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Exploring Adult Educators' Views About Mentoring as a Tool for Their Teaching Work-A Greek Empirical Study

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Abstract

Since the Lisbon European Council in 2000, there has been a growing interest in the European in Europe concerning mentoring in adult education, which, however, has focused primarily on adult learners as beneficiaries, and is linked to their participation in educational programs, as well as their inclusion in the labour market. The aim of this paper is to present a research study aimed at exploring Greek adult educators' views on mentoring. The findings indicated that adult educators are favourably disposed to mentorship and they describe a framework which incorporates the concepts of teamwork and reflection.

Keywords: mentoring, adult education, model, mentor, groupwork, reflection

1. Introduction

1.1 Basic Mentoring Models

Clearly, every practice requires a theoretical foundation. The various models of mentoring presented in the international literature have a different meaning and purpose based on each one's theoretical framework. A critical evaluation of these models placed them into two main categories, namely, those based on behaviourism which support knowledge transmission, and those based on constructivism which support knowledge transformation.

In the behavioural models the roles of mentor and mentee are clearly defined. The mentor is the role model whom the mentee tries to emulate by observing and imitating their actions. The mentor, whose guidance gradually decreases as the mentee gains independence, provides the theoretical knowledge needed to render the mentee efficient for the work they must perform. The mentor becomes the role model for the mentee and is associated with control and assessment (Kougioumtzis, 2016) The behaviourist teaching approach is through a technocratic model based on the application of specialized knowledge and skills, where the mentee is regarded as an apprentice (a learner of the trade) and knowledge is purely procedural which is acquired instinctively, following the prototype. Knowledge in these models is instrumental, learning is linear, and teaching is a series of individual tasks and duties (Jones, 2009) which require the development of certain basic skills. Obviously, the approaches represented by these models give the mentee a procedural role which is based on either experience or theoretical assumptions, significantly limiting their judgment and self-efficacy. This perspective is characterized by the traditional form of teaching of "depositing" knowledge, which Freire (1970) has coined the "banking model of education". The practices used involve linear learning of professional skills that respond to theoretical assumptions and institutional aspirations (Collins, 1991; Rogers, 1996; Day, 1999). This type of learning is neither problem-oriented nor action-oriented, and it is a long way from achieving what Freire calls "freedom through learning" (Illeris, 2007). Behavioural-based models have been criticized for their simplistic assumptions about learning and their strict adherence to the way teaching is transmitted (Kwo, 1994; Tomlinson, 1995; Rice, 2007).

Models based on constructivism move mentoring away from the traditional boundaries of education and learning. They are built on the notion that knowledge is discovered on the basis of prior knowledge and learning arises through reflective processes and collaborative practices in the context of a dynamic and flexible relationship of mutual trust. Through the exploration of practical dilemmas, and with dialogue as the basic tool, the development and utilization of participant' skills are sought, who acquire the ability to construct their professional knowledge rather than to merely adopt proven practices. Mentoring is seen as a place of active inclusive training and development for both mentors and mentees (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000), and the roles in such a reflective collaborative context are equal, with the mentor in the basic role of critical collaborator (Schon, 1987; Tang & Choi, 2007). The mentor, through reflective practices, supports and facilitates the mentee to reconsider their teaching methods, to identify dysfunctional mental habits, and to

proceed with the transformation of reference frames, views and actions.

1.2 Mentoring in Greek Adult Education

Studies on the adult educators' experiences of mentoring have indicated that most adult educators have experienced informal mentoring either in the form of consulting or being consulted by their colleagues (Koutsoukos, 2021). This occurs within the context of relationships that have been developed on a daily working basis between colleagues, and is not due to any organizational structure of the educational establishment (Russell & Adams, 1997; Cox, 2005). Both these practices, which involve discussions with respected colleagues, are a common form of educational collaboration as they fill the gap left by the absence of a formally organized system of teacher support (Knight, Tait & Yorke, 2006; Simon, Campbell, Johnson & Stylianidou, 2011). The findings of informal mentoring may offer an explanation for a number of issues. Firstly, it appears to confirm that adult educators have a need for supportive mechanisms (Phillips & Fragoulis, 2010; Koutsoukos, Kiriatzakou, Fragoulis, & Valkanos, 2021). Another issue that is raised concerns the appropriateness or sufficiency of the education and training received by adult educators, as well as the processes of accreditation of their qualifications, causing their certified (formal) and actual competence to be regarded with some skepticism (Ellstrom, 1992). Furthermore, such findings agree with that of other research according to which the majority of mentoring relationships are informal, which appears to be more satisfying for the mentees (Fagenson, 1989). Another explanation could be that the model of mentoring where the mentor as the authority imparts their opinions, knowledge, principles, etc. to the mentee no longer applies (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000). It could be that adult educators share Kolb's (2015) views that education is not the application of techniques but the sharing of meaningful relationships and experiences. Learning tools are not the transfer of know-how but the existence of reflective processes in collaborative environments. It can also be argued that mentoring is just as beneficial for experienced adult educators, as it is for novice teachers of adults (Burstein & Eli Kohn, 2017). Whatever the case, it is clear that colleagues in the same workplace seem to be the prime source of knowledge and guidance for teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan (2000), and that some educators can be effective mentors (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez & Tomlinson, 2009; Simon, Campbell, Johnson & Stylianidou, 2011; Knight et al., 2006).

The present paper examines mentoring as a supportive practice for the teaching guidance of adult educators, by focusing, on the one hand, on data related to the relevant teaching methodology in adult education, and on the other, the documented educational needs of adult educators.

2. Method

2.1 Aim and Research Questions

It is both conventional and expedient to divide the Method section into labeled subsections. These usually include a section with descriptions of the participants or subjects and a section describing the procedures used in the study. The latter section often includes description of (a) any experimental manipulations or interventions used and how they were delivered-for example, any mechanical apparatus used to deliver them; (b) sampling procedures and sample size and precision; (c) measurement approaches (including the psychometric properties of the instruments used); and (d) the research design. If the design of the study is complex or the stimuli require detailed description, additional subsections or subheadings to divide the subsections may be warranted to help readers find specific information.

The aim of the study was to explore Greek adult educators' views on mentoring as a tool for their teaching work. The research questions were the following:

1. Do adult educators show a desirability for instructional guidance?
2. How do adult educators perceive mentoring?
3. What are adult educators' views on the design of an integrated mentoring model to support their teaching work?
4. Do the views of adult educators differ depending on their age, experience in adult education and EOPPEP accreditation?

2.2 Sample

In Greece, there are no official statistics on the number of adult educators due to the fact that they are not employed as permanent staff in those positions, or as in most cases, they are simultaneously employed in two or more adult education institutions. Therefore, all the adult educators employed at the seventy-five (75) Vocational Training Institutes, Second Chance Schools and Life Long Learning Centers of Central Macedonia comprised the research population and determined the sampling framework of the present study (Vamvoukas, 2010). Nevertheless, it was still difficult to accurately determine the precise sample population because the majority of adult educator participants were teaching in more than one educational organization at the same time. However, a rough estimation of approximately one thousand

three hundred (1,300) adult educators were employed in all three establishments during the period of the study, which was between November 2020 and April 2021.

After having taken into consideration all the alternatives in conjunction with the needs of the study, gradual sampling was selected as the most appropriate sampling method, which essentially, is an extension of cluster sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). This was considered the best option for the data collection, as well as ensuring the representativeness of the sample in relation to population size, because the sample population was difficult to detect on account of the following factors: its large size, the fact that it was scattered, and there was no registered list (Zafiropoulos, 2015; Vamvoukas, 2010). Each type of educational establishment (SDE, IEK, KDMB) was defined as being one cluster.

The sample size was obtained using the mathematical formula proposed by Cohen, Manion & Morrison, (1993) which, determines the appropriate size of a probability sample for a given number of the wider population (Cohen et al., 2000). Thus, in accordance with this specific approach, the sample size was determined at 300 adult educators.

2.3 Data Collection

Describe the procedures for selecting participants, including (a) the sampling method, if a systematic sampling plan was used; (b) the percentage of the sample approached that participated; and (c) the number of participants who selected themselves into the sample. Describe the settings and locations in which the data were collected as well as any agreements and payments made to participants, agreements with the institutional review board, ethical standards met, and safety monitoring procedures.

An online questionnaire based on the research questions was developed, whose aim was to collect data on the views of adult educators, focusing on three main areas: a) their desirability to receive instructional guidance, b) their perception of mentoring, and c) their preferred model of mentoring. The questionnaire contained a set of items for each of these three areas, the responses of which were closed questions on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 being the least value and 5 the most (Robson, 2002).

The questionnaire was pilot tested on 50 adult educators, and its reliability and validity were checked. After the relevant adjustments, the final version was built through the Google Drive platform. Following, the web-based self-administered questionnaire was sent to the following educational organizations: 18 Vocational Training Institutes, 12 Second Chance Schools and 10 Life Long Learning Centers throughout Central Macedonia, Greece, with the request to be forwarded to their adult educators. Two hundred and eighty five (285) questionnaires were completed, which was a satisfactory Response Rate of 95%, in accordance with the relevant literature (Groves, 2006). Statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21).

2.4 Reliability, Validity and Limitations of the Research

To examine the self-report on the web-based questionnaire, test-retest reliability and internal consistency (Litwin, 1995) were applied, while content validity and factor validity were used to establish the degree and extent of the construct under investigation.

The limitations of the research are mainly related to the fact that there is no detailed and exhaustive list of adult educators working in the educational organizations from which the sample was drawn. Also, the sample selection which is from specific institutions may affect its representativeness, even though the participants' characteristics are the same as those of the general population. This, coupled with the high level of participation in the research, allows for the conclusions to be generalized to the wider population with increased assurance.

3. Results

The findings from the data analyses are presented and discussed in detail below. It must be noted that Tables 1 to 5 present the percentages of participants' responses on a 5-point Likert scale. For reasons of clarity the aggregate percentage of 5 (the highest value) and 4 (the next highest value) is given. The aggregate percentage of 2 and 1 (the least values) is given only where it was deemed necessary for further clarification. The middle value of 3 is also given when it is noteworthy. In the text all data are given in descending order from the highest to the lowest percentages.

3.1 Profile of Participating Adult Educators

The study participants not only have different scientific backgrounds, but also different knowledge and experience in adult education, and obviously different teaching needs. The largest group consists of accredited adult educators, which was expected since, according to current legislation, accredited educational competence is now a prerequisite for employment as an educator in non-formal education programs (Law 4485/2017). They have a relatively high mean age (45.1% are in the 46-55 age group, followed by 43.6% in the 36-45 age group), however, relatively little experience as adult educators. More specifically, while over half (53.7%) have 1-10 years of experience as adult educators, over a

third (37.1%) have 11-20 years' experience. This indicates that teachers in Greece do not tend to enter the field of adult education immediately on completion of their studies, but only after having gained experience in other places of work. This finding is in agreement with that of a relevant study in EU countries, according to which adult educators have 10-15 years of professional experience in other jobs before turning to the teaching of adults (Buiskool, Broek, Van Lakerveld, Zarifis & Osborne, 2010). This factor raises skepticism about the unbiased assumptions of the study participants in regards to the teaching of adults, i.e., there is a possibility that they have well-established notions about adult learning that are shaped to a great extent by their curriculum vitae and/or their previous engagement in basic education.

3.2 Adult Educatiors' Desirability for Instructional Guidance

Table 1 shows participants' level of instructional guidance desirability. As can be seen, with an aggregate of 63.5% the majority found instructional mentoring very desirable (34.4%) and desirable (29.1%), with another 20.5% stating it was moderately so. On the other hand, only an aggregate of 16% found it undesirable (10.7%) and very undesirable (5.3%).

Table 1. Adult Educators' Level of Desirability for Instructional Guidance

Very undesirable	**Undesirable**	**Moderately desirable**	**Desirable**	**Very desirable**
5.3%	10.7%	20.5%	29.1%	34.4%

3.3 Views on Mentoring

Participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale how importantly they viewed three specific factors, as given in the literature, in relation to mentoring (Aspfors & Fransson, 2015; Branch, 2016; Ehrich, 2013; Ambrosetti, 2014; Johnson, 2002; Merriam, 1983; Roberts, 2000). As can be seen in Table 2, the majority stated that a supportive relationship was the most important factor of mentoring, with an aggregate of 70% (37.7% and 32.3%, respectively), and another 21.1% who found it moderately important. The next most important factor was an integrative programme with an aggregate of 62.9% (28.8% and 34.1%, respectively), with another 26.4% considering it to be moderately important. Lastly, an aggregate of 55.8% (21.7% and 34.1%, respectively, plus 32.9% moderately important) viewed mentoring as a learning process.

Table 2. Adult Educators' perceptions of mentoring

	Percentages				
	Not important at all	**Slightly important**	**Moderately important**	**Very important**	**Extremely important**
Learning process	2.1%	9.2%	32.9%	34.1%	21.7%
Supportive relationship	0.9%	8.0%	21.1%	32.3%	37.7%
Integrative programme	3.0%	7.7%	26.4%	34.1%	28.8%

3.4 Adult Educators' reasons for becoming a mentee

In the context of exploring adult educators' perceptions on mentoring, participants were asked to assess the importance of ten given reasons for becoming mentees (Goff, Jackson, DiLeone, Culotta & DiTomasso, 2014; Richter, Kunter, Lodtke, Klusmann & Baumert, 2013; Gold, 1996). As can be seen in Table 3, four reasons received an aggregate of, or just over 80%, namely: feedback at an aggregate of 82.5% (47.8% and 34.7%, respectively); exchanging views on teaching issues at an aggregate of 81.3% (42.7% and 38.6%, respectively); enhancement of critical thinking at an aggregate of 80.5% (47.8% and 34.7%, respectively; and improving teaching skills at an aggregate of 80.1% (50.1% and 29.1%, respectively). This was followed by the reason to upgrade their qualifications at an aggregate of 71.8% (42.1% and 29.7%, respectively; plus 19.6% moderately important). The next three reasons which received an aggregate of over 60% were: acquisition of knowledge of teaching methodology at an aggregate of 68% (39.2% and 28.8%, respectively, with another 20.2% moderately important); enhancing self-confidence in teaching at an aggregate of 65.9% (30.3% and 35.6%, respectively, with another 19.0% moderately important); and adapting to the culture of the educational organization at an aggregate of 62% (27.9% and 34.1%, respectively; plus 28.2% moderately important). An aggregate of 52.8% (26.1% and 26.7%, respectively, with another 27.0% moderately important) stated that they would become mentees to expand their social contacts, whereas an aggregate of 20.2% stated that this reason was slightly or not important at all (16.6% and 3.6%, respectively). Finally, stress and insecurity management as a reason to

become a mentee received an aggregate of 49.8% (23.4% and 26.4%, respectively, with another 24.0% moderately important). However, an aggregate of 26.1% stated this reason was slightly or not at all important in encouraging them to become mentees (14.8% and 11.3%, respectively).

Table 3. Reasons for adult educators participating in the mentoring process

	Percentages				
	Not important at all	**Slightly important**	**Moderately important**	**Very important**	**Extremely important**
Exchange views on teaching issues	0.9%	3.3%	14.5%	38.6%	42.7%
Enhance self-confidence in teaching	5.6%	9.5%	19.0%	35.6%	30.3%
Expand social contacts	3.6%	16.6%	27.0%	26.7%	26.1%
Adaptation to the culture of educational organization	1.8%	8.0%	28.2%	34.1%	27.9%
Stress and management	11.3%	14.8%	24.0%	26.4%	23.4%
Acquisition of knowledge of teaching methodology	3.6%	8.3%	20.2%	28.8%	39.2%
Feedback	1.5%	1.8%	14.2%	34.7%	47.8%
Enhancement of critical thinking	0.6%	4.5%	14.5%	40.7%	39.8%
Upgrading qualifications	1.2%	7.4%	19.6%	29.7%	42.1%
Improving teaching skills	1.8%	4.2%	13.9%	29.1%	51.0%

3.5 The Types of Adult Educators Would Seek Mentoring From

In order to determine whom adult educators consider as the most desirable mentors, participants were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the likelihood of them seeking mentoring from seven different categories of colleagues. As can be seen in Table 4, the three highest aggregate percentages are: colleague with special studies at 83.7% (45.1% and 38.6%, respectively; followed by an experienced colleague at 80.4% (37.7% and 42.7%, respectively); and a respected colleague at 77.8% (37.4% and 40.4%, respectively). Interestingly, another 13.9%, 14.8%, and 14.2%, respectively stated that they would possibly accept mentoring from these colleagues.

An aggregate of 49% (20.5% and 28.5%; plus 27.9% possibly) stated they would seek mentoring from a colleague with common interests. Also, an aggregate of 47.2% (17.2% and 30.0%, respectively; plus 28.2% possibly) stated they would seek mentoring from a person in an institutional role, such as a head teacher or school director. This finding could suggest the reluctance of adult educators to trust a person in power as their mentor (Daloz, 1986). Finally, the aggregate percentages that participants would seek to be mentored by the categories of a peer colleague and trainees, were, 21% (5.6% and 15.4%, respectively; plus 36.8% possibly) and 20.3% (5.9% and 14,5%, respectively; plus 27.9% possibly), respectively.

Table 4. The likelihood of adult Educators seeking mentoring

	Percentages				
Categories of colleagues	**Definitely not**	**Probably not**	**Possibly**	**Very probably**	**Definitely**
trainees	23.1%	28.5%	27.9%	14.5%	5.9%
experienced colleague	0.6%	4.2%	14.8%	42.7%	37.7%
colleague with special studies	0.3%	2.1%	13.9%	38.6%	45.1%
someone in an institutional role (e.g., Head Teacher/ School Director)	7.1%	17.5%	28.2%	30.0%	17.2%
peer colleague	20.5%	21.7%	36.8%	15.4%	5.6%
a respected colleague	2.4%	5.6%	14.2%	40.4%	37.4%
colleague with common interests	6.5%	16.6%	27.9%	28.5%	20.5%

3.6 Views on a Desired Organizational Framework for the Implementation of Mentoring

Lastly, the participants were asked to rate the importance of fourteen given factors in order to more clearly identify a desired organizational framework for the implementation of mentoring. As can be seen in Table 5, meetings with specific content had by far the highest aggregate score of 87.8% (over half at 51.9% stated in was extremely important and 35.9% very important, while another 10.1% claimed it was moderately important).

This was then followed by factors which are related to the organizational aspect of mentoring: meetings planned jointly (by mentor and mentee) at an aggregate of 79.5% (44.5% and 35.0%, respectively; plus 17.2% moderately important); groups of educator sex changing experiences and supporting each other with an aggregate rating of 77.2% (46% and 31.2%, respectively; plus 18.7% moderately important); being part of a broader organizational framework at an aggregate of 75.4% (31.5% and 43.9%, respectively; plus 20.2% moderately important); and incorporated into the educational institution at an aggregate of 73.3% (31.5% and 41.8%, respectively; plus 20.2% moderately important), as well as Scheduled meetings an aggregate of 62% (29.4% and 32.6%, respectively; plus 24.6% moderately important).

The following highly-rated factors were related to the duration of mentoring. More specifically, continuous mentoring at an aggregate of 74.2% (36.2% and 38.0%, respectively; plus 19.3% moderately important); a short duration of mentoring at an aggregate of 73% (39.2% and 33.8%, respectively; plus 20.2% moderately important); and meetings of a specific duration at an aggregate of 72.1% (34.4% and 37.7%, respectively; plus 22.6% moderately important).

The following findings are the participants' responses to how important they perceived the different types of mentoring relationships to be. More specifically: the mentor being chosen by the mentee at an aggregate of 69.1% (33.2% and 35.9%, respectively; with 22% moderately important); and one mentor to multiple mentees at an aggregate of 68.5% (with almost an equal 34.1% and 34.4%, respectively; and another 23.7% moderately important). Furthermore, one-to-one mentoring was at an aggregate of 62.9% (30.6% and 32.3%, respectively; plus 25.2% moderately important). Perhaps, one interpretation for this finding being relatively lower than would otherwise be expected is that the traditional one-to-one form has connotations of a hierarchical relationship that hinders equal participation in the mentoring process. This was followed by distance mentoring at an aggregate of 52.5% (23.7% and 28.8%, respectively; plus 27.3% moderately important). Interestingly, an aggregate of 20.2%, i.e., a fifth (12.5% and 7.7%, respectively) claimed that e-mentoring was slightly and not at all important. Lastly, multiple mentors to one menteewas rated at an aggregate of only 34.4% (13.9% and 20.5%, respectively; plus 28.5% moderately important). In contrast, this factor was rated at a higher aggregate of 37.1% (18.1% and 19%, respectively) as being slightly and not at all important in the mentoring framework.

Table 5. Adult educators' views on the organizational framework for the implementation of mentoring

	Percentages				
	Not important at all	**Slightly important**	**Moderately important**	**Very important**	**Extremely important**
Incorporated into the educational organization	1.8%	4.7%	20.2%	41.8%	31.5%
Part of a broader organizational framewor	0.6%	3.9%	20.2%	43.9%	31.5%
Distance mentoring	7.7%	12.5%	27.3%	28.8%	23.7%
Short duration of mentoring	2.1%	4.7%	20.2%	33.8%	39.2%
Continuous mentoring	1.5%	5.0%	19.3%	38.0%	36.2%
Mentor chosen by mente	1.8%	7.1%	22.0%	35.9%	33.2%
Scheduled meetings	4.5%	8.9%	24.6%	32.6%	29.4%
Meetings with specific content	0.6%	1.5%	10.1%	35.9%	51.9%
Meetings of specific duration	2.1%	3.3%	22.6%	37.7%	34.4%
Meetings planned jointly (by mentor and mentee)	1.5%	1.8%	17.2%	35.0%	44.5%
One-to-one mentoring	4.5%	7.4%	25.2%	32.3%	30.6%
One mentor to multiple mentees (one-to-many mentoring)	2.4%	5.3%	23.7%	34.4%	34.1%
Multiple mentors to one mentee (many-to-one mentoring)	19.0%	18.1%	28.5%	20.5%	13.9%
Groups of educators Exchange experiences And support Each other	1.8%	2.4%	18.7%	31.2%	46.0%

3.7 Study Comparisons

The comparison tests, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis that were carried out showed that there was a correlation between adult educators' views and the variables age, experience in adult education, and accreditation. Specifically, the age groups 25-35 and 36-45 showed a preference for the following: lifelong mentoring, sharing and exchanging experiences, and having mutual support in teachers' groups. This is in contrast to the 46-55 age group (45.1%) who stated a preference for traditional models of mentoring and transfer of knowledge.

On the other hand, the perceptions of adult educators who had little experience (1-10 years, 53.7%) or who were not accredited (26.4%) seemed to be along the lines of mentoring consisting of knowledge transfer from colleagues, observing others' teaching, and that it should take place at a particular phase of their teacher training (Banks, Conway, Darmody, Leavy, Smyth & Watson, 2015). In contrast, experienced and accredited teachers perceived mentoring as a support mechanism for empowerment and personal change.

4. Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

The research results showed that irrespective of their scientific background, adult educators are positive towards mentoring. This finding is consistent with other related studies conducted in Greece, which recognize the importance of instructional guidance for adult educators during the mentoring process (Phillips & Fragoulis, 2010; Koutsoukos, et al., 2021). Overall, it appears that the main motives for adult educators to become involved in the mentoring process are to enhance their teaching skills and improve their teaching behaviour through feedback and reflection practices which take place in collaborative interactive environments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Bell, 2001).

Adult educators' perceptions of mentoring showed preference to a supportive relationship clearly which promotes the psychosocial function of mentoring (Kram, 1983); also of significance is its organizational characteristics in the importance of having an integrative programme (Banks, et al., 2015); and finally, the importance of the learning aspect of mentoring which highlights that it functions as a tool (Gold, 1996).

Even though their experience is based mainly on informal dyadic mentoring practices, there is agreement that the following factors must be applied to the mentorship framework, namely, that it has the characteristics of typical

mentoring; is both well-designed and well-organized by the educational organization; and that the meetings are scheduled, have specific content and are of a specific duration (Singh, Bains & Vinnicombe, 2002). The significance of the above has been pointed out by other research findings, which showed that structured activities and targeted mentoring enhance mentees' professional development much more than non-structured activities and generalized mentoring because they relate to specific needs (Stanulis, Little & Wibbens, 2012).

In addition, the mentoring process should be flexible and adaptable to the needs of the educators/mentees, as well as the conditions of the educational organization. The main difference is that while in typical mentoring the goals are usually short-term and of a specific duration (Ragins, Cotton & Miller, 2000), the participating adult educators in this study stated they preferred long-term mentoring. Furthermore, based on the general patterns of mentoring put forward by Young, Bullough, Draper, Smith & Erickson (2005), study participants opted for an interactive mentoring pattern, in which mentors and mentees jointly define goals, content and actions. Thus, they recognize the existence of a reflective collaborative framework as a key feature of mentoring in which the mentor has the role of critical collaborator (Schon, 1987; Tang & Choi, 2007). These findings confirm the basic conditions for adult learning which are, among other things, a well-organized and efficient educational program (Kokkos, 2005) in which learners actively participate, which is closely associated with being an adult (Rogers, 1996; Merriam & Cafarella, 1999).

They believe that group mentoring with peers is an active learning strategy, confirming the view that learning is relational and knowledge is produced through collaborative interaction (Freire, 1970).Choosing to be mentored by a respected colleague indicates that having a personal relationship is an important factor in the quality of mentoring (Rippon & Martin, 2003; Ehrich, 2013; Ambrosetti, 2014; Johnson, 2002), thus, offering empirical support to the psychosocial dimension of mentorship (Kram, 1983). Adult educators' preference for types of group-mentoring in the form of lifelong education confirms a finding by the Grundtvig-retro research study in which "supervisory teams, peer counseling and continuing education" were proposed (Armaos, Deligiannis & Kutentaki, 2010).

Adult educators perceive not only the mentor but also themselves as mentees, as a source of knowledge which can best be utilized only in an equal relationship (Brookfield, 2006) and they do not prefer linear learning of professional skills (Collins, 1991; Day, 1999; Rogers, 1996).They are negatively inclined towards the existence of contemporary hierarchical leadership approaches to mentoring practice, which is in line with the literature findings, according to which hierarchical relationships: prevent the mentee from becoming actively involved in the process, hinder the exchange of opinions, impede learning (Brown, Pryzwansky& Schulte, 2001), and often destroy the sense of mutual trust that should underpin the mentoring relationship (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010; Jones, 2009; Rippon & Martin, 2003). However, there is a substantial portion of adult educators who hold a more traditional view of mentoring roles (McConnell &Geesa, 2019). A possible explanation for this might be that these adult educators have experienced forms of education where hierarchical roles were prevalent.

Regarding the duration of mentoring (continuous or short-term), the adult educators' preferences can be explained in relation to their attitude towards learning. It is most likely that the participants' previous educational training experience of short duration has shaped and reinforced their learning preferences (Kelly, 2010). In addition, most of the support actions are related to induction training that have been incorporated into programmes for the integration of newly recruited teachers (McIntyre & Green-Hobson, 2017; Andrea, 2010).

Finally, participants wanting the meetings to be of a specific duration is associated to, on the one hand, the desire of adult educators to be involved in a well-organized process, and on the other, it reflects the need of each adult learner to know precisely what the aims, content and actions are of the educational process they are committed to (Courau, 1994).

Age, experience and accreditation are factors which influence their preferences on the organizational framework for the implementation of mentoring. Young adult educators focus on the transformation rather than on the transference of knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1995), and recognize the long-term benefits of mentoring which they associate with lifelong learning. Also, adult educators with little experience or not accredited are along the lines of mentoring consisting of knowledge transfer from colleagues. Experienced and accredited teachers perceive mentoring as a mechanism for strengthening their critical reflection in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning process and give meaning to the experience which leads to action (Illeris, 2007). These views are in agreement with Mezirow's (2000) stance, according to whom learning is not the addition of knowledge but the transformation of existing knowledge through critical thinking.

From the results, it becomes apparent that adult educators desire mentoring as a tool f to enhance their teaching skills and improve their teaching behaviour. They want a well-organized mentoring process which they can be involved in and make co-decisions on issues that concern them. Furthermore, it appears that of particular importance is the participants' desire for interaction in collaborative environments where there is an absence of hierarchy, in which the roles of mentor and mentee alternate as equal partners (Hobson et al., 2009; Gardiner, 2010; Angelique, Kyle & Taylor, 2002).

Also, adult educators desire constant mentoring, suggesting that they have adopted Brookfield's (1989) view that becoming a good teacher is a never-ending process.

A general conclusion from the present study is that the adult educators appear to move away from traditional models of mentoring (Richter et al., 2013). Although the perceptual mentoring framework they have developed incorporates elements from traditional and reflective-transformational mentoring models it relies heavily on constructive learning theories; corresponds to the main characteristics of adult learners, taking into account the conditions for effective adult learning and incorporates the concepts of teamwork and reflection.

The importance participants place on mentoring being integrated into the educational organization shows that they want a process which is designed on the basis of clearly defined educational goals directly linked to mentees' needs. This view places the educational organization in a significant position, recognizing its transformative dynamic nature (Retna & TeeNg, 2016; Moloi, 2010; Schechter, 2008). On this basis, the need arises for a broader study to be conducted on the existing culture of an adult education organization, as well as further examination of the factors associated with the organizational framework, which can affect the success of mentoring. The following questions present considerable interest for further research: Are educational organizations willing to adopt mentoring practices? What factors related to the organizational framework can influence the successful implementation of mentoring? What are the conditions required? In what ways does the organizational culture encourage or hinder making the most effective use of mentoring in adult educational structures? On the whole, the study and critical analysis of the social conditions associated with the adult educator's workplace will shed more light on the importance of organizational culture as a prerequisite for the implementation of mentoring, as well as give insight into the efficacy of mentoring as a means of offering teaching guidance to adult educators. All of this is, of course, with a view to transforming adult education structures into learning organizations.

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