

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHING MATERIALS AIMED AT MENTOR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The paper presents information on the concept of teaching materials supporting professional development of mentors, either teacher trainees trainers or introducing teachers of novice teachers, created within an international project by experts from 6 higher education institutions (Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra – SK, the University of J. Selye in Komárno - SK, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University in Eger - HU, the University of Ostrava in Ostrava - CZ, the Prague University of Economics and Business in Prague - CZ, the University of Novi Sad in Novi Sad – SRB).

Methods. Based on analyses of different resources and opinions of experts nominated by the above mentioned higher education institution a mentor competence profile consisting of fifteen key competences was compiled. Based on the platform of the created profile teaching materials supporting successful performance of the mentor role or position were processed.

Results. As a main output of the international project 2020-1-SK01-KA201-078250 Mentor training of the Erasmus+ program, five textbooks were created, the basic one in the English version and the other four – its mutations in the national languages of the individual project partners.

Conclusion. The textbooks created within the project will be used in the project partner countries within the mentors practical training and preparation.

Cognitive value. Currently the concept and philosophy of the teaching materials created within the Mentor training project have become a background for processing further teaching materials supporting mentors' competence development, which are under preparation within an other international project, namely the bilateral Slovak-Serbian project APVV SK-SRB-21-0025 Mentors' Vademecum supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency.

Keywords: mentor, mentee, mentor competence profile, mentor training, teaching materials supporting professional development of mentors

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring represents one of the oldest concepts of human personality development. It is a concept based on systematic professional collegial management of people, which focuses on their professional growth and development. Historically, this concept is associated with ancient Greece and classical ancient literature. The prototype of a mentor in ancient literature is the figure of Mentor in Homer's epic *Odyssey*. Mentor is an experienced old man whom Odysseus entrusts with the education of his son Telemachus when he leaves for the Trojan War. In relation to Telemachus, the mentor assumes fatherly roles and acts as his advisor, wise guide, and leader taking care of his educational development (Carruthers, 1993). Mentoring experienced significant development during the Middle Ages in connection with the functioning of craft guilds. However, it functioned on an informal basis within craft guilds. On a formal basis, it began to assert itself in the 18th and 19th centuries under the influence of the industrial revolution. In the 20th century, his main domain became the training of

managers of various organisations. Within education, mentoring began to be more widely applied in the last two decades of the 20th century (Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Parsloe & Wray, 2000). Subsequently, during the first two decades of the 21st century it has become one of the key factors of the professional development of future and beginning teachers (Pířová, 2005). In the mentioned context of pedagogical practice, we define the content of the term mentoring, mentoring as a professional activity of providing support, assistance and guidance to future and beginning (or other) teachers, the purpose of which is to develop their professionalism and increase their pedagogical success. The essence of the professional development of teachers supported by mentoring is the transfer of the mentor's professional experience to his mentee (mentored teacher). Although the term mentor, or the position of a mentor-teacher has its legislative anchoring in many European countries, due attention is not paid to the preparation of mentors. It is a generally accepted practice, that teachers with a certain length of teaching experience and a higher level of professional teaching competence are entrusted with mentorship. However, the results of various research studies point to the fact that a good (experienced) teacher does not automatically have to be a good mentor (Eraut, 1994; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hayes, 1999; Pířová, 2010). The best teachers of children and youth may not be the best teachers of adults. Therefore, in connection with the effective performance of the mentor institute, the requirement to complete specific training in the field of mentoring is starting to be enforced more and more strictly (Pířová et al., 2011). Adequate experience and knowledge base of the mentor are only a prerequisite for effective mentoring. However, in addition, the mentor must understand the essence of professional development processes, must know the typical problems that teachers face in individual phases of their professional development and, compared to a "normal" teacher, must have many specific knowledge, skills and abilities related to adult education.

INCREASING EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTORING IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL SCHOOL STRATEGIES AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

One of the reactions of the European Commission (EC) to the significant negative development of all the member states of the European Union, whether in the area of health care systems, social security, economy and economy or in the social sphere, caused by the pandemic of the coronavirus COVID-19, was the proposal of a strategy for a permanent and prosperous recovery NextGenerationEU (EU for next generations; European Commission, 2021), and the related strengthening of the long-term budget of the European Union for the years 2021-2027 (European Commission, 2020a, 2020b). Digital transformation, the so-called green transformation, smart,

sustainable and inclusive growth and employment, social and territorial cohesion. In addition to general measures, the Council of Europe has drawn up the so-called specific recommendations (Country specific recommendations). In relation to Slovakia, these specific recommendations concerned education, healthcare, energy, or green economy, research, development, innovation, digitisation, public administration, sustainability of public finances, labour market, pensions and social inclusion. The final version of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic was approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic at its meeting on April 28, 2021 (Úrad vlády SR [Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic], 2021a, 2021b). The solution to the issue of education is processed in Component 7.

The plan for the renewal and resilience of education in the Slovak Republic (Component 7 of the Plan for the Renewal and Resilience of the Slovak Republic) is based on three key pillars:

- Availability, development and quality of inclusive education;
- Education for the 21st century;
- Increasing the performance of universities,

while the main strategic aim of all three pillars is the modernisation of education. The following should contribute to the improvement of the quality of education:

- curricular reform of regional education;
- a larger portfolio of more modern textbooks, from which teachers will be able to choose based on the opening of the textbook market;
- teacher education, which, like the textbook market, will also be open;
- introduction of support teams in education, or to schools.

As part of the Education for the 21st Century chapter of Component 7 of the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic (MŠVVaŠ SR) prepared the national project Teachers for the 21st Century. Part of this project is creation of a network of regional centres for the support of teachers (*Regionálne centrá podpory učiteľov* [Regional Centres for the Support of Teachers]), whose goal is to be (*Plán obnovy* [Recovery Plan], 2019; *Plán obnovy a odolnosti* [Recovery and Resilience Plan], 2022):

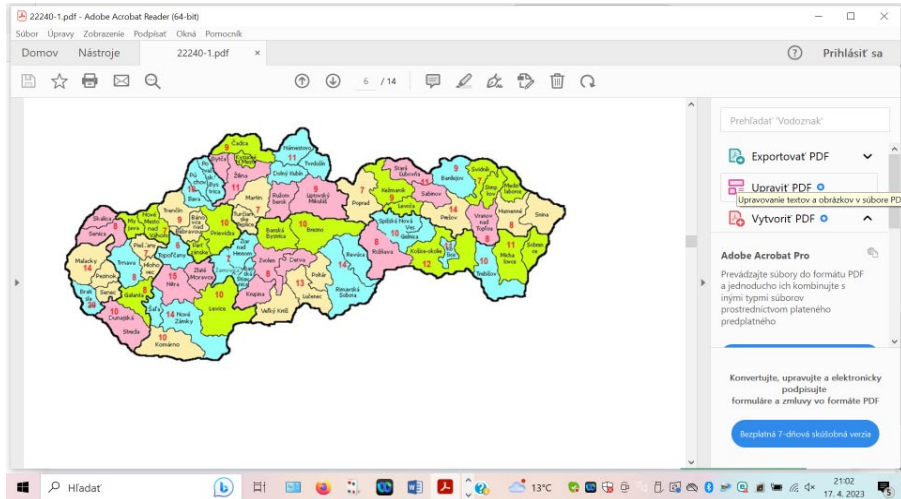
- the creation of regional partnerships to support the implementation of the principles and goals of the new basic education curriculum;
- supporting the professional training of pedagogical leaders in the regions;
- ensuring support for teachers in the regions during the implementation of the new basic education curriculum in the form of mentoring and counselling.

In the time period of 2022-2025, 40 regional centres are to be established, which means that on average there will be one regional centre for the sup-

port of teachers for every two districts, with a total number of 79 districts (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Location of the particular regional centres for the support of teachers



Source. Plán obnovy a odolnosti [Recovery and Resilience Plan], 2022, <https://www.minedu.sk/regionalne-centra-podpory-ucitelov/>

The red numbers in the individual coloured fields in Figure 1 indicate exact planned numbers of mentors in the centre. The planned network of regional centres and the number of mentors in them is a result of a calculation according to the numbers of so-called basic schools and classes in the basic schools in the districts (with an average number of ten mentors per one centre). System of the basic schools in Slovakia covers both primary education (the first stage of a basic school – the International Standard Classification of Education 1 [ISCED 1]) and lower secondary school (the second stage of a basic school – the International Standard Classification of Education 2 [ISCED 2]).

By introducing the Teachers for the 21st Century project into practice, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic has created a legislative the framework of the position of a mentor in Slovakia. Since in the previous period the official position of mentors was not established by legislation, no official formal training of mentors was established either (Gadušová & Vítečková, 2013). The requirement, determined by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports of the Slovak Republic, to fill the position of a mentor at the regional centres for the support of teachers is to have completed a second-level university education in teaching fields of study or in the field of pedagogy or related fields (e.g. special pedagogy, social pedagogy) and active work as an employee

in a school or school facility included in the network of schools and school facilities of the Slovak Republic. The advantage is certification I. or II. degree and/or completion of informal educational programmes aimed at developing pedagogical skills. According to the project, the selected applicants for the position of mentor will subsequently be educated in the issue of mentoring and in thematic areas in which they will provide individual help to educators from the position of mentors. This training of mentors is to be provided by experts selected through an open call.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is a common practice in most European countries that teachers with a certain length of teaching experience and a higher level of professional teaching competences are appointed as mentors, without having to undergo any kind of training to perform this position. Teachers (whether practicing or presenting) act as mentors mostly only on the basis of their acquired experience. This was the reason why even before the initiation of the strategy of permanent and prosperous renewal of the Next Generation EU (or even before the escalation of the coronavirus pandemic COVID-19) four Central European countries (Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech and Serbian Republics) jointly prepared a project of the Erasmus+ programme Mentor training (MENTRA), the aim of which has been to create a concept of professional training of teachers for adequate and effective performance of the position of a mentor.

METHODOLOGY OF THE CREATION OF THE TEACHING MATERIALS FOR MENTOR TRAINING

If one is to design and develop teaching materials devoted to any specialist training, he has to know what competences this specialist should have at his disposal. The stated also relates to mentor training. That is why also within the given Mentor training project (Mentor Training, 2020, No. 2020-1-SK01-KA201-078250) elaboration of a mentor competence profile has become a starting point to processing the relevant teaching materials. Based on analyses of different resources and invited experts' opinions a list was compiled of fifteen competences as key for a successful performance of the mentor role or position (Bilíková et al., 2014; Hašková et al., 2023). The compiled list of the key competences offered the members of the project team a platform for the consequent work on the teaching materials. The structure of the processed teaching materials maps six most serious problem areas, derived from the profile platform, which both mentors and their mentees face:

- fundamentals of mentoring;
- relationship between mentor and mentee;
- process of novice teacher professional socialisation and development of career identity;
- supporting the development of student self-assessment and reflective thinking;

- innovation in education;
- communication and conflict management.

The final set of the materials represents both a textbook and a workbook and primarily pursues two goals. On the one hand, it offers a summary of practical instructions, guidelines, recommendations and inspiring hints on how to guide a novice teacher. On the other hand, it sets up a rear-view mirror for the mentor. The set of tasks motivates them to self-reflection, to think about how they have guided their novices so far, what would improve their mutual communication, and how their cooperation could be made more effective (Gadušová et al., 2021). The choice of topics does not claim to be complete, but to be authentic. It was not developed on the “green table”, but on the basis of an extensive survey and personal interviews with mentors and novice teachers, which the project team carried out during the second half of the year 2020 and the first half of the year 2021.

The internal structure is - except for small modifications - the same in all chapters. It consists of a short theoretical reflection of the analysed problems and a set of practical tasks and assignments. The diction of the textbook is not mentoring. It projects the professional growth of the teachers, stimulates their own creativity, suggests ways of solving problems and provides a wide space for individual reflection, “planned improvisation”, self-reflection, and self-evaluation. It is a signpost, an imaginary orientation board for mentors, but novices or adepts of the teaching profession will also find inspiration in it. In the Appendix I and Appendix II examples of the tasks from two chapters are presented, in Appendix I tasks from the chapter Fundamentals from mentoring, and in Appendix II from the chapter Relationship between mentor and mentee.

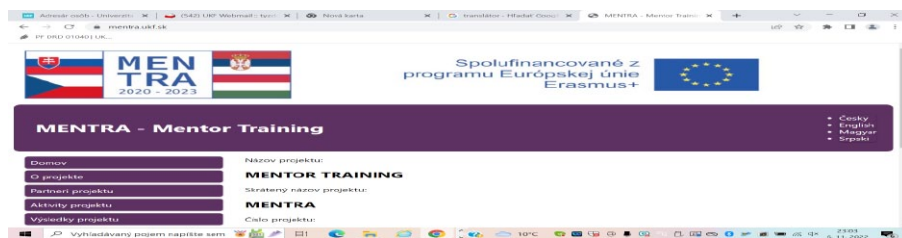
RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

A professional start and the associated induction phase of a novice teacher to the conditions of schoolwork is a path of discovery, inspiration, but often strenuous and thorny. The specificity of the teaching profession lies, among other things, in the fact that from the moment the novice teachers take their place at their desks, in front of the whole class, they also take full professional responsibility for their work. They are confronted with a number of variable situations not only of an educational, but also of a social, legislative or administrative nature. Lack of experience, a new environment, an unknown team of staff, the initial uncertainty that accompanies every entry into professional life are often a stumbling block, a source of nervousness, stress, insecurity and low self-confidence for a novice teacher, even after completing the best undergraduate training (Gadušová & Vítěčková, 2013). Professional responsibility does not arise by itself and does not come automatically with obtaining a university degree. It is born gradually, by con-

tinuously gaining experience (Auzina, 2018; Kriaučiūnienė & Targamadžė, 2019; Turchyn et al., 2022). It is an individual path of personal and professional maturation. It is the path full of hidden pitfalls and potential dangers of getting out or losing the right direction. Every novice teacher will welcome competent path marking and reliable indicators on this path. The imaginary signposts for them are mainly their mentors, within which a special emphasis is on the importance of personal characteristics because mentors represent a role model for their mentees (Maturkanič et al., 2021).

Figure 2

Logo of the Mentor training project



Source. Website of the Mentor training project <https://www.mentra.ukf.sk/>

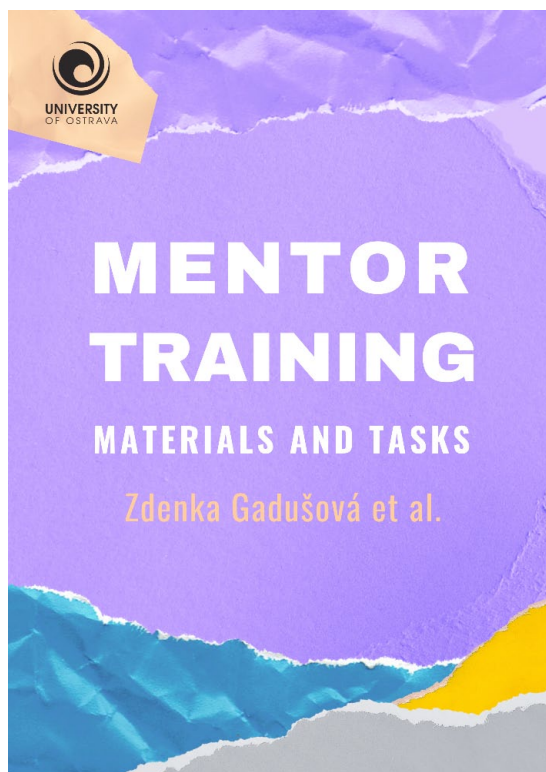


Figure 3

English version of the main output of the Mentor training project – teaching materials for the mentors professional training

Source. Gadušová et al., 2021. Mentor training: Materials and tasks. University of Ostrava.

The mentors task is to help the novice teachers to orient themselves as quickly as possible in the teaching profession, new tasks they face and to embark on a path that leads through experiential knowledge to the gradual acquisition of professional self-confidence. However, even the mentor does not always have it easy. Although the mentor has a great deal of precedence - experience from many years of teaching practice and the necessary skills, the path of their processing into the form of expert skills is also not paved. In the frame of the stated international project Mentor training (Figure 2) teaching materials were designed and developed whose ambition is to help the mentors to act successfully in performance of all their stated roles and tasks. As it was an international project we created five textbooks aimed at mentors practical training or preparation, the basic one is the English version (Figure 3) and the other four - its mutations in the national languages of the individual project partners (Figure 4 and Figure 5) which all are available on the web site <https://www.mentra.ukf.sk/>.

Figure 4

Slovak and Czech mutations of the main output of the Mentor training project – teaching materials for the mentors professional training



Source. Hašková et al., 2022, *Vademecum mentora* [Mentor's Vademecum]. Verbum; Pavera et al., 2022, *Vzdělávání mentorů* [Mentor training]. Verbum.

Figure 5

Hungarian and Serbian mutations of the main output of the Mentor training project – teaching materials for the mentors professional training



Source: Mogyorósi et al., 2022, *Mentorképzés: Képzési anyagok és feladatok* [Mentor training: Training materials and tasks]. Eszterházy Károly Katolikus Egyetem; Radulović et al., 2022. *Obuka mentora: Materijali i zadaci* [Mentor training: Materials and tasks]. Futura.

Examples of the teaching tasks from the developed teaching materials (main outputs of the Mentor training project are presented in Appendix I and Appendix II).

Currently the concept and philosophy of the teaching materials created within the Mentor training project have become a background for processing further teaching materials supporting mentor competence development, which are under preparation within another international project, namely the bilateral Slovak-Serbian project APVV SK-SRB-21-0025 Mentors' Vademecum supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency, project members of which are Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra and the University of Novi Sad in Novi Sad. The textbook Mentors' Vademecum, which is in the process of finalisation, will offer some theoretical aspects and some tasks with respect to the following four issues:

- interpersonal and communication competencies of a mentor;
- hospitations and observing;
- assessment of a beginning teacher;
- process of trainee teachers' professional socialisation, career identity development.

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APPENDIX I

FUNDAMENTALS OF MENTORING

Examples of the Task to the Given Topic

Task: DO WE KNOW WHAT MENTORING IS?

Focus: orientation in the issue of mentoring for teachers

Aims: to define mentoring, the role of mentoring in the development of mentees competences, how a mentor understands their position, and the mentoring – support of a teacher’s professional development (mentor + mentee)

Duration: 15 minutes

Interaction patterns: individual work, team work

Material / Tools: table in the textbook

Procedure:

Trainees read the statements listed in the table individually. They then express their agreement or disagreement with the content of the different statements and write it in the table. Afterwards, trainees think about the reasons for their decision and write them in the table.

Table 1a

Express your agreement or disagreement with the given statements and give the reasons to it

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Yes / No</i>	<i>Reasons</i>
Mentoring is applied only within the induction of a novice teacher into teaching at a school.		
Mentoring is oriented at the assessment of a mentee.		
The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is related to individuals who teach a similar subject.		
A mentor must possess a strong and authoritative personality.		
A mentor is always an older colleague.		
A head teacher is responsible for mentoring subordinates.		
An excellent teacher is always an excellent mentor.		
A mentor mentors a mentee as mentee, as a mentee lacks practical experience.		
The relationship between a mentor and a mentee is always asymmetrical.		
Mentoring is oriented at the cohesion of professional knowledge of mentees and their transformation into teaching.		
Mentoring is focused on the development of professional skills and potential in a particular field.		

Source. Gadušová et al., 2021.

In their respective groups, trainees discuss their choice and arguments expressed so that they can reach a common position.

Formulate the definition of mentoring:

Task: RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF WORK EXPERIENCE

Focus: analysing previous work experience

Aims: to raise awareness of the importance of reflection in teaching professions, to activate prior knowledge

Duration: 30 minutes prior preparation + 20 minutes in class

Interaction pattern: individual work, groups of 3 or 4, final plenary discussion

Material/Tools: none

Procedure:

Trainees recall their previous experience(s) and try to identify important moments. The following questions can help them as they try to answer the questions as honestly as possible.

Trainees make notes and write a type of journal entry with the most important issues to share with other trainees:

What/who made you choose a teaching profession?

When did you start your teaching career?

What was your first school like? Describe it in terms of size, location, atmosphere, and the like.

Did you have any particular expectations before you entered the school on the first day?

What was your novice-self like? (e.g., self-conscious, self-confident, ambitious, open-minded, anxious, shy, etc.)

What was the most difficult thing for you in those days? (e.g., lack of professional knowledge, classroom management, administration/paperwork, testing and assessing, rapport with school management/colleagues/parents, etc.)

Can you recall the strongest memories of that school year?

Once you have done this, do you think that today's novice teachers are similar to or different from you?

Working in groups of 3 or 4, trainees share these trending issues and then make a top-ten list of the most worrying things novices can experience in the teaching field. Finally, trainees discuss the items they agreed upon in a plenary discussion.

APPENDIX II

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MENTOR AND MENTEE

Examples of the Task to the Given Topic

Task: INTRAPERSONAL AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Focus: developing empathy and pro-sociality in communication

Aims: to develop teacher's intrapersonal dimension of communication; to develop interpersonal relationship, build collegial personal relationships; to understand the importance of personal communication background in the teaching profession

Duration: 30 minutes

Interaction pattern: personal reflection, group discussion

Material/Tools: motivational communication literature

Procedure: For effective and ethical communication in the teaching profession, it is

important to be aware of the quality of human and professional relationships. Interpersonal relationships are a support and source of strength in coping with ordinary and extremely difficult life situations. The purpose of the activity is the internal reflection of the teacher within the intrapersonal communication about the importance of professional collegiality and the subsequently presented interpersonal communication interaction. It is essential to have an overview of their relationships in the workplace and strive for their pro-social, empathic and congruent cultivation. Answer the following questions as part of developing authentic communication to improve the social (relationship) climate at school:

What makes some people important for me that I can rely on them in the teaching profession?

.....

I am satisfied with my personal relationships and that motivates me in my professional life as well. The most important for me is:

.....

I am not fully satisfied with my personal relationships and I want to change something fundamentally. It is mainly:

.....

Who do I want to improve my professional relationship with and why?

.....

What form of communication, methods and techniques will I try to improve my professional relationships?

.....

How can I prevent conflicts in communication and if they occur, how will I resolve them?

.....

Task: VERIFICATION OF ASSUMPTIONS

Focus: objectification of assumptions

Aims: to develop mentor’s ability to focus on and assess the factual nature of mentee’s work; to develop mentor’s ability to identify the essential manifestations of mentee, which testify the development, or insufficient development of their monitored competence / aspect of educational work

Duration: 20 minutes

Interaction pattern: individual work, group work (discussion), followed by a frontal summary of the results of the discussion

Material/Tools: the textbook

Procedure: Mentors characterise the following situations as problematic. Try to formulate the goals of your next observations of the mentee's lessons in order to verify the above assumptions. Indicate the specific aspects on the basis of which these assumptions can be confirmed or rejected.

Situation No. 1:

"I spotted with novice teachers that they are mostly educated only theoretically ..."

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Situation No. 2:

"Novice teachers cannot handle problematic students (undisciplined learners, learners with learning disabilities, and others)."

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Situation No. 3:

"Novice teachers do not know how to motivate students well."

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Situation No. 4:

"I was surprised by the overconfidence of the mentee."

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Aim of the observation:

Verification aspects of the assumption:

Task: PERSONAL PREREQUISITES

Focus: identifying personal prerequisites, preparedness and motivation of mentees

Aims: to identify personal prerequisites, preparedness and motivation of mentees; to interpret and reflect on prerequisites, preparedness and motivation of mentees; to motivate the mentor to formulate their further personal development goals

Duration: 30 minutes

Interaction pattern: individual work and pair work

Material/Tools: A3 sheets of paper, coloured marker pen

Procedure:

Palm drawing: trainees draw a line around one of their palms on an A3 sheet of paper and write their own ideas for each finger based on the following text for each finger (see the legend below). They can write the text on each finger.

Thumb: my most important personality trait as a teacher

Index finger: the kind of professional I would like to be (what I aspire to be)

Middle finger: what I want to change

Ring finger: my strongest professional competence

Little finger: my weakest professional competence

Group members first reflect on their own skills and motivation. It is worth making participants aware of the importance of reflecting on these aspects. As our motivations are usually linked to our strengths and weaknesses, it is worthwhile to address and develop them. It is also worth paying attention to our strengths, as we can rely on them to achieve our development goals.

The trainees are paired up (mentor-mentee) and practice the mentoring role as follows: based on the palm drawings, one of the trainees in the role of mentor highlights and formulates the areas for improvement based on the drawing and reflection of the mentee. These are discussed together and the steps for implementation are then drawn up in the form of a concept map using the <https://www.mindmup.com/> application. Then, they swap the roles.

Figure 1a

Palm drawing of a mentor competences: add the text to each finger



Source. Gadušová et al. (2021).

Note. The legend to the Figure 1a is presented in the above-stated Procedure.