7th International Conference on Intercultural Education "Education, Health and ICT for a Transcultural World", EDUHEM 2016, 15-17 June 2016, Almeria, Spain

Preparing to Become a Teacher Mentor: A Project of Professional Development of Preschool and Primary School Teachers in Czech Republic

Hana Navrátilová*

Faculty of Humanities, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Mostní 5139, 76005 Zlín, Czech Republic

Abstract

The paper presents the model of training for preschool and primary school teachers with the aim of preparing them to become the mentors for their colleagues at school – novice teachers in Zlín region in Czech Republic. The project includes sixteen differentiated instructional modules regarding the actual needs of teachers´ professional development. The project is implemented by the Faculty of Humanities at Tomas Bata University in Zlín in Czech Republic since 2014 so this paper presents already the experiences with creating a platform for teachers´ training as well with results from selected modules. The author concentrates on the instructional module focused on the case of creating a school team for good working and healthy school climate and the paper also presents the partial outcomes of the project evaluation.

1. Introduction

This paper presents the model of training for preschool and primary teachers based on importance of continuous improving of quality in teacher´s life-long learning system. The project functions in concordance with the Strategic Plan of Education and Development of the School System in the Czech Republic which supports improvement of the quality of education, new methods of school evaluation and also innovations in the educational process. We present

* Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* hnavratilova@fhs.utb.cz

sixteen instructional modules focused on currently needed themes as perceived by the teachers in Zlín region in Czech Republic. Our aim is also to present more detailed content of the module based on supporting the competences which are necessary to become a team member in school environment with the impact on better school climate and perceived social health in school relationships. Studies show that social relationships have cumulative impact on heath over time and they can be extremely stressful (Umberson & Montez, 2010). We can adapt these findings on school environment, especially for novice teachers trying to become accepted member of the teaching staff. The teaching profession is associated with a high level of emotional burnout which impacts teachers´ health immediately (Hong, 2010).

1.1. Current stage of the project

The project has already a coherent form of cooperation with school institutions in Zlín region after three years of existence. Initial distrust of schools in establishing the cooperation with a university had been eliminated after first positive references and some participants satisfied with previous modules enroll on more modules actually. In 2015, instructional materials were developed for all modules and professional education was launched. (Wiegerová et al., 2015) In 2016, we continue to realize the instructional modules including the module focused on support of teamwork among teachers in teaching staff. We deal with the content and evaluation of this module in detail in chapter 3 of the paper.

2. Instructional modules

The support for teachers is provided in the form of instructional modules. The module is a self-contained course for a particular target group of teachers. Each module is for 10-20 teachers who can participate in the learning process for free, as long as the module is part of the project. Each module has 90 hours of contact instruction and 40 hours of individual teacher reflective tasks.

1. Support during the adaptation of the novice teachers in the school environment: This module offers assistance to novice teachers during their adaptation process in the school environment. It instructs novice teachers about cooperation strategies between other teachers in the teaching staff, cooperation with parents, and cooperation with teacher mentors. Target group: novice teachers at preschools and primary schools.

2. Support of teamwork among teachers in the teaching staff: This instructional module offers knowledge on team leadership, cooperation and self-reflection regarding one's attitude towards working in a team. Major focus will be on the activating teaching methods and self-reflective techniques. Target group: teacher mentors.

3. Support of the project methods and cooperative teaching at preschools, primary schools and secondary schools in the Zlín region: This instructional module introduces teachers to innovative instructional methods and forms. It focuses on project methods and cooperative teaching. It provides examples of the main features and principles of project and cooperative teaching and their application. It also suggests appropriate forms of assessment and self-assessment of children and pupils. Practical output of the module is a teacher's lesson plan that uses the project method. Target group: primary school teachers.

4. Specific instructional modes in one-room schools: This instructional module introduces participants to the organization of the teaching process in one-room schools. It shows examples of traditional instructional methods, which include both teacher's presentation of the subject matter and independent pupils' learning. However, it also includes less traditional instructional modes, such as streaming and individualization, which - in accordance with principles of inclusive pedagogy - does not stream pupils by age or by any other characteristics. Target group: teachers at primary one-room schools.

5. Using pupils' portfolios: The aim of this module is to acquaint participants with pupils' portfolios and to instruct them how to use it in presentation of qualitative outcomes of the learning process. This is in accordance with the holistic teacher professionalization model. Participants will also be motivated to work with pupils' portfolios and also to do research with it. Target group: primary and secondary school teachers in the Zlín region, and teachers at one-room schools.

6. Reflective techniques in teacher's practice. Self-regulation: This module focuses on usage of reflective techniques. Participants acquire general knowledge regarding reflecting on their own instructional strategies and

methods. With the help of practical exercises and role playing, the participants acquire fundamental experience with some reflective techniques. Target group: novice teachers at primary and secondary schools.

7. Evaluation and self-evaluation strategies of teachers at preschools, primary and secondary schools in the Zlín region: This instructional module caters for the needs of teachers in the Zlín region regarding evaluation and self-evolution of schools. It offers information on the recent trends in school evaluation, especially on self-evaluation of schools. Target group: teachers at preschools, primary and secondary schools in the Zlín region, and teachers at one-room school.

8. Support in presentation of teaching experiences in a foreign language: This module is practically oriented and it focuses on practicing the skills that are necessary for effective presentation. The main focus is on practical training of individual skills; theoretical knowledge concerning the presentation will be minimal. Participants will be able to observe their own progress regarding the changes in their attitudes, knowledge and skills. They would later be able to use these skills when training their pupils. Target group: teachers at preschools, primary and secondary schools in the Zlín region, and teachers at one-room schools.

9. School networking and training of supervising teachers to support the teaching practice of Tomas Bata University students: This module offers a possibility to improve the competences of those teacher mentors who participate in training of the new generation of teachers. Target group: teacher mentors who cooperate with faculty as supervising teachers.

10. *Training of a teacher mentor:* This module focuses on creating a concept of mentor's work at preschools and primary schools. It demonstrates strategies that support quality work of a teacher mentor at school. The module also shows the possibilities of creation and subsequent coordination of adaptation programme for novice teachers. Target group: teacher mentors for preschools and primary school.

11. Analysis of the teacher's work with ill children: This module offers an overview of the most common children's illnesses, health risk factors and illness prevention. It also presents skills on how to work with ill children at schools, how to create positive environment for them and, if necessary, how to give first aid in life-threatening situations. Target group: teachers at preschools, primary and secondary schools in the Zlín region.

12. Methods of processing data from self-evaluation of schools: This module caters for the needs of teachers in the Zlín region regarding analysis of data from self-evaluation of schools. It offers supportive strategies aiming at effective statistic data processing. The aim of this module is also to create a platform for cooperation between schools and teachers in the Zlín region who deal with the self-evaluation and development. It offers a chance of competence development of teachers but also of implementation of innovations in the self-evaluation processes. Target group: teachers at preschools, primary and secondary schools in the Zlín region and teachers at one-room schools.

13. Preparing a high-quality instructional project: This module provides an opportunity to clarify the basic steps in preparation and application of the project theory and integrated thematic education. It also enables participants to prepare lesson plans for their courses. Target group: novice teachers at primary schools

14. Acquiring strategies for improving teachers' memory skills: This module offers professional knowledge regarding memory functions in connection with conditions for effective mental work. Participants learn a range of techniques that improve the learning of various types of material. Target group: novice teachers at preschools, primary and secondary schools in the Zlín region.

15. Dealing with children with learning disabilities: This module focuses on introducing the participants to diagnostics, prevention, compensation and re-education of pupils with learning disabilities. Participating novice teachers will acquire skills in dealing with children with specific learning disabilities. The experienced teachers/mentors will refresh their already acquired skills, which they are to provide for novice teachers. Participants will also learn of the newest trends in dealing with children with specific disabilities. Target group: novice teachers, experienced teachers and teacher mentors at primary schools.

16. Schools´ strategies in cooperating with parents: This module offers both traditional and modern strategies in cooperation between the school and families. These strategies have originated abroad but have also been tried out in the Czech Republic with very good results. Target groups: novice teachers of preschools and primary schools. (Wiegerová, Gavora, & Navrátilová, 2016)

3. Focus on selected module: Support of teamwork among teachers in the teaching staff

A beginning teachers enters the school environment with many expectations and s/he experience a difficult period of adaptation to the profession. A mentor can play an important role by guiding the beginning teacher, by facilitating the initial difficulties in interactions with new colleagues, by helping him/her to reflect experiences gained in common team work. However, a mentor needs to work not only on his own experiences but also on the acquired skills of teamwork built mostly on communication skills and perception of the team roles. (Navrátilová in Wiegerová et al., 2015)

The instructional module aimed to support the teamwork in school environment can be realized in two lines which were both examined. The first option is based on work with the participants who are real colleagues in existing teaching staff. So they have already defined roles among themselves and the instruction is focused on the diagnostics of these roles and other relationships since beginning of the courses. This way produces very intensive interaction among all participants. The current problems among the members of the team often appear during activities, lecturer´s work requires emphatic reactions on these problems and leadership that provides space for individuals to express their thoughts. The second option consists in random meeting of the participants from various teams or even different levels of education who have opportunity to share experiences both from position of a beginner and a mentor. Instead of individualised work regarding the actual state of existing team, the content of this module is more generally focused on development of competences required for effective teamwork with emphasis on the communication skills.

The content of the instructional module is always complied according to the composition and actual needs of the participants. In general it is aimed to develop these areas for effective teamwork:

- Working group versus team: the aim is to attain the knowledge of the participants that the mentoring of teamwork must be focused on various points to transform a basic working group into a team.
- Team roles: the aim is to get to know the characteristics of various team roles, to work together on Belbin Individual Report of Team Roles, to compare Belbin´s model of 9 team roles with other models, to analyse the possibilities of work on the roles in particular teaching staff.
- Self-knowledge as a team member.
- Support of a good climate at school through functional team. Social health of a teacher as a team member in demanding professional conditions.
- Selected aspects of communication skills needed for a teamwork: solving model conflict situations, communication strategies in a team, open communication, providing a feedback.
- Coaching in school environment, the specifics of a team leader (mostly in position of a school principal).

3.1 Evaluation of the module

Progressive evaluation system is applied during the realisation of instructional module. The following text represents the output of the module implementation in spring 2016. Ten teachers from the schools in Zlín region attended this module, they work in kindergartens and joint schools. (These are nursery and primary schools joint united in one administrative unit.) All participants were women, 6 of them are in the position of a school principal. The teaching staff in their schools had about 10 members, not more. The participants were in-service teachers with the practice from 3 to 30 years already. Therefore there was a group of participants who had not yet held the position of a mentor at their school but the heterogeneity of this group proved to be a very valuable source of shared experiences for all participants.

The evaluation of a programme focused on development of teamwork competencies can´t be based on quantitative analysis. The optimal number of participants matching the usual number of team members is very important. For this reason, we use different methods of data collection for the evaluation, we work with individual perceptions of the participants. Evaluation runs in three time steps – the evaluation at the beginning of the course is then followed by continuous assessment with final evaluation at the end of the learning process.

The starting point for both continuous and final evaluating analysis is based on the information collected from the participants during the first meeting in instructional module. Participants were asked to express their expectations in written form. These information are important for the lecturer who should react on participants´ needs. The specific

of this module is therefore in the content changing and depending on the constitution of participants in current courses.

Continuous evaluation is also built on participants´ expressions of the following aspects:

- What did I learn in the course up to now?

Two different types of statements appeared among the answers. The first kind of expressions reacted on immediate experiences of participants. They were describing the latest acquired skills in the field of team communication, especially the possibilities of using assertiveness in school environment. A different approach emerged in participants´ effort to summarize the knowledge and to express the impact of new information as individually perceived. These statements were characteristic for the participants in the position of a school principal.

> *"We named and explained the status of individual team members with their skills and application to a teamwork. Through the test of self-knowledge, I learned more about myself."*

- What information or experience do I perceive as brand new?

Each of the participants named at least one particular area of skills, they mostly expressed the satisfaction with the development of communication in conflict situations in the position of a team leader.

> *"Information about mentoring of conflicts were interesting and new for me."*

In addition to naming the important areas of participants´ personal development, they also reflected the immediate transfer of new knowledge into everyday practice.

> *"Everything I´ve learned, I began to use it at work in communicating with colleagues, parents, friends."*
> *"This is a real inspiration for me in the work with my colleagues"*

- What I would still like to learn.

Participants described particular skills and problematic moments of their own current team in the school, but they most often repeated the need of focusing the topic of a detailed analysis of conflict situations and their causes, although we have devoted to just this topic for many hours. They wished to reinforce their acquired skills in further model situations.

> *"I enjoyed a lot to respond to specific situations of conflicts. I would like to try a number of such situations again." The world is full of conflicts, I would like to solve more complex conflict situations."*

We consider the advantage of such form of continuous evaluation by the participants in that the quality of the course is expressed actually indirectly. The participants don´t rank the quality of a lecturer or the content of the module on a scale but through the reflection, they transmit information about whether they´re satisfied and why. As described by one of the participant:

> *"Basically I changed my mind about how I´ve communicated until now."*

The final evaluation after the end of learning process in the modules is the most detailed and it´s focused on these aspects:

- Quality evaluation of the module

This part of evaluation offers important feedback for the lecturers as well as the whole project team and it´s a part of the realisation of all modules. In case of the module described above, the participants appreciated the adequate number of teachers involved in the courses and also the offer of supportive materials from which they can derive the knowledge even after the end of sessions. They mostly evaluated the content of the module, only in one case the participant assessed also the lecturer´s work.

- Evaluation of participants´ individual development

As one of the participants expresses: *"Personally, I don´t mean to stunt. A teacher can´t stagnate at some level."* Or we can find in another reflection: *"There are teachers who don´t continue on studying and they´re convinced on their perfection. They freeze on their study knowledge gained twenty years ago, they resist all changes."* Thus the teachers reflect their own development and their roles in communication. The feeling of satisfaction and acknowledgement of the right decision to broaden their horizons by participating in modules occurred in the reflections. They compare their own efforts with the colleagues who don´t consider further education as important

842 Hana Navrátilová / Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 237 (2017) 837 – 842

part of their professional growth.

- Reflection on selected categories of support for the climate and teamwork of teaching staff

   Within necessary modicum of theory on teacher´s teamwork in school environment, we have also pointed to the importance of supporting the social health. Thus we asked the participants to try to express in written reflections their attitude to following topics:

   1. When we say a "social health", it comes to my mind that…The participants described the terms as respect, tolerance, "healthy relationships with other people" in all reflections on this term. In their opinion, these relationships are determined by a personal mental balance, it´s necessary to *"be yourself"*. The statements were different in case of the participants in the position of a school principal. Their point of view of social health showed the aspect of relational asymmetry at school which is still perceived by them as a basic condition in communication.

   2. What would I advise as a team coordinator to novice at this position in school environment?

   Each of participants created a large list of advices concerning the communication recommendations for school environment. Only few of them thought about other participants in educational process (*"You definitely should like children."*) Alongside, the participants with longer experience in the position of a mentor proposed the concrete advices from their own practice, while teachers – beginners focused on expression of their feelings in situations of inexperienced members of a team. These teachers described their need for empathy, appreciation, motivation and getting "*only demanded advices by more experienced colleagues*".

4. Conclusion

   The project focused on further education of in-service teachers is aimed not only to develop their knowledge or experiences in various topics but also to create a mentor. In 2016, some of the presented instructional modules will continue according to current needs and preferences of the teachers in Zlín region in Czech Republic. For the lecturers of this project as well as for the whole project team, it´s important to continue with evaluation of all instructional modules that had been realized and to complete the networking of schools in our region. The results should be also presented in further papers.

Acknowledgements

References

Hong, J. Y. (2010) Pre-service and beginning teachers´ professional identity and its relation to dropping out of profession. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 1530 – 1543.

Navrátilová, H. (2015) Podpora týmové práce v učitelském sboru. In Wiegerová, A. et al. (2015) *Od začátečníka k mentorovi (podpůrné strategie vzdělávání učitelů ve Zlínském region). Studijní materiály k 16 modulům projektu Fondu vzdělávací politiky MŠMT*. Zlín: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně.

Umberson, D., & Montez, J. K. (2010) Social Relationships and Health: A flashpoint for Health Policy. *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 51, 54 – 66.

Wiegerová, A. et al. (2015) *Od začátečníka k mentorovi (podpůrné strategie vzdělávání učitelů ve Zlínském region). Studijní materiály k 16 modulům projektu Fondu vzdělávací politiky MŠMT*. Zlín: Univerzita Tomáše Bati ve Zlíně.

Wiegerová, A., Gavora, P., & Navratilová, H. (2016) A project of Professional Development of Pre-School and Primary School Teachers. A Case of the Zlín Region in the Czech Republic. *Proceedings of INTED2016 Conference*.