

Asymmetries in thematic and interactional control in productive mentoring dialogues

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Background

Mentoring dialogues are usually highly asymmetric in terms of thematic and interactional control (Hennissen et al., 2008). In order to capture and describe the supervisory behavior of mentor teachers, Hennissen et al. developed the MERID model (**ME**ntor (teacher) **RO**les **I**n **D**ialogues). It analyzes mentoring dialogues with respect to two dimensions:

- (1) the extent to which the topics of the mentoring dialogue are introduced by the mentor teacher (**active vs. reactive input**);
- (2) The degree to which the mentor teacher controls the course of the dialogue on a particular topic (**directive vs. non-directive style**).

Based on these distinctions, the model specifies four particular roles: Initiator, Advisor, Encourager and Imperator.

So far the actual impact of thematic and interactional control on student teachers' learning in mentoring dialogues has not been systematically researched, however. Referring to research on tutoring, Chi (2009) argues that the more interactive and co-constructive tutoring dialogues are, the better tutees learn. Recent empirical findings from analyses of mentoring dialogues provide further evidence for this hypothesis: co-constructive mentoring dialogues are more often associated with evidence for learning (Kreis & Staub, 2011). Thus it can be argued that co-constructive learning dialogues are less likely to occur in highly asymmetric interactions.

Research Question

Do thematic units in mentoring dialogues with evidence for student teacher learning differ from thematic units without such evidence in terms of interactional and thematic control by the mentor teachers?

Method

Sample

- The sample consists of 21 mentor teachers of grades 7, 8 or 9, each of them attending to a student teacher.

Design

- All participating student teachers taught three mathematics lessons on circumference and area of rectangles based on their own materials.
- In connection with these 63 lessons, 61 mentoring dialogues were videotaped (23 hours).

Analyses

- Video-based analyses, including the transcription and coding of all recordings, were conducted with MAXQDA (all codings reached acceptable reliability values).
- A total of **783 thematic units** were identified. These units were coded with respect to **interactional** (directive or non-directive) and **thematic control** (active or reactive) along the lines of the MERID model.
- The coding of student teachers' learning focused on evidence for student teachers'
 - intentions to make **specific changes** in their teaching (Bakkenes et al., 2010) or
 - verbalizations of **higher-order reflection**, including arguments or explanations (Hatton & Smith, 1995).

References

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Results

243 thematic units with evidence for student teacher learning were identified (out of a total of 783 thematic units). Mapped onto the MERID-model, the results show that the mentoring dialogues in our sample were **highly asymmetric** in terms of thematic and interactional control. Almost all mentor teachers were assigned to the dominant role of the "Imperator".

These asymmetries, however, turned out to be significantly lower for both dimensions (directiveness [$Z(N = 21) = -3.875, p < 0.001$]; input [$Z(N = 21) = -3.724, p < 0.001$]) in units for which there is evidence for student teacher learning (i.e. student teachers expressed specific intentions to implement changes in their teaching or verbalized higher-order reflections).

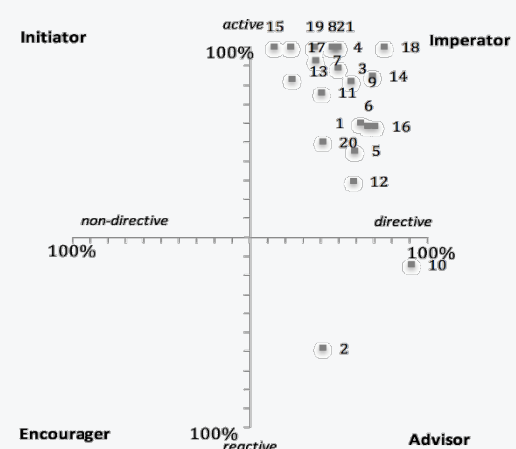


Figure 1: Location of the mentor teachers in the MERID model in terms of their mentoring style in thematic units **without evidence** for student teacher learning.

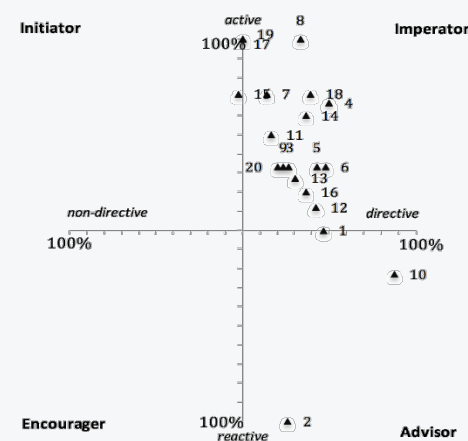


Figure 2: Location of the mentor teachers in the MERID model in terms of their mentoring style in thematic units **with evidence** for student teacher learning.

Discussion

The differences we found suggest that the occurrence of productive interactions with student teachers that are characterized by evidence for learning is more likely in mentoring dialogues which tend to be less asymmetric in terms of thematic and interactional control. Nevertheless, the "Imperator" role still prevails.