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Mentoring Student Training: What Do Mentors Do?

Abstract

In this paper we look into the role of mentors in student training given it is of paramount importance and at times both unknown and undefined. We studied this issue through research conducted in three Spanish universities using Creswell's biphasic model along with sequential data triangulation. We obtained information by interviewing mentors and applying an electronic questionnaire. The results show that basically mentors are available for students in student training, facilitate their integration in the center. The study indicates that conceptualizing and operationalizing mentoring functions is difficult, however, they set up a reference for the development of student training.

Keywords: mentor, mentoring, teaching practice, student learning

Introduction

Student training (Practicum) is often used as a term equivalent to "putting academic knowledge into practice" (Derrick & Dicks, 2005; Liston, Whitcomb & Borko, 2006), "induction" (Collinson et al, 2009) or "internship" (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Schön (1992) suggests the following definition: "a situation intended and set for the task of learning a practice (...) that (...) is in the middle ground between the world of practice, everyday life, and the esoteric world of college". On the other hand, Zabalza (2013) speaks of practicum, internship, field training and on-the-job training as "training stages that college students carry out in real professional contexts (p. 19).

Therefore, student training can be defined as an opportunity to implement and transfer the knowledge previously learnt during initial training to a professional

environment. From this perspective, we can say that they are training situations where thought is given to both experience in a real context and learning from experience (Raposo-Rivas & Martínez-Figueira, 2013).

The didactic and pedagogical nature of student training is going to depend on the execution of implicit mentoring, therefore without mentoring there is no training. In this sense, mentoring as the core element in student training (Zabalza & Cid, 2005) aims to guide the training process of the mentee and is of vital importance (Martínez-Figueira & Raposo, 2013; Raposo & Martínez-Figueira, 2013). It is the opportunity to explain the link between theory and classroom practice with training in situ in order to be able to relate academic reality to working scenarios as well as to learn to make decisions in daily situations by developing critical thinking and a self-concept of the action itself. Under this premise, the mentor is a key element in pre-professional training by providing a methodological and attitudinal scaffold as well as a framework of experiences and concepts where students can position their experiences, understand them, analyze them and reflect on them (Martínez-Figueira & Raposo, 2011a). How to do so is a question of styles or models (Martínez-Figueira & Raposo, 2011b) but, in any case, it is about influencing and transmitting their expertise to trainees. As Ehrich, Tennet & Handsford (2002) state, you forge "a relationship with the mentee/protégé in order to help him/her in his/her professional development and promotion" (p. 256).

Cid, Pérez & Sarmiento (2011) reviewed the literature on mentoring student training by examining 137 research articles. The authors indicate that mentoring is an elusive term and its conceptualization raises issues due to its decontextualized and incoherent use when describing a wide variety of interpersonal relationships (Jones & Brown, 2011).

The mentor plays the important role of being the closest and most important person as well as a reference that helps and guides students throughout student training. This role is often confused with 'support' functions that other people provide (Gibbs, 1999). Ehrich, Tennent & Handsford (2002, p. 256), refer to the mentor as "a person who establishes a relationship with the mentee/protégé in order to help him/her in his/her professional development and promotion".

According to Cid, Perez & Sarmiento (2011), the functions of the mentor are often analyzed by taking into account different variables. What type of relationship do mentor and mentee build during student training? (Enomoto, Grogan & Gardiner, 2002). In this context, Watkins (1992) highlights support, guidance and a sequential introduction to professional-related issues. Shea (1992) provides a series of important activities in tutoring, such as creating high expectations, providing attractive ideas, role modeling, explaining certain organizational aspects or helping the mentees in their professional careers. One of the most interesting papers may be that of Mertz (2004), who, on the basis of the social exchange theory, identifies three functional categories in mentoring: psychosocial development, professional development and professional promotion.

Finally, the multitask nature of the mentor's role can be summarized as commitment to provide the conditions needed by students to reflect on ideas that will help them act and make decisions (Raposo-Rivas & Martínez-Figueira, 2013). The role played by mentors is crucial because they bear the responsibility to train, guide and provide psychological, pedagogical and professional help to training students in their workplaces. But, which of these functions are most important? What relevance do tutors give them? The results presented in this paper are part of a wider investigation (Martínez-Figueira, 2010).

Research Methodology

General Background of Research

The role of mentors in student training is crucial, hence Martínez-Figueira (2010) conducted a study on this issue, by means of which the implicit tutorial model mentors use in training centers is described. Based on that study we carried out this research in an attempt to explore and understand the functions and activities that typify the role of the mentor.

Two of the specific objectives of the aforementioned study stand out as they are specially related to the research we submit, i.e., to investigate how mentoring is foreseen and how it is actually carried out, to know which functions mentors assume during student training and assess their viability and functional complexity.

This investigation was framed within a comparative method using Creswell's biphasic model (1994), adopting a research paradigm that integrates qualitative and quantitative analysis with sequential triangulation methodology, where the results of the first phase were essential in order to plan the following one.

Research Sample

In order to approach the object of study in the first phase we intentionally chose to work orally with mentors due to their geographic dispersion in training centers. We invited 26 mentors to participate in the study, but only 18 of them (69.23%) accepted and provided data. As for the second phase, the selection was

made by simple random sampling since in this quantitative phase we contrast the information obtained in the first and study in depth other aspects of the research in order to generalize the results. Thus, according to determinants associated with the optimum use of temporary, material and human resources, 120 mentors scattered throughout Galicia (Spain) from the Universities of A Coruña, Santiago de Compostela and Vigo were invited to participate in the research. The number of subjects was chosen because it was a well-balanced option between the best sampling error (4%) and a confidence level of 95% or, in other words, it is an optimum ratio in the investment of effort, resources and possible outcomes. The sample was made up of 83 subjects (69.16% of the sample invited) with the confidence levels of 95% and 90% and acceptable sampling errors of 6.9% and 5.7%. Therefore, the sample meets the required scientific characteristics regarding the number of valid responses (Fink, 1995), adequacy (Kerlinger, 1986) and representativeness (Fox, 1969).

Instrument, Procedures and Data Analysis

In this research the techniques and instruments used for collecting information were, in the first phase of the study, a structured, open, guided, individual and face-to-face interview validated by both content and triangulation (Patton, 1982); in the second quantitative phase, an electronic questionnaire which was descriptive, explicative and had a longitudinal-transverse time dimension (Author 1, 2010). The reliability result obtained by using Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was 0.982. The validity of the electronic questionnaire was also confirmed by means of content procedures (Fox, 1969) using the Delphi technique along with a pilot test of the instrument and construct validity by means of a conglomerate or cluster and factorial analysis.

Below we summarize the most relevant aspects of the research (Raposo & Martínez-Figueira, 2013).

- *Methodology* and methods: Mixed, we followed Creswell's biphasic model (1994) where:
 - (1) Phase I was qualitative.
 - (2) Phase II was quantitative.
- Objectives:
 - (1) To investigate how the development of mentoring is foreseen and how it is actually carried out.
 - (2) To find out which functions mentors in training centers assume during student training and assess their viability and functional complexity.
- Selection of the *sample*:

- (1) Phase I: Intentional sampling (Bisquerra, 2004). It allows us to make a first approach to the problem of study taking into account the geographical dispersion of the subjects.
- (2) Phase II: Simple random sampling (Bisquerra, 2004).
- Participants:
 - (1) Phase I: The invited sample: 26 mentors. The accepting sample: 18 mentors (69.23%).
 - (2) Phase II: The invited sample: 120 mentors (best sampling error, 4%, and 95% confidence level). The accepting sample: 83 mentors (69.16%, with confidence levels of 95% and 90% and acceptable sampling errors of 6.9% and 5.7%).
- Instruments:
 - (1) Phase I: interview (structured, open, guided, individual and face-to-face).
 - (2) Phase II: questionnaire (descriptive and explicative and had a longitudinal-transverse time dimension).
- Validity and Reliability:
 - (1) Phase I: Validity: content and triangulation (Patton, 1982).
 - (2) Phase II: Validity: Delphi technique together with a pilot test of the instrument and the construct validity (Nunnaly, 1987) through a conglomerate or cluster and factorial analysis. Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha (excellent; common questionnaire: 0.982; educational mode: 0.958; social mode: 0.954; and organizational mode: 0.995).
- Analysis data:
 - (1) Phase I: content analysis.
 - (2) Phase II: descriptive analysis, correlation and multiple statistical comparisons.
- Analysis of *software*:
 - (1) Phase I: AQUAD6
 - (1) Phase II: SPSS 15.0

Results and Discussion

In this section we present some of the results obtained in the research. We wanted to know which tasks were most frequently carried out by mentors, which were considered to be the most relevant in student training as well as their formative task value. In the quantitative phase, the 83 mentors submitted their opinions

according to the answer options, in this case on a four point scale: a lot (4), quite (3), little (2) and none (1). The sample assessed the frequency and the importance given to the activities and tasks related to mentoring. These functions are generic and specifically related to Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The activities that stand out most due to the frequency with which they are carried out are: "providing the students with knowledge of the context and access to documents of the institution", ($\bar{x} = 3.27$, $\sigma = 1.037$); "integrating the students in the training centers" ($\bar{x} = 3.25$, $\sigma = 1.069$); "being available for students" ($\bar{x} = 3.23$, $\sigma = 1.074$); and "establishing an open and trustworthy work relationship with the students" ($\bar{x} = 3.22$, $\sigma = 1.230$).

These four tasks are also considered to be the most important, although the one they carry out most in the first place is regarded as the third most important and the third most carried out is regarded as the first most important. The table shows that the most important thing is "being available for students", which is in third place in the tasks carried out. Meanwhile, they indicate that they normally "provide students with knowledge of the context and access to documents of the institution.

"Checking the activities carried out by training students" on a mean score of 3 points has a broader spread of data ($\sigma = 1.082$). We also have other functions with a mean score equal to or over 2.8, which indicates a trend towards "quite" in the frequency of performance, although there is a high degree of variation in scores: "Giving information to students about the services available in training centers" ($\bar{x} = 2.98$, $\sigma = 1.239$); "Taking into account the available resources as well as the difficulties involved in training" ($\bar{x} = 2.96$, $\sigma = 1.163$); "Promoting personal analysis and self-assessment in students" ($\bar{x} = 2.81$, $\sigma = 1.120$); "Gradually reducing the role of guide with the students" ($\bar{x} = 2.80$, $\sigma = 1.124$).

The activities and functions that were least carried out by the mentors involved, with a mean score under 1.6, are: "Establishing relations with other institutions in order to enrich student training" ($\bar{x} = 1.42$; $\sigma = 1.001$) and "Cooperating with the supervisor in coordinating the training program and designing a professional profile" ($\bar{x} = 1.57$; $\sigma = 1.073$). The first task mentioned is also regarded as the least important.

Contingency analysis was conducted among the following dependent variables: gender, age, university degree ("university degree" as a dependent variable refers to the mentor's degree), field ("field" can be: educational-schools-, social–associations- or organizational–firms-); professional experience in the institution and as a mentor in student training, one student mentoring ("one student mentoring" given the possibility of group or cross-degree mentoring) and the number of students. This indicates that by assuming the same variances there are few significant differences in most of the variables studied. As regards what mentors "do", there were significant differences in 35 of the 208 variables, being that the statistics obtained is less than 0.05 and at the established confidence level of 95% (Table 1). Only the gender variable shows no significance, on the other hand mentoring a single student along with age are the variables that show more significance in all the functions presented.

The data coincide with those obtained in the qualitative phase, where the functions carried out by mentors are reflected in the following statements (number of subject and line where these extracts can be read are in brackets):

"The function of a mentor in student training is to guide the student so that the first contact the student from a more or less organized, systematic and formal education has with the professional world is enriching. Therefore, what we do is act as mediators between their academic training and the work they will be doing afterwards". (E6, lines 69-73).

"Fostering the practical aspect, offering a realistic view of the situations they are going to encounter and shedding objectivity to all those topics and approaches that were learnt at a theoretical level by putting them into practice (...). I believe that the main function is to establish a link between their academic training and what their professional development is; practical, authentic and in a real context, i.e., a link between theory and practice (E8, lines 59-71).

"(...) giving them the option to participate and put forth their point of view and their creativity" (E13, line 85).

"Welcoming the students at the training center with a positive, open attitude and facilitating their involvement in authentic situations which sooner or later they will encounter." (E8, lines 63-65).

"Giving the student support so that he/she has a reference person in the institution to turn to when they encounter diverse situations during their training." (E1, lines 51-52).

In regard to "what is important" in mentoring, there were significant differences in 22 of the 208 variables studied, and the significant associations are related to the gender of the respondents, years of experience in mentoring, the field they belong to, one student mentoring and university degree, and the statistics obtained is less than 0.05 and at the established confidence level of 95%.

In this case we can see how neither the age of the mentors, nor the number of years of professional experience in the centre, nor the number of students they mentor seems to have any influence on the relevance attributed to the previously mentioned tasks and activities.

In the qualitative phase the mentors that were interviewed also point out the same aspects as can be seen in the following quotes that include the subject

	ciii-squaie		ane I. CIII-squared < 0.03 III WIIALIIIEII(015 00					
Activity	Gender	Age	Degree	Field	Expe- rience in center	Expe- rience as a mentor	One student mento- ring	Number of stu- dents
Being available for the students	0.282	0.045	0.005	0.592	0.086	0.204	0.029	0.017
• Providing the students with knowledge of the context and access to the documents of the institution	0.645	0.001	0.001	0.403	0.00	0.225	0.00	0.406
Integrating the students into the center	0.949	0.016	0.000	0.961	0.049	0.035	0.017	0.808
• Providing information about the services avail- able in the training center	0.77	0.179	0.46	0.349	0.288	0.062	0.14	0.742
Promoting personal analysis and self-assessment	0.141	0.15	0.003	0.894	0.222	0.777	0.049	0.049
• Establishing an open and trustworthy work relationship with the students	0.789	0.358	0.1	0.517	0.049	0.104	0.084	0.778
• Checking the activities carried out by the train- ing students	0.715	0.215	0.040	0.977	0.043	0.221	0.026	0.238
• Taking into account the available resources as well as the difficulties in training	0.703	0.047	0.031	0.331	0.116	0.248	0.141	0.235
Reducing progressively the role of guide with the students	0.768	0.247	0.029	0.573	0.06	0.138	0.049	0.132
 Helping the students analyze and assess their skills 	0.599	0.049	0.08	0.972	0.224	0.261	0.07	0.195
 Identifying the assessment criteria related to student training 	0.402	0.064	0.252	0.464	0.262	0.499	0.154	0.496
Guiding the students when preparing the train- ing report	0.735	0.342	0.214	0.732	0.22	0.312	0.102	0.682

Table 1. Chi-squared < 0.05 in what mentors "do".

Activity	Gender	Age	Degree	Field	Expe- rience in center	Expe- Expe- rience rience as in center a mentor	One student mento- ring	Number of stu- dents
Assessing the students	0.563	0.456	0.003	0.087	0.311	0.133	0.101	0.763
 Taking part in designing and monitoring the training program 	0.888	0.165	0.251	0.53	0.274	0.353	0.143	0.386
 Cooperating with the supervisor of coordination in creating their professional profile 	0.751	0.118	0.307	0.014	0.165	0.501	0.062	0.293
• Getting the rest of the staff in the center involved to enrich student training	0.167	0.66	0.178	0.224	0.171	0.755	0.017	0.967
Keeping in contact with other tutors	0.278	0.022	0.108	0.139	0.16	0.313	0.072	0.533
• Establishing relations with other institutions in order to enrich student training	0.294	0.233	0.029	0.135	0.036	0.569	0.488	0.367

number and the line where these extracts can be read (Raposo-Rivas & Martínez-Figueira, 2013):

"To guide, accompany (...). For me, the important thing is to know where each person goes, that he/she knows where is her/his place, (...). This is an important function because otherwise the person will be completely stymied." (E7, lines 87-91).

"(...) In spite of the very little attention I pay to them when they arrive, in the last interview I ask them: "Was there ever a time when you needed me that I was not available?" And they answer: "No. No, every time I needed you, both the tutor and you were there." (...) they come to me mostly to obtain general data of the institution." (E6, lines 101-107).

"(...) having prior information as to where he/she is going to go and what is to be done. That would direct the work a lot because we waste many sessions at the beginning in preparing, informing, knowing exactly what to do, what functions he/ she will have and what to do in order to make the most of and benefit most from their training." (E17, lines 106-109).

Conclusions

Throughout these pages, we have seen that, in initial training, student training fulfils a twofold objective: to complete the theoretical education and to make students qualified professionals by means of integrating them in real life contexts and giving them the opportunity to know the fields in which they will be able to practice their future profession. In this process, mentors in training centers play a vital role due to the use of appropriate strategies, which they might have acquired in specific training (Crasbron et al., 2008; Valencic & Vogrinc, 2007; Williams & Prestage, 2002), and in developing a series of functions and activities that give meaning to mentoring and an entity to mentors as professionals related to student training (Martínez-Figueira & Raposo, 2013).

The data presented here indicate what mentors do and how mentoring is carried out during student training. The study reveals that mentoring is important as it is the most effective support that future professionals can receive for their professional development (Carter & Francis, 2001; Marable & Raimondi, 2007; McDonald, 2013; Martínez-Figueira & Raposo, 2011a, b, 2013; Raposo-Rivas & Martínez-Figueira, 2013).

We obtained a profile of those functions carried out during student training which include: building an open, trustworthy work relationship with training students, integrating them in the training centers during their stay, being available for mentoring, providing the students with the knowledge of the context and access to documents in the institution. Although favoring an adequate working environment in line with reality (Edwards, 1998; Rajuan, Douwe & Verloop, 2007; Yusko & Feiman, 2008), reviewing, programming, participation, group work, cooperation, involving other professionals or entities related to the development of their professional work are some of the features and functions of mentors, the results of the study indicate that there is no collaboration with the coordinator regarding the design of the student training program itself, in designing their professional profile or with other centers in order to enrich student training.

It is noteworthy that there is some discrepancy between what mentors do and what they consider relevant. In the first case, they note that they mainly provide knowledge of the context and facilitate access to documents in the institution whereas Raposo-Rivas & Martínez-Figueira (2013) show that being available for students is the most important task for mentors.

At the same time, from the mentor's perspective, variables such as previous training, age and working fulltime as a tutor have a significant influence on mentoring. Therefore, it is necessary to take this into account when proposing a training experience to future professionals in training centers.

Finally, we must mention the difficulty in conceptualizing and operationalizing the functions involved in student training and covering a detailed and thorough list which compiles all the variables and possible contexts involved in the situation (Martínez-Figueira & Raposo, 2011a). Consequently, we made a necessary selection and specification of activities and functions, therefore the reader might regard that a certain activity or function they consider relevant is missing. Nonetheless, the results obtained in this research are a reference for assessing the mentoring functions carried out in student training and the possibility to incorporate new study indicators or scientific objectives that can promote improvements towards a higher quality of the subject of our study.

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