Teacher Mentoring: Experiences from International Teacher Mentors in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

In this paper, a closer look at mentoring in education is presented. The research sample was a team of eleven international teachers who were engaged in mentoring local teachers in a high school for gifted students in Kazakhstan. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of international teachers, as they relate their experiences of mentoring local teachers. The author sought the stories of the international mentor teachers and the meaning they placed on these experiences. Answers were sought to questions of how mentors defined mentoring, what they perceived as benefits of mentoring, and how they dealt with mentoring difficulties. Face to face semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from eleven volunteering international teachers. Seven categories of mentoring were found to be: Leading, guiding, modelling advising, and exposition; Supporting, challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation; Sharing, collaboration, Improving, passing on information; Coaching, change and improving, passing on information; Challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation; Sharing, collaboration; and Trouble-shooting. Benefits of mentoring were discussed under six categories: Dialogue and new ideas; self-awareness and motivation; emotional benefits; and professional improvement; mutual benefit; emotional betterment, modelling and emulation; and sharing, experimentation, dynamism. All mentors experienced difficulties in mentoring at some part in their employment. Mentoring pairs did something to resolve mentoring difficulties when they arose. The mentee holds the key to the success of the mentoring relationship.

Contents

Contribution of this paper to the literature
This paper contributes experiential definitions to teacher mentoring. It gives the mentors' own definitions and what they perceive as benefits of mentoring. For NIS schools in Kazakhstan, it provides a conversation opener for reflection and a basis for building upon what is existent.

1. Introduction

Teachers all over the world are finding their jobs more and more demanding, and they are taking up more and more responsibilities as the education system evolves (McGuire, 2007). Teachers today have become teachers, mentors, counselors, technological experts, communication experts with management, parents and the community, entertainment providers, care-givers, and even inspirational icons as the social support systems of the world take on a new meaning (Avidov-Ungar & Magen-Nagar, 2013). To cope with ever-changing roles, teachers need to be constantly upgrading their qualifications and skills, to keep up-to-date and to be flexible. Not surprisingly, teachers have become more and more tired, have been reported to have a high burnout rate, and are just overwhelmed with keeping their act together. Mentoring is one method used widely in the teaching field to upgrade teachers' skills, thus bridging the knowledge and skills gaps (Oliver & Townsend, 2013). Mentoring is considered a suitable way to help teachers adapt to the skills needs and demands of their jobs, as depicted in Tollefson-Hall (2015). In many ways, mentoring is cheaper, happens in the workplace thus saving time, and increases retention, Grimes and White (2015).

2. Literature

2.1. Education system in Kazakhstan

The education system in Kazakhstan is undergoing a transition (Gabdulina & Zhuman, 2018) from the Soviet system to the modern system. The Soviet system was content-based, dense, and highly teacher-centred (Bridges & Sagintayeva, 2014). Much of it was rote learning, according to Burkhalter and Shegebayev (2012). Students were forced to learn unmanageable chunks of content, with very little writing, and little interaction with their learning media. This way of "brain learning" might have been good in its time, where resources may have been limited, and content not so extensive. In today's system where information expansion is the norm brain learning is not adequate to prepare students for the world arena. The shortfalls of this system in modern day Kazakh education system were identified as being insufficient in opening the youths to international competitiveness. At a time when Kazakhstan is rising to become a world player in education the need for its education to change had never been so acute as in the late 200s, when the NIS Schools were conceived, with the aim to raise a crop of internationally competent Kazakh youth who can help build up Kazakhstan in the near future (Nuriyev, Sovetkanova, & Seysenbayeva, 2018). At the helm of the educational reform was the nation's president Nazarbayev, Lillis (2007) who set out phases of the reform in the form of Strategies (2020[1], 2030[2], 2050[3]). To achieve the objectives set out in the Strategies, Kazakhstan needed a crop of teachers, with modern education skills, to teach their youth to become world players (Hartley, Gopaul, Sagintayeva, & Apergenova, 2016). As Kazakh local teachers lacked the international skills in modern methods of teaching. In order to achieve this, it was decided that the mentoring method would best suit this transition and impart skills in the most beneficial way, time-wise, cost wise and pedagogy-wise. So teams of international subject experts were recruited into the NIS schools to co-teach and mentor local teachers in contemporary methods of teaching and learning.

2.2. Expected Results of the Kazakhstan Mentoring Program (Read and Straighten)

Kazakhstan has put education on the number one priority for the development of its nation (Abdiraiymova, Kenzhakimova, Verevkin, Lifanova, & Burkhanova, 2015). Desired skills sets at the end of the mentorship were broadly seen as enabling or building the, capacity of local teachers to teach just as good as any modern day international teacher, employing student-centred approaches, and also teaching in English. As there was no outline of how each mentoring pair would proceed, each international trainer devised their own programme depending on what they perceived to be the urgent needs in their mentees. Mentees were all at different levels of pedagogic competency, and at different levels of the English language. Some did not even have one English word at the beginning of the mentoring relationship. As such, starting points and focuses were different and unique to a mentoring pair. As the mentoring progressed the perceptions of resistance to change and resistance to mentoring began to emerge (Yekavets, 2014).

2.3. Mentoring

While most research like that of Savage, Cannon, and Sutters (2015) relates to mentoring of teachers just beginning their professional career—young teachers there is a general global movement towards extending mentoring to long-service teachers (Pennanen, Heikkinen, & Tynjälä, 2020). Published articles (in English) on mentoring teachers in Kazakhstan are non-existent. This paper will contribute to dialogue on mentoring in Kazakhstan's NIS schools in particular, with implications worldwide in general.

A systematic research documentation of the processes happening in the transition period of the education system of Kazakhstan are unique. The Kazakh special presidential schools employed international teachers to come in and train local teachers in a mentoring role within the schools' settings. The idea for this paper was borne of the need to investigate and document the phenomenon that international teachers were experiencing in their mentoring capacities in the school, to see what mentors would say to describe their experiences with their mentees, to start a dialogue on the practice of mentoring and find if there were common sentiments.

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[1] https://www.akorda.kz/en/official_documents/strategies_and_programs
[2] https://www.akorda.kz/en/official_documents/strategies_and_programs
[3] https://kazakhstan2050.com/

2.4. Defining Mentoring

Mentoring is acknowledged widely as a method of providing or imparting skills to professionals. Savage et al. (2015) referred to teachers as "mentors" (p. 23), implying that teaching is mentoring. On the other hand, Tollefson-Hall (2015) considered a mentor to be "a wise elder who provides guidance to a younger person" (p.30). Lai (2005) defined mentorship in terms of the word's origins, as having links with the older, wiser mentor imparting wisdom to a younger wisdom seeking youth. As a method to prop up leaders in Higher Education, Searby, Ballenger, and Tripses (2015) found it to have invaluable effects of adding confidence, imparting knowledge, building relationships, and improving efficiency. In all cases, mentoring is a recommended method in which mentors watch over mentees, and train them on-the-job to sharpen their skills. McGuire (2007) called the mentee by the name of or. protégé. In the education field mentoring happens at different levels depending on the focus of the mentoring relationship.

2.5. Benefits of Mentoring

Much research has been done on mentoring in higher education (Simonsen, Luebeck, & Bice, 2009; Van & Waghid, 2008) and its contributions to achieving positive results are well known (Garvey, 2009; Lai, 2005). In addition, Delaney, 2012 stated that mentoring is a valuable method to ensure teachers stay in their jobs longer, therefore being a cost-effective way to improve skills and the value on a teacher, while ensuring the students get high quality service. In schools mentoring has been used for a long time to impart skills and knowledge to teachers and students (Simonsen et al., 2009; Van & Waghid, 2008). However, most research like that of Savage et al. (2015) relates to mentoring of teachers just beginning their professional career – young teachers.

2.6. Education System in Kazakhstan

The education system in Kazakhstan is undergoing a transition, from the Soviet old system to the modern system. The Soviet system was content-based, dense, and highly teacher-centred. Much of it was rote learning. Students were forced to learn unmanageable chunks of content, with very little writing, and little interaction with their learning media. The shortfalls of this system to today's Kazakh education system were identified as being unable to open the youths to the international competitiveness. At a time when Kazakhstan is rising to become a world player, the need for its education to change had never been so acute as in 2010, when the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS) Schools were conceived, with the aim to raise a crop of Kazakh youth who are well educated, international, and can help build up Kazakhstan in the near future (Wilson, Turner, Sharimova, & Brownhill, 2013). In order to achieve this, it was decided that the mentoring method would best suit this transition and impart skills in the most beneficial way, time-wise, cost-wise and pedagogy-wise. Teams of international subject experts were invited to come into the NIS schools and mentor local teachers in contemporary methods of teaching and learning.

2.7. Expected Results of the Kazakhstan Mentoring Program

Desired skills sets at the end of the mentorship were broadly seen as enabling or building the capacity of local teachers to teach just as good as any modern day teacher, employing student-centred approaches. As there was no outline of how each mentoring pair would proceed, each international trainer devised their own programme depending on what they perceived to be the urgent needs in their mentees. Needless to say, mentees were all at different levels of pedagogic competency, and at different levels of the English language. Some did not even have one English word. As such, starting points and focuses were different and unique to a pair. And as the mentoring progressed the perceptions of resistance to change and resistance to being mentored began to emerge. Education is determined as one of priorities of state policy for social and economic development in the country (Nuriyev et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

Due to the nature of the research topic, seeking International teachers' experiences, perceptions, emotions, and opinions, constructivism was chosen as the framework of research. The act of meaning-making due to interaction and discourse, called interpretivism (Burkholder, Cos, & Crawford, 2016) was the preferred approach in this survey. Within this interpretivism, interviewing is a major method of data gathering. Phenomena is interpreted differently by different people, and even by the same person under different conditions. Further, the semi-structured interview is more flexible and allows gathering of information in a more open way, allowing respondents to explore areas of interest in greater detail (Burkholder et al., 2016). The respondent in semi-structured interviews has a good amount of freedom to explore their own statements, and maybe follow the direction of ideas led by their thinking, articulation, connection making and threads of thought. In interaction with the interviewer, these threads of thoughts can be concretized, and articulated and captured in time and space, as in by audio recorder, and analyzed for meaning.

An interview questionnaire was prepared. International teachers of one NIS, in 2016 were informed of and requested to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted with International Teachers of NIS who were working with a mentee (n=11), working in different subjects. Of these teachers, two were female. The survey group was all teachers despite their length of service. The only important factor was that they were all international teachers, and they were all mentoring local teachers, in one NIS. The international teachers came from diverse backgrounds and originated in different countries. Interviews were face-to-face and semi-structured. The semi-structured method was chosen because of the need to allow flexibility within limits. This was necessary to understand the context, background and the way each mentor found the whole mentoring role to be playing out. It would also allow respondents to express themselves freely.

Interviews were recorded using a dictaphone, and transcribed in Googledocs. The transcriptions were checked for correctness against the audios.

The interview atmosphere was free, relaxed, with free expression of emotions, with laughter, sighs, expressions of desperation and any other such as teachers felt, as this was seen as an avenue to share what teachers had been

feeling individually. It was also to create an open environment that would enable respondents to say out their thoughts without reservation. The interaction time was made as natural as possible, as if it was one of every day conversations at the workplace. The interviewer was one of the ITs, making it even more open and free. The understanding was that an interview from one of the team would not make them feel like keeping something back, since "we are in the same boat, anyway." Each interview lasted a minimum of 45 minutes.

4. Results

4.1. Defining Mentoring

From the interview responses, several definitions of mentoring arose. The definitions could be categorised under seven categories. While some definitions spanned more than one category, these some main categories were evident, and used to discuss meanings that International teachers made of their mentoring roles.

Seven categories of understanding of the definitions provided emerged. These were:

1. Leading, guiding, modelling advising, and exposition.
2. Supporting, challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation.
3. Sharing, collaboration, improving, passing on information.
4. Coaching, change and improving, passing on information.
5. Challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation.
6. Sharing, collaboration.
7. Trouble-shooting.

Category 1: Leading, guiding, modelling, advising, exposition

The words in this had a similar meaning and fitted together. Mentoring was defined in different ways from the point of view of the international teachers who were acting as mentors to their local teachers. The aspect of guiding, getting them to (a certain place or level) implies leading the way, holding the hand of the led, delicately manouvering, and building through demonstration a sense of security, trust and motivation in the led, the mentee. The classroom aspect limits the mentoring sphere of influence. In the former definition, "guiding them to improve their practices" can then be interpreted as practices in the classroom. However, it may be supposed that mentoring is not limited to the classroom.

"*Mentoring according to my perceptions is leading to emulate ... practices; practices known to improve student success. The mentee can emulate some of the practice.*" and "*Guiding colleague to emulate mentor/best practices.*"

Emulation comes from displaying something, having it seen, thought about and appreciated. It has an element of laying things out in the open, and giving the beholder the choice, to take what they see in and use, or not to. As such, this kind of mentoring is inclined to the mentor modelling lessons, modelling concepts, discussing pedagogy with the mentee, and trusting the mentee to make the right choice. Emulations also comes when the mentor is skilled in their function and has the disposition as described by Trubowitz (2004) including being focussed on mentee growth, cultural proficiency, promoting reflection, and being generous with ideas and resources, building trust and not judging the mentee whatever they decide to choose.

"*I never thought about defining it. I guess it is, uhm, guiding teachers, guiding your mentee, what we do is guiding them to improve their practice. Giving them advice to improve, how to plan, lesson structures, and something like that?*"

While guiding, can have many ways of delivering it, the general thought that comes to mind is that of a person walking ahead of another, clearing the path, and taking the safety of the guided to heart. The guide has a responsibility to bring the guided to a specific place. During the walk, the guide may take the hand of the guided, advise where to step, give lectures on the way…And this notion was a clear indication of the mentor role in the NISK. Guiding gives the notion that the mentor has something of superior quality to offer.

"*Oh, mentoring is just helping people to develop their skills, mainly through reflection, by modelling, by asking open questions, and letting them reflect, without being overtly aggressive.*"

Helping through reflection is a concept of mentoring that sees the mentor not as a guide but a helper. While a guide has a sense of authority and responsibility, the helper has a lesser role. Helping implies letting someone do what they do, and being there for them when they seek help, or when someone sees a need that the mentee may not see, and offer to help in that area.

This could be in the form of knowledge, as in other pedagogies that our local teachers may not have practiced. Or specific skills in dealing with students, or even a way of conducting a particular practical. Helping may also mean that the mentor and the mentee are at the same level and they do their work together.

Between international teachers and local teachers there is a great exchange that happens. However, proponents of bidirectional mentoring Chen (2018) would argue and say that the mentor can also find something to emulate in their mentee.

Category 2: Supporting

"*Supporting and challenging somebody…eh…, my mentee, into being somebody who will be competitive, and inviting her into areas she might not have thought of. Supporting her in her practice, supporting her to gain confidence.*"

Supporting, unlike guiding, gives the notion of being there by the mentee's side, not ahead of the mentee. Supporting implies an identified weakness that is being strengthened by the supporter. In this answer, supporting for competitiveness alludes to the mentee currently lacking in competitiveness, and the support provided leading to a desired goal, for both the mentor and he mentee. The following answer clarified in part, the connotations of the word 'support'.

"*In NIS it's a little different than my definition of mentoring. It's to provide support to my co-teachers. But providing support may be ambiguous. It's to get them to use best practices, international best practices, to be more organised, and to effect pedagogy in the classrooms. I say classrooms because I have no power to influence pedagogy in the whole school. I know that everyone does their mentoring in a different way, but… I don't push. I offer suggestions. It is up to them to take it or to leave. General opinion of mentoring, it should be to fine tune skills, knowledge, so basically it is fine tuning.*"

The object of support got clarified as international best practices. These were what the student-centred drive of the NIS schools was aiming for, what the Kazakh education system was going through.

The aspect of guiding, getting them to… implies leading the way, holding the hand of the led, delicately manouvering, and building through demonstration a sense of security, trust and motivation in the led, the mentee. The classroom aspect limits the mentoring sphere of influence. In the former definition, "guiding them to improve their practices" can then be interpreted as practices in the classroom. The question becomes: Does mentoring teachers only end in the classroom? Find refs.

Category 3: Challenging and suggesting exploration and experimentation;

"Inviting into areas mentee is not familiar with" implies challenging, leading, building trust and confidence and trust. Thus, it touches on the mentor-mentee relationship. As Trubowitz (2004) states, the mentor-mentee relationship is one of paramount importance to the success of mentoring.

McGuire (2007) gave an encompassing summary of the type of mentor role that covers categories 1-3. MacGuire stated that the role of the mentor was to help the protégé develop habits and attitudes that enable attaining a higher level of success comparing with where no mentoring occurs.

Category 4: Sharing, collaboration, Improving, passing on information

"I think, oh, I think, beginner teachers for strategies that work for them, working together through planning a lesson."

While this response focuses on beginner teachers, mentoring has been widely applied to teachers of all seniority, as it has been proved to be beneficial to all teachers (Garvey, 2009).

"In mentoring I think sharing new ideas, or looking at the curriculum and see what is the change, or what the students should be doing in the classroom. Students need to change their thinking processes. I see a pattern of doing the same things year after year. I think there should be more art making, and more experimenting, and less of lecture. There is a lot of lecture and a lot of talking. A lot of information given in one lesson … I think for students to appreciate, they need to break it down."

In this response the dialogue of Soviet pedagogy and modern pedagogy is laid bare. Or what other authors (Simonsen et al., 2009) refer to as traditional pedagogy versus modern pedagogy. The move from lecture to student activity, student critical thinking, form student as passive receiver to active questioner and enquirer, from delivering large chunks of contented to breaking it down into chewable chunks, are all examples of the differences between traditional and modern pedagogy. While mentoring for new pedagogy, the NIS international teachers needed to keep the aim of the program in mind. Mentoring is supposed to break down complex concepts into simpler ones, and the concepts taught from the simple to the complex, which makes learning simpler for the teacher and the student.

"Ehhm …, it is working with, in a collaborative fashion with usually a younger person or someone with less experience than oneself and wants to improve certain aspects of their practice."

In this definition the respondent agrees with the idea of mentoring being for beginner teachers. This is what was discussed in Grimes and White (2015). In this the respondents agree with the traditional meaning of mentoring, with the mentor at a higher level than the mentee.

Category 5: Coaching, change and improvement

"For me mentoring is like coaching, coaching the teachers, so that they become…and check the teacher. Honestly that is what I do. And I will be helping also. Like how do you formulate this?"

Here the response shows the interrelated terms that are used together with mentoring (coaching, co-teaching, team-teaching, training, demonstrating, modelling).

"I think mentoring is … when … you look at what is going on in the classroom, you see what practices are happening, and think of how to improve it, how to make it better, whether that is the way the lessons are taught, whether that different … I mean there are so many different things that go on in … the art room. I think it should be a whole bunch of things." Giving examples of what a "bunch of things" includes, Savage et al. (2015) mentioned, "organizing content for students, creating environments for learning, teaching for student learning, and professional responsibilities" p.24.

Category 6: Giving information

"Well, in essence when we talk of a mentor we talk of two people one above the other. The one who is above has something to pass onto the one below, regardless of age. You are looking at the process where there is passing on of information, skill, from the knowledgeable to the other who seeks to benefit."

Tollefson-Hall (2015) considered a mentor to be "a wise elder who provides guidance to a younger person" (p.30). In agreement, Lai (2005) analysed the word mentorship from its original meaning in the Greek language as linking an older, wiser mentor imparting wisdom to a younger wisdom seeking youth. Clark (2011) supported this by giving the information that the Greek mythological Mentor was a friend of Odysseus; that Mentor was asked to be the guardian and teacher of Odysseus' son while Odysseus led the Trojan War. Due to the fact that Mentor established a near-paternal relationship with Odysseus' son, the word "mentor" was adopted in English as a term meaning a "father-like teacher" (p 52).

"Traditionally, mentoring is best defined as an expert teacher who takes on a newer teacher. It's not a training session. It's one-on-one training with each other. Could also be among peers. Peer mentoring to think things through together."

The response agrees with the traditional meaning of mentoring, as defined in Clark (2011). In its original form, mentoring was performed by one older man, more knowledgeable individual – the mentor), to a younger, less experienced individual – the mentee (Clark, 2011). Introducing peer mentoring in this definition is one of the deviations from traditional mentoring. Peer mentoring is hailed as best practice because of its rather informal way and a relaxed way where negotiation with the mentor occurs. The peer mentor and peer mentee share those aspects that one understands well, and has the comfort of knowing that the mentor and mentee are at the same level, thus takes away the feeling of inferiority that comes with a more knowledgeable mentor versus a less knowledgeable mentee (Delaney, 2012).

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Introducing peer mentoring in this definition is one of the deviations from traditional mentoring. Peer mentoring is hailed as best practice (Collier, 2017) because the mentors share those aspects that one understands well, and has the comfort of knowing that the mentor and mentee are at the same level, thus takes away the feeling of inferiority that comes with a more knowledgeable mentor versus a less knowledgeable mentee (Delaney, 2012).

"Oh, mentoring is just helping people to develop their skills, mainly through reflection, by modelling, by asking open questions, and letting them reflect, without being overtly aggressive."

Category 7: Trouble shooting

"… and trouble-shooting sometimes."

"Trouble shooting" is a definition coming from the day to day interactions between the mentors and the mentees. In many ways, the mentor is preparing, looking ahead, and putting structures in place like paving the way for the mentee. Through planning mostly, the mentor plays that role of showing where the pitfalls may be during the lessons, and preparing the mentee for it. While trouble shooting could also be provided for under guiding, this term specifically implies keeping a watch out for possible problems and providing a way out, a solution before they happen.

"Having new ideas, looking at the curriculum, products, and creative things" are unique to this research. The reason for these extended definitions or additions to the definition of mentoring comes from the intimate ways the NISK international teachers were working in a mentoring position to their mentees.

4.2. Summary of Definitions of Mentoring

Seven categories of mentoring were found to be: Leading, guiding, modelling advising, and exposition; Supporting, challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation; Sharing, collaboration, Improving, passing on information; Coaching, change and improving, passing on information; Challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation; Sharing, collaboration; and Trouble-shooting.

As the number of category suggests a wide range of roles that a mentor performs, it confirms what Clark (2011) said about a mentor, agreeing that there is not one clear cut description or definite of a mentor.

Mentoring is acknowledged widely as a method of providing or imparting skills to professionals. Savage et al. (2015) referred to teachers as "mentors" (p. 23), considering mentors to be those who "make the journey" with the mentee (p.22), implying an intimate professional relationship where the two do everything together.

The goal of mentorship is the transfers knowledge and skill from the mentor to the mentee. Over the years, mentoring has taken on various forms, depending on mentor-mentee structures. In today's use, though, a mentor is no longer necessarily older than the mentee, and the mentor-mentee relationship has change since the word was first coined. It is also no longer of a male dominated, as female mentors now abound. The traditional mentoring has also evolved into many types since then. Thus today, we have different types of mentorship which include peer mentoring, co-teaching, on-the job training, and inculturation (Tollefson-Hall, 2015). However, the core of the relationship is still the transmission – whether uni-directional or bi-directional – of knowledge and skills. The definitions of mentoring from the findings fit into, and add onto, the known existing definitions of mentoring. What is new in this findings are the following: … Place the unique definitions here and discuss.

4.3. What Mentoring Should Bring/Benefits of Mentoring

Benefits of mentoring were grouped into six categories:
1. Dialogue and new ideas.
2. Self-awareness and motivation.
3. Emotional benefits.
4. Professional improvement.
5. Mutual benefit; emotional betterment, modelling and emulation.
6. Sharing, experimentation, dynamism.

Category 1: Dialogue

"The purpose of mentoring is ... to create, to create a vast formal dialogue, which is not driven by assessment as by professional development growth and mutual understanding."

"The purpose of mentoring is ... to create, to create a vast formal dialogue, which is not driven by assessment as by professional development growth and mutual understanding." Another respondent agreed by saying *"Development improvement. Ultimately what we do is to translate into student improvement."*

The focus on dialogue here is in line with … In the same way, the description below focuses on ideas

"I think it should bring new ideas, I see things one way and I think they see tings another way. If there should be productive banter going on, in the art class, it is better to kind of experiment with the different practices that are going on. If we discuss anything it should be how to break these down."

Category 2: New ideas, and change

One mentor stated that mentoring brought:

"Having new ideas, looking at the curriculum, products, and creative things" are unique to this research. The reason for these extended definitions or additions to the definition of mentoring comes from the intimate ways the NISK international teachers were working in a mentoring position to their mentees.

"Mentoring in my opinion is that is should cause … it is a way of doing things so that there is a change towards, the teachers, the students, the … and perhaps the parents. Directly it should focus on the clientele we are focusing on, our mentees or our co-teachers should start out as the core circle."

"A way of doing things" broad though it might seem as a benefit of mentoring, is true of mentoring. It echoes the differences in practice, and in understanding the practice. While mentees see the ITs as not understanding their

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system, and their practices, the ITs would say the same of their mentees. As such, in that definition is a cry for both sides to understand each other's view and practice.

"Well, you can see somebody else's perspective. You can learn from your mentee, maybe she is more efficient, maybe if you are good at your job, you can help them to… uh … organise themselves and deal with issues they meet in classrooms." Empathy is in agreement with all the other aspects of mentoring that require close knowledge and understanding, and emotional support.

"New ideas flow between mentor and mentee, and when practice improves and student performance improves, so does "satisfaction to both."

In any mentoring relationship communication plays a crucial role, while other aspects like modelling, showing, illustrating, "standing in" for the mentee, all work to support the work. This verbal and non-verbal interaction transmits the ideas between the mentoring pair, resulting in a vibrant exchange of ideas.

According to a respondent, mentoring was:

"Causing a positive change for teachers, students, parents, administration, our mentees."

The response goes beyond just the mentee to embrace the community.

Category 3: Emotional benefits

"A more confident teacher, a happier teacher, excited students. Student and teacher growth. When they all grow they are all happier with the learning."

In this explanation the mentor focused on the emotional and professional benefits of mentoring.

Category 4: Improvement

"Depending on mentor and mentee. For example, if I am a mentor, I would like to bring in differentiation, bring about ways of effective teaching mathematics, modern methods of teaching, e.g., ICT, and I have been asked to develop my teachers' English skills."

"I think it should help the mentee at the job, to be more effective. The student, to offer them guidance in different facets of the job. I focus on structures, routines that should make it easier for them in the long run."

"The mentee should become a sharper instrument, more accurate instrument, they should be., or mentoring should raise them to be at the top of their game. For the mentor, when you say mentor-mentee, you are right. The dynamics are right. The mentor has to motivate, encourage and inspire, inculcate. It should be good for both of them." That both mentor and mentee should learn is the contemporary view of mentorship as presented in Van and Waghid (2008) as found out from a study in South Africa.

In support, another response was:

"…should be able to mould the person being mentored into a person similar to the mentor, e.g., in sport, I would want my mentees to adopt ways that would make them like me."

This line of reasoning goes together with emulation, driven by modelling, and displaying abilities. This gives the mentor a reason to take mentorship and responsibility for own learning, the way they want, and what they want. *That "Benefits depend on the pair"* alludes to the way they interact. Some authors put this on the mentee, that the more the mentee is willing to reach out and be open to new ideas (Collier, 2017) the better they learn and the easier the relationship.

Agreeing with the traditional meaning of mentoring, a respondent opined:

"Of course, the mentee is the one improving more than the mentor. But, so, it's a two-way process, but for me a one-way process. As mentor I am stagnant. But the benefit for me as the mentor I become aware to the culture, and the education system. I see the flaws, and the loopholes."

Based on the traditional meaning of mentoring as stated in Clark (2011) a response that confirmed that was:

"Ah well, so many things. Should make the mentee, should bring a flow from the mentor to the mentee, so that the mentee should move to the level that is expected."

But the bidirectional flow of professional benefits is the ore modern approach, which sees both parties benefiting from the relationship.

The concluding remarks for this could be stated in the words of one respondents who said:

Another respondent stated:

"Help mentee improve at their job" … to be more effective with students."

This improvement could be attained through one of the many ways, which is modelling.

A simple summarising statement was that:

"Model the mentee to be similar to mentor," again taking the traditional approach to mentoring as in Clark (2011). This entails careful demonstration, modelling, correcting, working together through the process. According to, the relationship that developed between mentor and mentee sometimes became that of father and son.

However, other respondents were convinced the benefits of mentoring accrue to both the mentee and the mentor:

Category 5: Bi-directionality of mentoring

Several respondents emphasised the bi-directionality of mentoring relationship as of crucial importance to the success of the relationship. Proponents of the bi-directionality shifts from the traditional view of only the mentee benefiting from the relationship, and insists that the mentor also benefits from the relationship.

Another response was:

"Both should learn. Even for the mentor, the mentor improves their practice, their mentoring and their reflection." Yet another added *"A deeper insight into teaching for both, but primarily focussing on the mentee. And a focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee."*

As encouraged by Chen (2018) mentors have a lot to learn from their mentees too. A closely similar response was:

"*Both should learn. Teaching practice should improve. Model the mentee to be similar to mentor, "Help mentee improve at their job, "be more effective with students."* Unlike the opinion held by the other respondents, here a bidirectional benefit of mentoring is introduced. So as for mentoring methods, the findings leave the clear gap between unidirectional and bidirectional benefits, depending on the pair in the mentoring relationship.

"*You can learn from your mentee,*" observed one respondent. This view of mentoring as having double-directional benefits was said by ... who emphasised that the mentor sharpens their own practice as they instruct their mentees. That the mentee is stagnant is from the professional development standpoint. When mentoring, the mentor feels they are the one who gives and gives. It is possible that this giving gets tiring at some point, and mentors yearn also to get something out of the mentoring relationship. Mentor fatigue may set in. This is what Chen (2018) meant when they said mentoring was bi-directional, and should bring benefits to both mentor and mentee. Even so, from the research, the response

"*It should be good for both of them*" from a previous response sums it for us.

"*Also mentor learns from mentee*" emphasize the bi-directional nature of mentoring.

"*Raises the level of the mentee as they develop, and improve student learning and performance. At the same time the mentor learns how to motivate and inspire and encourage, inculcate.*"

In this response, the mentor learns something different from learning subject content, but some human relations skills. According to Pennanen et al. (2020) the human skills aspect of a mentor is a very important aspect of the success of the mentoring relationship.

For an educational reform system in NIS that was promoting critical thinking as part of the package for student-centeredness, the following response was given:

"*You have to promote self-regulation, self-learning. I will give you an analogy. If you came to my home. Definitely you will leave with a full stomach. I will give you a choice. For something not so spicy, or something spicy. You choose and you eat what you want. The other way I could force feed you. You have no say in what you eat.*" Self-regulation again is promoted, as defined and driven by the mentee's internal desire to reach excellence.

Category 6: Sharing, experimentation, dynamism

Another category for the benefits of mentoring was the sharing, which was supported by experimentation giving rise to dynamism, be it in the individuals, in the teaching practice or in the mentoring relationship:

"*A focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the mentee*" helps teach the mentees to organize themselves, to be better able to deal with issues in class."

"*More experimenting in class ensues from the mentor/mentee relationship.*"

Experimentation works to bring something new to the classroom, and to give new motivation for the mentee and the students. Experiment with the different practices is helping our teachers to be able to 'break down' parts of the lesson and the curriculum.

"*Learn to see from another perspective*" takes the discerning mentor/mentee. This aspect of empathy arises from close sharing of ideas, and events and even lives. It involves good communication. And a genuine desire for each other's good. In the case of NIS mentors, where from the responses given, we have seen a wide range of possibilities, and pairs that are diverse, it makes for the development of good personal relations.

"*A deeper insight into the practice for the mentee.*"

When mentors get a deeper insight into the practice for their mentees, a vibrant environment is created. First, the mentee would have opened the doors and allowed the mentor in. Or the mentor would have had the time and ability to help the mentee open the doors. In this case, the human aspects of the mentor are critical to the opening of the mentee doors.

"*Less lecture method, less (teacher) talk allows students to be more engaged.*"

The lecture method

The categories were found to be merging into each other, so that they could not be clear cut. For example, "*More experimenting in class ensues from the mentor/mentee relationship*" could be interpreted to belong to the experimenting category, or to the improvement category.

4.4. Summarising what Mentoring Should Bring

The five benefits of mentoring found were classified under seven categories: Dialogue, new ideas and structures, self-awareness and motivation, emotional, trouble-shooting, and professional improvement, mutual benefit. These categories fit with the benefits of mentoring to education and its contributions to achieving positive results as expounded by Abiddin and Hassan (2012); Lai (2005); Garvey (2009); Van and Waghid (2008); Simonsen et al. (2009) and Trubowitz (2004). In addition, Trubowitz (2004) alluded to the fact that teachers who receive intense mentoring are less likely to leave the teaching profession. Delaney (2012) agreed that mentoring was a valuable method to ensure teachers stay in their jobs longer. In schools mentoring has been used since the 1980 (Lai, 2005) to impart skills and knowledge to teachers and students (Simonsen et al., 2009; Van & Waghid, 2008).

4.5. Negative Aspects of Mentoring:

Having listed all the benefits of mentoring, it was inviting to find if there were perceived negative aspects of mentoring.

"*The teachers in this school have taught by themselves for a long time. We have taught by ourselves for a long time. When we come together, to merge our experiences, it is difficult to agree on things all the time. There has to be a lot of give and take. There is a lot of negotiation that goes on.*"

On the one hand, this could be the dynamics that makes mentoring exciting. The merging of experiences and knowledge, the seeking solutions of how to deal with the difficulties, the negotiation and disagreements should be in themselves a process leading to understanding one another. Some mentors would put this as a positive rather than a negative.

The question that followed this was whether age at work increased resistance. Searching for reasons from published works, Chari, Vhuramayi, Martin, and Nyasha (2013) found that seniority brought about a sense of security, and therefore reduced the uptake or receptivity to mentoring.

"We are not colleagues at the same level. The amount of responsibilities on us and on the teachers are enormous. They are in charge of marking, teaching, parents, completing the syllabus. So, there is always that. We want them to be modern teachers, but there is always that which exists."

An acknowledgment of differences in work weight and responsibilities between the mentor and the mentee brings in the dimension of the extent of the mentor's area of influence. As one respondent stated, it is up to the mentee to make the most of the relationship. While it was clear in this research that mentors felt limited by their mentees, those with keen mentees expressed more satisfaction with their work, and better results. In the following response, this notion was vocalised:

"Being overly eager to learn, being aware of own limitations and wanting to improve. You can't teach that. The mentee must be willing to…" That mentee role in mentoring is of utmost importance in the mentoring relationship as considered by StetsonEdu (2015). They sated that mentees, especially who were not new teachers, needed to make way for the mentorship to work. In the case of NISK, the mentorship is put into place by the institutions, and is embedded in the system, which is called collaborative teaching, or team teaching, or coaching, echoing the StetsonEdu, who said the mentee had to take full advantage of the mentoring relationship.

4.6. Aspects of Consideration in Mentoring:

Having listed the benefits of mentoring, it was imperative to find if there were perceived negative aspects of mentoring.

Team teaching and mentoring:

"The teachers in this school have taught by themselves for a long time. We have taught by ourselves for a long time. When we come together, to merge our experiences, it is difficult to agree on things all the time. There has to be a lot of give and take. There is a lot of negotiation that goes on."

When teachers have been in the profession for a long time and have learnt of the tricks that make their students pass, they do not see the reason to continue changing, as they have tried and tested methods (ref). When mentors have elder people for mentees, the wise thing is to be careful, and to find where the mentor could add an edge to what is already in the mentee. This response puts the relationship responsibility on the shoulders of the mentee. It touches the attitude of learning.

The question that followed this was whether seniority at work increased posed more problems for the mentor. Searching for reasons from published works, … Chari et al. (2013) found that … age at a job reduced a willingness to learn new things.

"We are not colleagues at the same level. The amount of responsibilities on us and on the teachers are enormous. They are in charge of: marking, teaching, parents, completing the syllabus. So, there is always that. We want them to be modern teachers, but there is always that which exists."

Considerations of the differences of the realities helps the mentor be more patient, more understanding of their mentee. Alleviating their burden by offering to help sometimes helps create a bond and a friendship, which will make the mentoring relationship stronger.

5. Discussion

Mentoring, as illustrated by the Greek use of the word in Clark (2011) is a way where a skilled person imparted skills to a less skilled one, in order to raise their skill level to that of the mentor. As such, this viewpoint puts the mentor and the mentee at different levels, which other authors discredit as causing the mentor to feel inferior, therefore unable to express themselves fully (Cranton & Wright, 2008). The mentor who is on a lower level than the mentee might therefore feel disempowered. This traditional mentoring model is what I called uni-directional mentoring. It is also the overall model taken by the NIS schools.

In the case of NIS schools in Kazakhstan, teacher mentoring was the best option for a large scale educational reformation. However, mentoring is not a stand-alone act in the reform arena. It comes with policy change, with political will, with economic demands, and with a campaign for widespread acceptance. This was demonstrated and pushed for by the then president of the republic, Nazarbayev Nur-Sultan.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with international teachers who were in mentoring positions in NISK. Definitions of mentoring varied, confirming what Clark (2011) found, that a mentor is a teacher, a trainer, a coach, and even a director (guide).

The meanings of mentoring were categorized, and the seven resulting categories were found to have no clear-cut meanings between themselves. Many benefits of mentoring were also found, and placed into six categories.

Bi-directional mentoring was encouraged by the respondents in this research, where both mentee and mentor learn and benefit, although there was a difference in what each gained. The mentee gained elevated classroom skills, while the mentor gained people and cultural skills in the NIS mentoring relationships.

Mentoring was also found to be performed under different names but with similar meanings. In NIS, the words coaching and team-teaching were commonly used, rather interchangeably. From this research, it was confirmed that it was difficult to limit mentoring definitions and meanings, which, by virtue of their dependence on the mentoring pair, increased diversity.

Aspects of mentoring that were found to need consideration included over-eager mentees, considering the differences between mentor and mentee, therefore being soft on the pace of development that mentors expect to see, and to care for the self as mentors, without always feeling responsible for the slow pace of the mentee, but to allow the mentee the time to reflect and choose and decide.

6. Conclusions

Mentoring is a cost-effective and worthwhile venture to upgrade the skills of teachers, whether they are new in the field or not. In Kazakhstan's NIS schools, international teachers mentor local teachers in modern pedagogy. In this article the author investigated mentors' experiences with mentoring, using face to face semi-structured interviews. Seven categories for definition of mentoring were found, indicating the difficulties of coming up with any strict definition. These were: 1. Leading, guiding, modelling advising, and exposition; 2. Supporting, challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation; 3. Sharing, collaboration, Improving, passing on information; 4. Coaching, change and improving, passing on information; 5. Challenging and suggesting, exploration and experimentation;6. Sharing, collaboration; and 7. Trouble-shooting.

Six categories of benefits of mentoring were found: 1. Dialogue and new ideas; 2. Self-awareness and motivation; 3. Emotional benefits; 4. Professional improvement; 5. Mutual benefit; emotional betterment, modelling and emulation; and 6. Sharing, experimentation, dynamism. Each category was discussed in depth.

Mentoring is a suitable skills upgrading tool for teachers and educational reform method for Kazakhstan's NIS schools' context, giving a diversity of meanings and benefits.

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