

# TRAINING TO BECOME A MENTOR: HUNGARIAN EFL TEACHERS' PERSONAL DISCOVERIES

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**Abstract:** This article identifies and illustrates key developmental stages of a group of ELT mentor trainees during an intensive training course in Hungary. It reveals changes in the way the teachers defined their professional identities that amount to major steps in the participants' development as teachers and mentors-in-training. As an account of how a highly structured teacher training event led to significant personal and professional development, the article also demonstrates the importance of the group process for participants to value and internalize the role of the mentor.

**Keywords:** mentoring, mentor training, teacher development, social constructivism

## 1 Introduction

This article is based on a 120-hour-mentor training course that took place at Trefort Secondary Grammar School in Budapest, Hungary. It was organised by IATEFL Hungary and was held between January and June 2013. It seemed that, for the 17 participating teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the course was not just a welcome in-service training opportunity but turned into an exciting, if demanding, journey of personal discovery. As co-facilitators of the course, we noticed different signs of this change and both of us found them intriguing. To get a grip on the essence of their discoveries, we took a close look at the reflective writing the teachers had done as part of the training. As it turned out, many of the individual insights were, in fact, shared in the group. As a result of this investigative stance, our role on the course began to combine didactic, exploratory and interpretive elements, more characteristic of an “enquiring tutor” (Rowland, 1993). In this article we will present some of the shared participant discoveries we identified in order to trace the mental and emotional shifts involved in becoming a mentor for this group of English teachers.

But, first, some background to the course is in order. We will briefly outline how a particular approach to mentoring evolved in the context of English language teacher training in Hungary. Then the main features of the course framework will be described, providing the necessary context for understanding the experience of the teachers as mentor trainees.

In the bulk of the article the participating teachers' personal and professional discoveries are presented and discussed as developmental stepping-stones. In other words, we will explore the developmental dimension of the programme as reconstructed from participants' written responses. Direct, unaltered quotes from course feedback and development reports will be used for this purpose and to make sure the course participants get to ‘speak for themselves’. The authors of individual quotes will remain anonymous because their names are not important for the interpretation of what they said and how their comments were interpreted. All of the authors had

the opportunity to read the article and verify their own contributions before the text was submitted for publication.

The article will finish with some suggestions about how the learning process on this course played out as a whole. Altogether, we hope to demonstrate that a formal training event does not need to be viewed only in terms of ‘delivery’ but that the *process* is the crucial trigger for more participant development.

## **2 Background**

### **2.1 Teacher training in Hungary**

Large-scale mentor training for English language teachers first started in Hungary in 1992. It has to be seen in the context of the political changes in Central Europe and the resulting need for teachers of modern languages other than Russian. In Hungarian ELT this led to a number of institutional and curricular initiatives to professionalise teacher education (Medgyes & Malderez, 1996).

Breaking with tradition, it was decided that Hungarian state schools would need cohorts of properly trained school-based teacher educators, who would be able to mentor the growing number of teacher trainees during their school practicum. Until then, most mentors had been untrained and based in relatively few ‘practice schools’, i.e., schools traditionally attached to universities and known for their strong academic record. With the support of the British Council, a mentor training programme was set up which has since provided such training to more than 350 professionals, many of whom came from regular primary or secondary schools. Two teacher trainers, Caroline Bodóczy and Angi Malderez, were the minds behind the programme and it was their ideas and experience that provided the blueprint for ELT mentor training courses in the years to come (Malderez & Bodóczy, 1999).

As a result of the Bologna process a separate 2-year MA programme for all Hungarian upper primary and secondary school teachers was phased in from 2006. Until that point, trainee teachers had only been required to complete a 15-hour practicum, which was usually done in a practice school attached to the university. To this, the new system added a one-semester teaching practice element that trainees had to do in a school outside the university system. Most recently, changes initiated by the current education authorities include the extension of the one-semester practicum into an entire academic year. This has a number of administrative and institutional but also personal and professional implications and highlights the continued need to provide a new generation of trained mentors.

### **2.2 About the course**

#### **2.2.1 Participants**

As with previous courses, admission to this mentor training programme was selective. All applicants were interviewed on the basis of information from a CV, a motivation letter and a recorded lesson or detailed lesson plan. Teachers applying for the course of 2013 needed to have

a college or university degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) as well as a minimum of five years' teaching experience. Among the initial applicants were teachers from state schools as well as private language schools, free-lance teachers and teacher trainers. Finally, all but one of the 17 participants came from public education: 14 of them came from secondary grammar schools, two of from a primary school. There was one free-lance English teacher who worked for a language school.

Their reasons for applying seemed to be quite diverse, as became clear from the motivation letters and follow-up selection interviews. Some were looking for a new professional challenge, others were hoping for extensive language improvement and a methodology update or simply saw the completion of the course as a professional career move, as the following excerpts from three motivation letters show:

*I applied for this mentor course a year ago, because after teaching for 26 years, I wanted to find new ways of professional development.*

*[working as an untrained mentor] I felt that I needed some help myself, I did not have clear-cut ideas concerning my needs but felt helpless in some situations with my trainees and it made me feel disappointed.*

*I started the mentor training course right after returning to the field of teaching after a long 'holiday' at home with my children. Thus, now I am in the middle of redefining myself as a teacher, I need to regain my self-confidence in this role and I have to relearn a number of things. It is quite hard to think of myself as a potential mentor at the moment.*

### 2.2.2 Aims of the course

The course aimed to enable ELT professionals to facilitate their colleagues' development as mentors, trainers and heads of English departments at schools. In terms of *mentoring*, they were to learn how to support teacher trainees as well as colleagues in the planning of lessons, during post-lesson discussions and in terms of appraisal. Regarding *training*, they acquired skills that would allow them to identify training needs, provide in-service workshops, or give conference presentations.

### 2.2.3 Content and structure

The course familiarized the participants with the principles and practice of social constructivist learning theory and a reflective approach to teacher development (Mann, 2005). They also learned about different lesson observation tools, and the conscious application of different intervention techniques during post-lesson discussions. The training took place once a week, lasting six hours per training day over nearly six months, which allowed for professional attitude and mentoring skills development. We wanted these teachers to experience and explore the value of interpersonal communication in a professional setting because this, we believe, makes them truly effective as school-based teacher trainers. The participants became well aware of the intention to familiarize them with the 'nuts and bolts' of mentoring while inviting them to explore

their professional selves, as shown by these two comments from participant development reports during the course:

*During the sessions of the course I observed classes and mentorials [post-lesson discussions] in videos, gave one workshop and took part in several others, mentored one of my fellow teachers, was assigned the role of a mentee after delivering a workshop and I could also practise mentoring in various role-plays.*

*I discovered areas in my professional attitude that were hidden before. The course provided a very unique mirror that could not have been provided through books or any other way.*

The course consisted of three main components. The first component, covering six weeks, was more input-driven and focused on learning theories as well as the notion of reflection in teacher education. In the process the teachers were encouraged to make explicit their values and underlying beliefs about teaching and learning and started working on basic interpersonal skills and intervention techniques (Heron, 2001). This was followed by a block of micro-training in the form of a series of in-service ELT methodology workshops, in which pairs of trainer trainees taught their participant colleagues. This component took about 9 weeks to complete. Each pair chose an area of ELT methodology for which they prepared a 40-minute workshop. Two of their peers on the course acted as their ‘mentors’, helping the workshop presenters at the planning stage, observing the workshop session and leading a post-session discussion. Following the mentorial, the whole group discussed training and mentoring issues that emerged from the experience. In the last two weeks of the course the participants continued to practise interventions and worked with training situations they found particularly challenging. They also dealt with the thorny issue of teacher evaluation and assessment. Figure 1, illustrates the shifting focus of each training phase.

TRAINING PHASE	PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOCUS
<b>Input</b> Learning theories Reflective approach to teacher education	self-awareness and value-clarification; mentoring skills in isolation (active listening, paraphrasing, questioning)
<b>Micro-training</b> ELT methodology topics (e.g. project work, using the interactive whiteboard, intercultural competence)	practising intervention skills in context; empathy-building more practice of selected interventions (e.g. confronting);
<b>Practice and input</b> Theory and practice of teacher evaluation/ assessment	problem-solving in 'difficult trainee' scenarios

Figure 1. Training phases and focus

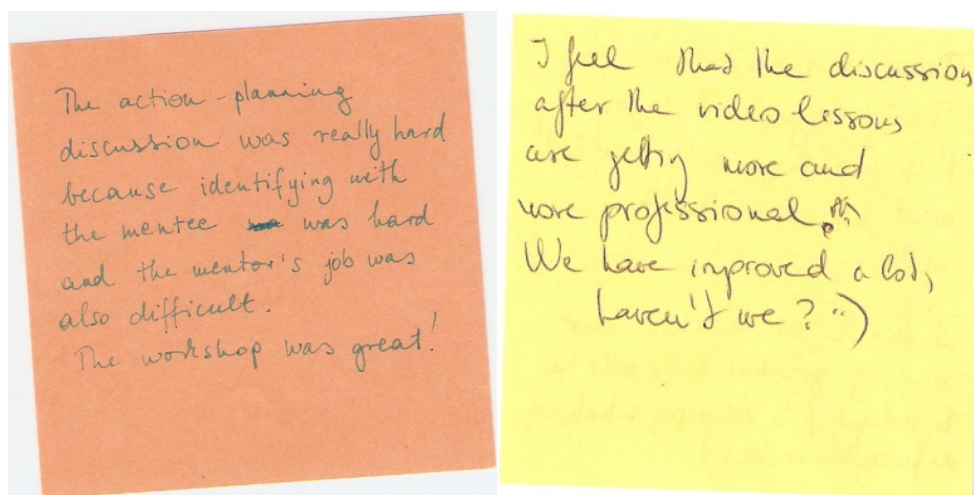
#### 2.2.4 Approach

This training course was intended to trigger a learning process that would lead participants to experience mentoring as a distinct extension of their professional identities as language teachers. This implied an approach to training grounded in the idea that all meaningful learning starts from people’s existing constructs (Matei, G., Wright, T., Bernaus, M., & Pohl, U., 2008; Richardson,

1997). For this reason plenty of time was allocated to awareness-raising activities, many of which were built around the metaphorical representations of the teachers' values, beliefs and experiences (Thornbury, 2011; Woodward, 1991).

*Reflection on shared experience* was another key element of the training process. For example, video recordings of beginning teachers' classes, as well as real and role-played mentoring scenarios, were analysed and discussed. In the same way the systematic review of training activities with the help of reflection grids (Bolitho & Wright, 1993), processing tasks for course readings and the writing of two development reports ensured that the participants engaged in different modes of reflection as a matter of routine. These reports required participants to review and make explicit their learning half-way through and towards the end of the course. All of this provided opportunities for thoughtful deliberation, created a shared language to talk about mentoring and a social-professional space or 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998, p. 48).

We also believe, as Wright and Bolitho (2007, p. 34) put it, that "the bedrock of a training course" is the group of people who experience the course together. During that time a learning *community* is formed with its own special relationships, rules and potential. To use this potential to the full, regular group-building exercises and a range of collaborative tasks got the course participants to experience working with partners whose communication styles, views and preferences were often very different. In addition, a 'feedback dialogue' gave everybody a sense of how individuals felt about their personal and professional learning in the sessions. At the end of each training day we asked participants to write feedback on a small slip of paper and started every new block of sessions by reading out and discussing the notes.



This dialogic approach also made it possible for the course to take on the feel of a professional 'conversation' which turned understanding the mentoring challenge into an exciting joint venture for the teachers and the two course tutors alike. This way of creating a public forum for talking about professional performance also modelled a commitment to a different kind of professionalism which challenges the conventional solitude of teachers (Malderez & Bodóczy, 1999, p. 19).

Finally, we should emphasize that, following tradition, this mentor course was co-trained from start to finish. This meant that as co-trainers we took joint responsibility in terms of course design, administration and delivery. Some advantages of occasional team-training have recently been mentioned (cf. Baguely, 2014) but, at least in the case of this mentor course framework, trainer collaboration has proved to be essential. For example, it opened up some on-the-spot decision-making to the group, modelled professional cooperation and strengthened the psychological 'safety net' in risk-taking situations for trainees and trainers alike.

### 3 Developmental stepping-stones

As pointed out earlier, we had the intuitive feeling that for many if not all of these experienced teachers this long mentor training experience became a journey of discovery. A close reading of all 36 development reports and 278 feedback slips pointed to a fair number of exciting as well as unsettling discoveries that these participants seemed to *share*. After further analysis, more distinct categories began to crystallize, which we would call 'stepping-stones'. Each 'stepping-stone' marks an important cluster of insights and all of them taken *together* constitute an articulation of ongoing personal and professional development during the course. This is not to say that we can pinpoint what exactly led to these discoveries. What we can say with some confidence is that the training approach described above provided the conditions that allowed the participants to develop professionally as well as personally and to become *aware* of this development.

It also needs to be stressed that the conceptualization of these 'stepping-stones' is entirely based on our selection and reading of the data as trainers. Further, we should point out that the two reports were sent to us directly, which means they might have been written in a way that would highlight the *positive* impact of the course. The feedback slips, too, though anonymous, were known to be made public at the beginning of each training day and probably phrased with this in mind. Having said that, what we found was very much in line with our shared impressions and by no means without critical awareness. To further verify our perceptions, an early draft of this article was made available to the course participants so that they could check our interpretations against their own perceptions, memories or insights and let us know of any over-generalisation on our part.

In the following sections, we will illustrate each 'stepping stone' with a selection of quotes taken either from continuous feedback or from the two reports. Each set of quotes will be accompanied by some introductory and interpretative comment on our part.

#### 3.1 The perception of the mentor

In basic terms, mentoring can be defined as a "programme of sustained developmental support" (Bailey, 2006, p. 335). But things become less clear when the exact nature of such 'support' is in question. We believe that how a mentor views their helping relationship with a teacher trainee determines what kind of mentor they will be. Initially, our course participants saw

a mentor's role mainly as prescriptive or *supervisory*, i.e., to provide instructional leadership (Freeman, 1982; Gebhard, 1990). Over time, some new understandings emerged that complemented and differentiated this idea:

*In my first development report, referring to my mentor metaphor I explained that I wouldn't be able to climb the mountain without being the leader all the way. A lot of issues have been clarified since then and working with mentees in a **cooperative way** is something I would really like to try.*

*I'm becoming more and more aware of what a **responsibility** it is to be a mentor.*

*[our attention] was called to how our brains perceive what is 'there' as invisible or what is 'not there' as an existing reality. For me, these awareness-raising demonstrations and activities formed the basis of **being able to see different perspectives**.*

*The 'butterfly and caterpillar' metaphor is fantastic. The activities designed around this topic really made me think about **the role of the mentor**: Do I change the mentee or do I help them to develop?*

*It is not easy to be observed by a group of people. It develops empathy and hopefully we will **remember these feelings** when we have post-lesson discussions [with our mentees].*

*I am more and more convinced that there are no perfect methods in mentoring. I'd say there are different techniques and different people involved. If there is harmony between them, the results will be optimal.*

*I'll have to concentrate on restraining myself and helping trainees to discover things for themselves by just listening and helping them self-reflect [...] I believe it is very easy to give in when they actually ask for advice. So I will need to be really conscious of my aims and act accordingly.*

*I'm glad that I can ask questions, have doubts, feel free to disagree and am never discouraged. You really show an example.*

*A mentor is less of a star and more of a silent business partner.*

These quotes illustrate well some key changes in the teachers' notion of what it means to be a mentor. For example, there is a move towards valuing different perspectives on the same event – a crucial shift in order to understand how trainees view their own teaching performance. Just as important is the notion of working *with* the mentee to achieve a shared understanding of lesson events. All of this implies unlearning habitual ways of seeing and (re)acting as well as an appreciation of a mentor's multiple roles. As a result, the participants' mentor concept seems to have become not only richer but also more flexible and individualized. This process reflects what Malderez and Weddell (2007, p. 89) describe as the move towards a more facilitative, interpersonal understanding of the helping relationship.

### 3.2 The value of special expertise

The question whether mentors of teacher trainees need special expertise is by no means settled. Many teachers and school administrators in Hungary still believe that very good teachers automatically make very good mentors, and only a minority of teachers have been specifically trained for the job (Révész, 2011). To be fair, many factors influence the effectiveness of a mentor, whether they have been trained or not. But it appears that appropriate mentor preparation is at least one strong prerequisite for successful mentoring (cf. Hobson et al., 2009). The next selection of quotes also shows that our mentor trainees discovered for themselves the value of mentor-specific skills and knowledge:

*I found it really beneficial that we got insights into more forceful and directive intervention techniques such as action planning and confronting and how to be authoritative without being authoritarian when necessary.*

*The session on questions and their effect was really interesting. Again it drew my attention to how important questions are. (22 March)*

*Watching the video I was thinking how terribly difficult it is to be a beginner and empathy is a very important skill. (1 March)*

*In my first development report I expressed my doubts about applying the right intervention technique at given situations, I wrote that I felt more confident about identifying the different techniques than about actually using them. I still don't think that I could use them perfectly in a real post-lesson discussion, but somehow, I have become more relaxed about the whole issue as we have had some chances to see the different techniques working parallel, as an organic system.*

What the participants discovered through a range of experiential activities was that an effective mentor can draw consciously on a range of intervention techniques, has a good grasp of the effect of their questions and an empathetic understanding of the trainee's situation. However, they also realized that this complexity can only be handled well if there is a transfer from *knowing* to *doing* and if the 'doing' itself becomes more or less automatic or intuitive, as the building blocks of their mentor competence blend together seamlessly (Schön, 1987, p. 158).

### 3.3 Articulating professional thinking

Some educationalists (cf. Lortie, 1975) have pointed out that teachers often lack the sophisticated vocabulary they would need to describe all the shades and intricacies of the complex tasks they perform. That may be true but, as Stern (1983, p. 27) points out, “teachers articulate their professional thinking through *practice*” (our emphasis). At the same time, we have also found in our teacher-training experience that trainees do welcome those terms or theories related to language teaching that capture, clarify or illustrate well aspects of their professional experience. This is more likely to happen if teachers’ “intuitions are accorded value and if the entry point into



theory is close to their experience” (Ramani, 1987, p. 5). Occasionally, some ideas and related concepts even get internalized to the extent that, unprompted, teachers will use them to *talk* or *write* about their practice. The following quotes are an indication of such ‘constructivism at work’, as mentoring-related concepts from the course were re-examined and combined in new ways with the teachers’ previous knowledge and experience:

*I also deepened my theoretical knowledge. I found the articles very useful, and I am really glad that now I have a lot broader professional vocabulary to use.*

*I will have to concentrate on restraining myself and helping the mentees to discover things for themselves by just listing or ‘holding up a mirror’.*

*The participants of this course worked together as a community of practice and it helped me to gain more practical knowledge. At the same time they provided a supportive atmosphere where we shared our very valuable experience that had accumulated over the years.”*

*As I wrote [...], I’m going through a ‘formative crisis’ hoping all the way through that I will be able to create my new mentor identity.*

*I am the kind of person who prefers teaching to speaking about teaching. Consequently, it has always been hard for me to speak about theories and principles of teaching. The course inspires me to articulate my beliefs, ideas, values, concepts, methods in my teaching.*

Teachers are usually wary of technical jargon, and rightly so. But, as Thornbury (2008, p. 6) put it, “we tend to be well disposed to a theory if its dominant imagery chimes with our own values and beliefs”. Our course participants, too, found some professional terms related to mentoring quite useful in order to read, think and talk about learning theories, reflective teaching or counselling skills. The above quotes also show how some even used a few image-rich concepts they had picked up from readings or trainer language. Examples are the names of feedback or intervention techniques and expressions such as ‘holding up a mirror’ or ‘communities of practice’. Malderez and Bodóczy (1999, p. 13) have called this appropriation turning ‘capital T theory’ into ‘small t’ or personal theory and consider it vital to how teachers reassemble and expand their existing constructs.

### 3.4 Beyond mentoring

We agree with Underhill (1991, p. 72) that real development is “a holistic process [and] development in one part of a human system (whether a group or an individual) affects other areas of the system.” In other words, there is a dynamic interplay of factors that contribute to people’s learning process. Bateson (1972, p. 271), for example, suggests that *outer* levels, such as the environment, tend to influence *inner* levels e.g. behaviour, competences and beliefs and *vice versa*. Intensive courses like ours create a unique environment as participants are exposed to the influence of the knowledge and experience of the course tutor(s) as well as the other participants in both formal and informal settings (Bolitho, 1996). This intense exposure creates special opportunities

for teachers to develop their perceptual and cognitive capacities in a way that benefits the whole person:

*The learning by doing approach encouraged me to try to use it more of [when teaching].*

*It's good to be aware our body language even in teaching situations.*

*I also just love all these energizers we do ... I'm never ever going to have another lesson without at least one.*

*I'm going to do the [reflective] grid nevertheless because I think I need it to reconstruct my thoughts about teaching.*

*Self-reflection done through the iceberg activity was really useful. I had never thought about my teaching from that perspective.*

*It was interesting to see how listening 'works'. I guess I should be more aware of how I listen to others every day – not only in a mentoring situation.*

*The deepest and most intimate conversation of the whole course came with this session for me. The questions related to the onion model led our small group to the interpretation of 'the meaning of life'.*

*Judit [one of the trainers] emphasized that the whole mentor/mentee relationship should exist within a culture of encouragement and I feel it is the same with all our relationships.*

*When I shared with my husband what I learned about observation interpretation and judgment, he agreed that using less judgmental statements would improve my communication. He welcomed my desire of practicing active listening as well.*

In their motivation letters several course applicants had expressed the expectation that the training would actually strengthen their competence in ELT methodology. Although this was not our primary concern, the quotes reveal that the course did contribute to the trainees' development as *language teachers*. For example, the participants were quick to spot the potential of short energizing training activities for their classroom teaching. Gradually, the teachers also seemed to recognize how various forms of conscious reflection can add focus and depth to their abilities as classroom practitioners. The last few quotes also show that some mentor-related learning clearly went beyond the confines of professional training. For example, the value of attentive listening, the importance of being encouraged in our efforts and the ability to relate to others empathetically are all alluded to as significant to the participants' everyday lives, as well.

### **3.5 Experience of a professional community**

Research in a number of contexts seems to indicate that teaching is still largely seen as a solitary activity. In Hungary, too, it is rare for practitioners to feel that they are part of a larger professional community (Pohl, 2009). Likewise, the work of school-based mentors, tied as it is to

individual institutions and concerns, affords mentors few opportunities to experience and enjoy the company of colleagues from other schools (Lőrincz, 2014). From this point of view, our intensive, group-based course provided a unique induction and socialization opportunity (De Lima, 2003; Hargreaves, 1980), which is demonstrated in the following quotes.

*I think we can learn the most from each other if we share ideas, think about questions together. The reading task, for example, made much more sense after we've discussed it.*

*I really enjoy that we have somewhat longer breaks now, also because we have so many ideas to share. Today, as well, we continued talking about the workshop and using drama throughout the break.*

*The discussion of the linguistic differences between interpretation and judgment was nearly a revelation...and knowing that others struggle with similar problems and finding out about the solutions they have worked out is encouraging.*

*In this mentor group there has been team spirit, collaboration and fantastic comradeship. I am starting to realize that teachers, just as students, need an environment in which they can flourish and develop - as we have done.*

*We as a group collected a large amount of knowledge and combined with our experience started to construct new knowledge.*

*The workshop was a real energizer! I crossed all my fingers (and toes) for Myrtill – she did a great job as a 'mentor'. I learnt a lot from her and from our discussion of the mentorial.*

*I love how the group gives feedback and reacts to the others' comments with genuine interest.*

First and foremost, this selection of quotes underscores the importance of *group talk* as a valid professional training activity. This experience seems to have been especially powerful for participants who had had little experience of collaborative peer conversation (Mann, 2005, p. 111), in which professional issues are talked about and thought through together. Some professional discussions served as an important processing device for readings and concepts. Those following the micro-training workshops on ELT methodology often led to a lively exchange of teaching ideas. For us as trainers, it was also good to detect signs that the participants were discovering the powerful effect a cohesive group can have on everybody's well-being. Central elements of this group's identity were a genuine interest in each other, readiness to disclose doubts and difficulties and pure enjoyment of togetherness.

#### **4 Putting the puzzle together again: Learning the hard way**

Everybody on this mentor-training course experienced different degrees of professional and personal development. Such development probably did not follow a neat, linear trajectory but

must have occurred in leaps or loops. Based on the data we have, however, it seems most teachers went through similar and fairly distinct *phases*, not unlike the cyclical stages of competence development – from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence – as described in Underhill (1991, p. 76). To use a metaphor, the process by which the participants re-configured their professional identities reminded us of taking apart a puzzle and recombining old and new pieces into an integrated whole, as shown in Figure 2. In other words, the participants had to explore their professional selves and (re)integrate their insights, new knowledge and unfamiliar skills in a way that allowed them to function in a new role.

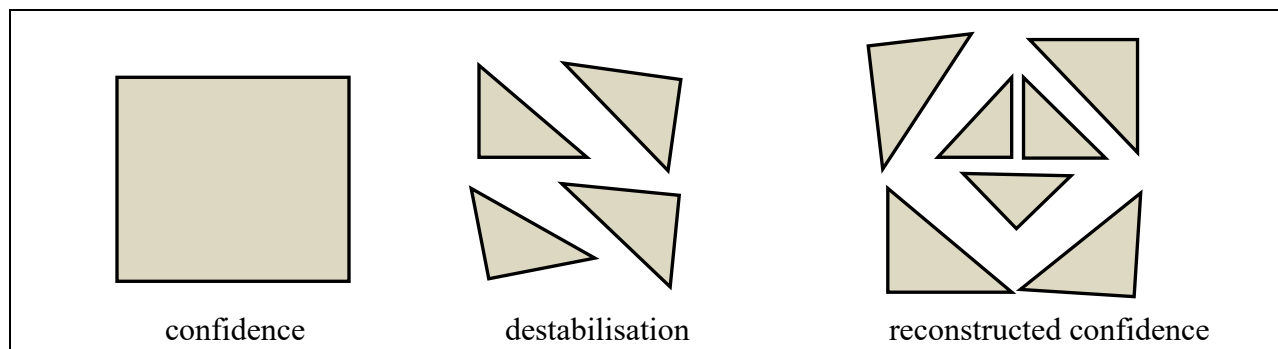


Figure 2. From whole to parts to re-constructed whole

#### 4.1 Intuitive confidence

At the start of the course, a high degree of confidence as teaching professionals was noticeable in several participants' writing:

*When I entered the course, my intention was to become a mentor with high expertise and I thought all I would have to do was to learn the necessary skills and theoretical knowledge.*

*Having learnt that I registered for IATEFL's Mentor Course, the head teacher of the secondary school where I work expressed his utmost approval by allocating a teacher trainee to me for the spring semester. The opportunity thrilled me, and I felt rather confident that I was suitable for this new role. After the first few weeks of the course, however, I am losing ground.*

It is perhaps not surprising that, at this early stage, the course participants would feel this way, given that they were experienced teachers with years of formal training behind them and often a range of additional qualifications under their belts. At the same time they were unaware of the kind of knowledge and skills they would need to master and seemed to anticipate mainly quantitative change.

#### 4.2 Constructive destabilization

As the last quote already signals, this short phase was soon followed by a kind of normative crisis (Erikson, 1968). This may involve, temporarily at least, acute feelings of destabilization in

one's sense of self. For the course participants, this meant uncertainty and self-doubt as regards their ability to become the kind of mentor they envisaged for themselves.

*Being a trainer felt as though I was a tribal healer who suddenly found herself at the medical university.*

*A thought-provoking session on how difficult mentoring is; there are more and more uncertainties.*

*The more we analyse mentor behavior the more insecure I feel. Will I ever get better at it?*

*I have been thrown into the pool at the deep end but I cannot swim!! That's how I felt when I started the (mentoring) role-play today.*

As a crucial developmental step, this phase is probably inevitable and 'constructive' in the sense that real learning and change can only happen in this way. As Underhill (1991, p. 76) puts it, "this is where I may begin to feel deskilled and destabilized as my self-image is challenged by the discovery of the disparity between what I think I am doing and what I am actually doing".

### 4.3 Reconstructed professional confidence

Gradually and at different points, most participants were beginning to believe in their ability to acquire the necessary competence to become good mentors. But, generally, it took a long time for most of them to articulate that they had regained a fair degree of professional confidence and were, in fact, ready to start mentoring:

*So far I have been enjoying the sessions for all sorts of reasons (opportunities for professional development etc.). But today I feel I've made it to a higher level as to my mentoring competence.*

*I have become much more conscious about how to work with and talk to mentees and why to choose a certain intervention or a course of interventions. I am also beginning to see this communication as a process and as a complete system, not just particles of a mess.*

*All in all, I feel ready to start working as a mentor.*

*I went from being an experienced teacher with a strong desire to grow professionally and help others but whose teaching was mostly based on routine to becoming a methodical helper, aware of her strengths and weaknesses and who can ensure her own professional growth while helping others to do likewise.*

The participants' renewed confidence seems to be not just a 'feeling' but something based on their conscious awareness of what it is that makes them mentors now *in addition* to being teachers. This realization is further enriched by the holistic and deeply personal nature of such learning.

## 5 Summary

In this article we have tried to capture the development that a group of Hungarian EFL teachers underwent during their mentor training. We identified main *stepping stones*, which were documented with the participants' own reflections. They describe key changes in the way the teachers defined their expanding professional identities and the degree to which they became conscious of how all facets of mentoring competence blend together in action. The teachers also realized the value of some mentoring-related terminology to explore their own questions and issues and to connect with the wider professional community. Our analysis further revealed that the learning on the course had implications for how the participants saw themselves in the EFL classroom and even in their private lives. Finally, we have illustrated how these experienced teachers-in-training came to appreciate the quality of their group discussions and the supportive climate of their peer group.

None of this, however, meant that the course was just a matter of making interesting discoveries. Practically all the teachers experienced moments, if not periods, of confusion, self-doubt and loss of confidence before their new role as mentors started to become integrated with their personalities and teaching selves. Neither has the development of these newly trained mentors been completed. Rather, we expect this integration process to continue and some feelings of uncertainty to return as these language teachers start mentoring trainees or colleagues "for real".

It is sometimes argued that teacher development "is different in nature" from teacher training (Mann 2005, p. 104), which almost suggests that the two exclude each other. But as we have shown, even a training course like ours, with pre-determined aims and content, offers an opportunity to combine skills training and habit formation with the facilitation of significant self-development in terms of beliefs and awareness.

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