according to Ryan, and others (1985), the presentation of the assessment methods adopted in the classroom lets raise motivation to study, because the students feel to be assessed with no judgement. They understand that the assessment aims to analyze their efforts to attain the results, increasing the perceptions about skills and competencies, fostering satisfaction in achieving better performance. Alkharusi (2015) highlights sharing assessment criterions and methods is associated to students' effective perceptions, as it allows them to engage in metacognitive processes, producing interests and self-regulated learning.

3. The empirical observation. Operational proposal addressed to tutors

After a brief theoretical framing of the issues previously outlined, the research experience (La Rocca, 2019) has been submitted to the tutors who attended the training activities. During the tests, teachers' assessment practices have been submitted to tri-focal observation: what teachers consider to do, what students expect from their teachers, and what an external observer detects. The procedure, and the results achieved are considered to offer an example of collaboration, and of field research, involving tutor teachers (in the role of external observers), newly hired teachers (the teacher of the related classroom), and their students. The goal is to build a learning-oriented educational environment based on trust. Notably about the assessment activities, where availability to reflection, problem-solving attitude, and collaborative behavior are enhanced through the mutual observation.

Therefore, it has been proposed to use the questionnaires designed and tested by Alkharusi (2011; 2015), that the author, here, translated into Italian, and validated in her field research (La Rocca & Capobianco, 2016). The questionnaires allow to detect both, the teacher (Q.D.), and the students (Q.S.) points of view on the assessment activities in class. As part of the tri-focal observation, Q.D. is used both, from the newly hired teachers, and from the teachers as external observers in these specific cases. Below the questionnaires submitted:

Question ID	Questions from Students questionnaires 4 possible answers = NEVER, SOMETIMES, ALMOST ALWAYS, ALWAYS
	PERFORMANCE-ORIENTED CONTEXT (in case of answers towards Almost always, and Always)
Q 1	In this class, there is a mismatch between the learned subject materials and the assigned homework and tests

Q 2	In this class, the teacher gives more important to the grades than to the learning
Q 3	In this class, the teacher's grading system is not clear
Q 4	It is difficult to achieve high grades this class
Q 5	In this class, assessment tasks (e.g., the in-class and homework assignments) are not interesting
Q 6	In this class, students who do poorly are criticized in front of the whole class
Q 7	In this class, the teacher compares students' performances to each other
Q 8	The tests in this class are difficult to students
Q 9	In this class, the assessment results do not fairly reflect the effort put in studying the subject
	LEARNING-ORIENTED CONTEXT (in case of answers towards Almost always, and Always)
Q 10	In this class, students receive continuous feedback from the teacher about their performance in the subject
Q 11	In this class, the teacher helps students identify the places where they need more effort to improve their performance
Q 12	In this class, the teacher uses a variety of ways (e.g., tests, reports, homework, activities, assignments, in class tasks …etc.) to assess students' mastery of the learned subject materials
Q 13	In this class, students are given a chance to correct their mistakes in the assigned homework and tests
Q 14	In this class, students can find out their strengths
Q 15	In this class, assessment tasks (e.g., assignments and tests) encourage thinking and understanding more than just memorizing
Q 16	In this class, the assigned homework and activities are related to the student's daily life
Q 17	In this class, the teacher holds students the responsibility to learn
Q 18	In this class, tests, reports and homework assignments are returned in a way that keeps individual student scores private

Tab. 1 – Questionnaire for students (filled in by the students in the classrooms involved)

ID domanda	Questions from the questionnaires for Tutor/Newly hired teacher (tutee) 4 possible answers = NEVER, SOMETIMES, ALMOST ALWAYS, ALWAYS
Dom 1	I/she inform/s students about the assessment criteria, I/she will use, before the task required
Dom 2	I/she provide/s each student with an oral feedback on the outcome performed
Dom 3	I/she provide/s each student with a written feedback on the outcome performed
Dom 4	I/she inform/s students about the homework goals to achieve, before the task performance, and before grading them
Dom 5	I/she provide/s students with suggestions, and tools to allow them to monitor their own learning improvement
Dom 6	I/she inform/s students about the assessment method for grading, before the task performance

Tab. 2 – Questionnaire for teachers (two versions: the one with questions in first person, filled in by the mentor teachers; the other with questions in third person, filled in by the newly hired teachers).

The first nine questions for students are clearly negatively asked, instead, the following are positively asked: this difference allows the internal control of the questionnaire verifying the coherence of the answers (Alkharusi, 2011). Notably, the first block of questions aims to highlight whether the teacher focuses on her students' performances. The second block detects whether the teacher focuses on the learning process, on the transversal skills development, such as thinking, assuming responsibility, self-assessment (Alkharusi, 2011, 2015). The questionnaire for teachers (both, tutors and newly hired) is made up of six questions to analyze which is the teacher's attitude applying the assessment practices, and the relationship with her students in class. From a comparison between the students answers and those from teachers, can be found very different points of view about what happens in class. The possible contradiction can be seen as an asset to promote dialogue and trusting relationship between those engaged in the teaching/learning process (La Rocca, 2019).

During the training activities, the tutor teachers have been explained that the three questionnaires should have been filled in by each classroom chosen to be involved in the test. Unlike in previous years, in 2022 training, the questionnaires have been provided in both, printable and digital versions. In addition, the links to the online modules have been indicated in the space reserved for the study units on the Moodle platform, where the participants were al-

lowed to access the available materials, and to interact with the course teachers. The digitalized questionnaires have been clearly more accessible, resulting in a considerable amount of compiling: 599 from students, 262 from tutors, 166 from newly hired teachers.

Unfortunately, not all the questionnaires have been filled in as per instructions given both, during the training, and then in the study units description on the platform. Therefore, data have been required to be filtered by the required identification information[3], in order to analyse each unique class, where all, including tutors, newly hired teachers, and students, had filled the questionnaires.

3.1 Aggregate data analysis

In this paper, data are presented as a whole, although evidences from shared observation tests about the assessment practices value for each classroom, where the tests have been carried out. Notably, in this paragraph the results from the three kinds of questionnaires, properly filled in, are presented as an overall. Furthermore, in section 3.2 the results are reported by educational stages. Aggregate data are from three educational stages: Primary and Secondary education, both lower, and upper (Primaria, Secondaria di I grado e Secondaria di II grado). And they refer to 45 classrooms, 499 students, 57 tutors, 54 newly hired teachers. For an easier discussion, the results description involves just two extreme answers distributed across the scale of the given options[4]. For a deeper reading, find the attached tables.

By a first data reading, feedback from students about the newly hired teacher educational, and assessment activities are basically positive. From almost all the first nine negative questions the answers are "never"[5]. More than 50% of students state in their classes, the learned subject materials and the assigned homework and tests match (57,92%); the teacher gives more important to the learning than to the grades (64,13%); students are not criticized unless they obtain high grades (74,35%); there is no comparison between the students' performances (56,91%). The percentage drops slightly below 50% when students are asked if the grading methods used are clear (46,09%), and drops considerably concerning if the assessment tasks are interesting (35,67%), if

[3] In the first part of the three types of questionnaires, the name of the school, the school's electronic code, the education stage (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary), the classroom section (A, B, C ,...) have been required. By cross-referencing this information, it has been possible to filter the classes in which the observation took place as per instructions given during the training.

[4] Comments are provided for the lowest negative answers ("never"), concerning 1-9 questions for students, and for the highest positively answers ("always"), regarding 10-18 questions for students, and also all the items of the questionnaire for teachers.

[5] The lowest answer level corresponds to "never". In students' opinions, what is described, negatively, in the item submitted, never happens. In the data presentation, the items have been translated into positive forms to make them more accessible.

the assessment results fairly reflect the effort put in studying the subject (34,47%), if the assessment tests are easy (25,25%), if it is easy to achieve high grades (24,65%).

In the second set of the positive questions[6], the percentage who chose the option "always" is around 30% in the following aspects of the teaching relationship. Indeed, students state that: the feedback are returned in a way that keeps individual student scores private (32,67%); the teacher helps students identify the places where they need more effort to improve their performance (31,66%); the percentage slightly raise when students are asked if the teacher holds students the responsibility to learn (37,07%). Furthermore, students state that in their classes, assessment tasks encourage thinking and understanding more than just memorizing (16,23%); that they receive continuous feedback from the teacher about their performance in the subject (21,24%); the teacher uses a variety of ways to assess students' mastery of the learned subject materials (27,86%), and to support them finding out their strengths (24,05%); the teacher gives them a chance to correct their mistakes in the assigned homework and tests (24,85%); the assigned homework and activities are related to the student's daily life (10,82%).

Overall, concerning the first set of questions, half of the classroom answer firmly positively about the work of the teacher, suggesting to her to focus on the assessment tests planning, and, more broadly, on assessment practices.

Concerning the second set of questions, only one third of students believe the class environment promotes the teacher's focus on the active and the aware learning. So, students, once again, invite teachers to improve their assessment methods, to make students felt more involved, valued and supported in the expression of their critical skills.

Only a few statements from the mentor teachers and newly hired teachers (tutees), which are substantially the same, match with what has been noticed from the answers provided by the classrooms as a whole. Please, find the related table in the annex section (ANNEX 1). Their opinions are more or less the same regarding: explaining the homework performance goals to achieve before the execution, and before grading them (Tutor:57,89% – Newly hired teacher:59,26%), and clarifying the criteria used for the evaluation before the requested task (T:66,67% – N:64,81%); activating self-assessment processes through suggestions, and tools to let the students monitor their own learning improvement (T:49,12% – N:50,00%). The tutors' opinions do not entirely match with those of the newly hired teachers about giving oral feedback (T:71,93% – N:61,11%), and written feedback (T:24,65% – N:31,48%) to each student on the performed outcome. Moreover, the output shows a substantial difference about informing about the method used to grade the tasks before they are performed (T:63,16% – N:50,00%). In this latest case there is

[6] Items from questions 10-18 are expressed in a positive form. The related answers confirm them by the option chosen.

a wide discrepancy between what the tutors, and the tutees observed, and what the students' answered about (46,09%). Comparing the questionnaire results, it can be noticed that, in a basically positive environment, actions should concern the improvement of the assessment methods and the organization of suitable tests that fit more the students demands. Debating around the discrepancies from the students, the tutor teachers and the new hired teachers (tutees) outputs, comparing, and cross-reading the data gathered from the three types of questionnaires, may allow to attain the real purpose of the research test, that is promoting dialogue between the stakeholders of the learning process. This process can be described as the educational relationship fulfilled through mutual trust (La Rocca, 2019, Lucisano, 2017).

3.2 Data analysis by educational stage

In this section the data collected are reported by category: primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education (primaria, secondaria di I grado e secondaria di II grado). As mentioned in section 3.1, only the classes where all three questionnaires have been filled in, have been taken into consideration.The data analysis and the related charts have been created in Microsoft Excel. The following charts have been divided by education stages reflecting the collected data by questionnaire type, that is for Students, for Tutor teachers, for Newly hired tutors (tutees). The abscissas columns describe the question numbers, instead, the ordinates reflect the response percentages. For further details on the data, please, look up the attached tabs, sources of the charts. The percentages are not reported on the charts, as it is easy to gather them from the chart itself, and from the ANNEXES (ANNEX 2).

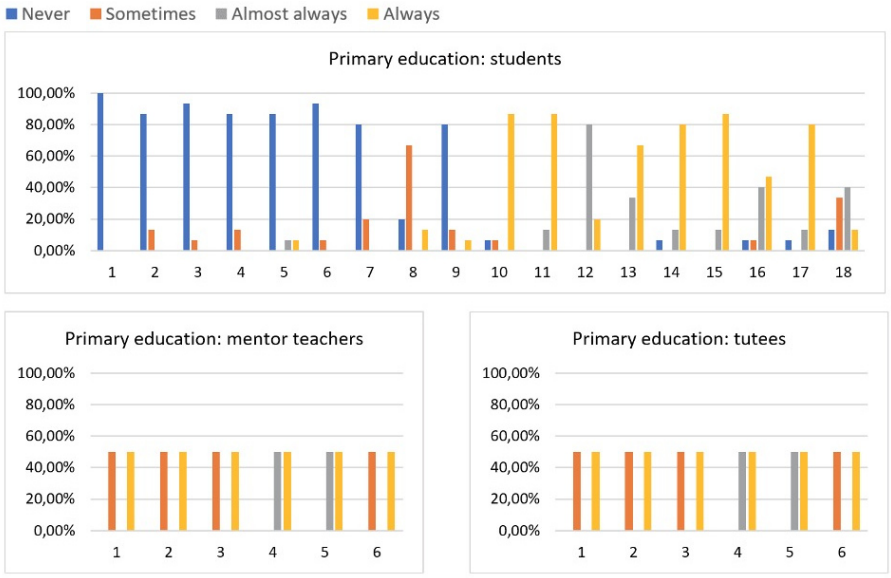

Chart 1 – Results from the Primary education questionnaires

Based on the selection explained in section 3[7], for the Primary education category have been involved 1 classroom made up of 15 students, 2 mentor teachers, 2 newly hired teachers (tutees) (*chart 1*). As per the above chart, students' opinions are substantially positive in the first set of questions and rather mixed in the second block. From the related questionnaires it can be noticed that not always: the assessment tests are difficult to students (Q. 8), the teacher applies a variety of ways to assess the students' mastery of the learned subject materials (Q. 12), the teacher gives the students a chance to correct their mistakes in the assigned homework and tests (Q. 13), the assigned homework and activities are related to the students' daily life (Q. 16), feedback on tests, reports, homework, are returned keeping the individual score private (Q. 18). From a comparison of the charts, regarding the overall results of the questionnaire addressed to teachers, the answers from the tutors and from the newly hired teachers match. The comparison between the teachers' answers and those from students shows that there is a similarity between the students' feedback and the learning proposals from the mentor teachers/newly hired teachers. Furthermore, some data highlight some students are not represented from the

[7] Not all the questionnaires submitted online have been filled in as per instructions given during the training. Therefore, data have been required to be filtered by the required identification information, in order to analyse each unique class, where all, including tutors, newly hired teachers, and students, had filled the questionnaires.

classroom spread opinion, indeed teachers should identify the critical results obtained and sharing them with students to promote an active dialogue.

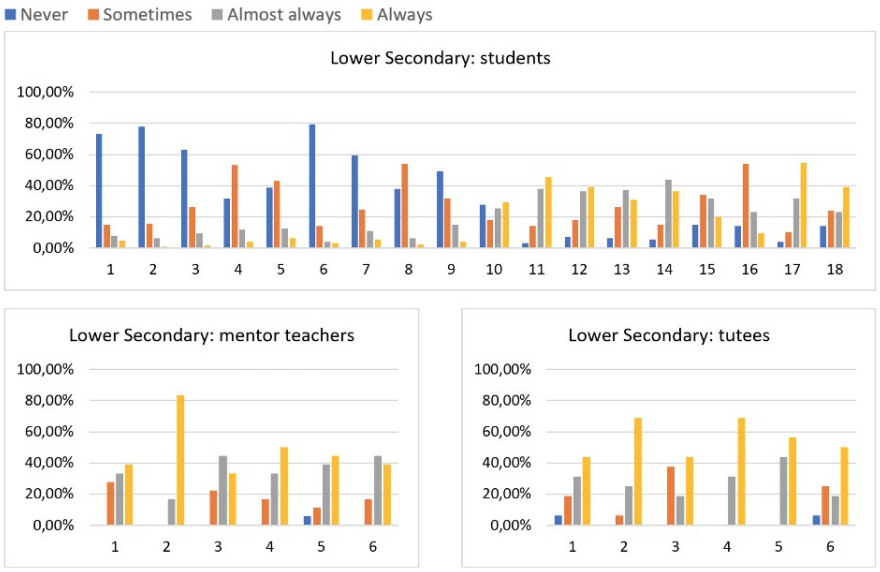

Chart 2 – Results from the Lower secondary education questionnaires

For the Lower secondary education, 11 classrooms, 130 students, 18 mentor teachers, 16 newly hired teachers (tutees) have been considered (*chart 2*). As per the above chart, students' opinions are substantially positive in the first set of questions and rather mixed in the second block, where most of the answers place along the different levels. Notably, in the first nine questions it is noticed that: sometimes students struggle to achieve high grades (Q. 4), the assessment tests assigned are not always stimulating (Q. 5) and the same are difficult to students (Q. 8). The results from the second set of questions are not all the same, because all the possible answers appear to have been selected, resulting as rather close percentages. The evidences are mainly from the following questions: students receive continuous feedback from the teacher about their performance in the subject (Q. 10), in the class, assessment tasks encourage thinking and understanding more than just memorizing (Q. 15), the assigned homework and activities are related student' s daily life (Q 16), feedback on tests, reports, homework, are given keeping the individual score private (Q. 18). Comparing the questionnaires filled in by the mentor teachers and by the newly hired teachers, it can be seen that opinions are fairly consistent, except in the answers to question 5, which concerns providing tools and suggestions for monitoring one's own learning path. Indeed, options "Never", and "Some-

times" appear in the mentor teachers' opinions. Instead, options "Almost always" and "Always" have been chosen by all the new hired teachers. Also in this case, it is interesting to observe how different opinions can encourage the dialogue between students, experienced teachers and teachers in training, especially regarding the assessment tests planning and the related returns. The assessment tests, indeed, should promote critical approach, and should be related to daily life.

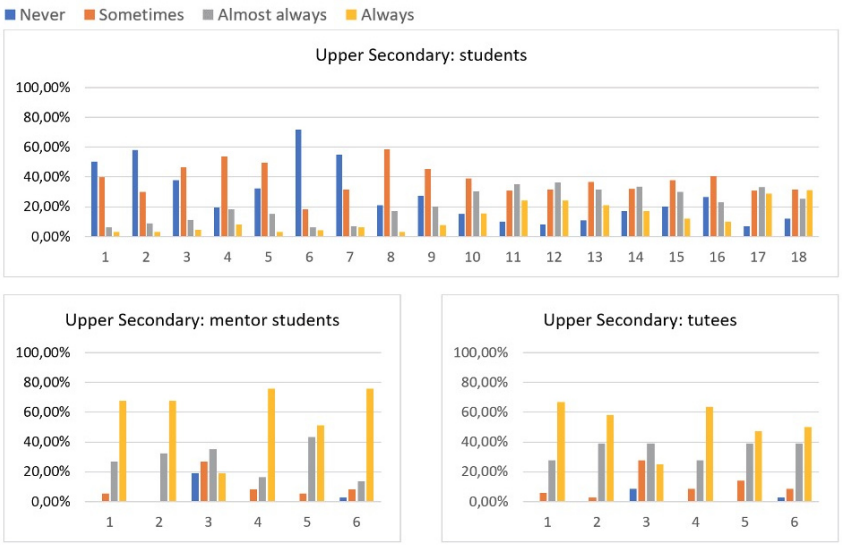

Chart 3 – Results from the Upper secondary education questionnaires

33 classrooms composed by 354 students, 37 mentor teachers, 36 newly hired teachers (tutees) have been evaluated concerning the Upper secondary education (*chart 3*). As per the questionnaires filled by the students, there is a mismatch in the results from the first set of questions. Notably, at school, in the classes: the grading systems applied by the teachers are not always so clear (Q. 3), it is difficult to achieve high grades (Q. 4), assessment tests are difficult to students (Q. 8), and the assessment results do not fairly reflect the effort put in studying the subject (Q. 9). Concerning the second set of questions, the results are mixed, similarly to those from the lower secondary education, because all the possible answers appear to have been selected, resulting as rather close percentages. Notably, the teachers help students to identify the places where they need more effort to improve their performance (Q. 11), the teachers use a variety of ways to assess students' mastery of the learned subject materials (Q. 12), students are given a chance to correct their mistakes in the assigned homework and tests (Q. 13), students are helped to find out their

strengths (Q. 14), assessment tasks encourage thinking and understanding more than just memorizing (Q. 15), the assigned homework and activities are related to the students daily lives (Q. 16), feedback on tests, reports, homework, are given keeping the individual score private (Q. 18). The results from teachers' questionnaires match across the whole questionnaire.

Similarly to the lower secondary education, also here the points by the students mainly concern the setting of assessment tests to be referred to daily life, and the related feedback methods. Furthermore, given the mixed results from students' answers, it should be worth to promote constructive dialogue within the whole classroom, starting from sharing the results of the questionnaires.

The observation by education stage allows to notice that primary education students' opinions about the teaching methods and activities are substantially positive. Instead, the students opinions from the lower, and upper secondary education, report some issues about educational, and assessment practices. Two hypotheses about: a. in primary stage classes, teachers pay more attention to teaching; b. the older students, from secondary education stages, are more aware about teaching methods, and more able to identify the related issues, and to raise them. As previously highlighted, in the lower, and upper secondary schools, opinions from the mentor teachers, and the tutees coincide. However, it is once again emphasized that the value of this observation lies in sharing the results obtained within the entire classrooms, in order to promote the desired educational dialogue.

4. Conclusions: opinions from mentor teachers about tri-focal observation

The training activities have been organized into units of study presented synchronously by the teachers/trainers; each unit materials, consisting of theoretical documents, experiential insights and related application tools, have been deployed in the dedicated Moodle online platform. At the end of the training, the tutor teachers involved returned their digital format reports. The reports are made up of a general introduction, and one focused section describing the unit of study chosen, for testing the tools used in the side-by-side with the newly hired teachers (tutees). The unit of study from the authors, concerning the tri-focal observation of the assessment practices in the classrooms involved, has been supported by 212 focused reports, reflecting the mentor teachers' experience using the questionnaires through both, closed-ended, and open-ended questions.

Notably, the mentor teachers have been asked how much tri-focal observation on assessment practices is helpful through four options (To a very large extent- somewhat- to a very small extent- at all) for:

a. Improving the education/assessment structure quality
b. Improving the quality of the relation between teachers and students
c. Monitoring the education action through students' points of view too

d. Thinking education/assessment action from a more general and ideal educational point of view
e. Thinking the assessment action with training purpose to promote clear and shared educational interventions
f. Increasing students and teachers participation and mutual involvement in the education/assessment action
g. Promoting co-development of knowledge and positive behavior from a cognitive side
h. Promoting co-development of knowledge and positive behavior from a relationship side
i. Increasing mutual confidence and collaboration between students and teachers

The following chart shows that the opinions from the mentor teachers involved are consistently positive for each of the item listed above.

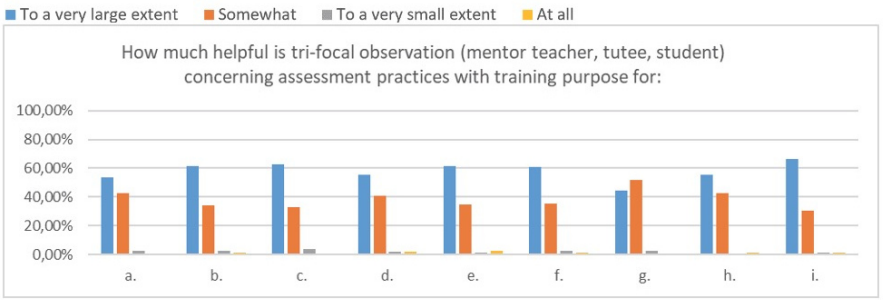

Chart 4 – Opinions from the mentor teachers about tri-focal observation on assessment practices

Mentor teachers have also been asked to give their opinions about the effectiveness of this tool.

85,71% think that it was easy to submit the questionnaires, despite only 33,70% claim to have submitted them in the digital format.

63,74% state to have shared the results from the tri-focal observation with both, the newly hired teachers, and their students. Among those stating to not have involved their students, 34,07% are from primary education. Indeed, the given reason was that their students were too young to properly understand a such complex activity.

In conclusion the proposed test has been welcomed with genuine interest by the mentor teachers.

As mentioned above, the most critical issue detected concerns the fact that only about one third of the activities have been properly carried out, that is filling in all the three questionnaires (for mentor teachers, for tutees, for students), in the same classrooms. However, from the online forum exchanges,

in some classrooms, questionnaires seem to have been filled, on one hand, online by the mentor teachers and by the tutees. On the other hand, in printed version by the students, apparently due to the limited availability of the number of workstations. Therefore, the results from the printed questionnaires are not in the digital database, although teachers had been asked to insert these data. For the future, the purpose is to find a shared method with mentor teachers, in order to have complete questionnaire results in digital format. Currently, the Microsoft Excel database is available to teachers who request it. From there the teachers will be able to extrapolate information about their own field research, including observation, consideration, confrontation.

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ANNEX 1: General results: questionnaires from students, mentor teachers, newly hired teachers (tutees)

PRIMARY, LOWER/UPPER SECONDARY										N° Classes: 45			
										N° Students: 499			
										N° Mentor teachers: 57			
										N° Tutees: 54			
Students questions	Students answers				Mentor teachers/tutees questions	Mentor teachers answers				Tutee answers			
	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always		Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
Q. 1.1	289	160	32	17	Q. 2.1	0	8	16	33	1	6	15	32
	57,92%	32,06%	6,41%	3,41%		0,00%	14,04%	28,07%	57,89%	1,85%	11,11%	27,78%	59,26%
Q. 1.2	320	128	39	12	Q. 2.2	0	1	15	41	0	3	18	33
	64,13%	25,65%	7,82%	2,40%		0,00%	1,75%	26,32%	71,93%	0,00%	5,56%	33,33%	61,11%
Q. 1.3	230	200	51	18	Q. 2.3	7	15	21	14	3	17	17	17
	46,09%	40,08%	10,22%	3,61%		12,28%	26,32%	36,84%	24,56%	5,56%	31,48%	31,48%	31,48%
Q. 1.4	123	262	80	34	Q. 2.4	0	6	13	38	0	3	16	35
	24,65%	52,51%	16,03%	6,81%		0,00%	10,53%	22,81%	66,67%	0,00%	5,56%	29,63%	64,81%
Q. 1.5	178	231	70	20	Q. 2.5	1	4	24	28	0	5	22	27
	35,67%	46,29%	14,03%	4,01%		1,75%	7,02%	42,11%	49,12%	0,00%	9,26%	40,74%	50,00%
Q. 1.6	371	84	26	18	Q. 2.6	1	7	13	36	2	8	17	27
	74,35%	16,83%	5,21%	3,61%		1,75%	12,28%	22,81%	63,16%	3,70%	14,81%	31,48%	50,00%
Q. 1.7	284	147	39	29									
	56,91%	29,46%	7,82%	5,81%									
Q. 1.8	126	288	69	16									
	25,25%	57,72%	13,83%	3,21%									
Q. 1.9	172	203	90	33									
	34,47%	40,68%	18,04%	6,61%									
Q. 1.10	91	162	140	106									
	18,24%	32,46%	28,06%	21,24%									
Q. 1.11	39	127	175	158									
	7,82%	25,45%	35,07%	31,66%									
Q. 1.12	38	135	187	139									
	7,62%	27,05%	37,47%	27,86%									
Q. 1.13	46	164	165	124									
	9,22%	32,87%	33,07%	24,85%									
Q. 1.14	69	132	177	120									
	13,83%	26,45%	35,47%	24,05%									

Q. 1.15	91	178	149	81	
	18,24%	35,67%	29,86%	16,23%	
Q. 1.16	113	215	117	54	
	22,65%	43,09%	23,45%	10,82%	
Q. 1.17	31	122	160	185	
	6,21%	24,45%	32,06%	37,07%	
Q. 1.18	63	148	125	163	
	12,63%	29,66%	25,05%	32,67%	

ANNEX 2: Results from students, mentor teachers, newly hired teachers (tutees) questionnaires – Primary, and Lower, Upper Secondary education

PRIMARY EDUCATION										Nº Classes: 1			
										Nº Students: 15			
										Nº Mentor teachers: 2			
										Nº Tutees: 2			
Students questions	Students answers				Mentor teachers/tutees questions	Mentor teachers answers				Tutee answers			
	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always		Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	Mai	Never	Sometimes	Almost always
Q. 1.1	15	0	0	0	Q. 2.1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
	100%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%		0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%
Q. 1.2	13	2	0	0	Q. 2.2	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
	86,67%	13,33%	0,00%	0,00%		0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%
Q. 1.3	14	1	0	0	Q. 2.3	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
	93,33%	6,67%	0,00%	0,00%		0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%
Q. 1.4	13	2	0	0	Q. 2.4	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
	86,67%	13,33%	0,00%	0,00%		0,00%	0,00%	50,00%	50,00%	0,00%	0,00%	50,00%	50,00%
Q. 1.5	13	0	1	1	Q. 2.5	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
	86,67%	0,00%	6,67%	6,67%		0,00%	0,00%	50,00%	50,00%	0,00%	0,00%	50,00%	50,00%
Q. 1.6	14	1	0	0	Q. 2.6	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1
	93,33%	6,67%	0,00%	0,00%		0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%	0,00%	50,00%
Q. 1.7	12	3	0	0									
	80,00%	20,00%	0,00%	0,00%									
Q. 1.8	3	10	0	2									
	20,00%	66,67%	0,00%	13,33%									
Q. 1.9	12	2	0	1									
	80,00%	13,33%	0,00%	6,67%									
Q. 1.10	1	1	0	13									

	6,67%	6,67%	0,00%	86,67%	
Q. 1.11	0	0	2	13	
	0,00%	0,00%	13,33%	86,67%	
Q. 1.12	0	0	12	3	
	0,00%	0,00%	80,00%	20,00%	
Q. 1.13	0	0	5	10	
	0,00%	0,00%	33,33%	66,67%	
Q. 1.14	1	0	2	12	
	6,67%	0,00%	13,33%	80,00%	
Q. 1.15	0	0	2	13	
	0,00%	0,00%	13,33%	86,67%	
Q. 1.16	1	1	6	7	
	6,67%	6,67%	40,00%	46,67%	
Q. 1.17	1	0	2	12	
	6,67%	0,00%	13,33%	80,00%	
Q. 1.18	2	5	6	2	
	13,33%	33,33%	40,00%	13,33%	

LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION										Nº Classrooms: 11			
										Nº Students: 130			
										Nº Mentor teachers: 18			
										Nº Tutees: 16			
Students questions	Students answers				Mentor teachers/tutees questions	Mentor teachers answers				Tutee answers			
	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always		Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	Mai	Never	Sometimes	Almost always
Q. 1.1	95	19	10	6	Q. 2.1	0	5	6	7	1	3	5	7
	73,08%	14,62%	7,69%	4,62%		0,00%	27,78%	33,33%	38,89%	6,25%	18,75%	31,25%	43,75%
Q. 1.2	101	20	8	1	Q. 2.2	0	0	3	15	0	1	4	11
	77,69%	15,38%	6,15%	0,77%		0,00%	0,00%	16,67%	83,33%	0,00%	6,25%	25,00%	68,75%
Q. 1.3	82	34	12	2	Q. 2.3	0	4	8	6	0	6	3	7
	63,08%	26,15%	9,23%	1,54%		0,00%	22,22%	44,44%	33,33%	0,00%	37,50%	18,75%	43,75%
Q. 1.4	41	69	15	5	Q. 2.4	0	3	6	9	0	0	5	11
	31,54%	53,08%	11,54%	3,85%		0,00%	16,67%	33,33%	50,00%	0,00%	0,00%	31,25%	68,75%
Q. 1.5	50	56	16	8	Q. 2.5	1	2	7	8	0	0	7	9
	38,46%	43,08%	12,31%	6,15%		5,56%	11,11%	38,89%	44,44%	0,00%	0,00%	43,75%	56,25%
Q. 1.6	103	18	5	4	Q. 2.6	0	3	8	7	1	4	3	8
	79,23%	13,85%	3,85%	3,08%		0,00%	16,67%	44,44%	38,89%	6,25%	25,00%	18,75%	50,00%
Q. 1.7	77	32	14	7									

	59,23%	24,62%	10,77%	5,38%	
Q. 1.8	49	70	8	3	
	37,69%	53,85%	6,15%	2,31%	
Q. 1.9	64	41	19	5	
	49,23%	31,54%	14,62%	3,85%	
Q. 1.10	36	23	33	38	
	27,69%	17,69%	25,38%	29,23%	
Q. 1.11	4	18	49	59	
	3,08%	13,85%	37,69%	45,38%	
Q. 1.12	9	23	47	51	
	6,92%	17,69%	36,15%	39,23%	
Q. 1.13	8	34	48	40	
	6,15%	26,15%	36,92%	30,77%	
Q. 1.14	7	19	57	47	
	5,38%	14,62%	43,85%	36,15%	
Q. 1.15	19	44	41	26	
	14,62%	33,85%	31,54%	20,00%	
Q. 1.16	18	70	30	12	
	13,85%	53,85%	23,08%	9,23%	
Q. 1.17	5	13	41	71	
	3,85%	10,00%	31,54%	54,62%	
Q. 1.18	18	31	30	51	
	13,85%	23,85%	23,08%	39,23%	

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION										Nº Classes 33			
										Nº Students: 354			
										Nº Mentor teachers: 37			
										Nº Tutees: 36			
Students questions	Students answers				Mentor teachers/tutees questions	Mentor teachers answers				Tutee answers			
	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always		Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	Mai	Never	Sometimes	Almost always
Q. 1.1	179	141	22	11	Q. 2.1	0	2	10	25	0	2	10	24
	50,56%	39,83%	6,21%	3,11%		0,00%	5,41%	27,03%	67,57%	0,00%	5,56%	27,78%	66,67%
Q. 1.2	206	106	31	11	Q. 2.2	0	0	12	25	0	1	14	21
	58,19%	29,94%	8,76%	3,11%		0,00%	0,00%	32,43%	67,57%	0,00%	2,78%	38,89%	58,33%
Q. 1.3	134	165	39	16	Q. 2.3	7	10	13	7	3	10	14	9
	37,85%	46,61%	11,02%	4,52%		18,92%	27,03%	35,14%	18,92%	8,33%	27,78%	38,89%	25,00%
Q. 1.4	69	191	65	29	Q. 2.4	0	3	6	28	0	3	10	23
	19,49%	53,95%	18,36%	8,19%		0,00%	8,11%	16,22%	75,68%	0,00%	8,33%	27,78%	63,89%

Q. 1.5	115	175	53	11	Q. 2.5	0	2	16	19	0	5	14	17
	32,49%	49,44%	14,97%	3,11%		0,00%	5,41%	43,24%	51,35%	0,00%	13,89%	38,89%	47,22%
Q. 1.6	254	65	21	14	Q. 2.6	1	3	5	28	1	3	14	18
	71,75%	18,36%	5,93%	3,95%		2,70%	8,11%	13,51%	75,68%	2,78%	8,33%	38,89%	50,00%
Q. 1.7	195	112	25	22									
	55,08%	31,64%	7,06%	6,21%									
Q. 1.8	74	208	61	11									
	20,90%	58,76%	17,23%	3,11%									
Q. 1.9	96	160	71	27									
	27,12%	45,20%	20,06%	7,63%									
Q. 1.10	54	138	107	55									
	15,25%	38,98%	30,23%	15,54%									
Q. 1.11	35	109	124	86									
	9,89%	30,79%	35,03%	24,29%									
Q. 1.12	29	112	128	85									
	8,19%	31,64%	36,16%	24,01%									
Q. 1.13	38	130	112	74									
	10,73%	36,72%	31,64%	20,90%									
Q. 1.14	61	113	118	61									
	17,23%	31,92%	33,33%	17,23%									
Q. 1.15	72	134	106	42									
	20,34%	37,85%	29,94%	11,86%									
Q. 1.16	94	144	81	35									
	26,55%	40,68%	22,88%	9,89%									
Q. 1.17	25	109	117	102									
	7,06%	30,79%	33,05%	28,81%									
Q. 1.18	43	112	89	110									
	12,15%	31,64%	25,14%	31,07%									

UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION										N° Classes 33			
										N° Students: 354			
										N° Mentor teachers: 37			
										N° Tutees: 36			
Students questions	Students answers				Mentor teachers/tutees questions	Mentor teachers answers				Tutee answers			
	Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always		Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always	Mai	Never	Sometimes	Almost always
Q. 1.1	179	141	22	11	Q. 2.1	0	2	10	25	0	2	10	24
	50,56%	39,83%	6,21%	3,11%		0,00%	5,41%	27,03%	67,57%	0,00%	5,56%	27,78%	66,67%
Q. 1.2	206	106	31	11	Q. 2.2	0	0	12	25	0	1	14	21
	58,19%	29,94%	8,76%	3,11%		0,00%	0,00%	32,43%	67,57%	0,00%	2,78%	38,89%	58,33%
Q. 1.3	134	165	39	16	Q. 2.3	7	10	13	7	3	10	14	9
	37,85%	46,61%	11,02%	4,52%		18,92%	27,03%	35,14%	18,92%	8,33%	27,78%	38,89%	25,00%
Q. 1.4	69	191	65	29	Q. 2.4	0	3	6	28	0	3	10	23
	19,49%	53,95%	18,36%	8,19%		0,00%	8,11%	16,22%	75,68%	0,00%	8,33%	27,78%	63,89%
Q. 1.5	115	175	53	11	Q. 2.5	0	2	16	19	0	5	14	17
	32,49%	49,44%	14,97%	3,11%		0,00%	5,41%	43,24%	51,35%	0,00%	13,89%	38,89%	47,22%
Q. 1.6	254	65	21	14	Q. 2.6	1	3	5	28	1	3	14	18
	71,75%	18,36%	5,93%	3,95%		2,70%	8,11%	13,51%	75,68%	2,78%	8,33%	38,89%	50,00%
Q. 1.7	195	112	25	22									
	55,08%	31,64%	7,06%	6,21%									
Q. 1.8	74	208	61	11									
	20,90%	58,76%	17,23%	3,11%									
Q. 1.9	96	160	71	27									
	27,12%	45,20%	20,06%	7,63%									
Q. 1.10	54	138	107	55									
	15,25%	38,98%	30,23%	15,54%									
Q. 1.11	35	109	124	86									
	9,89%	30,79%	35,03%	24,29%									
Q. 1.12	29	112	128	85									
	8,19%	31,64%	36,16%	24,01%									
Q. 1.13	38	130	112	74									
	10,73%	36,72%	31,64%	20,90%									
Q. 1.14	61	113	118	61									
	17,23%	31,92%	33,33%	17,23%									
Q. 1.15	72	134	106	42									
	20,34%	37,85%	29,94%	11,86%									
Q. 1.16	94	144	81	35									
	26,55%	40,68%	22,88%	9,89%									

Q. 1.17	25	109	117	102	
	7,06%	30,79%	33,05%	28,81%	
Q. 1.18	43	112	89	110	
	12,15%	31,64%	25,14%	31,07%	

CHAPTER 8

Teaching induction. Observation in class and peer education in teacher professional development

Anna Maria Ciraci, Monica Bianchi[1]

1. Introduction

Education is at the basis of self-realization, employability and active and responsible citizenship. The first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights underlines that everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning. Teachers, trainers and school leaders play a central role in the provision of high-quality, inclusive education for all learners; without any teacher, trainer, or school leader there is no innovation, no inclusion, and no transformative learning (European Commission, 2020).

The teacher education policy for skills development promotes high-quality education. However, subject-based knowledge only is no longer enough, due to the latest fast social, cultural and regulatory changes affecting school. Teachers are nowadays required to know how to manage multi-dimensional processes, combining subject knowledge, education techniques, communication, relationship, organizational, reflective and research skills. Communication and relationship skills are characteristic of teaching roles. These skills are required to build educational interpersonal relationships, and to shape teaching methods and techniques based on each student attitude. Therefore, it is crucial training and update course programme focus on heterogeneous classroom management and strategies. Furthermore, mentor teachers should be field experts with strong personal aptitudes and experienced working skills, because tutor-newly hired teacher good relationship affects the induction plan. However, only multiple years experience does not make teachers mentor teachers. Mentor teachers should be still highly motivated, in order to engage also as tutors. Field research on teacher working conditions explain the related-job risks that can appear just after few years on service. They include dissatisfaction and loss of motivation. In some extreme scenarios teachers may even experience *job burnout*. Hence, Headmasters and Teachers' Board should collaborate and select mentor teachers attentively. Selected teachers accept the educational challenge, with additional opportunities for personal and professional growth.

[1] This paper as result from the two authors collaboration; notably, A.M. Ciraci wrote paragraphs 2., 5., 6., 7. and M. Bianchi wrote paragraphs 3., 4. The Introduction paragraph has been written jointly.

Growth perspectives incentive teachers' motivation and job satisfaction as they bring their own best version of knowledge and culture.

2. Induction into the teaching profession

The European Commission has long stressed the importance of the *induction* step into the teaching profession normally thought as structured initial teacher education programs to support newly hired teachers (European Commission, 2012). Induction plans are organised in almost two-thirds of the European countries, albeit with different organizational models. The induction step normally lasts one year and is included in the initial education (OECD, 2019). It usually ends with a final evaluation confirming the candidate as a teacher or allow the candidate to qualify as a teacher. Many European countries organize special trainings or similar, to help *mentor teachers* carrying out their tasks. Two main activities are included in the support programs for mentor teachers: *mentoring*[2] and scheduled meetings with school Headmasters and/or other colleagues. Other support activities offered by the countries include: team teaching (40.8%), online communities (37.5%), peer review (34.8%), collaboration with other schools (29.2%), and diaries/journals (26%). Not all countries in Europe offer a widespread and systematic induction training, instead *mentoring* is available in almost all of them (Eurydice, 2016).

Italian Decree-Law 850/2015[3], issued by Law 107/2015[4], set down a series of training and education activities during newly hired teachers probationary year. Notably, Article 9 (*Peer learning*) explicitly refers to observation in class as a crucial training technique: "Classroom observation by mentor teachers and newly hired teachers aims at improving teaching practices and sharing reflection on teaching-related issues. The observation focuses on how lessons and activities are taught, whether and how students motivation are supported, whether positive and motivating environments are created, which and how learning outputs are assessed and evaluated" (Article 9, Paragraph 1); "Observation sequences are previously planned and then reviewed with mentor teachers, and need to be reported by newly hired teachers" (Article 9, Paragraph 2). Article 12 (*Mentor Teacher*) describes mentor teachers as people who "welcome newly hired teachers into the professional community, encourage their participation in collective

[2] International documents refer to *mentoring as* professional guidance and counselling offered to teachers by more experienced colleagues. *Mentoring* can be part of the induction step, or also be applied to any teacher who needs support (Eurydice, 2016).

[3] Decree-Law No. 850 of the Ministry, October 27, 2015, *Objectives, evaluation methods, training activities and assessment techniques of teachers and educational staff in training and on probationary period, as issued in Article 1, Paragraph 118 of Law No. 107, July 13, 2015.*

[4] LAW No. 107, July 13, 2015, N*ational education and training system reform and delegation of authority for the existing legislative provisions reorganization* (15G00122).

school activities, they listen, counsel and collaborate to improve newly hires' teaching quality and effectiveness. Furthermore mentor teachers arrange activities of mutual observation in class, as per Article 9. Collaboration may also be developed planning, testing, validating teaching resources and learning units" (Article 12, Paragraph 4). At the beginning of each school year, Headmasters, under Teachers' Board opinion, select one or more teachers to charge as mentors of newly hired teachers assigned at their schools (Article 12, Paragraph 1).

Therefore, starting from 2017/18 school year and following (2018/2019, 2021/2022, 2022/2023), the Minister of Education, University and Research, the Regional School Office of Lazio, in conjunction with Roma Tre University and the University of Cassino and Southern Lazio, have designed a training program (both on-site and online) targeting mentor teachers of newly hired teachers from all public schools in Lazio, in order to support, enhance and recognize mentor teacher position.

2.1 Mentor teachers' selection

Given the crucial importance of early working experience, a high quality selection of mentor teachers becomes significant. Throughout Europe, mentor teachers are experienced teachers hired at a higher contract level than the teachers they supervise, and are often employed on a permanent basis. They may be appointed by Headmasters (as in Italy), by regional or local authorities, or they may be certified mentor teachers. As per TALIS 2013 (OECD, 2014) research, some factors that mostly influence mentor teachers' selection have been identified: age and experience (either as a teacher or within the school); professional status; participation to initial programs as newly hired teachers. Other factors are context-related, such as school location and size, and the availability of a *mentoring* system. Normally, mentor teachers are largely more experienced and qualified than the newly hired assigned to them. Prior participation to initial teacher education program, when they were newly hired teachers, is a crucial selection factor in even 13 education systems. In fact, as per the OECD (OECD, 2014), this fact can have a long-term impact in the teacher's subsequent willingness to help other teachers improving their working skills. In any case, all European education systems consider *experience in teaching* as one of the most important requirement. Notably, "more than 10 years of teaching experience" are required in 11 different school systems, sometimes also "more than 5 years of experience in the same school" (Eurydice, 2016).

Even if, for some aspects, tutor teacher position can be considered as part of a career within the school *middle management*, the Italian law does not establish any specific position for the purpose. Hence, induction activities carried out are attested and recognized by Headmasters as training initiatives among those described by Law 107/2015, Article 1, Paragraph 124.

The Italian Law consider as mandatory requirements one or more of the qualifications listed in Annex A, Table 1 Decree-Law of the Minister, Nov. 11,

2011[5] (degrees, work experience, education and professional skills). Further important requirements concern appropriate education, proven teaching experience, and tutoring, *counselling*, and professional supervision skills (Decree-Law 850/2015, Article 12).

In our country, seniority is the least considered aspect compared to educational degrees, skills, and teaching experience (Fig. 1), as per the first meeting questionnaire outputs from mentor teachers involved in the training program designed by the Department of Education Sciences of Roma Tre University in collaboration with the Regional School Office of Lazio, in 2023.

Fig.1 – Degrees and skills most commonly used for mentor teachers selection in 2023

3. Mentor teachers, attitudes and work motivation

The importance of *mentor teacher* position in newly hired *induction* step leads to consider how teachers feel after several years experience, as experience is one of the requirement to charge in the role. However, even newly hired teachers often already have many years of teaching experience under their belt. Over time, correspondence or discrepancy between initial expectations and the reality experienced in the field emerges, and, in case of discrepancy, initial expectations can convert into demotivation. Research on teachers' working conditions show that the majority of teachers confirm their working choices and motivation, but a few are dissatisfied and demotivated (Cavalli & Argentin, 2010; Agnelli Foundation, 2011; Gatti & Confalonieri, 2014; OECD, 2015; Richardson, Karabenick & Watt, 2014).

[5] MIUR, Decree-Law, of Minister, Nov. 11, 2011, *Entry test method of implementation and features to access active training programs as per Decree-Law No. 249, Article 15, Paragraph 1, of the Minister of Education, University and Research, September 10, 2010.*

The school system is complex and demands many specialized skills to teachers, who constantly attend training plans to meet the expectations. Nevertheless, teachers may portrayed themselves as inadequate in all aspects of their teaching duties and performance, due to struggle, and even more due to distressful situations. Distressful experience can lead to make mistakes and can affect negatively self-effectiveness perception. Such a condition, over time, can generate job dissatisfaction perception.

Job dissatisfaction is caused by simultaneous factors affecting an individual in some moments of her personal or working life.

Indeed, working in inadequate structural and organizational conditions elicits negative feelings and discomfort, or impatience, annoyance and intolerance (crowded spaces, poor air quality, poor lighting, excessive noise, dilapidated buildings). Routine and lack of stimulation are sources of boredom, frustration and mortification, and also excessive physical and mental effort cause *stress* over time. Furthermore, demanding working environments, work overload, high professional expectations, forms of constant performance control cause dissatisfaction over time. Also, role ambiguity, that is lack of clarity about performance and expectations, scarcity of material or human resources for teaching effectiveness, lack of recognition (tangible or intangible) or even devaluation, disregard, excessive burden of responsibility, discrimination and inequality, all are additional sources of dissatisfaction (Di Pietro & Rampazzo, 1997; Lazarus, 1999; Maslach & Leiter, 2000; Bezza, 2000; Moé, 2010).

Job dissatisfaction over a long period of time can lead to *job burnout,* the negative emotional, physical and psychological condition caused by continuous excessive work demands that exceed individual resources. Negative stress deteriorates the psychophysical balance by generating breakdown, emotional exhaustion, hypertension, heart problems, irritability, anxiety, frustration, depression, sleep and mental disorders. Furthermore, this discomfort undermines the *organizational commitment*, including role identity, engagement, goals sharing. Negative condition decreases concentration, attention, memory and effort, till lowering the quality of performance overall and affecting the entire educational community. Leaving is the final decision (Blandino & Granieri, 2002; Lodolo D'Oria, 2005; Moé, 2010). Teachers often work with intrusive, frustrating and aggressive recipients in complex and inadequate environments. They therefore perform arduous jobs, and for a long time (Bermejo-Toro & Prieto-Ursùa, 2014; Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2014; Yldirim, 2015; Kugiejko, 2015).

Instead, job satisfaction, is a feeling generated by perception of fulfilment, self-realization in line with personal values, needs, goals and opportunities for career development. It is fostered by healthy working conditions and positive supportive environments. Daily tasks are perceived as rewarding, thanks to fruitful relationships with students, colleagues and managers (Avallone, 2007; Bezza, 2000; Blandino & Granieri, 2002). Expectations and personal fulfilment positively balance with negative emotions (Di Pietro & Rampazzo, 1997;

Gatti & Confalonieri, 2014; Lodolo D'Oria, 2005; Yilmaz, Altinkurt, Guner & Sen, 2015).

4. Teaching as human services profession

Teaching is a human services profession. The service relationships that teachers develop require an ongoing and intense level of personal, emotional contact to take care of recipients with their needs and problems. This kind of jobs requires a permanent review of relational and interpersonal dimensions (Bezza, 2000; Lodolo D'Oria, 2005; Maslach & Leiter 2000; Rossati & Magro, 2000). Hence, Decree-Law N. 850/2015 *"Objectives, evaluation methods, training activities and assessment techniques of teachers and educational staff in training and on probationary period, as issued also in Article 1, Paragraph 118, of Law No. 107, July 13, 2015"*. Article 12 *(Mentor Teacher),* Paragraph 3, establishes "skills" to perform tutoring, *counselling* and professional supervision as mandatory requirements for teachers selection. Mentoring is relationship-oriented, as it includes both personal and professional involvement. The position's goal is to make newly hired teachers independent, promoting their skills and abilities development, and facilitating the psychological and organizational obstacles overcoming at school. Psychologists define "aptitude" as "*a condition, a quality, or a set of qualities in an individual which is indicative of the probable extent to which he will be able to acquire under suitable training, some (usually specified) knowledge, skill, or composite of knowledge, understanding and skill, such as ability to contribute to art or music, or ability to read and speak a foreign language"* (Bingham, 1952). *A*ptitudes include individuals' natural inclinations, inherent tendencies, and original talents, and also these abilities modification through experience. From this perspective, aptitude is a much more complex concept that includes not only innate dispositions, but also interest in developing them, and in growing in the related domains. According to Hahn and MaeLean (1955) "aptitudes are latent potentialities, undeveloped capacities to acquire abilities and skills and to demonstrate achievements". "An aptitude refers to an inclination, predisposition, or potential ability to perform an activity that can be realized and *express* only with the right external (by context) and internal (motivational) conditions (Hahn & MacLean, 1955).

In order to assisting *mentor teachers* supporting newly hired teachers, a training program should include mentoring, *counselling*, and professional supervision skills development as required by Decree-Law No. 850/2015.

5. Teachers' continuing professional development

Continuing professional development, namely, in-service training of teachers, has gained a central position in the international education policy debate

during the latest years and is mandatory in most of the European countries. According to the international literature, the most effective programs for teachers' professional development are those based on both, *theory and practice*. Despite a large amount of investment in the teachers' continuing professional education, the training offered seem not to be effective (OECD, 2009, 2014), and courses and seminars are still the main types of professional development offered in OECD countries. Notably, in Italy, 81% of teachers attend this kind of training, while 25% attend training based on peer learning and *coaching*. Overall, teachers in OECD countries believe that professional development based on active collaboration is among the most impactful (OECD, 2019). Italian universities have not always offered training accordingly, mainly, because of the overemphasis on pedagogy rather than on knowledge, and didactic management skills. The parcelled subject learning structure, and the lack of educational management programs reflect Gentile's idea of education according to whom *knowledge* is the only requirement to know how to teach. Due to this approach the literature has paid little attention to "didactics" (Ciraci, 2014, 2019a). Therefore, both training program contents and teaching methods and techniques should be reviewed accordingly (Ciraci & Isidori, 2017). Formal and traditional training methods such as courses, seminars and conferences, which are still widely spread, should be converted to peer group activities, that are less structured and also focuses on students involvement on field. Peer group activities allow to bring out and to develop expertise, intuitions, aptitudes, competencies according to specific situations. These are all part of the professional requirement to review and reflect on teaching practices, and find out new and specific strategies for coping with daily challenges beyond mere experience. Experience alone is not enough. It should be reviewed and analysed through critical thinking to be transformed into awareness and expertise. It needs to assess experience relevance for making an interpretation and thus learning (Mezirow, 1991). More precisely this means applying a "reflection in action" (Schön, 1983). Ultimately, the shift is from a transmissive to an interactive training approach where *full immersion* activities are implemented on-field. Interactive training entails skills such as team critical thinking on teaching practices; team problem-solving; availability to be observed to receive guiding suggestions, and, above all, observation capacities.

5.1 New training perspectives for teachers: peer education through observation-reflection processes.

The international literature argue the most effective teacher training plans are those engaging them in action-reflection cyclical processes mediated by colleagues or by experts giving *feedback* to reorient daily teaching in classroom, then there are preferred models across the countries. According to the *lesson study* model (Lewis, *et al.*, 2012), for example, players work collaboratively to analyse a lesson planning and presentation, called "*research lesson",* in order to

improve professional practices at both individual and team levels (Calvani, *et al.*, 2013). The *lesson study* is different from *microteaching*. *Microteaching* (Allen, 1967) focuses on observing a teacher's behaviour in classroom. The *lesson study* focuses on the team lesson planning. The lesson is then taught by one teacher of the team. After the lesson, the rest of the team report on what they observed. The lesson can be reviewed through the video (if recorded), or edited and repeated as per modifications suggested by the team. What is most interesting here is that the observation does not focus on teachers' performance, but on students' reactions, on how they interact and participate, on what they have learned. In order to develop *expertise,* teacher training programs should deal with teacher-learner dynamics: "The greatest likelihood of high quality learning achievement occurs when both teaching and learning are visible" (Hattie, 2009, p. 18). Whether the expected results are not attained through the proposed strategies, then the lesson is edited collaboratively, and implemented. This approach occurs like in a Japanese perspective. Single teacher does not make mistakes, the responsibility is on the whole group who had not adequately develop the lesson plan. Hence, the starting point is to plan the lesson again. In that case, a second teacher hold the lesson following the new plan, while the rest of the team observe, following by another debate. Research lesson process generally involves ten to fifteen hours of team meetings spread over a period of three to four weeks, with two weekly lessons a few days apart (Fernandez, 2010).

5.2 Observation as advantageous training technique

All above-mentioned teacher training techniques have all shifted from a transmissive to a collaborative interactive approach implementing on-field *full immersion* activities.

Teachers' expertise should develop through "on-field experience and practice, supported by a mediator who encourages their awareness and knowledge improvement, who participates to analysis activities in a co-training approach" (Altet, 1996, p. 41).

Teachers agree with the mentioned-above approach, according to the feedback from the mentor teachers' first meeting questionnaires submitted in the training course designed by the Department of Education Sciences of Roma Tre University in collaboration with the Regional School Office of Lazio in 2022.

The outputs highlight almost all respondents saw their positions as opportunities to experience training based on collaborative peer education models and to share reflections on teaching action aspects.

It is interesting that most of the mentor teachers in Lazio region "find helpful to use classroom lesson observation forms" (Fig. 2).

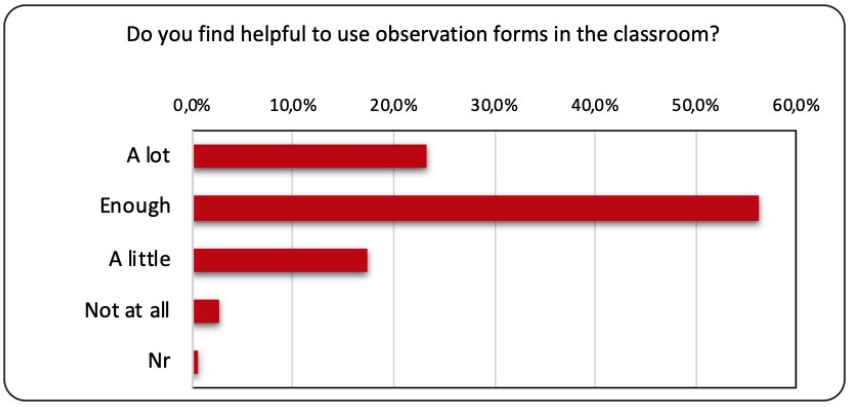

Fig. 2 – Use of observation forms in classroom in 2022

The same data are confirmed by the first meeting questionnaire outputs submitted by 2110 state schools mentor teachers involved in the training course designed by the Department of Education Sciences of Roma Tre University in collaboration with the Regional School Office of Lazio, in Lazio, in 2023.

Ultimately, almost all respondents (98.4%) state they "find moments for mutual observation" (Fig. 3).

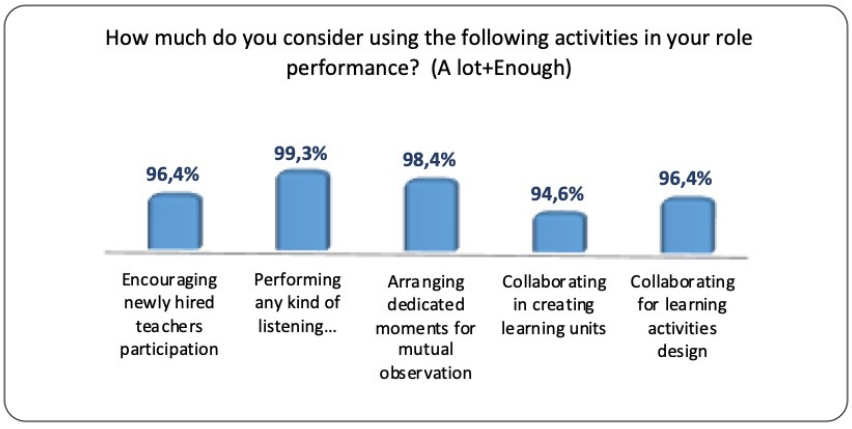

Fig. 3 – Activities used by mentor teachers in 2023

6. The observation processes

Moving from transmissive to a collaborative interactive approach implementing on-field *full immersion* activities entails team critical thinking on teaching practices, team problem-solving, availability to be observed, and, above all, "observation capacity". However, teachers should be trained to observe, describe, and analyse, in order to avoid dispersive approaches and self-referential attitudes in defence of their own work.

6.1 Scientific observation

Observation is a technique of information collection aimed at investigating a phenomenon. Observation consists of describing as much faithfully and completely as possible the features of events, behaviours, situations as they occur (Braga & Tosi, 1995). Observation is a data collection on behaviours (from these data, that will be used as indicators, it is possible to investigate also opinions/intentions and attitudes) trying not to intervene on the contexts where they occur. Scientific observation is named *systematic* to distinguish from common human observation. Indeed, ordinary observation does not involve specific methods or purposes: things and facts are "seen" accidentally and "considered" intentionally, but rarely "observed". Instead, systematic observation is previously structured, based on procedures and on clearly defined objectives, and, sometimes, targets specific already-chosen items (Webe,r 1958).

Observation can be *direct* if acted on-field, *or indirect*, if acted on recorded material. Structured observation take place with pre-defined plan and tools (the observation is so influenced by the theoretical framework guiding the observer). Some examples are *checklists* listing some expected/not expected behaviours and the related characteristics; *rating scales* to measure behaviour and attitude intensity. *Structured observation* usually involves collection and classification tools based on hypotheses, and generates a data matrix to which statistical analysis techniques can be applied. Instead, *unstructured observation* takes place without any pre-defined plan and characteristics, therefore, observer takes into consideration only what is relevant by her own thinking, without using any structured tool. The observer is free to note, and to interpret what she thinks is important, without any expected checklist to fill out.

Ultimately, structured observation aims at collecting "scientific" data, that are comparable, interactive and replicable. Instead, unstructured observation aims at collecting "humanistic" data, that capture aspects and nuances of reality that cannot be detected by structured detection tools.

6.2 The observer role

Observation can be *participant* or *non-participant*. *Participant observation* refers, for instance, to educators who observe their own working environments.

Participant observation is typically used in ethnography. Researchers collect information recording what is happening in a certain community where they are directly involved in, with the purpose of studying its symbolic systems, and meanings, etc. Instead, non-participant observation involves external observers who use the same tools as in participant observation. An example of *Non-participant observation* is when external experts describe students' behaviours during laboratory activities.

6.3 How to conduct an observation

– *Data collection*: observers select the facts they consider relevant to verify the research hypotheses. Observers awareness and knowledge are very important at this stage, in order to discover causes behind facts on behaviours, opinions, attitudes (including clothing, graffiti, symbols, readings, linguistic jargon…) of the observed groups' "world representations" leading individuals' actions, relationships, behaviours (Postic & De Ketele, 1993); which structures and roles act; which symbols and rituals take place; which key events and key players within the educational dimension. This last one aspect is related to cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and relationship domains (Fetterman, 1989; Magri & Rossi, 1998). Facts, even if analysed at the same time when they happen, should be divided from interpretation. In fact, one of observers' typical capacity is being able to separate objective facts from related possible interpretations.

– *Data annotation:* verbal and nonverbal behaviours can be written down on *paper with a pencil* (organised by *checklists* or by rating scales); they can be video/audio recorded, if possible. When audio or video recording is not possible, the annotation should be particularly accurate and should include all elements, even those unimportant at first glance, in order to have a proper description and understanding of the issue submitted. If possible, immediate annotation is always to be preferred to the deferred annotation, to facilitate behaviours, opinions, attitudes analysis and related causes and individuals' intentions understanding.

– *Dividing facts from interpretations:* observers might propose interpretations of the facts based on their on-field experience, but annotation and interpretation should be kept separate so as not to confuse the two related frameworks at the moment of the overall data evaluation. Observed individuals may be asked to express their interpretations on the facts, but these should be always kept separately.

– *Taking an avalutative attitude:* observers should suspend their judgment during observation sessions, in order not to misunderstand the data collected.

– *Self-observation for findings evaluation:* observers should undergo a period of self-reflection and self-observation to understand which elements they tend to notice in other people's behaviours and which not. Self-observation is also useful in learning to distinguish facts from judgments and interpretations.

– *Observation of nonverbal behaviour:* observers should collect all the details for the hypothesis tests, such as whether individuals observed communicate with their peers, or tend not to let them talk. Whether they play team leadership roles, or tend to be influenced by their peers. Whether they have oppositional or cooperative attitudes, or show awe of adults (teachers, researchers). Whether they are comfortable or not within the group, tend to be quiet or anxious, tend to assume given postures or get closer to others when talking to them (proxemics), tend to assume given facial expressions, a certain gesture or certain looks (kinesics), use paralinguistic elements (forms of meta-communication).

– *Relating individuals' behaviours, opinions and attitudes to group culture:* observers should relate individual behaviours to the "culture" of the group studied. This practice is important especially in case of adolescent behaviour study, in order to contextualize the data collected, and understand them properly. For this purpose, it is useful to identify the framework of the group's myths, legends and values, at the moment of the data collection.

– *Individual observation outside and inside the group:* observers should detect how individuals act outside and inside the group, in order to consider the different behaviours between the individual interacting alone, face to face with other individuals, and the same individual interacting with others within the group.

– *Key events and key players identification:* observers should notice relevant events to describe and understand the targeted individuals' behaviours. A single key event, properly identified, can often give more information than many daily reports. Identifying key players has important informational effectiveness to understand groups' behaviours. Moreover, identifying key players in an individual's personal story gives crucial information for understanding the individual's behaviours, opinions, attitudes.

– *Reorganizing* data selection by consistent interpretive frameworks.

7. The role of research in teachers' professional development

Only from 1999 with the Bologna Process, there is a stimulus towards effective teaching quality improvement. In fact, the Process was the European reformation to include teacher education as part of the European Higher Education Area, to ensure high-quality academic education in all its components, including research, teaching, and education engagement with civil society. Hence, University systems adapted moving from traditional academic models towards more diversified programs involving topics, contents, teaching techniques, targeted categories (European Commission, 2003). The transformation is close to Aldo Visalberghi's vision on teachers' education. He argued institutions dealing with teachers' education should operate as research centres at the most advanced systematic level, interchanging, suggesting, formulating

hypotheses and collaborating. "Future teachers and educators can internalise the scientific approach, to avoid dangerous passive encyclopedism, if also institutions become scientific" (Visalberghi, 1978).

However, it is not easy to discern common knowledge from scientific knowledge.

"*Science* signifies the existence of systematic methods of inquiry, which, when they are brought to bear on a range of facts, enable us to understand them better and to control them more intelligently, less haphazardly and with less routine" (Dewey, 1929). Scientific research in education deals with reflection through common knowledge, but with appropriate scientific methods. It is a kind of knowledge approaching real problems through empirical evidence including observation and data and events recording. By this approach, teachers' education improve thanks to the development of "controlled and targeted forms of reflection to recognize compliant information, evaluate changes, control operational sequences, and monitor process evolution" (Benvenuto, 2015, p.30). School can no longer faces new challenges through suggestions, intuitions, or psychological, sociological, philosophical hypotheses. Instead, organic and verified knowledge is required (Ciraci, 2019b), to avoid uncertain, intuitive, and approximate outcomes in favour of verified and suitable methods and hypotheses. This kind of knowledge is no longer psychology, sociology, or philosophy: it is *education research* (Calonghi, 1993). Furthermore, in order to promote evidence-based teaching practice, general principles from the top must be shaped on the diverse, multifaceted, complex education contexts.

Empirical studies from other fields can contribute to understand impacting factors on education processes, however, teachers must be able to inquiry themselves on relevant problems affecting their teaching actions, and be able to critically read academic research findings and analyse and select the most suitable results for their own teaching (Ciraci, 2019b). However, without methodological studies and research process experience, teachers struggle to be education-oriented. Ultimately they have to acquire analytical and open abilities, to be able to draw conclusions from their own working experience and observations. Hence, teachers need to be equipped with skills to develop controlled intervention plans for problem management.

Unfortunately, teacher research skills have been, so far, the most neglected area in both teacher training and school practices. Teachers do continuous research facing several daily problems, but mostly without being aware about how they do. One of the main teachers' frustration cause is precisely the total amnesia to which even the best experiences of its practitioners are doomed (Erdas, 1991). Teachers' attitudes and culture must change. Teaching need to be more aware about reflection and practices to face problems (Oberg, 1987). Indeed, in order to cope with daily problems, teachers should base the actions on empirical research techniques rather than on mere encyclopaedic knowledge of pedagogy. They need critical thinking and scientific approach to avoid uncertain, intuitive, and approximate outcomes. This is crucial to manage in-

creasing complex tasks reflecting complex education environments involving multiple cultural and social challenges. Teachers are required to be also researchers, and related focused training must be part of their continuous professional development. New training approach is urgent. Ultimately, training must combine theoretical reflection, and on-field practice based on research as both a pedagogical mindset and a tool to understand and cope with educational challenges. This way, teachers as researchers become the contact points between theory and practice, as they are able to reflect on their own teaching, to critically read research findings, to evaluate and select suitable evidences, to choose between formally equivalent alternatives, to implement and monitor their own choices, and to potentially review them. In this process, classrooms become real laboratories where teachers can improve observation practices and experiment teaching techniques, originating virtuous and recursive circles between theory and practice (Ciraci, 2019c).

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CHAPTER 9

Peer observation in the induction step: a tool to qualify mentoring activities

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1. Introduction

One of the most relevant goals of the induction step is to promote newly hired teachers' professional development through data and information on their teaching performance, in order to improve the effectiveness of training interventions and to confirm the teaching-learning processes. Tutor-newly hired teacher *peer-to-peer* activities have been introduced in the probationary year to encourage direct confrontation from mutual observation in classroom (USR Lazio, 2017; Magnoler, 2018; Moretti et al., 2020). In this context, the main purpose of peer observation is to promote teachers' reflective attitudes (Schön, 1993) by encouraging sharing and exchange. Therefore, reflection should be guided by a wide range of reliable, contextualized and meaningful information about the teaching action performed (Bell, 2005; Daniels, Pirayoff & Bessant, 2013).

Mentor teachers play strategic and crucial roles guiding the newly hires through their initial training (Bleach, 2013; Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019). In order to validate mentoring performance and to enhance specific activities, mentor teachers should attend training courses in turn. Thanks to such training plans, mentor teachers can consolidate the required cultural, professional, methodological-educational, and, especially relational and communication skills. Furthermore, they are facilitated to effectively perform supervision and mentoring (as per Decree-Law 850/2015) in positive climate of exchange and peer confrontation (Shortland, 2004; Kemmis et al., 2014; Yiend, Weller & Kinchin, 2014).

In Italy, a large amount of field research have been done with the purpose of developing tools, devices and techniques for peer observation, especially regarding observation with education purposes (Cardarello, 2016; Mangione & D'Ugo, 2019; Trinchero et al., 2020; Bandini et al., 2021).

This paper presents and explains the "Checklists in the form of hetero-observation and self-assessment used by both mentor teachers and newly hired teachers for observation in classroom" (Morini, 2019; Moretti et al., 2020). It is a tool supporting observation in classroom through two symmetric versions

[1] This paper is the result of the authors' teamworking. Notably; G. Moretti wrote paragraphs 7.1, 7.4 and A. Morini wrote paragraphs 7.2, 7.2.1, 7.2.3, 7.3. The authors wrote section 7.5 together.

designed to examine how newly hired teachers perform. One version supports mentor teachers' hetero-observation, the other focus on newly hired teachers' self-evaluation. The *Checklist descriptor* can be picked one by one, or analysed as a whole, and they allow to detect a variety of meaningful data and information supporting peer-to-peer exchange and *feedback* in the *induction* step.

This flexible tool is a valuable resource to develop mentor teachers' ecosystemic posture at school (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2022). Ecosystemic posture allows balanced field observation between analytical and descriptive needs and data interpretation, in order to provide dynamic and integrated frameworks to explain events and behaviours. Furthermore, the possible viewpoint triangulation enhances teachers' distributed education leadership (Moretti, 2022), in order to develop egalitarian and non-hierarchical relationships for cooperative mutual learning-oriented environments, where both mentor teacher and newly hired teacher are responsible for their performance.

2. Checklists presentation in the form of hetero-observation and self-assessment

In Italy, two possible kinds of observation have been established during the probationary year: mutual observation, when mentor teachers and tutees observe each other; and newly hired teachers' self-evaluation on their own performance.

In order to address the need to further explore how to effectively and sustainably conduct observation during probationary year, "Checklists presentation in the form of hetero-observation and self-assessment" have been designed (Morini, 2019; Moretti et al., 2020).

The Checklists focus on some teaching dimensions. The first Checklist versions were designed and applied within the framework of the training plan offered by the Department of Education Sciences at Roma Tre University during the 2018/2019 school year (Morini, 2019; Moretti, Morini & Giuliani, 2019). The related data collected confirmed the tool capacity to detect both mentor teacher and newly hired teacher points of view at the same time, and comparing them. The research results highlight some remarks from teachers to improve the tool access. For this reason, the Checklists had been revised and updated for the 2021/2022 professional development training edition (edited by Moretti, Morini & Briceag, 2022). The tool has nor evaluative neither judgment purpose on teachers' professional performance on probationary year. It is intended as a customized educational feedback provider that can be implemented during as well as at the end of the probationary training to improve.

According to the relevant national and international literature (Domenici, 1981; Scheerens, 2000; Calvani, 2012; Hattie, 2012; Bonaiuti, 2014) specific descriptors highlighting some key elements have been designed by dimension. According to the descriptors for each dimension, it is asked to indicate the degree of occurrence of the element detected during the observation in classroom.

Checklists provide 6 sections by dimension: Teaching planning, Teaching

tools and techniques adopted by teachers, Evaluation, Educational feedback, Relationship with the students and Relationship with the colleagues. The "Teaching planning" section examines how teachers manage learning space and time. The descriptors (12) in this section refer to the teaching practices adopted. Notably, it is asked to teachers to observe which kind of strategies are put in place to foster active learning process and to respond to specific individuals' learning needs within inclusive environments. In particular, it is asked to reflect how teachers promote soft skills development, including critical thinking, communication and peer confrontation, students' responsibility and autonomy. Additionally, it is detected what kind of resources are proposed to engage students in classroom activities, such as what kind of alternative materials to school textbooks are presented (Moretti, 2017). Regarding time management, special attention is paid on activity planning, whether it is flexible enough to meet the contextual needs arising during the classes. Table 1 shows the descriptors of this dimension.

Teaching planning	The teacher responds to any questions from the students by spending time in group discussion
	The teacher arranges moments providing the students with opportunities for choice, exploration, and independent discovery
	Activities with reference to current events and/or students' interests are suggested during the lessons
	The teacher provides clarification, example, and alternative explanations upon request
	The teacher promotes peer discussion and exchange
	The teacher holds the students the responsibility to learn and encourages them to use materials wisely and to tidy them up
	The teacher problematizes what is presented to students by fostering the development of critical thinking
	Time available is coherently managed by the proposed task
	The teacher uses active teaching strategies to promote the students' responsibility and autonomy
	The teacher submits study materials to the students in addition to the school textbooks
	During the lesson, the teacher leave time for practice
	The teacher proposes customized activities to promote and develop inclusive environments

Table 1 – "Teaching planning" descriptors domain

The section "Teaching tools and techniques adopted by teachers" (Table 2) aims to promote tools and intentionally acts to attain specific objectives, according with the specific school management and vision.

The tools considered in the Checklists stimulate student involvement and motivation through small group activities promoting awareness and peer interaction, such as simulation, role-playing, pretend play, or brainstorming. Also "peer tutoring" is considered as a peer learning strategy focused on cooperation and mutual learning (Martinez & Comoglio, 1994; Topping, 2014).

Teaching tools and techniques adopted by the teacher	Outdoor education
	Small group activities
	Simulation/role-playing/pretend play
	Open class activities
	Lab activities
	Peer tutoring
	Setting up libraries or reading corners for borrow quality books
	Brainstorming
	Problem-solving activities

Table 2 – "Teaching tools and techniques adopted by the teacher" descriptors domain

The "Evaluation Practices" (Table 3) focuses on whether the teacher clarify the evaluation criteria before the task required, whether she implements a variety of evaluation tools to assess learning levels, including objective evidence, semi-structured tests and assessment grids for oral tests (Benvenuto, 2003; Domenici, 2003; Notti, 2014; Nirchi & Simeone, 2022). This section explores also whether the teacher normally uses other tool types to collect helpful data and information for flexible education management, such as observation grids and questionnaires.

Evaluation	The teacher uses assessment grids for oral tests
	The teacher uses data collection tools
	The teacher uses questionnaires
	The teacher uses observation grids
	The teacher uses a variety of evaluation tools
	The teacher clarifies the evaluation criteria before the task performance
	The teacher uses objective evidence
	The teacher uses semi-structured tests

Table 3 – "Evaluation" descriptors domain

Feedback on both outcomes from classrooms and individuals, is another domain analysed with the related descriptors, according with the educational purpose of the evaluation. Field research confirm the importance of providing educational feedback to guide the individuals or the class groups (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008), and enable them to develop management and self-regulation skills on their own learning. Notably, the question focuses on whether the teacher provides the students with educational either oral or written argumentative feedback improving their future performance. Table 4 shows the descriptors for the dimension "Educational feedback".

Educational feedback	The teacher provides the group with feedback in order to guide their students in the evaluation step
	The teacher provides the group with feedback concerning the tasks done or any other questions from the students, providing additional information
	The teacher provides the individuals with feedback with orientation purpose
	The teacher recognizes the student's commitment and provides customized feedback enhancing his involvement and persistence of his performance
	The teacher implements customized verification manners

Table 4 – "Educational feedback" descriptors domain

In the area defined as "Relationship with the students" specific aspects referring to communication and relationship dimensions are detected. Each de-

scriptor (Table 5) is an open-ended question asking to briefly describe what is observed and to give some related examples. For instance, it is asked whether the teacher uses strategies promoting students' active participation and motivation; or to specify whether and how the teacher communicates effectively with the students. The descriptor is presented as an open-ended question to let the teachers argue about the strategies implemented by the newly hired teachers observed, as teacher-students relationship is one of the most complex phenomenon to observe. There are also descriptors identifying how problems, such as oppositional behaviours, are handled, and which strategies and techniques are adopted to promote and improve inclusion at school (Chiappetta Cajola & Ciraci, 2013; D'Alonzo, Bocci & Pinnelli, 2015).

Relationship with the students	The teacher implements strategies promoting the students' participation and motivation Specify which ones:
	The teacher communicates effectively with students. Specify which techniques are used:
	The teacher manages the class in difficult situations. Explain how:
	The teacher interacts positively with students. Explain how:
	The teacher is able to handle oppositional behaviours. Explain how:
	The teacher creates the conditions to promote inclusion. Explain how:
	The teacher maintains the eye contact with the students while talking, and interacts shaping the register according with the situation.
	The teacher pays attention to the students 'emotions and timely detects any related struggle.

Table 5 – "Relationship with the students" descriptor domain

The Checklists include the "Relationship with the colleagues" section (Table 6) to properly investigate whether the newly hired teachers are ready to participate to educating community life, in terms of sharing tools and materials, disposition to confrontation and collaboration, and in relation to the ability to accept guidance, suggestions and advice from their colleagues. Although this dimension cannot be detected through direct observation in classroom, its impact on teaching can be verified. From here it is interesting to reflect on aspects related to participation in the wider school community.

Relationship with the colleagues	The teacher is available to share tools and materials
	The teacher is open to confrontation and collaboration
	The teacher accepts guidance or advice from the colleagues

Table 6 – "Relationship with the colleagues" descriptor domain

The mentioned-above dimensions and descriptors compose two Checklists, A and B. "Checklist A-mentor teachers" focuses on the so-called hetero-observation, that is the observation conducted by mentor teachers. "Checklist B- newly hired teacher" focuses on self-evaluation. Through this one, newly hired teachers can examine and explain their professional performance and action. While submitting both Checklists, it is possible to collect two different points of view at the same time.

2.1 Summary of the outcomes of factor analysis

Both confirmatory and explorative factor analyses have been done in order to frame and validate the "Checklists for peer observation in the form of hetero-observation and self-evaluation in classroom". 1418 mentor teachers and 1331 newly hired teachers have been taken as a sample for the purpose.

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) conducted on "Checklist A" revealed a 6-variable factorial solution explaining 50.72% of the total variance. The indexes of data saturation for each dimension all report values between 0.324 and 0.869. Regarding "Checklist B," the EFA revealed a 6-variable factorial solution that explains 50.53% of the total variance. The data saturation indexes for each dimension have values between 0.310 and 0.912.

The reliability analysis done on the 6 variables extracted from the exploratory factorial solution, shows Cronbach's Alpha indexes between 0.778 and 0.882 for Checklist A and between 0.727 and 0.866 for Checklist B. Therefore, internal consistency registered for each dimension ranges between very good to excellent.

The results from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and the evidence from the Exploratory Analysis conducted on Checklists A and B are consistent. The values found are all suitable and meet the benchmark indexes proving the goodness of fit of the hypothesized model (Checklist A, goodness of fit indices: χ^2 3916.727 (DF 929) (p=.00); CFI: 0.925; TLI: 0.918; RMSEA: 0.048; (0.046-0.049); SRMR: 0.051; AFC Checklist B, Goodness-of-fit indices: χ^2 2949.104(DF 650) (p=.00); CFI: 0.918; TLI: 0.917; RMSEA: 0.052; (0.052-0.054); SRMR: 0.05; cf. Moretti & Morini, 2022). Checklist A, for the teaching hetero-observation, takes shape in its final version made up of 6 dimensions and 45 descriptors.

Checklist B turns out to be made up of the same 6 dimensions as Checklist

A, but with 38 descriptors, that is a lower number. This reduction in number did not affect the validity and reliability of the instrument.

2.2 Viewpoints triangulation: how to use the Checklists

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, our Checklist has been designed in two versions. Checklist A focuses on hetero-observation, and requires to be filled out after mentor teachers have observed the probationary newly hired teachers performance in classroom. It is important to have multiple sessions in order to ensure data reliability as results of systematic observations. While newly hired teachers are asked to fill out Checklist B based on their teaching experience in classroom, notably during the mentor teachers' observation sessions.

Both Checklists are designed to be used across all school stages and levels, so multiple descriptors have been prepared for each dimension. The Checklists are used during an agreed-upon time, so it is possible that some descriptors may not match the teacher's performance during the related period. That is why in addition to the Likert scale, the option "not observed" was included, in order to respond to this circumstance. Whether a certain behaviour could not be observed within the time available, it will be distinguished from the behaviour totally instead absent. For instance, in the section "Teaching planning" there is the item checking whether "the teacher provides clarification, example, and alternative explanations upon request", however, it may happen that during some observation sessions there is no circumstance in which students request any clarification. In this case the observer flags the option "not observed". Furthermore, in order to obtain more detailed and reliable data, an additional option has been provided, that is "not detectable in the school stage and level of reference", to be chosen where the descriptor refers to aspects that cannot be found in one specific context where the observation session carries out.

Then, in addition to the Likert scale (to assign values from 1 to 4), observers have been provided with the option to focus on some aspects in some specific cases. They can report also qualitative details which allow to frame the data and information collected. Hence, the outputs include both qualitative and quantitative data. These kinds of outputs help to reflect afterwards on the education strategies adopted, promoting confrontation and debate between two different points of view. The goal is to improve the quality of the tutor-newly hired teacher relationship and to raise their awareness.

3. Main research findings

The Checklist results reported in this section are from 1451 mentor teachers and 1332 newly hired teachers attending the training during the 2022/2023 school year.

The average[2] score of each dimension for both groups has been detected

[2] The reference scale is a four-step scale, where 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=always.

from the preliminary analysis. Both hetero-observation and self-evaluation have very similar score averages. The scores from mentor teacher observation on the newly hired teachers are slightly more positive than those from the self-evaluation in all dimensions, except in the "Relationship with the colleagues" (Chart 1). This trend had also been noted in the previous research (Morini, 2019; Moretti & Morini, 2022), where it was found that the hetero-observation average scores were higher than those recorded in self-evaluation.

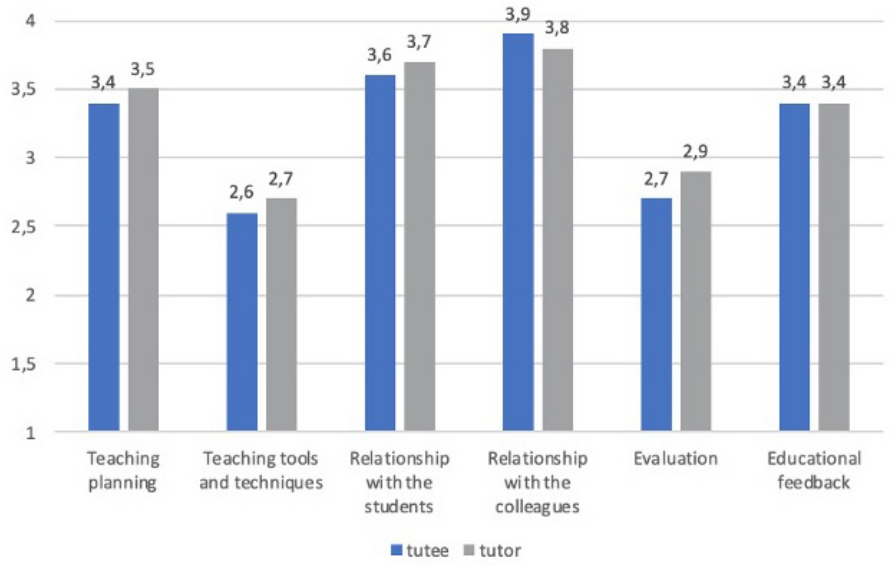

Chart 1 – Averages in the Checklist dimensions: comparison between tutors and tutees

Chart 1 shows that the two relationship descriptor dimensions (relationships with the colleagues and with the students) registered the highest trends, followed by the "Teaching planning" and the "Educational feedback" dimensions. Instead, the lowest averages are from the "Teaching tools and techniques" used by the newly hired teachers, and the "Evaluation", both in line with the previous piece of researches, in 2019 and 2022. The tools and the techniques inserted in the Checklist had been identified from the relevant literature as being among the most effective to improve learning outcomes, and the choices included tools and techniques suitable for all school age groups, stages and levels. Among them there are, for instance, small group activities, peer tutoring, lab activities, *brainstorming*, *problem solving* simulations (Hattie, 2016). From the analysis results, the teaching tools and techniques seem to be used most in the lower school stages. However, they are not systematically used, instead, only during specific teaching observation sessions, therefore, they had been reported as not "often used".

Positive results, with high averages (3.4 from both mentor teachers and newly hired teachers), have been registered for the "Educational feedback" dimension. During the probationary year, on the one hand it seems that specific tools and techniques supporting the teaching validation are not often used from both the mentor and the newly hired teachers. On the other hand, educational feedback seem to be part of a widespread cultural habitude. The same is for the "Evaluation" dimension. Therefore, the newly hired teachers appear to be aware about the strategic function of feedback in education, in order to foster the students' abilities to manage and regulate their learning by themselves. This paper focuses on the dimensions with the highest averages, that is the "Relationship with the students" (Chart no. 2). Its descriptors examine the teachers' abilities to interact positively with their students, notably, how they handle problems, such as oppositional behaviours, and how they promote and improve inclusion at school. Attention is also paid to communication strategies adopted with the students, and whether the teachers manage to detect their emotional states, in order to promptly intervene on possible problematic situations. Chart 2 compares the averages from tutors and tutees by descriptor.

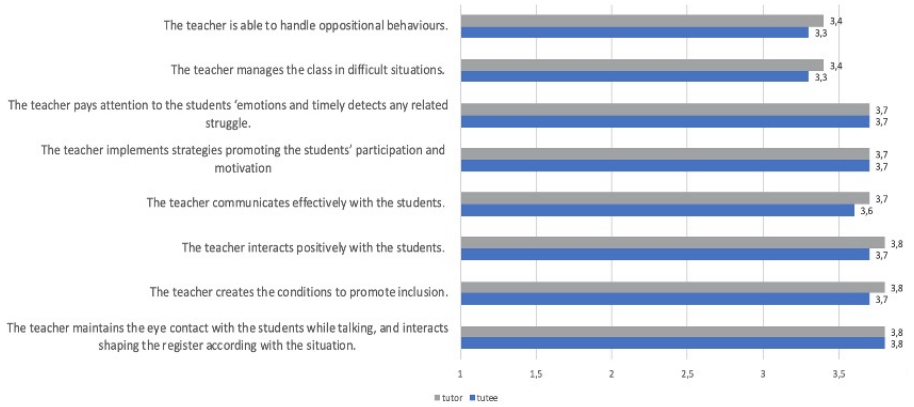

Chart 2 – Descriptors of the "Relationship with the students" dimension – tutor and tutee averages compared

As per the Chart above, the two points of view are substantially aligned. All descriptor averages are higher than 3.4. Notably, the behaviour detected as most widespread is the teacher's ability to always maintain the eye contact with the students while talking, and to interact shaping the register according with the situation. There is also a high level of attention to setting up inclusion-oriented learning environments.

The slightly lower averages (3.3 and 3.4) represent the newly hired teachers' abilities to cope with possible problems in classroom and students oppositional behaviours. Indeed experience and years of teaching can help positively in

identifying the best strategies to solve problematic situations. The Checklist open-ended question analysis focused on how critical issues are handled within the class group, in order to conduct also a qualitative study on the outcomes from observation and self-evaluation.

The answers differ according to the school stage, however there are some aspects that can be considered cross-cutting as they are recurring.

According to the tutor teachers' observation, newly hired teachers tend to act as neutral mediators in conflicts between students. Some answer examples: "*The teacher always tries to adopt an active listening attitude, using positive language, refraining from judging to cope with difficult situations.. She then tries to negotiate effective solutions to restore serenity in the classroom"* (T.L.). Among the main strategies adopted there are dialogue and the empowerment of those involved, as reported in the following comments: *"She enables dialogue; she manages conflictual relationships; she pacifies and trains the students to interpersonal understanding and clarification" (T.U.); "She stimulates interest and encourages participation, intervenes in group dynamics keeping the situation under control, in order to act preventively in case of need" (R.D.).*

Especially in Secondary schools, teachers are careful to consolidate virtuous attitudes promoting collective well-being: "*The teacher establishes clear rules, and share them promoting virtuous coexistence and collaborative attitudes. In difficult situations, while firmly adhering to certain principles of politeness and mutual respect, she holds students the responsibility to politely explain the problems they are facing, in order to recreate balanced situations. In more complex situations, she promotes strategies leading the acquisition of responsibility and awareness about proper behaviours"* (P.L.).

The extracts refer to some examples of the most recurring actions.

The same open-ended question was submitted in the Checklist for newly hired teachers, in the form of self-evaluation. Among the most recurring answers, some thematic groups have been identified: learning climate, affective-emotional dimension, active listening and students empowerment.

The strategies adopted change according to the school stage and to students' ages. For instance, *circle time* is a technique often implemented at Kindergarten, to share reflections on the dynamics to be analysed.

According to one of the newly hired teachers' comment*: "I listen to the children, I try to modulate the tone of the voice using both verbal and non-verbal language. I involve the whole class group in the debate using simple and clear language, repeating the rules. If necessary, I propose playful educational activities aimed at reflecting on specific behaviours and their consequences, involving the whole class group"* (F.B.).

Instead, teachers from Primary and Lower Secondary schools highlight the importance of reflecting on the emotional dimension, especially on sources of discomfort: "*I try to understand the roots of problems and to analyse them rationally together with my students. I avoid to encourage dysregulated or problematic attitudes. I manifest emotional closeness".* (D.S.)

"Trying to empower each class group member to a more appropriate attitude at school, trying to understand the reasons of discomfort or struggles, in order to face them together". (C.P.)

The opportunity given to describe the data collected by descriptor, and the open-ended question facilitate education feedback in the confrontation step, improving the teaching.

4. Mentor teachers' opinion on Checklists implementation

After filling out the *Checklists*, the mentor teachers had been asked to submit a final report summarizing what they experienced during the professional development training. 1406 had prepared and returned the final Reports, most of them were from Primary school (34.7%), and were aged between 51 and 60 (41.5%), and 87.3% of them were women.

The mentor teachers who completed the training activities were asked to express their opinions with a twofold objective. On the one side, the goal was to understand how the *Checklists* were implemented in their working contexts, in order to make the probationary training meaningful. On the other side, the goal was to test the effectiveness of the Checklists according to the teachers' needs for rigorous, reliable, and accessible tools.

The tool is also sustainable. Indeed, 97.7% of the participants stated they chose to share the tool technique and to reflect on its use with the newly hired teachers; the confrontation had been mostly carried out before starting the observation session in classroom. This choice made both tutor and tutee aware about the fact that *peer-to-peer* observation should be carried out in a climate of trust and with the will to learn from each other.

It is no coincidence that the survey showed that the use of *Checklists* A and B was very helpful, especially for: starting a shared reflection on teaching performance; giving feedback to the newly hired teachers on their performance; improving the observation of the newly hired teacher in classroom; stimulating shared reflection with the newly recruited teacher on education.

Some focused questions aimed to investigate the opinions and the points of view of the mentor teachers on the observation sessions in classroom, through the Checklists (Chart 3). A 4-point scale was provided for each question (1= not at all, 2= a little, 3= enough, 4= a lot).

It was asked whether they had struggled to return feedbacks to the newly hired teachers at the end of the observation sessions. The response average was 1.3: teachers claimed the tool facilitated the feedback returning on the observation sessions in classroom.

Two further questions investigated whether the Checklists influenced the perceptions on the activities, making them appear as more educational and fa-

cilitating peer confrontation. Notably, it had been asked: "Do you think the newly hired teachers perceived a hierarchical rather than a peer relationship during the peer observation in classroom?" Most of the mentor teachers answered "not at all" (average 1.3), and they confirmed that the learning purpose rather than the evaluation scope of the observation was clear since the beginning also for the newly hired teachers. The positive climate perceived was furtherly confirmed by the mentor teachers stating that they did not struggle to conduct the observation in classroom and that both (tutor and tutee) felt comfortable during the activity (mean 3.4 and 3.6).

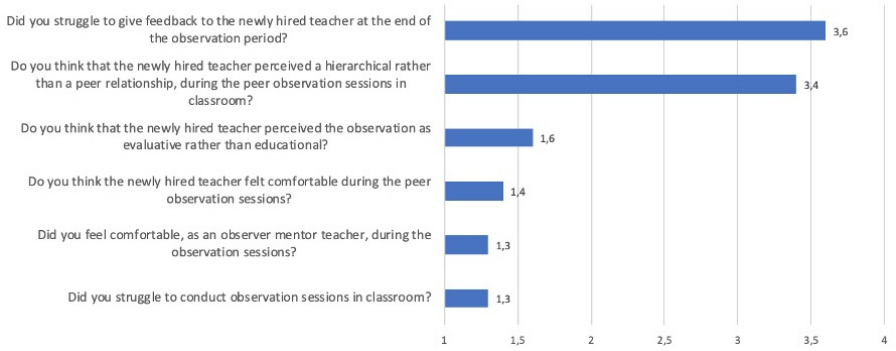

Chart 3 – Mentor teachers' viewpoints on the Checklists implementation

Chart 4 explains the mentor teachers' opinions on the Checklist tool reliability.

Firstly, it was checked whether the wording of the descriptors was clear and comprehensible. Regarding this point the response average scores 3.5 corresponding to scale "a lot-enough". It was then asked whether, in general, they struggled to use the Checklists during the observation sessions, the score average is 1.6 corresponding to scale "not at all-sometimes". This means there was no serious issue using the tool.

Furthermore, it was taken into consideration whether the dimensions were suitable for the purpose. The feedback is positive (average of 3.3): the dimensions and the related descriptors are considered to be effective for describing the observed teaching details. Finally, the mentor teacher participants were asked to feed back on how much the open-ended sections had been helpful to explain the data collected. The opportunity to study educational aspects using open-ended questions and qualitative answers had been appreciated overall.

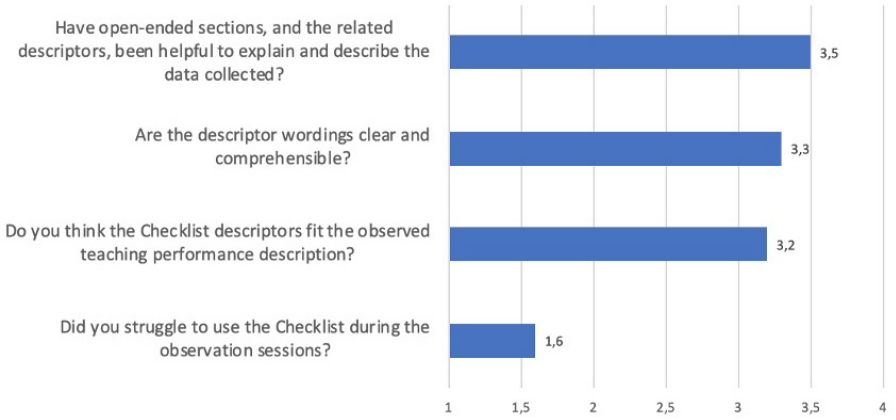

Chart 4 – Mentor teachers' opinions on the Checklist suitability

Concerning the observation sessions, mentor teachers have also been asked to explain how the feedback and tutor-tutee confrontation activities were been planned and conducted. 72.6% of the mentor teachers claimed not to have struggled returning feedback to the newly hired teachers on what they observed; while 23% of them struggled "a little", the rest of them struggled "enough", or "a lot".

According to the data analysis during the confrontation step after the observation session, 55.7% of the mentor teachers discussed the *Checklist* dimensions as a whole, rather than by specific descriptor.

Furthermore, in the final Report analysis some relevant personal comments had been considered as among the most representative. From these comments, it appears that the *Checklist* tool is greatly appreciated. The mentor teachers were asked to describe how they presented the observation activities before the sessions started, and the Checklist tool was indeed presented in its main characteristics and purposes.

As S. T. reports:

"I talked to the newly hired teacher about this tool proposed in the training, explaining that it would have enhanced and supported our confrontation and the teaching probationary education. I asked the tutee to fill in the checklist designed for newly hired teachers and then to discuss and reflect with me".

The use of the Checklist provides opportunities to redesign the induction activities in a flexible manner: "*I provided the Checklist B to the newly hired teacher, we read the indicators together and then we reviewed our peer-to-peer activities. After that, the newly hire teacher filled in her Checklist independently, and then I examined it"* (T.U.).

Moreover, it was noticed that the subdivision by dimensions is helpful, especially for the newly hired teachers engaged for the first year ever in teaching.

In the Italian schools, in fact, many newly hired teachers have already performed as non-tenured teachers. The following comment confirms "*We planned the work according to the observation dimensions, choosing specific related activities. It was so helpful to think by areas, strategies, and objectives. This subdivision makes work smooth and effective"* (L.S.).

According with the final Report from the mentor teachers at the end of the observation period, the Checklist has been found effective. Some comments point out that the opportunity to use a specific tool enabled to identify strategies, techniques and tools to introduce in the teaching-learning process: *"We shared the Checklists that helped us to change where required, to analyse teaching processes, to elaborate more effective working tools. The observation of the teacher classroom management in complex situations was fundamental"* (E.A.)*; "Once the observation session was over, we exchanged opinions on the answers given by both of us, and examining each dimension. This process allowed to recognise which new actions were required to improve the teaching*" (G.C.).

Equally positive was the attitude of the mentor teachers in carrying out their assigned roles, not so much as senior teachers called upon to *mentor* newly hires, but as teachers who were keen to take advantage of a peer training opportunity, believing that such an experience would have improved their professional skills. *"After the peer observation, we have shared reflections on the data and information collected. This opportunity for confrontation represented a further moment for mutual growth. In my opinion, precisely self-evaluation is the main strength that allows to analyse and improve our own ways of doing things and, thus, to grow professionally"* (F.C.)*; "It was an opportunity for exchange, and we agreed on the need for continuous self-evaluation, in order to build continuous and better interactions with children/students and between colleagues so as to co-construct knowledge, dialogue and positive relationships"* (D.L.).

Finally, the mentor teachers were asked to submit any further descriptor or dimension that should have been added to the *Checklists* by their opinions, in order to collect meaningful information on teaching. Most of them think there is no need to add any further descriptor or dimension, because those already there are suitable and complete: *"I believe that the set of descriptors allowed to achieve a detail-oriented teaching observation"* (D.L.). From the previous research editions, someone proposed some additional features (Moretti & Morini, 2022), notably, two interesting aspects emerged regarding the *Checklists composition*.

The first aspect refers to the learning environment, notably to the "*descriptors relating to the planning/setting/organisation of the classroom environment"* (V.B.) or "*organisation of the space (desks position, free-use of learning tools, posters or maps, arrangement of specific corners) and laboratory activities"* (T.S.). These elements could be detected through the open-ended questions for better understanding the contexts in which teaching takes place. Resources available or space organisation cannot be directly attributed to newly hired teachers, that is why these piece of information should be contextualised as background data,

supporting interpretation of the observed newly hired teacher interactions in specific environments.

The second aspect concerns relationship dimension of observation including the relationships with the students' families (from one of the comments "*A dimension focused on the relationships with families could be included*", D. Z.). On the one hand, this additional dimension can enhance schools-families co-responsibility. On the other hand it can promote reflection on how parental functions can be positively performed by actively collaborating with schools. Although the school-families relationships are different depending on school stages and levels, it is possible to insert a specific section dedicated to any strength or weakness reported.

A further proposal was detected in the latest training edition, and refers to the teacher-student relationships. Although some Checklist descriptors already investigate the communication and relationship dimensions, the need to further examine this aspect have been emphasised by some mentor teachers. As one tutor proposes: "*I would study and focus on teachers' relationship verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal features, in order to investigate more objectively, and help effectively the observed teachers. Indeed, in this way, it could be possible to understand attitudes and unconscious beliefs on the students in detail, and therefore, also any tendency to authoritarianism vs. authority/active listening*" (F. S.).

5. Conclusions and future prospects

Reflection on peer observation tools is crucial to enhance and promote professional development through peer-to-peer practices.

The data collection and analysis overall confirm the Checklist, in both its vesions A and B, as an instrumental and methodological resource to support newly hired teachers' ecosystemic posture development at school. Both Checklist versions fit ecosystemic posture and multilevel and multiple-actor representations of school, education, and training systems (Stufflebeam, 1971; 1981; 2001; Scheerens, 2018; Moretti, 2022) as per Chapter one of this book.

In particular, both Checklist versions, A and B, have been strongly validated by both the explorative and confirmatory analyses. And the validation of both hetero-observation and self-evaluation allow to have two instruments that detect data at the same time, that can be compared, and, therefore, greatly enhancing peer-to-peer activities.

This positive outcome should be taken into serious consideration, as, currently, there are no many observation tools available for the teaching examination or to observe newly hired teachers' performance during their inductions, in Italy.

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CHAPTER 10

The mentor teacher training: program structure and main research outcomes

Arianna Morini, Edoardo Casale[1]

1. Introduction

Entering school world represents a significant step in every teacher's career. In Italy, newly hired teacher initial training has been mandatory since many years with the main goal to properly integrate teachers in a school environment. At this initial stage, "newly hired in-service" teachers are mentored by teachers who perform as mentors. They support and foster newly hires' orientation in the school environment (Moretti et al., 2021).

Mentor teachers should be aware of their professionalism and contribute to improve teaching practices and techniques, in order to promote newly hired teachers' active participation and, hence, contribute to improve teaching practices themselves (Mezirow, 2003; Balconi, 2017; Bandini et al., 2021).

In Italy, newly hired teacher initial training in the probationary year has been amended in accordance with Law 107/2015. Notably, ministerial Decree-Law 850/2015 defines mentoring as training and induction, and each year, the Ministry of Education provides guidance for newly hired teachers' work shadowing. As per the current probationary year guidance, newly hired teachers are guided in their daily activities and highly involved in any school organization stage. Newly hired teachers should discuss with their mentors, collaborate drafting both initial and final skills assessments. They also should participate selecting learning activities and planning learning units.

The goal of the initial training is to enhance newly hires' experience, skills and competencies, in order to motivate them and let them reflect on their professional development opportunities (Pellerey, 2006; Mangione, Pettenati & Rosa, 2016) contributing to school autonomy (Domenici, La Rocca, Margottini & Moretti, 2016; Domenici, 2017).

Headmasters should select mentor teachers among those who have "proper knowledge, proven teaching experience, and tutoring, counselling, supervision skills" (Decree-Law 850/2015 art. 12, Paragraph 3) because, mentor teachers play a crucial role for newly hires professional development at the beginning of their career (Magnoler, 2017; Hobson et al., 2009; Balconi et

[1] This paper is the result of the authors' teamworking. Notably, A. Morini wrote § 3, 4 and 5, and Edoardo Casale § 1, 2, 2.1, 2.2.

al., 2020). Furthermore, mentor teachers are responsible for guiding the newly hires through all probationary training steps during their probationary year, including welcome, educational activities coordination, until their final evaluation within the Evaluation Committee. Hence, mentor teachers should be familiar with tools and techniques promoting positive and collaborative work environments, where colleagues can openly communicate, and personal and professional mutual help is available.

This paper will discuss mentor teachers' profile in Lazio region and the related professional development training model designed by the Department of Education Sciences (DSF) at Roma Tre University in collaboration with the Lazio Regional School Office (USR) and in agreement with University of Cassino. As per the first chapter of this book by Fiorucci and Moretti, the training was first launched in the 2017/2018 school year to enhance mentor teachers' tutoring, counselling and professional supervision skills.

More than 1000 teachers from all the school stages participated mainly on-site to the first training edition, with DSF Professors doing speech. In addition, helpful resources and tools were uploaded on the Moodle digital platform to analyse the topics proposed during the meetings on-site.

In the 2018/2019 school year second edition, about 670 mentor teachers participated to the activities, both on-site and remotely. Several data collection tools and techniques were proposed and used, and an initial survey was conducted in order to explore the newly hired teachers induction and the role of their mentor teachers (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019; Moretti, Morini & Giuliani, 2019). Ultimately, the Research Group was able to outline the mentor teacher professional profiles, and investigate the tutor-newly hired teacher relationship through the first meeting questionnaires. In addition, some tutor-newly hired teacher observation tools and techniques were proposed and used during the activities on-site. The outputs allowed the Research Group to specifically analyse some tutor-newly hired teacher relation dynamics.

After the 2018/2019 edition, the training program was redesigned. Special attention was paid to adapt the activities offered according to the previous edition findings. Hence, mentoring activities, tools and techniques had been gradually introduced in the program, in order to meet mentor teachers' training needs.

In 2019/2020 school year edition, 679 mentor teachers attended the training on-site and remotely. The remote activities were arranged by 5 thematic modules to analyse the topics introduced during the meetings on-site. Then, COVID-19 health emergency required to revise and convert the training into remote activities. Notably, the activities were shaped taking into consideration each school specific Remote Learning: some tools were added, some tools were updated to enable the tutor-newly hired teacher remote observation.

This paper aims to explain the data collected during the 2022/2023 (fifth edition) training and to share how the training had been flexibly designed since 2021/2022 (fourth edition) to respond to the restrictions imposed by

the emergency situation. In here also the mentor teacher profile insights and the professional development plan outcomes.

2. Structure and stages of the mentor teachers professional development training

The training course designed by the Department of Education Sciences at Roma Tre University, in collaboration with the Lazio USR and in agreement with University of Cassino in 2022/2023 school year, entitled "Training for mentor teachers of probationary teachers hired in state schools in Lazio". It involved nine Professors from the Department[2] and five Assistants[3] who helped guide and support the mentor teachers in carrying out the proposed activities on the Moodle platform. The training carried out in *blended* mode involving about 2681 teachers, from Kindergarten to Secondary school, serving in Lazio, namely in Rome, Rieti and Viterbo.

The training structure included one first stage of synchronous activities on Microsoft Teams[4] , and one second stage of asynchronous activities, developed on the Moodle *e-learning* platform[5] . The synchronous module developed in a three-hour meeting with the DSF Professors and the Lazio USR representatives. The same meeting had been done for three times, due to the large amount of participants, who had been divided by alphabetical order and in proportionate groups, so as to allow all teachers to participate and interact while avoiding possible technical issues. The Research and Training Group decided not to record the meeting, to encourage mentor teachers' active participation. The mentor teachers were able to interact with the Research Group through the Question and Answer (Q&A) function built into Microsoft Teams and moderated by the Assistants.

The topics discussed during the synchronous meeting provided the mentor teachers with theoretical and methodological core knowledge for the asynchronous analyses. In the e-learning platform there was the opportunity to share research materials, the presentation of data collection tools devices and techniques to be used in the mentoring activities with newly hired teachers.

Asynchronous activities mainly focused on five crucial topic analyses:

– *Probationary teachers' mentors roles and activities.*

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[2] Massimiliano Fiorucci, Rector of Roma Tre University, former Head of the DSF; Paola Perucchini, Director of the DSF; Giovanni Moretti, Valeria Biasci, Fabio Bocci, Anna Maria Ciraci, Concetta La Rocca, Massimo Margottini and Arianna Morini.

[3]Monica Bianchi, Edoardo Casale, Federica De Carlo, Conny De Vincenzo, Nazarena Patrizi.

[4] Teams is a Microsoft application for communication and collaboration. Roma Tre University officially uses it for online conference with students and trainees.

[5] The Moodle platform has been set up by the Roma Tre-Education Foundation, which President is Prof. Massimo Margottini. The technical management of the platform has been done by Eng. Marco Ciccarini.

– *Observation and peer observation at school.*
– *Peer-to-peer training and reflection on working practices.*
– *Knowledge of education techniques, tools and methodologies for professional supervision (classroom observation techniques, peer review, educational materials, professional counselling, etc.).*
– *Knowledge of dialogic and collaborative teaching strategies tools and techniques.*

In the professional development training for mentor teachers – fifth edition, in line with the fourth edition, investigation focused on profiles and strategic roles played by mentor teachers in the *middle management*, using data collection tools and techniques as described below.

2.1 Asynchronous training: the digital environment

The asynchronous training activities had been performed on the Moodle *e-learning* platform[6] provided by Fondazione Roma Tre-Education[7]. The main page of the digital environment contained: a "welcome" podcast by Prof. Giovanni Moretti, a description of the training program, the training registration form for the personal account creation, information and contacts of the training secretariat, the calendar of synchronous meetings with the related Microsoft Teams links, and the link to the first meeting questionnaire that enabled the working group to collect data for the purposes of the research.

The *home page* was divided into one first section containing an institutional welcome video from the Rector of the University, Prof. Massimiliano Fiorucci, the notice board and the training forum. One second section was a workspace including the slides used by the teachers during the synchronous meetings, and the instructions to work on the research materials (Figure 1) These sections are followed by 5 topic training proposals[8] .

[6] The *e-learning* platform can be accessed to https://crisfad.uniroma3.it/docentitutor .

[7] The online environment was provided by the Roma Tre-Education Foundation (President, Prof. Massimo Margottini). Platform manager: Eng. Marco Ciccarini.

[8] The topics and, the tools and the techniques will be more accurately described in section 8.2.2

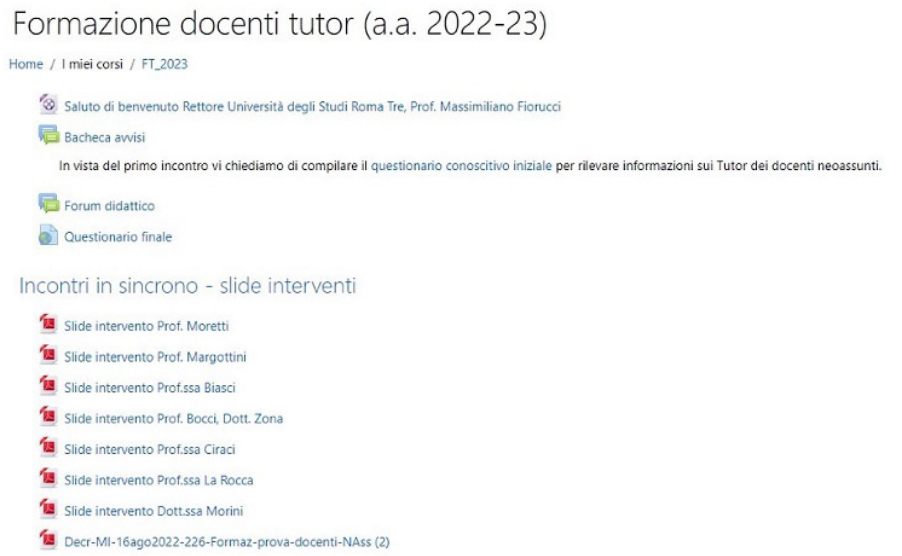


Figure 1 – Home page screenshot from the asynchronous activities e-learning platform

Each topic was introduced by the relevant literature and correlated with tools/techniques to be used with newly hired teachers in classroom (Figure 2). Each section contained different kinds of resources: a discussion forum, scholarly papers on the topic, tool/technique instructions, tool digital and printable versions, and the final report to fill up at the end.

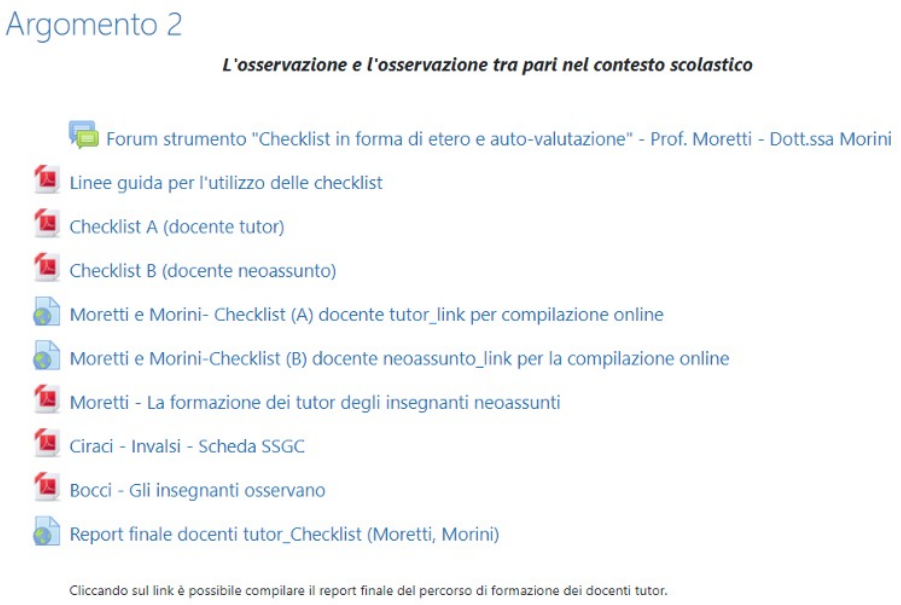


Figure 2: Example of one of the e-learning environment section named as "Topic"

2.2 Data collection tools and techniques used in the training program

Two inbound-outbound semi-structured questionnaires were submitted during the training, in order to analyse the newly hired teacher profiles and their roles within school autonomy.

The first meeting questionnaire was used to investigate the specific training needs of mentor teachers, how they manage their roles, strengths and weaknesses within the school, and how they collaborate and cooperate with the newly hired colleagues. The questionnaire had four sections, and an additional one for Kindergarten teachers. The first section included personal data, albeit anonymously, such as socio-anagraphic and professional information; the second section concerned open-ended questions about the role of mentor teacher, asking to report three strengths and three critical issues encountered in the working experience; the third section investigated teachers' research skills; and the fourth was dedicated to teachers' professionalism in dealing with issues and problems. The questionnaires was filled through Google Forms, before attending the synchronous training meeting, and they were anonymous, in order to obtain more proper data to analyse the participants' profiles. The same questionnaires allowed to detect the teachers' in training expectations and their points of view about, before starting the training (Fortini, 2000). 2364 responses in total were collected from the questionnaires; data processing and analysis is presented in Section 3.

The final questionnaires were distributed at the end of the training, in order to detect information about the mentor teachers of newly hired teachers. The goal was on the one hand, to analyse the opinions about the training effectiveness. On the other hand, it was intended to monitor the training course itself, to shape it closer to teachers' working needs and expectations.

The questionnaire had five sections: the first one for personal data; the second for the mentor teachers' interest level in participating in a Research-Training program with Professors from the Department of Education of Roma Tre University; the third one investigated the teachers' research skills; in the fourth section the teachers' working experience was defined, in order to promote learning and inclusion; finally, the fifth part assessed some key competencies for lifelong learning. A total of 1442 outputs were collected.

In addition to the initial and final questionnaires, various tools were provided to mentor teachers during the training, to collaborate with the newly hired colleagues. These tools introduced during the synchronous activities, were also shared on the *e-learning* platform with specific insights and instructions for an informed use.

In their asynchronous activities, the mentor teachers had independently chosen the tools based on their own requirements, and on their mentored newly hired teachers needs.

For a comprehensive overview on the mentor teachers asynchronous tasks, below is a summary of the available activities by tool/technique[9].

Peer observation (microteaching or video analysis)

Participants had been requested to use microteaching[10] or video analysis as tools for teachers' professional development and learning (Bocci, 2019). Microteaching was created as a teacher training technique and as a tool for pedagogic research. Microteaching helps teachers to analyse their own teaching, supporting them "to know the essential techniques and gain the core skills for the most efficient performance" (Allen & Ryan, 1974, p. 29). Performance is analysed on recorded lesson sequences, which are observed and examined by a group of in-training teachers monitored by a trainer-supervisor. Observers, including performers, identify strengths and weaknesses of the teaching task to provide possible improvement suggestions. Video analysis allows to inves-

[9] The outcomes of the in-depth surveys are reported in the papers in this volume as follow: Peer Observation Practices – Microteaching or Videoanalysis (chapter by Fabio Bocci, Umberto Zona and Aurora Bulgarelli); QPCC – Self-Competences and Convictions' Perception Questionnaire (chapter by Massimo Margottini), Counselling for Professional Supervision and Scale on Teacher Self-Efficacy (chapter by Valeria Biasi, Nazarena Patrizi and Conny de Vincenzo), Tri-focal Observation: questionnaires for mentor teachers, mentee teachers (newly hired) and students (Chapter by Concetta La Rocca and Edoardo Casale), Checklist in the form of hetero-observation and self-assessment of teaching action (Chapter by Giovanni Moretti and Arianna Morini).

[10] Microteaching is a training activity that involves observation of recorded lessons and following between an experienced teacher and a newly hired colleague. The topic is discussed in detail in Chapter by Fabio Bocci, Umberto Zona and Aurora Bulgarelli.

tigate several knowledge problems concerning the complexity of education processes to be investigated. Video analysis is a potentially very efficient support tool for describing, reproducing and understanding complex education processes. Video analysis is also a support technique to assess students' skills. It is a prototype able to focus on structural components of competencies to be assessed, detecting aspects, indicators and levels.

QPCC – Self-Competences and Convictions' Perception Questionnaire

The *Self-Competences and Convictions' Perception Questionnaire* is an instrument of self-evaluation of one's strategic competences. It was created by Michele Pellerey, in Italy, in 2001 (Pellerey & Orio, 2001). It is meant for adult subjects, involved in working contexts of relational type. It aims to promote reflective processes on self-images and on personal competences and convictions that can underlie the capacity of behaviour self-regulation. It thus involves a set of skills, abilities, attitudes, beliefs and competences that can be defined as "strategic".

At the same time, the questionnaire can be used as a tool for planning systematic, well-founded educational interventions targeting specific cognitive, affective-motivational and relational dimensions at the basis of a competent action. The QPCC had been proposed as a tool to mentor teachers to promote awareness about how much competences and convictions impact their teaching actions. The expected outcome was to promote focused well-founded and systematic approaches for training and self-training programs (Margottini, 2017).

Counselling as supervision – Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

Counselling[11] involved teachers writing two short self-reports on their own working experience. After that, there was a synchronous collective discussion online. In addition to the reports, the mentor teachers were asked to fill out the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale together with their tutees. The goal of the test was to analyse the teacher profiles, including their abilities to gain students' commitment, the capacity to choose appropriate teaching strategies, and the ability to effectively manage the classrooms (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Biasi et al., 2014). The anonymous data collected were analysed statistically to discuss and share the issues emerged, and relating them to the training purpose of promoting procedure knowledge and special features of Counselling as a tool for professional supervision.

Tri-focal observation: questionnaires for mentor teachers, mentee teachers (newly hired) and students

The proposed trifocal observation normally carries out in "classroom contexts", and should involve tutor teachers, tutees (newly hired teachers) and stu-

[11] Counselling is believed to be a dialogue-oriented activity. It fosters tutor-newly hired teacher relationship through active listening, and promote probationary teachers' reflection on their strengths and weaknesses. The topic is further explored in Chapter by Conny de Vincenzo, Valeria Biasi and Nazarena Patrizi.

dents. Tutee conduct their lessons on specific topics. At the end of the lesson, the observers complete three questionnaires:

– the mentor teacher questionnaire – for the observation of tutees' teaching action;
– the tutee teacher questionnaire – for self-observation on the teaching action;
– student questionnaire – for the tutees' teaching action observed by students.

The training questionnaires outputs allowed to reflect on teaching performance and to revise it according to the evidence by crossing the three different points of view. The purpose is to observe the teaching performance, in order to promote sharing and trusting behaviours and to co-build teaching-learning activities by involving all the players participating in the educational process (La Rocca, 2021).

Checklists in the form of hetero-observation and self-assessment

There are two kinds of observation during the probationary year: mutual observation, when mentor teachers and tutees observe each other; and newly hired teachers' self-evaluation on their own performance. Both checklists had been designed to encourage additional exploration on how conduct effectively and sustainably observation during the probationary year. The two checklists were proposed as part of the training program. The goal was to collect data on some teaching strategic areas, enhancing peer observation, self-assessment, and obtain a triangulating perspective (Morini, 2019; Moretti et al., 2020). Checklist A, in the form of multiple-session (in order to collect reliable data) hetero-observation, was used by mentor teachers to observe teaching performance of the newly hired teachers. Checklist B, in the form of self-assessment, was used by *tutee teachers* detecting their perceptions on mentor teachers observation in classroom. The goal was to have information to share about what had been observed from both tutor and newly hired tutee points of view, in order to improve the quality of tutor-newly hired teacher relationship and awareness development.

At the end of the activities, the teachers were proposed to fill out the final report to summarize their activities. Each specific tool final report had 3 sections. The first two sections, in common to all reports, dealt with personal data and common topics; the third one, specific for each tool report, asked for personal considerations on the tool used, and for activity self-assessments.

3. Mentor teacher: profile analysis

The data analysis from the first meeting questionnaires allowed to identify the mentor teachers' profiles of newly hired teachers in Lazio region, who participated to the working development training offered by the DSF at Roma Tre University.

The questionnaire first section concerned personal data. As per the question about age, most of the participants (42.3%) were between 50 and 60 years old, followed by a high percentage of teachers ranked between 40 and 50 years old (33.2%). Only a small amount of them aged over 60 years old (14.6%), the rest of the participants were under 40 years old.

In Lazio region, mentor teachers were mainly women (86.4%), compared to 13.6% man. Most of the participants taught at school in Rome (58.4%). 34.7% worked in Rome, 3.7% Viterbo, 3.3% in Rieti. Mentor teachers from Frosinone and Latina attended the training in Cassino (as per agreement between Roma Tre University, University of Cassino and USR Lazio).

In the 2022/2023 school year, mentor teachers from Upper Secondary education were the majority: 34.2%, followed by the Primary education (30.7%). A smaller percentage came from Lower Secondary schools (23.8%) and from Kindergarten (11.3%). For the first time in five editions, most of mentor teachers were from Upper Secondary education.

More than half of 2335 participating mentor teachers (60.4%) said to be in the role for the first time. The remaining participants had been tutors from about 2-3 years (18.8%) or from more time.

In the 2022/2023 school year, 58.5% of teachers did not fulfil any other *middle management* role at school, maybe by Headmaster decisions, in order to avoid teachers' working overload.

In the questionnaires, mentor teachers were asked how much helpful they considered a series of activities as mentor teachers of newly hired teachers. The options had been organized by a 4-point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not at all), 2 (a little), 3 (enough), 4 (a lot). Chart 1 shows the results.

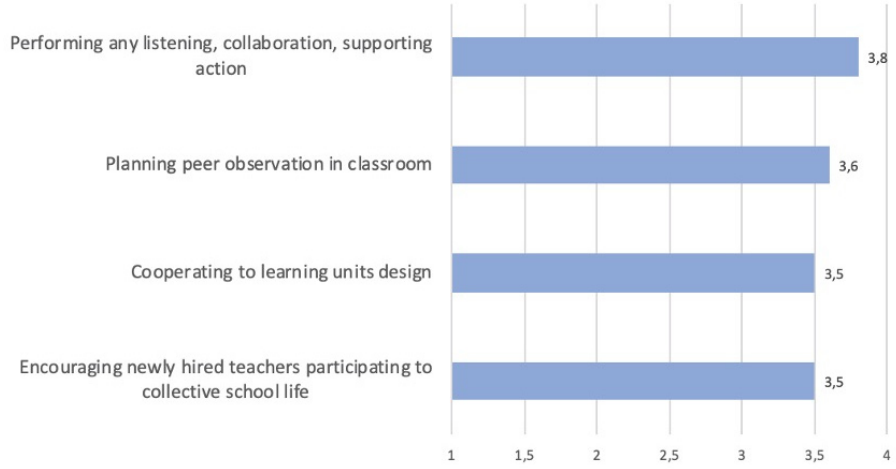


Chart 1 – Activities with the newly hired teachers: the mentor teachers' perceptions

From the data analysis, it appears that mentor teachers are proactively newly hired teacher-oriented during the probationary year. Based on the questionnaire results, mentor teachers seem to carefully focus on collaboration and counselling. Mutual observation is recognized as a resource in line with literature relevant to the subject analysed in the previous Chapters (e.g.: Donnelly, 2007; Lasagabaster & Sierra; 2011; Mangione, Pettenati & Rosa, 2016). The literature consider mentor teachers as strategic for newly hired teacher professional development (Magnoler, 2017; Balconi et al., 2020; Moretti et al., 2020), as also confirmed by teachers involved in Lazio region.

They reported to spend on average of about 1-2 hours per week with the newly hired colleagues discussing activities to be collectively developed (49.4%). Tutors who, for various reasons, were unable to engage in weekly discussions with the newly hired colleagues committed at least 1-2 hours per month to group activities (43.3%). The remaining 7.3% indicated flexible schedules based on newly hires' training needs and requests.

Data from the final questionnaires are explained in the following paragraph.

4. Main training outcomes

At the end of the training, the mentor teachers were given the final questionnaires to reflect on the professional development experience and to express their opinions on the effectiveness of the activities carried out.

The first question asked to explain which dimension of their working performance was mostly impacted by their training participation. Most of them found effects mainly on relations and communication (52.2%), followed by the methodological-didactic area (32.2%). Less relevant were the psycho-pedagogical (9.2%) and the juridical-administrative (6.4%) areas.

The results are aligned with what was found at the beginning. Ultimately, most of the participants saw positive effects on relations and communication, thus, the outcomes confirmed the training had satisfied the specific needs and requests.

Answers	rate % input	rate % output
1. Methodological – didactic area	36,6%	32,2%
2. Psycho – pedagogical area	8,9%	9,2%
3. Relational – communication area	49,6%	52,2%
4. Juridical – administrative area	3,2%	6,4%
Other	1,7%	–

Table 1 – Training areas: comparison between inputs and outputs

The result is particularly relevant especially in comparison with what was found before the health emergency period. While mentor teachers are found mainly focused on the

methodological-didactic area in 2019, after the pandemic, both in 2022 and in 2023, mentor teachers feel the need to improve relational and communication aptitudes.

The 2022/2023 professional development plan of the Department of Education Science was designed taking into consideration the 2017/2018 findings. The constant monitoring through the years allowed to respond more effectively to the mentor teachers' educational needs, including in terms of training delivery methods and timing.

As per the previous research (Moretti, Morini & Giuliani, 2019), among the mentor teachers' educational expectations expressed there were tools for newly hired teacher performance effective observation, and, eventually, to learn more about possible effective mentoring practices to use.

After the health emergency period, because mentor teachers acquired digital skills as requested in situations of Distance Education (DaD) and then of Digital Integrated Learning (DDI), the training course had been organized in a *blended* mode. Mentor teachers had been involved in synchronous and asynchronous remote activities, in order to obey the restrictions to prevent Covid-19 spread. This way, more than 5000 teachers had the opportunity to attend (referring to the after-pandemic period).

Thanks to the digital skills gained to access remote communication and learning platforms during the pandemic, mentor teachers' participation to all activity stages was likely to be more active and informed.

One question was intended to investigate which mode was found to be most effective.

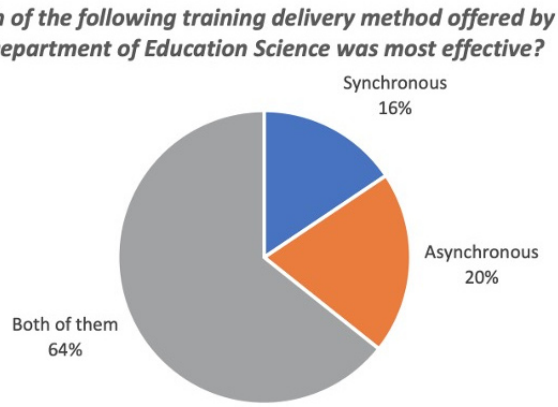


Chart 2 – Effectiveness of training delivery methods

Overall (64%) both activities had been positively evaluated. 16% preferred the synchronous activities, and 20% valued more highly the asynchronous activities. Data analysis had been done checking for possible differences related to years of service and age.

Chi-square test valued at 4.8% level the participants' years of service. The value ranked within the acceptability threshold set at 5%. Considering the independence of the two factors to be unlikely, it is be said that seniority changed teacher perception of training effectiveness. The largest cluster, the one with the highest seniority "dragged " the percentages. The results were similar to the general value. However, especially for this cluster, the two delivery methods were considered of equal value (69.5%). Those with less years of service had much more often evaluated one delivery method as superior to the other. The 5 to 10 years of service cluster preferred asynchronous activities and found the synchronous activities less impactful. Also teachers with less years of service found synchronous activities less relevant.

		Years of service			
	Sample	Less than 5 years	5 to 10 years	11 to 15 years	More than 15 years
Both activities	64,4%	70,8%	59,5%	58,4%	66,5%
Synchronous activities	15,7%	10,4%	13,1%	18,4%	16,1%
Asynchronous activities	19,9%	18,8%	27,4%	23,2%	17,5%
Total	1439	48	239	190	962

Table 2 – Training delivery method different evaluation by years of services

Comparing the responses with the age of the sample, there was a dependency structure: the chi-square test reported 0.1% value. Therefore, teacher's age appeared to affect the perception of the effectiveness of the training program. Even if related, age and seniority had not an identical pattern. Teachers with high seniority were in almost all age groups (25-30 years old participants had been reported only for completeness, but excluded from the test because numerically inconsistent) and some patterns were recurring. The largest clusters did not see one delivery method superior to the other. Instead, by age, younger teachers preferred asynchronous activities, and vice versa.

		Age group				
	Sample	25-30 years old	31-40 years old	41-50 years old	51-60 years old	> 60
Both activities	64,4%	71,4%	55,1%	61,0%	67,1%	69,4%
Synchronous activity	15,7%	14,3%	11,0%	16,5%	15,8%	17,0%
Asynchronous activities	19,9%	14,3%	33,8%	22,6%	17,1%	13,6%
Total	1438	7	136	477	609	209

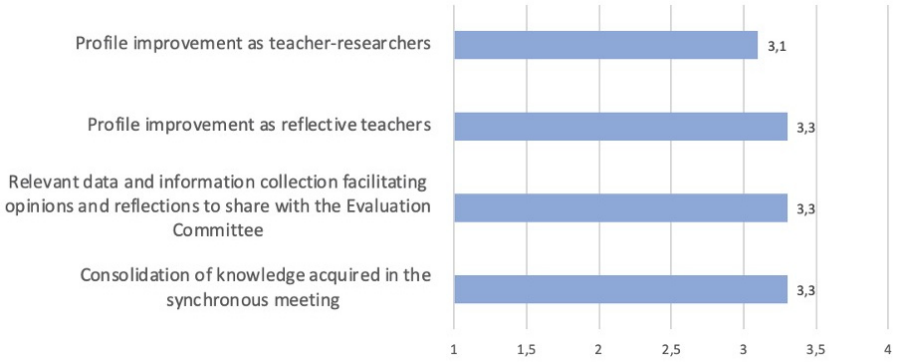
Table 3 – Training delivery method different evaluation by age group

During the synchronous activities mentor teachers and the Department Professors discussed core arguments about the mentor role. The same activities, with the same purposes, had been carried out on-site in the previous editions. However, the fact to have been converted into remote didn't affect negatively.

Due to the large amount of the participants, special attention had been paid to strategies enable to ensure active participation: the same meeting was repeated for three times balancing the number of participants. No meeting was recorded, in order to keep attention and motivation high. Teachers could ask questions and clarifications through a digital chat moderated by the Assistants, this way, the Professors could answer in real time, or redirect to the forum for further insights.

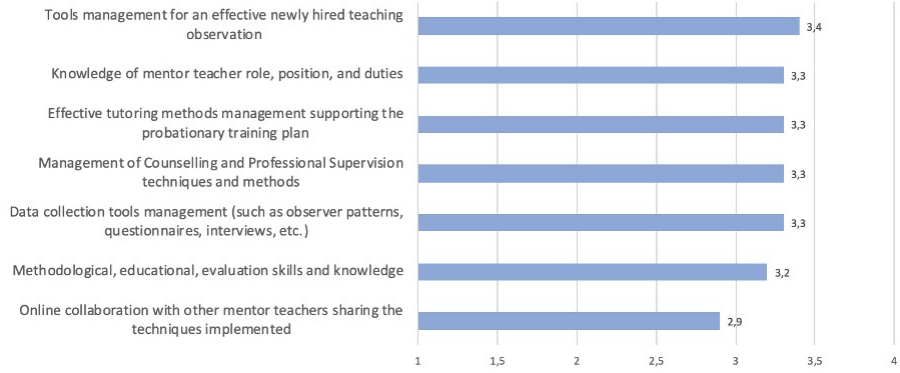
Asynchronous activities on the Moodle platform were the main new feature. These activities had a twofold goal. On the one hand, they provided in-depth insights about what was shared during the synchronous meetings. On the other hand, the same tool was one of the training instrument for teaching observation and reflection that could be introduced for mentoring newly hired teachers.

Mentor teachers were asked to express their perceived usefulness on specific aspects. The average output, presented in Graph n. 2, was high, instead, the consideration for the development of teaching profile as teacher-researcher proposal (average 3.1 out of 4) was the lowest. This means that although mentor teachers recognized to have consolidated remotely certain knowledge acquired in the synchronous meeting (average 3.3), and to have studied better and more helpful methods to collect relevant data and information facilitating opinions and reflections to share with the Evaluation Committee (average 3.3), and to have improved their profiles as reflective teachers (average 3.3), they struggled to see themselves as teacher-researchers (Moretti, 2003; Domenici & Biasi, 2019).



Graph 3 – Mentor teachers perception about how much helpful data collection tools were for the newly hired probationary training: averages on scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot)

The further goal was to investigate mentor teachers' perception about the training effectiveness.
They were asked to express how much the proposed activities had facilitated their teaching improvement. Notably, they were invited to reflect on whether and how training contributed: managing tools for effective newly hired teaching observation; improving the knowledge of mentor teacher role, position, and duties; managing effective tutoring methods supporting the probationary training plan; managing Counselling and Professional Supervision techniques and methods; improving data collection tools management (such as observer patterns, questionnaires, interviews, etc.); improving methodological, educational, evaluation skills and knowledge; collaborating online with other mentor teachers sharing the techniques implemented.



Graph 4 – Skills and knowledge strengthened through the training: the mentor teacher perceptions at the end of the activities

Chart n. 4 shows the averages obtained for each item. The training course had mainly provided mentor teachers with tools knowledge for effective peer observation. In this sense, tools should be reliable for the observation process validation, and should promote relaxed and educational environments. Overall the mentor teachers awareness appeared to had strengthened during the training.

In the logic of the lifelong learning, in order to continue to consolidate teacher positions as reflective teachers and teacher-researchers, the final questionnaire investigated the mentor teachers' potential motivation to start a Research-Training plan (Magnoler, 2012; Asquini, 2018). Almost half of the participants, 48.8% were interested in. The percentage – out of more than 1400 teachers – testified that the mentor teacher role was seen as an opportunity for professional growth.

The interested group was asked to express one area of interest among the following:

Topic 1. Position and activities as mentor teachers of probationary newly hired teachers
Topic 2. Peer observation and observation at school.
Topic 3. Peer-to-peer training and reflection on working practices.
Topic 4. Knowledge of relevant tools and professional supervision techniques (classroom observation techniques, peer review, educational documentation, professional counselling, etc.).
Topic 5. Knowledge of dialogic and collaborative teaching strategies and tools.

Graph 5 shows the response percentages. The preference focused on professional supervision tools and techniques, and on strategies and tools promoting peer exchange and confrontation.

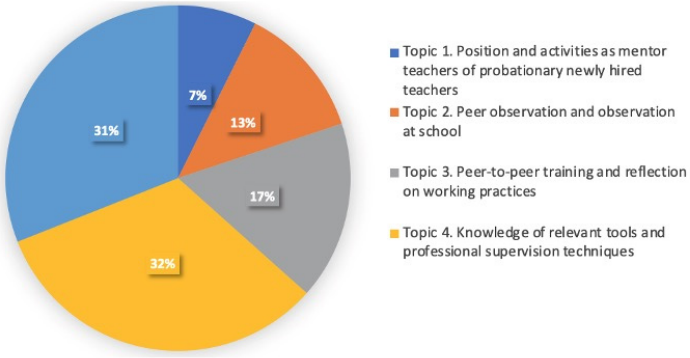


Chart 5 – Topics for developing a Research-Training program in the future.

The data collected at the end of the training allowed to frame further mentor teacher profile. They also facilitated reflection on the training effectiveness offered by the Department of Education Sciences at Roma Tre University. Finally, the data provided helpful evidence to design the future professional development training aims at promoting the research also on newly hired teachers in their probationary year.

5. Conclusion

The data collected about the training program contribute to the educational research on probationary training during newly hired teachers' induction. At this stage mentor teacher position is crucial.

Information about mentor teacher profiles allow both, to frame and enhance this role, and to know the main training needs, in order to more properly design the professional development projects. The research and monitoring activities carried out by the DSF at Roma Tre University since the 2017/2018 academic year allow to frame peer *tutorship* in *induction* stage. These results are put at the service of both the scientific community, and the players involved in the educational process, including schools, Headmasters, Regional School Offices.

The data extent highlights the mentor teachers want to contribute to the training and research processes improvement. These results are from initial and ending anonymous and not mandatory questionnaires. Notably, the outcomes from the first meeting questionnaires allow a comparison with the outcomes from the previous research, especially before the emergency health period (Fiorucci & Moretti, 2019). Some results confirm some permanent features: such as gender, almost entirely female; age range, mostly between 50 and 60; service seniority, predominantly more than 15 years; and the number of newly hired teachers entrusted to them, roughly one. Also the percentage of teachers holding other *middle management* positions within the schools remains essentially unchanged.

Instead, regarding the educational stages, in 2019 more homogeneity was found between Primary and Upper Secondary education (in both cases about 31.5%), in 2022 most of the participants were from Primary schools (41.9%). In 2023 most of the mentor teachers attending the training were from Upper Secondary schools (34.2%). These percentages may reflect regional trends in teacher tenure.

Furthermore, concerning the training needs, it is interesting to notice some changes. Notably, by the first cluster results, methodological and didactic areas were among the first. Instead, since the end of the pandemic period – when exchange and confrontation at school were severely restricted – relational and communication are perceived as crucial in the probationary training of newly hires.

The evidence find confirmation in the final questionnaire feedbacks. The mentor teachers state that they considered the training and mentoring activities as helpful, especially to enjoy the dialogical exchange and to improve their disposition to teamworking.

Finally, about the training plan effectiveness, the data analysis considers the opinions of the mentor teachers, who positively evaluated the plan in its *blended* mode, and who considered as valid both synchronous and asynchronous delivery methods, on the average.

Mentor teachers recognised and appreciated the attention paid to the training design, focused on educational activities enhancing mentor teachers experience also remotely, and aimed at promote tools and techniques for probationary training improvement. Hence, the willingness of almost half of the participants to continue with a Research-Training (R-T) plan furtherly confirms the positive feedback overall, and it attests the interest in maintaining active interaction with University.

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The volume examines the role and functions of mentors for newly hired teachers in Italy from an ecosystemic perspective. The essays delve into the chosen topic starting from reflections on the outcomes of a multi-year training program and diachronic investigative studies conducted by the Department of Education Sciences of Roma Tre University, in collaboration with the Regional Education Office for Lazio and the local school networks. The results of the annual surveys conducted, and the subsequent multi-year study on the entirety of the available data, confirm the importance of promoting the adoption of an open, multi-actor, and inclusive ecosystemic perspective among all the actors involved in the decision-making processes and the processes activated by the decisions taken. The findings also suggest the continuous promotion of the professional training and development initiatives for mentors of newly hired teachers.

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