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Managing Mentoring Concepts of Educational Sciences at the University of Duisburg-Essen

Abstract

The university-wide mentoring system of the University of Duisburg-Essen pursues systematic, continuous and individual counseling for all students. The Faculty of Educational Sciences therefore offers different mentoring concepts according to its study programs considering not only the students' demand but also their course content and job prospects in order to enhance their autonomy. Existing counseling services of the university are involved and different mentoring programs are linked so that synergies regarding content and organization are leveraged and a matching appearance is maintained.

Keywords

Mentoring, competence-based feedback, competence profile, learning process support, autonomy

Koordination unterschiedlicher Mentoringkonzepte der Bildungswissenschaften der Universität Duisburg-Essen

Zusammenfassung

Das fakultätsübergreifende Mentoring-System der Universität Duisburg-Essen bietet systematische persönliche Beratung und Betreuung für alle Studierenden. Die Fakultät für Bildungswissenschaften setzt dies für ihre Studiengänge in unterschiedlichen Programmen um, die sowohl auf die persönlichen Bedürfnisse der Studierenden als auch deren Studieninhalte und Berufsperspektiven abgestimmt sind und somit die Autonomie der Studierenden fördern. Dabei werden existierende Beratungs- und Unterstützungsangebote der Universität integriert und die verschiedenen Mentoring-Programme miteinander verknüpft, sodass inhaltliche und organisatorische Synergieeffekte genutzt werden sowie ein aufeinander abgestimmtes Auftreten möglich ist.

Schlüsselwörter

Mentoring, Kompetenzrückmeldung, Kompetenzprofil, Lernprozessbegleitung, Autonomie

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1 Introduction

The University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) is one of the largest universities in Germany counting a great diversity of students, many of whom come from the local region, lower income and/or educationally disadvantaged sections of the population. System-wide student support and funding are therefore essential requirements while pursuing educational equity. The UDE thus implemented not only a Vice-Rectorate for Diversity Management but also a university-wide mentoring system across all subjects and departments starting in 2009 and pursuing systematic, continuous and individual counseling for all students. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research supports and funds this project within the “Quality Pact for Teaching”, a joint program of the Federal Government and the Länder.² Having in mind educational equity it is the general objective of this extensive project to improve the overall student satisfaction and their academic success. In addition, studying shall be considered more attractive and the students’ scholastic aptitude enhanced. The UDE thus aims at intensifying and professionalizing mentoring in order to support students in further developing their personal, strategic and professional competencies (cf. UNIVERSITÄT DUISBURG-ESSEN, 2008).

program	<i>MentOR</i>	<i>MEwiSA</i>	<i>MentAl</i>
target group	teacher training students	students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies	students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies
phase of study	practical training (“Orientierungspraktikum”), 3 rd - 4 th semester	introductory phase, 2 nd -3 rd semester	final phase, 5 th -6 th semester (B.A.), 3 rd -4 th semester (M.A.)
duration	2 semesters	2 semesters	2 semesters
mentors	lecturers (experienced school teachers)	mature students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies	professionally experienced alumni of Educational Science and Social Work Studies
mentor-student-ratio	1:<25	1:1	1:1
objectives	vocational guidance	educational guidance, learning support	vocational guidance
supporting tools	online multi-rater feedback, competence profile	learning log, records of meetings	records of meetings
participation	obligatory	voluntary	voluntary

Table 1: overview of the different programs of the Faculty of Educational Sciences

² For more information see <http://www.qualitaetspakt-lehre.de/en/1294.php>.

Within this general framework passed by the Rectorate all faculties were asked to develop fitting mentoring-programs in line with demand and according to the specific culture of the faculty. Therefore, the Faculty of Educational Sciences came up with different approaches considering its various study programs. It introduced a peer-mentoring program for students of Physical Education, a competence-based feedback instrument for teacher training students and one-on-one mentoring programs for students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies. The feedback instrument and the one-on-one mentoring concepts will be presented and discussed in the following (see also table 1) to illustrate the importance of various and flexible mentoring approaches within one faculty and the potential to increase students' autonomy.

2 Mentoring for Teacher Training Students

During the introductory phase (first and second semester of study) teacher training students at the UDE participate in mentoring programs offered by the faculty of one of their two subjects. The Faculty of Educational Sciences – offering Educational Sciences as a part of teacher training – therefore implemented a mentoring program focusing on specific vocational guidance during their third and fourth semester. This period of study includes a practical training supported by a corresponding ungraded seminar. Since this training period is intrinsically meant to facilitate and provide vocational orientation and to allow reconsidering the choice of career (*“Orientierungspraktikum”*, cf. MINISTERIUM FÜR SCHULE UND WEITERBILDUNG DES LANDES NORDRHEIN-WESTFALEN, 2009) an integrative mentoring concept for teacher training students enrolled in the new bachelor's degree program was set up in 2012.

Furthermore, a survey among the faculty's teacher training students conducted after their practical training in 2011 showed their great interest and need for further personal counseling and reflection on experiences made during practical training. Within the findings of the survey it is also evident that feedback on the students' personal, professional and social competencies is rarely given while any individual feedback given was evaluated very positively. In addition, the assessment of competencies is an essential part of their future career so there is also a professional interest of teacher training students in feedback and assessment measures.

Another fundamental result in this context was that most of those questioned know about general counseling services at the UDE such as the Academic Counseling Center for Study and Career Development but usually do not take advantage of them. This is a general phenomenon which has also been reported by the German Center for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies (cf. ORTENBURGER, 2013, pp. 73-79). The obligatory mentoring program MentOR (*“Mentoring durch online-gestützte Rückmeldung”*: mentoring through online feedback) implemented for all teacher training students at the UDE takes into account these findings offering individual feedback, personal mentoring and information about general counseling services of the UDE.

MentOR focuses on vocational guidance through multi-rater feedback on social, methodical and professional competencies. The following fields of competencies

and the corresponding items have been determined regarding their relevance for the teaching profession as indicated by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (cf. KMK, 2004; OSER, 2001; FREY, 2007; GRÖSCHNER, 2009), considering findings of similar instruments such as REBHOLZ & KOSTA of the University Koblenz-Landau:

- reflective capabilities
- innovation capabilities
- appropriateness of conduct and appearance
- articulateness
- ability to cooperate
- flexibility
- independent work
- sense of responsibility and decisiveness
- theory-practice transfer
- lesson planning and design
- association with students
- professionalism in teaching and learning situations

Each student, her/his supervisor and the lecturer are asked to give their feedback responding several items on a 5-point Likert scale as well as optional free-text answers. These data are combined within a personal competence profile for each student which they are asked to individually reflect upon. The outcome is supposed to show their personal progress during the practical training period as well as to juxtapose the introspection and the perception by others. This allows revealing both strengths and further potential for development. The profile then serves as a basis for a final personal feedback and consultation with the lecturer who functions as the mentor (see figure 1). In this context they can distinguish personal and professional strengths and discuss further counseling services or advanced training options at the UDE like various workshops offered at the Teacher Training Center.

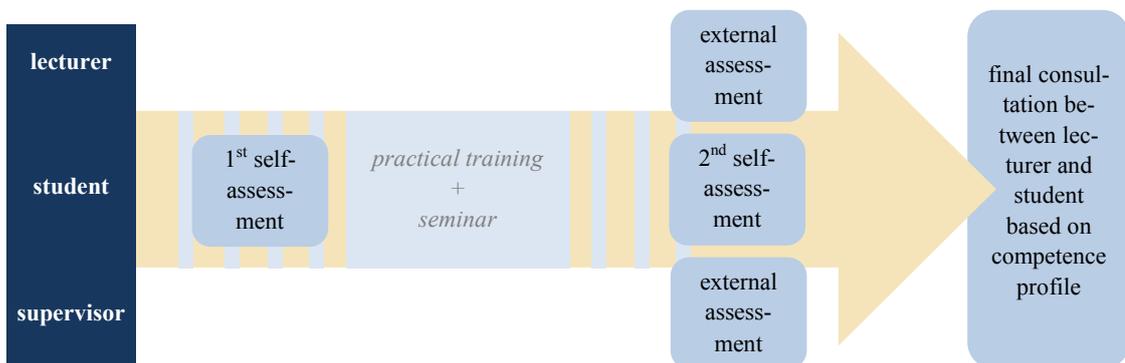


Figure 1: MentOR process

The actual mentoring and support through the mentor is not limited to the final consultation but also part of the corresponding seminar during the students' third and fourth semester. Students are continuously asked to report and reflect upon their experiences made at their training school, they discuss urgent matters and

receive guidance from the mentor and/or the peer group. Besides, lecturers of the corresponding seminar – who are usually professionally experienced full-time teachers – have always been and functioned as informal mentors in the conventional sense of mentorship: relationship in which a more experienced or more knowledgeable person helps to guide a less experienced or less knowledgeable person (cf. ROBERTS, 2000, p. 162). Through the program MentOR their expertise and intrinsic commitment to train students to be successful teachers has been formally valued. In addition, all lecturers have been qualified for their function as formal mentors during an obligatory one-day workshop about methods of mentoring.

3 Mentoring for Students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies

3.1 Mentoring during the Introductory Phase

First-year students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies are each introduced to the UDE and the faculty during an orientation week organized by a group of representatives of the student body who also offer support and counseling during the entire study program. In addition, the first semester of study includes an obligatory tutorial about general study techniques given by mature students. Considering these existing services a complementing mentoring concept was created starting in their second semester to further develop their learning and self-management. The voluntary one-year mentoring program MEwiSA (*“Mentoring Erziehungswissenschaft und Soziale Arbeit”*: mentoring Educational Science and Social Work) was officially implemented in 2012 offering a personal learning sponsorship between a first-year student (mentee) and a mature student (mentor) as well as study-related workshops and regular meetings for both groups of mentees and mentors.

The personal learning sponsorship between two students is the center of the program. For that reason prospect mentees and mentors must apply formally indicating their motivation and experiences they are willing to contribute. On this basis the coordinator matches each mentee with a suitable mentor. The matched tandem partners are introduced to each other during an official kick-off event and are then asked to independently organize their individual meetings throughout the year. There are no obligations as to the number of meetings or subjects to be discussed. The tandems themselves are responsible to arrange terms that enable a successful mentorship. They are given a rough draft of a mentoring contract which they can modify and complete in line with their demand in order to formalize the binding nature between each other and their commitment to the mentoring program. They are nevertheless asked to hand in records of their meetings listing their discussed topics and targets the mentee sets for her-/himself. This way relevant subjects and study-related difficulties can be revealed by the program coordinator in order to support the tandems with corresponding workshops.

Findings of the first year's records indicate the mentees' felt need for further support regarding academic writing and seminar papers (formal requirements, literature research, finding a topic) as well as interest in feedback on lecturers, personal

learning progress or career perspectives. Taking into account these aspects as well as the students' general interests a number of workshops have been offered throughout the first year covering various subjects: academic writing, exam nerves, self- and sharing of responsibility as a concept of action (based on theme centered interaction) and intercultural training. These customized workshops are usually realized by or together with existing services of the UDE to introduce them and reduce any possible diffidence of the students (cf. ORTENBURGER, 2013).

An additional instrument of MEwiSA within the learning process support is the learning log. Mentees are asked to use the provided learning log in order to deepen course content and improve learning outcomes. A learning log is a core element of learning support since the documentation of learning success and inhibitions can reveal the individual learning behavior (cf. MANZ, 2010, p. 76). These findings can then serve as a starting point for further counseling through the mentor. The self- and external evaluation of the learning process as well as the awareness of one's learning behavior eventually leads to an enhanced knowledge processing and transfer. Besides that, the MEwiSA learning log (designed based on STRAUCH, JÜTTEN & MANIA, 2009; RAMBOW & NÜCKLES, 2002) offers not only multiple-choice questions for beginners but also reflective open questions for advanced users to address various levels of reflection. This way study content can be objectively documented and prioritized and eventually learning strategies can be reflected upon which is indispensable for self-control of learning (cf. KEMPER & KLEIN, 1998, pp. 82f.).

Besides learning process support for mentees MEwiSA simultaneously enables theory-practice transfer for mentors. Students of Educational Science and Social Work Studies are confronted with different forms of counseling such as mentorship throughout their study program. These theoretical concepts are then consolidated and practiced during a preparatory qualification workshop for all MEwiSA-mentors organized by the coordinator. Especially practiced skills regarding learning process support such as giving structured feedback are relevant not only during the learning sponsorship but also on the job (cf. HARMEIER & HÄUSER, 2013, p. 18). In addition, there are regular meetings for the group of mentors where they exchange experience regarding their tandem, learning process support or forms of counseling. During these meetings a former group of mentors even suggested practicing further methods voluntarily such as peer consulting of specific cases. This shows that both mentees and mentors can derive concrete benefit from this mentoring program eventually enhancing their personal and professional autonomy (cf. *ibid.*, p. 21).

3.2 Mentoring during the Final Phase

In addition to the mentoring program of the introductory phase the Faculty of Educational Sciences also introduced a voluntary program for students in their final phase of Educational Science and Social Work Studies (particularly third and fourth semester of the master's degree programs). In cooperation with the faculty's alumni-network former graduates volunteer as external mentors of students who are about to graduate and start their career. The mentoring program MentAl (mentoring alumni) focuses on vocational guidance and especially all aspects regarding

starting a career. The one-year program is supposed to link theoretical education and requirements of professional practice.

The one-on-one mentorship of MentAl is organized similarly to the learning sponsorship of MEwiSA. Prospect mentees and mentors apply through an application form and a letter of motivation in order to match each mentee with a mentor. After getting to know each other during an official kick-off event they organize themselves throughout the year and hand in records of their meetings and discussed topics. During the program's first year mentors have provided practical support on the subject of writing a master thesis, finding job openings, applications for internships or jobs as well as feedback on personal and professional competencies. Besides that, mentors themselves have also been profiting from the mentorship and their cooperation with the faculty: they could win young (future) professionals for their company and benefit from new input about the current study content and state of research. In addition they are invited to sharing with other mentors expanding their professional network. Both mentors and mentees are also invited to all workshops offered by the alumni-network (e.g. teambuilding, de-escalatory communication etc.) and especially mentees are free to participate in workshops offered by MEwiSA as mentioned previously. This way the program benefits from and links existing networks, programs and services within the faculty.

4 Managing Different Mentoring Programs

Since the UDE-wide mentoring system is part of the federal Quality Pact for Teaching a central support unit has been established within the Center for Higher Education and Quality Development at the UDE. This unit supports all faculties during the conception, coordination and evaluation of their programs and offers qualifications and regular meetings for all coordinators. This way all coordinators can benefit from each other's experience and leverage synergies.

The Faculty of Educational Sciences created two part-time positions encompassing the conception, implementation and coordination of the mentoring programs MentOR, MEwiSA and MentAl. Both coordinators cooperate very closely trying to link their programs and services benefitting from each other's network where possible. This also includes a matching visual appearance of all advertising media.

In general, publicizing the mentoring system within the UDE is the objective of the Center for Higher Education and Quality and each faculty promotes its programs individually according to their culture and their target group. Therefore MentOR advertisement is primarily directed to third semester students, lecturers and training schools as well as everyone involved in the organization of the training period such as the Teacher Training Center. Advertisement measures of MEwiSA and MentAl targets students and alumni as well as general counseling services. So a number of posters and brochures are regularly distributed digitally and on campus and handed out to cooperation partners. Social media is also involved in order to reach participants as well as interested students informing them about upcoming workshops, meetings or general matters. Apart from internal measures the UDE and all faculties are also eager to bring the mentoring system to public attention promoting it as an integral part of the university's unique culture.

The coordinators are primarily responsible for the conception of fitting programs as well as their implementation, monitoring and evaluation reporting directly to the dean of studies. This straight link allows quick support and flexible action where needed as well as access to and awareness within various networks. Therefore potential cooperation and further synergies could be discovered. The MentOR feedback system for teacher training students for example will possibly be adapted to the training periods within Educational Science and Social Work Studies and later training periods of teacher training students. There are definitely more synergies to be revealed eventually which allows flexible concepts and customized counseling services for all students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences.

Besides many synergies and successful cooperation within the faculty and the UDE there are also challenges the programs have been facing especially in the beginning. First of all existing counseling services were uncertain about the side effects of widespread mentoring programs fearing competition instead of potential for cooperation. Besides that there were opinions portraying mentoring to take all personal responsibility off the students' shoulders. Furthermore, a uniform mentoring concept was feared appointing the small group of professors to be mentors for hundreds of students. Another challenge the coordinators faced was their own need for orientation regarding their recently created positions. The latter has been dealt with by the Center for Higher Education and Quality Development who initiated general qualifications and meetings for all coordinators in order to support them establishing their work profile. Other doubts could be dispelled by involving existing counseling services and by allowing flexible mentoring concepts according to the actual demand and obtainable resources.

All together the experiences of the Faculty of Educational Sciences underline the importance of different and flexible mentoring concepts according to the target group and existing resources. Even though the implementation of mentoring programs has been determined by the Rectorate there was plenty of room for the concrete realization by each faculty considering the student's study programs and demand. All mentoring programs and existing counseling services have been linked where possible to form an effective network through systematic, continuous and individual counseling. MentOR, MEwiSA and MentAl are not only designed in line with demand of the students but also with regard to the student's course content and job prospective. Therefore these programs are effective on various levels: offering support for students apart from their daily studies as well as practicing theoretical knowledge such as mentoring, structured feedback or assessment of competencies. This way mentoring is not meant to take personal responsibility off the students' shoulders but rather enhances another level of their autonomy.

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