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# Preparing to Become a Teacher Mentor: A Project of Professional Development of Preschool and Primary School Teachers in Czech Republic

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## Abstract

The paper presents the model of training for preschool and primary school teachers with the aim of preparing them to become the mentors for their colleagues at school – novice teachers in Zlín region in Czech Republic. The project includes sixteen differentiated instructional modules regarding the actual needs of teachers’ professional development. The project is implemented by the Faculty of Humanities at Tomas Bata University in Zlín in Czech Republic since 2014 so this paper presents already the experiences with creating a platform for teachers’ training as well with results from selected modules. The author concentrates on the instructional module focused on the case of creating a school team for good working and healthy school climate and the paper also presents the partial outcomes of the project evaluation.

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*Keywords:* teacher mentor; professional development; preschool teacher; primary school teacher

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## 1. Introduction

This paper presents the model of training for preschool and primary teachers based on importance of continuous improving of quality in teacher’s life-long learning system. The project functions in concordance with the Strategic Plan of Education and Development of the School System in the Czech Republic which supports improvement of the quality of education, new methods of school evaluation and also innovations in the educational process. We present

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sixteen instructional modules focused on currently needed themes as perceived by the teachers in Zlín region in Czech Republic. Our aim is also to present more detailed content of the module based on supporting the competences which are necessary to become a team member in school environment with the impact on better school climate and perceived social health in school relationships. Studies show that social relationships have cumulative impact on health over time and they can be extremely stressful (Umberson & Montez, 2010). We can adapt these findings on school environment, especially for novice teachers trying to become accepted member of the teaching staff. The teaching profession is associated with a high level of emotional burnout which impacts teachers' health immediately (Hong, 2010).

### 1.1. Current stage of the project

The project has already a coherent form of cooperation with school institutions in Zlín region after three years of existence. Initial distrust of schools in establishing the cooperation with a university had been eliminated after first positive references and some participants satisfied with previous modules enroll on more modules actually. In 2015, instructional materials were developed for all modules and professional education was launched. (Wiegerová et al., 2015) In 2016, we continue to realize the instructional modules including the module focused on support of teamwork among teachers in teaching staff. We deal with the content and evaluation of this module in detail in chapter 3 of the paper.

## 2. Instructional modules

The support for teachers is provided in the form of instructional modules. The module is a self-contained course for a particular target group of teachers. Each module is for 10-20 teachers who can participate in the learning process for free, as long as the module is part of the project. Each module has 90 hours of contact instruction and 40 hours of individual teacher reflective tasks.

1. *Support during the adaptation of the novice teachers in the school environment:* This module offers assistance to novice teachers during their adaptation process in the school environment. It instructs novice teachers about cooperation strategies between other teachers in the teaching staff, cooperation with parents, and cooperation with teacher mentors. Target group: novice teachers at preschools and primary schools.
2. *Support of teamwork among teachers in the teaching staff:* This instructional module offers knowledge on team leadership, cooperation and self-reflection regarding one's attitude towards working in a team. Major focus will be on the activating teaching methods and self-reflective techniques. Target group: teacher mentors.
3. *Support of the project methods and cooperative teaching at preschools, primary schools and secondary schools in the Zlín region:* This instructional module introduces teachers to innovative instructional methods and forms. It focuses on project methods and cooperative teaching. It provides examples of the main features and principles of project and cooperative teaching and their application. It also suggests appropriate forms of assessment and self-assessment of children and pupils. Practical output of the module is a teacher's lesson plan that uses the project method. Target group: primary school teachers.
4. *Specific instructional modes in one-room schools:* This instructional module introduces participants to the organization of the teaching process in one-room schools. It shows examples of traditional instructional methods, which include both teacher's presentation of the subject matter and independent pupils' learning. However, it also includes less traditional instructional modes, such as streaming and individualization, which - in accordance with principles of inclusive pedagogy - does not stream pupils by age or by any other characteristics. Target group: teachers at primary one-room schools.
5. *Using pupils' portfolios:* The aim of this module is to acquaint participants with pupils' portfolios and to instruct them how to use it in presentation of qualitative outcomes of the learning process. This is in accordance with the holistic teacher professionalization model. Participants will also be motivated to work with pupils' portfolios and also to do research with it. Target group: primary and secondary school teachers in the Zlín region, and teachers at one-room schools.
6. *Reflective techniques in teacher's practice. Self-regulation:* This module focuses on usage of reflective techniques. Participants acquire general knowledge regarding reflecting on their own instructional strategies and

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