Exemplary mentors' perspectives towards mentoring across mentoring contexts: Lessons from collective case studies

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ABSTRACT

Framed as collective case studies, this study examined the perspectives that mentors, who are considered exemplary in the field, exhibit towards mentoring in different mentoring contexts in the Israeli school system from a variety of view points: The mentors themselves, their mentees, supervisors, school principals, and project leaders. Mentoring contexts are distinguished by their organisational, instructional and professional orientations towards teaching and mentoring. Perspectives towards mentoring are reflected in the language that the mentor uses in order to describe his/her work and the behavior that the mentor exhibits as it plays out in his/her actions. The findings of the study reveal that, despite the different contexts of practice, star mentors shared common perspectives towards mentoring in terms of educational ideologies and envisioned roles and practices, exhibited through the use of a similar professional language. We also learned that these attributed meanings were highly congruent with their mentees, principals, supervisors and colleagues' perceptions of the mentors' practice. The common emergent themes that surfaced in mentors and their respective participants' characterizations of their practice were: Organisational skills, interpersonal relationships, integration of theory and practice, knowledge and expertise, challenge, modelling and reflexivity. Mentors also acted upon some of these characterizations in unique, idiosyncratic ways, guided by the distinctiveness of their organisational and educational mentoring context. Thus, alongside similar ideologies and beliefs across contexts we also identified differences as to the emphasis that each mentor gave to a particular aspect of organisation, knowledge and relationships.

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1. Introduction and purpose

Over the last two decades, the Ministry of Education and Culture in Israel has dedicated significant funding and resources to the development of mentoring programmes in the Israeli school system. School or disciplinary inspectors, and regional project leaders of educational reforms appoint in-service mentors who are considered good teachers in the field, to provide ongoing assistance to teachers in the field. In-service mentors are delegated to assist novice and experienced teachers within specific disciplines of school teaching, both in elementary and high schools. The proliferation of mentoring schemes has given rise to diverse models of mentoring to enhance teachers' professional development (Author, 2003). Little is known, however, about what constitutes exemplary mentoring practice in these different contexts. Although the

different 'recipients' of mentoring i.e. mentees, school principals, and supervisors can impressionistically point to mentoring practices that are exemplary and to specific mentors in the field that are considered 'star mentors', there is little systematic research to substantiate these impressions. The present study addresses this missing lens in research in the context of Israeli in-service education.

Framed as 'collective case studies' (Stake, 1995), the study examined the perspectives that mentors, who are considered experts (or 'stars') in the field, exhibit towards mentoring in different mentoring contexts from a variety of view points: The mentors themselves, their mentees, supervisors, school principals, and project leaders. Mentoring contexts are distinguished by their organisational, instructional and professional orientations towards teaching and mentoring. Perspectives towards mentoring are reflected in the language that the mentor uses in order to describe his/her work and the behavior that the mentor exhibits as it plays out in his/her actions (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985).

Important studies on mentoring have focused on programmatic, organisational, content and professional development aspects of the practice (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Allerman, 1986; Lasley,

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1996; Murphy, 1986; Phillip-Jones, 1982; Rowley, 1999; Zey, 1984).Studies have also focused on conceptualizing good mentoring practices (Allerman, 1986; Daloz, 1983; Kirkham, 1992; Lasley, 1996; Miller-Marsh, 2002; Vonk, 1993). The contextual character of good mentoring is, however, an area that needs further inquiry. Only a few studies have focused specifically on the context of mentoring (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Wang, 2001), underscoring the practice of mentoring as a contextual activity. Since very little is known about conceptual differences and about practical strategies of mentoring with mentors working in different situations, Wang suggests paying more attention to the connection between mentoring activities and the context within which they are implemented. Our study attends to this connection by exploring the thinking and actions of mentors whose practices are regarded as 'exemplary' across five different mentoring contexts.

2. The diverse contexts of mentoring in Israel

In the course of the years, as early as 1975, the Israeli educational system has seen a proliferation of mentoring areas and contexts in in-service education. These contexts have grown at the background of rapid, ongoing changes in the educational system throughout the years, such as a growing autonomy granted to schools over the past ten years, the propagation of schools that specialize in a distinctive subject matter area with a particular educational and disciplinary orientation, and the establishment of collaborative frameworks for the development of school-based curricula, pedagogical policy and assessment tools.

Contexts of mentoring are also diverse in their range from individual to group mentoring, from internal school-based mentoring (whereby the mentor is one of the school teachers) to external mentoring (appointed by inspectors or project leaders), and from regional mentoring according to districts to national mentoring (to promote curricular reforms at national policy level).

The variety of mentoring contexts created for the diverse and changing needs of particular functions and institutions, raise the need to establish standards of professional conduct for the practice. To this end, it is important to describe and characterize exemplary mentoring in the diverse forms and contexts within which it is practiced. In this study, we focus on five different contexts of mentoring: (1) Mentoring of novice mentors of teachers (group sessions geared to prepare teachers for the passage from teaching to mentoring in the school educational system); (2) Regional mentoring (an external mentor who is responsible for an entire geographical area, both pedagogically and administratively, through workshops, lecture sessions and focused group sessions); (3) Internal school mentoring (whereby the mentor works in one school with different groups of teachers on areas such as curriculum development, character education, languages); (4) Subject matter mentoring (an external mentor in a particular region is responsible for disseminating reform in a particular subject matter area with groups of teachers and with novice teachers providing individual assistance).

Prior to introducing each of the contexts and the five mentoring cases, we turn to the conceptual frameworks that guided the study: The notion of perspectives and extant theorizing on good mentoring practices.

3. Perspectives towards mentoring

Our focus on the perspectives towards mentoring that characterize exemplary mentors in different mentoring contexts borrows from the notion of 'perspectives towards teaching' in the literature of teacher education. Drawing on the work of Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961) and later on Zeichner and Tabahnick's

conceptualization of perspectives towards teaching, we define perspectives as the ideologies and actions that guide professionals in their practice.

During the past few decades, several studies have focused on prospective teachers' perspectives towards teaching, in an effort to understand how neophytes grow into becoming professional teachers as shaped by their personal histories, by the university teacher education programme and by the school culture into which they are inducted. Becker et al. (1961) defined perspectives as a 'coordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situation'. According to this view, perspectives differ from attitudes since they include actions and not merely dispositions to act. Unlike values, perspectives are understood by Becker et al. as specific to situations rather than as representing generalized beliefs.

The situated character of the notion of 'perspectives' (as compared to the more generalized definition of attitudes, values, beliefs and dispositions), enables us to examine mentors' ideas and actions within the particular contextual and interpersonal context of their mentoring practices. An important assumption underlying our choice of the notion of perspectives as a guiding conceptual framework for the study is the premise that actions and thinking cannot be separated and constitute part of the same incident. It follows, then, that perspectives are realized through professional behavior, reflected in the language used when talking about such behavior (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985). In this reciprocal sense, what is said, how it is said, and what is done i.e. language and behavior, need to be examined complementarily.

Perspectives also speak to Haberman's notion of functions (Haberman, 1995), defined in the context of 'star teachers', as a collection of behaviors and ideologies that characterize star teachers in their thinking and in their educational stance towards teaching. The two notions, perspectives and functions, seem almost interchangeable as they connect between thinking and actions. Perspectives, however, place a strong emphasis on the language that professionals use both to talk about their work and about their actions, relating it to specific incidents within a particular context and as perceived by the different players in the system (in our case mentees, principals, project leaders and inspectors).

4. Characteristics of good mentoring practices

Over the past three decades or so, various important empirical and conceptual studies have attempted to describe and characterize good mentoring practices. Early characterizations of a one-to-one relationship between an expert and a novice envisioned in the role of Mentor towards Telemachus, have long been expanded to include both formal and informal mentoring relationships (Evans, 2000) between teachers and pupils, teachers and teachers, supervisors and teachers, etc. (McIntyre, Hagger, & Wilkin, 1993; Roberts, 2000). Good mentoring practices are, both at pre-service and in-service levels, described as of a developmental and nurturing character, whereby the mentor leads the mentees in the development of their professional competence and performance at various personal, interpersonal and organisational levels of assistance (McIntyre & Hagger, 1996). As such, they range from modelling and instructing to information sources, co-thinkers and inquirers, evaluators, supervisors, and learning companions (Zanting, Verloop, Vermont, & Van Driel, 1998).

In particular, the literature on mentoring focuses on characterizing good mentoring practices as related to domains of expertise, to interpersonal relationships and to knowledge development. In regard to domains of expertise, the good mentor is seen as an expert in the specific subject matter that s/he mentors, exhibiting a capacity to talk to the mentee about teaching subject matter

(Author, 2005) in ways that connect to the mentee's context of teaching. Good mentors are also, first and foremost, expert teachers with rich content, practical and pedagogical content knowledge as teachers. They are flexible and sensitive to task demands and to the social situations surrounding them while solving problems (Berliner, 2001; Glaser, 1990;) and are challenged to reinterpret and reorganise their thinking when they experience dissonance. In their behavior, they excel in a familiar domain and in particular contexts; they develop automaticity for repetitive operations needed to accomplish their goals, and can infer how to act upon new situations from previous experiences (Berliner, 2001).

In regard to knowledge development, good mentors are seen as sources of knowledge (Little, 1990) who can access their theoretical knowledge and translate it for mentoring purposes in order to enhance the mentee's teaching–learning processes (Ardery, 1990; Roberts, 2000). In addition to subject matter knowledge, good mentors possess rich pedagogical content knowledge (Author, 2001; Brown, 2001) which enable them to represent problems in qualitatively rich and deep ways, to engage in fast and accurate pattern recognition, and bring rich, personal sources of information to bear on the problems and dilemmas that they confront (Berliner, 2001: 472). Rich pedagogical knowledge in mentoring also entails the ability to talk about teaching in ways that connect between theory, practice, and the particular context of the mentee (Feiman-Nemser & Folden, 1986; Kirkham, 1992; Vonk, 1991, 1993). These attributions call for inquiry into how exemplary mentoring practices or in Haberman's words 'star mentors' access their theoretical knowledge and translate it for mentoring purposes in the different contexts.

The good mentor is also described as acting as a model of an ongoing learner who exhibits transparency, is open to learning from colleagues and new teachers, strives for professional growth, engages in the development of new curricula, reads professional articles and shares his/her new knowledge with others (Rowley, 1999). Good mentors encourage processes rather than solely products of learning (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1992; Feiman-Nemser, 2001b; Shandley, 1989), stressing collaboration over time between mentor and mentee and focusing on the social and professional change in the teacher (Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1992). They also provide mentees with learning opportunities in order to foster their professional development (Wang, 2001) and their teaching capacities (Tomlinson, 2001). In this respect, interpersonal relationships based on trust, collaboration, caring, support and mutual recognition are also considered core to the work of the mentor (Belenky, Blythe, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Cochran-Smith & Paris, 1992; Elliott & Calderhead, 1993; McIntyre & Hagger, 1996). This is seen to be true across all contexts of mentoring (Roberts, 2000).

Good mentoring practices also entail mentors' awareness and understanding of the dynamics of power relationships within the new accountabilities, acting as activist professionals (Sachs, 2000). Mentors, thus, need to have a clear vision of what being and behaving as a good professional in changing classrooms, schools, policy and societal contexts means. In this respect, mentors' roles, defined as 'a set of expectations and commitment to act in a particular way in a particular context' (Rollinson, Broadfield, & Edwards, 1988), require taking upon a role in order address the idiosyncratic expectations of the different contexts within which the mentor operates. Thus, when a mentor moves from one context to another, s/he must adapt and adopt his/her perspective to the target group or context, both in world view and behavior (Roberts, 2000). In this context, good mentors function as role models of different behaviors (Bandura 1997) with qualities and techniques which, through observation of the mentee's actions, can lead to the latter's learning (Kemper, 1968; Scandura & Scheriesheim, 1994; Zanting et al., 1998). The diversity of mentoring contexts within

which the focal mentors of our study operate, allows for exploring how mentors adapt their perspectives to the different needs of their mentees.

In being a role model for the mentee, good mentors are also professionals who know how to challenge then mentee (Daloz, 1983; McIntyre & Hagger, 1996; Rowley, 1999) leading to the latter's autonomy (Lasley, 1996). Hence, an important aspect of a good mentoring conversation is the capacity of the mentor to challenge the mentee with reflective questions (Collison & Edwards, 1996).

4.1. Good mentors as formative leaders

The above characteristics of good mentoring also speak to the qualities of a good leader who motivates, inspires, and leads in a particular direction (Popper, 2000). Initially, leaders were identified by way of their physical qualities (Terman, 1904), extending, later on, to highlighting more interpersonal characteristics such as the ability to articulate a vision and translate in into operative goals, intelligence, creativity and others. The direction that emerges from the literature is that the characteristics needed for becoming a leader are not dependent on a fixed system of qualities but rather on the needs and expectations of the context within which they function. Accordingly, it is not the qualities *but the circumstances* that dictate the kind of roles to be taken and created for a particular group of people. Taken to mentoring, such interactional view of mentoring as leadership would call for examining their leadership as emergent from the interaction between the particular personal characteristics of the mentor/leader and the environmental and circumstantial factors that shape his/her role. Alternately, viewing mentoring as a kind of transactional leadership would focus on the expectations of the group and how these connect to the mentor's efficient work and remuneration. By contrast, a transformational leadership view of mentoring would regard the mentor as a person with vision who helps the group into becoming autonomous by encouraging them to set goals rather than solve immediate matters (Bass, 1985, 1999; Burns, 1978). Transformational mentor as leaders would, then, strive for motivation, meaning, challenge, and responsiveness to others. They would encourage new ideas, question and solve problems in new ways (Bass & Avolio, 1996).

4.2. Good mentoring and teacher leadership

The literature of leadership has gradually gained a prominent platform in the realm of teacher education, underscoring the notion of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership identifies with notions of individual empowerment and management, suggesting that teachers hold a central position in the ways schools operate and in the core functions of teaching and learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Just as the literature of leadership distinguishes between transactional and transformative leaders, perceptions of teacher leadership have evolved from initial views of the teacher serving more 'transactional' leadership roles (mainly extended managerial roles as department heads, coordinators or union representatives (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000)), to roles that capitalize on the instructional expertise of teachers (through roles such as curriculum leaders, staff developers, and mentors of new teachers; to recent views of teacher leaders as agents of change in their school cultures (Darling-Hammond, 1988; Lieberman & Miller, 1999, 2004; Silva et al., 2000)). This recent view speaks to more transformative definitions of leadership, stressing the role of the teacher leader as enhancing collaboration and empowerment of individuals within an organisational culture, promoting continuous professional learning of teachers within communities of practice (Ash & Persall, 2000; Childs-Bowen, Moller, & Scrivner, 2000). Adopting a more expanded definition of teacher leadership as transformative,

Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson, and Hann (2002) suggest viewing teacher leadership and its contributions as action that transforms teaching and learning in a school, that ties school and community together on behalf of learning, and that advances social sustainability and quality of life for a community…. Teacher leadership facilitates principled action to achieve whole-school success. It applies the distinctive power of teaching to shape meaning for children, youth and adults. And it contributes to long-term, enhanced quality of community life. (p. xvii).

Examining the practice of good mentors in diverse mentoring contexts would then, call for exploring how the different contexts might call for a particular orientation to leadership and teacher leadership. We should mention though, that by and large, the extant approaches to mentoring seem to forward a view of the mentor as a transformative leader, stressing the personal, interpersonal and professional qualities of good mentors.

5. The contexts of mentoring: lessons from collective case studies

How do the above postulations regarding the character of good mentoring practices play out in diverse contexts of mentoring? To address our question regarding the perspectives towards mentoring that characterize exemplary practices of expert mentors in the five different mentoring contexts mentioned earlier, we selected five in-service mentors working in the north of the country, who exhibited exemplary practices. Several initial criteria guided our selection 1) At least five years of experience in mentoring, 2) Engagement in mentoring practices at least two days a week, 3) Recommendations of exemplary practices from regional subject matter and general inspectors, project leaders and school principals 4) Maximum diversity in terms of the context of mentors' work, 5) Diversity in terms of the model of mentoring espoused in each of the contexts. These criteria allowed for gaining a multifaceted picture of the nature of exemplary mentoring practices as it plays out in diverse mentoring contexts and models of mentoring.

The process of gathering recommendations of exemplary practices from regional subject matter and general inspectors, project leaders and school principals entailed several stages: First, we approached ten general and ten subject matter inspectors from the Northern District of the country (General inspectors' mandate is to be responsible for entire schools in a particular geographical area in all aspects of the school system –one inspector is usually responsible for a number of schools in the same town/city/village/community). Disciplinary inspectors are responsible for a particular subject matter area in the entire district (English, Math, Sciences, Language, etc.). The inspectors were asked to recommend mentors in their district that they consider 'stars' or exemplary in their practices. As mentioned earlier, we stressed the fact that these mentors should have a reputation of having succeeded in implementing innovations with teachers and are considered by school principals and teachers as particularly successful. We received a list of 15 mentors. During the second stage, we approached the seven leading regional counselors in the district (who function as mentors of mentors in the field and provide the connection between the field and the Ministry policy) to narrow the list to the 'best mentors'. The list of 15 mentors was then reduced to 8 mentors. We then approached all the school principals and project leaders working with the selected 8 mentors in different professional development frameworks. They were asked to give their opinion on the selected mentors that they knew. Finally, we approached the eight mentors to participate in the study. Five of them expressed a strong motivation to take part in the study. These were eventually the five case studies which were investigated.

For a detailed description of the mentors' contexts of mentoring see Appendix 1. In the next section we present a brief account of the five contexts of mentoring. These are further elaborated in further sections throughout the findings and discussion.

5.1. Orly's context of mentoring: training teachers to become mentors

Orly works as a mentor of mentors, preparing teachers to become mentors of curriculum in the framework of workshop sessions and lectures. The function of the mentor of curriculum is to implement changes in schools and to construct curricula with the entire school staff, with a stress on organisational aspects of schooling. Orly is very task oriented and possesses excellent organisational skills. She talks about her approach to mentoring as formative with a stress on creating ongoing dialogues which attend to both cognitive and affective aspects of curriculum design and implementation (interview and observations).

5.2. Dorit's context of mentoring: implementing curriculum innovation

Dorit is a regional school mentor for curriculum implementation whose mandate is to mentor individual teachers and provide ongoing support to teachers in different schools, often observing them in their classes. Dorit works in a variety of secondary schools, ranging from secular to religious schools, comprehensive and specialized schools. Dorit sees herself as especially committed to her role and to the people she mentors. Her approach to mentoring is to begin from the unique strengths of each teacher in order to build rich interpersonal relations which she sees as core to good mentoring practices. She is also very involved in her own school as an internal mentor and she works very closely with the principal. She is particularly involved in curriculum implementation and evaluation.

5.3. Nurit's context of mentoring: regional mentor of English teachers

Nurit is a subject matter external/regional English mentor who gives workshops to groups of teachers in Elementary School. She also works with novice teachers of English and with communities of English teachers. Her role also entails administrative work with the inspector of English. Nurit relates to her mentees as colleagues and regards collaboration as essential for sustaining the communities of English teachers she works with.

5.4. Rina's context of mentoring: school mentor of character education

Rina is a regional mentor of character education in Elementary schools and her function is to deepen study in subject matter that focuses on tradition and culture. She is an experienced elementary school mentor and a former elementary school principal. In her work as mentor, Rina integrates exposure to theory and tools for planning and implementation of curriculum. Her approach is collaborative and she believes in challenging the mentees through questions that promote reflection.

5.5. Mirit's context of mentoring: integrating computers in math education

Mirit is a mentor of mathematics and computer in education who works in the framework of workshops and specializes in the teaching of mathematics in elementary schools. Her meetings with

the mentees are not regular but she has managed to establish good relationships with the mentees, forwarding a view of the mentee as a learning professional and innovator.

6. Method: collective case studies

The study followed a case study approach to data collection, analysis and interpretation. Data included semi-structured interviews with the five mentors, observations of the mentors at work, interviews with mentees, school principals and project leaders/ supervisor. Drawing on notions of good mentoring practices and on the notion of perspectives towards teaching and mentoring as tentative theoretical templates, the questions for the interviews were phrased around the mentors' espoused beliefs and conceptions about good mentoring practices and on how these attributions played out in their actual practices. For example, the mentors of the study were asked to describe what they think a good mentoring practice is and at the same time to provide concrete examples from their own practices that reflect such beliefs: (i.e. what do you think makes a good mentoring practice? What will I see in your work that reflects some of these beliefs? What is the most important thing for you in mentoring and how would you achieve it in your own work?). The interviews conducted with the mentees, school principals and supervisors revolved around similar questions but were rephrased accordingly. Appendix 2 includes a detail of the questions asked for each of the participant populations.

The five case studies were examined and analyzed from multiple perspectives, using qualitative procedures of interpretation. Through the use of a variety of sources of data collection, we gained access into star mentor's perspectives from different points of view: The semi-structured interviews with the five mentors exposed their espoused ideologies, beliefs and thoughts about good mentoring practices. The emergent initial findings from the analysis of the interviews were triangulated with observations of the mentors at work to identify their language and actions as reflective (or not) of their expressed ideas. These initial findings were then further triangulated with interviews conducted with the mentees, the school principals and the project leaders and supervisors. The hermeneutic process of triangulation of these multiple sources yielded a multifaceted and intricate portrayal of the ideologies and actions that characterize the focal mentors' practices from a variety of angles.

Data analysis was conducted within and across cases, yielding unique portrayals of each case as well as common themes that surfaced for all five 'star' mentors as related to their ideologies and to their practices. The data analysis consisted of four stages according to Grossman (1990) and Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985). During the first stage, individual summaries of each case were created focusing on the main emergent themes to create individual profiles of exemplary mentoring. These were guided by the tentative theoretical templates on good mentoring practices. In the second stage, a within case analysis was conducted (Miles & Haberman, 1984) to create semantic categories substantiated by excerpts from the data for each case. The third stage entailed a cross cases analysis to identify common categories to all five cases and idiosyncratic differences across cases.

7. Exemplary mentoring across contexts: common and unique perspectives

The analysis yielded recurrent themes that shed light on participants' perspectives of what constitutes exemplary practice in mentoring and of the idiosyncratic forms and meanings that such exemplary practices take in the different contexts of mentoring examined.

In particular, we learned that *despite the different contexts of practice*, exemplary mentors shared common perspectives towards mentoring in terms of educational ideologies and envisioned roles and practices, exhibited through the use of similar professional language. We also learned that these attributed meanings were highly congruent with their mentees, principals, supervisors and colleagues' perceptions of the mentors' practice. That is, there was a strong correspondence between what the mentors said they believed in and what the mentees' and others said about their enacted roles in practice. The common emergent themes that surfaced in mentors and their respective participants' characterizations of their practice were: Organisational skills, interpersonal relationships, integration of theory and practice, knowledge and expertise, challenge, modelling and reflexivity.

At the same time, however, we learned that mentors acted upon some of these characterizations in *unique, idiosyncratic ways,* guided by the distinctiveness of their organisational and educational mentoring context. Thus, alongside similar ideologies and beliefs across contexts we also identified differences as to the emphasis that each mentor gave to a particular aspect of organisation, knowledge or relationships. These differences were also reflected in how they acted upon these beliefs. We examine these dimensions in the following section.

8. Perspectives as reflected in language: shared and distinctive views across mentoring contexts

8.1. Professionalism and expertise

In tune with the literature on exemplary practice (Brown, 2001), mentees, school principals, and supervisors *alike* mentioned professionalism and knowledge (which we identified as content and pedagogical content knowledge) as an important characteristic of the mentors they worked with. Likewise, the five mentors spoke in a similar language about the importance of having rich content and pedagogical content knowledge in their particular subject matter area, exhibiting similar perspectives on professionalism and expertise.

Rina, for example, defined her main role as '*deepening knowledge in the area of festivals and Jewish tradition*'. In the same vein, one of her mentees commented that '*she made us surface the concerns and questions that we had always kept inside and never spoken about out loud …for example, we spoke in depth about what is tradition, what we want to preserve, how much of it …what she did with us was that she 'aired the dust' of some of our deeper concerns that we had never really dealt with…she certainly deepened our knowledge in the area'.* Observing her in action, indeed, we could identify a discourse guided by questions that problematized values, geared to challenging critical thinking and introspection into the topic of tradition and values in character education. Notice, for example, her line of questioning in one of the sessions we observed: ' *Do you remember the four questions- Whether to teach a specific topic? If yes, what to teach? How to teach it, and the last and central question: How can I transform a particular traditional festivity into an opportunity for teaching and learning?'.*

Mirit, describes herself as '*an ongoing learner in [her] subject matter area of mentoring'.* In her work as a mentor of computers in education her main concern is being '*upgraded about new knowledge in the area in order to translate theory to practice …because in my work the connection between theory and practice is essential'.* Mirit, thus, views her role as transforming theoretical knowledge to activities that can be introduced and applied to teaching: '*I bring different triggers through the use of computers and then they have to change them into teaching activities for their particular classes'.* The following excerpt from one of the observed mentoring sessions

illustrates her views in action: *'Let's look at the principle behind this activity and then see how you can manage on your own to apply this principle in your own teaching …choose a concept that has the potential for expansion and see where it leads you to…'*

Likewise, Dorit, the school mentor for curriculum, stresses that *'it is important to be a professional and an expert in your subject matter and to develop in this direction'*.She also sees professionalism as *'the capacity to develop others…focusing on processes'* identifying less with *'prescriptions'* or top-down models of knowledge transmission. Dorit spoke at length about enhancing processes rather than transmitting knowledge: *'one of my roles is triggering and encouraging new theoretical understandings and helping the teachers to arruive at their own insights about certain new areas in the curriculum and in their teaching'*. In our observations of her work as a school mentor, we evidenced a strong focus on encouraging the mentees to discover by themselves how theoretical ideas can be applied to practical teaching methods and strategies. Dorit's stated beliefs were congruent with her mentees' and principal's description of her mentoring .One of her mentees describes as *'a uniquely qualitative person, easy to talk to, and you feel can give you a lot and especially lift you up …she encourages and challenges us but never imposes anything on us…'*. Similarly, the school principal contends that *'most of the teachers tell me that the meetings with her are key to their professional development …they get from Dorit ideas can be applied to practical teaching methods and strategies…each teacher progresses according to her own pace and ability , she never sets a middle line and never compares between teachers…'*.

Orly is also a mentor in the same subject matter area (curriculum development) although her work, as mentioned earlier, is in the context of preparing teachers to become mentors of curriculum in the framework of group workshop sessions and lectures. Despite this difference (one-to-one assistance as opposed to group sessions), both Orly and Dorit hold similar views about knowledge acquisition, about disposition to learn, and about mentored learning as a less directive and more developmental process. As Orly says: *'I see my role in mentoring in two main directions-exposure to theoretical concepts that new mentors need to be equipped with and experiencing these theoretical notions through various activities and modalities of work'*. Her mentees, too, contend that *'Orly constructs the theoretical material together with us and then we try out different strategies that can be used in the field to create a practical pool from the theoretical ideas …'*.

Similarly, Nurit, a mentor of English, contends that *'acquiring knowledge is an individual process according to the particular needs of the teacher '*.When she talks about how she works with her mentees, she describes *'a process of collaboration and mutual learning'*. Professionalism and expertise are also core issues in her attributions to mentoring and well as in her mentees' attributions of her work. As one of her mentees contends: *'She gives us tools, ideas of what to do, how to cope… ideas that are not necessarily taken from books but from her own experience …and we work together to find ways to suit them to my class and how to organise them in my different classes'*.

Thus, despite the uniqueness of each mentoring context, all five cases share similar perspectives in regard to stated beliefs about professionalism and expertise. These were also in line what other participants in their respective contexts (mentees, school principals and/or inspectors) said about their work.

8.2. Interpersonal relationships

Establishing and sustaining good interpersonal relationships in mentoring allows for mediating between emotional, social and professional aspects of learning (Evans, 2000). Indeed, all five mentors spoke about this area at length, yet each focused on a particular aspect of establishing interpersonal relationships. These

differences in the perception of what constitutes a constructive mentor–mentee relationship might, indeed, be attributed to the particular features of their respective mentoring contexts.

For example, as a school mentor for curriculum implementation whose mandate is to move from school to school in order to provide ongoing support to individual teachers and to the school principal, Dorit talks about building of interpersonal relationships as grounded in respect, trust, and reciprocity. She speaks of herself as *'a mentor but also a friend who compliments a lot and want[s] to build trust relationships with each of the parties involved in mentoring: the principal and the teachers…so that no side is left unattended'*. She calls this *'authentic relationships, not martini relationships and dealing with real care'*. This view of reciprocity seems important for the various relationships that she needs to sustain simultaneously when working holistically with the whole school. Her mentees also elaborate on this aspect of her mentoring: *'She does not come from above and never gives you the feeling that she knows and we don't…there is a feeling of partnership, a real collaboration between equals and not an expert with a novice…everything done with the right dose of sensitivity so as not to step on anybody's toes…'*. Her ability to navigate between the different 'parties' is also reflected in the principal's comments about her work: *'Dorit is the closest person to me at school, she acts as a sound board to me and as a real partner…without damaging the relationship with the teachers'*.

Orly expresses a similar view regarding interpersonal relationships, yet stresses notions such as openness and collaboration: *'When there is a good relationship it is built on recognition and collaboration to accept and understand'*. In the observations and conversations with her we evidenced a very warm bond between her and the mentees. She is also open to sharing personal experiences and shows a lot of interest for the personal lives of the mentees. There is a lot of laughter and jokes during the sessions, although sometimes it can be interpreted as crossing professional borders and becoming too open and intimate, which some mentees might find it hard to accept. One of her mentees contends : *'The relationships are very open, the atmosphere very nice and during breaks we talk about family stuff and then come back again to talking about teaching and know how to move from one kind of talk to another …we can make that distinction with no problem..'*.

Orly also shares her difficulties and dilemmas as a mentor, as part of her belief that this is important for their training as future mentors. The fact that she is training prospective mentors who need to learn how to articulate knowledge about teaching and how to build impersonal relationships, probably directs her over attention towards this aspect of the relationship. In this capacity, the content of her mentoring is establishing and sustaining professional relationships, so her behavior functions as a loop for the areas that she works on with her prospective teachers.

Mirit described interpersonal relationships as built mainly on reciprocity. She mentions non-hierarchical relationships where 'everybody can learn from everybody'. This is especially relevant for her context of in-service training with experienced teachers, who are expected to attend her workshops as part of their life long learning development. The compulsory nature of the professional courses that she leads, probably shapes her decision to relate to the teachers she mentors as colleagues. She says: *'I don't come from above I'm a colleague and this serves to mitigate resistances at the beginning to the fact that they are mandated to come'*. She also speaks about *'how much [she] learn[s] from the teachers during the workshops'*. Her choice of the word *'colleagues'* reflects her world view of a collaborative relationship. She stresses the fact that she is *'not an inspector but a mentor and sees [herself] first of all accountable to the teachers [she] works with'*. Mirit also speaks a lot about the fact that she herself is a teacher, which helps her to better understand her teachers' hardships.

Likewise, Rina talks about dialogue, collaboration, and interpersonal communication *'I think there is a lot of place for interpersonal relationships. If there is a good conversation and dialogue it has the chance to grow'*. As a mentor in character education, Rina works with individual teachers, a context which enables her to allot more time to developing interpersonal relationships which is, in itself, a core topic area in her programme.

8.3. Leadership roles across contexts: idiosyncratic forms of challenge and support

Good mentoring is about the right combination of challenge and support (Daloz, 1983). All the mentors spoke about their roles as challenging and supporting the mentees to become autonomous life long learners who can develop curricula by themselves. This view speaks to the characteristics of formative leadership described in earlier section, which stresses challenging the protégés by setting high expectations and commitment to personal goals, encouraging them to think creatively and asking questions and approaching problems in new and unexpected ways (Popper, 2000). Such orientation towards mentoring as transformative (rather than transactional) leadership, can partly be explained against the centralized yet collaborative context of the school system in Israel. By and large, mentors' actions are shaped by their mandated roles as dictated 'from above' by policy makers in the Israeli educational system. Said that, the dissemination of top-down policy is conceived as of a more collaborative, bottom-up fashion, stressing the role of the mentor as mediating, initiating ideas, motivating, facilitating and challenging, and not solely delivering (Author, 2003). In tune with this wide-ranging implementation policy, mentors see their roles as challenging and supporting in unique, idiosyncratic ways, namely determined by the particular audience and setting. For example, Rina challenges by *'encouraging them* [the mentees] *to cope with questions and models that they themselves bring to the workshops…They analyze them together in a more reciprocal and fashion'*. This particular combination of challenge alongside individual support seems to be facilitated by the unique mentoring model that is implemented in the school- one which acknowledges the importance of individual assistance, of staff collaboration and of working in one school holistically. By contrast, Mirit *'exposes new material'* and then *'let*[s] *them cope by themselves'*. Her mode of challenging takes account of the fact that she works in the context of mentoring experienced teachers, who need to be stimulated by new *'theory'* yet, at the same time, be granted the right dose of autonomy to apply new ideas in creative, idiosyncratic ways.

The different forms of challenge and support exhibited by each mentor were also reflected in the ways in which each mentor (and their respective mentees) spoke about how the mentor connected or 'tuned in' to the mentee (Author, 2001) to advance his/her learning. The different meanings attributed to the notion of 'tuning in to the mentee' varied across contexts from emotional to instrumental and/or pedagogical.

For example, recognizing the importance of connecting emotionally to the mentee in her mandated role as agent of curriculum reform, Orly talks about tuning in emotionally to the mentee as a springboard for enhancing creative, innovative thinking about new curriculum: *'It is important to connect to them and accept them even if they resist the process, processes of change are not simple and each is in a different place, they need the confidence in themselves first in order to think about new ways of teaching…'*. Her ideas find support in the mentoring conversations that we observed, which focus mainly on encouraging the mentees to share critical events and personal incidents.

By contrast, Nurit alludes to tuning in to the mentees at personal, emotional and professional levels. This is dictated by her context, since she works with novice teachers who need support at all levels. In the same vein, Nurit speaks about tuning in to the mentees in order to mitigate resistances, since all novice teachers in the country are 'expected' to work with a mentor: *'as I connect to each teacher according to where she is at, I am delivering the message that every teacher has an individual style and that I am open to connecting to each of them according to their needs and to what is most appropriate for them ..that also helps with managing their resistance to my mentoring, because don't forget that they were assigned by the principal to me , they didn't come to me on free will at the beginning…'*. Thus, in this mandated context, she needs to be particularly sensitive to emergent resistances towards her presence as representative of the Ministry of Education and as supervisor of their performance during the first years of teaching.

Mirit connects to the mentees mainly professionally to *'realize their potential to their maximum'*. She talks about each mentee as possessing particular abilities and as her role to identify their strengths as a starting point for their development. Working in the context of a regional math mentor, she does not have the possibility of developing close connections on a more personal basis with her mentees, hence, interpersonal relationships is not a recurrent feature of her talk.

By contrast, Dorit, talks at length about connecting to her teachers emotionally in order to develop them professionally. She describes it as *'knowing how to improve the mentee's practice but from where the mentee is at, in a democratic relationship and getting to soul and feelings of the teacher'*. As an internal school mentor, she has the time and the space to deepen into areas which are both of a personal and professional character. Indeed, she mentions *'encourag*[ing] *dialogue and allow*[ing] *for space to flow with the process…'*.

9. Perspectives as reflected in actions: commonalities and distinctiveness across mentoring contexts

In the mentoring interactions that we observed we learned that, *despite* the different contexts of mentoring, the *content* of mentors' talk was common and shared similar features. These features also resonated strongly with behaviors that are characteristic of good *teaching* practices: Acknowledging diversity, providing a rationale for new ideas, developing ideas in a didactic manner, enhancing dialogues rather than monologues, asking and engaging in reflective questions, providing models of work, and triggering discussions and analysis of cases.

The differences that we identified between contexts of individual mentoring and contexts of group mentoring were mainly around the *structure* and *organisation* of the sessions. For example, as group mentors, Orly and Mirit displayed a similar format in their workshop sessions: Ice breaking activities to bring people together, diverse activities that encouraged questions, group work and dialogues and a lot of experimenting during the sessions. The sessions always ended with a structured feedback or a relevant source that helps *'put it all together'*. Despite these similarities, however, there were differences in regard to the degree of closeness exhibited by the mentees in each of the groups. In Orly's group there was an atmosphere of familiarity and intimacy amongst the teachers whereas Mirit's group was more detached and instrumental .This could be explained by the fact that the frequency of meetings constituted an important condition which shaped the difference in atmosphere between Mirit and Orly: Orly's meetings were frequent and ongoing, allowing for the development of closer community of participants. Mirit's meetings were less frequent and discontinuous, hence, confining to mainly solving practical problems and dealing with burning and pedagogical issues.

We also identified similarities in the content of the mentoring conversations across the various contexts. Most of the

conversations entailed aspects of organisation (of schedule and lessons), support, counselling, reporting on previous meetings, personal reflections, giving each other ideas, and developing a particular task. Each mentor, however, exhibited different ways of promoting reflection: Nurit tended to reciprocate and cooperate through questions such as '*what do you think?' 'what should we do?'* and '*how should we go about it?'*; Dorit asked questions related to feelings and empathy '*What bothers you?';* Rina questioned values and beliefs: '*What kind of stance should we take?';* Orly asked questions of organisation: '*Who is responsible for what?'*; of clarification '*Do I understand from what you say that …?'*. Each mentor, thus, exhibited a predominant line of reflective questions: Guided by her school mentoring context which stresses individual growth, Dorit focuses on encouraging reflection to address diversity even at the expense of not 'covering' all her goals. In a context of mentoring mentors where the organisational aspect of learning to mentor in different settings is a core aspect of learning, Orly focuses on questions around planning, organisation, and addressing the particular needs of a teaching population. In a context that stresses subject matter mentoring Rina focuses on the development of thinking skills and on challenging thinking about subject matter in new ways. Working with experienced teachers, Mirit uses their experience as a springboard for asking questions that encourage teachers to produce individual products and outcomes of learning.

Despite these differences, however, as mentioned in earlier section, all five mentors exhibited the characteristics attributed to expertise, good relationships, and a strong orientation towards developing autonomy and creativity. In particular, Dorit, Rina and Nurit, who worked mainly with individual teachers, exhibited similar behaviors: They used a variety of techniques for opening a session, they opened their sessions introducing the purpose of the meeting, they recapped previous meetings as a way of connecting experiences, they were focused and did not diverge to too many different topics, and they always set expectations for the next meeting. The end of their sessions included reflective feedback and planning for future meetings.

10. Lessons from the five collective case studies

The similarities and differences revealed in perspectives across mentoring contexts shed light on four major insights regarding the perspectives that characterize outstanding mentors: One, that exemplary mentoring practice, indeed, exhibits similar characteristics to exemplary teaching practice. This emergent insight supports previous studies on the connection between mentoring and teaching (Author, 2001). Two, that outstanding mentors think and behave as transformative leaders, exhibiting characteristics that are close to those of good leaders. This finding is partly explained through the centralized character of the educational system in Israel, which positions mentors as agents of change, designated to 'lead' educational reforms. It is also a reflection of the way in which mentors are initially selected to carry out their role-by way of their '*natural characteristics as leaders'* and their '*ability to lead and implement reforms in schools*' (Interview with one of the inspectors). Three, that exemplary mentoring takes certain idiosyncratic forms according to the context within which it is practiced: What is considered to be exemplary practice in one context is not always necessarily visible or regarded as exemplary practice in another. Said that, exemplary mentors mentors seem to exhibit significant *similarities* in their perspectives, reflected both in their language of practice and in their actions *despite the different contexts*. Four, that there is a tight correlation between the language employed by star mentors to describe their practice and their actual behavior in practice. We discuss each of these insights in the following section.

11. Exemplary mentoring practice and exemplary teaching practice

As elaborated in earlier sections, we identified many similarities between good mentoring and good teaching and teacher leadership. For example, the finding regarding the ability to connect between theory and practical knowledge in mentoring (Vonk, 1991, 1993) is congruent with the notion of pedagogical content knowledge in teaching, geared to the development of specific tasks and planning of instruction (Shulman, 1986). The notion of pedagogical content knowledge in mentoring was elaborated in earlier work (Author, 2001). Mentors' pedagogical content knowledge would differ from that of teachers in that it entails talking about teaching in a different way. Indeed, the focal mentors exhibited high skills in connecting what they observed in their mentee's teaching to broader theoretical, pedagogical and didactic issues.

The mentors' ability to establish and sustain good interpersonal relationships (Cochran-Smith & Paris 1992; McIntyre & Hagger, 1996; Roberts, 2000; Rowley, 1999) is also congruent with 'star teachers' ability to create positive interpersonal relationships and classroom climate with the pupils. Having to deal with adult professionals, though, calls for stressing unique forms of support, reciprocity, challenge and collaboration in mentors' practices, as revealed in the study.

The closest connection between exemplary teachers and mentors was found to be around the domain of organisational ability. Just as in exemplary teaching the management of time, setting, planning and style of work are considered important (Haberman, 1995), the focal mentors exhibited high skills in planning workshops, in the didactic organisation of their workshops, and in their organisation of time. Orly's case is particularly illustrative of this resemblance in her ability to manage time, place and contents effectively. Orly and her mentees talked about her sense of order and organisation as crucial qualities in her mentoring that enhanced her mentees' learning. We might explain this recurrent theme as reflective of the highly practical and problem-solving oriented nature of both the practice of teaching and the practice of mentoring, especially in the context of mandated reforms.

The findings regarding mentors as leaders resonate with Miles, Saxl, and Lieberman study (1988) of teacher leaders who identified the skills and capabilities of faculty who had taken or changed agent roles in schools. Similarly, they found that teachers who become leaders come to their work as knowledgeable and experienced in demonstrative and organisational skills, have as strong disposition to learn about the complexity of school culture, are risk takers willing to promote new ideas that might seem difficult or threatening to their colleagues, and hold strong interpersonal skills.

The finding that good mentoring practices resemble good leadership practices in teaching is not new and supports earlier conceptualizations of mentoring as a second language of teaching (Author, 2001; Clark, 1995) as well as entrenched connections between teaching and mentoring in aspects of planning mentoring activities and in the way in which mentors use their expertise as teachers to develop the mentee (Feiman-Nemser, 2001a; McIntyre & Hagger, 1996).

12. Exemplary mentors think and behave as leaders

Across contexts, we identified a tight connection between the characteristics of an outstanding mentor and those of a leader. Mentors acted as leaders in their ability to empower, promote autonomy, raise motivation and encourage reflection (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Popper, 2001; Popper, Mayseless, & Castelnovo, 2000). For example, Rina spoke about leading the mentees towards autonomy, empowering them and developing them professionally by focusing on developing their thinking through questions that encourage reflection. Dorit, too, talks about empowerment as she

tries to build supportive relationships in a mentoring conversation that is empathetic, respectful and accepting.

The similarities between outstanding mentors and leaders can be understood at the background of the centralistic character of the educational system in Israel. Centralization invites roles that are perceived as leadership roles, whereby the mentor functions as the agent of mandated agendas from above and is expected to perform accordingly. This calls for characteristics of mentors such as authority to influence, and power-features that associate with more transactional, positivistic approaches to leadership. The latter, however, contrasted radically with the collaborative, collegial profile exhibited by the focal ~~star~~ mentors in all five contexts -inclined towards transformative views of leadership.

We can explain this tendency given the ambiguous and uncertain status of the mentor in the Israeli educational school system which does not grant tenure or a differential salary scale. Such a volatile status stands in stark contrast with recognized transactional roles of 'leaders' in other settings and workplaces whereby they are granted formal power, authority, reward, remuneration and recognition (Popper, 2001). Furthermore, the perception of outstanding mentors as more transformative in their views and actions can be understood given the highly feminine character of teaching (and mentoring)- mostly led by women, hence, identifying with more feminist approaches that stress collaboration, acceptance, the development of 'sisterhood bonds' between mentor and mentee (Semeniuk & Worrall, 2000), and a stress on caring and emotional support. By contrast, the dominant narrative of leadership is more masculine. One example of such dominant masculine leadership in the Israeli context is the army. As Popper's studies (2001) point out, leadership in the army is ruled by dominant male characters and toughness myths. Examining mentoring as an issue of gender, especially in this context, hence, underscores the differences that we found between perceived masculine notions of mentors as transactional leaders and extant tendencies of women mentors to function as transformative leaders.

13. Exemplary mentoring practices and their uniqueness across contexts

Will an outstanding mentor in one context be considered outstanding in another?. The educational system in Israel is characterized by a multiplicity of diverse contexts within which mentors work and which, in principle, should somewhat bear an influence on their beliefs and actions in mentoring. At the same time, mentors bring to mentoring different idiosyncratic beliefs, goals and objectives which they act upon in their particular contexts (Wang, 2001). The above question invites examining how the *same* mentor acts in different contexts (an aspect which we did not pursue). Nevertheless, the findings of our study point to important issues and conjectures. We ask, for example, whether the qualities displayed by Dorit as a school mentor with small groups will also serve her to excel in large workshops or lectures and, will she be able to modify new strategies of communication for other external mentoring contexts? Drawing on the notion of flexibility as core to expertise (Berliner, 2001; Clark, 1995) we would then assume that in order for Dorit to successfully move from one context to another she has to exhibit flexibility and adaptiveness. Very few mentors (and mentees) alluded to flexibility as a quality of outstanding mentors. We invite future research on this aspect in exemplary mentoring practices.

Although our study pointed to significant similarities in the views held by mentors, mentees, inspectors and principals regarding exemplary mentoring practices across contexts, it also uncovered the particular features of the culture and organisation of the mentoring workplace and population as shaping a particular perspective towards mentoring. We learned that in contexts of school mentoring, mentees spoke about the ability of outstanding mentors to organise the staff, to engage them in collaborative curriculum planning, and to create a communal environment. By contrast, mentors and mentees in general curriculum areas did not attribute much importance to organisation and order, and stressed, instead, the ability to deliver knowledge, to plan, and to exhibit expertise and professionalism.

The above particularities suggest the importance of connecting perspectives to their context (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985), despite the many similarities. In this sense, we are of Berliners' assertion regarding the context -bound nature of expertise: Although experts share similar characteristics, it is probably the case that a person who is considered an expert in one context will not necessarily automatically be regarded as expert in another context by others (Berliner, 2001).

14. Language as reflected in practice

Outstanding mentors' perspectives towards their goals, educational beliefs, and approach to mentoring proved to be tightly congruent with their actions. Put differently, their 'language of practice' (Freeman, 1993) was also reflected in their actual practice. This finding speaks to Berliner's work on expertise, which sheds light on the relatedness between the language used by expert teachers to describe their teaching and their performance in action. Dorit, the school mentor, speaks about developing interpersonal relationships on the basis of empathy and acceptance. Indeed, the mentoring interactions that we observed were characterized by respect, empathy and acceptance. Her mentees, too, stressed these qualities in Dorit's mentoring. Likewise, Orly, spoke at length about organisation and control and her workshops were characterized by a clear structure, with set goals and tasks for articulating and experiencing mentoring processes. Dorit's language was proliferate with connotations of acceptance, of providing 'a listening ear', and of 'tuning' to people. Her actions, too revealed a similar orientation. Mirit used phrases such as 'being in touch with innovations, challenging, solving problems and establishing open relationships', which were evident in how she conducted her workshop sessions. Rina, too, says she stresses values in education, and uses phrases such as deepening knowledge, the need to question, and dialogical relationships. As elaborated in earlier sections, her mentees, too, allude to a similar behavior during the mentoring sessions.

15. Implications

Theoretically, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of what constitutes exemplary mentoring practice as it plays out in different contexts, both in terms of mentors' beliefs and behaviors, and as described by the various 'players' in each of the contexts. Practically, the study can contribute to informing programmes for mentoring mentors by exposing mentors to a variety of mentoring contexts and to the kinds of exemplary practices that are similar and those that might be unique to each context. The present study focused on five case studies. Future research invites inquiry into other contexts of mentoring. It also invites exploring how the same 'star' mentor thinks and behaves in different contexts of mentoring. We also suggest further inquiry into how different forms of leadership in mentoring might be shaped by cultural, political and pedagogical contexts and agendas. Finally, our earlier discussion of mentoring as an issue of gender, suggests the development of research agendas that examine perceptions of leadership roles in mentoring as shaped by dominant masculine or feminine narratives.

Appendix 1. Mentors' contexts of mentoring

Type of mentee population	Role	Type of programme	Department in charge	Role definition
ORLY Preparing teachers to become mentors of curriculum in the framework of workshop sessions and lectures	Qualifying teachers to become mentors. Mentor of Mentors	A monthly continuing education programme at a teacher training college	College Department of Education, Curriculum Development at the Ministry of Education	Implement changes in schools, construct curricula with the entire school staff, with a stress on organisational aspects of schooling. Equipping new mentors to become agents of change
DORIT School staff to disseminate new curriculum	Assisting teachers on an individual basis	Individual guidance, meetings with teams and class observations	Department of Education, Curriculum Development at the Ministry of Education	Mentoring individual teachers, providing ongoing support to teachers in different schools
NURIT English teachers	Regional, external mentor	Continuing education programmes for new teachers, individual guidance of English staff at school	Department of Education The English Inspectorate –Ministry of Education	Mentoring English teachers in different schools in various areas, continuing education programmes for new English teachers, working with English coordinator at schools
RINA Teachers of character education. Elementary school	Regional mentor	Individual and group mentoring at schools	Department of Education-Ministry of Education	Enhancing social activities at school in order to create a better social climate at school
MIRIT Math and computers in education teachers, elementary school	Regional mentor of continuing education programmes	A continuing education programme for teachers	Department of Education, Private Institution for the development of thinking skills in teaching	Workshops with a focus on the teaching of mathematics and computers education

Appendix 2. Questions for the semi-structured interviews with the different participant populations

Interview with the mentor (According to the notions about exemplary mentoring)

1. How is your role as mentor defined?
2. Can you describe your work ?
3. You are considered a star mentor in your work, what do you think makes an exemplary mentoring practice in general? And in your particular case?
4. What will I see in your work that reflects an exemplary mentoring practice?
5. Tell me about your successes as a mentor. What did you do that led you to such success? Can you recall any particular stories of success?
6. What is unique about your work as a mentor which is different from others?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your mentees?
8. What do you do in order to develop professionally?
9. What is the most important thing for you in mentoring?
10. How would that be achieved in your own work?

Interview with the mentees

1. How would you describe your mentor's work with you? What happens during a mentoring conversation?
2. What are some of the main characteristics of your mentor?
3. What has your mentor managed to develop in her work with you? How does she do it?
4. What does your professional relationship with your mentor look like and feel like? Can you think of concrete examples of things she does that helps develop this relationship?
5. Your mentor is considered a 'star mentor'–what in your opinion makes her a 'star'?

Interview with the school principal

1. How would you describe your work with (name of the mentor)? Can you give concrete examples of your work with her?

2. How would you describe the work of (name of the mentor) with the teachers in your school? What is special about (name of the mentor) work with your teachers?
3. (Name of the mentor) is considered a 'star mentor'–what, in your opinion, makes her a 'star'?
4. What characterizes (name of the mentor) as a professional mentor?

Interview with the supervisor from the Ministry of Education

1. What can you tell me about (name of the mentor) on the basis of your acquaintance with her?
2. Have you seen (name of the mentor) in her work with teachers at school? If so, what characterizes her work? Can you give concrete examples of the kind of work that she does with teachers?
3. What makes her, in your opinion and according to others, a 'star mentor'? What is unique about her work as compared to other mentors in your district?

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