



Teacher Educator Story 3



Read through this story and see what teacher educator dilemma(s) you can spot.

When I became a school-based teacher educator (SBTE), supervising the training of teachers in my school alliance, it soon became clear to me that the teacher mentor has a great impact in school-based training. When that mentor has an open mind, has space, gives for the student teacher, and wants to learn together with the student teacher, then it's a rich learning environment for the student teacher. The Higher Education Institute (HEI) set up training for teacher mentors, where all mentors involved in school-based teacher education were obliged to attend. The content was diverse; from information about the curriculum and about coaching, and from practising coaching skills with a training actor, to coaching the student teacher. In my eyes it was what was needed; the teacher mentors themselves, however, thought differently. Even though the training was judged good enough on the evaluation forms, we heard rumours that the training was insufficiently in line with the mentors' wishes. What to do? We really wanted to involve the teacher mentors actively in school-based teacher education. It was a challenge for us as a project team. How could we provide training in which mentors really got motivated and came to learn?

We had to make some changes. We organized it differently; from four whole days we went back to two afternoons and we picked out those elements that really seemed to matter and where the highest rating came. It felt good to make an adjustment that would benefit the teacher mentors in our eyes. We missed the mark again. The discontent was repeated; teacher mentors didn't feel intrinsically involved in the training and actually only came to it because they had to.

Then I got the opportunity to take it over, and I grabbed it with both hands. It was a challenge for me and I knew I could learn a lot from it. It was also a task in which my voice would have a greater reach.

The first thing I did was to talk about it with the coordinator of the HEI and he came up with a valuable tip: talk with the teacher mentors! Ask them why they don't feel involved in this training. And that is what I did! I talked with the teacher mentors themselves, but also with their school leaders, with the SBTEs overseeing the training in their schools and other key people involved. This clarified a lot. The teacher mentors didn't need another training session, with a lot of things they'd learned in other professional development courses, at a time of heavy workload in just doing their jobs, and also having to travel to the HEI for it! The training felt more like a burden than an interesting learning encounter. They told me they needed exchange with other teacher mentors, they wanted to learn more about the curriculum and solution-oriented coaching was high on the wish list.

I went back to the HEI and they listened to my findings. How nice it felt to be taken so seriously. They gave me the space for an experiment in collaboration with the HEI. What if we start a pilot with a 'mentoring workshop' with a group of schools? No training, but a time of being together in which we work together and learn together. Not at the HEI, but simply at one of the schools, that saves travel time. A workshop like this gives space to respond to what's happening within their own schools. What are the challenges, what do these teacher mentors want to learn? We also organized the workshop to include the institute-based teacher educators (IBTEs) who were working with these schools. Together, we came up with practical workshops with meaningful content, for example, about the assessment form: how do you actually assess? When I have to fill in a 4-point scale on an assessment form, what does that 4 mean for me? And what does 4 mean for you? Is that the same for every teacher mentor? Just talking about this together proved to be very useful.

I found this pilot that we started exciting! How would the teacher mentors receive this new

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way of working? Would they open up? I decided to put my own uncertainties aside and just do it. Experimentation is part of daring. And it worked! The teacher mentors felt heard and enjoyed meeting each other. They felt appreciated by the HEI, because now the IBTE joined the sessions in the schools, instead of the other way around.

This success means that next year we are going to scale up. No more training at the HEI, workshops in the schools now. No more standard training, but responding to the questions of those teacher mentors within those schools. Fully customized. That models what we want when we educate student teachers together; a student teacher who has the ability to work from his/her own learning questions and not from a curriculum imposed from above.

And what have I learned? That experimenting is an exciting, but especially useful, step in finding out what works and what doesn't work. It creates an open attitude in which we dare to look more broadly and therefore can connect much more to the needs that existed, but which we didn't anticipate. But, above all, that we shouldn't talk about student teachers or teacher mentors, but we should talk with them! When they feel taken seriously and we really listen to them, they get much more out of their comfort zone and they dare to show where they want to grow. We are not just teaching, but we are learning together!



Key words

- Use different colours and highlight the significant words in the story for you.
- What do the highlighted words say about the story and you?
- Discuss the story in pairs or triplets. What's it all about? What do you think are the issues that it raises?
- What are the factors that are affecting the developing professional identity of the SBTE?



Mentor development

- Discuss together any pathways for mentor development that you have.
- What are the contents and goals of your mentor development pathways?
- How are the pathways being designed?
- Is there input from mentors, SBTEs and IBTEs into this process?
- Are there barriers to receiving input, into the process, from mentors, SBTEs and IBTEs?



Reflecting

- Consider what you have learnt from this story
- Share this with the group



Read more about developing a professional identity as a SBTE:

Jarvis, J. 2013. "Becoming a teacher educator: developing a new aspect to your identity." In *School-based Teacher Training: a handbook for tutors and mentors*, edited by E White and J Jarvis. London: Sage.

White, E. 2014. "Being a teacher and a teacher educator - developing a new identity?" *Professional Development in Education* 40 (3):436-449.