

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) – SCIENTIFIC REPORT

The STSM applicant submits this report for approval to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA15221

STSM title: The mentoring of beginning teachers: A resource pack for schools and higher education institutions as part of COST Action CA15221

STSM start and end date: 27/08/2018 to 31/08/2018

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PURPOSE OF THE STSM/

The COST Action CA15221: Advancing effective institutional models towards cohesive teaching, learning, research and writing development has the objective of ‘creating synergy among the increasingly more specialised and centralised supports for four key higher education activities - research, writing, teaching and learning’. This Short Term Scientific Mission hinges on the objectives of this COST action because it proposes to develop an effective link between teaching, learning, research and writing. Teachers are exposed to these four actions on a daily basis, however they do not always find the opportunity to acknowledge the link between them and to use this synergy effectively. The aim of this scientific mission is to develop resources which teachers in these four actions.

In this Short-term Scientific Mission, the primary objective is to concentrate on the specific functions and responsibilities of the most complex and intricate role in the induction process: that of mentoring. The effective induction of new staff is an important first step in ensuring that new colleagues are able to develop professionally and make an impact upon change and learning within classrooms at the earliest possible opportunity. There are certain skills necessary for survival in the classroom at the beginning of a career in teaching. These skills mature and develop as the teacher grows in the profession. It is the skills for beginning teachers that teacher mentors must have in mind as they guide the practising beginning teachers towards professional competence. A beginning teacher cannot be expected to act with the degree of competence of a teacher of ten years’ experience. Learning to teach is a process and there are stages that the beginning teacher must be allowed to move through. At the same time, beginning teachers often have a wide range of knowledge about learning, and mentors need to acknowledge this and help to enable the expression of this expertise in a new role while developing the member of staff in new areas.

Although nowadays there are many education systems in which mentoring enjoys widespread support, is generally regarded as beneficial or at least benign, not all education systems have at their dispositions tangible tools which can make mentoring more feasible and consistent across schools. Thus, this scientific mission will collate and develop a number of guides and resources for mentors’ professional development. These resources will incorporate current research in and theories of relating, assessing, guiding and supporting beginning teachers in their practice. They will include an awareness of the influence of context and culture, and will facilitate the development of their mentees’ instructional

ability, content knowledge, and understanding of student learning. They will identify the strategies that effective mentors use, provide tools to guide mentoring activities, and help mentors find a balance between facilitating discovery and offering suggestions for improved practice. These resources will also include a set of tools designed to support beginning teachers as they assess their strengths, needs, and teaching context; identify professional learning priorities; and work with their teacher mentor to carry out and reflect on a variety of learning activities.

The overall purpose of this scientific mission is to promote awareness and critical understanding of practical ways of mentoring, specifically that of assisting beginning teachers to teach in schools. Teacher mentors can profit from systematic assistance and support from others to develop the capabilities of their new role.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

Throughout this week I was given the opportunity to meet different members of staff within the VIA University College and focus on the mentoring of NQTs that one of its departments, that of Research and Development, carries out in a number of schools and municipalities.

The following are some reflections which I have made, as an outcome of these experiences:

The VIA university College campus in Aarhus: I am spending this week at the VIA University College in Aarhus, Denmark, collaborating with Danish colleagues on teacher mentoring. Throughout the meetings I had today I was struck by the building which houses this college, in particular the social, collaborative spaces developed for students and staff, the smart, clean design and layout, and the nearly total absence of cars on campus. Despite the open areas, the place was extremely quiet, peaceful and productive.

Meeting Malene at the Teachers' Association: This meeting proved to be very insightful because the teachers' union is a very powerful force in the field of teacher education in Malta and influences policy implementation significantly. We discussed the ways teachers collaborate in Denmark and how the teachers' union supports their work and provides them with advocacy and advice.

Meet with Frede Krøjgaard and visit Aarhus Efterskole: Today I had the privilege of visiting Aarhus Efterskole, a boarding school for 15 to 17 year-olds. This school is private and fee paying, but takes students from all sectors of society as the government subsidises the fees according to parents' level of income. The students follow the curriculum of core subjects until lunchtime, then switch to subjects they specialise in, like Creative Arts, Music, Science, Sports, etc.

The students reside in the school but can go and visit their parents at weekends. Sometimes, arrangements are made for them to go out during the week, but curfew is 21.00. During the night, three teachers (student population is 250) stay with them till midnight, then they are left on their own till 7am, when another teacher joins them. The headmaster resides in an apartment attached to the school, so he sometimes also checks up on them at night. The school is set in an idyllic location in the countryside, and there are even sheep on the premises.

The concept behind this school is 'character building' so all learning is focused on how they learn to live together. The school is highly inclusive and accepts students of different abilities or backgrounds, and they all need to learn how to live in a community. Their learning, especially in the second year, is assessed through projects which they decide upon, as a group, and there is a strong sense of democratic and active participatory spirit throughout. These students learn how to be responsible for their own actions and their wellbeing, also by preparing their own food and cleaning up the place, including toilets. They were highly polite and respectful, and truly a joy to spend time with.

Meet with Librarian Dorthe Brauner Sejersen: This was a very interesting meeting wherein we discussed the way students and staff in this college are supported in their research and in their studies. Dorthe explained to me the kind of resources one can find in this library, spread across different buildings of the

campus, and the challenges they sometimes have to cater for the students' needs.

Meeting in the Guidance and Mentorship programme: *In this meeting I was exposed to the kind of work that the department is engaged with. I was also given the opportunity to listen to a presentation on teachers' agency by Dr Birgitte Lund Nielsen and to discuss this concept with the rest of the staff. I then gave a presentation on teacher mentorship in Malta and we discussed the challenges of this particular context, and how they could be overcome.*

A summary of this presentation is listed underneath:

In this presentation I start by defining the way mentoring is being implemented in Malta for beginning teachers. In Malta, the need for school-based mentoring for ITE and also for NQTs has been felt by the Faculty of Education (University of Malta) for quite some time. Over the years, faculty staff members have become increasingly more convinced of the professional benefits that can be derived when carefully selected and trained practitioners in schools mentor student-teachers and novice teachers. Important developments outside the Faculty have also paved the way for the eventual introduction of school-based mentoring. Suffice it to mention the declared support, at least in principle, by a number of key stakeholders outside the Faculty who operate in the field of education. This support appears to extend across the Ministry for Education and Employment, policy makers, the Directorates for Education, high ranking administrators from the state, Church and independent school sectors, school leaders and teachers, and the teachers' union.

I have used the above experience to discuss a number of insights which I have developed and which can be applied to different mentoring contexts and also in particular, to the mentoring of NQTs in Denmark.

- One important factor which institutions must focus upon is the way policy makers are engaged: Mentoring will only become a reality if policy makers translate their long-declared support for this innovation into tangible actions. Crucial here is the need to develop the legal and administrative structures that will permit the implementation of school-based mentoring and also create a congenial environment for it to flourish.
- The introduction of mentoring is likely to mean that faculty staff at university will be involved in a type of work (such as, a heavier presence in schools; participation in mentoring conversations; and ongoing support to student teachers throughout their field placements) that is either undervalued or not even recognised by the current collective agreement for university staff. This situation needs to be addressed. Moreover, in recognition of the services rendered by teachers and schools to ITE studies, the university will need to consider ways of how to offer some form of adequate compensation.
- The introduction of mentoring will mean that education authorities and schools will need to invest more in the support that they currently offer to NQTs. The Faculty, on its part, is offering to assist schools during the induction years of beginning teachers, particularly through partnerships but also through plans to participate more actively in current induction programmes and in the mentoring of NQTs.
- In practical terms, schools are being asked to become professional learning centres in addition to remaining places of practice for trainee teachers. It is therefore fundamental that schools not only understand what is being expected of them, but also agree to assume these responsibilities.
- The importance of selecting the right people to be mentors emerges clearly when one realises that they will be "requested to develop a second professional identity as school-based teacher educators, which means undertaking further formal and informal education in order to accumulate theoretical and practical knowledge and understandings to be certified as mentors" (Smith 2015, 296).
- The onus of the implementation of mentoring in schools will fall primarily on the shoulders of mentors and faculty staff. In this scenario, keeping in mind that mentoring will boost the quality of both ITE and CPD provision, one would expect the unions representing these two sets of professionals to support the innovation. It is also crucial that these unions engage in talks with

the respective employers in order to guarantee recognition of the work done and adequate forms of compensation.

I then proceeded by presenting the resources developed during this week to support schools and higher education institutions in mentoring NQTs. The resources developed will contribute to the four actions in this manner:

- **Teaching:** During induction, teachers are consolidating their pedagogical teaching skills and this resource pack will support them in collaborating with their mentors, observing their mentors' practices, reflecting on their teaching and considering innovative and effective ways of teaching.
- **Learning:** Beginning teachers need to be positioned as 'visible' learners where their vulnerability is recognised by the school community and where mentors take the responsibility and commitment in supporting them. This resource pack develops the capacity of teachers to recognise their learning needs. It also emphasises the importance of interaction among colleagues and mentors and suggests an environment which allows them to grow professionally and aspire to be high-quality teachers.
- **Research:** Teachers need inquiry skills to analyse their schools and their classrooms. Research, particularly action research, is a valuable tool for teachers to translate educational goals into specific methods for achieving them. This resource pack can trigger action research between mentors and beginning teachers as they are being asked to contest their practice and evolve into more reflexive and effective practitioners.
- **Writing:** Most of the resources developed are based on reflective practice, and both mentors and beginning teachers will be required to keep a journal and write their reflections. Documenting these experiences is important to maintain a scholarship of teaching and learning. Writing can become a public, peer-reviewed and critiqued activity, exchanged with other members of the professional community that continue to build on that work.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

Since the focus of this week was to develop resources in NQT mentoring, the following is a small selection of the resources being developed. The full pack of resources can be provided.

Resource 1 - Using narratives

When we hear a story, our first reaction is often to position it as simple expression – as an outpouring of self. If we are thinking about story in this way we might engage with it by analysing the themes that it contains.

Expression of self is a good phrase to describe what it can feel like to listen to, or to narrate a story. However, it is important to keep in mind that when people tell particular types of story, they do so by drawing on discourses that are available to them within a given cultural context.

Many writers pay particular attention to this and highlight the impossibility of any type of story-telling outside of context. Bruner (1996), for instance, highlights that it is language, used within various contexts, which enables the structuring of stories and which allows us to communicate and navigate 'intersubjective' space. Language is the technology that enables people to straddle the divide between self and other. Other writers go further than Bruner and argue that it isn't simply the case that 'we' select available discourses that express 'our' story but rather that available discourses are the mechanisms that produce the stories that can be told and the storytellers that can tell them (Butler, 1990).

As well as considering the themes that we might understand as being located within a story, it is also important to look to the contextual factors that may be generating or enabling a particular type of storytelling in the first instance. When we identify that some beginning teachers write that they feel like failures, we might indeed describe this as a theme that is evident across a number of stories but we might also ask: *What is it that is evident within the contexts that these beginning teachers are inhabiting that is generating this effect?* If they are writing that they feel like failures because they lacked control we could ask: *What might it be that is evident within a particular context that is generating a type of person who feels that success is dependent on control?* And further: *Why is it that failure to 'manage' is positioned as such a key concern?*

Some of the discourses which teachers write about construct the teaching disaster as:

- ✓ an instance where learning intentions were not realized;
- ✓ a class when the teacher formed the impression that students were disengaged;
- ✓ a moment when the teacher felt that students were not being challenged or were not learning;
- ✓ a moment when the teacher realized that their classroom management skills weren't working effectively with a particular group of students;
- ✓ a moment when the teacher's organizational skills were lacking;
- ✓ or as a moment when the teacher felt that they had overestimated what a particular class was able to achieve at a particular point in time.

When a beginning teacher writes a narrative, the teacher mentor can pose a question from the list below to be used as a lens with which to engage:

- ✓ What is the moment of crisis in the narrative?
- ✓ Where is the crisis located?
- ✓ What is the main catalyst for the crisis?
- ✓ How are learners constructed in the narrative?
- ✓ Who is positioned as being responsible for this crisis?
- ✓ Did the beginning teacher consult with colleagues at any stage?
- ✓ Has the beginning teacher tried to tap into school supports?
- ✓ How is this crisis experienced by the beginning teacher?
- ✓ What sort of language is used to describe or analyse this crisis?
- ✓ What sorts of themes are evident in this narrative?
- ✓ Is there a key theme that connects or links themes in a particular narrative?
- ✓ What sorts of feelings are written about?
- ✓ Is the writer concerned with control?
- ✓ Is the writer focused on learning?
- ✓ What teacher self is being constructed for the reader in the telling of this disaster narrative?
- ✓ What is the key reason that this moment is considered to be a disaster?
- ✓ What does this key reason indicate about the writers' ideas about the purposes of schooling or education?
- ✓ What is the response to this crisis?
- ✓ How would you characterize this response?
- ✓ What seems to be motivating this response?
- ✓ Is the response a retreat into established or known modes of operation?
- ✓ Does the response involve strategic planning?
- ✓ Is the response reactive?
- ✓ Is the response proactive?
- ✓ Is the response based on theory?

Invitations to discussion

It's interesting to think about where a particular moment of crisis is located and where the person involved thinks that moment is originating from. *Do moments of crisis originate with the teacher or with the students? Do moments of crisis originate in the individual or in the broader cultural context?*

How we understand and unpack the origins of a particular moment of crisis will impact on how we respond to it. It will also impact on where responsibility for managing the crisis is located.

- ✓ What is the moment of crisis in the narrative above?
- ✓ Where is the crisis located?
- ✓ Is the source of the crisis located with learners or with the teacher?
- ✓ Who is responsible for managing this crisis?
- ✓ Are any cultural or contextual points of origin identified?
- ✓ If there are contextual points identified, what implications are there to be drawn from this observation?

References:

Crowhurst, M. (2015), 'Beginning teachers reviewing disastrous lessons: Some themes and responses' in Michael Crowhurst (ed.) *Beginning Teachers: Reviewing Disastrous Lessons*, Sense Publishers, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

This Scientific Mission has made me aware of the similar tasks, in the field of teacher education and academia, that these colleagues carry out. As a result of this collaboration we are now considering further work together, as listed underneath:

- Research and publications in teachee mentoring and NQT support
- Participation in Erasmus+ staff mobility
- Participation in an Erasmus+ project