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BUILDING BLOCK I: MENTOR'S PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

**UNIT II - ME AS A TEACHER MENTOR: MISUNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS
MANAGEMENT**



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UNIT II - ME AS A TEACHER MENTOR: MISUNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring as a social phenomenon is as old as millennia. It seems that the first ever recorded instance of mentioning a “mentor” can be found in The Odyssey, as Odysseus himself appointed his friend to look after his son Telemachus before he sailed to Troy. “Mentor” supported Telemachus and acted as the boy’s role model as he matured. The figure of a Mentor continued to follow various heroes throughout their journeys – every Harry Potter had its Dumbledore, every Frodo has its Gandalf, and every Luke Skywalker had its own Yoda. But what every good story and every good hero’s journey rarely mentions is the obstacles its mentors have to face. This image created a notion that somehow, the challenges and issues that mentors face are less important than the ones their teachers mentees have to bear. But mentors have their journeys as well. We’re well aware of it, as well as we are aware of the challenges teacher mentor faces, and the expectations they have to meet – towards their teachers mentees, towards their environment, and themselves.

To better manage their expectations, both teacher mentor and teacher mentee have to comprehend that the teacher mentor is not an instructor, and the teacher mentee is not a student; they are both colleagues, and that many potential benefits of their relationship also carry certain risks for teachers mentors. Issues of boundaries, mismanaged expectations and communication breakdowns have to be understood and successfully navigated to help ensure that the process is successful. Misunderstanding only one aspect of the process may affect the totality of mentorship, as all spheres of action are intertwined and affect each other. That’s why all possible areas may need to be addressed separately, to fine-tune the complete mentoring process. In the next pages, we will concentrate on strengthening teachers mentors’ approach toward managing expectations in different spheres and highlight the crucial role they have in shaping the profession of teaching. The three spheres we will concentrate on regard teachers mentors’ relationship with their teacher mentee, their environment, and themselves, as all aspects are crucial in developing a healthy and working mentoring attitude.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop a realistic understanding of teachers mentors’ roles
- To start to explore effective approaches to mentoring
- To develop an effective expectations management strategy
- To identify and resolve misunderstandings more easily within the teacher mentor - teacher mentee relationship
- To easily create common goals and set boundaries

CONTENTS

- Expectations towards (and for) myself
- Expectations towards my environment
- Expectations towards my teacher mentee

DURATION, ACTIVITIES AND DYNAMICS

Estimated working time: 120m

Running time for activity and dynamic:



Activity	Dynamic	Duration	Total Duration
1. Expectations towards (and for) myself	1. Self-reflection activity	15m	35m
	2. Opposite extremes of a continuum	20m	
2. Expectations towards my environment	1. Environment checklist	20m	20m
3. Expectations towards my teacher mentee	1. What practices get in the way of effective mentoring	10m	65m
	2. Discussion on 4 key points	25m	
	3. Reviewing scenarios and expectations	30 m	
			120m

Activity 1: Expectations towards (and for) myself | 35 Minutes

To establish a proper relationship with others, and successfully manage expectations that you set for them, one has to first establish a proper relationship with themselves and set realistic expectations for themselves. This perspective is reflected in the ways we position ourselves about our teachers mentees when we work together, as well as the way we react to different scenarios. Our position can be rather complicated, dynamic, and multifaceted, as we sometimes behave differently depending on the specific people we're with and the circumstances we're in. If we reflect on our attitudes and become more aware of them, we can take up different positions within the process, and optimize our own experience.

Dynamic 1 – Self-reflection activity | 15 Minutes

In this activity, the teacher mentor can reflect on his/her expectations for himself/herself as a teacher mentor and in the mentoring relationship. Take some time to answer the next questions (see [Annex 3](#))

Now, expand on these answers and assess your attitude towards mentoring process, asking yourself “What is my stance, concerning...”

- ...the purpose of the mentoring?
- ...the relationship with my teacher mentee?
- ...who knows best?
- ...who sets the agenda?
- ...how things will be decided?
- ...who talks, who listens, and when?
- ...who has the last word?
- ...being asked a ‘silly question’?
- ...who chooses the focus?
- ...being approachable, accessible and available?
- ...how, when, and where do we work together?



Dynamic 2 – Opposite extremes of a continuum | 20 Minutes

How you operate as a teacher mentor will be significantly impacted by some aspects of your perspective. While some people make encouraging and supportive remarks to others, some are drawn to asking challenging questions and may find it awkward to give compliments. While some people can be disorganized, others may have a great desire for structure and order. The following questions are presented as two opposite extremes of a continuum. You might not be on the end of the continuum, but rather halfway between. When assessing what this would mean for being a teacher mentor, there may be value in taking into account where you might typically fall on these hypothetical continuums.

Use [Annex 4](#) to answer the questions.

Try to estimate how much this affects your role as a teacher mentor – are your opinions on these questions supporting or impeding your mentoring? Will it affect your expectations in a good way, or will it affect you poorly? It is important to notice that this activity can be used with your teacher mentee. He/she will also have strongly embedded opinions on the same questions and your scales won't necessarily balance them. This activity can be repeated once the complete unit is finished, with the difference that now both teacher mentor and teacher mentee revisit the questions together and discuss them.

Activity 2: Expectations towards my environment | 20 Minutes

Managing expectations as a teacher mentor can heavily depend on the school environment. In the same way that the school can make the whole process easier, it can also obstruct your progress. What the teacher mentor can do in this situation, to mitigate the potential issues and develop achievable expectations, is to realistically assess their environment, and optimize their position within. It is critical to emphasize that occasionally operational restrictions will make it challenging or impractical for a school to manage one or more of the enabling structures. Because of this, it could be necessary to enhance other enabling structures or find a strategy to make up for a "missing" enabler. What would happen, for instance, if it wasn't feasible for you and your teacher mentee to be physically close to one another? How would that impact your working process and relationship? What if scheduling allotments have already been set up, making it challenging to find enough time for meetings and collaboration? Each of these questions poses a sizable professional problem that must be discussed and resolved with school administrators because teachers mentors cannot handle such difficulties on their own. What teachers mentors can do, however, is to develop their attitude towards potential challenges and obstacles that await them, and manage the expectations accordingly. The checklist in Dynamic 1 can help you assess your environment.

Dynamic 1 – Environment checklist | 20 Minutes

What is helping my work, and what is obstructing it within my environment – the checklist (see [Annex 5](#)) will offer you a set of assessments of potential support of structures. Instead of just ticking the boxes, you can indicate the quality of support with the letters 'S' (if a structure presents a strength in your school), an 'M' (moderately supportive), or a 'W' (weak/non-existing). In the checklist, you will also find two more sections that you can examine for each statement: "Can this be solved?" (Yes/No) and "Who can solve this?" (School leader/Administration/Colleagues).

The last section in the checklist titled "Comments" is reserved for your remarks and reflections. If you marked some of the statements with a "W", if you wish, you can mark here a potential situation, if it's within your power. Keep in mind, once again, that the **teacher mentor cannot handle all the difficulties on their own**. You



can offer a filled-out checklist to your school leader and see if there is an area for improvement within statements that you deem crucial for your development.

Activity 3: Expectations towards my teacher mentee | 65 Minutes

As mentoring is a two-way relationship, and equally depends on the actions and attitude of the teacher mentee, as well as the actions and attitudes of the teacher mentor, it is a connection that can suffer most easily from mismanaged expectations. This can arise from various factors, miscommunication leading to differences in approach, appreciation and goals. It is important to keep in mind that the perceived outcomes of mentoring may be different for teachers mentors and teachers mentees. Approaches to attain these outcomes may vary, some people will exert pressure on themselves, others, and even the environment to get these results as quickly as possible. Everybody works at a different pace. Some people can and will build on what they've already learned, and some people are just starting their learning journey fresh. Together, develop goals that are both reasonable and attainable. They can then serve as motivating objectives, as well as a gentle reminder that learning takes time. Relationship issues may arise if teacher mentor or teacher mentee holds the other to unrealistically high or low standards. Discuss your expectations and the relationship as a whole at the start of your mentorship journey honestly and openly. Then, you may develop a list of expectations that will serve as the cornerstone of your partnership.

Dynamic 1 – What practices get in the way of effective mentoring | 10 Minutes

Reflect upon what practices get in the way of effective mentoring. What are instances that could be a basis for misunderstanding and misinterpretation of expectations? Some statements built on experiences with seasoned teachers mentors can help to reassess first notions about the expectations of a mentoring process (record your reflections in [Annex 6](#)).

Dynamic 2 – Discussion on 4 key points | 25 Minutes

It is important to remember that it is very difficult to achieve goals that you are unaware even exist if expectations are not clearly stated. Frustration missed opportunities, and challenging discussions based on assumptions are the only outcomes of not having transparent expectations. Expectations must be precise, short, and obvious. Take some time with your teacher mentee, and lead with them a discussion on key points of your relationship, and how it can be more transparent. You can write your conclusions in [Annex 7](#). We identified four key points that you should discuss with your teacher mentee to synchronize your expectations and avoid potential misunderstanding. Speak with your teacher mentee plainly and openly, and allow them to express their opinions as well.

Dynamic 3 – Reviewing scenarios and expectations (Portner, 2008) | 30 Minutes

The following exercise provides an opportunity to anticipate actions in the face of hypothetical, but very likely, professional scenarios. In [Annex 8](#), you will find four categories of scenarios that most commonly challenge teachers mentees are described. In the category, a particular situation is described and an example of a specific need, related to that category, is given. The need predicts what the teacher mentee should do. The task posed is to add an example for each category and an example of a need. You may also suggest a solution as an additional exercise.

ANNEXES

Annex 5 - Environment checklist

What is helping my work, and what is obstructing it within my environment – the checklist will offer you a set of assessments of potential support of structures. Instead of just ticking the boxes, you can indicate the quality of support with the letters ‘S’ (if a structure presents a strength in your school), an ‘M’ (moderately supportive), or a ‘W’ (weak/non-existing). In the checklist, you will also find two more sections that you can examine for each statement: “Can this be solved?” (Yes/No) and “Who can solve this?” (School leader/Administration/Colleagues). The last section in the checklist titled “Comments” is reserved for your remarks and reflections. If you marked some of the statements with a “W”, if you wish, you can mark here a potential situation, if it’s within your power. Keep in mind, once again, that **the teacher mentor cannot handle all the difficulties on their own**. You can offer a filled-out checklist to your school leader, and see if there is an area for improvement within statements that you need crucial for your development.

	Strong/ Medium/ Weak	Can this be solved?	Who can solve this?	Comments
Teachers are offered an induction plan and support resources when they first start working at this school.		Y/N		
The matching of teacher mentor and the teacher mentee is carefully considered, as is the degree to which the teacher mentor and the teacher mentee are compatible on a professional and interpersonal level.		Y/N		
Supporting teacher mentee is provided by a wide range of individuals, systems, and procedures at the school; it is not only the teacher mentor's job.		Y/N		
Enough time is set aside for meetings and collaboration between the teacher mentor and the teacher mentee .		Y/N		
Regular mentorship meetings between teacher mentor and the teacher mentee are scheduled.		Y/N		
Recognizing the necessity for time away from the classroom to collaborate, the teacher mentor and the teacher mentee share less amount of face-to-face class time.		Y/N		
Professional learning opportunities exist for a teacher mentor and a teacher mentee .		Y/N		
The teaching schedule and class placement are taken into account in accordance with the experience, aptitude, and requirements of the teacher mentee .		Y/N		
The teacher mentor and the teacher mentee share the same workspace.		Y/N		
The teacher mentor and the teacher mentee are both teaching at the same grade level or subject.		Y/N		
There are systems in place to track and discuss the teachers mentees’ progress, level of professionalism, and sense of self-efficacy regularly.		Y/N		
Both the teacher mentor and the teacher mentee receive active, direct assistance from school administrators.		Y/N		
Teachers mentors have access to a network of support systems both inside and outside of the school.		Y/N		
People support and work with one another in the school's collegial approach to teaching and learning.		Y/N		
Teachers mentors are highly acknowledged and valued for the work they do.		Y/N		
Mentoring is prioritized and viewed as essential to enhancing student learning outcomes, building capacity, and enhancing educational institutions.		Y/N		
A professional learning or induction leader supports teachers mentors and mentoring.		Y/N		



Annex 6 - *What practices get in the way of effective mentoring*

Reflect upon what practices get in the way of effective mentoring.

- “There is a corresponding imbalance in the power relationship if there is a big knowledge, experience, and expertise gap between two persons.”
- “The gradual deepening of a mentoring relationship, via various types of professional dialogue and collaboration, is crucial to deepening the learning that such relationships enable.”
- “It can be intimidating to converse with someone who has far more experience and knowledge of teaching and learning than we do.”
- “Some topics are more comfortable or ready for discussion with different persons than others.”
- “Some people are more knowledgeable or more capable than we might think.”

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