

University of Teacher Education Zug
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“Nightingale” in Teacher Education: Program Evaluation

Research Report

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1 Introduction

Mentoring programs, which aim at supporting specific disadvantaged or under-represented groups, are becoming increasingly popular in the higher education landscape. Among many other target groups, socially disadvantaged children constitute a focus of many mentoring programs, such as “Big Brothers Big Sisters” in the United States of America (<http://www.bbbs.org>), “Perach” in Israel (<http://www.perach.org.il>), “Nightingale” in Europe (<http://nightingalementoring.org/>), or “Balu und Du” in Germany (<http://www.balu-und-du.de>), among many others. Generally, these mentoring programs aim at preventing children from engaging in high-risk behaviour and at fostering the general development of the mentees, including encouraging higher aspirations in education, gaining greater self-confidence and developing better relationships.

1.1 Literature review: Benefits for mentees and mentors

Considering the extremely diversified and heterogeneous program landscape, it is difficult to assess potential benefits for mentees and mentors. The variety of different mentoring programs makes a clear definition of the unit of analysis hard to define: “The whole area of mentoring is fraught with definitional and conceptual problems” (Hall, 2003, p. 2). Already in 2003, mentoring was characterized as “a very fuzzy and ill-defined concept” (*ibid.*, p. 3) – an assessment that still holds true. Traditionally, mentoring has meant a one-to-one relationship between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee; nowadays this traditional meaning is expanded and also includes different forms of group mentoring (see Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2011; Sipe, 2005). For the following overview of potential benefits for mentees and mentors, the literature was reviewed with regard to mentoring programs that pair higher education students (as mentors) with underprivileged children or youths (as mentees) in one-to-one settings. The whole area of mentoring in business and for professional development is not considered.

Effects of mentoring programs on mentees have been empirically identified multiple times. The available evidence suggests that mentees are less likely to show problematic and high-risk behaviours (such as alcohol and illegal drug consumption) than comparable children who do not participate in a mentoring program; that the mentees miss fewer school days and show better academic behaviour and attitudes than their counterparts; that they show a better relationship with their parents; and that they are better integrated in the school community than before the program (e.g. Drexler, Borrmann, & Müller-Kohlenberg, 2012; Hall, 2003; Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, & McMaken, 2011; MacArthur, Higginbotham, & Ho, 2013; Mueller-Kohlenberg & Drexler, 2013; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 2000). Regarding the benefits for academic performance as well as for self-worth and self-confidence, the available evidence is, however, inconsistent (Herrera, et al., 2011; Topping & Hill, 1995). Teachers involved expect the mentees to broaden their horizons, develop new interests and gain stimulating experiences (Özcelik, Stenzel, Blankenburg, & Menzel, 2012, p. 5.15.12). The study by Bartl et al. (2012; see also Mueller-Kohlenberg & Drexler, 2013) suggests that

teachers perceive their pupils after having participated in a mentoring program as more prepared to take decisions, as more integrated in the classroom community, as being more focused on the subjects, as less insecure when tackling new situations and as having better self-organization and higher motivation to learn.

However, it seems to be clear that the empirically identified effects describe *potential* effects for mentees rather than *actual* effects that happen more or less automatically (see in this regard the early discussion in Topping & Hill, 1995). With this in mind, more recent research has focused on the differential effects on different types of mentees (e.g. Bakketeig, 2013; Thompson, Corsello, McReynolds, & Conklin-Powers, 2013) or on preconditions for effective mentoring programs (e.g. Rhodes, 2008). These approaches investigated how a mentee's and mentor's characteristics as well as the program characteristics facilitate or optimize the expected effects on mentees. In this regard, the available research suggests the following characteristics as preconditions for effective mentoring programs (see for an extended overview Feu & Prieto-Flores, 2011):

- activities that are structured and clearly aligned with regard to the specified goals of the mentoring program;
- the quality of the relationship between mentor and mentee, characterized by mutual trust and dialogic approaches for the planning of joint activities (whereas a more instructional relation seems to be rather obstructive);
- a respective preparation of the mentors that firstly enables them to design the relationship with the mentees and the activities according to the objective of the program and that secondly enables them to deal productively with upcoming challenges;
- the length of the program, suggesting often one year as a critical duration;
- the design of the program itself, whereby a growing body of evidence suggests that so-called "relational mentoring programs" (that include consciously and purposefully involved parties such as family and teachers of the mentees, social workers or other members of the community) achieve higher effects on mentees than the classical one-to-one setting.

With regard to possible *effects for the mentors*, the available evidence is still rather sparse and based on anecdotal evidence in the majority of the cases. Generally, the respective potential is seen in terms of increased social insight, better social and interpersonal skills, development of the mentors' self-esteem and deepened intercultural learning (Hall, 2003, p. 30; Warren, 2012, p. 60).

In terms of social insight, ex-post interview data suggests that mentors "began to develop an understanding of the economic difficulties afflicting the families of many of the children" and got to know "dysfunctional families" (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001, p. 153). Mentors often report that they have developed "an increased understanding of the child's social and domestic

living conditions” and that they “have gained direct insights into issues such as multicultural societies, integration, segregation and social estrangement” (Sild Lönroth, 2007, p. 148). In this regard, a mentor in the Israeli Perach program concludes: “I came in contact with another kind of population that I didn’t know before” (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001, p. 155). Grander (2011) argues that together with social insight, knowledge of socio-economic segregation processes might also be developed.

In terms of social and interpersonal skills, the literature suggests a benefit for the mentors with regard to enhanced social responsibility (Warren, 2012), more developed empathy and better understanding of unfamiliar people (Szczyzny, Goloborodko, & Mueller-Kohlenberg, 2009).

In terms of the mentors’ self-esteem, mentors report having “successfully dealt with situations which they never would have believed they could handle” (Sild Lönroth, 2007, p. 89). Indeed, Larose (2013) shows with a methodologically robust longitudinal study that some mentors increase their perceived self-efficacy during a mentoring program.

In terms of intercultural learning, the literature suggests a benefit for the mentors in the sense of enhanced tolerance and intercultural sensitivity (Özcelik, et al., 2012), increased cultural awareness (Warren, 2012), a better understanding of children and families with minority backgrounds (Bakketeig, 2013), and an “increased ability to move between different cultural worlds” (Grander, 2011, p. 70). Mentors report that they can discover “what it means to have come from another country, to be a refugee (or be exiled) from another country” and that they “have greater curiosity about things that are ‘different’” (Sild Lönroth, 2007, p. 86).

To sum up, effects of mentoring programs have been extensively researched in relation to benefits for mentees and to a lesser extent in relation to general effects for mentors. With regard to Teacher Education, it may be argued that the outlined general effects for mentors are beneficial for the teaching profession, too. The importance of these skills, experiences and attitudes is indisputable for teachers – they are not, however, teaching-specific.

1.2 Mentoring programs in Teacher Education

As long as mentors engage in mentoring activities on a voluntary basis and in their spare time, the question of whether future teachers can also specifically benefit for their profession is not urgent. However, some mentoring programs are formally embedded in Teacher Education programs and pre-service teachers can be awarded credits for mentoring activities. In these cases, the question regarding the teaching-specific benefits has to be seen in light of the strict separation of general education and teaching-specific training: University-based Teacher Education expects a completed general education and focuses on the development of the very teaching-specific competencies and attitudes. Within a Teacher Education program, the ever-present contest for the priorities of teaching content in the very limited study time requires a clear and explicit substantiation of why a specific element is

needed for pre-service teachers. With regard to mentoring activities, this substantiation is still rather vaguely understood.

The available literature suggests that pre-service teachers engaging in mentoring activities can, *firstly*, learn about children and children's perceptions of the world. In an evaluation of the Israeli Perach program, pre-service teachers reported after six to eight months of mentoring activity that they experienced individually how children learn and how learning difficulties can arise in socially and economically disadvantaged families (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001, p. 152). In an evaluation of the Swedish Nightingale program, mentors reported that they can discover "how a child copes with the transition from a Swedish school life to a different life at home – where norms and rules are very often completely different" (Sild Lönroth, 2007, p. 86). In this regard, Özcelik et al. (2012) report an increased awareness for foreign thinking styles. Grander (2011) concludes that awareness of the "effects of cultural differences" (p. 56) on learning can be developed. These potential benefits for mentors may be read as teaching-specific translations of the general social insight into unfamiliar contexts (see above).

Secondly, pre-service teachers may improve their instructional skills: Fresko and Wertheim (2001) report that mentors experienced how to stimulate children's interests; that they "improved their ability to really listen to a child" (p. 157) and, in this sense, raised their awareness of addressing individual needs. Furthermore, their evaluation of the Perach program suggests that pre-service teachers may develop their understanding for the children's cognitive processes. These potential benefits for mentors may be read as teaching-specific translations of the general social and interpersonal skills (see above).

Thirdly, the evaluation of the Perach program suggests that through mentoring activities pre-service teachers develop their self-confidence as future educators: They report having had to "cope with a very difficult and different case" (Fresko & Wertheim, 2001, p. 158). This potential benefit for mentors, finally, may be read as a teaching-specific translation of the general development of the mentors' self-esteem (see above).

In the summary of the reported findings, it is obvious that teaching-specific effects are reported only scarcely and in rather vague terms. What does it mean when one increases his or her awareness for foreign thinking styles? What does it mean when mentors develop their understanding of the children's cognitive processes? The concrete benefits of mentoring experiences for future teachers have, so far, only partially been explained. The present study offers a contribution to close this gap in research.

1.3 Research questions and context of the study

The present evaluation focuses on one specific mentoring program: the Nightingale scheme at the University of Teacher Education Zug (PH Zug). It sets out to analyse its implementation at PH Zug and answer the following questions:

- How can the Nightingale scheme at PH Zug be optimised to ensure a greater benefit for mentees and mentors?
- What are the challenges and difficulties for the participating mentors?
- What kind of additional support could be helpful for the mentors?

“Nightingale” is a mentoring project that aims to contribute to the integration of mentees and to cross-cultural understanding and intercultural learning (Sild Lönroth, 2007). The mentors act as positive role models by establishing a personal relationship with the mentees. This in turn should help strengthen the children’s personal and social confidence. The mentors should gain insight into a child’s life, as well as increased knowledge about and a higher empathy for people who lead lives completely different to their own. The Nightingale mentoring program was established in 1997 at Malmö University. In 2006, Nightingale was implemented in seven European countries through the EU-network “Mentor Migration” financed by the EU-program Comenius 2.1. The Nightingale mentoring program has expanded both nationally and internationally to more than 20 sites. All European partners have joined The Nightingale Mentoring Network.

At PH Zug, pre-service teachers get paired with 8-12 year old children (mainly but not exclusively with immigrant backgrounds) from a primary school in the city of Zug. Mentors and mentees get together for approximately 2-3 hours a week over a period of 9 months. During these informal meetings, the mentors and mentees undertake enjoyable and everyday activities together. The focus of this program is explicitly not on school, learning or homework, but on spare time. Nevertheless, the mentoring activities of the mentors are awarded credits within their Teacher Education program. Within this context, the question of possible improvements to the project design shall be addressed. The following section describes this study’s procedure.

2 Method

In order to identify possible improvements to the project, the present study adopted a methodological approach that allowed for substantial evidence for the improvement of the project implementation. To achieve this, in-depth interviews were carried out with one cohort of participants (i.e. mentors) both at the beginning of the participation and some months after the formal end of the program. In the interviews the participants were conceived of as experts who have the best insight into what supports and what hinders their activities, their own learning and the learning of the mentees. In order to make use of these deep insights into the program’s implementation, the mentors were given plenty of room to elaborate on

their perceptions and their thoughts regarding the project. At t_1 (the beginning of the program) the in-depth interviews covered questions about the mentors' motivation for participating and about their expected benefits, the preparation within the program and the goals they intended to achieve with their mentees. As the mentors had already had some first contact with their mentees at t_1 , the in-depth interviews also covered their first impressions of their relationship with the mentees and possible challenges they had faced at the beginning or that they expected to face in the further course of the program. At t_2 (about two months after the end of the program) the in-depth interviews covered the mentors' stories of their activities and their relationships with the mentees; questions about the challenges they had faced and their strategies for dealing with them; the perceived support they had received; questions about the perceived benefits and their relevance for the teaching profession; and questions about their general assessment of the program and their suggestions for its improvement.

The sample considered in this study consists of one cohort of mentors in the Nightingale program at the University of Teacher Education Zug. In this cohort, 8 students participated as mentors: 7 women and 1 man. At the beginning of the program they were in their second year of the Teacher Education program for kindergarten or primary school teachers. In order to include an additional, more distant perspective on the program, the topics covered at t_2 were also presented to one cohort of students that had participated as mentors one year before. This cohort of students consisted of 7 mentors: 5 women and 2 men. At the time of the interview, the end of their participation in Nightingale dated back about one year.

In order to analyse the data, categories were developed from the transcribed interviews with an inductive approach and then structured into a category system informed by the few available research findings (cf. above). The data was then coded according to this system and analysed initially on a case-by-case basis. In the ensuing "cross case analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1994), case-orientated and variable-orientated strategies were combined and the individual cases were thereby condensed to typical patterns in relation to the research questions. The pivotal results of this analysis will be described in the following section. When quotes are provided to illustrate a finding, pseudonyms are used in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Because of the small size of the sample, all cases are treated as female mentors. Pseudonyms starting with an A represent mentors from the cohort who took part in both interviews at t_1 and at t_2 ; pseudonyms starting with a B represent mentors from the cohort who had only one interview about one year after the end of their participation. The quotes, originally in Swiss German, were translated as precisely as possible by the authors of this report.

3 Results

In order to report the key findings from a program perspective, the *first* part of the results section summarizes the goals the mentors reported having followed with their mentees and describes how they linked these goals with the activities they undertook with their mentees. The *second* part reports on the perceived relationships between mentors and their mentees, while the *third* part reports the mentors' assessment of their preparation for the participation. Subsequently, the *fourth* part identifies the specific learning potential of the one-to-one setting by comparing the mentors' perspectives on different learning settings within their Teacher Education program. Finally, the *fifth* part summarizes what the mentors perceived as the biggest challenges in the program and what they suggested could improve the program design.

3.1 Goals for the mentees and corresponding activities

The mentors intended to achieve different goals with their mentees:

1. Some of the mentors tried to support their mentees in exploring and expressing their own interests. Agnes, for instance, hoped that her mentee would "open up" during the program and would be able to see "how life is". Her mentee should see "that there are plenty of possibilities, that there are so many things to do, that life is not just school, babysitting and other Albanian families."
2. Some of the mentors hoped to be able to enhance the mentee's self-esteem with the chosen activities. They supported the mentees in undertaking activities which the mentees thought they would not be capable of. In doing so, they believed that performing these activities would successfully increase the mentees' self-esteem. Anita, for instance, reported how she made an excursion by bicycle from the mentee's home to the lake nearby and how her mentee was so proud that she was able to bike so far – something she had never thought herself capable of before. For Anita this excursion was a highlight in the project because she realized that she was able to provide an experience for the mentee which made her proud of herself.
3. The mentors intended to show their mentees a broader range of leisure activities than the mentees would normally be exposed to. Some mentors thought specifically that they should show the mentees outdoor leisure activities. Andrea, for instance, reported: "Because my mentee grew up in the city I wanted to instill in her a consideration and love of nature."
4. In one case, a mentor tried to show her mentee new insights during everyday activities. For Alice, it seemed important to go beyond the first superficial perceptions and, in doing so, gain new information and opportunities to learn in everyday life. "If we, for example, go to the zoo I would like to provide my mentee with additional information about the animals."

Most of the mentors did not express an explicit strategy for achieving the above-mentioned goals. Furthermore, it seems that they did not really have an idea of how to proceed towards these goals. However, with regard to goals (1) and (3), some of the mentors declared that they did undertake activities that should achieve these goals: In the case of the intent to explore and express their own interests, some of the mentors tried to discuss their interests again and again with the mentees and to support the mentees' attempts to express their wishes. In the case of the intent to show their mentees a broader range of leisure time activities, some of the mentors actually suggested new kinds of activities, such as outdoor activities or visits to museums.

Regarding the planning of activities, the mentors pointed out that they tried to consider the mentees' ideas as much as possible, however, most of the mentors also experienced that the mentees did not suggest enough activities that the mentors consider appropriate and realistic. For instance, Anita's mentee wanted to go climbing in the Alps. Anita figured out that this would mean a long journey to get to an appropriate location and that it would imply a lot of costs (e.g. rental costs of the equipment) as well as a level of responsibility that the mentor was not willing to take on.

3.2 Relationship between mentor and mentee

The literature review has shown that the quality of the relationship between mentor and mentee is a key factor for successful mentoring programs. In this regard, the present data showed mainly a positive assessment in the sense that the mentors considered the relationship with the mentees as being trusting and friendly. In many of the cases the first impression was already very enthusiastic: "She was a very sweet girl and I was sure that we would have a very good time together. Immediately, the chemistry was very good" (Anita). In other cases, the beginning was rather reserved and the relationship was characterized by timidity and distance.

Among the mentors, there seemed to be a clear consensus that the development of a trusting and solid relationship needs time and continued meetings. When the mentors reported on how they engaged in such a positive development, they mainly recounted features of friendships and seemed to distance themselves from a teacher's role: "From the beginning, I insisted that my mentee call me by my first name because I am not her teacher" (Alexandra). The following examples were reported as expressions of a positive development of the relationship. In the case of Anita, she considered herself as a confidential person for her mentee when she realized that the mentee talked about her personal family experiences (e.g. the death of her great-grandmother). Agnes considered her relationship as very trustful when she saw a photo of herself together with the mentee as the only picture in the mentee's home and when she saw that her mentee talked with friends about her. Alice, in turn, realized that she had become a very important person for her mentee when she received an SMS during the mentee's holidays abroad and when she saw how the personal rituals established between herself and her mentee had become quite natural. Another expression

of the good and friendly quality of the relationship can be seen in the fact that the great majority of the mentors reported maintaining contact with their mentees even after the formal ending of the program.

However, some of the mentors also experienced factors which hindered the development of a trusting relationship. When they talked about such detrimental factors, they reported mainly characteristics of the mentees: In these cases, the mentees were described as being very shy, very reserved and not talkative at all. In some of the cases, the mentors perceived that the mentees became more open and easier to approach during the program. In a few cases, however, the relationship remained – in the perception of the mentors – rather distanced and reserved throughout the course of the program.

3.3 Preparation of the mentors

The mentors experienced, in general, an appropriate preparation process. They appreciated the timely information about the project and the individualized clarification of their roles and duties. Moreover, they highlighted the early contact with the school coordinator as a positive feature of the preparation. The respective kick-off meeting allowed for a clarification of the different responsibilities of school coordinator and project manager and made them feel comfortable to get to know their mentees and to start the activities.

However, some mentors would have liked to have had more information about their mentees (such as about their family, ethnic or religious background) even before the first meeting with their mentees. In this regard, Anna felt she was “thrown in at the deep end”. Others, however, considered the preparation sufficient and argued that appropriate preparation would be difficult to anticipate.

3.4 Experiences in different learning settings

Asked about what kind of learning experiences they made during the mentoring program, the mentors mentioned the following aspects as unique features of the learning setting “Nightingale”:

All mentors stressed the fact that the one-to-one setting in Nightingale (1 mentor with 1 child) was unique and, at the same time, important for them. They reported how this setting allowed them to focus on one child and the child’s family, social and cultural context. “I have an insight into the private, extra-curricular life of a child. I see how he gets to school, how his family welcomes him when he comes home, how his everyday life is structured, when he goes to sleep and what he does on weekends” (Beatrice). The mentors reported that this fact had allowed them to develop a deeper understanding of the child and his development. All mentors agreed, furthermore, in their assessment that the one-to-one setting allowed them to establish a more personal contact with their child: a personal, faithful relationship in a way that would never be possible in the role of a teacher. “I deal with the child as a person, not

as a teacher, where you have many barriers. I have a much closer relation with the child than what would be possible in school” (Agnes). The mentors concluded that this setting enabled them to learn to really listen to a child and his individual needs. Combined with the focus on spare-time activities – and therefore on the personal interests of the children – the mentors perceived the Nightingale program as an ideal learning setting to develop empathy. “In Nightingale, it’s all about the individual approach and your personal relationship with the child. You can dedicate your full concentration on the interests and needs of the child. There are no curricular requirements, guidelines or specifications to meet” (Brenda).

The singularity of this learning setting became even more apparent when the mentors contrasted their learning experiences in Nightingale with those in the regular practical training. There, they apparently felt prompted to focus more on curricular-oriented topics than on the personal interests and approaches of the children. The function of the practical training was perceived as an opportunity to practise the role of a teacher extensively, as a “person of respect” (Anna), and as an “authority person” (Andrea). The practical training was seen, furthermore, as an opportunity to develop classroom management skills, to learn to deal with groups and to experience the heterogeneity of mixed groups. “In practical training, it’s about learning to teach. It’s all about subject matter and knowledge transfer” (Angela). During the practical training, the mentors felt as if they were the centre of attention, being observed and assessed by the so called ‘praxis coach’ (an experienced teacher mandated to coach the student teacher), which even caused stress in some cases. “In practical training, the focus is always on yourself, on your own role, on planning and implementing your teaching activities, on your teaching skills and on your performance. There is no scope to focus on the children’s perspective, on their individual needs and interests” (Anita).

These statements suggest that the mentors identified the one-to-one setting, and as a consequence thereof, the opportunity to focus on one child, his personal interests and approaches as the most specific feature of the Nightingale program. These statements also allow for the conclusion that this opportunity to focus on one child was perceived as an important learning experience for the mentors – an opportunity that was not perceived in any other part of their teacher education program.

Many mentors also stressed the importance of having to relate to a child that was unknown to them and that was not selected by them. (Mentors and mentees were matched by the program coordinator.) In contrast to private experiences – where many mentors did relate to individual children, e.g. cousins or nephews – in Nightingale, they had to learn to build a trusting relationship with a child from a very different context than their own. This was seen as a new learning experience which provided an insight into previously unfamiliar social realities and challenged the mentors’ own social skills. “In Nightingale, I was expected to relate to a child who initially I had little in common with” (Andrea). Faced with this challenge, some mentors characterized the learning setting of Nightingale as being focused on the development of social competencies – something they considered important for teachers but not covered in the regular modules of their teacher education program. That was also

stressed, specifically in relation to communicating with parents from minority cultures. In general, the mentors appreciated the opportunity to communicate with parents, because this was something that they otherwise only dealt with in theory or that they had to leave up to the praxis coaches in practical training.

However, the mentors hardly perceived any explicit links between the learning experiences made in Nightingale and the topics dealt with in other parts of their teacher education program. Some mentors alluded in very vague terms to a general connection of theory and practice: “I had the opportunity to experience ‘live’ what we had been taught ‘in theory’” (Anna). Ariane reported: “I became more aware of what we learned in the modules.” However, when asked to specify these connections, the mentors did not particularise content nor provide specific experiences; instead they alluded very indeterminately to general topics of their teacher education program, such as “German as a foreign language”, “ethics and religion”, or “parental involvement”. Some mentors even postulated that they did not see and did not wish for a connection between the different learning settings. Others wished to address more explicitly some of the key challenges of the program in the so-called “theoretical studies”, referring especially to issues like parental involvement or social skills. They expected that they would have been better prepared for these challenges if these issues had been previously addressed in other parts of their teacher education program.

3.5 Dealing with challenges and suggestions for the improvement of the program design

The main challenge for all the mentors was time management. On the one hand, it seems to have been difficult for the mentors to allocate time slots for their mentoring activities within their numerous social, personal and study obligations. On the other hand, in some cases, the mentees were also very busy with different leisure activities, e.g. football training. Therefore, it was a great challenge for all the mentors to organize time slots for regular meetings with their mentees. In some cases, it was not even possible to implement the program’s requirements of weekly meetings. Even though time management proved to be very challenging, most of the mentors reported that developing the good relationship they wanted needed a high investment of their personal time. With this in mind, it seems clear that the mentors’ first suggestion for improving the program would be better support in time management. Indeed, nearly all the mentors expressed their wish to define clear time slots in their weekly study programs – specifically during periods when the mentees are off school.¹

A second challenge for most of the mentors was planning the activities with their mentees. On the one hand, the mentors aimed at supporting their mentees in exploring and expressing their own interests. However, most of the mentors had difficulties finding out what the mentees’ interests were. Some mentors had the impression that their mentees did not even

¹ In the current program design, the mentors are responsible for arranging time slots individually with their mentees; often they plan from one meeting to the next.

have any hobbies or specific interests. Therefore, they felt themselves encumbered with the task of suggesting all the activities. However, with this approach, they were unsure whether the suggested activities really fitted the mentees' interests. Furthermore, they had only limited ideas for further activities. With this in mind, it seems clear that the mentors' second suggestion for improving the program would be to provide more support in generating possible ideas for activities. Many mentors would have liked to have a list of inspiring, active and meaningful leisure time activities in the surroundings of their mentees' homes.

A third challenge for the mentors seems to have been the lack of clarity with regard to the expectations of their roles. Even though the mentors did not explicitly report challenges in this regard, the analysis of the data revealed a high degree of ambiguity. Mentor reports indicated very different expectations: Some seemed to expect real friendships that would outlast the participation in the program. These mentors reported the completion of the program as a challenge and referred to the mentees' possible disappointment. Anita, for instance, asked in this regard: "Does it really make sense to establish such a close and faithful relationship as we did?" She suggested making it more clear to the mentees that this relationship would only be for a limited time. Other mentors stated that it would be beneficial to be told how to provide more carefully targeted support for their mentees. They reported that identifying the individual developmental needs of their mentees was a challenge and suggested providing an earlier and more intense exchange with the school coordinator about the mentee. With this suggestion, they hoped to receive more specific information about the mentee and to obtain more opportunities to support them. "I realized only after some months that my mentee had great problems interacting with peers and that she would need specific support to develop her social skills" (Anna). Again, other mentors complained of the sub-optimal matching. They were disappointed that their mentees did not really share their own interests. This might be read as another expression of unclear expectations. Is the mentor expected to be a sparring partner for specific leisure activities, a role model, a good friend, or an individual coach for personal and social development? The mentors' reports stressed the importance of clarifying this uncertainty and supporting the mentors in their expectation management.

Some mentors referred to challenges which might be seen as another facet of expectation management: Some mentors reported their insecurity in how to deal with unknown children (and their parents) from unfamiliar contexts. On the one hand, some mentors were confronted with situations where they did not know how to behave appropriately. For instance, Anita reported the repeated invitations from the mentee's parents and their expectation that she stay for dinner. On the other hand, some mentors experienced having been characterized by the mentees' parents as a "shining example" (Anita) or even as a "godhead" (Berta). Dealing with such idealisation proved to be a challenge for some mentors. In light of this, a further suggestion of the mentors for improving the program would be to provide better information about the mentees' backgrounds and support in communicating with parents.

In addition to these general challenges, many of the mentors were confronted with very specific and particular challenges. Anita's mentee, for instance, always brought her little sister along and made it impossible to have more personal conversations between mentor and mentee. Anna's mentee lived mainly with her mother and Anna realized only after several meetings that her mentee was lacking a male role model. "My mentee told stories about sport activities with her father. After the first meeting with her really obese father I understood that these stories could not possibly be true." Generally, the mentors reported having found individual solutions on their own. For instance, Anita confronted the parents with the situation and explained why she preferred to have more time alone with her mentee. Anna planned more sport activities with different role models. These cases show that the mentors felt that they were sufficiently prepared and equipped with the necessary resources to address the potential challenges within this mentoring program.

Many mentors stressed the importance of having a regular exchange of experiences between the mentors themselves, but stated that it would also be beneficial to exchange experiences with the school coordinator and the corresponding lecturer at the University of Teacher Education. While the existing exchange meetings proved to be highly beneficial for the mentors, some mentors stressed the need for a more individual setting in order to be able to address specific personal experiences. "I was confronted with a challenging situation when I realized that I had developed a prejudice against my mentees' mother. In the end I found a way to understand her decisions," said Anna and added that these kinds of reflections were difficult to discuss in the group meetings.

The need for individual reflections is, without any doubt, of great importance if the program is to aim at supporting the learning effects on the part of the mentors. The following chapter takes up this issue – among others – and discusses the key findings of this evaluation in a broader framework.

4 Discussion and conclusion

The present study aimed to identify how the Nightingale scheme at PH Zug can be optimised. It tackled the questions of how to maximise the benefit to mentees and mentors, and what kind of additional support could help the mentors address the various challenges and difficulties. For this purpose, it collected comprehensive interview data from one cohort of mentors at the beginning and end of the program as well as from one cohort of former mentors.

The data shows that while the mentors intended to achieve very different goals with their mentees, they did not make use of any specific strategy to achieve these goals. It seems that they did not know how to proceed towards these goals nor even consider this. Such an interpretation fits the mentors' narratives regarding the relationship with their mentees: The mentors considered their relationship with their mentee as predominantly trusting and friendly. This fits the mentors' generally very positive perception of these relationships and suggests that the relationships were guided by a clearly relational focus rather than a goal-

directed focus (Karcher & Nakkula, 2010, p. 17) and that the relationships aimed to promote the children's emotional well-being rather than to implement any ulterior, goal-directed strategies or agendas. On the one hand, this apparently good quality of the relationships between mentors and mentees is a key factor for successful mentoring programs (see literature review) and can, therefore, be considered a success. On the other hand, the absence of a goal-directed focus raises the question of the role and value of these goals. The literature review has shown that it is equally important to align activities clearly with regard to goals specified in the mentoring program. In view of this, the challenge is to maintain the high quality of the relationships while simultaneously introducing elements of a stronger, goal-oriented approach.

With regard to the relationship between mentors and mentees, it has to be mentioned that not all cases developed in a desirable way. For some, the relationship remained rather distanced and reserved throughout the course of the program. The mentors accredited this absence of positive development to individual characteristics of the mentees, portraying them as shy or uncommunicative. This might indeed be one explanation for why a relationship does not evolve as expected. However, applying such an individualised and personalised explanation exempts the mentor from considering any contextual or cultural factors that might influence the perceived character of a relationship. It also excludes from consideration the possibility that some characteristics of the mentor were responsible for inhibiting the relationship's development. The lack of any respective reasoning even at the end of the program might be read as an expression that this kind of social insight into an unknown context did not lead to a broader or better understanding of this context (see in this regard Leutwyler, Meierhans, & Aegerter, forthcoming). This interpretation points to the importance of structured and supported reflection with regard to the perception of these foreign contexts and their respective relational implications (see below).

With regard to the goals the mentors intended to achieve, another finding is worth highlighting: The data showed, on the one hand, that most of the mentors tried to support their mentees in exploring and expressing their own interests and wishes. On the other hand, the same mentors intended to show their mentee a wider range of leisure activities in an attempt to broaden their mentee's horizons. While both goals may seem appropriate in the context of this mentoring scheme, the inherent conflict in trying to achieve these two goals cannot be overlooked, since both goals are mutually exclusive to a certain extent. Hoping to promote the mentee's initiative while at the same time introducing new opportunities requires an approach with at least a certain level of awareness of these conflicting priorities.

With regard to the experiences in different learning settings, the results indicate that the one-to-one setting in Nightingale (1 mentor with 1 child) was unique and very valuable for the mentors. They expressed appreciation of the uniqueness and importance of this learning setting with reference to the exclusive focus on the child and its development, whereas in other settings they perceived a stronger focus on curricular-oriented topics or on their role of being a teacher. However, it should be noted that the mentors hardly perceived any explicit links between the learning experiences made in Nightingale and the topics dealt with in other parts of their teacher education program. The fact that the mentors hardly saw – and hardly looked for – connections to topics of their teacher education program might be due to the

program, which focuses explicitly on non-school matters. Nevertheless, in cases where important learning opportunities in Nightingale were perceived, it is difficult to argue that no links exist to the other parts of Teacher Education. When mentors reported that they obtained an insight into the “children’s world”, or that they learned about the personal, social and cognitive development of a child, then it can be considered a useful part of their professional development as prospective teachers. It should be noted that in the Nightingale program a meaningful connection between the different learning settings has not yet been overtly delineated – and if it is the intention of the program to draw attention to these connections, then this task cannot be left up to the individual mentors.

With regard to what the mentors suggested for the improvement of the program design, these suggestions emanated from the main challenges: from time management and the difficulty in allocating time slots for their mentoring activities; from the difficulty in finding out what the mentees’ interests could be and the resultant difficulty in planning activities, given the mentors’ limited range of activity ideas. One suggestion emerged from an apparent insecurity of how to deal with parents with unfamiliar backgrounds: The mentors suggested being briefed better on the mentees’ backgrounds and receiving support for communicating with parents. While this suggestion can be easily understood, it raises the question of what kind of information could in fact be beneficial for them. How much and what kind of concrete, factual knowledge about, for instance, religious traditions supports an open, curious and respectful approach to relating positively to someone with an unfamiliar background? When does such knowledge turn into an essentialist understanding of ‘culture’ that opens the floor for thinking in cultural clichés and stereotypes? Obviously, it is not only a question of how much or what kind of information; it is also a question of how the mentors deal with this information and how their worldview is shaped. Some individual statements provided by mentors suggest that some mentors did indeed expect clear, ‘objective’ information about ‘this culture’. Indulging such essentialist predilections would contradict the program’s expectations to cultivate and develop an approach that does not apply cultural classifications, but rather supports inquiry into different ways of experiencing childhood and different ways of living in unknown contexts.

With this in mind, individual reflection on personal experiences and individual approaches play a crucial role if the program is to support the mentors’ learning effects, and not only the mentees’. Some of the mentors’ reports indicated that substantial personal reflection was rather not introduced in the existing group meetings. On the one hand, it may be beneficial for some reflection to be guided in groups, for instance about different expectations of what the mentors’ role is expected to be: a sparring partner for specific leisure activities, a role model, a good friend or an individual coach for personal and social development. It may also be worth discussing which expectations correspond to realistic roles, and to what extent these expectations – for instance “friendship” or “being a confidential person” – are appropriate for their roles as mentors. On the other hand, other forms of reflection may require individual settings, such as when dealing with the recognition of one’s own prejudices or with judgments informed by essentialist approaches.

These considerations clarify an apparent need for a comprehensive embedding of mentoring activities in Teacher Education programs. Participating in the mentoring program does not

automatically lead to a specific benefit, even though participation may provide an opportunity for participants to develop specific facets of professional competencies (see Leutwyler, et al., forthcoming). If participation in mentoring programs should contribute to the professional development of future teachers, the learning opportunities have to be specified. Only with clearly defined expectations of learning opportunities is it possible to conceptualize and implement optimal support for participants and to instruct expected transfers. In this regard, a comprehensive embedding of mentoring activities in Teacher Education programs should address questions of the appropriate preparations before the mentoring experience, individual coaching and supervision during it, and teaching-specific debriefing and wrap-ups afterwards. It seems clear that unguided, non-structured personal experiences during the mentoring activities do not automatically materialise into tangible effects – even less so when it comes to teaching-specific developments. A comprehensive embedding should, moreover, address questions about relevant *individual* pre-conditions so that productive developments can be maximised.

5 References

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