



## Review

Mediation in mentoring: A synthesis of studies in *Teaching and Teacher Education*<sup>☆</sup>Lily Orland-Barak<sup>\*</sup>

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Available online 13 August 2014

## Keywords:

Mentoring  
Mediation  
Professional learning  
Teacher education

## ABSTRACT

Mentoring is essentially about the mediation of professional learning. This review presents a synthesis of the studies published in *Teaching and Teacher Education* (39) on mediation in mentoring. The first part positions these studies in relation to three distinctive domains: 1) Mentors' performance and behaviors; 2) Mentors' reasoning, beliefs and identity formation and 3) The place of culture, context and discourse in mentoring. These domains run as parallel themes along the timeline of studies examined, crossing geographical areas, periods, and contexts of pre-service and in-service education. The second part examines nine selected articles, representative of the identified domains.

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## 1. Introduction

Ever since its conception in Homers' *Odyssey*, mentoring has been described as mediating between opposing yet complementing functions: The 'matriarchal' function, which entails establishing and sustaining relationships based on personal caring, emotional support and nurturing; and the 'patriarchal' function of the mentor as expert, reflected in roles such as guiding, instructing, imparting knowledge, and challenging the novice protégé in the public sphere. The past twenty years of published research in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, indeed, evidence how these two mediating roles have evolved and been re-conceptualized in the literature of mentoring.

Mentoring is essentially about the mediation of professional learning, hence, the decision to focus on the construct in this review. Resorting to their knowledge and expertise as experienced teachers towards administrative, pedagogical, and professional matters, mentors constantly engage in mediation between persons and content in value-laden contexts of practice. The corpus of studies on mentoring in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, altogether 39 articles, portrays a variety of aspects in the process of mediation in mentoring activity. The studies, situated in different geographical regions, cultural contexts, and teacher education settings, represent a wide

range of conceptual, methodological and ideological orientations to the study of mentoring, across pre-service and in-service contexts.

The first part of this review positions these studies in relation to distinctive domains identified in the study of mediation in mentoring. The second part examines nine selected articles from different locations and contexts. The selected articles are representative of the different domains that have been identified in the study of mentoring.

## 2. Mediation in mentoring over twenty years (1991–2014)

The examination of the published studies on mentoring in *Teaching and Teacher Education* point to three distinctive domains in the mediation of learning in mentoring: 1) Mentors' performance and behaviors; 2) Mentors' reasoning, beliefs and identity formation; and 3) The place of culture, context and discourse in mentoring. These three domains run as parallel themes along the timeline of studies examined, crossing geographical areas, periods, and contexts of pre-service and in-service education.

## 2.1. Mentors' performance and behavior

This cluster of studies focuses on mentors' competencies, performance and behavior while mediating learning, often connecting them to mentoring approaches. Most of the studies take up the perspective of the mentor's functioning in terms of strategic planning, training on practical skills, and mentoring for the development of professional competencies. Several studies also focus on the impact of induction programs on mentees' development of skills

<sup>☆</sup> This review article also serves as the Editorial for a *Teaching and Teacher Education Virtual Special Issue on Mediation in Mentoring* available online at: <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/teaching-and-teacher-education/virtual-special-issues/virtual-special-issue-on-mentoring/>

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and on the assessment of mentoring programs. Specifically, the studies identified (14) focus on comparative effects and outcomes of different models of induction (Klug & Salzman, 1991); innovative supervision models and their impact on student teacher learning and practices (Rodgers & Keil, 2007); examination of differences and similarities between functions in different roles related to mentoring practices (Awaya et al., 2003); conditions and types of mentoring relationships that promote best practices in mentoring (Harrison, Dymoke, & Pell, 2006); effects and quality of mentoring activities on teachers' professional development (Chaliès, Bertone, Flavier, & Durand, 2008); how different mentoring approaches affect beginning teachers' development and practice (Richter et al., 2013); mentor teachers' use of supervisory skills (Frank Crasborna); characteristics of exemplary teaching practices (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, & Pressley, 2008) and contents of mentor teachers' interactive cognitions (Hennissen, Crasborn, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen, 2010); exemplary mentors' perspectives towards mentoring as reflected in their talk and practices across mentoring contexts (Orland-Barak & Hasin, 2010); mentoring for leading classroom discussions (Stanulis, Little, & Wibbens, 2012); and uses of technology as informal mentoring networks (Smith-Risse, 2013). Methodologically, the studies follow both qualitative and qualitative methods.

## 2.2. Mentors' reasoning, beliefs and identity formation

16 studies out of 39 were identified under this domain, focusing on one of the following themes: how teachers and mentors reason during mediated learning processes (e.g. Bullough, Young, Hall, Draper, & Smith, 2008; Norman & Feiman-Nemser, 2005; Orland, 2001); mentors' conceptions of their developing identity as shaped by the mediating roles they assume and the skills that they exhibit (e.g. Bullough, 2005; Franke & Dahlgren, 1996); the role that agency plays in the kind of mentoring relationships established (e.g. Abell, Dillon, Hopkins, McInerney, & O'Brien, 1995); how expectations and emergent tensions in mediated learning shape mentoring relationships (e.g. Bradbury & Koballa, 2008; Graham, 1997; Yayli, 2008); relationships that focus on the teacher's well being and their outcome for the kind of mediated learning exhibited (e.g. Johnson, 2003; Wang & Odell, 2007).

This group of studies in *Teaching and Teacher Education* focuses on mentors' thinking and reasoning processes. Conceptually, a synthetic view of these publications points to relational aspects (e.g. Halai, 2006); to role perceptions and professional identity (e.g. Nevins Stanulis & Russell, 2000); a few (although this is not a very strong trend) to subject matter aspects of mediation (e.g. Martin, 1997; Schmidt, 2008); This group of studies focuses on matching thinking processes to desired outcomes, on monitoring teaching activities, scaffolding subject matter teaching and learning, on

beliefs about forms of support, and on collaboration processes that occur during dyadic interactions. Conceptualized as a second language of teaching (Orland-Barak, 2010), this group of studies acknowledges mentoring as connected to cognitive and constructivist views of knowledge and learning (Papert, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978).

## 2.3. The place of culture, context and discourse in mentoring

By contrast to the previous domains a relatively small number of studies (7 out of 39) published in TATE focuses on the place of culture, context and discourse in mentors' mediation of learning: how different contexts and settings affect mentors' beliefs about teachers' needs during mediation; the place of the local context and program philosophy for directing certain patterns of conversation during mediation; how professional standards and school culture affect forms of mediation and encourages certain aspects of teacher identity; mentoring as a product of context and culture.

Conceptually, these studies point to structural and organizational dimensions of mentoring; some articles (although very few) stress dimensions of the practice that pertain to issues of diversity, cultural sensitivity, discourse (Devos, 2010; Strong & Baron, 2004), context and power relations (Hamel & Jaasko-Fisher, 2011). There are also a few publications that attend to tensions between approaches to mediated professional learning (Sundli, 2007) and inherent complexities that surface in the context of learning in teachers study group (Carroll, 2005) and in diverse contexts of teaching (Wang, 2001).

This category of studies suggests a growing recognition of the political, ethical and moral dimensions of mediation occurring within complex interpersonal and social professional webs (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Loughran, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Mentors as mediators are seen as functioning in critical and moral ways, making decisions and subsequent actions in terms of dilemmas that carry moral values (Orland-Barak, 2005; Rubinshtein, 2000).

The studies in these three categories are classified in Table 1.

## 3. Mediation in mentoring over twenty years: nine selected articles

This section zooms in to an in-depth examination of nine selected articles from the larger pool of studies presented in Section 2. The articles were selected on the basis of being representative of a variety of well-known scholars in the study of mentoring, of diverse geographical origins, of a wide spectrum of approaches to mentoring and of different mentoring settings and modalities—to allow for a rich illustrative portrayal of the domain.

**Table 1**  
Classification of articles by domains of mediation in mentoring.

Domains in the mediation of learning in mentoring	Number of articles	Pre-service contexts of mentoring	In-service contexts of mentoring	Pre- & in-service contexts compared	Mentor preparation contexts	Range of years	Geographical location
Mentors' performance and behavior	14	6	7	0	1	1991–2013	USA (6); The Netherlands (3); UK (1); France (1); Finland(1); Israel (1); Germany (1);
Mentors' reasoning, beliefs and identity formation	17	6	11	0	0	1995–2009	USA (11); Israel (2); Sweden (1); UK (1); Turkey (1);; Pakistan (1)
The place of culture, context and discourse in mentoring	7	3	3	1	0	1997–2011	USA (3); Canada (1); Norway (1); Australia (1); USA/UK/China (1)
International review of research on mentoring new teachers	1		1			2009	UK (1)
Altogether	39	15	22	1	1	1991–2013	

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