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**Novices Teachers Mentors –
What do they contribute to the
Intern's professional development
in the Bedouin and in the Jewish
sectors?**

Orly Michael

Head of the new teachers unit,

School of Education

Bar Ilan University

Ramat Gan, Israel

Athens Institute for Education and Research
8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10671 Athens, Greece
Tel: + 30 210 3634210 Fax: + 30 210 3634209
Email: info@atiner.gr URL: www.atiner.gr
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**Novices Teachers Mentors –
What do they contribute to the Intern's professional
development in the Bedouin and in the Jewish sectors?**

**Orly Michael
Head of the new teachers unit,
School of Education
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Ramat Gan, Israel**

Abstract

This study focuses on the way the mentor is perceived and contributes to Israeli novice teachers ("interns"), during the internship period (their first year of work as a teacher).

The research population included 109 teaching interns from the Bedouin and Jewish sectors at a teacher training college. The study tools were open questionnaires and interviews with the interns.

In all the five examined categories, the mentor's contribution was found to be significant to the intern's success, and the level of satisfaction from the mentoring was found to be high. However, there were differences between the two sectors, meaning that the mentor-intern relationship is influenced by the cultural context and that there are differences in the perception of the mentoring and its implementation.

It is recommended that topics such as assertiveness, coordinating of expectations, feedback, problem-solving, emotional support and inter-personal communication should be taught in the intern induction workshops as well as in the mentors training course.

Finally, it is recommended that feedback and lesson observation during the induction program should be made compulsory in both sectors.

The findings might reduce novice teacher dropout rates and promote their professional development.

The findings should be implemented in three areas: the teacher training system, novice teacher's induction programs and mentor training courses.

Keywords: Mentor, novice teacher, beginning teachers, induction, multicultural, professional development

Corresponding Author:

Introduction

The first teaching year is crucial in the teacher's professional development process. In this year they take upon themselves, autonomously and independently, all their areas of professional responsibility: adjusting to their role as a teacher, proving mastery of relevant knowledge and skills, and meeting the expectations of the school hierarchy with all its complexity (Vonk, 1993; Winstead-Fry, 2007). The teacher's first year is also of great importance in determining whether he will continue this career, therefore, receives much attention in educational research (Kuzmic, 1992). Teachers' first-year coping and difficulties are one of the factors that induce teacher quitting the profession. These factors have raised the need for developing various induction programs for beginning teachers. Awareness towards the difficulties of interns and affording support might reduce the beginning teacher dropout rates (Huling-Austin, 1990).

Support programs for beginning teachers -internship programs

There are reports from all around the world of a variety of support programs. The various programs emphasize different aspects of entering the role, but display some common characteristics (Reichenberg et al., 2000): 1. Assisting beginning teachers to "translate" the knowledge and skills acquired at their teacher training to the environment in which they teach, to attain maximal efficiency; 2. Assisting beginning teachers in learning from their experiences to enhance their professional development; 3. Assisting beginning teachers to obtain and adjust new skills to better function in their educational environment. The findings in Winstead-Fry's research (2007) indicate that in some cases new teachers do receive support during their induction, but that induction is not necessarily characterized by critical feedback, and is characterized by a general lack of attention on part of the school principals.

The internship program in Israel initiated by the Ministry of Education (MoE). Participation in the program is compulsory for every beginning teacher (MoE, 1999). The internship objectives, as defined by the MoE, are to assist beginning teachers and raise their professional level. As part of this program, the intern has to work in a school as an independent teacher for eight weekly hours or above. Throughout the internship year, the intern is accompanied by both the mentoring teacher (at school) and the internship workshop instructor (in the teacher training institute). The internship year is the final stage of the teacher training and at its end the intern receives a license which permits him to teach in Israel.

All programs have two characteristics: internship workshops, which provide beginning teachers with group work support and guidance, and the mentoring element, which is characterized by personal support given to the teacher by a mentor – a more experienced colleague.

We now elaborate on the characteristics of the support programs: the internship workshops and the mentoring teacher.

The internship workshop

The workshop is intended to provide beginning teachers with professional support and personal development. The workshops emphasises a reflective process, in which the interns are given an opportunity to raise problems and questions from their field work and receive emotional, cognitive, social and empathic support from other participants.

Many studies point out beginning teachers' urgent need of mentoring. The partial success of most models presented by the studies suggests the importance of support and the various ways to achieving it. Schatz et al, (2006) point out that the contribution of mentoring was in raising the beginning teachers' level of confidence and helping them perceive their difficulties in correct proportions. Their research shows that after solving discipline problems, it is important to address the didactic aspects of material coverage and teaching in accordance to the students' level. The integrated model presented by MoE (1999) addressed both emotional and cognitive areas, and helped interns acquire professional skills.

A study conducted in the United States has shown that beginning teachers face similar problems and difficulties during their first year of work (Winstead-Fry, 2007). This reinforces the rationale of establishing a permanent support system as part of a workshop for beginners.

Mentoring is done differently in different institutes. In the teacher training college discussed in this article, the internship workshops are heterogeneous, which contributes to the diversity of the discussions, thinking methods and the suggested solutions. The heterogeneity of the groups serves to empower the interns. The workshop instructors and the interns incorporate a variety of pedagogical outlooks and theories into the group discussion.

The mentoring teacher

Much research has been devoted to the mentor's influence on the socialization process of beginning teachers (Chubbuck et al., 2001; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). The mentor is an experienced teacher who guides the intern, preferably at the same school or at least on the same subject or age group taught by the intern. His role is to assist the intern in the induction process and support him in order to facilitate his integration into the teaching staff and his acquaintance with the school regulations and hierarchy. The mentor should support the intern in didactics and professional knowledge, as well as in emotional and social aspects. For the mentoring process to be effective, an on-going and open dialogue must be developed (Brooks, 2000; Coppenhaver et al., 2000). The mentor's ability to support and advise the new teacher, as well as his input for assessment, is significant. These two roles require a wide range of professional and personal skills, in order to sustain good mentoring relationship with the beginning teacher (Ripon & Martin, 2006). Gilbert study (2005) found that an effective and healthy dialogical relationship between the mentor and the intern is a necessary condition for high-quality mentoring.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) recommend educative mentoring, which has two dimensions: emotional support which enables a relationship and an environment to facilitate the beginning teacher's development, and professional support based on understanding teachers and the ways they work. The needs of beginning teachers were identified as practical knowledge, logistical knowledge, exchanging pragmatic knowledge with experienced teachers, reflective discussions with colleagues and emotional support independent of any pressure (Chubbuck et al, 2001). All these are possible directions in contemporary thinking about the roles of mentoring in a wider context.

In Israel, according to MeO requirements, the mentor's formal credentials should be: at least four years' teaching experience, teaching experience in the age group taught by the intern, a teaching certificate and license, and preferably an academic degree and experience at guiding students. It was found that an experienced mentoring teacher who is involved in the school activity and educational work is the most effective in supporting interns, as he can serve as a professional model (Debolt, 1992).

The objectives of the research are:

- a. Examining the mentor's contribution to the intern in the Bedouin and in the Jewish sectors.
- b. Checking whether there is a multicultural aspect to the perception of the mentor's role, namely, whether the perception of the mentor's role in the internship program varies across cultures.

We will address in detail four categories which pertain to the mentor's role: the organizational framework of mentoring, the meeting climate, the professional contribution to intern's sense of development, the intern's overall satisfaction with the mentoring teacher.

Method

Participants:

The research population is a sample of the student population in a school of education at a college in Israel. The college offers a teacher training track for the Jewish sector and one for the Bedouin sector. Participation in the induction workshops at the college is a direct sequel to the training and is held separately for each sector. As a result, the research population is composed of interns from both the Jewish and the Bedouin sector. All interns did their specialization during the same academic year.

A total of 109 interns participated in the study – a sample which constitutes half of the intern population studying in the college that year 73 interns were from the Jewish sector and 36 were from the Bedouin sector. This ratio represents the ratio of these sectors in the school of education in the college. All subjects were active participants in all parts of the induction program – a workshop and personal mentoring.

Table 1. *The distribution according to tracks in the Jewish and in the Bedouin sector*

Track	Jewish sector		Bedouin sector	
	Number of students	Percentage of students	Number of students	Percentage of students
Kindergarten	21	29	5	14
Elementary education	29	40	28	77
Secondary education	18	25	2	6
Special education	4	5	1	3
Unspecified	1	1	-	-
Total	73	100	36	100

The Research Tools

The research tools were open questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was designed to examine the elements which characterize the intern at work, and to provide feedback on the quality of the relationship between the intern and the mentor as well as on the mentor's contribution to the intern. Following are examples of questions: what would the intern want to receive from the mentor; what was the atmosphere during meetings; was the mentor attentive to the intern's difficulties; did the mentor contribute to the intern, and if so, how. The interns answered the questionnaires anonymously.

The questionnaire was qualitatively analysed, categories were set up and it was validated by two of the induction workshop instructors. Content analysis and quantification were used. For each question, statements belonging to each category were counted and categories for answers were set up. The findings were coded quantitatively and then analysed with statistical software for frequency and percentage. The tables in the findings section present the distribution of answers, the averages and the standard deviations for each question.

Interviews with interns were held randomly in order to better establish the interpretation of the quantitative data from the questionnaires. 12 interns were chosen at random: six from each sector. Each interview took one hour. The interviews were coded and qualitatively analysed according to the Interpretive Approach. The text of each interview was analysed and classified into categories, and validated by two induction workshop instructors.

Findings

The mentor's role and his contribution to the interns were examined according to the four categories specified above. This section will present the quantitative and qualitative findings in each area.

1. Organizational framework of the mentoring – the following parameters were addressed: location of meetings and their duration. We have found that in both sectors, in all tracks, there were regular meetings in the school or in the kindergarten. Most meetings were scheduled and a small part

took place occasionally during recesses. In the Bedouin sector the meetings with the mentor were held only in school or in kindergarten, while in the Jewish sector there were also reports of meetings at the mentor's home (13%), at the intern's home (2%) or on the phone (2%). Regarding the duration of the meeting we have found that most interns reported meetings of up to an hour – 54% in the Jewish sector and 78% in the Bedouin sector. Meetings of less than half an hour were reported among 16% of the Bedouin sector and 12% of the Jewish sector. About one third of the interns in the Jewish sector reported longer meetings of an hour and a half or more, No such meetings were reported in the Bedouin sector.

2. The meeting climate

In the "meeting climate" category we address parameters such as the atmosphere in the meeting, the mentor's attentiveness to the intern's mood, who raises topics for discussion in the meeting, and whether problems arise in the relationship between the mentor and the intern. We have found that almost all interns reported a good or very good atmosphere. 73% of the Jewish sector and 32% of the Bedouin sector reported that there was a very good atmosphere. In comparison, most of the interns from the Bedouin sector (62%) and one fourth of the interns from the Jewish sector reported that there was a good atmosphere. In both sectors, only a minority of the interns reported an unpleasant or borderline atmosphere. There were no reports of a bad atmosphere.

The positive reactions to the good atmosphere in the meetings can be seen in the following descriptions: 'The mentor gives a sense of calmness and ease, we share all our dilemmas, successes and more...; a feeling of two colleagues discussing their expectations and aspirations'. Almost all interns testified that their mentor was attentive to their mood; a minority of 6% of the Jewish sector and 3% of the Bedouin sector reported that the mentor was not aware of their mood. Testimony to the mentor's awareness of the intern's mood can be seen in the following quote: 'she always senses me, inquires throughout the day and then calls in the evening, saying she saw that something was wrong'; another intern commented: 'L. was aware of my moods and encouraged me when I encountered difficulties...'.

With regard to the question of who raises topics for discussion during meetings, we have found that in both sectors, over half of the subjects replied that sometimes the mentor raised the topics and sometimes the intern.

Regarding the question whether problems arose between the mentor and the intern, in both sectors, 70% of the subjects replied that no problems arose, and about one third of the interns reported that problems did arise. The interviews supported the finding that most interns did not encounter any problems with the mentor: However, about a third of the interns did report problems. One intern said: 'there were problems and arguments between us, but I would always yield, since I would tell myself, meanwhile I'm learning from the mentor...'; or 'there was misunderstanding at the beginning of the year but later on I managed to overcome by listening to what the mentor had to say'. In some cases the interns mentioned that they decided in advance to not be in any conflict with

the mentor: 'she has experience and I wanted to learn and not get into any trouble'. During interviews, interns from both sectors pointed out that they avoided confrontations with mentors, in order to complete their induction year successfully.

Based on the responses in the Jewish sector, it appears that problems were resolved after discussions with mentor. Quote: 'After listening to the problems I experienced, the mentor provided possible solutions and we tested their efficacy together'. However, in the Bedouin sector, most problems were left unresolved by the end of internship. Interns indicated that they did not feel comfortable discussing problem areas with their mentors. 'She made me feel she was superior.' These responses strengthen the notion that there were problems between the mentor and intern in the Bedouin sector.

3. The mentor contribution to the professional development of the intern

Table 2 indicates that 44% of interns in the Jewish sector and about 80% of interns from the Bedouin sector noted they had gained professionally from the mentoring process.

Table 2. *Criteria of Contribution in the Mentoring Meetings Frequencies (N=109)*

Criteria of contribution	Jewish sector		Bedouin sector	
	N	% of respondents	N	% of respondents
1. No response	12	16	-	-
2. Professional development	32	44	29	80
3. Emotional development	6	9	1	3
4. Integration	7	10	6	17
5. Personal development	5	6	-	-
6. Other	4	5	-	-
7. All	7	10	-	-
Total	73	100	36	100

An analysis of the interviews from both sectors indicates that the professional contribution made by mentors focussed on dealing with discipline problems and violence among students. An intern from the Bedouin sector stated, 'The meetings contributed to the accumulation of knowledge and dealing with discipline issues in a problem-solving manner...', 'we discussed curriculum for every school trimester and for all cognitive levels.' 'The mentor advised me about the lesson planning and how to deliver the lesson... she helped me inject life into uninspiring material.'

the majority (79%) of interns in the Jewish sector and (74%) from the Bedouin sector reported that they had developed their abilities to be more reflective and self - evaluative. 14% of interns from the Jewish sector and 20% of interns from the Bedouin sector reported no change in their ability to be self-critical. Similar findings were found in the interviews. An intern from the Jewish sector stated, 'During the meetings, the mentor often gave me the

opportunity to gain greater insight and self-awareness.' Another stated, 'After every meeting I analysed the issues raised and I deliberated on how I could improve, be more efficient in my teaching.' Another intern expanded, 'Many times my mentor noticed things that I had not even thought about and therefore, I always felt she gave me an additional perspective on my teaching which led to greater self-reflection.' It is interesting to note that during interviews conducted in the Bedouin sector, no novice teacher indicated that mentors offered emotional support; however, novice teachers from the Jewish sector brought up this aspect.

Table 3 shows that, mentors, in both sectors, are aware of the various difficulties which interns face.

Table 3. *The areas in which the mentor is aware of the difficulties of the intern teacher Frequencies (N=109)*

areas in which the mentor is aware of the difficulties of the intern teacher	Jewish sector		Bedouin sector	
	N	%	N	%
1. Physical Difficulty	4	5	2	8
2. Social Difficulty	7	10	2	4
3. Didactic / Pedagogic Difficulty	17	22	23	65
4. Emotional Difficulty	23	30	2	4
5. Work environment Difficulties	-	-	2	4
6. General Difficulties	22	32	5	15
TOTAL	73	100	36	100

It is interesting to note that during interviews conducted in the Bedouin sector, no novice teacher indicated that mentors offered emotional support; however, novice teachers from the Jewish sector brought up this aspect. Quote: 'The mentor asked what I did in the lesson and why I did it. She then listened and advised. '; 'We shared ideas. '; 'N helped a lot, I overcame my fears. '; 'My mentor helped me at all times, even in the middle of the night... thanks to her I remained at school. '

4. Overall satisfaction of the mentor

Intern teachers overall satisfaction with mentors was measured in the way the intern teacher recommended their mentors to new intern friends. It was found that the vast majority will recommend or highly recommend their mentor.

The most outstanding difference between the two sectors was that 14% of the interns in the Bedouin sector did not recommend their mentors at all. Examples of ways in which intern teachers praised their mentors: 'She is like a vessel filled with knowledge from which intern teachers can imbibe, and 'She

is an asset to intern teachers'; 'She is a teacher for life' (Jewish sector); 'She knows how to explain things' (Bedouin sector).

Discussion and Conclusions

This study analysed four categories of responses of interns in the Jewish and Bedouin sectors. The differences are discussed below:

Regarding the **organisational framework** of the mentoring, intern teachers teaching in kindergarten or school, in both sectors, reported regular on-site weekly meetings with their mentors. The most notable difference was the location and duration of the meetings. In the Jewish sector, some of the meetings took place in the mentor's home whereas in the Bedouin sector, they took place only in the working environment and as such, were more formal. An explanation for this finding can be attributed to the fact that in the Bedouin sector the distance between school and home was great and access was difficult. (Knesset Research Centre, 2006). As to the duration of meetings, a third of the intern teachers in the Jewish sector participated in meetings that lasted for an hour or above, in comparison with meetings lasting between half to an hour in the Bedouin sector. This is consistent with research findings in which the time allocation for mentoring meetings is not always adhered to. (Ripon and Martin, 2006) The duration of the meeting is of prime importance. Shortening the meeting affects adversely the atmosphere and the quality of training.

In the category of the **climate of the meetings**, the majority of interns in the Jewish sector and only a third in the Bedouin sector reported a very good atmosphere during the meetings. The majority of novice teachers in the Bedouin sector and a quarter of this in the Jewish sector reported a good atmosphere. It appears as though the atmosphere of meetings in the Jewish sector is better than in the Bedouin sector. This may be the result of the systematic approach that is acceptable in the Bedouin sector and a result of their mentors' appointment based on ascribed status, family ties, rather than a knowledge base and professional expertise. Since the Bedouin society is grounded on a hierarchical basis, and sometimes it parallel to family ties, it appears that the principal views the mentor as part of the hierarchy, kind of supervisor and part of the pattern of supervising network. This fact might adversely affect the mentoring process. In the Jewish sector, the principal chooses the mentors based on their competence rather than their status in the community.

The findings show that a positive atmosphere in meetings can promote communication between the mentor and the novice teacher. Furthermore, the literature highlights the importance of atmosphere in meetings and based on this study, we recommend that meetings take place in an open and empathetic atmosphere that allows mutual sharing of feelings. (Margolin, 2002).

There is an apparent contradiction between the findings which indicate a great satisfaction with the atmosphere during meetings, the management of those

meetings and the finding that a third of the novice teachers in both sectors reported experiencing problems with their mentors. A possible explanation for this contradiction emerged from the interviews: novice teachers from both sectors who are in the process of completing their internship, wish to avoid confrontation with their mentors. Although the problems that need to be discussed may be relevant, this study raises the possibility that the atmosphere is pleasant because problems are not being discussed. Since the process of learning and teaching is enhanced through discussion and debate, avoidance of problem areas may give rise to an artificial atmosphere and thus the opportunity for learning and development is missed.

As to meeting management, we found a balance regarding the number of issues raised for discussion by both parties. The findings indicate that the mentors allow the intern to raise questions when necessary. Two thirds of the interns indicated that no problems arose. Based on the responses in the Jewish sector, it appears that problems were resolved after discussions with mentor. However, in the Bedouin sector, most problems were left unresolved by the end of internship. In most mentoring models there is a significant impact of the method in which professional mentor perform the transmission of knowledge from mentor to intern teacher and, as such, the unequal relationship between the two. (Tickle, 2000) According to this argument, it is natural to disregard the competencies and knowledge of the intern teachers regardless their quality. This has, encouraged novice teachers to align their teaching and thinking to existing principles and practices and avoid new approaches, thus stultifying development of the teaching profession.

The reference above reinforces the findings of the current study. A possible explanation for the difference between the sectors may stem from cultural differences. Novice teachers in the Bedouin sector are bound by the limitations of cultural tribalism and manage their relationship with their mentors in a traditional and authoritative manner. They experience the inequality of the model. Mentor-novice relationships are predicated on a hierarchical basis and therefore the Bedouin novice teachers find it hard to be assertive or conduct open discussions with their mentors. In the Jewish sector, however, it is easier to manage open and interactive communication.

Further research is suggested. The findings reinforce that both interns and mentors; require specialised vocational training to solve problems and conflicts, to communicate interactively, thereby acquiring the necessary emotional support. As a result, they will learn to discuss contestable issues and manage conflicts in a more assertive manner. This is advisable in both sectors and especially in the Bedouin sector.

As to the **professional contribution** of meetings to the intern's sense of professional growth process, two thirds of the intern teachers in the Jewish sector and about half the intern teachers in the Bedouin sector said that they learned and developed during their meetings with their mentors. Bedouin novice teachers felt that their development was mostly in their field of specialization. Most Bedouin interns indicated that they experienced difficulties in the field of didactical pedagogics while only a half of the intern

teachers in the Jewish sector noted this cognitive support. However, they mentioned other aspects of the mentoring process such as the emotional aspect, school integration and the development of their character. This evidence is supported by current literature. (Arends and Rigagio-Digilio, 2000).

Findings that mentors in the Bedouin sector focus on professional development, while mentors in the Jewish sector focus on professional, emotional and social development can be accounted for by the following explanation; firstly, the pre-service teacher education programmes in the Jewish sector provide more professional support and as such, provide novice teachers with the tools to cope with problem areas in the professional aspect. Second explanation can be based on the cultural differences. It may be felt by mentors in the Bedouin sector that novice teachers receive sufficient social and emotional support from the community and therefore only require professional and cognitive support from the mentor. This explanation is supported by Michael et al., (2004).

The mentor's awareness of the novice teacher's difficulties and the support given to them can prevent the rate of drop-outs of beginner teachers. (Huling-Austin, 1990) Many studies have been conducted about the difficulties novice teachers face (Amir and Tamir, 1992; Reichenberg et al., 2000).

Majority of Bedouin interns noted that the mentor focused mainly on solving professional, pedagogical, and didactic difficulties, including discipline problems and violence. Only few noted their mentor's awareness of other difficulties, and not one intern mentioned that the mentor was aware of emotional difficulties. Among Jewish interns, answers were more widely distributed and the interns reported that the mentor related to emotional and social difficulties as well. It seems that the mentor in the Jewish sector provides a broader response to the interns' need.

The difference could be attributed to cultural differences and to a different role perception. In the Bedouin sector, mentors perceive their role as providing professional answers. Despite cultural differences, our recommendation is to guide mentors and interns in both sectors and encourage them to initialize talks that touch upon social and emotional difficulties. It is also suggested that mentors and interns be exposed to using emotional-support skills.

The intern's general, **overall satisfaction** with the mentor in the Jewish sector is greater than in the Bedouin sector and it can be used as an indicator for matching the right mentor with a novice teacher.

The findings of the research should be implemented in three areas: the teacher training programmes, novice teacher's induction programmes and mentor training courses.

Topics such as assertiveness, growth, professional development, coordination of expectations, feedback, problem-solving, emotional support and interpersonal communication should be taught in the intern induction workshops as well as in the mentors training course. The findings might reduce novice teacher dropout rates and promote their professional development.

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