

ACTION RESEARCH DEMOCRACY IN MENTORING SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to stress the strength of the action research in creating democratic values in mentoring primary schools in the Republic of Macedonia. The benefit of the mentoring schools acquired through the changes in mentoring student teachers by using action research methodology are in the focus of the researcher interest. In the Introduction are given theoretical discussion of the experiences, attitudes and opinion about the action research, mentoring teacher students, democracy, etc. Action research methodology is elaborated as acting on macro and micro level trying to find the answer about the The ways for democratization of the mentoring schools through the process of mentorship with the Faculties of Education? The Results and the discussions of the research are the following parts in the paper in which the changes made by the taking actions are presented and elaborated.

Key words: action research, research competencies, democratization, mentoring process, teacher training

Introduction

The mentorship in the initial teacher training of primary school teachers¹ is a process of exchange of goods and services, obligations duties and mutual achievements of the mentor institutions² and of the Faculties of Education. The inclusion in the process of mentorship in ITT, shown through experiences for positive and negative aspects of its realization, gives me right to think and act in decreasing the intensity of the negative processes, and strengthening the position and the application of positive benefits. The choice was made and the action researches were used for changing the practice, the mentorship to be used as a process in acquiring goods and values. In that sense, together with the mentor teachers, we have tried through the action research to create a democratic climate for acting and work in the mentorship institution.

1. Learning from the practice- what a benefit?

As people who want to create better environment for pupils learning, development and social growth, me and the teacher-mentors, have organized an action research study focussed on our specific practice. From my point of view, I was interested in changing something in the processes of mentoring of my students, their communication with the mentor-teachers and the pupils.

¹ ITT of Primary School Teachers in Republic of Macedonia means a four years course of study, which lead to Bachelor degree and gave a possibilities to continue with the master studies. Those courses are gained on the Faculties, which are a part of two State Universities.

² The mentor institutions are a few state Primary schools institutions, which have a contract with the Faculties of Pedagogy for realization the processes of mentorship. Some practical aspect of teaching in the frame of the pedagogical practice and the basis of the methodology of teaching of all curricula subject are the subjects of the process of mentorship in Republic of Macedonia.

For the mentor-teachers, the focus was on the mutual cooperation and help among the teachers and capabilities for facing with the changing challenges. The action research design was appropriate to act and to research, in other words, to work on realization of the mentorship with creating and implementing changes in the process, and to research and monitor that processes. The action research design is a point where the needs of the academic and practical sides of the mentoring process meet and they are fulfilled. Taking into consideration the characteristic of the action research "...to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge" (Elliot J., 2001, p. 49), and that one which stresses that: "...all action research has the aims of improvement and involvement..." (According to Carr W. & Kemmis S., 1986. In Schwandt T. A. 1997, p. 2) we found that that is the right way to satisfy our interest. Another resource of our theoretical guidance is the conceptions of the reflective practitioners. Because we wanted to *think in action as professionals*, (more in Schon D., 2003), we went further in a place marked from Brockbank & Anne as a *critical reflective learning*. (1998, p. 73)

2. Giving a sense of the action research- First attempt

From our experience we can tell that if want to change something in our schools, in a situation when everything is changing, we face with problem at the beginning. That means that every kind of change without involving the teachers in a process of creating of that change is going to fail. Not focusing with action research on some *dilemma faced by teacher*, will lead to dissatisfaction from the proposals of the research. (Pollard A. at al., 2002, p. 7) At this stage, one of the main derivation of mutual action in a mutual place with the mutual problems was the use of the conception critical friend as an ideology of our action research. According ESRC Teaching and Learning Research programme 2002, the critical friend should: *"observe, listen and learn; demonstrate positive regard for the learner; help identify issues and explore alternatives; offer sources of evidence and/or expertise; work collaboratively; encourage the learner to explore his own possibilities; offer a thoughtful critical perspective,"* (Stroobants H. & Leysen H., 2004) which was acceptable for all enthusiastic mentors. In other words, we were prepared to *learn* from each other, respecting the meanings of the concept of learning given from Jarvis (1990). These are: *"any more or less permanent change in behaviour as a result of experience; a relatively permanent change in behaviour which occurs as a result of practice; the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; the processes of transforming experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes, and memorizing information."* (In: Tight M., 2002, p. 25)

2.1 Giving a sense of the action

Every action researcher, just as we wanted to be, must take care about the dimensions of the action, the sense of the processes of implementation of the action, the ethical questions connected with and the development of the research framework on a democratic way.

Dimensions of the action should compliance with the characterized "*professions*" features given by Carr W. and Kemmis S. (1986, p. 220-221). *First: the "professions" employ methods and procedures based on theoretical knowledge and research; Second: the members of the profession have an overriding commitment to the well-being of their clients; Third: individually and collectively the members of the profession reserve the right to make autonomous and independent judgment, free from external non-professional controls and constraints, about the particular courses of action to be adopted in any particular situation.*

The action researchers should take care about the principles of change developed in the frame of school-based management. In that point, the researcher should know that: *"creating new governance structure is not enough; It is a systemic change that requires a transition to a new way of managing and a new logic of organizing; ...it must be implemented in the context of goals for the educational process; there is a strong and critical role for the district in the transition to the school-based management; the essence of the transition ...is a learning process that requires the establishment of a learning community; the transition is a deep change, one that entails changes in attitudes, assumptions and behaviours, etc."* (Monhram A.S. & Wohlstetter P. In: Mohrman A.S., 1994, p. 255-266)

A sense for the processes of implementation of the action should be focused on activities for solving the dilemmas, which arise from our previous action researches experience and reflective knowledge, which comprise:

1. *Personal and the institutional success;*
2. *Personal view on the success and personal view of success and objective parametres of success;*
3. *Personal view for the personal success and environmental view on the personal success;*
4. *When is the process finished?, and*
5. *Who desires the fame for the success? (Iliev D., 2004, p. 326. In: Terzis P.N.)*

Taking care about the ethical dimensions of our action research, we were encouraged to develop relationship in the action research seen as: "*equality, harmony, acceptance, cooperation and sensitivity,*" (Stringer T.S., 1996, p. 26) and communicate with: "*attentiveness, acceptance, understanding, truth, sincerity, appropriateness and openness.*" (Ibid, p. 29) Looking the all idea, preparation and the number of activities planed to be realized within our action research, it maybe looked very enthusiastic. But in other words, that was only a practical side written and mentioned in the text above, previously arranged between enthusiastic persons.

2.2 Setting the scene for our action research

When we started with our action research project, we had on our mind that the mentoring process is one of the most important grounds of the Initial teacher training. The main idea was to change the mentoring practice in the area of tuition of the mentors and mentoring school for engaging in that process. The first step was to assure ourselves that even the changing society can't pay enough for that process, there must be something, an appropriate response to this.

Our professional and vocational strength and self-confidence was the only tool for proving the opposite. The sample of the research was: 35 mentors (primary school teacher-researchers) and one researcher from the Faculty of Pedagogy-Bitola. The research was held with 6 students with the high scores in methodology of research, who gained a training course for observing the behaviour, too. Those 6 students realized an activity of external evaluation of the behaviour of the mentors. The main research question in the research is: *The process of mentoring can improve and develop mentoring schools.*

Guiding with, with the action research we had created a "*model of mentorship*" which imply the actions on the **macro** and the **micro level**. The actions on the macro level were focussed on the interpersonal behaviour and communication of the mentors and there were implemented by main researcher. The actions on the micro level were focussed on the developing personal abilities of the mentor teachers to use the knowledge acquired through the implementation of the actions on the macro level and to reflect on it. The researchers findings on the macro level have had a reflection on the mentor researchers who did an action researches on the micro level, and vice versa. On the other hand, we had a parallel research with the non-mentoring schools, used as indicator for comparing the quality of the actions in the mentoring schools.

The actions of the macro level were in organizing and practicing training for mentors about:

1. *The secrets of mentoring process (Training Course 1)*
2. *Using and production of the learning tools (mediums)(Training course 2)*
3. *Basis and the content of the communication between mentors, and mentors with students (Training course 3)*
4. *Creating pilot project, and involving and participating of the mentors in that project*³.

A part of this research, which will be explored, analysed and interpreted is focused on verification of the **hypothesis** of the research: *The "model of mentorship" encourages the process of capacity building of mentors for mutual cooperation and helps them to manage the changes in their schools.*

There were four research questions set up:

1. The influence of the "Model of mentorship" on the mutual trust and confidence of the mentor teachers;
2. The influence of the pilot project realized in the frame of the "Model of mentorship" on the processes of mutual interactions among mentor teachers;
3. The influence of the pilot project realized in the frame of the "Model of mentorship" on the personal attitudes of the mentor teacher according to the changes in their school;
4. The relationship between the "Model of mentorship" and the abilities of the mentor teachers to be leaders of the school changes.

2.3 The proposed answers of these research questions were:

1. *The "Model of mentorship" significantly increases the mutual trust and confidence of the mentor teachers.*
2. *The pilot project nourishes and increases the processes of mutual interactions among mentor teachers.*
3. *The participation of mentor teacher in pilot projects helps and develops the personal attitudes of the mentor teacher towards the changes in their school*

³ The topics of the Pilot projects are: "*The needs of our children*", "*You can learn from me ...*", "*The student can learn from me ...*", "*Dear parents, come to our classroom!*", "*I teach like a mentor, I learn like a pupil*", "*Mentor as a team member*".

4. The participation of mentor teacher in pilot projects strengthens capabilities of the mentor teachers for leading the changes in their schools

The characteristics of the research are: *it is focused on transforming, not on reforming; to originate and promote cooperation; create and produce new knowledge, way of thinking and behaviour of the mentor-researcher; it is action research on the action researches; every researcher is practitioner, too.*

2.4 Treatment of the democracy in our action research

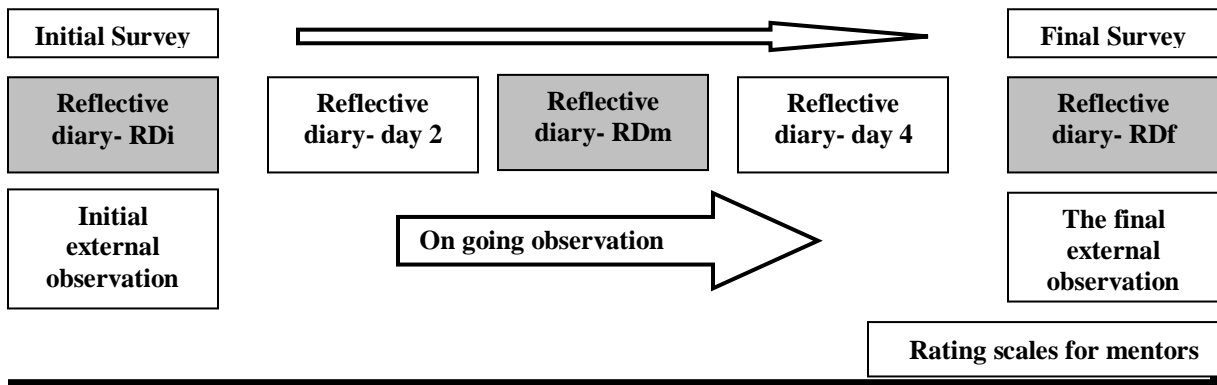
There are a number of authors who are engaged with the theme democracy in Primary schools. One of them is Doug Springate, who saw the democracy in primary schools as a process of: *learning about democracy, learning through democracy and learning for democracy.* (More in: Springate D., 2003, p. 27- 28). If we made a transfer of that meaning into area of school development, it means that *"The task of reforming a school into a learning organisation includes a democratic aspect. The members of the organisations have to be active in the ongoing changing process."* (Sternudd-Groth, 2002, p. 299) We feel that the approaches to democracy above mentioned convenient to our meaning of the action research-based democracy. In the next part of the paper we will present the formal side of establishing democratic values with the action research in a mentoring school and we will affirm the result, interpretation and the values of the achieved change.

2.5 Developing an action research study with democracy

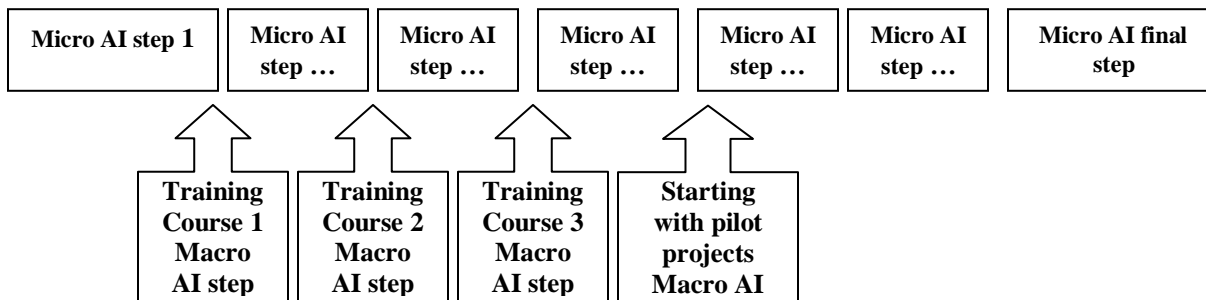
Democratic values in the mentoring institutions are a sensitive component of school leaving relations. The mentor, as a component of that complex process, is a bearer of the processes of democratisation. The actions in the action research above mentioned, were implemented in the mentoring process in the mentoring schools presented according to the following timetable:

Figure 1: Timetable of the coordinated and implemented actions and research procedure in our action research

A. The research procedures



Process of implementation of the action research



B. The implemented actions

In the process of our action research, as we can see, we used a number of procedures and actions. This means that without arrangement for composing of the activities it wouldn't be possible. Because of that we have developed our action research project based upon the following democratic values:

- *Decisions about technical questions:* the training courses should take place in a time that nobody is engaged at; the duration of the time should be agreed by all participants; every participants should be free to change something in his/her classroom without special permission from the other participants in the research; every mentor teacher should put their name on the instruments for data gathering; every mentor teacher can have a copy from their own action research on the micro level; the results from the research should be analysed and interpreted on the level of schools etc.
- *Decisions about social values:* everyone can make a decision to be involved in the realization of the research; everyone who want to stop with the realization of the action research can do that without any specific permission from other participants in the research; the mentor teacher should discussed with the pupils in their class about the interest for involving in the research process; the parents should know about the involvement in the research process etc.

If we want to make a more general view of this democratic and practical values, it will be more convenient by using the words: voluntary work; mutual respect; defined responsibilities; equality and not competitiveness.

3. *Establishing the democratic values with action research study*

One of the values of our action research is the production of democracy in the mentoring schools. It can simply be shown with the following four tables in which the changes in the relationships among the mentors in the mentoring school, changes with the mentor teachers from participation in the realization of pilot projects in the mentoring schools, participation of the mentor teachers in the pilot projects and their attitude towards the changes and capabilities of the mentor teachers for leading the changes in their schools are shown through data gathering by the students- external observers, the satisfaction of the mentor teachers from the realized change and their opinion about that change. Two observations are done: Initial (Io) and final (Fo) whereas the satisfaction of the mentors is measured at the end of the realization of the action research circle with rating scales. In the column (Rank) are ranked all conditions acquired through the differences in the averages of the final and initial measures for each of the items.

In the Table 1 are shown the results from the changes in the relationship between the teacher mentors in the mentoring schools.

Table 1 Changes in the relationship between the teacher mentors in the mentoring schools

Categories	Observing from the students				Rating scales		Questioning			
	Io	Fo	Fo-Io	Rank	Average	Rank	Iq	Fq	Fq-Iq	Rank
1. Mutual respect	2,286	2,800	0,514	1	3,714	1	3,114	4,200	1,086	2
2. Exchange of opinions	2,543	2,686	0,143	6	3,000	6	3,029	3,857	0,829	11
3. Readiness for giving help	2,971	3,000	0,029	12	3,543	2	2,800	3,686	0,886	8
4. Readiness for accepting help	2,657	3,114	0,457	2	2,914	8	2,829	3,914	1,086	3
5. Positive productive communication	3,057	3,286	0,229	5	2,486	11	2,943	3,857	0,914	7
6. Exchange of working materials	3,257	3,200	-0,057	13	2,600	10	2,886	3,743	0,857	9
7. Exchange of positive experience	3,400	3,543	0,143	6	3,257	4	3,143	3,886	0,743	12
8. Exchange of negative experience	2,114	2,543	0,429	3	2,714	9	2,629	3,486	0,857	9
9. Finding mutual solution of problems	3,514	3,629	0,114	9	3,171	5	2,800	3,800	1,000	4
10. Exchange of the learning materials	2,914	3,057	0,143	6	2,171	12	2,943	3,600	0,657	13
11. Readiness for giving critics	2,800	3,114	0,314	4	1,971	13	2,714	3,686	0,971	5
12. Readiness for accepting criticism	2,971	3,086	0,114	9	2,943	7	2,314	3,629	1,314	1
13. Mutual trust	3,057	3,143	0,086	11	3,457	3	2,686	3,629	0,943	6

Analysing these results we can conclude that with our research, more precisely our "*Model of mentorship*":

1. There is a positive change in all given categories;
2. The biggest positive influence is done with the category mutual respect and readiness for accepting help;
3. The least positive influence is done with the exchange of the learning materials;
4. There is still a big space for improvement of the relations among the mentor teachers in the given categories because on the scale with maximum value 5, the values range from 2,543 to 4,200, with concentration 2.500 to 3.500.

According to what we said above, we can conclude that we accept supposition 1 *The "Model of mentorship" significantly increases the mutual trust and confidence of the mentor teachers.* That confirms setting of improved social conditions for democratic behaviour in the mentoring school.

The processing of data and the results from the changes with the mentor teachers from participation in the realization of pilot projects in the mentoring schools given in table 2 given us the following cognition:

Table 2 Changes with the mentor teachers from participation in the realization of pilot projects in the mentoring schools

Categories	Observing from the students				Rating scales		Questioning			
	External view of the change				Satisfaction of the mentors		Personal view of the change			
	Io	Fo	Fo-Io	Rank	Average	Rank	Iq	Fq	Fq-Iq	Rank
1. They improve my (him-her) presentational abilities (abilities of the mentor)	2,543	3,343	0,800	4	2,657	7	3,314	3,971	0,657	12
2. It makes me (him-her) active listened	2,457	3,314	0,857	3	3,086	5	3,457	4,229	0,771	9
3. It triggers the exchange of experience	2,143	3,600	1,457	1	3,486	1	3,229	4,486	1,257	1
4. Among mentors it strengthens the mentors self-confidence	2,629	3,171	0,543	7	3,143	3	3,400	4,314	0,914	5
5. It stresses the positive values of the staff	2,200	2,200	0,000	12	2,486	12	3,543	4,314	0,771	9
6. It stresses the negative values of the mentor	2,571	2,943	0,371	9	2,600	9	2,914	3,429	0,514	13
7. It stresses the abilities of every educator	2,486	3,286	0,800	5	3,143	3	3,314	4,029	0,714	11
8. It strengthens the trust in the power of the staff	2,657	3,114	0,457	8	2,486	12	2,886	4,000	1,114	3
9. It makes me (him-her) self-critical	2,114	2,800	0,686	6	3,200	2	3,429	4,257	0,829	6
10. It increases the power for criticizing the colleagues	3,457	3,600	0,143	11	2,457	14	2,914	3,257	0,343	14
11. It increases the ability for accepting criticism by the colleagues	3,371	3,371	0,000	12	2,514	11	2,943	3,771	0,829	8
12. It increases the interest of mentors for participation in pedagogical researches as a sample	2,571	2,571	0,000	12	2,629	8	3,314	4,143	0,829	6
13. It increases the interest of mentors for participation in pedagogical researches as a researcher	1,943	2,914	0,971	2	3,057	6	3,086	4,229	1,143	2
14. Mentor`s openness for collaboration with stakeholders and people from different institutions	1,971	2,314	0,343	9	2,543	10	3,257	4,371	1,114	4

1. The research had a positive impact on the categories;
2. The biggest positive change is done in the category *It triggers the exchange of experience* and *It increases the interest of mentors for participation in pedagogical researches as a researcher*;
3. The least positive change is done in the category *It increases the power for criticizing the colleagues* and *It stresses the positive values of the staff*;
4. There is a little and not so exposed change in the categories: *It stresses the positive values of the staff*, *It increases the ability for accepting criticism by the colleagues* and *It increases the interest of mentors for participation in pedagogical researches as a sample*
5. If we look at the satisfaction from the project and the achieved changes, the mentors have balanced attitude so that here are given the maximum and the minimum values are given on the same categories.

6. As it was said in the previous table, the satisfaction of the mentors from the change is less and they think that there is space to increase more from the opinions about the achieved change.

We can conclude that our supposition *The pilot project nourishes and increases the processes of mutual interactions among mentor teachers* is confirmed. That is a good base for development of the relationship, which are considered in table 3 and table 4, where in more concrete way is shown the influence of our "Model of mentorship" on the democratic values in the mentoring schools taking into consideration the meaning of the mentors acting.

From the table 3 we can notice the change in the attitudes of the mentor teachers according to their participation in the pilot project.

Table 3 Participation of the mentor teachers in the pilot projects and their attitude towards the changes

Categories	Rating scales		Questioning			
	Satisfaction of the mentors		Personal view of the change			
	Average	Rank	Iq	Fq	Fq-Iq	Rank
1. It strengthens the ability of the mentor for identification of the positive and negative changes	3,171	3	3,343	4,371	1,029	1
2. It encourage me to adopt to the changes	1,714	7	3,514	4,371	0,857	3
3. It enables me to take part in the collective managing of the changes in my school	2,257	5	3,486	4,257	0,771	5
4. It enables me to be a leader of the changes in my school	2,229	6	3,314	4,200	0,886	2
5. It enables me to deal with the changes in my classroom	3,571	1	3,714	4,514	0,800	4
6. It enables me to influence the others to deal with their own problems	3,343	2	3,229	3,714	0,486	6

From the table 3 we can notice the change in the attitudes of the mentor teachers according to their participation in the pilot project.

Actually, there is a positive value of the averages of the categories, but there are a lot of differences comparing the *satisfaction from* and *thinking about*. The trend of "to be satisfied but not to support that with the opinion about the power of the change" is still surviving.

If we compare those two things in the category *It encourages me to adopt to the changes*, we can see that there is the biggest positive influence of the action research.

According to this, we can conclude that our supposition *The participation of mentor teacher in pilot projects helps and develops the personal attitudes of the mentor teacher towards the changes in their school* is partially accepted, which means that we or someone who want to improve his/ her work can hardly work on it.

Table 4 Capabilities of the mentor teachers for leading the changes in their schools

Categories	Rating scales		Questioning			
	Satisfaction of the mentors		Personal view of the change			
	Average	Rank	Iq	Fq	Fq-Iq	Rank
1. It is a task of the state	2,800	4	2,743	2,657	-0,086	5
2. It is a task of somebody out of the school	3,257	2	2,200	1,943	-0,257	7
3. It is typical for and belongs to the principal	1,971	8	2,686	2,571	-0,114	6
4. It belongs to school services	2,343	6	2,743	2,829	0,086	4
5. It belongs to the individuals educators in the schools	2,371	5	2,343	3,286	0,943	1
6. It belongs to each teacher in the school	3,257	2	3,086	3,771	0,686	2
7. It is too complicated for me and I couldn't do it	2,114	7	2,000	1,686	-0,314	8
8. It's appropriate to my profession and I'm ready to do it	3,314	1	3,171	3,571	0,400	3

Those abilities of the mentor, which are aimed towards accepting the role of the school leaders have increased strengthening of their self-confidence in leading the change and the trust in their colleagues teachers for leading the change in the school. (See table 4) It is obvious that the values of the averages of the given categories are more positive oriented in area of mentor strength, and negative values of the averages are in the categories, which are primarily not pedagogical and political. Those values stress the abilities for managing the school from outside and managing only from the heads of the institution. These lead to the conclusion that our action research develops the trust of the mentor teachers in their abilities in leading the changes. That only confirms the supposition that: *The participation of mentor teacher in pilot projects strengthens capabilities of the mentor teachers for leading the changes in their schools.*

4. Conclusion

From data processing and the acquired results from our action research we can find out a lot of positive influences on making conditions for democratic acting of peers, influence on developing a positive attitude towards the changes and strengthening the ability for leading the changes. On the other hand, with our action research we can confirm that there is a possibility for further influence with similar action research on the mentor institutions in republic of Macedonia, which final aim is the democratisation of the conditions and the processes of studying and teaching both for the students and the pupils in the realization of the pedagogical practice.

In that sense, the confirmed *hypothesis* of the research *The "model of mentorship" encourage the process of capacity building of mentors for mutual cooperation and helps them to manage the changes in their schools* gives space for intensifying the cooperation between the pedagogical faculties and the mentoring schools in Republic of Macedonia about the setting of the content, organisation and realisation, based on democratic principles and values.

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