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Learning through mentoring. Mentors as bearers of a model of learning for an integrated society

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Abstract

Every year, about ninety university students go through Malmö University's mentoring programme *The Nightingale*. As a mentor, the student meets with a child from an elementary school in a deprived area of the city for eight months. This article is based on my master's thesis in educational science, in which I examined the learning among the mentors. The study focuses on learning from two different perspectives: first, what type of learning takes place; and second, the actual knowledge the mentors are developing. In order to analyze my results, I have used theories of learning, social exclusion, societal inclusion and intercultural competence. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used. I interviewed twenty four mentors and conducted a survey of all sixty eight mentors in The Nightingale Mentoring Programme in 2008/2009. My results suggest that there is extensive learning in the programme. Mentors develop knowledge about children's living conditions, social exclusion and social inclusion. Furthermore, they develop intercultural skills that are necessary to decrease the boundaries between exclusion and inclusion.

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Keywords: Learning, mentoring, intercultural, inclusion, exclusion, integration

Resum

Cada any, al voltant de noranta estudiants universitaris participen en el programa de mentoria de la Universitat de Malmö, Nightingale -Rossinyol-. Com a mentor, l'alumne o alumna universitària es troba amb un infant d'escola de primària d'un barri desfavorit de la ciutat durant vuit mesos. Aquest article es basa en el treball de tesi en Ciències de l'Educació en el que vaig explorar l'aprenentatge que tenien els mentors i mentores que participaven en aquest tipus de programa. L'estudi es centra en l'aprenentatge des de dues perspectives diferents: primer, l'observació de quin tipus d'aprenentatge es dona; i segon, el coneixement que van acumulant els mentors al llarg de l'experiència. Per a l'anàlisi dels resultats, he emprat teories de l'aprenentatge, l'exclusió social i les competències interculturals. Per això, s'han emprat tant tècniques quantitatives com qualitatives. Vaig entrevistar a vint-i-cuatro mentors i vaig portar a terme una enquesta amb tots els seixanta vuit que participaren en el curs 2008/2009. Els resultats demostren que existeix un aprenentatge extensiu en el programa i que els mentors desenvolupen un coneixement important de les condicions de vida dels infants en risc d'exclusió social, compromís social i inclusió. També aprenen habilitats interculturals que són necessàries per acabar amb les barreres existents entre exclusió i inclusió social.

Paraules clau: Aprenentatge, mentoria, interculturalitat, inclusió social, exclusió social.

Resumen

Anualmente, cerca de unos noventa estudiantes universitarios participan en el programa de mentoría de la Universidad de Malmö, Nightingale -Ruisseñor-. Como mentores, los alumnos y alumnas universitarias quedan una vez por semana con un niño o niña de una escuela de primaria de un barrio de la ciudad durante ocho meses. Este artículo se basa en el trabajo de tesis en Ciencias de la Educación en el que exploré el aprendizaje que tenían

los mentores y mentoras que participaban en este tipo de programa. El estudio se centra en el aprendizaje desde dos perspectivas diferenciadas: primero, desde la observación de qué tipo de aprendizaje se lleva a cabo; y segundo, sobre el conocimiento que el alumnado universitario va acumulando a lo largo de la experiencia. Para el análisis de los resultados, he utilizado algunas teorías del aprendizaje, la exclusión social y las competencias interculturales. Por ellos, se han utilizado técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas entrevistando a veinticuatro mentores y llevando a cabo una encuesta con todos los sesenta y ocho mentores que participaron durante el curso 2008/2009. Los resultados demuestran que existe un aprendizaje extensivo en el programa y que los mentores desarrollan un conocimiento importante de las condiciones de vida de los niños y niñas en riesgo de exclusión social, compromiso social e inclusión. También aprenden habilidades que son necesarias para acabar con las barreras existentes entre la exclusión y la inclusión social.

Palabras clave: Aprendizaje, mentoría, interculturalidad, inclusión social, exclusión social.

1. Introduction

1.1. Objective

The basic concept of *The Nightingale Mentoring Programme*² is the mutual benefit that arises in the encounter between child and mentor. The child gets to meet an adult role model and gain insight into what it is like to study at university. In this way opportunities are created for children to strengthen their self-esteem. The student gets to meet with a child who has a different background, in the aim to create “... *an insight into a child's life and thereby increase knowledge, understanding and empathy for people's different life conditions*” (Sild Lönroth 2007:12).

The purpose of the programme is thus to create conditions for learning among students who become mentors. But what is this learning? And what knowledge are the mentors developing in that role?

This study takes as its starting point the concept of learning. I want to explore the learning that takes place in The Nightingale programme. The starting point is that the learning that happens in the mentoring programme is different from the learning that takes place in the classroom. In school we see a kind of learning that is commonly known as institutionalized learning. But what kind of learning is taking place in programme?

The approach to explore the learning in the mentoring programme can be divided into two parts. First, I want to find out what type of learning takes place among the mentors. Second, I want to know what the mentors are actually learning; what skills they train. My hypothesis is that a university student employed as a mentor develops the following skills:

- Practical acquired knowledge about children's living conditions, social exclusion and social inclusion
- Intercultural competence

2. Information about the programme: www.mah.se/nightingale

This approach leads me to the following two research questions:

1. What kind of learning takes place among the mentors participating in mentoring programme?
2. What knowledge is developed among the mentors participating in the mentoring programme?

1.2. Previous research on mentors' learning

Previous research of what students gain from mentoring has found that mentors gain increased empathy, enhanced communication skills and improved self-confidence (see Fresco & Carmeli (1990); Goodlad (1998); Hobfoll (1980); Topping & Hill (1995) and Wertheim et al., (1999)). Fresco and Wertheim (2001) have found that the learning that occurs among mentors can be divided into three main areas. The first area is about knowledge about children in today's society. Knowledge about socio-economical segregation, dysfunctional families and the effects of cultural differences are examples of what the mentors learn. The second main area of learning is the ability to communicate. According to the study, the mentors become more skilled in talking, listening and setting limits. A third area of learning is the self-awareness that mentors develop. During mentorship, mentors become aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, which is important in future professions. Furthermore, the authors state that the learning that takes place during mentoring is impossible to find in the regular education system.

The research done on the learning among mentors has so far mostly focused on the actual skills the mentors develop. However, there is a lack of research about the ways the learning in mentoring differs from the learning in school. To fill this gap, this article will focus on both the actual knowledge and the type of learning that occurs.

1.3. Limitations

Many different competences are certainly trained in a mentoring programme. In this study I have chosen to confine myself to skills connected to living conditions and social exclusion, as I find them most relevant and most in need of research.

2. Methods

I have used both qualitative and quantitative methods in this study. I have focused primarily on qualitative research interviews to collect data, while a quantitative survey was made to ensure results. Such a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches is referred to as method triangulation, and is designed to compensate for the weaknesses of each method (Halvorsen 1992:92).

Of the 68 mentors participating in the 2008/2009 mentoring year, 24 were selected as research subjects for the qualitative study, generating a sample of 35%. I have used a so-called subjective non-probability sample (Halvorsen 1992:97), in which it is important to base the selection on analytical considerations of how typical the sample is in relation to the whole population. The 24 mentors were chosen to create a high diversity group in terms of gender, age, background and education.

The mentors were interviewed on two occasions. The reason why the interviews took place on two occasions is that I wanted to do a longitudinal study of the mentor's learning. In this way I could follow the learning process among the mentors and see how it had developed during the seven months that elapsed between the interviews. All mentors were asked whether they wanted to participate in the research study before supervision began. All respondents acknowledged recording and no one declined to participate in the research study. During my interviews I used a questionnaire based on a number of themes. I used the same questionnaire at both times to allow for longitudinal comparison. The interviews were partially transcribed as needed.

In the quantitative study, a survey was sent to all 68 active mentors in April 2009. The idea of the survey was to obtain a concrete and quantified measure of how the mentors considered their learning. The survey was distributed electronically and consisted of 15 questions or statements which the respondents had to answer, using a scale from 1 to 6. The respondents were also able to clarify, exemplify and comment on their responses. The response rate for the survey was 81%. In a non-response analysis, I found that men were as likely to respond as women. And I didn't see any patterns regarding age. The loss thus appeared to have a random character. The survey has not had any internal non-responses.

Using Microsoft Excel calculations, I have been able to control the standard deviation and to do cross tabulations where necessary.

3. Theoretical framework

Following the hypothesis, the theoretical framework of this study focuses on three areas: the concept of learning, theories about social exclusion and social boundaries, and inter-cultural competence.

3.1. Learning - what is it?

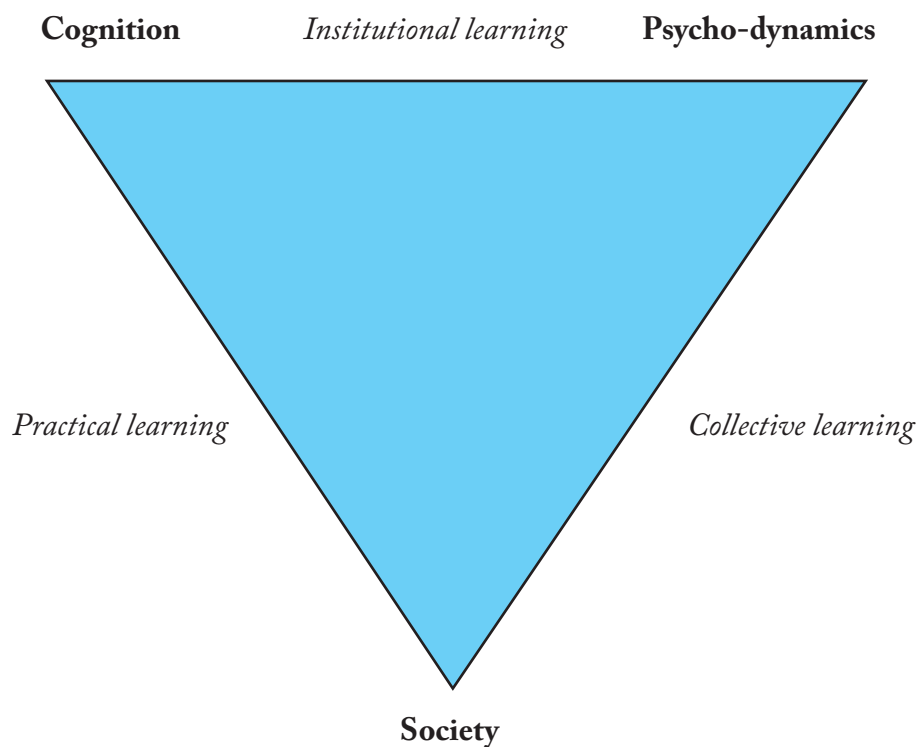
My premise is the view of learning advocated by the theory of *context-based learning*, in which the context the knowledge is developed in is central. When information is put into context and processed by a person, knowledge is created. Vygotsky states that all learning occurs in a social context (Lindqvist 1999). You learn together with others and you cannot learn anything outside the social context you are in. Thus, the quality of the social relationship, such as that between a teacher and a pupil at a school or between two persons in a mentorship, is crucial to learning really occurring.

The Swedish curriculum reflects an epistemological belief that knowledge is created when information is inserted into a context. Unfortunately, very little of the teaching in primary schools, but also at the university, makes use of any context (see Resnick 1987 & Eriksson 2009). This is especially evident for teaching of subjects not traditionally associated with experiments.

Context-based learning is not new. The background to the concept can be found in theories of learning in apprenticeships and it has occasionally been called “learning by doing”. But the definition of context-based learning is broader than this. Lave and Wenger develop the concept of using a process they call “*legitimate external participation*” (Lave & Wenger 1991:29). They mean that everyone who learns is part of a community of practitioners, and that learning requires full participation in the socio-cultural acts that occur within this community.

Context-based learning is the basis for much of today's learning research. Illeris (2001) has developed a model that assumes that learning is based on three dimensions, closely integrated with one another. There is a *cognitive* dimension related to content, a *psychodynamic* dimension related to emotions, attitude and motivation, and a *social* and *societal* dimension (Illeris 2001:24). All learning includes all three dimensions, and through these dimensions learning can also be analyzed.

Figure 1: Illeris' model of learning



The cognitive dimension involves the gathering of knowledge through environmental influences. The psychodynamic dimension is about the psychological urge to learn: learning always includes a process in which emotions, motivation and willingness to learn are keys. The societal dimension is explained in the following way: “*Comprehension of the social side of learning must therefore be related to the prevailing societal structure*” (Illeris 2001: 17f). Learning is fundamentally determined or included in the existing societal conditions.

These dimensions form three poles in Illeris' triangular model of learning. Illeris states that these poles together create a field in which all learning takes place. All learning has elements of all three dimensions, but to facilitate their analysis it can be useful to separate them to get a clearer picture of learning, *“provided that one is aware that the three dimensions are practically united”* (Illeris 2001: 19).

Illeris states that various types of learning can be placed in the areas between the poles: *institutional learning* that takes place in school; *collective learning*, which deals with the interaction between psychodynamics and societal learning; and *practical learning*. Illeris' field can be related to theories of context-based learning. Supporters of context-based learning are accordingly focused on the left side of the model, close to what Illeris calls practical learning.

3.2. Societal boundaries - especially apparent for children in cities

Parts of the neighbourhoods the participating children live in are characterized by social exclusion. Today, the term social exclusion is frequently used in media and by politicians to describe problems in society. What is meant by the term can however be substantially different. Miller (2002) argues that social exclusion means being excluded from the full benefits of being a citizen in society. In current research, social exclusion is seen as something that is multi-dimensional; it may be about poverty, unemployment or lack of participation in elections and other social structures. Levitas (2005) says that exclusion can be seen in three different discourses: MUD, RED and SID. MUD (moral underclass discourse) means exclusion in the sense of deviance and lower morale. RED (redistributionist discourse) is associated with poverty, while SID (social integrationist discourse) is related to unemployment. Such a division can be deployed in a more general theory about the causes of the exclusion. According to Stigendal (2008), the society's norms about what you don't *do*, what you don't *have* and what you don't *think* are essential if you are excluded or not.

Social exclusion must also be seen in relation to something. If you are excluded you are outside of something. Stigendal defines this as the inclusion of society. Society has evolved into an inclusion and the boundaries between the social inclusion and exclusion are most evident in cities. In the city district where the children in The Nightingale programme live, the borders between inclusion and exclusion are highly visible. These borders can be as sim-

ple as a street separating a tenement area from an area dominated by private houses. The borders are interesting, since they indicate the relationship between exclusion and inclusion.

Measures that intend to break exclusion must focus also on the included part of the relationship (Stigendal 2006: 10ff). A mentoring programme can be seen as an attempt to also change the included part of the relationship. Colley writes about the mentorship's ability to reproduce spontaneous informal meetings and make the advantages of these available also to children (Colley 2003:42). Children who live in areas characterized by social exclusion can make contact with inclusion, at least with persons who represent the societal inclusion. Thus, a mentor has the potential to become the bridge that contributes to a possible change, albeit in the long run.

3.3. Intercultural competence - a tool for managing social boundaries

When talking about social exclusion and inclusion, a relevant term is interculturality. A meeting between exclusion and inclusion is often an intercultural meeting.

Intercultural competence is a relatively new concept that has become very popular in education and sociology in recent years. Since the concept is relatively new, the definitions tend to vary. The Swedish National Encyclopaedia Dictionary defines the word intercultural by stressing the interaction between people with different languages and cultures. Thus, intercultural competence is different from multicultural competence in the sense that something is happening *between* cultures. This difference between multicultural and intercultural is supported by Lorentz and Bergstedt (2006), who refer to a definition used by the Council of Europe. According to this division the word intercultural indicates acts or phenomena that describe movements between individuals. Hence, multicultural competence could simply be a matter of having knowledge of various cultures, while intercultural competence is about communication between cultures. Stigendal (2009) elaborates on this, saying that intercultural competence involves knowledge about different worlds and the ability to cross social and cultural boundaries.

Thus, intercultural competence deals with both *knowledge* and *ability*. An interculturally competent individual has knowledge of other cultures, but also the ability to move

across borders between different cultures. However, it is important that both of these characteristics are seen as knowledge. Thus, a better approach is to use the distinction between “*know what*” and “*know how*”.

Many of the children in The Nightingale programme live in areas characterized by cultural pluralism. Thus, many possess intercultural competence. This is perhaps not something that the children themselves are aware of. It’s natural for them to move across borders between different cultures. At school – and on the way to school from home – such borders are crossed every day.

4. Results

This chapter presents the results from interviews and questionnaires. I will start by presenting the results regarding the *type* of learning that takes place among mentors. In the next section I will present the results in relation to *what* the mentors are learning.

In my qualitative study I asked the questions; “*What kind of learning takes place in The Nightingale, do you think?*” and “*How does learning in The Nightingale differ from what happens in the classroom or in your practice?*” The responses were many and varied³.

*“It’s not the same as practice. During practice you have a teacher who watches your back. Here it is my responsibility from day one. During practice you are more of an observer. Instead of reading about it, you go out and feel it; like dipping your toes in the water. But in The Nightingale, it is the real thing. I think that sort of learning is good” (Rolf)*⁴.

“The Nightingale is 100% practice, but it is a completely different experience than what occurs in school’s practice. Here it’s one-to-one meetings. And you do not think that everything must be so educational” (Sue).

3. The selection of quotes has been made using a representative criterion. Persons who best illustrate general point of views have been used more frequently than others. Furthermore, data has been limited so only the most relevant aspects of the interviews have been used in this study.

4. All mentors have been renamed using fictitious names.

The mentors reflect on the knowledge in theoretical, practical and also empirical terms. According to this, the answers to the question about what kind of learning takes place in the Nightingale can be divided into two categories of the view of knowledge. The first category is the mentors who make a clear distinction between theoretical, practical and empirical knowledge, as the quote above indicates. They claim theoretical knowledge happens in school, while practical and empirical knowledge is developed in The Nightingale:

“In school, you learn the theories, and in The Nightingale, you learn by participating” (Survey response).

The second category of mentors sees learning as something that is practical, theoretical *and* empirical, stating that all types of knowledge must be included in learning. Mentoring is seen as a way to reconcile theory and practice and also to entrench empirical knowledge.

“The social worker training is very theoretical. Usually it is just that we sit and listen. So far, I feel that I am taking in information and facts, but I do not have time to anchor it. The knowledge never really has time to sink in (...) but what I have learned in The Nightingale is to anchor the theories. You are carrying something that you can use, like some kind of tacit knowledge” (Sophie).

This category of mentors doesn't make any explicit distinction between theoretical, practical and empirical knowledge. They describe the mentoring as something that deepens learning through encounters with another human being, and it's this knowledge you have to process in order to make it your own knowledge. They argue that the type of learning that takes place during mentoring is unique:

“You feel it yourself. It is not about books you read. It is not theories. It is not practical. This is something concrete, something real. You get experience from reality and discuss it using your other knowledge” (Damien).

“The Nightingale helps me reflect on what I read about in school. It makes the knowledge in school stick; I make it my knowledge” (Nour).

The answers can be categorized using the different approach mentors have to the knowledge developed in *The Nightingale* in particular, but also epistemological beliefs in general.

4.1. The realization of a context-based learning

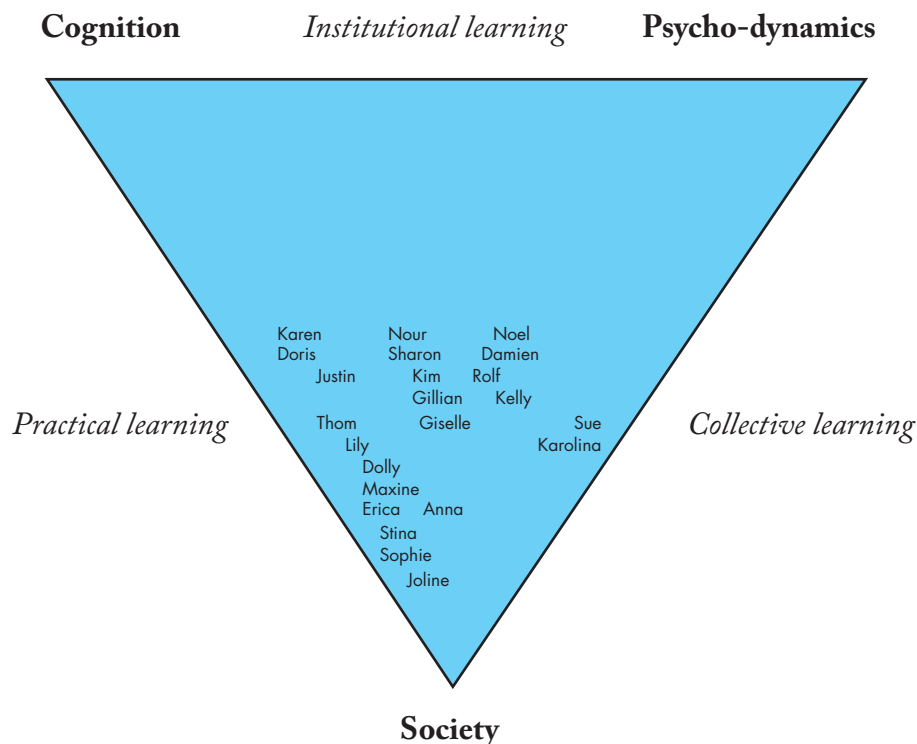
According to the contextual view on knowledge, learning takes place in a context, is a social activity that is dependent on cooperation, and must consist of theoretical, practical and empirical knowledge. The different kinds of knowledge are interrelated and all learning includes all three types. This is also the epistemological view expressed in the Swedish curriculum. The curriculum includes theoretical, practical and empirical elements in its approach to describe the learning process:

“Knowledge is expressed in various forms – such as factual knowledge, understanding, skills and experience – all of which presuppose and interact with each other” (Skolverket 1994:4).

This view of knowledge is not as present in higher education in Sweden. The university's curriculum distinguishes between *knowledge*, *skills* and *attitudes*. This can be interpreted as meaning that practical knowledge (skills) is not knowledge, but something else. Some of the mentors appear to confirm this view of knowledge. They reflect an epistemological point of view where theoretical knowledge is developed in school and empirical and practical knowledge are developed in meetings with the mentor child. But one group of mentors accounts for a learning that has characteristics of contextual knowledge and a view of knowledge that can be found in the school's curriculum. According to those, theoretical, practical and empirical knowledge is necessary for learning and interacting with each other.

Illeris' model of learning is interesting as a tool to analyze the mentors' responses. By ranking the knowledge that the interviewed persons claim to gain as mentors using scales linked to the three dimensions, I have placed the 24 mentors in Illeris' model to present their views on learning.

Figure 2: The mentors placed in Illeris' model of learning



The first thing I can conclude is that the learning in the mentoring programme is of a social nature. Almost all the mentors can be placed in the bottom part of the field. A group of mentors is placed on the left side of the model. These mentors see the learning in mentoring as development of pure practical knowledge. A smaller number of mentors are on the right side of the model. These mentors believe that learning occurs in community with others. The mentors placed on the right and left sides form a category that represents a view of learning where theoretical, practical and empirical knowledge is not interconnected.

A second category of mentors is placed around the middle of the triangle. They see the knowledge they develop in the mentoring programme as the result of a unique learning process, a process that is not covered in the regular education system. Learning consists of different types of knowledge, but it is the context that is most important for the experiences to really become knowledge.

These mentors represent a contextual view of knowledge. The fragments of knowledge you gain becomes learning when put into a context. The interplay between theoretical, practical and empirical knowledge is very visible and learning occurs in a cooperative process between the mentor and child. This is also confirmed by other studies that relate mentoring to context-based learning (see Miller 2002). The knowledge becomes your own if the relationship is characterized by psycho-dynamics, if the conversation with the child is cognitive and, above all, if the meeting takes place in a social context that represents the child's everyday life. Based on this experience, the mentors shape their knowledge, and use and develop it further in their educations and own life. This learning is very clearly expressed in the Swedish curriculum, but is not properly practiced in schools today.

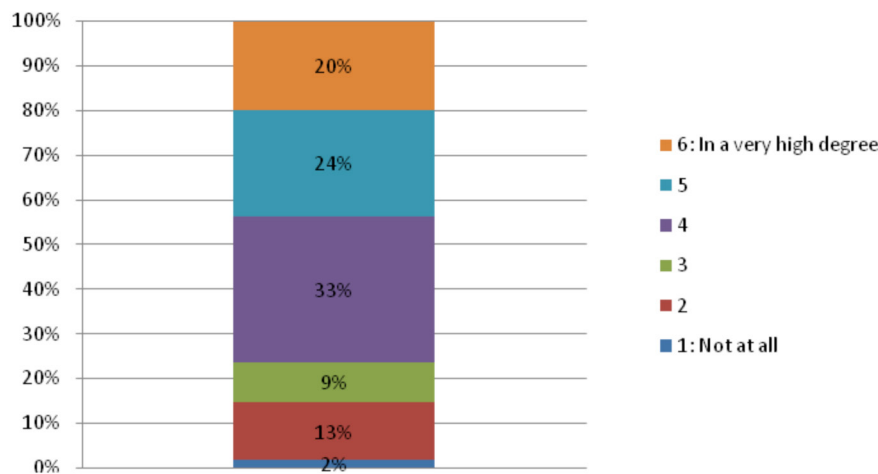
4.2. Knowledge hard to access becomes available

The second question in the study deals with what the mentors actually learn. During the interviews I initially asked an open question; "What have you learned during the year as a mentor?" The responses cover a wide range, and many are connected to my hypothesis.

Knowledge of societal boundaries

As noted, many of the children participating in the mentoring programme live in areas characterized by social exclusion. The situation of the mentors can, on the other hand, be characterized as inclusion, that is to say that they are representing the society, for example by studying at the university, having a job or being part of a social structure that does not exist in the excluded areas. A number of responses in the interviews suggest that awareness of exclusion and inclusion has increased, since the mentors have gained insight into something that is new and different. The answers from the survey confirm this:

Figure 3: To what degree have you gained knowledge of children's living conditions?



Almost half of the mentors indicated that they have strongly or very strongly increased their knowledge of children's living conditions. The mean level is 4.2 out of 6. The comments and interviews illustrate how the mentors have gained knowledge of a world that often differs from the world they live in:

"I have learned (...) how is it to be a refugee growing up in Sweden. What problems one encounters, how family relationships look and the culture of the family (...) what happens when the father is not the safest person of all people on earth who can fix everything, and when mom cannot go shopping because she does not know how to ask for cheese in the deli?" (Nour).

Comments provide examples of how mentors develop their thoughts about the world they encounter, reflecting on their own role in the meeting with the child.

"I have learned that many children who come here have been through terrible things. We went to the cinema and there was one person in the movie with an automatic rifle. The child told me: "I have used one in Iraq." (...) Then, who am I to explain that it is dangerous to climb too high in a scaffold?" (Damien).

Many of the comments deal with social boundaries. Mentors have gained insight into what it is like to grow up cramped in an excluded area, how it can be to have parents

who are without work or how hard it is to connect with societal structures. It is clear that many have gained insight into the existence of social boundaries and that in many cases they belong on different sides of these boundaries than the children and their families. Mentors want to show a different world than the one the children live in. It may be about showing student apartments, university facilities or the residential area students live in. For some children the meeting with the mentor is the first time they meet someone outside the family network. Many hope this will demonstrate Malmö's diversity and different areas. "I hope I can be a door that allows him to get around to more places in Malmö", says one mentor. Another mentor says she hopes to give a better image of the university:

"We were at my house and I told him that I would study in the evening. He said 'why should you study, you already know Swedish'. So I showed my books and talked about the university" (Nour).

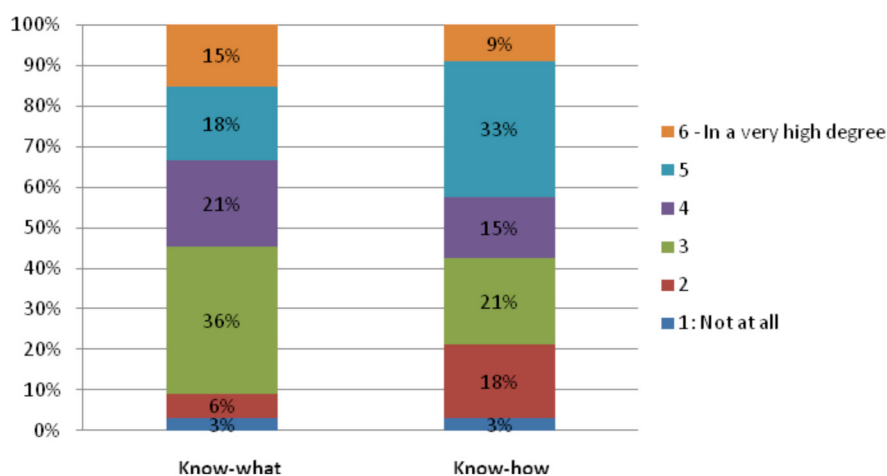
In the previous chapter I have stated that a change from exclusion can only be achieved if the included part is also incorporated in the change. Mentoring has the potential to account for such a change. But for this to happen, the mentors must work to change themselves and their views of exclusion. From the results I can conclude that many of the mentors are in a position to do this. According to Levitas' discourses of exclusion, the mentors can see how exclusion takes on a certain character. According to the replies, there are large numbers of children who seem to be in exclusion, as regarded by the RED discourse (e.g. poverty) and the SID discourse (e.g. unemployment). Many of the mentors have, thanks to the new knowledge, changed their views of themselves. Several of the mentors believe that new knowledge about people's different living conditions allows one to see oneself in a new light, so that prejudices disappear and it becomes easier to understand and work to overcome exclusion. Responses indicate that the mentors have initiated a small but possibly significant movement from exclusion to inclusion. Through changes in their view of exclusion and in particular their role in representing inclusion, the meetings may be the beginning of important journeys of the children from exclusion to inclusion. With respect to Malmö University, helping to crack codes in the new community or just introducing new, previously inaccessible places for children might play an important role in the future. Mentors may act as a bridge or link to social inclusion. Not only for the children, but also for their families. Thus, the mentors become bearers of a method of integration.

Interculturally skilled students

Much of the knowledge developed is related to the boundaries of society. One way to take advantage of these skills is to see them in light of intercultural competence. I have stated that intercultural skills can be seen as *know-what*, as a result of interaction with individuals from other cultures, and as *know-how*, skills to move across barriers between different cultures. The meeting between mentor and child creates conditions for intercultural skills. Many of the children in the programme already have these skills. They meet many cultures every day and are constantly crossing borders. Many of them master several languages and have knowledge of the cultures and expressions of their schoolmates. Thus, it is interesting to examine if also the mentors are able to develop intercultural skills through the mentoring process.

Survey responses indicate that cultural understanding (*know-what*) have increased. On a scale of 1 to 6, where 6 represents a much better understanding of other cultures, the mean is 3.9. When it comes to adaptability (*know-how*), the responses indicate that this has also increased. On the claim “*The Nightingale has given me greater skills to move between different cultural worlds*” the mean is 3.9. The figure below shows a comparison of how mentors perceive their competence with respect to *know-what* and *know-how*.

Figure 4: Intercultural skills: I have gained knowledge of other cultures (*know-what*), I have gained the skills to move between different cultural worlds (*know-how*).



Thus, half of the mentors believe that they have gained greater knowledge of different cultures to a fairly high degree or higher, and nearly 60 percent believe that their ability to move between cultural worlds has increased to a fairly high degree or higher. Intercultural competence has undoubtedly increased among the mentors. Mentors describe how this can turn out by giving examples of both *know-what* and *know-how*:

“You get more respect for people when you know where they are from and what they’ve been through. This respect and knowledge makes you more open as a person. I can connect with more people. It’s easy to talk to a fellow student since we are so similar. But since having gotten to know my mentee and his family, I can more easily approach other people who do not have the same cultural background as me” (Nour).

Related to the previous discussion about social boundaries, some of the mentors make a connection between the cultural competence that is developed and the role it plays in the relationship between social exclusion and inclusion:

“A mentor can play a role in bridging cultural differences. I have gotten a better understanding of other cultures and may play a role in changing exclusion” (Damien).

“It is a skill that I will find useful when I’m going to work. It is in many ways different to how I grew up. It is important to know this, especially in Malmö. If you want to help with integration issues, you must have knowledge of different cultures” (Nour).

I have been able to show that most mentors believe that they have developed increased awareness of cultural differences and also increased ability to move between different cultural worlds. Some of the mentors said that they will find it easier to approach people with different backgrounds than themselves in the future. I can conclude that some of the mentors, by being able to develop intercultural skills, also can act as bridges between exclusion and inclusion. One mentor said that by seeing yourself from a new perspective you can understand and help. And that’s exactly what is required in the new society that is characterized by pluralism. With a new perspective on your own culture, it’s easier to understand other cultures and be able to move between different cultural worlds. Without such skills, it would be more difficult to contribute to a society with weakened boundaries between social exclusion and inclusion.

5. Conclusions

My analysis suggests that the learning that takes place in The Nightingale Mentoring Programme is extensive and valuable. The mentors express a view of knowledge that is very much in line with the epistemology advocated in the Swedish curriculum: that knowledge is created when information is put into a context. This is a view of knowledge that has been hard to achieve in the ordinary educational system. The mentors present context-based learning that can be said to bring to life the view of learning that is presented in many policy documents but not often actually achieved.

Learning through mentoring is thus context-based, in the sense that the information received at school and through experiences is put into a context; the context of meeting the child in his or her environment. Through the mentoring process, mentors can jointly develop practical and empirical knowledge, which they can use to enhance their theoretical knowledge. By being able to follow a child over a long period of time, a condition is created to insert the knowledge from the university into a context. A mentor who is studying to become a city planner is able to see a child in his or her physical context and to gain insight into the conditions that characterize the residential areas they are going to work in. Learning takes place from the encounters with the children and their environment, and the learning in school is inserted into this context.

Learning through mentoring should not only be seen as a complement to the learning that takes place in universities, but also as one way to transform knowledge about today's society to one's own knowledge, which is a necessity for learning. The learning that the mentors express represents an approach to knowledge that is necessary to get around in today's society.

The results also show that the mentors have achieved a number of specific competences. The analysis suggests that knowledge of society's boundaries between social exclusion and the inclusion of society has increased very much. Also, the results show that many mentors have developed intercultural competence, both by having knowledge of different cultures and knowledge of how to move between cultural boundaries. The result is even more interesting when put into a larger perspective. Knowledge of social exclusion,

the perception of your role as representative of social inclusion, and the development of competence which means that you can move between cultural worlds in a society characterized by pluralism suggests that the learning that takes place in the mentoring programme ensures that the mentors are well equipped for the future. They can leverage their knowledge to build a society where the boundaries between social exclusion and inclusion are weakened and where new skills – needed in society – can be taken care of.

Context-based learning together with these intercultural and integrative skills forms the main conclusion I would like to highlight in this study. Mentoring is not only a complement to university education. Meeting with the children creates a knowledge that is more or less unique and hard to obtain in any other way. This knowledge is invaluable when it comes to building tomorrow's integrated society.

6. Future courses of action

Performing a study with a number of students who are in the midst of a mentoring year gives a result which of course is uncertain. In this research I find trends on how mentors perceive themselves at the present time. Measuring the sustainability of my conclusions will require a different type of study, a study that examines the effects of mentoring in the longer term.

Thus, an interesting research project would be to perform a study on mentors who have gone through a mentoring programme during university studies and now are active in the labour market. Such a study could give legitimacy to the conclusions I draw in this study.

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